

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 4: The Purgatory

### Chapter 368 – Post Battle

When Jake saw a brave and proud woman like Sarah burst into tears, his chest tightened with grief without really knowing why and he felt extremely uncomfortable. Comparatively, he hadn't felt much, when the two sisters cried after saving them.

Remembering that she had the characteristics of a gold digger, Jake said the only stupid thing that came to his mind in an attempt to console her. Patting her shoulder, he blurted out,

"Stop crying, I'll buy you another one... "

No doubt she stopped wallowing in self-pity, but that was not the reaction he was hoping for either. The tears stopped flowing and she brushed off the hand on her shoulder with a hard jerk and then gave him a look full of reproach and resentment.

It was pretty clear that he had said something wrong.

Sarah then rubbed her eyes to dry her tears and strode forward to his Yellow Cube and disappeared inside without a word. Where she went to mope, only God knew.

"What's wrong with her, seriously..." Jake mumbled with a sense of injustice. After rescuing her and offering to buy her a new island, this was not the reaction he was expecting.

[Idiot. She just needed you to hold her. Not to remind her of her failure and all that she owes you.]

As if to drive the nail in, Enya and Esya, who wasn't as affected as Sarah, also gave him a meaningful look. Instead of explaining their behavior, they thanked him sincerely with a contrite smile, then they also hurriedly walked towards the Yellow Cube and vanished.

Jake was almost certain that they had gone to comfort Sarah, but he still felt pretty bad.

"Women..." Jake grumbled in a bad mood.

[It's just you who has no psychology at all. They have their own egos. Proud women like Enya and Sarah couldn't have gotten this far in their Second Ordeal if they wanted to depend on someone else.]

Jake frowned, but he didn't really understand, or at least didn't want to understand.

"I understand the principle." He answered after a while. "But there's nothing stopping them from paying me back one day if it's so important to them. It's silly to refuse free help."

[You're an idiot, but I never said they weren't either.] Xi quibbled in an amused tone. [You're all pretty dumb.]

"Thank you for your outspokenness." Jake replied sarcastically.

[You're welcome.]

Now alone and in a bad mood, Jake just wanted to lie down and do nothing, but in the midst of all those stinking Digestors corpses, that was just impossible. So to clear his mind, he set about cleaning his island until the metallic surface of the disc sparkled like a polished diamond.

He first collected all the Aether filaments scattered on the battlefield for a grand total of 3428 Aether points. Knowing that keeping the Faction Space Vault open was already costing him 100,000 Aether pts a day, it was just peanuts.

However, now that he had activated a shield costing him 1000 Aether pts per day, his detection system was no longer necessary. Jake deactivated the long-range scan scheduled every hour to let the Aether Core inside accumulate more power.

In the medium term, he hoped to be able to increase the frequency and range of these scans. A shame that this Aether Core could not be used to power anything else, or even provide continuous Aether output.

Since he had an Aether Core in his body, he could theoretically have accumulated a fairly impressive amount of Aether in a very short period of time, but he had long since found that his Oracle Device was rejecting this Aether.

Even before he had an Aether Core, it was already extremely simple for him to collect the equivalent of a thousand Aether points from a single thought. His Aether Core alone could maintain an Aether density of 157pts in his body permanently and he could draw that amount of Aether from himself multiple times per second.

It was as if to the Oracle this Aether was dirty money. He refused to accept this Aether too easily earned. According to Xi, it was to prevent the Evolvers from sacrificing the Aether that was supposed to make them stronger for profit, but also to prevent them from taking it easy.

Oovuzjalu, fii hasaiarfl hmpit vfsu lnuro ovuaz tfwl tmare rmovare jvau iasare mdd ovu Ozfhiu Somzu fl imre fl ovuw vft f tuhuro Snazao Bmtw frt f tuhuro Auovuz nuzhunoamr. Io jfl fglmipouiw hmprouznzmtphoasu om ovu Ozfhiu Swlouq frt juro fefarlo aol arouroamrl.

The only good thing was that despite the distressing consequences of this short battle for Sarah and the two sisters, he had exterminated his share of Digestor remarkably quickly.

Presumably less than a minute, which was an incredible improvement compared to his previous Ordeal or a similar horde would have been a mortal danger to him. Technically, if he could fight a whole day without any unforeseen incidents, he could accumulate several million Aether points a day without any problem.

Naturally, this was by being stupidly optimistic. With the size of some of these meteors and the bit he had seen of the monsters hiding inside, things would have ended up badly...

Jake then picked up all of the undamaged carcasses and placed them in the Faction Space Vault before filling his personal Space Storage to the brim. Will would finally have the first goods he needed to begin his operations.

He didn't forget to extract as much blood as possible and put it in dedicated containers. As soon as he had acquired his Space Storage, he immediately filled it with all his possessions, including a number of containers and vials of all kinds. His assault rifle and some ammunition were also stored there.

To his delight, Jake discovered that he could ask his three robots to clean the island for him. The Oracle Constructors were truly a technological marvel.

As soon as Jake gave them this order, the three robots crawled out of the ground through a kind of automated trapdoors reserved for their use and set to work. Their multiple arms and legs were transformed into a vacuum cleaner or a karcher and an odourless product was sprayed on the most stubborn traces, which instantly dissolved on contact.

While these machines were busy cleaning everything, Jake recapitulated in his head the events of the previous battle and a slight anxiety overcame him. This time he had done well, but it might not always be this way.

He had to get stronger. He had to accumulate more Aether pts to expand and customize his Floating Island into an impregnable fortress and he had to prepare for the next Ordeal.

After Colonel Hale's thinly disguised threat, Jake immediately gave up his plans for revenge against Yerode and Lamine. Even if these two bastards were making an exit on B842 out of the Oracle Shelters he was not ready to take such a risk. If the Earth Government had its eye on him, his irrational vendetta would be like throwing himself into the lion's den.

That was why he had taken the risk of facing these Space Digestors. His island was the only place where he did not have to fear falling into New Earth's shenanigans. At least he still had time. Paradoxically, Jake was less afraid of the Digestors than he was of humans.

"Xi, what did you think of Ruby's reaction?" Jake suddenly asked out of the blue. He had thought of her when he recalled Colonel Hale.

Jake had thought they were related because of their resemblance, but he was shocked inside when he learned that Ruby was only her adopted daughter. From the Colonel's emphatic tone, it was clear to him that they were not related by blood. It was rather unexpected.

During the few minutes that they had been chatting with Craig and Ryo, although he had said little and left it to his comrades to make conversation, he had still gleaned some information about the young woman.

As a ward of the nation, she was just one of many children who had been raised by the person she called Aunt. Many of these children had also suffered from various deformities, but most were the children whose military parents had lost their lives.

Ruby was truly an orphan and no one really knew who her parents were. The circumstances of her birth were unclear, and all he knew was that her mother had not survived the birth.

At the time, before he knew the truth, he thought that Ruby's mother had been exposed to too much radiation, resulting in her daughter's deformities. But he knew from Alima and Patrick, two soldiers working for the government, that very few nukes had been fired during the False World War.

And London was not on the list.

Originally rather introverted, but cheerful, she had become colder as she grew up. The behavioral transition had been gradual and her comrades had not immediately noticed the difference. It was only recently, after her deformities had healed, that she began to show a completely different persona.

[ I think... she's hiding a secret.] Xi finally responded, pulling him out of his thoughts. [ She gives the impression that she is in perfect control of her expressions and emotions to the point of being unsettling, but in reality it lacks subtlety. If she was that clever, she would maintain a mask of indifference, or even vulnerability in all circumstances. She has much more to gain from this than by acting as she does. Even her peers are beginning to distrust her. In reality, her behavior makes no sense.]

Jake shared this opinion. This icy, despicable conduct was too different from the candid, smiling girl he had spent a memorable afternoon with seven months earlier.

Why did she seem more beautiful to him back then when she was such an ugly girl?

[ I think she was being herself at the time.] Xi gently reassured him. [But I also think that Ruby acting like an ungrateful, cold, selfish, impulsive person is not faked.]

"A dual personality, or a neurological disease rendering her unstable?" Jake brought up the hypothesis without really believing it.

[ I don't buy it. The Oracle System would have fixed such a problem when she was transported into the Mirror Universe. She's hiding a secret, that's all I can say. She is aware of it, it's affecting her, but she's compelled to act that way. I tried to communicate with her Oracle AI this morning, but he ignored me. I didn't think it was possible. It's not in the nature of the Oracle AIs to refuse an opportunity to exchange information. After all, we are all connected to the Oracle System and are supposed to act with transparency.]

"Mmmm... I give up. It's too complicated for me."

In saying this, Jake wasn't just talking about trying to understand or forgive her. It was about the fact that she had done something inexcusable. Jake was petty and vengeful. He was the kind of guy who would pay back all enmities with interest.

Otherwise, he knew he would be unable to interact normally with her and he didn't want to. It was the same reason he was so cold and ruthless with his cousins although a lot of water has passed under the bridge ever since.

With a clearer mind, Jake stretched his body and then contacted Will, whom he had almost forgotten, to find out how the situation was on his side. Soon the answer came.

" Everything's fine. No one is hurt on my side." Will confirmed before inquiring about the girls' situation with a worried tone. " How are the girls doing? "

"They're safe and sound, but they won't be able to buy an island for a while... "

Jake told him the price of a new Floating Island and Yellow Cube after destroying their first island and Sarah's crying fit. Will took note of this valuable information and praised himself for his wisdom. He also promised to take care of the Digestors' remains that Jake had stored in the Faction Vault.

Unfortunately, their islands had been separated by tens of kilometers during the blast and this would complicate their interactions. Communicating through the scan of their bracelets was now much more expensive. Only Jake could initiate such a call.

Once all these matters were settled, Jake swept the island with his eyes and initiated his terraforming plan to make it an ideal training ground.

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