

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 4: The Purgatory

### Chapter 369 - We Can't Find Him

In a large manor house with luxurious furniture and tapestries, three men and a woman were facing each other around a heavy walnut wood table. Four still smoking cups of tea were placed on this table but none of these individuals had touched it.

An old man with a well-defined physique tapped his fingers on the table without hiding his gloomy mood, while the three others, twenty to thirty years younger and slightly resembling him, didn't dare to face his gaze and bore the look of a puppy being torn a strip off after having peed on its owner's bed.

If Jake had been present, he would not have recognized this room, but he would have definitely recognized the mansion and the four people present. It was the mansion that the Wilderths had purchased in an Oracle City of the Oracle Playground and that old man was his grandfather Antoine.

These three middle-aged men and women were other relatives of his. One had to admire the incredible fertility and resilience of his grandmother Jeanne who had given birth to so many children. However, she had died of illness eighteen years ago and Jake had virtually no memory of it.

"Christopher. "The old man spoke all of a sudden with a disappointed look at his oldest son there.

The son in question, dressed in an officer's uniform, and tremendously muscular for a man approaching fifty but of average height and stature, suddenly stiffened at the mention of his name, but quickly pulled himself together.

"We can't find Jake..." Christopher confessed with a sweaty forehead and a helpless grimace. "Since the army has officially tried to recruit him on Thelma, his location is constantly changing and when it is stable we can't reach him either. The Shadow Guide takes us on the Yellow Cube to Jorgen's Floating Island, then the trail ends there, pointing in a certain direction in space.

"It's a common behavior of the Shadow Guides when Evolvers lock the Yellow Cube on their Floating Island. He might be dozens of light years away from the nearest island for all we know, and without a spaceship there's nothing I can do....

Christopher clenched his fists unconsciously as he prepared to be severely beaten up, but to his relief the old man resumed tapping his fingers on the table with a thoughtful expression. After a while he sighed, giving an impression of terrible weariness.

"Even a general like you can't do anything... Do they know Jake's exact rating?"

This time it was his area of expertise, and the middle-aged man quickly answered.

"They shouldn't..."

"But? "Antoine raised an unsatisfied eyebrow. He knew his son well. It lacked conviction.

Indeed, under his father's interrogating gaze, the general shrugged his shoulders with a few nervous tics denoting some distress,

"Because my son George was forced to provide the video recordings of his Ordeal, but also because of Brice who was recently recruited, almost all officers above the rank of colonel have access to this information... Two recruits from the Prodigy program also transmitted crucial information about him, but they only answer to General Eric and he kept some information to himself.

"However, I know for a fact that Jake was still alive when Prodigy Ruby Hale was eliminated. There were only three of them left in the running at that time. Jake, a Jakam named Hakkrasha and a male Krish. To find out more, we have to interrogate these two aliens but it will be difficult. The Krishs are hostile to us and quite honestly our technology is inferior to them... As for the Jakams, they are too few in number and their behavior is as unpredictable as the wind. Moreover their habitat is just impractical for our troops. There remains, however, the possibility that an Evolver from New Earth with a high enough Oracle Rank has paid the price required to get this information from the Oracle System... But it's unlikely...

Christopher, who had finished his report, abruptly deflated and sighed long and hard in an unexpected way. Looking at his brother and sister, then at his father, the soldier grabbed his hot cup of tea to warm his hands and decided to get it off his chest,

"To be frank, his capabilities are frightening for a Second Ordeal Player... I had to read the report three times before I believed the information to be true. It's just too incredible. If his Oracle Rank had been higher and he had received proper training his performance might have been better than all these elite recruits. If someone had once told me that it would be this spineless, lazy Jake, bullied by my son, who would have become the diamond in the rough that all the Earth factions are fighting over right now, I would never have believed it...

A strange silence settled around the table. Even the old man had stopped tapping the table with his fingers.

"Indeed, who would have believed that?" Antoine finally nodded in a solemn, meaningful tone. Stroking his chin pensively, he turned to his second son and added, "If I am not mistaken, General Eric answers directly to General Rob, whose faction is loyal to the Earth Union. Richard, as a senator who is also a member of that faction, you should know more about it, shouldn't you?"

Richard was Kevin's father, who was Jake's cousin Werebear. Although his son had developed an unprecedented muscularity and hairiness, they were very much alike. Except that his father was in a suit, tie and leather shoes with a much more uptight and refined disposition.

On hearing his father address him, the politician stirred his tea delicately, sipped a sip slowly, then put his cup down and responded with a relaxed air,

"General Rob does know Jake's rating."

Antoine and Christopher rolled their eyes in disdain when they saw Richard smirk at them complacently. A sudden urge to slap his son for the first time in ten years crossed his mind, but the old man kept his cool. Instead, he asked,

"Who else?"

"General Youssouf, the Prime Minister and you know who from a reliable source. The others I can't say for sure.

"Given that President Ivan Sozonoff is preparing to step down in a few weeks, he probably has something else to think about and should not be aware of it either. In any case, Jake is not an isolated case. A few hundred civilian humans also had exceptional performances during their First and Second Ordeal. All of these people are on a watch list and Jake should not have to worry at this time.

"General Eric is a patriot capable of the best and the worst, but without Rob's or the government's endorsement he won't do anything. He's busier keeping an eye on dissident factions that pose an immediate threat. So far hostilities have not erupted, but relations are increasingly tense between New Earth and these few independent factions filled with veteran Evolvers. These high-ranking Players and Evolvers are a valuable resource for the Earth Union. Each time one of them deserts, joins or creates its own faction, the government becomes more and more unstable. Without you know who and those few loyal generals who remain inflexible, the Earth Union cohesion would probably have already shattered."

The middle-aged woman, older than her brothers by a few years, who had said nothing until now, interrupted the chatty Senator by clearing her throat. Getting their attention, she stared her father straight in the eyes for a few seconds, then pleased, she averted her gaze.

Of the three siblings, she was the only one whose Aetheric fluctuations were frightening. Only Antoine gave similar vibes. If it wasn't for her old-fashioned clothes and graying hair, she could definitely have passed for the elder sister of her own son Vincent.

"Diana, keep an eye on General Eric and find a way to contact Jake. Maybe try through Anya or Kalen." The old man ordered quietly after their silent exchange. "If Jake doesn't show himself, as long as he's okay let him do it his way. If the government or the army changes its attitude, Diana you will protect him. As for Brice and George, be careful working for the government. At the slightest sign that the tide is turning, I want them to resign immediately and come back here. And I hope they will put aside their rivalries to work with Jake. Only together we have a chance to get through the coming crisis."

"What about my son Vincent?" Diana worried with a disgruntled expression.

"What about my son Kevin?" Richard also grumbled with a reproachful tone.

The old man rubbed his temples, cursing himself for having completely forgotten about them.

"They are promising. Antoine conceded reluctantly. "If they haven't created their Floating Islands yet, they can create them next to Jake's with his consent, and even join his faction if he has one."

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"Shouldn't they join the Wilderths faction instead?" Christopher replied incomprehensibly.

"Alfred is undeniably strong, but ultimately he is not a Wilderth and he is of your generation. Even if I take his place, the situation would not be ideal. I lack courage. Let's leave it to the young people."

"Don't you trust my husband?" Diana snarled as she got up from her chair and gave him a glare.

"I do, but I believe his potential, mine and yours is limited. "You, like him, had barely survived your Fifth Ordeal and were traumatized at the thought of going back. To thrive in the Mirror Universe, Five Ordeals are not enough."

"And according to you Jake will do better than us?"

" He already has. "The old man chuckled before putting an end to their family reunion.

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Far away from them, Jake, who did not know that he had been the central topic of an intense conversation, finally reappeared on his Floating Island after who knows how many consecutive trips on B842.

On each trip, Jake had carefully filled his Space Storage with all kinds of rocks and soil and after all those trips the metal surface of the disk supporting his island was no longer visible. A thick layer of earth and gravel several meters thick had covered it and a hill of piled rocks twenty meters high was even towering right in the center of his island.

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