

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 4: The Purgatory

### Chapter 377 - Exotic Breakfast

A moment later, it was Jake's turn to place his order. The same facial recognition system as with his locker room was activated, scanning and comparing his face to the ship's database and an interface with all sorts of menus appeared on the screen in front of him.

Jake was delighted to discover that he was apparently considered a first class passenger. The range of selections was wide and elaborately prepared. On top of that, he had no restrictions on quantities.

'Awesome!' He could not help but gloat inside.

Not overly adventurous, he selected a few items suitable for breakfast, such as an omelet, some fruit, a herbal tea and what looked like a kind of chocolate pastry out of curiosity.

Of course, the omelet was not made with chicken eggs, but since the species was not mentioned he assumed that it was a product commonly used in Riva's food industry. The fruits had more outlandish appearances and tasting them would truly be a leap of faith.

As soon as he had finished taking his order, a small rectangular opening opened below the screen and a meal tray identical to the selected food slid out in front of him. Jake took a curious look at his tray, but kept a neutral expression so as not to show that it was the first time he was seeing these ingredients.

He freed the space for Hade lining up behind him and sat at one of the more remote steel tables to avoid attracting the Inquisitors' attention. Their faceless hoods had left him with a bitter feeling.

Vigilantly watching the steady stream of passengers arriving in the refectory, Jake developed an appetite for his food. So far he had not yet spotted any of his comrades.

He was relatively surprised at first that his tall stature and golden silver hair had not attracted any attention, but he had simply not seen enough of the world.

In a few minutes, he had sighted several dozen passengers with appearances even more peculiar than his own. Whether they were Players or not, he could not say yet.

"Do you mind if I sit here?" A familiar voice interrupted his reflection.

Looking up, Jake recognized the young man named Hade whom he had shaken hands with earlier. The man was smiling politely at him, but he seemed nervous as if afraid of rejection.

"Please feel free to make yourself at home." Jake responded by biting into a purple, spherical fruit the size of a melon.

Crunch, crunch!

His expression subtly changed as he chewed. He had almost broken a tooth biting into that fruit. It was fucking hard.

In front of him, Hade's eyes widened, completely slackjawed. Seeing his reaction, he knew he had made a mistake. Fortunately, the young man knew how to adapt and immediately dispersed the discomfort.

"I have to admit that this is the first time in my life that I've ever seen someone eat a Crakuva in this way...". He chuckled awkwardly. "You really opened up my horizons."

Now that Jake had made a blunder, he had to follow through on his blunder. Nonchalantly, he chewed again in his Crakuva and began to munch vigorously. Hade was speechless, but couldn't help but give him an astonished look.

Perhaps to avoid embarrassing him, the young man put a pair of special gloves on his tray and grabbed a tool with a tip that looked like a drill and placed it against the skin of another fruit. He pressed a tiny button and the drill started to rotate quickly like an electric drill, digging a hole in the fruit. He then inserted a metal straw into the new hole and began to sip its precious contents as if nothing had happened.

Jake examined his tray and actually found several strange cutlery items he had ignored, including this electric drill of sorts. The same pair of gloves were also present.

"Don't get me wrong. I've always had good teeth." He finally justified himself as he finished the fruit, not without difficulty. Even a child could have told he was lying.

Hade was dying to laugh, but he knew when not to. Still, he was deeply shocked. He had to clarify things.

"Since Riva's atmosphere has become unbearable, fruits have been genetically modified to better withstand radiation." He finally explained in a hesitant tone. "Their skin is supposed to be almost impenetrable, but that's not really the problem. Their role is to stop radiation and toxins, and as a result the skin contains huge amounts of radiation and toxins, especially in the surface layer. For your health, it's best to stop this while you still can."

Jake was taken aback by this revelation. For the other passengers and even most of the participants it was indeed dangerous, but for him these radiations and toxins were a tonic.

He was looking for a suitable response when he recognized a familiar face a few meters away from him.

"Will, here!"

The businessman, who wore his glasses again, walked towards him with relief. Because of the enormous Aether density, his Aether stat advantage had been nullified and he was myopic again. The Myrtharian Body was not enough to fully correct this condition. Luckily, the Oracle had planned for everything.

His comrade took a curious look at Hade and sat down next to them. With Jake's introduction, Will and Hade quickly broke the ice between them and began to talk heatedly.

Jake had to admit that his eloquence was nothing compared to that of Will. While he had to rack his brains to keep the conversation going, the nerd had no difficulty conversing about anything and everything.

What depressed Jake the most was that Will hadn't stupidly munched on one of these fruits. After weighing one of the fruits he had chosen, his gaze had immediately turned to

the strange instruments and cutlery in his tray, and he had used his common sense not to make any odd mistakes.

"Where do you know each other from?" Hade asked after a while, which caught them slightly off guard.

Jake and Will hadn't really thought about the possibility that they were perhaps not supposed to know each other. But if they didn't know each other, how could they regroup with the rest of their faction without appearing suspicious?

"We met at the boarding area of the Titan Pearl. We were in the same line." Jake gave the only plausible excuse.

If such a lie could be turned against him, it meant that their every move was being watched. In that case, trying to keep a low profile would be completely useless.

"Oh..." Hade seemed to accept this explanation.

"And you, where are you from?" Will spontaneously changed the subject. "Qualified personnel, family of personnel, redeemed tickets or a genuine lottery winner?"

For one reason or another, this question immediately put Hade on the defensive. He still gave them an evasive answer.

"I guess I'm a little all at once. I've always been pretty lucky..." Hade smiled wryly.

His answer reminded them of Tim. With his luck he should have already found them effortlessly. Somewhat coincidentally, Jake saw two little figures walking hand in hand into the dining hall: Tim and Lily.

This time, having learned his lesson, he behaved as if nothing had happened and kept eating. The two children eventually spotted him, but when they saw his attitude they understood the message. They lined up to get their trays and then chose an empty table nearby.

Once again, Jake felt ashamed when he saw the two children using the cutlery correctly to eat their fruit. He had by far the best cognitive abilities of their group, so why did he have so little common sense?

[You have common sense.] Xi consoled him while containing her urge to make fun of him. [The skin of these fruits is no danger to you. They are even beneficial. Neither Will nor Tim nor Lily can eat this fruit the way you did without breaking their teeth. They don't have a choice. You just have to think like them.]

With Xi's encouragement, he regained his good mood and started eating eagerly again. Over the next hour, all the passengers finally woke up and soon the dining hall was full to bursting point.

Jake and Will eventually found Sarah and the others, but the free chairs at their table had long been occupied by other passengers.

At first Jake wondered how to differentiate the participants from the native passengers, but he had already found a first method. The Players had generally gotten up before the native passengers and tended to speak little while keeping a watchful eye on their surroundings. Their dressing style also sometimes betrayed their origin.

In comparison, the native passengers were talkative and tended to crowd together in small groups. They spoke loudly and had no difficulty exchanging all sorts of anecdotes about their past life on Riva.

For Jake and the other Players, these passengers were a wealth of information. Just by listening to them it was possible to glean everything they needed to know.

Apart from an authentic identity and mastery of the native language, the Oracle had given them no special privileges. If they wanted to integrate, they had to find the solution themselves.

With his hearing and intelligence, Jake could hear and remember everything that was said in the refectory, and he showed no scruples about making use of it.

He, who at first took little part in the conversation, leaving Will to do the work, gradually took over in front of an astonished Will. In a few moments, he assimilated all the anecdotes he had heard and made them his own.

"... And that's how I got my ticket. "Jake valiantly concluded a long tirade after having knocked half of his entire audience to sleep. "If my friend hadn't contracted the Terinthian Plague, he would never have given me his ticket and I would probably still be stuck in that Vijindai place."

Jake was so proud of himself that he almost expected applause, but aside from Will who was about to prostrate himself in admiration, the passengers sitting at their tables remained indifferent. Even Hade did not seem particularly interested. His curiosity seemed to have died down.

'Fuck, I really wasted my breath for nothing,' Jake cursed inwardly.

Well, at least he had managed to get rid of suspicion. Even his mistake with the fruit had been covered up. The few Players and passengers whose gaze he had felt lingering on him had moved on. But not all of them.

He still felt he was being watched.

When they were done eating breakfast, Jake and the other Players experienced a blank moment where they were at a loss as to what to do. The Oracle System hadn't given them any Ordeal missions, which meant that the Ordeal hadn't really started yet.

Not being able to take it anymore, Jake suddenly got up and disposed of his empty tray. He was about to leave to explore the ship, when a shrill sizzling noise buzzed through their eardrums.

Jake turned his head in the noise direction and found several sound amplifiers suspended from the ceiling. After a few adjustments, a somewhat parched female voice cleared her throat and broke the silence.