

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 394 - Ambush

And Jake didn't stop there. With his consciousness almost merging with his Fluid Core, his perception of the surrounding world had suddenly changed, as had his perception of time. Focusing like that, he just couldn't stop.

He could already say that his bloodline abilities were compatible with Fluid. He hadn't tested his powers through his Fluid Core yet, but he was already pretty sure it would work. The only thing he couldn't clearly estimate at this point was whether the effects would deviate from their normal functioning.

The reason Jake was progressing so fast, accomplishing in a few hours what should have taken months or even years for a native, was twofold. The first was that the handling of Aether and Fluid had a lot in common. Both required a powerful Spirit Body, high Intelligence and Perception.

For a native Fluid Wielder, the Fluid replaced the Aether and their bodies and minds were so adapted to the former that they could no longer even feel the existence of the Aether that was supposed to be the source of all things. It was an evolutionary dead end, making them dependent on this new energy.

To depend entirely on the nourishing properties of Fluid to strengthen one's Spirit Body and other mental attributes took a considerable amount of time. In addition, the very existence of their Fluid Core on the anatomical level condemned them not to awaken their Extrasensory Perception easily.

Furthermore, it was only from the rank of Fluid Master that the people of this world would truly become able to take the first step towards perfect evolution. Before that their bodies were basically normal and their brains were nothing special.

All these steps Jake had ignored. His Spirit Body, body and Aether stats were well above average, while his Aether stat of Extrasensory Perception had long since been unlocked.

The second aspect of his swift progression was that he did not need to seek, like the natives, a connection to the Fluid through meditation and a relaxed mental state. He could just subdue this energy by sheer willpower. His mind was resilient enough for that.

If a Fluid Master or Grandmaster assisted a beginner in this way by forcing their body to absorb vast amounts of Fluid, the Fluid Core would explode because of the energy overflow and the meridians might be irreversibly damaged.

Again, Jake's Body Constitution and Vitality guaranteed that this method was safe for him. His Fluid Core had cracked several times, but his spontaneous regeneration had no trouble following.

In other words, his rate of progress was not that extraordinary. He was simply converting his Aether accomplishments into another form more suited to this world. This was only

possible because the Oracle System had given him the physiology of a native the time of this Ordeal.

Two days later, Avy Shanmin's voice echoed loudly throughout the ship and Jake came out of his trance.

[Ladies and gentlemen, we have passed through the electromagnetic storm jamming our communications and will reach the Yotai Shien 3 space station in about 3 hours. There we will make a thorough check-up of the ship along with any necessary maintenance and repairs and we invite you to stay in your cabins throughout this period. Of course, all services aboard the Titan Pearl remain free of charge and at your entire disposal.]

"Hmm, they have already repaired the communications?" Jake murmured, somewhat astonished. They had worked fast!

The general's speech was just a matter of principle to reassure the few normal passengers of the Titan Pearl. The crew and the Players on board all knew that the ship had been sabotaged from the inside long before entering the turbulence zone.

The pirate attack was no secret to anyone, but officially it had been handled in an exemplary manner, the enemy ship had even been destroyed and their captain captured.

Emiwan being a Fluid Master whose feats of arms were famously acknowledged far and wide, the thesis was credible and the passengers' wavering confidence in the Titan Pearl's crew had been amply restored.

After opening his eyes, Jake calmly assessed his body and sensations before concluding in his head,

' My Fluid Core is now the size of an eye and is as opaque as a black hole. I should be at the level of a Fluid Adept about to advance.'

Jake was more than satisfied with his achievement. If the Consortium's Fluid Wielders knew that he had gone from an atrophied Squire Fluid Core to an Adept Fluid Core to the verge of being promoted, they most likely would have placed a bounty on his head to capture him dead or alive so they could turn him into a lab rat and unravel all of his secrets.

The Fluid Ghost in particular was extremely moved. For him it was a divine miracle. The more exceptional his new master was, the better it was for him. After all, he would depend on his master in the future to survive. Jake's Aether and Fluid fluctuations were so strong that just standing by was enough to feed his intangible carcass.

"How do you feel, master?" The ghost asked reverently with a bow.

Jake briefly merged his consciousness with his Fluid Core to gain control of his Fluid and feeling full of energy he burst out laughing before answering,

"I couldn't feel better."

For him it was a harmless sentence, but for the Fluid Ghost this laughter and these few words had a completely different connotation because without realizing it, his eyes had turned black, the white of his eyes included, and a sinister, mysterious aura had started to ooze out of his body.

Jake didn't feel the difference, but like the natives of this world he was now under the Fluid's influence, with all the advantages and perils that this entailed.

It was a mysterious state. Now that his Core was more developed, he could say that Fluid was not necessarily inferior to Aether. Its possibilities were not as infinite, but its use was simpler.

If manipulating the raw Aether was akin to using an overriding programming language like binary, the Fluid was an available energy supplied with a pre-programmed script. Besides providing a simplified language for its manipulation, the Fluid literally helped every Fluid User to use it correctly.

If the Aether was a low-tier energy, the Fluid could be called a high tier energy. Easy to use and intuitive, but limited in its possibilities.

Waov f qart nmjuzdpi urmpev, oficare fgmpo mqralthaurhu jvau hmrruhoare om ovu Fipat jfl rmo hmqniuouiw jzmre. Id fr artasatpfi hmpit zufiiw prtuzlofrt aol rfopzu, ovu crmjuteu mgofarut jmpit gu ukhunoamrfi, gpo rm qfoouz vmj ao jfl arouznzuout, ao jmpit gu difjut. Bw aermzare ovu ulluroafi hmqnmruro ovfo qftu pn ovu Auovuz, mqralthaurhu hmpit rmo zufiiw gu fhvausut.

This meant that this Ordeal World was an evolutionary dead end. According to Jake, the only way for a native to realize this was to strengthen sufficiently their Spirit Body and consciousness to the point of realizing the existence of Aether.

Except that in order to get to that point, one would probably have to become a Fluid Grandmaster and at that level, it was virtually impossible for such an expert to give up on Fluid in order to focus on Aether, which existed in this world only in trace amounts.

Taking advantage of the three hours he had left, Jake did a few more tests to familiarize himself with his new abilities and left his cabin about thirty minutes before landing with a satisfied smile on his face. Though not for long.

"Jake Wilderth?" A soldier asked politely, blocking his way. The individual was wearing an officer's cap and his tilted head was hiding his face. His right hand tightly clutched a carbon tube to his belt, not even trying to hide his hostility.

Jake thought he had memorized the faces of all the officers present at the hangar to greet Emiwan, but this man did not ring a bell. All of the officers he had met rarely walked unescorted, especially after the discovery of the sabotage.

"Himself." He finally replied.

"I am very relieved. You can die now." The soldier chuckled evilly with no warning, and when he raised his head, two black eyes met his gaze.

As Jake squinted his eyes, his vision darkened and he got dizzy for a second. When he regained consciousness, two fingers covered with a halo of dark energy were closing in dangerously within an inch of his glabella, and a piercing pain immediately assailed his senses.

Faced with this life-or-death situation, his instincts kicked in and a devastating wave combining telekinesis, plasma and radiation exploded forth from his being, blasting away his aggressor.

Tvu àllflar, talepalut fl f lmitauz, lvmo gfhc om ovu urt md ovu hmzzatmz msuz dadow quouzl fjfw, mriw hmqare om f lomn gw hzflvare arom ovu quofi jfii fo aol urt. Tvu lfqu tfzc fpzf hmsuzare val dareuzl ursuimnut val gmtw om hplvamr ovu aqnfho, gpo ovu jfii loaii hfsut ar

gupart vaq. Hu ovur hmiifnlut om ovu ezmprt mr fii dmpzl, vfid crmhcut prhmrlhampl, lnaooare mpo f eplv md gimmt, smqao, firt epol.

The dark energy enveloping his body had disappeared, as had his clothes and equipment except for the tube in his other hand. The entire front part of his body was charred and his face had literally melted away. Most of his bones were fractured and he could barely breathe with his mouth, but his burning lungs ensured he would not survive much longer.

"A shame..." Jake lamented bitterly as he turned off his Berserk mode.

If he hadn't panicked by instinct and retaliated with all his might, he could have interrogated him and moved forward with his investigation. A precious opportunity to improve his Ordeal rating had been wasted just like that ...

Even though he seemed relaxed, he had just brushed with death. Thinking back on that mental attack, he couldn't help but shudder. He thought his spiritual strength was good enough to handle most Players and natives, he now knew that it wasn't.

That native had really almost killed him. If his mind had been any weaker, those fingers would have punctured his brain before he could react. And considering the target area... this guy was after his Fluid Core. If he had used the tube in his other hand to attack instead of his two fingers, he certainly would have succeeded.

As if to prove him right, the dying soldier breathed his last in utter apathy, and a humanoid, almost solid Fluid Ghost came out a split second later.

"I failed... My gluttony will be my downfall... He won't be happy." The Fluid Ghost sighed in disappointment.

Without giving Jake a chance to question it, the intangible spirit floated up to the ceiling without giving him so much as a glance and vanished as it had come. He was about to inspect the corpse when his bracelet suddenly activated, letting Will's grave voice come through.

"Jake, you have to come see this."