

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 4: The Purgatory

### Chapter 444 - Air Crash

Clap, clap, clap.

‘Jake, you didn’t think we’d forget you, huh?’ ‘Avros’ figure appeared on the soaked wooden dock in the harbor.

Jake frowned. He couldn’t tell how they had gotten out of the Drakkar in time. The most convenient way was for them to be so fast that he didn’t see a thing, but that was unlikely or they wouldn’t have fled during the First Round.

‘An illusion?’ Jake deduced. ‘But made by whom?’

He looked around for the person responsible, but even deploying his Spirit Body his search was fruitless.

‘Don’t bother. You won’t find him.’ The Australian taunted him, his eyes filled with contempt.

Jake ignored the two Players and carried on with his search. Stealthily, he used Aether Conversion to convert the pure Aether in his Aether Core to Extrasensory Perception and activated Myrtharian Sight to scan the area. He also tested observing the surroundings through the filter of his Fluid Core.

A couple of seconds later, his vision detected a presence fifty meters above him.

‘Found you.’

A normal human wouldn't have noticed, but to a trained mind, the faint psychic signature was impossible to mistake. In fact, a keen eye was enough. The artificial blue sky was cloudless and uniform, but with sufficiently sharp eyesight it was still possible to pick out micro anomalies.

The illusionist was clearly not talented enough to affect his brain like the Second Ordeal's Blue Soul Stones. He depended on skillful light manipulation for his staging and there was a limit to his precision and thoroughness.

**BANG!**

A ball of air pierced the mirage above his head with no warning and a shadow shot out of the way, only to flee for his life the next instant.

Recognizing Daryl, Jake immediately flew after him. Seeing the Myrtharian take the bait, an evil smile appeared on Avros' face.

'It's done. 'The Australian bowed to a shaded wall with no one there.

'Begin the operation. ' A raspy, metallic voice squeaked from the shadows.

' At your command, My Lady...'

'Is something bothering you? ' The shadow observed patiently, waiting for the man to speak up.

Avros hesitated shortly, before saying,

'What about Daryl? He lost his Fluid Card in the previous round and, with all due respect, I don't think he can outrun Jake for long. '

A dreary laughter erupted without fixed location, seeming to reverberate all around the Australian. Sometimes the laughter came from his right and the next moment it would come from his left or above him.

‘A Fluid Master who runs away from an otherworldly alien is of no use to me. ‘ The voice scorned harshly after regaining its seriousness.

‘I understand, but that doesn’t answer my question. ‘Avros winced.‘ If Jake comes back too soon, it could get ugly. ‘

‘Don’t worry. I never counted on Daryl to carry out this diversion. When you know as much as I do, predicting a youngster’s actions is a breeze. ‘

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Jake caught up with Daryl in a matter of seconds, as Daryl was clearly not used to aerial chases. He didn’t try to convince him to stop for a friendly chat. Instead, with no remorse, he slashed down.

The Fluid Master dodged at the last moment without turning around, but his back was lacerated deeply despite his quick response. He thought he had barely made it, but a crippling pain down the wound told him he was done for.

Behind him, Jake watched mercilessly as the Healer’s back melted and cauterized, releasing a foul, burnt smell. He had hit him with a white-hot blade powered by his Sharpening Aether.

In addition to being monstrously sharp and burning hot, the blade was nearly as radioactive as the reactor core of a nuclear power plant. Without proper precautions or sufficient Constitution, it was impossible to escape alive.

Feeling his death approaching, Daryl mobilized his Fluid to stimulate his cells, but this only slowed his cells’ necrosis imperceptibly. Meanwhile, Jake casually raised his blade again.

Sweating profusely and wheezing, the doctor was on the verge of fainting. Gritting his teeth, he deployed his rectangular shield

formation, each one a Fluid Artifact, then once inside activated the Healing Spell conferred by his Healer Role.

His wounds instantly healed and he could finally catch his breath. However, just as he was recovering from his trauma, a shrill whirring sound pierced his eardrums, while a raging headache knocked him unconscious for a split second.

His shield formation withered like petals on a wilted flower and the Fluid Master tumbled toward the Lake. Jake took advantage of this opening to swoop down and slice him into dozens of pieces with his machete.

A blink of an eye later, a shower of guts and blood fell into the Lake, attracting marine predators from miles around. Jake braked hard, generating an impressive counter-wave, then with a supersonic burst of speed he spun around and propelled himself in the opposite direction.

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‘Daryl is dead. ‘Avros said as he saw a change in one of his Ordeal Missions.

‘Don’t worry about him and get on with the operation. ‘ The raspy, metallic voice ignored his concern, but the presence vanished after that.

The Australian was heartened to see his mysterious Lady take action. No one had seen her face, but anyone who had experienced her intent knew that resisting her was simply suicide.

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As he sped up, Jake felt his wrath spike to record levels, but it was the frustration of being targeted so quickly that had him on edge. If he

had known that the Second Round would commence immediately after the first, he would never have given his enemies time to establish themselves.

Infuriated, without realizing it, he began to stimulate the Silver alloy in his cells to push his limits even further. His already blazing speed soared even higher, to match that of the best fighter jets.

Bursts of white flame shot out of his feet to propel him even faster, and his telekinesis tamed the air to reduce friction to a near sidereal vacuum. At this speed, his Village soon reappeared before his eyes.

Jake saw the flames rising to the sky from his ruined castle, the houses destroyed, and the bloody corpses of Guardsmen and Villagers strewn across the cobblestone roads painted with blood and guts. When he saw his allies fighting back to back against a horde of enemy Guardsmen far beyond the capabilities of a single Village, his heart leapt in his chest. Will's corpse was already lying on the ground in a pool of his own blood.

‘Fucking bast-‘

**BAM!**

Jake's skull hit something hard. Horribly hard. At over 2000km/h and with no protection other than his Stone Skin and a thin force field, he smashed head first into a translucent barrier as hard as diamond.

The shockwave on impact created multiple ripples on the surface of the invisible barrier, which was nothing more than a masterfully placed force field. The consequences were dramatic.

His skull caved in like the shell of an egg thrown against a rock and part of his brain splattered the barrier. His spine snapped under the blow and his head sank into his torso about ten centimeters deep.

Even so, Jake was not dead. His Spirit Body took over, his rage fueling the remnants of his consciousness to keep him from fainting. Completely confused and in shock, he tried to make sense of what had just happened, but he was barely able to formulate a coherent thought.

He had clearly hit something, but there was nothing in front of him. If it wasn't for his brain being plastered all over it, he might still be wondering what the hell had just happened. It was the most flawless barrier he had ever seen and he would not have been at all surprised if its creator turned out to be the God of Window Cleaners. This was his last intelligible thought.

His vision blurred as he lost feeling in his limbs, and he had just enough time to give Xi the reins before he was devoured by the abyss of a dreamless sleep. Once he passed out, the levitating force that held him up was removed and he fell into the water with a loud splash.

As soon as he landed in the water, he began to sink and the choppy crimson lake water engulfed him. Once Jake was swept into the depths of the lake, a black hooded figure materialized behind the translucent barrier.

‘What a fearsome fellow...’ The individual made no secret of its obsession. ‘I thought he would have died instantly, but he still had a breath of life left. Impressive.’

Three other figures appeared behind this first person. They too were wearing long black hooded coats, but where their faces should have been, there was only an ocean of darkness.

‘Shall we retrieve his remains Grand Master Isbeus?’ One of the Inquisitors asked respectfully. ‘According to our recent investigations,

some of these aliens have demonstrated abilities that even the Consortium cannot explain. ‘

Grandmaster Isbeus considered the question for a breath before agreeing.

‘If I intervene in person, it may trigger an escalation of unwanted consequences. Croyorn and Oxium, I leave that to you. If you still haven’t found him by tonight, forget it. The Lake is deeper than you can imagine and even lower is the Pit. In his condition, the chances of him making it out are slim. ‘

The two appointed Inquisitors bowed and dove into the lake like two northern gannets. After that, the two remaining figures melted away like two malfunctioning holograms, and the lake returned to its original tranquility.