

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 445 - Near Death Experience

[Oracle Heal activated. Number of Oracle Heals remaining for this Ordeal 0/1.]

As soon as Jake had sunk deep enough and she was sure the resulting light wouldn't alert their enemies, Xi triggered the Oracle Skill to save him. This was the upside of their enhanced mental link. Even if Jake was passed out, Xi could take over just fine.

His ruined body was swathed in an emerald light, and in less time than it takes to blink, he reverted to his original healthy self.

Even better. As with Chinen, who found his arm strengthened to handle the strain caused by his oversized arm, Jake's forehead bone doubled in density, while his neck muscles were also strengthened accordingly. If he wanted to, Jake could now develop a Headbutt Skill and crush all his foes.

Yet, he did not regain consciousness. His mended body kept sinking like a log with no reaction at all. But this did not worry Xi.

High in the sky, a ghostly figure, giving off a vague light, was masking its presence behind the blinding brilliance of the sun. Anyone who looked up would see nothing but the rays of a normal star.

That phantom was Jake. Or rather his Spirit Body.

When he had crashed into the barrier, his brain had been badly damaged. He had lasted a few seconds with his immense Constitution and Vitality, but eventually he had slipped into a near death state.

It was commonly believed that brain cells could survive for a few minutes before going into necrosis, and it was this window that Xi used to resurrect him. Of course, on Earth, even if we could have saved him, he would probably have ended up a vegetable. However, with his bloodline and the Oracle Heal, the prognosis was much rosier.

Upon losing consciousness, his soul had been ejected from his body and he was left free to wander in this ghostly form. He could still feel a tiny link tying him to his body, but it was precariously fragile. Without Xi as a bridge, he would have died forever.

Or at least his body would have.

Once he broke free of his body, Jake didn't actually feel like he was dead. His Spirit Body wasn't tangible like his body was, but it didn't suffer from the same limitations either. In this form, he could reach a speed inconceivable by mere thought and it seemed he could think much better.

His Body Stats were excellent, but ultimately they were different from his Spirit Body Stats, which he couldn't properly see. There was only one way to measure his soul strength and that was through his Spirit Body level.

Lastly, the Radiation and Heat attribute that his soul had obtained in the past was already showing its usefulness. Just by exposing himself to the sun's rays, he could feel his Spirit Body slowly but surely strengthening.

It wasn't as fierce as the green lava, but it was more bearable. It was the difference between walking and sprinting. Both were good for your health, but the former was less traumatic for your body.

Hiding beneath the sun, Jake listened silently to the conversation between Grandmaster Isbeus and her three Inquisitors. The anger of the earlier instant that had cost him dearly had departed him, replaced by a growing disconcertment. Especially about this Isbeus.

He had seen this woman before, but he was unable to remember when. Although her face was partially hidden, her oval jaw, her immaculate skin, her nose and her delicate lips were perfect, but that was also why he was confused. He should have remembered such a person.

In any case, he could at least say that this Grand Master Isbeus was physically young, 16-17 years old no more. The problem was that this observation would get him nowhere. The bodies of Fluid Wielders were nothing special before the Fluid Master stage, but they enjoyed a considerable lifespan thanks to the revitalizing properties of Fluid.

Hence, this woman could very well be a hundred years old or more. Which didn't help him much...

When she ordered Croyorn and Oxium to find his remains, Jake knew it was time to leave. He didn't have much time left anyway. Xi had already cast the Oracle Heal and the link connecting him to his body was rapidly strengthening.

The next thing he knew, he was back in his own body, and he felt momentarily suffocated as he reconnected with his brain. He almost felt like one of those claustrophobics stuck in a broken down elevator.

Fortunately, he wasn't dead for long and he soon found his feet. His forehead and neck were a little thicker than before, but nothing too bothersome. These minor problems would be taken care of in time.

'Aaah, I'm in no hurry to die again.' He whined inwardly, cracking his neck.

[And I'm in no hurry to see your head digging into your chest like a nail... Don't forget that we share our senses.] Xi gave him an earbashing.

'Haha, sorry.' He chose to keep his mouth shut rather than retort. He knew how badly he had screwed up this time. If it weren't for Xi, he'd be dead for sure.

[The Inquisitors will be here soon.] She returned to her usual strictness.

'I'm on it.'

Jake wasn't worried about the two Inquisitors diving in after him. With his 'Extreme Diver' and 'A Fish in Water' Glyphs, he was in his element. Even if they proved to be competent, he was confident that he could escape them.

Nevertheless, after his near death experience, he would not underestimate anyone ever again. Breathe in... Breathe out. From now on, he would strive to keep the Corruption in check. He had seen what happened when he let go.

Taking advantage of the water's cloudiness, Jake deliberately dove to the depths this time, but diagonally, so that the Inquisitors could not determine his position from the original spot where he had sunk.

Sadly, his efforts proved futile. He had forgotten the inhuman foreknowledge of high-level Fluid Wielders. Like a school of piranhas

that smelled blood, the Inquisitors drifted straight toward him, trusting their instincts.

They didn't know if he was alive or not, but as long as they had that sixth sense, it was almost like having a Shadow Guide showing them the way.

'Master, you can mislead them with your Fluid. You are also a Peak Fluid Adept.'

The subservient and agitated voice of the ghost he had saved suddenly echoed below him. Scanning the depths, he finally discerned the ethereal outlines of the fifty-something ghost.

'You're back!' Jake beamed telepathically.

'I am, Master.' The ghost said respectfully, while bowing.

'Did you accomplish the mission I gave you?' Jake pressed him with a mixture of hope and foreboding.

The ghost remained silent for several seconds, then gave a toothy grin.

'It's done. I've found out what happened to the previous expeditions and who was behind it all. I also think I've found the identity of my murderer, or at least the mastermind behind it all.'

'Oh?' Jake was leaning toward a Player as the murderer, partly because of the tattoo many of the participants wore and the comparison to him, but the two were not mutually exclusive. He hadn't seen any natives with tattoos so far, but it wasn't nearly enough to rule out the possibility.

In truth, it made perfect sense that the mastermind would be a native of this world, like Daryl who was originally a dormant spy for the

First Brotherhood. If we followed this trend, there were probably spies working for the other Brotherhoods on board the Titan Pearl.

On the other hand, such sabotage would take time to set up. If you included the fact that the previous 22 expeditions had all ended up here as drifting shipwrecks, it was even more obvious. This was not something a Player who had just come out of Hypersleep for a few minutes could accomplish.

On the other hand, a Player could be given the identity of a spy for another Brotherhood or the Consortium, or even a saboteur. Anything was possible. In the end, he could not rule out any scenario.

Jake wanted to know more, but when his Myrtharian Sight detected two energy signatures approaching at high speed, he took his lumps and started swimming again.

[At this rate, they'll catch up with us in less than three minutes.] Xi told him soberly. We have to find a solution.]

'Old Ghost, you were a Fluid Wielder too, right?' Jake thought back to what the ghost had said when he arrived.

'Yes, but my talent paled in comparison to Master. Based on the bits of memory I have left, I was a Fluid Knight in the beginning stage.'

'It's enough. Tell me how to lure them.' Jake asked urgently.

In the end, it turned out that controlling Fluid wasn't very challenging, compared to Aether. If he listened to the Fluid with his gut and not his intellect, manipulating this energy came naturally. The best part was that after he did the drill once, he would remember it for the next time.

This was not the case with lesser Fluid Wielders, as evidenced by the Fluid Ghost's jealous pout. Their Fluid sensitivity was too low to allow for this kind of epiphany.

Once Jake caught the trick, he put it into action at once. His senses plugged into the ambient Fluid through his Fluid Core and without quite understanding how and why, he emitted a sort of untraceable counter signal, which quickly reverberated throughout the entire Fluid fabric of this universe.

With his task completed, Jake veered off in a different direction. As expected, the two Inquisitors kept following his previous course, and he rejoiced when he saw their energy signature fade into the distance.

Now that he had lost them, it was time for him to return to the Village to find out what had befallen his friends. With a bit of luck, he might even be able to save some of them.