

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 487 - Soul and True Will

‘Ja-Jake?’ Avy stuttered with difficulty, on the verge of slipping into unconsciousness, or rather madness.

The overflow of emotions and rebounds had finally got the better of her sanity. She was 99% sure it was him, but the formidable full armor fashioned from a huge mass of liquid alloy made it impossible to discern the facial features underneath the armor except for that unique pair of eyes.

Jake’s ears twitched as he heard the young woman’s feeble voice and he instantly turned around and lunged forth, thrusting the claws of his right hand straight into her chest with a fierce expression on his face.

Just as he was about to rip her heart out, a strange glint flashed in his eye and his arm subtly deviated from its path to tear out a good portion of her left shoulder and collarbone.

The sheer magnitude of the pain and the severity of the wound was like an electric shock to Avy and her fragile consciousness regained its clarity and alertness at once. A second earlier, she was poised to die, but not anymore. Jake had definitely tried to save her, and she didn’t want to waste his efforts.

Getting up with difficulty, she compressed the bloody wound that would have killed a normal human with a wince of pain, then staggered off in the opposite direction. Jake trembled on the spot as he stared at her slender figure like a predator on the prowl, but his

gaze eventually shifted away from the young woman when he caught the scent of more interesting prey nearby.

Giving up on the temptation, Jake let his body's warped instincts take over and charged like a flaming bolt of lightning through the dark corridors of the ruined station in search of his next victim.

As he left, a flash of blue light appeared near Avy and tapped a spot on her neck to make her faint. Ilfora's holographic figure appeared and cast a complicated, but grateful look toward where Jake had gone before taking the general in her arms and disappearing in a second burst of light.

Most of the lucid survivors had already made it to the launch bay or finished killing each other. All the places his mental sense scanned were littered with fresh corpses, both parasites and humans. He already knew where his comrades were, but at that moment he didn't care about their fate. There was plenty of fun to be had where he was, and he didn't have enough willpower to change that.

Because while Jake wasn't fundamentally different from before, the Corruption had definitely turned him into a madman. The constant struggle he was putting himself through to not betray his core principles was far too hard for morality to prevail.

The recent incident where he almost stabbed Avy in the heart after saving her was a clear indication of this.

As the wave of Corrupted Fluid engulfed him, several emergency measures were implemented to preserve his soul. One was from Xi, another from Xion Zolvhur's Will Fragment in his possession, and two more from himself.

First, because of his mental link with Xi, he was not totally able to close himself off from her. The Oracle AI's consciousness was more

powerful than his own and supported by the nearly 30 tons of liquid alloy flowing through his cells.

In some ways, their two minds could be considered one and the same, and sensing the danger, Xi had pulled whatever consciousness she could into the liquid alloy to protect it. This knowledge was buried in her memories and had been brought back to her at that crucial moment, or she would have informed him of it much earlier.

This was one of the reasons why Jake had wrapped himself up in his huge liquid alloy armor. Increasing his defense was one reason, but stopping the spread of the Corruption was the real purpose. The result wasn't perfect, but the Corruption's influence on his mind had been somewhat curbed.

As Xi's backup, Xion Zolvhur's Will Fragment had instinctively protected the core part of his Soul, but had finally pulled back after Jake's True Will had been provoked, refusing to be encroached upon.

That was the problem with the Soul and consciousness in general. We could easily see the effect of our choices, thoughts and actions on our environment and ourselves, but it was difficult to observe the brain and in this case the Soul behind it all.

Even with his recent progress, Jake could only rudimentarily control his Spirit Body like his legs and arms, but he could not influence, let alone access, his own Soul. The True Will point he had acquired was hidden there and so it was impossible for him to appreciate its existence.

However, its effects were nonetheless real. This True Will point was a type of Soul Force condensed from his unyielding willpower, his ideals, his memories, and everything that was dear to him, and as long as it existed his Soul would remain untouched.

Urdmzoprfoiwi, oval Tzpu Waii nmaro fimru jfl rmo urmpev om nzmouho val uroazu Smpi dzmq oval Cmzzpnoamr frt fl npzu frt zulaiauro fl oval nmjuz jfl, ao jfl rmo arsarhagiu uaovuz.

Fpzovuzqmzu, oval Tzpu Waii nmaro mriw ukalout om tudurt ovu ovarel ovfo Jfcu ozpiw hfzut fgmpo.

Therefore, Jake was currently like an intruder in his own body.

Thanks to his Myrtharian Soul's property of multitasking, his consciousness had split in two, one huge formed of about 80% of his Soul and Spirit Body and the rest fiercely defended by his True Will.

In a weak position, Jake was not able to resist the instincts and thoughts generated by his new personality, which in spite of everything truly came from him and thus seemed completely natural to him, but in key moments he could grit his teeth and give the little push that would change the outcome.

Rather than resisting head-on and draining his mental power, Jake had quickly analyzed the situation and chosen to focus his efforts. Rather than resist his murderous, greedy and other perverse urges with little success, he opted to let his instincts guide his body and thoughts as they wished, intervening only when it directly infringed on his core values.

It was a very strange process and mental state that was difficult to explain in a few words, but that was how Jake had spent the last fifteen minutes and he was slowly beginning to adjust.

However, the Corruption was still spreading and he needed to save his strength for the final battle. When Avy had spoken his name, it had forced him to make a colossal mental effort to save her life. His only solution had been to immediately look for a new prey to channel this killing urge rather than give it up.

A minute later, his heart and ragged breathing almost stopped as he found adequate prey to match his intentions. Slowing noiselessly to a complete stop, his pupils dilated like those of a lurking predator as he discovered the scene of devastation before his eyes.

In a ruined hall that had once been a sort of cafeteria for the staff of Yotai Shien 3, four Inquisitors were engaged in a titanic battle only slightly less destructive than the one between Sigmar and his son.

One of them, a man with golden skin and wrapped in a fading halo of the same color, was fighting alone against the other three and was in a sorry state. His body had no apparent wounds and his killing intent was still as valiant as before, but the Corruption was finally beginning to impact his performance.

This warrior was Kagarim, the only Inquisitor in Minerva's service still alive.

Haeviw fooprut om frt tunurturo mr Fipat, ovu hmzzpnoamr md oval uruzew vft hfoflozmnvah frt tazuhohmrluypurhul mr Irypalaomzl, jvm juzu rmovare qmzu ovfr dfaiut Fipat Gzfrtqflouzl. Hal gmtw, lvzmpnut ar f eimzaml emitur fpzf zuqaralhuro md qwovmimeahfi vuzmul, jfl zfnatiw opzrare gifhc, guhmqare arhzufiareiw himptw, frt val gmtw vft guepr om diphopfou lozfreuiw fl ad val ukalourhu jfl fgmpo om urt.

The invincibility he boasted about and made his name no longer seemed so overpowering.

'You're tough, I'll give you that.' Imaev spat out a bloody tooth as he put his broken jaw back in place. 'But, you've reached your limit. No matter how strong you are, you are still a failure. If you had succeeded your ascension, the outcome would have been different, but you can't change the past.'

A compassionate expression that was absolutely not feigned rested on his face. The compliment was sincere. As a proud new Fluid Grandmaster and traitor to Minerva, Imaev was arrogant and devoted to Nylreg's cause, but in the course of battle his former co-worker's bravery had earned his respect.

The other two Inquisitors serving Nylreg from the beginning were also in dire straits. The Flame Inquisitor was like a dying chimney fire while Qizor, the dark specter-like one with a cleaver was now unable to take human form, resembling nothing more than a nightmarishly incapacitated monster.

'I will fight to the death if I don't get a contrary order from Minerva.' Kagorim replied solemnly without flinching.

The Flame Inquisitor laughed wearily as he beheld the stubborn determination of their opponent.

'Minerva is already dead. You already know that, don't you? What on earth are you doing sacrificing yourself for that self-centered old hag? In a thousand years, she's never loved anything or anyone and you're just expendable pawns.'

Kagorim's indifferent face twitched imperceptibly at these words and his golden aura darkened by an additional tint. The death match was about to resume when clapping noises interrupted the dramatic scene.

Jake had long recognized the Flame Inquisitor as the one from his Purgatory First Round.

'If you're so keen to be friends, I'll give you that chance.' He proclaimed sarcastically.

At that very moment, he reached out his right arm towards the Flame Inquisitor and grabbed the void. The dying flames of the fallen Fluid

Master rippled erratically and then converged on Jake's hand as if answering his call.

'Nooo!'

Imaev tried to stop the attack, but in the blink of an eye, the Inquisitor's flames were sucked into Jake's hand and obliterated once and for all as he violently snapped his fist shut.

Now there were only three Inquisitors left to kill. Allies or enemies? It didn't matter. Jake didn't actually know any of them.