

The Oracle Paths

Volume 5: The Last Tutorial

Chapter 502 - Debriefing

When Jake returned to his Floating Island, he found neither Crunch nor any of the other felines, but his Shadow Guide was pointing toward the planet B842 below him. If they had stayed true to form, the feline pride was probably hunting. It was also colder and darker than when he left, but that was to be expected since he had taken his Aether Sun Core with him.

Before greeting his comrades, and perhaps to stall for time, the first thing he did was to put the now much warmer and brighter Aether Sun Core back where it belonged. Because of its much higher output than before, he had to adjust the various force fields protecting the island to seal off the excess energy, but in the end he managed to get the temperature and radiation back to a satisfactory range.

Before long, the temperature returned to normal and he was able to turn off the island's spontaneous temperature control. His companions saw him flying back and forth like an overworked bee, but no one interrupted him. They all needed a little peace and quiet after the hectic Ordeal they had just finished. The last few hours in particular had been particularly taxing.

Even Lily, who had been eliminated much earlier, shared the same mental fatigue. When a death occurred, the Soul was repatriated, leaving the body and most of the bracelet behind. It was only after a few hours that what remained of the body would eventually be

recalled. This was typically done to avoid disturbing the local natives and often took place after a burial or when the body was out of sight.

Jake had picked up all this information from Will, who had collected all sorts of data while trading around, but he had never witnessed it. The fact was that once dead, the Soul was sent back to the Red Cube's black space and the process of waiting would begin.

There, one would lose track of time, but the overall impression was that it rarely lasted more than a few hours, no matter the time of death. Kyle and the others had already attested to this during the previous Ordeals.

Therefore, in Lily's eyes she had been brutally eliminated just a few hours earlier and her emotional state was much the same as Tim's or Kevin's. The only difference was that the latter two were more sullen and concerned about other things.

'What happened to Ostrexora?' Tim broke the ice with the question that bothered him the most.

His resentment towards the Banshee woman had not been assuaged by the Corruption's withdrawal. Lily, Kevin, Will, Vincent, Sarah, and Daniel had no idea what they were talking about, but a knowing smile spread across the others' lips.

'She's dead. You sure as hell didn't miss her.' Jake said with a weird look plastered on his face.

'Yesssss!' The teenager raised his fist in the air, barely holding back his gloating.

Esya opened her mouth as if to add something but seeing his joy she could not bring herself to inform him that it was a permanent death. If he found out, it was hard to predict how he would cope.

After that, the silence returned until the group's focus gradually shifted to Sarah and Kevin. Especially Sarah.

Both of them had complicated expressions on their faces, but not for the same reasons. Kevin was staring at Jake composedly, but was troubled by the prospect of his cousin holding a grudge against him when he was actually the victim.

Sarah was mostly wracked with guilt, but also with the painful conviction that she had crossed the line. The scowl Will was shooting at her was the stinging proof of that.

Because it was indeed her who had killed Will. While attacking under the orders of Wyatts and on top of that Nylreg, she had fallen into violence and depravity to the point of attacking without any restraint her friends who were part of the killing list.

Will, who was the weakest fighter in the group, had seen his dragon be decapitated in front of his very eyes, followed shortly by his own head. The strong resentment that was brewing inside him was unquenchable other than by her expulsion.

This kind of mistake could not be trivialized by virtue of the fact that this was a tutorial and the death was not final. At that time, this death had felt more real than ever and one had to integrate the notion that after the next Ordeal, such an accident would have far more lasting consequences.

In fact, the Oracle heavily sanctioned Players who made little effort or chose to die on purpose in order to save their Aether points... Those who indulged in the worst kind of behavior or ignored their mission objectives were also frowned upon by the Oracle System.

While this may have started out as a childish attempt to annoy Jake and make him jealous, Sarah's actions had unfortunately gone well beyond that point and had even ended up hurting the entire team.

Even without the Corruption, her Chaos Zhorion Bloodline was affecting her temperament and personality, causing her to seek out violence and chaos. Something she had unfortunately made evident in this Ordeal while hanging out with the wrong people.

Where Vampires like Wyatts and Carmin had learned to deal with this part of themselves long ago, it was clear that Sarah was like a newborn. Furthermore, the Bloodline she had obtained was more average compared to that same subspecies. With the Corruption on top of that, her poor self-control had degenerated to the point of non-existence.

Despite her catastrophic performance during the last Ordeal, she had, thanks to Jake's mercy, survived until the very end, but her final Ordeal Rating could at best be considered sub-par. The Oracle hadn't offered her any cost-effective solutions to resolve the conflicting traits of her two Bloodlines, and she wasn't eligible for any special rewards anyway, other than keeping her Fluid Core.

In the end, she had used her credits to buy an Oracle Skill and an Aether Skill both called Pacify. The first skill could, at the cost of a large amount of Aether, remove all external mental influences as well as remove the aggression and negative mental effects of a Bloodline for a very short time. The second one did the same thing, but its effects were much weaker and depended on the host's power, especially its Aether stats, and mental power.

This could be considered both a good and bad choice given her circumstances, but it still showed a certain amount of lucidity regarding her behavior.

Unfortunately, it was too late. The damage was already done and she was well aware of that. Rather than suffer the disdain, dislike or rejection of her companions, she would rather take the lead.

‘ I’ m leaving the Myrtharian Nerds. ‘ She blurted out unambiguously. Seeing the two sisters interject, she immediately cut them off before adding, ‘My decision is made, I will not change my mind. What I did is unpardonable and I’m not 100% sure I won’t do it again. I’m sorry for everything that happened.’

After that, she stared at Jake to probe his expression, but was disappointed once again when she failed to detect more than a slight frown. Her eyes welled up with tears, but not enough to spill.

Deep down, she hoped he would have stopped her, but Jake was true to himself. His only movement was to materialize the Myrtharian gladius sword he had confiscated from her and hand it over.

‘Your sword.’ He said with a straight face. ‘I hope you won’t regret it.

What more could he say. If he had been the one to do that, he would probably leave too. It was hard enough for him to look his cousin in the eye who bore no ill will towards him so to endure Will’s loathing glare on a daily basis would likely be far too great of a challenge.

Especially since she knew her own value. Will had a much more crucial role in the Faction. Despite his shortcomings, he had managed to survive his last Ordeal with flying colors only to be killed pitifully by his very own comrade in the next. He had every right to be angry.

‘What do you think Will?’ Jake asked flatly to the businessman.

Jake had his faults, but he was ultimately not a grudge-holder. His nonsensical, narrow-minded resentment toward his cousins and family in general was something rooted in early childhood that wasn’t entirely rational. As an adult, it was hard to sway him to dislike someone, and he was usually fairly quick to forgive if his principles were not violated.

If Will was willing to forgive her, he might be willing to tolerate her presence, but he would no longer care about her. She would also lose her status as a founding member and go on probation until she proved herself like the dozens of Players they had recruited. In other words, their relationship would become strictly professional.

Upon hearing his question, Will forced himself to rein in his inner turmoil and return to his customary business-like demeanor. After a few more seconds of staring at the young blonde, he declared sternly, 'If she wanted to stay, I wouldn't have stopped her, but my social and business relationships are based on trust. When a business partner puts one over on you or your girlfriend cheats on you, would you still trust them? No. When the bond of trust is broken I find it almost impossible to restore. In order for her to stay, she would have to accept a Slave Contract or at the very least an extremely strict Servant Contract.'

'Would you accept that, Sarah?' Jake shifted his attention to the young woman. With her prideful nature, he already knew the answer.

'Never.' She objected adamantly.

'In that case, good luck.' Jake wished her honestly. This might be the last time they would ever see each other again.

The next second, she received her kick-out message from the Myrtharian Nerds.

At that moment, the tears that were refusing to come out began to roll down, and once they did, they became like two rivers deprived of their dam.

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From now on, she was on her own.