

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 117 - One can only trust oneself.

As with previous missions, the reward was a gain of experience points to improve the Oracle Rank as well as a better rating for the Ordeal. To the surprise and synchro expression of Jake, Kyle and Lu Yifeng, they had received the same mission.

Lu Yan had not reacted the same way they had and Jake realized as he stared at her that she was extremely pale and had sweaty skin. His previous doubts returned to him in full force.

‘Where’s Miya?’ Jake questioned Lu Yan by looking behind the young woman.

The skinny woman had a good constitution and consumed limited amounts of poison. She could already stand up with help when the trio went to get weapons. So she should at least have been able to walk after all that time.

‘...She’s dead.’ Lu Yan answered softly with the reserve and small voice that characterized her.

But Jake didn’t take the bait this time. With a determined step, he pushed her sideways without politeness to enter the cantina, incurring the wrath of her brother.

‘What’s wrong with you?!’

Lu Yifeng’s outraged scream did not manage to make him feel guilty. Once in the cantina, he immediately noticed two things. Miya’s

bloody corpse and that of Lutex. When he checked Lutex's body, he was unable to determine whether the death was natural or not. In any case there was one thing he was sure of. Someone had harvested the Aether. With Miya dead, there was only one suspect left.

His eyebrows frowned more and more as he investigated the crime scene, his expression was indecipherable when he discovered the cause of Miya's death. Although he wondered how the young woman could have smuggled in such good quality daggers with impunity, at least he knew for sure that she was one of the only Players to wield a dagger with incredible skill.

Despite Lu Yan's talent and after the revelation of Miya's Constitution and High Vitality, he doubted that the young woman had the slightest chance of winning, especially unarmed. And yet the proof was there. Miya had been stabbed by her own weapon, and with exceptional strength on top of that.

Again, there was no Aether on the corpse, but that was simply because the first four Ordeals were non-lethal. The real Miya was probably somewhere in stasis inside the Red Cude waiting for her body to be rebuilt, unless this was all just a very realistic virtual reality game.

For the sake of good form, Jake also checked the condition of the unconscious gladiator in the corridor and was able to confirm that the gladiator had died as well. As with Lutex, there were no apparent physical signs that his death had been precipitated by someone.

Nevertheless, if Jake could make mistakes or had difficulty judging people to the point of relying too much on his Oracle for this kind of thing, he wasn't an idiot. To save Lutex, he had still made a proper wish and the Path existed. The Path had not interfered with his

priority of going through the armory first and it indicated that even if the gladiator's prognosis was critical, he could still hold out for a while.

Suuare vaq tuft mr val zuopzr jvaiu val Svftmj Gpatu jfl loaii  
dmiimjare ovu nzusampl Pfov lvmjut ovfo ovu Ozfhiu vft qftu f  
qalhfihpifoamr... Art ovfo jfl nzmgiuqfoah!

'Xi? Any explanation?' Jake's tone seemed peaceful when he spoke, but he was fuming inside.

[...I don't know. My memory's locked, as is my access to information requiring a higher rank than Private. ] Xi responded with a certain haste in her voice, a sign that she, too, was disturbed by the revelation.

'In other words... Even information you think you know for certain may be false or incomplete. But I suppose you must still have the intelligence of the original Xi if you don't have all her memories. You must have some ideas, right? I do, but I'd like you to confirm them with me. '

While he was having a mental chat with Xi, he started sprinting towards Gerulf, whose war cries were becoming more and more thundering. He ignored Lu Yan and his brother this time, feeling that he could no longer trust them.

It was the same with the Oracle. Miya, just as Lu Yan had acted in a way that his Oracle could not predict and this ended his previous relative dependence on it. The bracelet was an incredible technology, but the Oracle System was clearly not infallible, or at least not so impartial as it seemed.

[Don't bury the Prediction function too quickly, Jake.] Xi warned him. [It's limited, but I can switch to manual mode, if you wish.

We'll only use the information gathered by your senses and your bracelet to formulate more accurate Paths. That should help to overcome some of the contradictions.]

‘And why haven't we been doing this from the beginning?’

[Because it's even more imperfect than the Oracle System. The bracelet would depend on your senses to gather information and calculate paths, and you're bound to miss crucial information. The senses can also be deceived.]

‘In that case, I only have to increase my perception, I suppose, to avoid this problem?’ Jake merely deduced.

[Indeed, but keep in mind that you then lose some of your omniscience. For example, if a giant meteor were to hit where you are in a week's time, the standard Oracle System could easily anticipate it and make you travel far from the impact location long in advance. If you use only the information gathered by your senses, you'll never see it coming. ]

What was the probability of getting hit by an asteroid? Minute! However, that was true on Earth, not in the Mirror Universe. There was too much he didn't know to completely ignore the Oracle System.

‘I guess there's a catch when you combine the two predictive systems?’ Jake said suddenly, bouncing back on his previous words.

[There is one. The contradictions. If your senses notice something that doesn't match the Path generated by the global Oracle System, it usually takes precedence. You can choose to rely on your own perceptions when in doubt, but then again, sometimes the Oracle is right.]

‘ Hmmm, example? »

[For example, you see an army coming towards you from the South and the North. One of them is an illusion. The conventional Oracle would immediately know which one is true and therefore in which direction to flee. If you rely only on your sight or hearing, then you must consider both armies to be true.]

‘Can’t the Oracle make those kinds of distinctions on his own? ‘Jake saw where she was going, but it was confusing and he was running out of time.

[ Most of the time it does. But like with Lu Yan or Miya, imagine if the second army is true, but the Oracle doesn’t see it? Then all of his calculations would be wrong...]

‘Keeps both calculation modes active. If there is a conflict, what I perceive will be considered the truth‘ His decision was made. It was better to die by his own mistake than by trusting an entity he knew nothing about and playing him.

By killing Lutex, Lu Yan had reaped an absurd amount of Aether, negating in an instant all the advantage that Jake had built up in 42 days of intensive effort. If he let all the Players with less scruples than him take all the Aether that could have been his, he would not last long.

At that moment, his Path ‘I want to get stronger’, which had been hindered by the filter of his morality, became less restricted without him being aware of it. If morality was no longer sufficient to guarantee his survival, he too could become a monster.

When he reached the position where Gerulf was fighting against an army of assailants, Jake’s face became serious and chilly in turn,

wiping out any form of empathy and compassion he might have felt that night.

Leaping high into the air, Jake threw himself into the fray with his wooden sword and small round shield. One of the recruits who was standing at the sidelines, watching the confrontation passively and not daring to participate, suddenly saw his head explode like a ripe fruit crashing against a wall.

Jake who had just landed near the new corpse inspected his broken wooden sword with indifference, the other half lost in the dead man's head. Throwing it to the ground, he picked up his victim's bronze sword with a satisfied smile. He had a weapon now. The time had come to reap Aether and lives.