

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 378 - No Communications

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your Flight Commander Avy Shanmin at your service. "The voice presented itself in a somewhat mischievous, but awkward tone.

This Avy Shanmin wasn't even trying to be polite, and you could feel a profound disgust. From her slightly hoarse voice, she did not seem to appreciate her forced awakening, and unlike the other passengers she unfortunately knew the reason why.

Jake and the other participants were also in the know thanks to the synopsis provided by the Oracle System, but the rest of the crew was not. Predictably, the captain of the Titan Pearl quickly abandoned trivialities to get to the point.

"Sigh... I hope you are enjoying your trip with us and that you are recovering well from your cryosleep. Alas, I have two pieces of bad news to tell you."

The unsuspecting native passengers, easily recognizable by their boundless enthusiasm, suddenly put down their cutlery and stopped smiling stupidly. Of course, not all these passengers were filled with happiness.

Quite a few had poorly recovered from hypersleep or had not yet mourned the relatives and friends they had left behind on Riva. After all the time spent sleeping, it would be a miracle if these relatives were still alive.

All these reactions were reasonable, but the commander's subsequent statements were not going to make things any better...

"Cough, I'm not cut out for announcing this kind of thing..." Avy Shanmin complained in frustration throughout the refectory, thinking she had turned off her microphone before realizing her mistake. "Damn it. Where's the bitch in charge of the events when you need her?! And where is my coffee?!"

A sound of an object smashing on the floor, followed by a flurry of insults directed at the poor "bitch" resounded throughout the refectory before communication was suddenly cut off.

At that very moment, the heads of all the passengers were funny and Jake was no less puzzled. A few minutes later, the sound amplifiers crackled again and another much softer, professional female voice addressed them.

"Ahem, sorry for the inconvenience. I am Fuj Xuri, the chief host of this cruise and will be at your disposal throughout your stay. As the commander has suggested, we do indeed have two pieces of bad news for you. However, depending on your point of view you might see this as a gift.

"I feel you are impatient, so let's stop kidding around. The first bad news is that we haven't arrived. Your hypersleep was interrupted halfway through the trip because of an anomaly

detected in the ship. Based on our current flying speed, we won't reach Riva 2 for another 79 years."

"What?!"

Tval mpozfeut zufhoamr jfl rmo bplo dzmq ovu rfoasu nllureuzl. Tvu Pifwuzl juzu film lvmhcut. Tvu Oztufi arozmtphoamr jfl fgmpo f hfii dmz vuin hmqare dzmq f gufhmr imlo ar lnflu, rmo fr frmqfiw arlatu ovu lvan.

They were two very different things. In the first case, the ship was perfectly functional while in the second case they didn't know what they were dealing with.

The passengers were not fooled and immediately began to consider the worst-case scenarios. Within seconds, the joyful atmosphere in the dining hall fell into panic and turmoil.

Perhaps because she had access to the camera or because of the commander's glare, the host quickly corrected the situation before it got out of hand,

"Don't panic! The Titan Pearl is doing well. We'll just do a routine check-up and that's great, we're only three weeks away from the Yotai Shien 3 Space Station and after making contact with the station we'll go there to refuel and make any needed repairs."

The quieter passengers started whispering to each other again and Jake listened to them so as not to miss anything they were talking about. It turned out that no one had ever heard of the space station. Other than knowing that it was under the direct jurisdiction of the Galactic Consortium, their knowledge level was zero. Nevertheless, the host had no reason to lie to them.

'I don't like it'. Jake thought inwardly as he exchanged a meaningful glance with Will.

He was beginning to get a good idea of how the scenario would unfold. Xi also shared his pessimism.

[If our goal was to maximize our chances of survival, we could take control of the ship and prevent it from docking to this station at all costs, but our Main Ordeal Mission is to discover the truth behind a call for help signal that hasn't happened yet.]

[My guess is that the signal will either come from the station or from an object nearby. In either case, the Titan Pearl will be involved. Before being a transport ship, it is a heavily armed star battleship created and designed for military use. The ship's crew is primarily composed of highly skilled military personnel. They are perfectly qualified to handle this type of situation.]

Jfcu rmttut jaov fr aqnllasu uknzullamr, ovur ialourut om ovu luhmrt gft rujl frmprrhuquro.

"The second bad news is that the space station in question is not responding. The station is trapped in an electromagnetic storm of gigantic magnitude that has been raging for nearly a hundred years and communications have long since become impossible. We expect turbulence as we pass through this area.

"Even without this anomaly, the Titan Pearl would have been forced to deactivate the crew's hypersleep to investigate the situation because this electromagnetic storm is on our way. Unfortunately, we don't know why you, the passengers, were also awakened, but we assume that this would be related to the anomaly detected on board. In any case, the situation is under control."

At this stage, passengers were definitely worried. Although this could ultimately only be a simple mishap, it was human nature to expect the worst. The Players in particular knew full well that this cruise would soon turn sour.

Fortunately, the host was experienced. After announcing the bad news, she took great care to end on a positive note, immediately making the less suspicious forget about their doubts.

"Nevertheless, behind every black cloud there is a sun!" She exclaimed with almost intoxicating passion. "During the investigation of Yotai Shien 3 and the check-up of the Titan Pearl, you will be able to enjoy all the services of the ship free of charge. I wish you all a very pleasant cruise and we'll see you tonight at the seventh floor disco for a crazy night with DJ Wajin! Please come out and join us!"

At the end, the host's voice took on the childish pitch of a Japanese idol and she or DJ Wajin must have been famous on Riva, as most of the native passengers shouted excitedly after the last announcement. The word "free of charge" could also have had something to do with it.

When silence returned to the dining hall, the discussions resumed. The passengers were in a frenzy, but the Players were all pondering over their next move.

Jake, who was already ready to leave to explore the ship, winked at his comrades and they too got up. Once out of the dining hall, he took out his boarding papers and found his cabin number.

"Room 128, 5 floor, Compartment B. It's not too far from here..." He mumbled with a falsely lost expression.

Tvu zuduhomzw jfl film ar Cm qnfzoquro B ar ovu qattiu md ovu Ivan, gpo mr ovu ovazt dimmz. Adouz f duj qarpoul md lmaiofzw jficare, Jfcu dmprr val hfgar frt jfl urhvfrou om talhmsuz f ipkzamp lpaou jmzovw md f 5-lofz vmoui.

A varnished parquet floor, a solid gold chandelier, exquisite decorations and paintings reminiscent of the Versailles Palace and a king size bed large enough to accommodate at least 5 people. People like Jake.

There was even a wall screen transmitting a faithful vision of space from outside the Titan Pearl to give the illusion of having its own window.

Jake immediately let himself fall into bed and when he sunk into the soft mattress he almost forgot the calamity that was brewing in the shadows. After contemplating the ceiling for a few minutes, he sighed tiredly and straightened up.

'No cameras here,' he remarked serenely. 'We should be able to communicate freely from our rooms using radio transmitters or our Oracle Devices.'

[Use your bracelets instead.] Xi shouted in a warning tone. [If they can pick up your radio frequency, it would be a catastrophe.]

As usual, his Oracle Ai thought of everything. The only thing that bothered him was that with the transmitters they could have at least saved a few Aether points.

To let Will and the others know where he was, he transmitted his findings via his bracelet and waited for a possible answer. Strangely enough, even after two hours none of his group had responded.

"Fuck, what the hell are they doing?" Jake began to get annoyed after the third hour.

"Jake, look at the screen," Xi pressed him with obvious bafflement.

"Why, what's the matter with you?"

When he saw the screen completely black, he froze on the spot. Rushing towards the screen, he pressed several buttons and confirmed that the screen was still on. He tried again to contact Will and the others with his bracelet without success.

[It won't work with radio transmitters either.] Xi said categorically. [Communications have been cut off.]

Jake was taken aback by this statement. That the Titan Pearl had malfunctions was perfectly acceptable, but what did that have to do with their Oracle Devices.

[Try a scan to find out for sure] Xi proposed without much conviction.

Jake hated wasting his Aether like that, but he played along. After reabsorbing as much liquid alloy as he could carry, he ran a scan. A spiritual wave gushed out of his body and traveled through the ship at the speed of light.

He waited for the usual feedback with anticipation, but to his dismay it didn't come. The bracelet remained abnormally silent.

Seriously alarmed this time, he deployed his own Spirit Body as far as he could and tried to shroud his environment with his consciousness. At his greatest shock, after only a few meters, he felt his control over his Spirit Body waning and after five meters it began to flicker and warp dangerously as if an alien energy was destabilizing it. If he insisted on maintaining control, he would risk damaging his soul.

After recalling his Spirit Body, Jake had a dark look on his face, but he kept his chin up.

"I'm going to see what's going on myself." He suddenly informed Xi as he donned his armor straight away.

Waovmpo dprhoamrfi hmqqprahfoamrl, vu vft rm zuflmr om vatu. Hal arloarhol omit vaq ovfo vu jmpit lmmr ruut ao.

Just as he was closing the door of his cabin, the Oracle Coach gave him his first mission unceremoniously:

[First Side Mission: Go to the command room and make sure all your companions are safe and sound.]