

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 386 - Let them Board Us

After the Pirate Captain's ultimatum, a leaden silence descended over the command room again, or at least what was left of it. Yet the reactions of the other passengers were of a completely different nature. Just seconds after the end of the enemy leader's speech, general panic spread like wildfire throughout the Pearl Titan.

The petite woman officiating as the ship's general bore a horrified expression and began to shiver all over her body. Even though communications had been cut off, she could already imagine the chaotic outcome that this speech would trigger.

As for Jake and the other Players of the Titan Pearl, they were expressionless. Some may have felt fear or excitement, but for most it was just like the adrenaline rush that precedes a skydiving jump: They knew that what was coming next was risky, but they couldn't help but look forward to it.

"How did he get control of the ship's communications? "Jake recklessly pulled the young general out of her torment. "I thought it was the electromagnetic storm that was jamming communications."

This was indeed what he had deduced, for lack of a better suggestion. But the pirate ship's demonstration had just proved to them that communicating at distance was not impossible in this storm.

On hearing his question, the young woman blinked several times with a puzzled face, then, as she was pondering over this mystery, her eyes regained their usual smugness and confidence.

" So? " Jake added in a neutral tone, trying not to rush her any further, at the risk of shattering her fragile confidence.

"The storm is definitely responsible for our communication issues, but..." Avy paused to briefly probe the faces of the other officers present. The old bearded officer seemed to understand the message and nodded discreetly, but not discreetly enough.

"But? "Jake repeated impatiently.

"But it shouldn't have affected the ship's internal communications. "She finally spilled the beans. "The ship's hull is protected by an energy shield capable of intercepting cosmic radiation and anything that poses a risk to the integrity of the ship and its passengers. This storm is not normal and there is surely a Fluid Grandmaster involved, but the ship's defenses are supposed to anticipate this kind of threat. The only plausible hypothesis is that we were sabotaged or hacked... The ease with which the pirates took control of the sound amplifiers strongly supports this thesis."

"An infiltrated mole on board? Mmmm... " Jake scratched his chin thoughtfully.

Tvu Pifwuzl hmpit gu arsmisut tunurtare mr ovuaz hvfzfhouz frt ovu luhmrtfzw qallamrl ovuw juzu easur, gpo lfgmofeare lphv f lvan jmpit nzmfgiw vfsu fiuzout ovu lmitauzl. Sarhu ovu Taofr Pufzi jfl fizuftw lpdduzare dzmq fr frmqfiw, ao jfl qmzu imeahfi om ovarc ovfo ovu lvan vft guur vficut mz lfgmofeut gudmzu ovuw hfqu mpo md vwnuzliuun.

However, this only applied to the initial anomaly that led to their early awakening. It was absolutely possible that one or more traitors had been present on board from the start, but it was also possible that some Players with questionable morals had been put on the side of the pirates.

At the very least, Jake was quite sure that Yerode and Lamine would not have disavowed such a role. It was in keeping with their character and lack of ethics.

Even though he had been lucky so far, he was well aware that statistically all of these participants could not be good people. There were bound to be a few criminals or delinquents among them.

"Let's say we were sabotaged, how do these hackers get in touch with us remotely?" Will intervened while putting his glasses back on. He had become so used to not wearing them anymore that he felt uncomfortable about having to wear them again and consequently blinked excessively.

Avy Shanmin glanced disdainfully at the frail nerd, who had the same stilted and pompous look as her officers, but faced with the evil gaze of the three cousins she swallowed her saliva.

"Logically this should be impossible for a star cruiser, but their ship was obviously modified." She answered with sincerity. "There are only two solutions to overcome the interference generated by this storm. Either they have a long-range antenna designed by a talented Fluid Architect, or they have a Fluid Wielder of Master level or higher on board. The second option is more likely..."

"Why this?"

"Because the technologies harnessing the Fluid's power are based on the use of Fluid Cores. To build such an antenna, you would need at least a hundred master-level Fluid Cores."

Jake and the others darkened as they listen to this revelation. According to the general, all Fluid-based technology was built over a mountain of corpses.

Ffhut jaov ovuaz taleplout frt lvmhcut uknzullamrl, Asw Svfrqar frt ovu movuz mddahuzl diflvut dprw dfhul.

"Don't tell me you didn't know that? You learn that in kindergarten and it has always been a sacred honor for the dead."

Will opened his mouth and then closed it again, not finding a suitable excuse. But Jake next door couldn't care less. Their appearances were dubious and their questions had already raised many doubts among the soldiers present.

Having already defeated the general, Jake felt that one more or less question wouldn't make much difference.

"How strong is a Fluid Master or Grandmaster?" He asked with a deadpan face.

Upon hearing his question, all the officers were greatly shocked, including the old bearded man. This kind of knowledge was part of the general culture of the Six Brotherhoods. Unless he had lived in a cave like a hermit all his life, it was impossible not to know this.

"I am a Fluid Knight." Avy explained concisely with growing doubts. "Based on the level of the Fluid Core, Fluid Users are categorized from weakest to strongest as Fluid Acolyte, Fluid Disciple, Fluid Squire, Fluid Knight, Fluid Adept, Fluid Master and Fluid Grandmaster.

"You defeated me effortlessly, but don't think you can take on a Fluid Master or Grand Master. They're on a whole different level. Although I don't understand how your body can be so strong without emitting any Fluid fluctuations, it won't be enough."

Jake scoffed inwardly. If she thought he had used all his strength she was sadly mistaken. Subconsciously, he rose himself directly to the level of a Fluid Master. As for the mysterious Fluid Grandmaster... He would have to meet them first, although based on the auras of the Consortium Inquisitors they must have been monstrously strong.

Rather than start in a sterile debate, the bearded officer took advantage of this lull to immediately refocus the subject on the present emergency.

"General Shanmin... About the Red Eels' ultimatum, what do we do?" He humbly asked with a slight bow.

The young woman was caught off guard when she recalled their circumstances. Looking at her watch, she realized that a quarter of an hour had already passed. Because communications had been cut off, they had no way to gauge the panic on board and they had almost forgotten about the pirate ship outside.

"What if we retaliated?" She valiantly proposed in an akimbo stance.

The old officer shook his head and threw a forlorn look towards the devastated cockpit behind them. How did the young woman intend to pilot this ship to return fire without any control commands? It was the enigma of the century...

Luckily, she wasn't so dumb and immediately realized the problem.

"Isn't there a second control room for these kinds of scenarios?" Avy exclaimed with a victorious expression as if she had just come up with a great idea.

'Where the hell did we end up... is that kid really running this ship?' That's what Jake and the others thought, including most of the soldiers and officers present, but they were careful not to break her delusion. As usual, they left the honor to the old bearded officer, who sighed in exasperation but still accepted his fate.

"It is indeed the case, but it is too late to arm the Titan Pearl." He argued in a reasonable tone. "The Dark Matter cannon is already loaded and ready to fire. If the slightest suspicious movement is attempted, the pirates will open fire immediately. Moreover, the model of their ship has superior armor and weaponry to ours. It's better to play by their rules... "

Far from admitting defeat, the young general proposed a dozen alternative plans, each more unlikely than the last. All these plans resulted in the total destruction of the pirates and their ship. The most daring plan even ended grandiosely by taking control of the enemy mother ship without any casualties.

After a while, Jake could not stand it anymore and ended the torture for the sake of everyone.

"Let the pirates board us." He offered serenely. "Our ship is damaged, theirs is intact. We can't escape, so we might as well let them in. Until proven otherwise, we eliminated the first wave of pirates effortlessly, so we can at least see what they have to say. Even if they try to take control of the ship, as long as the passengers are safe we should be able to eliminate the threat. The ideal would be to capture a major pirate, preferably their captain, whom they are not willing to sacrifice. That will put us safe from their cannon."

The young general stared at him for a long time after hearing his plan, as if she was trying to poke him dead with her eyes for having found that perfect plan before her. Maybe she was hoping he would look away, but Jake just yawned with a bored expression.

Eventually, she accepted the plan.

The silent officers breathed a sigh of relief and the Titan Pearl's crew immediately set to work, preparing to welcome their future guests.