

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 391 - Emiwan's Tale

Once everyone was seated, Emiwan got straight to the point.

"Did you start the engines again?" He asked in an urgent tone. "We have to get out of here as soon as possible. Whatever your initial reasons for being here are, believe me, it's not worth it."

"Why such a hurry?" The old bearded officer snarled without hiding his animosity. "Until we complete our investigative mission on Yotai Shien 3, we can't turn back. Even if we wanted to, your stupid pirates caused so much damage during their boarding that we would have to stop at the space station to finish those goddamn repairs!"

Faced with the reprimand, the pirate captain's face darkened, but he didn't lose his temper. Quite the opposite, a surge of despair flashed fleetingly before being immediately repressed. It went almost unnoticed, except for a few watchful glances.

"Do you have any idea why I blew up my own ship, which was in perfect condition and superior in all respects to your Titan Pearl?" Emiwan asked suddenly after a short silence.

"Because you are stupid? A need for change?" One of the two Egeans, a young man with leafy-green long hair and eyebrows mocked openly.

The Egeans knew nothing about these futuristic technologies, but by comparing these spaceships to their boats they could readily estimate their value. Bigger and better armed, self-destructing the Red Eels' mothership indeed seemed completely stupid from any angle.

"And to whom do I owe the honor?" The one-eyed pirate chuckled without looking offended.

"Greatmage Mihangyl Sarcaryn, son of Nardual Sarcaryn and High Duke of Ianjor. I walked when I was 3 months old, learned to read when I was 2 years old and awakened my magical affinity when I was 3. My Wood Spirit Root are Celestial grade and I have been blessed with the combined life force of 12 Wood Archmages. At five years old, I was ..."

Once thrown into his litany, there was no stopping him. Jake's eyes, who could hardly stop yawning, suddenly widened in surprise and he stared at the young green-haired mage as if he was staring at a fascinating freak of nature.

Discreetly, but in fact not quite so, he turned his head towards the two sisters who were standing not far behind him and probed their expression with an air of "is this normal?". He almost burst out laughing at their reaction.

Because the table wasn't big enough for everyone, except for Jake and Will the rest of their group was standing up behind them. At that very moment, the two sisters' faces were flushed with shame and their clenched fists were quivering with rage and embarrassment.

Flames were blazing in their pupils and the thermostat around them had risen sharply. If they could, they would have thrown a fireball at him to silence him. At least there was no lack of envy to do so...

"Cough... Nobody cares. "Jake cut him off without a care in the world after a five-minute long pamphlet, which earned him an outraged look from the young man.

Choosing to ignore the moron nobleman, he then turned to the pirate captain, who was vainly rummaging through his memories to make sense of all those claims and he said,

"Just tell us why you destroyed your ship so we can move forward. As for the Titan Pearl, it's already on its way to Yotai Shien 3."

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"You may have heard from the captured pirates that since the exploration of Yotai Shien 3, everyone is going crazy. That's all true. The Fluid Ghosts brought back from the station are just one of the problems. If it was only that, I would have exterminated them long ago. The truth is, there are other creatures on board. Creatures that even I have to flee from."

"A Fluid Master like you has to run away from a creature? How is this possible?! "Avy Shanmin exclaimed in a perplexed voice.

"Alas, I fear so. "Emiwan recognized with a wry smile. "The pirates who returned from the space station were contaminated by an unknown life form. I don't know if it's a fungus, a bacteria, a virus or something else, but once it's infected it evolves very quickly and becomes a nightmare.

"The infected patient will be affected on many levels. First he or she will become irritable and aggressive, with an increased appetite and eventually a slight fever. It's nothing too bad. The Fluid accumulated in their body decreases a bit during this incubation period and some Fluid Core has even been downgraded by half a grade. So far nothing too serious. It's only afterwards that it gets more complicated.

"Organs will quickly show signs of inflammation, with a peak after 7 to 10 days when things take an irreversible turn. Overnight, one or two organs will randomly show signs of inflammation and then fail. If it's the brain or heart, people die, but this is quite rare. It is usually a kidney or a lung and rarely both at the same time, which would also be fatal.

"At this stage, those infected lose consciousness and fall into a coma for several days. Naturally, the necessary medical examinations were carried out to try to find the origin of the problem, but without success. All we know is that these failing organs are gradually replaced by a substance. If nothing is done, this substance takes the form of an embryo and gives birth to a large grayish larva after 3 weeks."

"I see you coming, but of course we tried to extract the substance, including the larvae before they mature. Believe it or not, it's almost impossible. The substance becomes extremely strong and resilient to hostile intent, while the larva, even immature or embryonic, is incredibly vivacious when attacked directly. It flees by moving around in the body of the contaminated subject, which ultimately only aggravates his or her symptoms. If the larva reaches the brain or the heart, it's all over. I'm not hiding the fact that we simply gave up after a while. We're not equipped to deal with this type of bug..."

The atmosphere in the room had become very heavy in a few minutes. Most of the officers shivered with horrified expressions while the Players present were mostly impassive, lost in thought.

These parasites may have been an insoluble problem for most people, but not for Jake. With his telekinesis and high Perception he was confident that he could extract the mature larva. It was a different story, though, for the liquid substance that came with it...

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"What happens once the larva matures? "Will solemnly invited the pirate to continue his story. He had taken a notebook out of who knows where and was taking notes.

Jake gladly left this pleasure to Xi and his bracelet, which was already recording everything. After all, that was what technology was made for. From Will's concentrated posture, one could assume that it helped him to think, but it was definitely a useless quirk.

"Ahem... Once the larva matures, it just comes out. "Emiwan coughed with embarrassment.

"Can you get rid of it at this point? "Avy asked, while playing with a dagger to mask her nervousness.

"That's the problem... I couldn't do it. "The pirate captain sadly confessed. "This larva isn't particularly tough, but it does have a few trump cards up its sleeve. It is ridiculously fast, as elusive as a soap bar, but most of all it is invulnerable to thermal and energetic ammunition and tolerates Fluid-based attacks very well. Worse, it accelerates its growth.

"Although we prepared ourselves perfectly before each hatching, we only managed to injure one of them. We even tried to isolate them in a room with no ventilation or ducts. As a result, they devour their unconscious host or, if necessary, they spit out an acidic substance capable of dissolving metal obstacles. They then eat the corroded metal sludge, which further accelerates their growth." Don't be fooled by the outward appearance of my ship. Inside, it was a real wreck."

"The growth is just too fast and uncontrollable, even without eating anything these larvae grow to the naked eye. In a few days they form a cocoon in an inaccessible corner of the ship, then a few hours later they reach their mature form. Then, rather than hiding, they begin to actively hunt."

"Paradoxically, in their adult form I can face them. They are big enough to make the fight fair, but their abilities differ significantly from one creature to another. That's why I'm still alive. Nevertheless it is a real fight to the death and very often I only manage to scare them away."

Jake suddenly raised his hand to interrupt him.

"Wait a minute, why didn't the pirates we captured talk about these creatures? According to you, the ship was literally infested."

"I was wondering the same thing. "The second Egean present nodded.

Compared to his compatriot, he had fire-red hair and wore a medieval plate armor covered with insignia and a long cape of the same color as his hair. Although young, his attitude was not impertinent, while his nimble muscles and calloused hands attested to his dedication to training.

Emiwan alternately glanced at the two men and shrugged with a sorry look.

"Aaah... That's why I call it a nightmare. These creatures are intelligent and they have a skillset that is worth the detour. They adapt very quickly. First of all, they know that the

ship is limited in size. They understand that if they kill us all, they would lose their food source. That's why if they can avoid it, they won't kill us."

"They don't want us to gang up on them either. So what do they do? Very simple... They lobotomize us. Literally. After each attack, they devour a portion of Fluid, blood and flesh of their victim, then leave a bit of substance in their brain to clean up their memories. It leaves no trace. Worse, it creates a kind of addiction.

"This is also true for those people whose larva has already hatched. As soon as a pirate has been contaminated by this substance and it reaches his brain, he can no longer be trusted. He now serves the cause of these monsters. It is not a strict control, but these victims feel a visceral need to protect them as if they were from the same family and they start behaving in the same way.

"That's for the normal monsters we call Hunters. Some rarer creatures specialize in psychic attacks and coordinate them. They are called Controllers. Among other things, they exacerbate the negative emotions of the crew and use them to assemble Fluid Ghosts that they control. With these Fluid Ghosts they then influence nearby pirates.

"Others suck out the Fluid from the ship and then spit it out in another form that these monsters crave. Unfortunately this new Fluid is a poison for us. It bewitches us and affects us in a mysterious way, which transforms us little by little into decerebrated beasts. This third type we call them Converters."