

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 396 - Space Station

Once the ship was docked, all the people in the crowded hangar held their breath almost like they were expecting an impending disaster. The stifling silence and stagnant atmosphere lasted for almost five minutes before the female general deigned to lower the gangplank.

Far from being immediately assaulted by thousands of nightmarish aliens, it was a scenery both plain and unsettling that unfolded before their eyes: No light, no sound. The current was conspicuously cut off.

Although everyone had donned a proper protective suit or at the very least a gas mask for the most confident, the first tests soon confirmed to them that the atmosphere was perfectly breathable and the temperature still within tolerable limits. It was a little chilly, just a couple of degrees warmer than a refrigerator, but that was no big deal for these properly outfitted Players and soldiers.

"Begin the landing!" Avy yelled out in a bossy way. "Teams 2, 3 and 7 scout. I want a report in 30 minutes. Teams 1 and 3, take some engineers with you and get the power back on. If not, deploy some generators and make sure we have light. Team 4, and 8 set up camp. The rest of you, set up a security perimeter."

"At your command."

"Loud and clear."

"It will be done right this minute."

Upon receiving their orders, squads of soldiers consisting of about twenty individuals dispersed professionally and methodically like a well-oiled machine. Jake and the other Players realized for the first time that these soldiers were not entirely useless.

If the Players had been in charge of the initial probe, each group would probably have kept information to themselves and cooperation would have been rendered impractical or grossly insincere. With the Titan Pearl's general personally handling this matter, any problems related to their inability to trust each other were resolved. At least for the time being.

"What do we do?" Vincent asked, gripping his assault rifle nervously. On the surface he seemed indifferent, but he was obviously eager for action.

Jake stared at the darkness stretching out in front of them for a moment, then quietly replied,

"Nothing. We wait."

His cousin and Kevin nearby showed disappointed faces, but on the inside they were not in the least surprised. Their faction was far from being the only one to embrace this approach.

Scouring a gigantic space station in complete darkness that might be harboring a Fluid Grandmaster plus an army of parasitic aliens was such a stupid idea that any Player with at least three functional neurons would be able to discard it.

There were some stupid Players, though.

Although all the races participating in this Ordeal were essentially human in appearance, this did not mean that their cognitive abilities were all equivalent. Based on his own experience, Jake had recognized at least one species that fit this profile among the participants present.

This human species was currently the first aliens Jake had ever confronted at the Red Cube of his first Ordeal. They were called the Nawaiis.

They were a race of humans with primitive technology and tribal culture. Their skin was the color of mud and their iris and hair was a phosphorescent blue-green color whose exact hue could vary from one individual and tribe to another.

It was a species characterized like many other species by sexual dimorphism, except that unlike Homo sapiens these traits were accentuated. Where a woman earthling could assume the same functions as a man earthling and vice versa, it was definitely more difficult for the Nawaiis.

The men were mountains of muscles, with a prominent jaw and heights ranging from two to three meters high. Their vocabulary was limited to a few thousand words and their syntax was crude.

Their temperament was equally bestial and impulsive, and their society was unable to maintain its stability once the number of individuals grew too large. This is why they had adopted a tribe division, generally limited to a few dozen individuals. Even the most respectable tribes did not exceed five thousand members.

Aiovmpev ovulu Nfjfaa qur vft mriw gzpou lozureov om mdduz, ovuw juzu rusuzovuiull
fqgaoampl, nmlullasu, ukozuquiw hplow, frt zuqfzcfgiw uflw om nzmsmcu. Tvuw cruj rm dufz,
frt proai ovuw uknuzaurhut tudufo tazuhoiw ao jfl aqnmllagiudmz ovuq om iufzr dzmq ovuaz
qalofcul mz dufz frwmru mz frwovare.

The Nawaii women did have mud-colored skin, but apart from that they looked like normal human women. Their intelligence was also far superior to that of the males and this gave them some influence over their tribe, though, on condition that they were willing to bend to the insatiable urges of the males.

Under normal circumstances, the equilibrium of influence between the two genders was relatively well distributed. If the men were strong, but dumb, horny and violent, they depended on the women to heal their wounds, to build or to make sensible decisions. While the society remained patriarchal in their primitive world, it was not as extreme as it seemed.

The arrival of the Oracle Devices had put an end to this precarious balance. Because the Nawaii men were possessive, they had immediately taken advantage of the existence of the Slave Contracts to reaffirm their authority. Moreover, thanks to the Aether of Intelligence, they had finally begun to overcome some of their intellectual deficiencies.

One of the female slaves that Yerode and Lamine had enslaved was precisely a Nawaii that they had acquired ownership of by butchering her husband, or in any case the male who owned her at the time.

Compared to his first Ordeal, where all the humans present had witnessed speechlessly their tendency to fornicate on open ground, the Nawaiis had nevertheless evolved substantially. They no longer fornicated like animals, but this was unfortunately not quite enough.

Their instincts were not so simple to overcome. If Jake and Sarah struggled to keep their urges in check, it was easy to imagine what must be going through the minds of these retarded aliens.

Thus, it came as no surprise that a hundred or so Nawaiis rushed fearlessly into the pitch dark station, scattering fearlessly through the various metal corridors while uttering guttural roars. Some even more reckless Nawaiis ventured out alone, so full of arrogance that for those unfamiliar with them one might have thought they were genuinely powerful.

But for Players like Jake, they were just a joke. Tragically, most Nawaii females had no choice but to follow their leader, husband or owner. Only two of them stayed behind in the ship, probably because they were powerful or influential enough to assert their opinion.

Obviously, if there were patriarchal alien societies, there were also matriarchal species. A group of backward-looking women with chalky white eyes, as if they were all blind, made no secret of their contempt when they saw these dumb bastards fade into the darkness.

Tvuaz eifzu jfl usur qmzu taltfardpi md ovu jmqur hvflare fdouz ovuq. Buvart ovulu nzmpt jmqur, lopztw frt vfrlmqu vpqfrl lommt zaeatiw guvart ovuq jaov lifsalv frt atmifozmpl uknzullamrl.

Their situation was truly the opposite of the previous people.

Of course, Jake and the other vigilant Players hadn't missed any of this. All those Players who chose to wait for the scouts to return had naturally not done so out of fear or caution alone. It was also to gather as much information as possible about their competitors. Whether they end up collaborating or competing in the future, all this preparatory work would not have been in vain.

While the scouting teams were doing their job, Jake soon grew tired of all these Players staring at his faction like a juicy piece of meat. Those who gave him intimidating glances or calmly stared at him were still fine, but all those who were ogling licentiously at Sarah and the two sisters were a real pain to deal with.

Jake wasn't the jealous type, but even Will was finding it annoying. The two sisters were used to catching everyone's eye wherever they went, but they weren't the type to show off. Without the protection of their guards, they were even somewhat self-conscious.

Sarah, on the other hand, seemed to relish this kind of attention. The continual teasing, insistent glances as well as the faint smiles she threw at them in turns only made things worse. After a while, Jake snapped,

"Sarah, stop it."

"Stop what?" She quibbled in a falsely ignorant tone.

"You know what." Jake rebuked coldly.

"I don't know what you're talking about." She beat around the bush innocently and at the same time winked at one of the tattooed men drooling so much you could have mopped the whole shed with his saliva. Obviously, she was doing it on purpose.

In the end, Jake just sighed in exasperation. Enya and Esya also gave him an apologetic look. They didn't know how to handle her either.

Perhaps the solution to appease such provocative and spiteful women was incredibly simple. A bold man would have simply grabbed her by the waist and kissed her fiercely, but that simply wasn't his character. It just never crossed his mind.

It was actually the opposite. The more Sarah tried to provoke him by making him jealous, the more she ticked him off. In this Ordeal context, it was even infuriating him. Clearly, if a month earlier he wasn't sure how he felt about her, he was pretty sure now that he didn't love her. They were just too different and he didn't want to spend his life tormenting himself about how to handle her venomous personality.

Sarah had missed the boat. Because she was popular and used to appealing, she had followed a tried and tested method to win him over, but on Jake it was sadly doomed to failure. In a different way, she was just as bad a psychologist as he was.

"If you don't know what I'm talking about, I guess all I have to do is invite all those men who stare at you." Jake quipped finally with a fake smile. "I'm sure at least one of them will take it as a green light from me to woo you in the proper way. With the signals you're sending them, I hope you're mentally prepared? Because I won't lift a finger."

It was an Ordeal, not a playground. It was about time she woke up!

Sarah's face turned ugly in a split second, but contrary to the response he had hoped for, instead of settling down and backing off, she became even bolder.

"No need, I'm going to check them out myself." She declared boastfully.

The whole group was dumbfounded, not just Jake. The two sisters in particular were especially horrified. Before they could say anything to change her mind, Sarah was already gone, marching valiantly towards a faction full of complete strangers.