

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 4: The Purgatory

### Chapter 399 - Did You Hear That?

"Did you hear that?" A slightly drunken soldier blurted out as he straightened up a little.

They weren't supposed to drink on duty, but all these recent twists and turns had shaken his sense of discipline. With nightfall, the halogen neon lights had been reduced to a minimum and the temptation to drink to soothe his nerves had outweighed his common sense.

The vial of strong alcohol he kept on him for a special occasion had been wasted just like that.

"Hmm? Should I?" The soldier standing guard at his side kept his ears open for a long time, but apart from the hubbub of the discussions in the camp he found nothing unusual.

These two soldiers were currently defending the Titan Pearl's landing bridge, preventing the passengers confined inside the ship from leaving freely and only letting in those soldiers who had received a direct order from the general.

Avy and her trusted officers had come to the conclusion that after the ship was sabotaged they were all suspects. The young general was simply too young and impulsive to be considered. She was rarely alone and was in any case a mere Fluid Knight. Some of the old veterans on board were stronger than she was and closely watched.

Avy as a general was the ideal target for the saboteur to control, but she carried a Fluid Artefact on her to protect her mind. This was a procedure commonly used among the Six Brotherhoods and influential families to ensure the viability of their chain of command.

Her colorful character had automatically ruled her out anyway. Even Jake was 99% certain that she was not on the saboteur's side. He had crushed her with just a single kick when, comparatively speaking, he had nearly died against an ordinary warrior working for the saboteur.

While the two soldiers were still bickering over the existence or not of this noise, real footsteps suddenly thudded behind them with the steady rhythm of a metronome.

Alerted, the two soldiers turned back toward the Titan Pearl, blocking the gangway to the outgoing individuals.

"Halt! Passengers are not allowed to leave the ..."

As he was brimming with confidence, the soldier speaking raised his head and recognized the newcomers at the top of the walkway. Eight humans hooded in black, their faces under the hood absorbing all outside light like a black hole. Six dark, carbonaceous tubes dangled down from the belt beneath their coats.

Inquisitors!

" You are most welcome. Suit yourself... " The two soldiers immediately scrambled out of the way, sweating so much that it looked like they had just come back from a dip in the pool.

The eight Inquisitors ignored the two guards from beginning to end, crossing the footbridge with the same steady pace. The muffled sound of their boots vaguely reminded the soldiers that there were actually real human beings under these mantles.

Once inside the station, one of the Inquisitors stirred the Fluid around him and an imperceptible shock wave, reminiscent of a sonar device, spread out from his body. After a while, he sniffed the air and said,

"Sigmar is truly here. Let's go find him."

And just like that, they left. No one dared to stop them. Avy hesitated for a long time about blocking their way to ask them some questions, but her courage deflated like a punctured balloon when she felt their eery aura.

She didn't have the authority to command them around anyway. These fabulous Fluid Wielders were under the direct jurisdiction of the Consortium Senate, to which even the Third Brotherhood's president had to obey at its beck and call. They were the Consortium's hounds and anyone interfering with their mission could be killed at sight.

They were not known for their good temper.

Jake, who like most Players wasn't asleep yet, followed the eight Inquisitors with his eyes until their silhouette disappeared completely. Now that he had cultivated his own Adept Fluid Core, he was aware of the enormous power their bodies were brimming with.

Each of them was at the very least as strong as Emiwan, a Fluid Master. Their Fluid fluctuations were similar, but with something different that he could not yet define.

"Did you hear that noise? "That same drunken guard asked again with a start.

"Damn it. Stop drinking and sober up. "His comrade barked dryly.

"Hehe, but was I wrong the first time? "The first soldier chuckled awkwardly.

"... You weren't."

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"What the hell are you doing here?! You can't disembark on the station right now. Go back to your cabins!" The sober guard quickly forgot his recent misadventure with the Inquisitors and began to holler coldly as he saw a herd of passengers in evening wear.

Did they really think this space station was a touristic stopover?

The commotion attracted the attention of quite a few Players and soldiers this time, but for another reason. Whether the drunken soldier really heard something or not the first time was unimportant and could be considered a fortunate coincidence. The second time, however, it was worth their attention.

Because there was really no noise... Yes, the Inquisitors and those passengers had indeed come out, but the timing was off. The first time, the Inquisitors had appeared a long time later, suggesting a coincidence, but this time it was accurate. Too accurate.

Jake jumped to his feet, clutching his machete tightly with a concerned creasing on his forehead, and he wasn't the only one. He didn't despise the natives, but this soldier was among the most ordinary.

If he had not heard anything with his high Perception, how could this lowly guard have heard anything before everyone else? Yet, he did.

It could also be an astonishing coincidence, but Fluid Cultivation conferred a visceral instinct akin to prescience. He had to be sure.

Without remorse, he scanned the guard, and it was actually several dozen energy signatures that overlapped as he scanned the poor carefree soldier. His scan report also gave him the name and motive of the people behind these scans so long as their Oracle Rank remained less than or equal to his own.

Unsurprisingly, it turned out that they shared the same goal. Although most Players laughed, joked, and relaxed as usual, it was mostly an act.

Tvu lhfr zusufiut usuzwovare vu ruutut om crmj fgmpo oval tzpreur epfzt, frt ovu iuflo vu hmpit lfw jfl ovfo oval lmitauz artuut vft f emmt vufzare! Burufov oval juvc frt przuqfzcfgiu tuqufrnz jfl vatare f qmrlouz ar vppqr dmzq.

Except that next to Emiwan and the Inquisitors, he truly looked ordinary. He was concealing his strength from his Myrtharian Sight and Fluid Core and the real surprise was that it was possible. Jake didn't know how to do that.

"Goosebumps? How weird..." The drunken soldier shivered imperceptibly as he underwent all these scans and for an infinitesimal moment his eyes emitted a ferocity that shouldn't appear in a wasted guard, but the glint disappeared as it had come.

Jake realized with a glance that Avy had actually placed her two best men in front of the bridge. These two ordinary soldiers were among the bodyguards assigned by her family for her personal protection. Not even the bearded officer was aware of their existence.

They both were Fluid Masters. He could understand better why the saboteur had not directly gone after the general. Now that Jake knew that this guard was not hallucinating, the course of action was obvious.

He telepathically alerted everyone in his group except Sarah, but it wasn't necessary. The handsome pale man had also informed his own party.

With all these Players putting their comrades in the know, the dormant camp began to bubble with liveliness again. Meanwhile, the passengers continued to cause a commotion, refusing to leave.

"If they want to die, let them come out." One of the officers, annoyed by their screams, took the matter into his own hands. Turning to the unreasonable passengers, he threw a vicious glare at them and coldly warned them, "If you leave the ship now, you will not be allowed back inside if anything happens. Do you accept?"

Faced with the officer's indifferent facade and icy tone, the indignant passengers lost much of their panache. They became much calmer, clearly hesitant.

Idiots may have had blind faith in the Titan Pearl's crew, but those with brains were much less optimistic. Avy's previous reassuring speeches may have dulled the passengers' vigilance, but it was normal for some of them to remain wary.

Esur ar f nuzduhoiw dprhoamrfi frt lfdi lmhauow ovuzu juzu fijfwl lqfii ezmpnl md numniu guiausare ar sfzAMPL hmrlnazfhw ovumzaul. Tvmlu duj nflureuzl juzu ovu mrul ovuaz nzmnefrtf vft dfaiut om hmrsarhu. Mmlo aqnmzofroiw, ovuw vft emmt zuflmr om gu lplnahAMPL.

After a first pirate attack, and strange supernatural events that they had personally experienced, they were willing to do anything to stay close to the soldiers. Although they had been informed by the ship's personnel that these visual and auditory "hallucinations" were normal during a premature hypersleep awakening, this explanation was too mild to satisfy everyone.

However, after the officer's warning, some passengers gave up on this idea and preferred to return to their cabins. It was a human paradox. They didn't feel safe, but they didn't want to give up their comfy life either.

With this warning, they at least knew that the situation within the station was not simple. Their racket had not been completely in vain. In the end, more than half chose to stay on the station. That is to say, about thirty people.

Among them, Jake recognized the slim body of Hade, who was hiding in the middle of the group. The young man scoured the crowd of soldiers and Players looking for someone, and when he recognized Jake his face lit up and he walked towards him.

"I hear some noise again."

When the drunken soldier repeated this sentence for the third time, everyone froze. A strange rattle of pliers and claws, including some unpleasant squeaks, began to resound around them, spreading through the station's pipes and walls. It was impossible to pinpoint the exact distance and origin of this noise.

All the soldiers and Players drew their weapons, pointing their rifles in all directions, sometimes in front of them towards the dark corridors or straight down to the floor or ceiling.

"What did the noise sound like on the previous occasions?" A Player who couldn't stand the unnecessary suspense asked the question that was bothering everyone.

"It sounded like... sizzling. Like something melting."

"Fuck!"

As Jake cursed, the Titan Pearl's door opening to the bridge closed automatically with a bang and the roar of the engines shook the place as the propellant rockets discharged a blue plasma upon ignition.

"No, stop the ship!" Avy yelled in panic.

Alas, that was the moment the creatures chose to attack. Before her troops could even attempt anything, the ceiling above them gave way under its own weight and a flood of monsters poured down on them.