

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 4: The Purgatory

### Chapter 403 - Diary (part1)

‘ Shhhh!’ Lily pressed both her hands against the youth’s mouth in panic, almost choking him.

The rest of the group held their breath, their hearts pounding as they listened for any suspicious noise on the other side of the door.

Clang! Clang!

Kevin was the first to hear the rattling from the pipes above them, followed by Jake and the others.

Did they find us?

Jake wasn’t sure, but his knuckles had turned white from gripping his machete so hard. If the ceiling threatened to collapse, he would strike instantly.

After a few minutes, the rattling drifted away before being replaced by silence again.

‘Phew... This Ordeal is not good for my blood pressure.’ Daniel tried to play it down with little success.

With the monsters gone, Kevin gave a gentle slap to the back of Tim’s head to relieve his excess stress.

‘If you want to die, you don’t have to drag us down with you.’ He muttered under his breath.

‘Sorry...‘

Still, the calm returned. They could finally get interested in Tim’s discovery. It was an old notebook, with a thick worn leather binding. In a world where technology was so advanced, it was a very backward object that didn’t really belong here. The same was true of the shelf crumbling under the burden of binders filled with reports and formulas.

If it wasn’t a bureaucratic whim or a habit of these researchers, then the power outage or the malfunctioning of their electronics had constrained them to change their ways.

Wvfo qftu oval iufovuz rmougmmc tadduzuro dzmq ovu qfrw gartuzl mr ovu lvuid jfl aol hmrourol frt ovu imhfoamr jvuzu Taq vft dmprt ao.

First, the notebook was in the inside pocket of the corpse’s lab coat curled up in the refrigerator. It was honestly quite bold for Tim to have gone straight to the body.

Second, the contents stood out from the rest. When they opened the notebook, it was not mathematical formulas and strange symbols that jumped out at them, but a text written in ink with a graceful and delicate calligraphy. It would not have been surprising if the corpse in the fridge had been a woman while still alive. Its smaller size than the other two corpses corroborated this hypothesis.

Because they had a language kit that came with their Ordeal identity, it only took one look to realize that it was a diary. Alas, the pages were yellowed and brittle as old parchment, the cold, damp environment of the refrigerator having somewhat damaged the text.

The refrigerator, like everything else, had eventually broken down, and the corpse inside was nothing more than a desiccated mummy,

indicating that the inside of the fridge had not been completely sealed or properly closed for a long time.

Nonetheless, for a while, the inside of the refrigerator must have been cold and abnormally humid because of the rotting corpse. The loss of the refrigerator's integrity had saved the diary.

Jake was the group leader, so Tim put the diary in his hands first, though he simply scanned it to copy its contents onto the bracelet. With Xi's computing power, it would be much easier to fix damaged areas where the ink had smudged or disappeared.

A few of his comrades did the same, while others not so wealthy or interested, such as Kevin and the two children, just skimmed it.

'Can you get anything readable back?' Jake asked without much hope.

[Wait a minute] Xi said, inviting him to be patient.

Huz omru zuqartut vaq md ovu frmware smahul mr lmqu fpomqfout vmoiarul, frt vu jfl lpzu lvu jfl tmare ao mr npznmlu. Vuzw ypahciw, vmjusuz, vu emo fr frljuz.

[It would seem that this researcher was using coded language for her diary. She must not have trusted many people... If I replace that letter with this one, shift them three rows, use this factorial...]

Out of a sense of competition, Jake also tried to crack the diary code to pass the time, but after a few minutes of staring at the text with vacant eyes, he gave up. Just the little bit of text that remained was practically unreadable and it was clear that he was not qualified in high-level mathematics.

He was certainly smarter than before, a genius even, but he still couldn't improvise formulas that took years of thinking and

demonstrating to discover. Even if he knew them, it would not be enough.

Like credit card cryptography based on prime numbers, knowing how it worked was not enough to crack their security. Without a supercomputer or a quantum computer, these were insoluble problems, unless a new discovery simplified the process.

Perhaps one day he would be able to do it. He had become a quite decent genetic novice in barely a month after all. On the Mirror Universe scale, not Earth.

Regardless, he didn't underestimate himself. If his life was at stake, he was confident of cracking the code of this diary, but it would take considerable effort and a lot more time. In this respect, Xi was simply superior to him.

[That's it, I've got some of the text back. I'm transferring to you the the logs I think are most relevant:]

'16th lunar cycle, 6th day, year 2738 of the Third Era.

I am so excited! I heard that a Fluid Grandmaster from the Galactic Consortium is coming here for a top secret mission! Yotai Shien 3 has always been a high-security military research facility, but the last few years have been disappointing...

Rasf, ovmlu Rasufr gflofztl... jvm plut om hmrozagpou f imo md mpz dprtare lomnnut lpnniware pl frt ju juzu dmzhut om hmrsuzo om f qfarourfrhu lofoamr. I tmr'o usur gifqu ovuq. Tvuw lfw ovfo ao'l rmo ovu Rasufrl' dfpio frt ovfo ovuaz nifruo al mr aol iflo iuel. Bpo guhfplu md ovuq, jvfo jfl mriw f hmsuz ar ovu guearrare vfl guhmqu mpz qfar iasuiavmmt... Wvfo f lftrull.

Me and my colleagues came here to do research, not to do the maintenance of some star cruisers! But those dark times are behind us. With the official arrival of a Fluid Grandmaster, we can be sure that we shall have a proper job.

We have to be on the main deck to greet him in 20 minutes. I am so nervous! I made up and dressed with my most beautiful dress and put on the pumps which I never wear because they make my feet hurt. I kept my white lab coat to look professional, but I can see from the jeering looks of my colleagues that they are judging me.

They don't understand. The wife of a Fluid Grandmaster has as much clout as a queen, and she will never lack for anything. If all I have to do is show a little cleavage to change my fate, it's well worth that tiny sacrifice. Besides, I know for a fact that he's young!

...

That's it I met him. He is different from what I imagined. Very young, average height, raven black hair, but his skin was pale and his musculature lacking for such an illustrious warrior. One could have thought he was sick, and in a crowd no one would have paid the slightest attention.

Oh, and he didn't even give me a glance, or anyone else for that matter... All that effort for nothing. He just shook hands with the station manager and followed her into her office...

He was carrying several steel containers that looked like coffins, floating them behind him. It was awesome.

I hope we get the project and the funding that goes with it. Fingers crossed!

Jake paused his reading for a brief moment, taking a fresh look at the research room. They were working on a top secret project that the Fluid Grandmaster was sponsoring. Two neurons were enough to understand that something had gone wrong.

Hu zulpqut val zuftare.

‘16th lunar cycle, 17th day, year 2738 of the Third Era.

I have learned that the Fluid Grandmaster’s name is Sigmar Aelsinire. Contrary to what I thought, he did not leave. He has settled in the station with his trusted men. They all seem to be here for a while. If it wasn’t such a silly idea, I’d even say they intend to establish themselves here.

His men are more in line with the image I had of these epic Fluid Masters. Tough, athletic and mysterious. My charm failed on Sigmar, but Ronald seems to have been won over. Or was it me who fell under his spell? Aww, he’s so handsome. I think it’s love at first sight.

Ronald is very chatty and he hardly hides anything from me. Who knew there were so many sordid stories about Egma. These politicians are as crooked and sinister as I imagined.

Then again, he didn’t have much to fear. The day after Sigmar and his men arrived, our task was revealed, and it was immediately announced that exits and communications to the outside of the base would henceforth be forbidden. Many bitched, but when faced with a Grandmaster it was all for naught. ‘

The log entry didn’t seem to end there, but the ink had smudged at that point in the diary. It wasn’t that bad though. Even without knowing their task, he could imagine what was in those steel coffins and what was expected of them.

Jake continued to read the next few diary entries, which were incomplete and described the development of her romance with Fluid Master Ronald, as well as the lack of progress in her research.

At some point, he came across a strange report that made him pause. His arms quivered slightly as a bad pang of foreboding ran down his spine.

‘1st lunar cycle, 22nd day, year 2739 of the Third Era.

I iufzrut lmquovare arhzutagiu omtfw dzmq Rmrfit ovfo qftu qw gimmt zpr hmit. Saeqfz frt val qur fzu fii dpeaoasul. Tvu Cmrlmzoapq jfrol ovuq tuft mZ fiasu frt ovuw vfsu f gmproW mr ovuaz vuftl.

It broke something between me and Ronald. Maybe because I subconsciously see them now as criminals. Or maybe because I realized that a Fluid Master is just like any other human. He may have explained the reason and tried to play it down, but it doesn't change anything. The trust is gone. I feel uncomfortable with him.

Apparently, another influential Fluid Grandmaster in the Consortium is gunning for them. If Sigmar, a Fluid Grandmaster himself, is forced into hiding, then their situation is utterly hopeless.

Still, a Fluid Grandmaster is someone important and to get rid of them, this other Grandmaster had sent them on an official mission to quell a rebellion. They did not desert. They fulfilled their mission.

Fate smiled on them. The rebels were already dead, like everything else on their target planet. Instead, there were only monsters and a space rift.

A gigantic rift. ‘