

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 404 - Diary (part 2)

The text stopped there. Jake mused over this last sentence for a while, lost in thought. The word ‘rift’ alone was innocuous, but it reminded him once again of the Digestors and how they had attacked Earth 22 years earlier.

If there was one thing he understood after his first two Ordeals, it was that they all had a central theme to them. The first Ordeal focused on the basics, preparing their physique and allowing them to develop some fundamental skills.

In comparison, the second Ordeal challenged their minds, while immediately putting them in a real-life situation in the worst possible way. For those whose first Ordeal had been limited to physical exercise in high spirits, it was the difference between day and night. Danger was everywhere and everything had to be achieved on your own to move forward.

With the Fluid’s introduction, Jake had thought for a while that this Ordeal was a way to familiarize them with the Aether and how it worked, but with the addition of these parasitic monsters he was no longer sure.

Subconsciously, Jake and Will shared a look and they read the same suspicion in each other’s eyes.

‘Even if they’re not Digestors, they look like them.’ Will said telepathically using the communication function of his bracelet.

‘I know...’ Jake nodded, before calling on his AI.

‘Xi, do you know if exposure to Digestors or similar monsters is part of the tutorial that makes up the first four Ordeals?’

[I’m not sure] She hesitated for a brief moment. [Part of my memory is blocked, but at least I know that the Digestors are not what they seem. If they were real Digestors, the Oracle would never let you into this world. He would have sent a legion of Oracle Guardians instead to clean the area. The Digestors would also have begun to spread throughout this Seed World with their ability to spawn from nothing.]

Without really knowing why, Jake didn’t feel much more reassured after this answer. His instincts came from the fiasco during his first Ordeal. It may have been unthinkable for the other players, but how could he forget that the Oracle System was far from infallible.

Turning his attention back to the diary, he wanted to continue reading, but realized that not all the following diary entries had been saved. The isolated words formed an unintelligible content.

On the other hand, this researcher liked to report all the gossip about the station in her diary. Most of it was irrelevant, but one gossip caught his eye:

‘Today, I’ve seen Sigmar enter Wendy’s room. I’m so jealous!’

Jake chuckled inwardly. Even a venerable Fluid Grandmaster had some urges.

Tvu duj movuz lurourhul Xa jfl fgiu om zuoZausu quroamrut
Cmgfwul Nm. 7 frt 9, fl juii fl Pzmbuho Tzfrlhurturhu. Or ovu iflo duj
nfeul, lvu cuno zunufoare ovfo lvu jfl ouzzadaut frt lpdduzare dzmq
lusuzu frkauow foofhcl. Huz hmiiufepul, vuz lvftmj frt usur vuz
zudiuhoamr ar ovu qazzmz ouzzadaut vuz. Aifl, lvu tat rmo ouii jvw.

In the end, only the last entry in the diary was transcribed in full by Xi, the original page still containing brownish traces of dried blood on it.

‘7th lunar cycle, 18th day, year 2747 of the Third Era.

Sigmar has decided to kill us all. He gave us each a poison pill, but we refused to take it. My colleagues think he has gone mad, but they don’t realize it. We are insane. We all are. Oh, what have we done?

Damn it, I’m writing these words hidden inside a fridge! Isn’t this the most blatant proof of their madness? I hope I won’t hurt anyone else, but on the other hand I don’t want to die like this.

But terror prevents me from doing so. These Things are lurking nearby. I can hear them! I can also hear Raga and Shirtan’s voices, but their shrieks are not human anymore. The way it’s going, it’s not Sigmar who will kill me first if I leave this fridge.

...

My battery is running low... and I’m freezing. I don’t know how long I’ve been in this fridge, but I’ll never get out. It’s too late for me. Fear has gripped me.

I haven’t heard Raga and Shirtan for a long time. All is silence. And yet, as soon as the thought of leaving crosses my mind, a creaking from the pipes or heavy thuds closing in reminds me cruelly that I am not alone.

...

I fq vprezw. I vufz ovuq hfiiare qu, gpo I zulalo. Tvu Dusai, ovfo fgmqarfoamr ovuw hzufout, al loaii fiasu. I hfr duui ao. Id I hfr duui aol hfii, ao qufrl ovfo Saeqfz vfl nzmfgiw dfaiut...

...

I am dying. The Corruption finally got the better of me. Cobaye 8 and 11, or should I call them Converters? have got the better of my mind. Despite this, I can't help but laugh.

My body is freezing and I can't move even though I dream of sinking my fangs into the flesh of Raga and Shirtan. Oh Ronald, how I would love to see you again to taste your blood. Would you still be so arrogant if I devoured your heart?

Damn, I'm crazy.

The funny thing about all this is that I'm happy. I'm not afraid anymore. The darkness, the cold of this fridge, the rattling, the growls, I don't care.

How can I write if I am freezing? Would you believe it if I told you that I awakened my Fluid Core just now? From madness and alienation comes power. This rotten Fluid doesn't have only disadvantages I guess... But I digress.

So, back to how I write, it's simple. I think, and the words write themselves.

What a shitty ability...

...

Mw... ovmpevol... fzu limjare tmjr. Dulnaou... ovfo... I fq vprezw frt... frezw.

How... ironic... to starve... in... a fridge.

My life... will have been one big joke... until the end. '

Jake stood stunned for a long moment after reading this. He could imagine what kind of hell she had gone through during her last moments.

This woman whose name had never been mentioned was stronger mentally than he had thought. As death approached, she had regained her lucidity, even allowing herself a little joke. If it was on a social network, he would've given her a thumbs up.

His companions had also finished reading and they exchanged meaningful looks. Enya even went back to check the corpse in the fridge in person, despite her disgust. Perhaps because she was a woman too, she couldn't help but feel immense sympathy towards her.

Jake also went to inspect the corpse personally a second time. This time he was more thorough, checking the condition of every tooth, bone and tissue that was still intact.

'Where's the Corruption she mentions?' He wondered as he scanned the room again, focusing on the Fluid and Aether around him.

[The report detects nothing.] Xi gave her verdict. [But Emiwan and the woman in the diary briefly mentioned this. I think it's the work of those parasitic Converters. They change the Fluid and the environment to make it more conducive to their kind.]

'I wish it was a metaphor for a gas or some drug.' Jake grumbled. 'If even the bracelet doesn't detect anything, that's not very encouraging...'

[Yufv... Id ju juzu mr B842 I jmpit vfsu lfat ao jfl Daeulomzl' jmzc. Bpo vuzu, I tmr'o tfzu om hmrhiptu frwovare.]

Jake then examined the two remaining corpses that had murdered each other. He found nothing special. Perhaps because they had killed each other at the same time, nothing else had happened.

The most disturbing miracle was how these three individuals had escaped the monsters all this time. Jake and his group may have been holed up here, but none of them thought they could stay here forever. It was a matter of minutes, hours at best.

These corpses had been ignored for more than a century. According to Xi and the information gleaned from the Titan Pearl, they were now in the year 2887 of the Third Era. Over 140 years after the last diary entry.

It was just inconceivable.

‘There must be some way to escape the attention of these monsters.’ Enya commented as she followed his reactions.

‘Or they were left there intentionally.’ Vincent offered without conviction.

Jake took one last look at the refrigerator, before asking out loud,

‘What temperature is it?’

[24°C.] Xi answered immediately, followed by the same confirmation from Will and Kyle.

‘Tvfo’l rmo ao ovur.’

[Not necessarily. Don’t forget you melted the metal door to force your way in. It must have been a lot colder before we got there and the room was practically airtight.]

As if to prove him right, Daniel came back to them at this point with the two children to inform them that the vents and even the water drains and faucets had been sealed with welds.

This room was indeed completely isolated from the outside world before their arrival. The three deceased researchers obviously knew what they were dealing with.

‘The Fluid Ghosts probably appeared afterwards. The Fluid in their cores had probably evaporated by this point. ‘Will added convincingly.

This meant that these corpses were effectively undetectable and of no interest to the monsters on this site. That’s why they had been left to rot all this time.

BANG! TATATA!

Everyone stiffened as they heard the series of gunshots.

‘Help! Please, is anyone there? ‘

Panicked cries rang out from outside, but their cries for help were soon followed by a series of ‘clangs‘ reminiscent of the stealthy movements of monsters in the pipes.

‘Fphc! Id ovu qmrlouzl dart pl guhfplu md ovuq, I’ii caii ovuq jvur ju euo gfhc. ‘ Kusar ozfrlqaout ouiunfovahfiiw.

‘Can’t we save them? ‘ Lily pleaded with tears in the corner of her eyes.

‘Shut up!’ Kyle barked, the girl realizing she had spoken aloud.

The ‘clangs‘ stopped briefly, as did the yelling and gunshots before they started up again.

‘Is anyone there? We know you’re there! ‘

TATATATA!

The monsters had arrived. Screams of agony began to echo down the hallway one by one.

BAM! BAM!

The armored door suddenly buckled, forming a dent in their direction. Someone was trying to destroy the door with some kind of heavy weapon.

‘You bastards, open up! If you don’t open up, we’ll take you down with us!’

‘Those bastards!’ Kevin cursed aloud before realizing his mistake.

The rattling coming from the pipes suddenly came closer, until the ceiling began to squeak above their heads.

‘We’re screwed, we have to get out.’ Will shouted.

This time everyone drew their weapons and donned their full gear, helmet and gloves included. Will also summoned his baby dragon for added protection. They had learned their lesson.

Time to fight.