

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 407 - New Members

‘Back so soon?’ Kevin marveled as he saw Jake return so quickly. It had been less than five minutes since he’d left them and he was still in his Werebear form, so tall he almost touched the ceiling.

‘The real question is why did you stop?’ Jake countered curiously.

‘Aren’t you afraid the monsters will catch up with us?’

‘See for yourself.’ His cousin beckoned him with a tilt of his head as he pointed to the wall behind him.

Jake’s gaze followed the direction the Werebear was indicating and he understood instantly. The monsters were gone. No. They were still there. Reaching out, Jake heard them snoring behind the wall.

‘What’s going on?’

‘We don’t know.’ Will shrugged wryly. ‘About a minute after you left, they quieted down, but that’s not necessarily good news.’

To support his point, the businessman quietly pointed to the corridor walls surrounding them, including the ceiling tiles above Jake. A new scan revealed all he needed to know.

They were surrounded.

Jake’s face darkened, but there wasn’t much he could do about it. He was already pretty sure that someone or something was controlling

everything that was happening on this station, trying to lead them somewhere.

Remembering the danger he felt in the previous empty corridor, he frowned. 'Should I follow the plot?'

If there was a plot. He still wasn't sure if the Ordeals were scripted. So far, the main mission and side quests had followed an opportunistic model. In essence, they were given a standard mission that was tailored to them, but the other stuff felt purely random.

Deciding not to fret over things beyond his control, he finally noticed the other survivors who had volunteered to stay with them.

'What are your names and ranks?' Jake asked quietly.

It was out of politeness. He already knew what he was supposed to know from his Side Mission details, but he had to at least pretend.

'Oliver. Private.'

'Aias. Private.'

Two of the soldiers, who were clearly newbies, came forward without flinching, but the Fluid Wielder with the axe remained stiff as a board with a scowling countenance. His blisters were hurting like hell and he wasn't about to forgive the culprit.

'Wvfousuz. 'Jfcu lfat, hvmmmlare om aermzu ovu zulurodpi jfzzamz.

As for the two female Players, they thanked him gratefully, more than happy to hang out with a group of morally decent Players. They were factionless and this Ordeal had quickly turned into a nightmare.

The fact that there were two women and two children perfectly comfortable in Jake's group was highly reassuring for ladies like them with Low-Oracle Ranks.

So far, they had been lucky, but they had heard horrible things from other Players. In fact, there was nothing really surprising about it.

Like many, they had followed the basic script during their first Ordeal without deviating once from the path laid out for them. Like Kyle and the majority, they were then ejected from their second Ordeal after a few minutes of misery. Under these circumstances, their rank 4 Corporal was actually quite all right.

‘Welcome aboard Arryn and Siraye. ‘Jake nodded. ‘You can join our faction if you wish for the time of the Ordeal to facilitate our cooperation. You can leave whenever you want. ‘

Both women then received a sudden notification from their bracelets and their almond eyes bulged out as they read the perks accompanying their joining. Only the faction name dampened their enthusiasm, but they were careful not to grouse.

When Jake got the confirmation on his side, the other members were also informed and cheered for the new additions. The two sisters immediately hit it off with the two newcomers, more than happy to have new friends to gossip with. Since Sarah’s departure, they had been a bit downhearted.

Not wanting to spoil this great moment, Jake gave them an annoyed look. Will was the one who understood Jake best, so he tacitly agreed to play the bad cop. Walking over to the four women, he smiled and said,

‘All right, all right, we’re glad to have you with us, but need I remind you that we’re surrounded by monsters in a rundown station with no lights and no power? ‘

Bmov lalouzl frljuzut jaov zmiare uwul, gpo ovu ojm ruj eazil duio uqgfzzfllut.

Arryn was a pretty, tan-skinned brunette with a Tomb Raider look, while Siraye was paler and more demure with a stout bone structure. Jake would have bet his life that Siraye had been overweight before the Mirror Universe forced regime.

‘No need to be so uptight with us. ‘Will eased the tension as he watched them panic. ‘For now, you’re on probation. You can communicate with any of us through the faction member listing, and use the Faction Skills if you can afford the price. However, you will need permission from the leader or myself to access the Faction Vault area. And only, the all-member part. ‘

This was clearly bluff talk. So far, a tiny section had indeed been set aside for resources restricted to core members, but at the moment everything they had arranged was stored in bulk at the same place.

Not having planned to accept new members so soon, they trusted each other and this ‘what’s mine is yours’ policy had been working just fine until now. Anyway, the two new members nodded like pecking chicks, accepting the rules without a fuss.

Now that the Fluid Wielder with the axe was the only person who still hadn’t introduced himself, he began to feel uncomfortable.

Headstrong, he was gripping the handle of his axe tightly as if to reassure himself and standing back. Jake and the others were more than happy to leave him alone.

‘What do we do now? ‘ Kyle inquired worriedly. He had found his courage, but he knew his limits.

Although he was better at hand-to-hand combat than either of the sisters, the mere fact that they had survived so long during their Second Ordeal proved that they had an iron will despite appearances. In that sense, even Tim and Lily were considerably superior to him.

The others turned to Jake, leaving the decision to their leader. Knowing that the Myrtharian Body Faction Skill came from him, Arryn and Siraye couldn't help but feel expectant.

'Two choices.' Jake summarized with his fingers. 'Either we keep going down the safest corridors, avoiding the monsters and accepting that we're heading straight into a trap, or... We turn around, and make our way to our landing point.'

'Wu'ii dfai ovu qallamr ad ju tm ovfo.' Dfraui dzmjrut fl vu hzmlut val fzql. 'Bulatul, ao'l rmo usur lpzu ovfo'l nmlagi.''

'What's wrong with taking the safer corridors?' Tim raised his hand.

Patient with the children, Enya took it upon herself to explain.

'Based on the pattern of previous attacks and scans, the space station is infested. If these monsters wanted to, they could kill us right now. The fact that they abandoned their assault just now suggests that they are following orders from someone or something.'

'Aren't they just traumatized by Jake and Kevin?' Lily suggested naively.

'I wish they were.' Jake scoffed. 'I'm pretty confident we'll be able to escape if we only run into those monsters, but saving you all would be impossible. According to Emiwan, these monsters are called Hunters and are just cannon fodder. If the difficulty ended there, it would be far too easy.'

'This is still a third Ordeal though. The survival rate should remain relatively high if we don't deviate from the planned scenario.' Will reminded as he put his glasses back on.

Jake nodded. Kyle, Esya and Vincent confirmed that they had already fulfilled their main mission objective. Arryn and Siraye, who was of

even lower rank, also confirmed. They could all leave the Ordeal at any time.

Continuing was just a bonus for them and that was why they were not particularly tense.

Kyle simply had to survive until they arrived on Yotai Shien 3 while Esya and Vincent simply had to find a clue to solve the mystery behind the distress beacons. By the looks of it, the diary had been considered sufficient evidence.

Tvu movuzl vft om uaovuz lmisu ovu qwlouzw guvart ovu ofel mZ lpzsasu proai lmqumru tat. Eaovuz jfw, Jfcu frt Erwf hmpitr'o Zpr fjfw frt jmpit gu dmzhut om qmsu dmzjftz usur ad usuZwmru uilu efsu pn.

‘Let’s take a vote.’ Jake finally proposed. ‘Anyone who wants to risk a sortie to reach one of the ships, raise your hand. We’ll escort you out. Those who want to carry on, keep your hands down.’

No one raised their hands, not even the two new girls. As for the three soldiers, they had been off for a while. Apart from the fact that these ‘passengers’ weren’t really passengers, they merely figured out they were following a ‘mission.’ Whether they were spies for another Brotherhood or terrorists was irrelevant as long as they could stay alive.

The only serious question they had was how these Players planned to cross and survive the void to reach the ship graveyard outside the station. If these soldiers knew about their Faction Vault and Myrtharian Body they wouldn’t have been so concerned.

In addition to being able to do without oxygen for a few minutes by absorbing heat and cosmic radiation, Will had also anticipated the worst-case scenarios. Astronaut suits, but also diving suits had been

provided for each of them. Jake could only admire his meticulousness.

Satisfied to see that they were all willing and determined, Jake skipped the long speech.

‘ Let’s go. We shall see what kind of dastardly trap the mastermind of this nightmarish place has devised for us. ‘

They laughed. Some heartily, like his cousins, others with markedly less enthusiasm.