

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 464 - Revelation (part 1)

With a nod, Hade, or rather Sigmar, dismissed the two Inquisitors at his side. Ilfora complied without batting an eyelid, but the second one only moved after a while as if he wanted to say something, but the youth kept ignoring him. Not getting the attention he sought, he bowed and left the castle as well.

When the doors of the great gate creaked shut, Sigmar abandoned his aloofness and turned to Carmin with a wistful frown.

‘Can we trust her?’ He asked as he rhythmically tapped the armrest of his black crystal throne with his finger.

As he asked this question, the black of his irises extended to the whites of his eyes. After a few seconds, his eyes returned to normal and a mischievous glint ran across his face.

‘I guess so. Jake I’ll let you decide.’ He said with an amused look.

The man in question frowned in turn, not exactly thrilled with this privilege. It was as if he didn’t even have a choice until Sigmar gave him permission.

‘She can stay.’ Jake replied stiffly.

Due to his wary nature, he didn’t fully trust anyone. Here Corruption could make his family and friends act in unexpected ways as demonstrated recently with Kevin and Sarah.

That was why he had given up his plan to patiently and methodically improve his Roles through recruiting and protecting more and more Villagers. Somehow he knew that this Purgatory experiment made no sense, and neither did this Monster Game. Its creator seemed to have already grown bored of the game, as if he had already found his answer.

Thus, Jake didn't care if Carmin turned on him afterwards. Whether it was his own intention or because of the Corruption, he was ready to face whatever this Ordeal would throw at him.

Ironically, Jake's acceptance of her was interpreted completely differently by the young woman. In spite of her usual coldness, an innocent smile briefly flitted across her face, bringing a little warmth to her taciturn bearing. Sometimes, a small gesture could go a long way.

Once at ease and Carmin's presence accepted, Sigmar dropped his pompous ways, reverting to Hade's amiable persona.

'I know you have a lot of questions, so I'll try to answer them first. I'm listening.' The young man pulled a bag of chips out of nowhere and began to munch leisurely.

This was what Jake wanted to hear and he already knew what he wanted to ask.

'Was our first encounter planned or a fluke?' He asked with an intense look.

Hade noisily chomped on his potato chip before chuckling,

'Both. From the moment you woke up, you got our attention. Not just mine, but Minerva's and many others. You may already know her as Isbeus...'

Jfcu jarhut ifhmrahfiw fl vu vufzt jvfo vu tzuftut. Tvu Oit Gvmlo jfl zaevo.

In order to unravel the mystery behind the emergency beacons and provide an accurate and extensive report of the situation, the Fluid Ghost had used the few memories he had left to fly back to the Titan Pearl and begin his investigation.

The Titan Pearl may have departed the station against all expectations, but it hadn't gone far. Like all the ships of the past expeditions, it was orbiting lethargically a few kilometers away from Yotai Shien 3, infested with Fluid Ghost and parasites. The passengers still alive were incubating a new generation of monsters if they had not already killed each other.

Possessing someone to access the surveillance room hadn't been too difficult once all the heavyweights had deserted the ship. With the codes he remembered, and considering that his former self was directly involved in the sabotage of the Titan Pearl, accessing the archives had been a breeze.

He was then able to effortlessly identify who had woken up first. Some of the records had been erased, but the passengers' awakening from hypersleep at the beginning of the Ordeal was properly recorded.

And therein lay the clincher: Jake had woken up... first. At least according to the official record panel. And the reason was fairly straightforward: His Myrtharian Bloodline.

His Body Stats surpassed that of the natives and the majority of the Players. In a context where their biological and brain functions were sluggish and their skills unusable, his recovery speed surpassed even that of the Inquisitors on board.

The odd thing about this was that it was a detail that had bugged him from the moment he woke up, and should have concerned him all along. But in the end, as soon as he had met ‘Minerva’, a nerdy technician in her forties, his worries had gone out of his head.

Afterwards, when he had sighted the first passengers present in the Titan Pearl’s refectory, and then met Hade, he had simply thought that the time of waking up had little to do with their physical abilities.

That couldn’t have been further from the truth. The reality was that he had been manipulated into thinking that way. His arrival in the mess hall, though innocuous, was staged. Whether it was the Inquisitors, Hade or the few other passengers present, none of them were normal. So it was no surprise that his early presence had aroused Sigmar’s interest.

Those who joined the dining hall afterwards were almost all Players, but at the time Jake had no way of knowing that. It wasn’t until one or two hours later that the normal passengers began to fill the dining hall. Except that by then, Jake and his comrades had long since finished their breakfast.

Also, if Jake had been more ruthless later on, he could have coerced Avy into giving him access to all these data much earlier. Finding the saboteur(s) would have been much easier. Especially with what he knew today.

A passenger named Tootega as well as some members of the technical staff had officially never woken up, or rather never really slept. They were theoretically already awake when the anomaly occurred.

Hade was like a ghost too, his name absent from all records. He was literally a stowaway on the Titan Pearl. The only good news in all of this was that the Old Ghost had at least found his first name, or at

least the details of the identity he was embodying at the time of his death, since he was part of the awakened personnel before the anomaly.

That's all it took for Jake and Xi to realize that they had been hypnotized and manipulated by someone into missing all those details. It wasn't until the Fluid Ghost reported to him that they became aware of the subterfuge. Perhaps the spell had also weakened over time, or the increase in his mental stats had changed everything.

And the real culprit behind it all, all the evidence pointed to Minerva, or rather Grand Master Minerva Isbeus, his first encounter on the Titan Pearl after coming out of Hypersleep.

'Second question, if you were aboard the Titan Pearl and had no hand in what's happening on this station, who's holding the reins here?'

Jake did his best to regain his composure before continuing his questioning.

Carmin was also interested in this question, notwithstanding the fact that she knew nothing about this Sigmar except that he was an extremely powerful Fluid Wielder and wanted by the Consortium.

'My son, Nylreg.' Hade admitted with surprising detachment. 'My greatest joy, but also the cause of all my torments. The Purgatory in which we are now, and which serves as the venue for this Monster Game, is a Fluid Artifact that I gifted to him on his fifth birthday. Since then... What was once just a toy for a special child has grown to incommensurable proportions.'

Jake, and even the Old Ghost inside him, were extremely shocked when they learned this revelation. According to their investigations, this child was supposed to be long dead. Slain by his own father.

Nmoahare ovu lopnudfhoamr md ovu Pifwuz ar dzmro md vaq, Hftu lqaiut jzaiw.

‘Let me tell you the story from the beginning. You’re the third Player to hear it, so hang on to your seat.’

‘I’m standing.’ Jake blurted out unmoved.

‘Who were the other two?’ Carmin inquired suddenly.

‘Wyatt Griffith and Boris Slominsky. Wyatt... It didn’t go as well as I’d intended because of his Bloodline plus Minerva and Nylreg’s interference. As for Boris, he woke up right after you on the Titan Pearl, but his character is somewhat problematic. He holds the largest Criminal Village in the South.

‘Back to my story, let me reveal something first. It was I who summoned you to this world. When a Fluid Grandmaster reaches the top, he will begin to touch the Fluid’s confines. I am no exception. With our minds powerful enough, the Aether’s existence becomes obvious to us and we have the opportunity to switch our energy source.

‘As you know, Aether is not nearly as simple and intuitive to use as Fluid and that’s why most Fluid Grandmasters never take that step. They will sooner or later lose their self-awareness as their affinity and intimacy with the Fluid of the cosmos increases. The Fluid is not pure energy and feeds on all kinds of information, thoughts, knowledge and emotions. Whoever knows how to listen can obtain all kinds of powers and innate knowledge, which at the highest level comes close to the knowledge accumulated in this universe since its very inception, but sadly one cannot choose what to learn. Sooner or later, you end up being engulfed. Like a drop of water trying to absorb the ocean, the only consequence is to become part of the ocean itself.

‘However, if we choose Aether, the Oracle finds us and an Oracle Device is provided for us. Because of our power far exceeding that of a First Ordeal Player, we are given many options. I have chosen to remain in this world to protect it and oversee any Ordeals that may take place in it.

‘ Yet, I do not have the authority to decide when and why Players will be sent here. Except in one circumstance: If this world is threatened and I lose control of the situation.’

Jake and Carmin were sporting ugly faces at this point. They didn’t need a drawing to guess what was coming next. And indeed, Sigmar confirmed their suspicions.

‘Digestors. They are the very reason why everything is going wrong here.’