

< Day 1 >

< Level: Administrative >

< Overseer's Command Room >

The bright lights of the Cognition Terminal failed to completely illuminate the most sacred chamber of the Site. Auxiliary lights in the form of tiny, floating golden orbs were used to keep the room well lit as all eyes fell onto the Terminal.

Or rather, only Papilia's.

Aisyle stood before the Terminal, somehow watching every screen with sealed eyes as her Navigator partner stood shoulder to shoulder with her. In Papilia's tiny hands was a crystal, transparent plaque that could only be deciphered by herself, courtesy of the access granted by the mysterious Black Box embedded within her skull.

"Our Unit Manager will take the lead. My orders will be issued. Your voice will guide them. I trust you know how to execute your role perfectly?"

"Mm. I wouldn't be here if I didn't." Papilia's brows furrowed as she tapped the side of her head. "Testing. Establishing communications. Can you hear me, Unit Manager?"

"I can. 06:15 exactly. Too thorough for my liking. But you're the boss here." His voice was crystal clear, but it lacked the professionalism that was unquestionably associated with the Unit Managers. *"What are the objectives? Aside from harvesting Nex, of course."*

Papilia tapped at the crystal plaque, playing it like a harp. It caused words to emerge as it gave off a vibrant, teal glow. The Crystal Plaque was an item used to transport confidential information through Act X's courier network. Not even the Heralds who delivered this knew of its contents, and perhaps those who created this in the first place.

An ImpulseWorks Site had two daily processes. The first was the generation of Nex. And the second yet optional one was to complete the tasks written on these plaques. The symbols formed coherent letters. Then, they became words as she uttered them to the Unit Manager.

"Touch the remnant of a time begone – the light is here. Have a Worker proclaim their aspirations within the Essence of Light's containment unit. Simple enough... um, Aisyle." Papilia cut the channel as she addressed her Overseer.

"Leave it to their interpretation. That is the will of Act X's messages. I do not believe that predictions are a necessity while we only have one M-Risk Classed Corrupted. It is not nearly enough Nex to attract the likes of the Dungeons. A Tribulation."

Tribulations were essentially invasions from Dungeon entities, such as giant clumps of flesh or pages that could transform one into a book containing their entire life's history. These entities were attracted to large sources of Nex, and the reason why the missions on the

plaque – however vague they were – should be completed was because they would be rewarded with the predictions of a Trepidation or other catastrophic events in advance.

She recalled the exact page from the Overseer’s Manual that contained this information:

What are my Tertiary Tasks?

A perfectly fine question. Once per day a Herald from our partners at Act X will deliver a crystal plaque with both your tasks and the predictions of all events throughout the day. This does not include Corrupted Breakouts. We hope you still remember how to play the crystal plaque from your appraisal test.

Refer to the Emergency Section for more details about the daily tribulations your site will face.

What kind of tasks will I do?

Luckily, you will never fulfil the tasks yourself. Your Workers must accomplish these tasks. The more seals the Site Core has broken, the more tasks that must be accomplished for accurate predictions.

Tasks can be as simple as observing a certain Corrupted or passing through a wing at a certain time. A good indicator of brewing trouble is when you are asked for a complicated task. Have a good sleep, because the next day will be tough!

But you can handle that, right our dear Overseer?

“... so they’ve begun with their cryptic nonsense. What a waste. I don’t see how this can get any better. And yet ‘she’s’ again and again. The breeze doesn’t end. Navigator. Your name is Papilia. Funny. I know –”

Suddenly, before the First Floor Unit Manager – Paolo – could finish speaking, their communications were unexpectedly cut short. She tried to establish communications, tapping on her head repeatedly but to no avail.

“A-Aisyle –!”

“Fear not, dear Navigator. The Site wills this silence. We should not allow the ramblings of a ghost to distract us from our mission. Look upon the Terminal. Therein lies the only thing we must obey.”

She pointed at a counter displayed on one of the screens.

< NEX QUOTA >

< 0% >

< 0mL | 15mL >

And strangely underneath it was another meter.

< EXCESS NEX >

< 0mL >

The quantity was small. Minuscule even, but this was expected from only one M-Risk Classed Corrupted. Eventually, they'd reach liters, tons, etcetera. The demand varied on both internal and external fluctuations, but with how remote they were she wondered how much of the outside would affect their daily quota.

Regardless, Papila stared at the bar as she watched the Core Team march through the halls in the direction of the Essence of Light.

The very first interaction was about to commence, and she prepared to document it all as thoroughly as an archivist. Silence consumed them both as the glow of the orbs behind them flickered. The steady ticking of her pocket watch was all that played as they eagerly watched them finally reach the doors of the Corrupted.

Suddenly, Aisyle took a step forward as the largest screen broadcasted the docile Corrupted within its containment unit. To Papilia, it appeared like an apple hanging from the tip of a dead tree.

But to Aisyle?

“What do you think its name implies? The Essence of Light?”

“Something about what we can see? We all see it differently through the Terminals.”

“I see. A logical standpoint.” Aisyle didn't seem satisfied, however. In fact, she sounded... annoyed.

“What about you? You seem to be bothered by something?” Papilia wondered.

“The notion of interpretation. The freedom of how we interpret things is a double-edged blade because it introduces biases.” Aisyle spoke as cryptically as always, the blue glow of the screens causing her to appear ominous as she stood there with both arms held by her lap before she continued:

“Utter to me this, dear Navigator – Why do birds fly? How do you interpret it?”

“I don’t see the point in asking riddles when they’re about to greet a Corrupted. But since it’s so weak...” Papilia put considerable thought into the question before arriving at the one logical conclusion. “Because they have wings. That’s why birds fly.”

A longing look came across the Overseer’s face unexpectedly as she stared intently at the Essence of Light.

“Purpose. So that is your answer.”