

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 427 - The Pit

Watching listlessly as the young woman spasmed on the floor, snarling in agony, Jake continued to devote his attention to regaining full control of his body.

About 30 seconds later, Carmin was able to contain the heat and pain overwhelming her and she stopped flailing around, her dress soaked with cold sweat. But in that short moment, Jake had recovered all of his strength.

He was about to retaliate, just to show her what he was made of, when an incongruous event interrupted him.

[Contestant Carmin Liche broke the rules by attacking contestant Jake Wilderth at 2:56am during the Night Day phase. She will be punished by being sent to the Pit. The sentence will be carried out immediately. If she survives her trial, she will reappear in the central square of the Village in front of the fountain.]

As if it had just received a signal, the aging wooden floor suddenly split in two, opening a bottomless pit beneath the condemned vampire. Stronger than she looked, she did not immediately fall into the void, just as Jake did. Swinging wide, her feet stayed on either side of the floor and she even managed to leap into the air to grab onto the chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

‘Aren’t you one of the Monsters?’ Jake came to realize at last, though a tad doubtful.

‘Good grief, I’m not!’ She snapped when she felt an irresistible attractive force sucking her towards the abyss. The chandelier to which she was clinging threatened to come down any second. In fact, the roof, denser than lead, was already beginning to crack.

‘Don’t forget our Contract!’ Carmin lost it for good when she noticed Jake’s stolid countenance, even finding the leisure to fill himself a glass of water.

‘Why should I?’ Jake raised a sarcastic eyebrow. ‘You attacked me. The Contract is void. You haven’t forgotten all the clauses I added to it?’

‘It’s not what you think! It wasn’t supposed to be like this.’ She tried to defend herself as best she could, but from the snide look on his face she might as well have been talking to a wall.

‘And what was supposed to happen?’ Jake retorted. ‘I’m dying of anemia in general indifference and you walk away leaving me three million?’

Carmin opened her mouth as if to retort something, but the chandelier broke at that very moment. Sucked in by the gravitational pull, she fell with no grip to hold on to, and Jake truly thought she had slipped into the Pit.

Yet, as she disappeared, Jake heard her roar madly from the bottom of the pit and saw a blood red crystal scythe rise from the darkness. It then planted itself against a ledge of the chasm, like a pickaxe striking down a deposit to better mine it.

Leaning over the hole, Jake saw a sickly Carmine clutching a long ruby chain with her left hand, while her right palm was bleeding profusely, the chain deeply embedded in the middle. Stroking the scythe’s blade with his fingertips, he sensed a characteristic energy

signature within the chain, and inferred that it was not a concrete object.

The vampire had undoubtedly sacrificed a huge portion of her vitality to materialize this weapon. When the young woman met his gaze this time, her ruby eyes were filled with despair and he also discerned a tinge of pleading.

‘Why are you so afraid of this pit? It’s just another hardship. ‘Jake looked at her in genuine curiosity. ‘It’s the very reason we’re in these Ordeals. To be tested. ‘

‘I can’t lose! Not yet!’ Carmin gritted her teeth, her grip beginning to loosen. ‘I just needed a little blood. If you hadn’t woken up, you wouldn’t have known the difference the next morning. Three million for some blood was a fair price!’

‘And why should I believe you?’ Jake snickered.

‘The Contract!’ She exclaimed exasperatedly. The floor in which her scythe was stuck was about to shatter too. ‘Do you really think I haven’t memorized the clauses?! I’m a vampire of the noble Liche clan, not one of those inferior bloodsuckers!’

Jake frowned. She wasn’t lying! Given the urgency of her situation, reading those emotions was a breeze.

‘Very well. I’ll honor my part of the Contract. After all, I’ve already been paid. ‘Jake changed his mind.

He raised his arm over the abyss, palm down and said just to show off,

‘Rise.’

The pull of the abyss was suddenly counterbalanced by an even more intense force and Carmin felt her body become lighter than a feather. The next moment, she was rising to the surface, carried by the air currents like a helium balloon.

The young woman finally breathed a sigh of relief as she recognized the pine furniture of Jake's home, but that was the moment the robotic voice chose to destroy her last hopes.

[Contestant Jake Wilderth broke the rules by helping Carmin Liche escape her punishment at 2:59am during the Night Day phase. He will be punished along with Carmin by being sent to the Pit. The sentence will be carried out immediately. If he survives his trial, he will reappear in the central square of the Village in front of the fountain.]

Upon hearing the sentence, Jake's expression also changed for the first time.

‘Seriously?’

In a hurry, Jake grabbed the crystallized blood chain with one hand and with a quick motion snatched Carmine from the chasm, sending her flopping behind him. He thought the young woman was out of the woods, when he remembered the words of the robotic voice.

‘Punished along with Carmin’.

‘Fuck!’ Jake cursed as he saw the floor disappear completely, an endless darkness engulfing the entire house. To escape, he would have to break through the ceiling or one of the walls, but this time the Pit runes gave him no chance.

An immeasurable gravitational force surged out of nowhere from the depths of the abyss, with such intensity that he felt his joints crack. His veins and arteries were so compressed that the flow of oxygen to

his brain was also affected. His vision narrowed and his cognitive abilities weakened noticeably.

Still holding the blood chain linking him to Carmin, Jake continued to float in the air for a few minutes, forming a status quo with the runes of the Pit below him. He briefly hesitated to go all out, activating Bloodline Ignition and the Silver Ore in his cells, but eventually relented.

From the moment he made his decision, he stopped resisting. Carmin, who was clinging to life, sensed his determination and accepted her fate as well. Still clutching her chain, she let Jake drag her down to the bottom of the abyss.

Jake and the vampire fell for several long minutes, which felt like forever, the total darkness depriving them of any sense of direction. At the end of the long fall, the two criminals welcomed a change.

An orangish spark appeared in their field of vision and they knew that they had finally arrived at their destination. A few seconds later, they landed in a pool filled with an orange liquid reminiscent of pumpkin soup with a big splash.

‘AAARRRGH!’

Carmine’s gut-wrenching scream nearly burst his eardrums as they crashed into the vile mixture. Jake grunted covered in blood, his skin itching like he’d just rubbed himself with a mutant itching powder a billion times more irritating than normal. He had to summon all his willpower to keep from peeling himself like a vegetable.

Lmlare nfoaurhu, Jfcu crmhcute ovu sfqnazu mpo jaov jvaniflv frt tzfeeut vuz iacu f lfhc md nmofomul mpo md ovu vuuialv nmimi. Hal uwul gimmtlvmo dzmq ovu omzquro val gmtw jfl prtuz, vu aermzut

ovu duutgfhc dzmq val lurImZw ruzsul om dmhpl mr val ruj
lpzzmprtarel.

‘It’s truly a Pit.’ Jake noted with an almost disappointed tone.

The correct word would be that they were in a large, poorly lit cavern, since the chasm had closed over them. There were small holes in the walls, evenly spaced and reminiscent of the architecture of a termite mound. Aside from the pool they had landed in, Jake noticed that they were on a thin rocky platform surrounded by some sort of greenish lava.

In any case, the heat was real. Even he wasn’t confident he could get away unscathed from exposing his body to this substance. But they had a bigger problem.

‘We stink.’ Jake remarked as he sniffed his arms covered in abrasive pumpkin soup.

Experimentally, he tasted the liquid with the tip of his tongue before spitting it out immediately.

‘Bitter and hot, but edible.’ He concluded summarily.

If this was the Purgatory, it was nothing writing home about. Of course, that was impossible. Unlike Peter Brady, this pool was not a deadly poison. At least not for players like them. A non-Fluid Wielder native might have died, but not them.

[The execution of the sentence will begin in 3, 2, 1, 0.]

A countdown resounding in the cave spared him this headache. Simultaneously, a groan of pain beside him informed him that Carmin was awake.

‘Why does my head hurt like this...’ She muttered as she rubbed the back of her head.

‘No idea.’

Jake turned to her before immediately looking away. Unlike her armor, her dress was plain satin. Harmful or not, the dress hadn’t survived their plunge into the pumpkin basin. The woman was stark-naked.

She did not, however, have time to be mortified with shame. From the darkness filling the galleries dotting the walls, an alien cackling sounded, raising the hairs on their spines. Soon, more inhuman cackles and growls answered it, and specks of silver light filled those holes like stars in the night sky.

‘Ja-Jake. I can’t fight right now. I’ve used up too much blood.’ Carmin explained anxiously, covering her breasts and genitals as best she could with her hands.

Jake inspected her condition and had to admit that she was right.

‘Leave it to me.’

Within a breath, the obsidian floor was molded into various weapons and pieces of armor that could be worn by a woman with Carmin’s proportions.

‘Help yourself.’ He ordered in a commanding tone.

The vampire gawked at him like an idiot, as if meeting him for the first time. Without saying anything, she appraised the pieces of armor and put on the ones that best fit her. A minute later, with her helmet, chest protector, leggings, shoulder pads, armband, as well as a longsword and shield, she now looked like a gladiator.

Tvuw juzu zuftw om dfhu ovuaZ npralvquro.