

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 439 - End of the First Round (part 4)

‘It was Laksmi who told me. ‘ Kewanee defended herself wholeheartedly. ‘She is also one of the Monsters, except that she did it of her own free will. To pull this off, Ostrexora sneakily met them in the Pit and gave them enough Fluid to qualify from there. Since they were still in the Pit, no message announced their qualification. As far as the other Villagers were concerned, they died in the Pit.’

Jake didn’t even question whether Ostrexora could really enter the Pit of her own free will without alarming anyone. He knew it was feasible because he had taken some steps in that direction himself.

Once all the questions were answered, Jake paced around the Witch’s shack for a few minutes before rendering his judgment,

‘Okay Kewanee. I’m giving you a chance. You escape the Slave Contract, but you’ll have to sign a temporary Servant Contract until the Ordeal is over. I’ll let you think about the clauses you want to include in it. Carmin, you are exempt from it for the time being, but I have my eye on you too. Don’t give me a reason to change my mind.

‘Hmmpf. ‘ The gorgeous vampire harrumphed as she turned her head with the firm intention of snubbing him.

‘Now let’s go vote. We’ve got work to do. ‘ Jake said as he left the cabin.

The vote went as planned and Ostrexora and Laksmi were declared guilty, while Jake was once again given the status of Enforcer. Not surprisingly, the robotic voice announced the qualification of the two fugitives a few minutes later.

With the two Monsters out, all that remained was Kewanee's case to win the round. Good news for them, the Native American woman didn't have enough Fluid to qualify.

Olozukmzf hmpit fhppifou fl qphv Fipat ar nfzo ovfrcl om vuz fiiul. Lfclqara frt Arr Sozfrtu juzu Maruzl, frt ao jfl f lfdu guo ovfo ovuzu jfl lmqu luhzuo emare mr ar ovu Maru mz uilu ao jfl aqnmllagi om uknifar vmj ovuw vft fhppifout fii ovfo Fipat. Uriacu ovu movuz Mmrlouzl, Olozukmzf vft rmo mddahafiiw caiiut frwmru.

Over the next few days, Jake and the remaining survivors continued to accumulate the Fluid and Cards they were missing without fear of being slaughtered in their sleep. The easiest way to accumulate Fluid without stealing it from others was to get it by drawing.

There were three Cards that made it easy to accumulate Fluid from the worst to the best: The simplest was the Treasure Card: Fluid Card, which was exactly what the title implied, a Fluid Card containing a certain amount of Fluid. The amount was random, ranging from 100,000 to 20M.

The second and third methods depended on two Event Cards: Lottery and Jackpot. Jackpot multiplied the amount of Fluid a Villager owned by 3, while Lottery could give away huge amounts of Fluid, but also various items and other Cards.

The king of them all was the Jackpot Card. By using several in a row, it was possible to increase your fortune exponentially. Unfortunately, the card was ridiculously rare.

With the exception of a Player who had shown him one a few days earlier, none of the Villagers managed to draw it in the days that followed. There was even a significant likelihood that this card was unique or could only be drawn a certain number of times.

It made perfect sense. As powerful as the creator of this Monster Game was, it was impossible for him to generate an infinite stream of purified Fluid. The reverse would have been far more shocking.

During this time, Jake also got two new Roles:

[Villager: Monster Hunter (Rare)(Upgradeable): Can attack identified Monsters at any time. Prerequisite: Kill a Monster.]

[Villager: Hero (Legendary): Can vote against one person each Round. If the Hero betrays the Hero's values, they lose their Role.

Prerequisite: Gain recognition from the Village and end the night attacks in one Round.]

He had fulfilled the requirements of the first Role long ago, and a native under his protection had willingly offered him this Card that was rotting in his hands. This Card resembled the Barber's Card but was far superior to it in that it was permanent and did not limit the number of attacks.

The existence of this card added an additional constraint for the Monsters by emphasizing the importance of keeping their Monster identity secret. Because of its importance, Jake had collected several of these cards to redistribute to his allies. Drastan, Svava and Carmin had also been given this Role.

As for the second Role, he had more than earned it and it was Kewanee who had given him this Card. Obtaining the Villagers' recognition and the Hero's values were very vague terms, but they probably included concrete criteria such as saving a certain number of people, eliminating Monsters, etc...

Overall, these two new Roles consolidated his status and gave him even more leverage than he already had. He was now ready for the next Round.

Thanks to Kewanee, he was also able to learn more about how the Monster card works:

[Monster: Monster(Upgradeable): Can roam the Village during the first half of the night. Can enter a House each night and attack its residents. While in Monster form (usable only at night), the participant will be granted superhuman abilities. The Monster form gets stronger after each Cycle and each kill performed under this form. After three Cycles, the Monster obtains the 'Contamination' ability, allowing it to convert Villagers into Monsters via bites or scratches. Limited to once per Cycle.]

Kewanee's Monster Card was limited in information, but she assured him that Avros' or Ostrexora's Monster Card would definitely be very different from hers. Avros especially had killed a lot of people.

With his reputation and Fluid accumulated over the days, Jake was also able to upgrade his Forest Warden and Lord Roles to the next rank. He was currently gaining 7 reputation points each Cycle from the Villagers under his protection, which included 5 natives, Kewanee and Svara. Gordon and Carl had also ended up joining them for fear of being ostracized, which brought the total to 9 points per day.

It was possible to upgrade most of the Roles without relying on Reputation Points or Fluid, but having enough of them would bypass most of the prerequisites. For Forest Warden in particular, he would have had to spend most of his time in the forest to meet the requirements.

After upgrading, his two Roles were now as follows:

[Vaiifeuz: Fmzulo Wfztur(isi2) (Rfzu)(Unezftufgiu): Mfw jfic dzuuiw ar ovu dmzulo gw tfw frt raevo. Ojrl f qfn lvmjare ovu imhfoamr md zulmpzhul frt tfreuzl ar ovu dmzulo. Hu hfr film fpovmzaxu frt/mz dmzgat 3 numniu om urouz ovu dmzulo gw Cwhiu.]

[Villager: Lord(Baron)(Upgradeable): The Lord can offer to protect other participants against a certain fee. the Lord can protect up to 100 people. Can mobilize the Village guards. Prerequisites: Letters of Nobility, saving a person from a monster attack, or possessing the Monster Hunter Role.]

Forest Warden (lvl2) had increased the limit of permissions and bans from 1 to 3, but it was the Lord Role that had evolved drastically. As of now, he could no longer lose his Role by failing to save one of his protégés, and the number of people under his protection had increased from one more person per Cycle to a set number of 100.

He didn't yet know what mobilizing the guards meant, but he would find out soon enough.

At first, Jake and the others planned to abuse the system by taking advantage of the timeout to gather Fluid and Cards, but less than a week later they had to forego this method.

The Corruption was gaining ground.

With no enemies or threats looming, the remaining villagers had regained much of their nerve, but it was short-lived. The respect and fear that Jake instilled in them was enough to curb them for a few days, but not much longer.

On the fourth day, the incidents resumed and one of the only remaining female villagers was almost raped. The next day, Carl and Gordon tried to kill each other and were thrown into the Pit. They

survived, but by the time they returned they had mellowed noticeably.

When Peter told him one morning that the herbs were no longer enough to satisfy his addiction, and that Drastan was spending far too much time slaying monsters in the forest, Jake knew it was time to end the Round.

On the one hand, Jake didn't want to see his protégés die because of the benefits he was getting from them for his Lord Role. And on the other hand, because even he could feel his mood turning chaotic again despite his recent progress. If this continued, he would have to go back into the Pit, but there was no guarantee that more lava would be waiting for him down there.

On the morning of the eighth day, Jake and the other villagers gathered and he informed them of his decision. Some of the natives, especially Gordon, protested and made a fuss, but unfortunately for them he wasn't asking their opinion.

As long as Kewanee agreed to qualify, the round would end. And she did agree, of course, because of the Servant Contract she had signed.

Not sure if they would all end up on the other side, they said their goodbyes to the young Indian girl and she disappeared before their eyes, followed by the robotic voice announcing the end of the Round and the Villagers' Victory.