

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 4: The Purgatory

### Chapter 416 - Poor Thing

Jake didn't even bother trying. For one thing, he didn't smoke, and the miscellaneous assets of that sort suitable for trade were still stuck in his space storage.

This Peter Brady was simply trying to scrounge up some profits in exchange for the tale of his experience inside the Pit. As the first person to be sent there and come back unscathed, this information was priceless and he knew it.

A fool would be the one seeking to satisfy him, thinking he could make do with a mere cigarette. This guy was a heavy drug addict and would do anything to get his fix. One cigarette would never be enough.

As stupid as this Peter was to attack someone just one hour after the Round started, at least he knew how to count. Such a chance to reap maximum benefits would not happen again anytime soon and he absolutely intended to milk every last one of them for all they were worth.

'I've got one!' The tattooed Asian stepped forward and took out a pack of cigarettes from his pants pocket and a lighter from the other.

His face deprived of the threatening rictus he permanently sported, he threw the cigarette to Peter, who caught it on the fly between his index and middle finger. The latter closed the eyes, sniffed with a big inhale the object stuck to his nose, then pushed a small sigh of ecstasy.

‘Aaah, that’s the real stuff. It should be of the Seven Stars brand ? You’re Japanese ?’ The stoner asked in an expert tone.

‘I am.’

‘Nice. Not that I want to rush you, but it won’t light itself. ‘Peter bragged without an ounce of respect as he played with the cigarette in his mouth.

The tattooed Player clenched his fists subconsciously, his muscles bulging dangerously, but he managed to remain calm. With a constipated smile, he crouched down to bring his lighter to the cigarette and lit the end.

At once, Peter puffed on his finally lit cigarette and closed his eyes for a few seconds holding his breath before exhaling a cloud of smoke straight to his benefactor’s face.

The benefactor’s facade shattered instantly and flushed with anger, he raised his cutlass against the insolent man’s throat.

‘I chose diplomacy because I have a big heart. If you want me to play it rough, keep testing my patience. A little hint, I don’t have any. ‘

The stoner continued to act as if he hadn’t heard anything, too focused on enjoying the sensations brought on by this nicotine shot.

‘Oh, you were saying something ? ‘Peter seemed to notice something was wrong when he saw the congested face and the huge veins pulsing on the forehead of his questioner.

Seeing that his benefactor was about to explode with fury, far from apologizing, he burst out laughing.

‘You can’t hit me. Unless you want to go into the Pit next. But then, what would be the point of negotiating with me ?’

Baited, the Player lightly thrust the tip of his blade into Peter's throat with the countenance of a guy willing to act, but at the last moment he retracted it and patted his shoulders a few times instead, though a bit too heavily.

'You're right... My bad. 'The tattooed Asian man apologized deceptively. 'Enjoy your cigarette all you want. '

'Can I have another one? '

'...Sure. '

Half an hour later and after 5-6 cigarette butts had polluted the pavement of the public square, the infuriating Peter finally dropped a piece of information.

'They threw me into a basin filled with corrosive liquid. Nothing more, nothing less. '

The audience was momentarily taken aback by this short account.

'How did you survive? Or rather, how did you leave the Pit? 'The tattooed Player rephrased his question, realizing that nothing obliged the junkie to divulge his abilities. Everyone had trump cards for this kind of predicament.

Instead of answering, Peter begged again, holding out his hand. Three cigarette butts on the floor later, he answered cheekily,

'I just left the pool after a while. '

'Damn it!'

The Asian instantly lost it and strangled him with both hands, his thumbs and fingers digging deep into his throat, squeezing his windpipe and carotid arteries. The junkie's eyes became bloodshot and his face turned a sickly purple.

Before Peter could even pretend to resist, the ground suddenly opened under the furious Player's feet and an irresistible force of attraction drew him down into the gulf. He resisted for a brief second, but then the gravitational pull overcame him and he was whisked away. The cobblestone floor then closed up behind him as if nothing had happened.

If there weren't so many witnesses to the incident, they might have thought it was a hallucination.

[ Contestant Chinen Taisho broke the rules by attacking contestant Peter Brady at 1:03pm during the Cycle Day phase. He will be sentenced to the Pit. The sentence will be carried out immediately. If he survives his trial, he will reappear in the Village's central square in front of the fountain.]

'Mwahahaha!'

A burst of insane laughter broke the incredulous silence. Turning toward the source of the noise, the crowd discovered a Peter curled up on the ground and spasming. A minute later, he picked up and puffed on his still-lit cigarette and exhaled yet another cloud of smoke with a long sigh.

'What a fucking moron. Taking the bait so easily at his age? Poor thing.'

Jake frowned with mild suspicion, but he didn't interrupt the 'victim's' fit of mockery. Peter was clearly insane and much harder to deal with than anyone else had thought.

Still, this Chinen Taisho had given in to violence too easily. With his perpetual sullen demeanor and death threats, this guy was far from an angel, but he shouldn't have been that quick to lose his temper. Was it Peter's talent or the Corruption at work?

That was a mystery for later. Convinced that Peter wouldn't spill his guts so easily, Jake decided to go back and explore his forest. He already had a little idea on how to coax the druggie, but that would depend on the largesse of the land under his protection.

'Where are you going?' Kewanee asked in surprise as she saw him leave without a goodbye.

'Into the forest.' Jake grumbled without turning around.

Soon, he heard someone running after him with a light step.

'Can I come with you?' Kewanee asked pleadingly with her best pout.

Jake assessed her request while glancing her up and down, then remembered her Witch's Role and agreed with one condition.

'I want 5% of your Fluid immediately as payment and 20% of the potions you produce with the herbs you obtain with my assistance.'

'What?! But I thought we were friends!' The Native American woman huffed, arms akimbo.

'Nice try.' Jake scoffed as he started walking again.

'Wait, wait, wait!' She shouted as she trotted after him. 'I can pay the 5%, but I can't give away 20% of the potions. For starters, I can only make 4 potions a day right now.'

'Then give me one everyday.' Jake objected. He wasn't so naive as to believe that 4 was really her limit. At least not for long.

Besides, there was no reason for her to use her Witch Role to craft these concoctions. If her residence was a match for her Role, she probably possessed all the paraphernalia dedicated to alchemy and other practices one would expect of a respected Witch.

Kewanee seemed to hesitate for a long time, but she kept walking beside him, thus proving to him that she had already agreed to the deal.

‘Okay then. ‘ She said cautiously after a while. ‘But I must have priority to accompany you into the forest. I know you have a quota too. ‘

‘Sure. ‘

Kewanee’s face lit up like sunshine upon hearing his approval.

‘But first we sign a Contract. ‘ Jake doused her enthusiasm mercilessly.

A Contract with their bracelets meant that neither of them could evade or lie about the terms of the agreement. Even if the Oracle System didn’t work perfectly in this Ordeal, the punishment would come sooner or later and those for breaking the Contract meant at best a huge compensation and at worst permanent death.

For Kewanee, she would be forced to reveal exactly how many potions and what types she could produce each day. It was extremely restrictive, but a necessary precaution. The Witch Role just had too much potential.

Jake also had to specify what his daily quota was, but since it was 1 anyway, he was clearly the winner of the Contract. In the end, it turned out that Kewanee could create up to 6 potions daily with her current Witch Role, 2 more than originally stated.

Kewanee read over the Contract with reluctance, but eventually signed it with a sigh.

‘I hope I’m not making a huge mistake...‘ she gròànéd with an aggrieved expression.

‘I return the compliment. ‘Jake said happily as he received the 5% Fluid promised in their deal. Connecting their Fluid Cards was all it took to make this trade.

With the Contract signed, the two Players visibly relaxed. Despite a good first impression, neither of them had really let their guard down and this Contract allowed them to trust each other. At least enough to start cooperating.

About ten minutes later, the duo reached the forest and with his authorization, characterized by a thin halo of green light, Kewanee was allowed to follow him inside. Jake then guided her to the destination originally planned, and marked on the map by a four-leaf clover.

When they got there, they discovered a sunny meadow covered with flowers and exotic plants of all kinds. The trees around also carried alien fruits with bizarre shapes. Some of the fruits and plants looked almost normal, but most of them were so unusual that it was almost certain that they did not exist outside, having been invented solely for this game.

Upon seeing all these ingredients, Kewanee gave a delighted yell and hurried to start plucking. She seemed to know exactly what to pick, and Jake put this omniscience down to her Witch Role. Jake assisted her as best he could, picking up whatever he found interesting.

Al ovu lpr duui frt ovuaz gfhcnfhcl nfhcut dpui, ovuw opzrut gfhc om ovu saiifeu, gmov lfoaldaut. Wvur ovuw fzzasut fo val vimplu, ovuw jfsut emmtgwu frt juro ovuaz lunzfou jfwl. A duj qarpoul ifouz, ovu zmgmoah smahu ardmzqut ovuq ovfo ovu luhmrt nvflu md ovu Cwhiu jfl fgmpo om gear.

[Night will fall in five minutes. The Monsters will then be empowered to take action. Villagers must be and remain in their homes during this time unless they have special permission, ability, or conditions that allow them to ignore this rule. Any violation of this rule will be punished by a trip to the Pit.]