

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 418 - The Noon Vote

[Villagers Willem Colt and Fanny Sins were killed by the Monsters last night. Villager Hephais Vist survived his attack and gains one reputation point.]

Jake opened his eyes and listened to the announcement carefully.

‘If a Monster can only attack one Villager per night, then there are at least three of them.’ Jake stated serenely.

[It would be wise to go find this Hephais to learn a little more about the methods available to these Monsters.] Xi commented, as she removed her hologram. [Especially what appearance they take on at night to cover their real identities.]

Jake nodded, then cautiously tried to open the shutters. This time he did not hear the monotone voice calling him to order. The first rays of sunlight penetrated the cottage unimpeded and he finally had a clear view of the street after a night cut off from the rest of the world.

A new Cycle had begun. With it came the right to draw again and Jake immediately asserted that right. After all, it was one of the only levers they had in this Round other than their initial Role and abilities.

There were 3 stacks to choose from: Roles/Challenges, Treasures, and Enchantments/Events. The last category, Reward, was grayed out and Jake suspected that it would only be available at the end of a Round

or after certain conditions had been met, possibly those of a Challenge.

Without hesitation, he drew a Role and Challenge card. Rather than gamble on a miracle item, he thought it best to increase the number of options available to him.

More Roles meant more room to maneuver and more knowledge of them and the game itself. As for Challenges, by virtue of the feat or action to be accomplished they would at least tell him they were possible.

For example, if a Challenge required him to attack another Villager at night, it would confirm to him that there was at least one way other than being a Monster to perform this task. Of course, there was still the possibility that it was impossible, in which case the Card might remain useless, but it was a risk worth taking.

Jake felt a momentary spike of excitement when he found he had just drawn a Role Card, but immediately lost interest when he read the details.

[Role Card: Baker (Uncommon): The baker wakes up an hour before sunrise to bake bread and has priority over certain products from Farmers, Farmers, and Grocers.]

[Ruypazuqurol dmz ovu Rmiu: Bfcuzw gpaitare, nzunfzu frt luii f gfohv md gzuft frt nflozaul om ovu arvfgaofrol. Tm cuun oval zmiu, ao al ruhullfzw om nzunfzu f gfohv md gzuft usuzw qmzrare. Tvu Rmiu jaii gu imlo fdouz ojm hmrluhpoasu qallut tfwl ad ovu Vaiifeu vmitl frmovuz fhoasu Bfcuz.]

‘Fuck. ‘

The Role was virtually useless to him. There was only one Bakery in the Village and it already had its Baker. Anyway, he didn't have time to bake bread every morning.

Compared to his own Role as Forest Garden, this Baker Role was only obligations and duties.

Yet, this role was not as useless as it seemed. With their Space Storage out of reach, the Players would quickly run out of food. With violence prohibited, they would eventually be compelled to buy bread to satisfy their hunger. Meanwhile, the only currency available was the Fluid within their Fluid Card.

Baker was actually an easy way to make quick bucks. To take it a step further, it was probably one of the safest and most lucrative jobs available at the beginning of the game. Lastly, the slight advantage of waking up a little earlier than others could certainly be put to good use in many ways.

After drawing this disappointing card, Jake contemplated using his Fluid to draw new cards briefly. At 1M units per card drawn, he reluctantly dismissed this crazy idea.

He was confident in his ability to conserve his Fluid and even gain some, but with the Corruption at work, this pure, readily usable energy had become extremely valuable. He would not spend it easily. Not until he had a safe and efficient way to acquire more.

With the card drawn unusable, Jake stopped dithering and left his house, taking his map and his Warden's gear with him. He walked briskly toward the town square and noted that the Bakery was indeed already open.

The Villager inside was a native he didn't recognize and he took the opportunity to test the waters. The Baker looked tiny in front of him but he did not take advantage of it.

'A loaf of bread and a croissant please. 'He asked politely.

Jake didn't really need to eat, but it was necessary to understand the market.

'That'll be 15 units of Fluid... No, 50!' The former Titan Pearl cook, panicked as he quoted his prices, clearly ignorant about the market's notion of supply and demand.

' Okay. ' Jake accepted with no attempt to bargain. It was a good deal.

If it were him, he would have produced a limited amount of bread and resold it to the locals at a premium. Even if this generated resentment and hatred towards him, the worst he risked was a night attack by a Monster. Needless to say, that was all he hoped for.

Of course, Jake did not try to educate the native. He would learn from his mistakes soon enough and the price would surely skyrocket if he wasn't an idiot. Otherwise, accumulating 50M Fluid units at these rates would take him years.

Jake then visited the Grocery, Butchery and Fishmonger's and bought some groceries and other staples. He learned from their owners that, like the Baker, they were dependent on the producing trades such as Farmers, Hunters and Fishermen for their supplies.

All in all, he spent 2680 Fluid units, which was a trifle compared to the 500 000 units he had charged Kewanee. Maybe he should lower his price next time...

For the moment, these businesses were far from operating at their full potential and were running on the meager reserves contained in their

residence at the start of the Round. It wouldn't be long before they were completely sold out.

Before leaving the Village, he tried to find out who Hephais was, the only fellow to have been attacked by a Monster and survived to tell the tale. It turned out that Hephais was one of the Farmers, but also a Player from Ega like the two sisters.

Jfcu film iufZrut jaov fqfxuquro ovfo Cvarur Tfalvm, ovu ofoommut Pifwuz jaov f wfcpxf immc, vft film lpzsasut jvur vu hfqu fhzmll val qmzgat dfhu jvaiu jficare mr ovu gmpiusfzt.

Unlike Peter Brady, he had no wounds on him and no one knew when he had returned from the Pit. However, the warrior didn't have his trademark cutlass with him and had lost a few pounds since the day before.

When his tour was over, Jake went to knock on Kewanee's door to find her making potions with her cauldron. It was ridiculously simple. All she had to do was throw the ingredients in the right order and clouds of various colors would spring forth from the concoction.

'Hey Jake! You're just in time.' The Native American greeted him without taking her eyes off her cauldron.

A pile of ready potions and even more failed products lay on the only small table in the room. Some mishap must have occurred during the concoction process, for the ceiling and walls were black with soot, the floor having turned oddly green in one place.

Kewanee threw her last ingredient into the pot with extreme concentration, then sponged off her forehead with a cloth prepared in advance.

‘Phew! I’m done using all the herbs. I can only make 2 different Potions right now, but I’m optimistic. I’ll let you pick the ones you’re interested in. ‘

Inspecting the potions out of the corner of his eye, Jake quickly noticed that the amber liquid inside was the same for all the vials. Opening and sniffing the vials one by one, he was amazed to find that they were odorless. Baffled, he asked,

‘How am I supposed to choose?’

‘Oh, I almost forgot! The labels!’ Kewanee facepalmed before realizing that she didn’t have any labels anyway.

Faced with Jake’s annoyance, she had no choice but to explain.

‘The first potion is a Healing Potion that can heal all wounds except amputations, while the second is a Poison effective against Monsters but harmless to other Villagers. ‘

‘All right. I’ll take my share. ‘ Jake complied, before remembering their deal. ‘Will you come into the forest with me today?’

Kewanee was clearly dying to, but she had to decline.

‘Sorry, but I have to sell these Potions if I want to make a living here’ She justified herself with an apologetic expression.

Jake expected this and didn’t bother her further. He went back to his house and crafted a wooden sign with the words,

‘If interested in entering the Forest or prohibiting another person from entering the Forest, contact me. Jake, The Forest Warden. ‘

He then spent the rest of the day exploring the hardwood territory under his protection, picking anything that caught his eye and appeared to have the slightest value. Without Kewanee to slow him

down, he quickly filled his bag with all sorts of herbs and fruits. Even if he had no more Fluid to buy food, he would not starve.

He also encountered his first monsters as he ventured further afield, where the woods were so dark that it seemed to be almost dusk.

The creature looked like a boar, but was the size of a full-grown rhino with huge tusks. This thing proved so tenacious that it took all his strength to knock down the giant wild pig with a cataclysmic punch.

Wvur ovu gmfz taut, Jfcu jfl fiqmlo mr val cruul, jvuuxare frt npddare vufsaiw om hfohv val gzufov.

A few minutes later, Jake came across another Player in the forest and watched him kill a similar boar with a single arrow between the eyes: a Hunter. Apparently, this Role also came with some advantages. Either the bow was something special, or it was the arrows.

With some hope, Jake tried his own bow and arrow, but they turned out to be completely normal. Obviously, hunting forest creatures was not part of his duties. The bow was just for self-defense.

The Hunter, a Player named Tayyar, taught him that apart from entering the forest to hunt, he could do nothing else. If he tried to pick up a special herb or fruit, he would get a warning.

' At least, this game is still fair.' Jake rejoiced inwardly as he discovered that his own Role also had its perks.

Alas, this short-lived joy did not survive the next announcement from the robotic voice a few hours later:

[The noon vote took place in the Village Square. The villagers present voted against Jake Wilderth, Tayyar Zeybek and Peter Brady, suspecting them of being Monsters. The Enforcers Chinen Taisho,

Avros Valruc and Svara were chosen to eliminate the culprits. Until the next vote, the Enforcers can attack them freely.]