

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 421 - Post-Battle

[Enforcer Chinen Taisho and Svara were defeated by Jake Wilderth while carrying out their duty. Having survived his execution twice, Jake Wilderth gains 2 reputation points.]

Jake, who had been hoping to extract some intelligence from Chinen, flashed an expectant look when he heard the announcement. This morning, the Monsters' victims had been announced by the robotic voice. Since only their defeat was mentioned here, it seemed that Chinen was still breathing.

Svara would remain unconscious for a few more minutes, so he approached Chinen's severed body half where his head was. Chinen, who had deflated back to his original form, glared at him, still alive only because of the support provided by his high Constitution and Vitality. Though, he would die soon if nothing was done.

Amused, Jake crouched down beside him and gave him a sympathetic look.

'What a shitty luck you have...' Jake snickered with a glint of compassion in his eye.

Because of the slanting stroke, his right arm had been separated from the rest of his torso, left dangling by a flap of flesh and a few broken ribs to both legs. This detail would not have been so poignant under any other circumstances. Regrettably, it turned out that his Oracle

Device was on his right wrist. With Chinen still alive, the bracelet was only lying there for the taking.

‘I, I will-‘ Chinen tried to stammer something, but Jake forced him to lie back down.

‘Shh... Don’t worry about it. I’ll take good care of it. ‘ Jake whispered in a low voice as if he were telling him a lullaby. ‘Your sacrifice will not be forgotten. ‘

Jake then palpated the tattooed Player’s body and clothes, and winced as he found nothing of interest except for his Fluid Card. Ultimately, his attention returned to his two tattoos.

One was a larger-than-life brown bull, while the second looked like some sort of half-horse, half-lizard creature with deer antlers. If he had been a bit more into Chinese mythology, he would have recognized a Kirin.

The two tattoos still emitted a faint afterglow, and as he peered into their eyes, Jake had the unsettling sensation of being spied on in return, as if both tattoos were alive.

‘Should I skin him to retrieve the tattoos? ‘ Jake muttered, not caring about Chinen’s gurgling in agony.

The poor guy seemed extremely panicked and despite his critical condition, he found the strength to wriggle for a final confrontation. It was useless, of course. His face was deathly pale and advanced signs of cyanosis were gradually creeping over his face. He would enter a coma any moment.

Yet, during those few minutes the futile stance of the defeated warrior quickly got on his nerves. He rewrapped a vacuum bubble around his skull and moved the time of his final coma forward by a few breaths.

‘ Quiet at last. ‘

Jake then slammed his bracelet against Chinen’s, enthusiastically snatching up the modest sum of 16M Aether pts along with half a kilo of liquid alloy. It wasn’t a life-changing fortune, but it was still quite a decent haul.

He then hesitated to scalp the skin area holding the tattoos before eventually deciding to go through with it. Based on Sarah’s experience, there was a good chance that those tattoos and his bracelet would be returned to him upon his recovery. The only downside was that he would probably have to pay a steep price...

But this was none of his concern.

With his machete, he had no trouble carving out the corresponding portions of skin and surprisingly, both tattoos immediately relinquished the dead flesh once it was separated from its original body.

To survive, they sought out the nearest life source and Jake, who to them beamed like a sun, turned out to be their natural choice. Unable to resist, the two tattoos crept onto his skin in search of a new home. As for their former host Chinen, as far as they were concerned he was already dead.

Fortunately, Xi was on the case and with his bracelet and Spirit Body’s cooperation, they managed to lock them in a piece of liquid alloy. His AI reassured him shortly afterwards, explaining that these tattoos were some kind of artificial spirits with no intelligence.

Tvuw juzu iacu nmZofgiu gimmtiarul, ruutare mriw f iaooiu uruzew dzmq ovuaZ vmlo om lpZsasU. Ir ukhvfreu, ovuw juzu ukhuiuuro lwqgamoul, gulomjare fgaiaoaUl pnmr ovuaZ vmlo fhhmZtare om ovu

uruzew lfhzadahut. Ir ovu imre zpr, ovuw jmpit film urvfrhu sfzamp
Bmtw frt Auovuz Aoozagpoul.

Overall, it was a shortcut to power with few drawbacks. The only catch was that removing or replacing them could be tricky. Generally, the older the symbiosis, the more difficult it would become. For players who drew their power from these tattoos, the limited skin surface area would quickly become a major bottleneck to their progress.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Chinen died eaten away by regret a few minutes later. The fun part was that until the bitter end, he didn't regret attacking Jake, only underestimating him. Until his death, he remained a moronic jerk.

A few seconds later the robotic voice rang out to inform the rest of the townspeople of his death.

[He was definitely in the grip of the Corruption.] Xi commented dispassionately, as he stared at the evil rictus on the face of the deceased.

'Yeah... Unfortunately, I'm afraid I didn't escape that either. 'Jake shook his head in an attempt to calm himself down with little success. 'Normally, I wouldn't be this sadistic. Believe it or not, I actually enjoyed the kill. '

[Did you only use your Aether Core ?] The Oracle AI inquired with concern.

'I did. It was better, but not perfect. If the fight had gone on for another 10 minutes, things might have taken a strange turn. '

Xi remained silent after his clarification, pondering over all the clues.

[If it's what I think it is, don't use your Aether Core again unless it's an absolute emergency.] She declared sternly. [Remember the Digestor soul you absorbed when you first came to the Mirror Universe? I told you not to do that again because you would gradually become like those creatures. I didn't tell you everything, but your level of authority isn't enough yet. Just remember, it's much worse than you think.]

Sensing that there was a big secret behind this, Jake promised to try his best. Xi's overly dramatic tone reinforced his resolve. Now that they were sharing their minds, he could feel the pessimism and despair that never left her, and these feelings had just intensified.

'Let's go check on Svara.' Jake said to take her mind off it. Turning to the sleeping Nawai woman, he shouted, 'I know you're awake. If you want to stay alive, you better give me a good reason.'

The barbarian woman abruptly opened her eyes, flinching as if someone had just stepped on her foot. She looked around for her axe, but then she remembered that she was still encased in a rock tomb.

This one looked vaguely like the mound of earth from a red ant hill, or even a small volcano. Except for her head, which stuck out like a sore thumb, her entire body was trapped inside.

'I ask the questions, you answer.' Jake commanded chillingly after finding a round boulder to sit on.

Spotting Chinen's bloody, partially skinned corpse behind Jake, Svara nodded hurriedly in obedience.

'Is your name Svara?'

'Yes.'

‘Why did you attack me?’ Jake got to the heart of the matter with the second question.

‘I needed more Fluid and I wanted to improve my Ordeal Rating.’ She stated simply. ‘My primary target was Tayyar, I came over after I was done with him.’

‘You killed him?’

Jake promptly regretted his question. He hadn’t heard an announcement so the Hunter was definitely still alive.

‘No, I forced him to sign a Contract with me.’ Svara chuckled haughtily. ‘My Role is Tanner. I have priority over the Hunters’ skins and furs, but Tayyar and the other two Hunters tried to rip me off.’

‘So... You’re telling me you spared the one who ripped you off, but you tried to kill me just for some Fluid?’ Jake found it hard to believe. It was just plain ridiculous!

Taking a deep breath to compose himself, he forced her to look him in the eye and asked another question, the most crucial one,

‘Who voted against me, Tayyar and Peter Brady and why? I get it for Peter. He’s an àsshole. As for Tayyar, he ripped you off but you said yourself he wasn’t the only Hunter.’

Svara broke the eyecontact and she nervously looked around for an escape route or even a savior passing by to no avail. When Jake pressed the tip of his blade against her throat, she abandoned her futile effort. Sighing, she said,

‘Peter because he attacked Susan yesterday and you guys because you were the only ones absent. To be honest, a few Villagers objected. Kewanee and Daryl defended you and the Inquisitor refused to vote.’

The reason you were chosen was because of Gordon Mason. He convinced the natives to vote against you and Tayyar. ‘

‘The Bailiff?’ Jake squinted as he visualized the mealy-mouthed officer. It would seem that their first bad impression was mutual.

The truth however was actually much simpler. The officer simply feared him. The soldier had seen him fight Avy Shanmin and it had left a deep impression on him. The mere idea of Jake being one of the Monsters was enough to give him nightmares.

Piuflut jaov ovu arouzzmefoamr, Jfcu tat rmo lvmj fl qphv quzhw fl vu tat jaov Cvarur. Tvu ifoouz vfsare zudplut val dazlo mdduz, vu daepzut ovfo f lozahouz hmrozfho jmpit tm bplo fl juui.

‘If you want to live and continue your Ordeal, sign a Slave Contract with me. I promise to end the Contract at the end of the Ordeal and not to give any orders that could endanger your life. ‘

The faint hope occupying Svava’s heart abandoned her at once when she heard the terms of her release. A dizzying sense of helplessness almost made her pass out again, but the cold, impassive gaze of the man in front of her caused her to bite her tongue to stay awake.

She mulled over her other options, but soon concluded that none of them would be satisfactory. Ostracized by her own people because of her superiority in battle over most males, she had no allies to rely on. Eventually, she was forced to accept the deal.

[The Slave Contract between Player Svava and Player Jake Wilderth has been signed by both parties. Svava is hereby enslaved to Jake Wilderth from now until the end of this Ordeal.]

The rock imprisoning her turned to sand and crumbled to the ground right after.

'To our collaboration. 'Jake cheered as he shook hands with her.