

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 422 – Madness

A moment later, Jake and his new slave Svara were back at the outskirts of the Village. Just as he was inviting the young woman into his humble abode, the robotic voice rang out for the umpteenth time that day.

[Enforcer Avros Valruc has completed his duty and executed the criminal Tayyar Zeybek. He gains one point of reputation.]

‘What?!’ Svara was caught off guard by this information.

She had spared him and secured a deal with the Hunter only to have him murdered by another Enforcer moments later. All her efforts had been nullified.

‘Who’s this Avros?’ Jake asked as he tried to remember a dude with such a name with limited success.

‘I didn’t know him either. I first noticed him during the voting.’ Svara apologized meekly.

‘Is his official Role known?’

‘No... He stays in his house all day and doesn’t talk to anyone.’ The Nawai woman hastened to reply.

‘Never mind I guess... As long as he doesn’t come to mess with me, that should be fine.’ Jake shrugged the individual off his mind. He had plenty to worry about as it was.

Once inside, Jake guided the young warrior to a nearby rickety pine chair. He placed a glass of water in front of her, then began a much more thorough interrogation than the previous one. With the new Slave Contract, he no longer had to worry about her hiding or altering any information.

In the end, he realized very quickly that he was making life difficult for himself. By borrowing her Fluid Card, he could easily access her information. First of all, he transferred 5M of Fluid units to himself to make her pay the price for her affront.

This was also in Svava's interest. Thanks to the previous announcement, everyone knew that she had been defeated by Jake. With Chinen dead and her alive, she also became a prime suspect, especially if they were seen hanging out together afterwards.

Therefore, making her pay a certain price was the least we could do to justify her being spared.

Cross-referencing her previous answers with the contents of the Fluid Card, Jake was able to confirm that she was telling the truth. Her only Role was indeed Tanner, and the card she had drawn that morning was an Event Card named 'Prison Break. Not having found a prison, or even a police station in the Village, he deemed this Card useless. For now, at least.

Tanner was indeed a Production Role. She could produce a variety of accessories, tools, and armor from the leather she generated, and like the Witch Kewanee, creating these items was child's play.

Unlike the primary food-related Production Roles, however, its appeal was much more limited. Still, depending on the length of this Purgatory, participants might have to change their clothes.

Al jaov fii Rmiul, ao jfl pnezftufgiu frt ao jfl fnnfzuroiw nmlagiou om hzufou zfzu mz iueurtfzw aouql jaov imj nzmfgaiaow. Aefar, vu hmpit mriw ftqazu ovu hzufomz md oval jmrtuzdpi efqu.

Jake then inspected the Fluid Card of the recently deceased Chinen and for the first time that day he was able to laugh. 10M Fluid Units! That jerk hadn't even bought food or water. After spending a night in the Pit, he had probably spent the morning sleeping before going to vote.

With that extra money, Jake was already halfway to the 50M goal required to qualify for the second round.

On top of that, with the exception of his Roles, Jake was able to collect his other unused card. The tattooed Player had an Enchantment Card named 'Unbreakable Lock'.

The point of this card was not so much in its usefulness as in what it implied. Jake hid absolutely nothing in his residence, but the existence of this card taught him that breaking into other people's homes was possible with the right key or other methods.

As for the card itself, its function was clear. All he had to do was apply it to the door of his choice and it would become impossible to break into for the duration of the Round. The only way to thwart this card, if possible, was to use another card with an opposite purpose.

On the other hand, even though Jake did not manage to take on Chinen's Roles, he learned everything he needed to know about them. This addressed many of his unanswered questions.

It turned out that Chinen was much luckier than he was! His initial Role was indeed Comedian, but it was a very special Role. The Role itself had no feature, but allowed its owner to draw 3 additional Role Cards at the beginning of the Round.

Like an actor, the Comedian could assume his Roles as he wished, but only one at a time. If he changed Roles, he would lose the previous one permanently. The first Role Chinen played, and rightly so, was Healer.

This allowed him to heal any non-lethal wound once per Cycle, except amputation. This was how the Player had healed from being impaled after falling into his trap. The second instantaneous healing was triggered by an Oracle Heal.

Tvmlu movuz ojm prfhoasfout Rmiul juzu Ffzquz frt Maruz. Nm jmrutz vu hvmlu om talzuefzt ovuq.

As for his temporary Enforcer Role, Jake had already learned all he needed to know from Svara. This status effectively allowed the Enforcer to attack targets with the Criminal status for one day. If an Enforcer was able to eliminate a Criminal during that period, he or she would retain the Role permanently.

This was not necessarily good news for him. For it meant that in the medium run the number of Enforcers might become very high if three more Enforcers were appointed at each vote.

‘Stay with me tonight, Svara.’ Jake ordered after learning and retrieving whatever he was interested in.

‘Wh-what do you mean? I’d rather die than be humiliated!’ The Nawai woman fumbled for words with a flushed face.

Jake paused as he gauged her reaction before catching on.

‘It’s not what you think. Maybe another day, but not here.’ He teased her before quickly reverting to his serious self. ‘I just want to test some of my theories.’

‘Oh...’

‘Yeah, oh...’

An awkward blankness settled between them, but they soon got used to each other’s presence. Even though she was only his slave for the Ordeal, the Oracle System made no difference between temporary and permanent. Jake had only promised to avoid putting her in danger, so he could effectively give her any order, even the most inappropriate.

[You should bed her while you can. It’s not healthy for a man to abstain for too long.] Xi suggested with an excitement far removed from her previous brooding mood.

‘Cough...’ Jake cleared his throat and pretended he hadn’t heard anything.

Inwardly, he was tempted. Who didn’t want a pretty, obedient sex slave ready to indulge any fantasy? Just thinking about it, strange scenes began to occupy his mind and his breathing quickened dangerously.

At that moment, insidious thoughts that he would never normally have had began to arise, such as ‘After all, she is my slave, it’s my right.’ or ‘I’m sure she wants it too.’

Ruby, Sarah, and even the two sisters showed up in succession in his mind with increasingly suggestive poses, and even Xi eventually joined the group. When Jake looked again at the vulnerable Svava, none of his former poise and composure could be seen.

His lava veins were exposed, and the whites of his eyes had turned completely black. The aura around him was murky and evil.

‘Jake?’ Svava probed warily as she took a few steps back.

[Jake, wake up!] Xi yelled sharply, snapping him out of his trance.

Jake shook his head and bolted outside for a breath of fresh air. It was a close call. For the first time, he took the threat of this Corruption seriously.

‘Xi, is there any way to resist this influence?’ He pleaded, sweating buckets of sweat. He was still shell-shocked.

[...]

Paradoxically, the lack of an answer scared him more than a simple ‘I don’t know’. Xi’s pessimism and despair was back, stronger than ever, and this time she didn’t seem aware that she had forgotten the filter keeping their mutual emotions apart.

More vividly than with any words, Jake finally understood what this Corruption was: ineluctable, inexorable. Like time flowing by and never stopping, the changes brought about by this mysterious influence could not be stopped.

‘But I can at least stall it.’ Jake reasserted his resolve once again. He hadn’t come this far to give in to his primal urges like a lowly animal.

[Contestant Orun broke the rules by attacking contestant Ingrid Jepsen at 3:27pm during the Cycle Day phase. He will be punished 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.]

As if to demonstrate that he was not the only one affected, the announcements multiplied during the rest of the day. By the time night fell, 6 more Villagers had been sent to the Pit and Jake realized that the Monsters were not nearly as dangerous as their own selves.

Jake took Svara home at dusk, after confirming that it was indeed possible to spend the night with another Villager. The ban on going

out at night remained in effect, though. He then shut himself up at home, sitting by the fire to relax and think of a solution.

When the next morning dawned, Jake still had no idea how to resist this pervasive Corruption, but he felt calmer, more at ease.

The robotic voice then heralded two more victims and one survivor at sunrise, and a new Cycle began with its share of unpleasant twists and turns.