

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 423 - Another Contract

This time Jake happened to know the survivor. The man who lived through his night attack was Gordon Mason, the Bailiff. It seems that by his conduct and ambition he had alienated some people.

By habit, Jake then checked the status of his Ordeal Missions. The list of people to protect had only grown longer, Kewanee and Svava having joined the restricted club of people under his protection.

Upon discovering a gray name in the middle of that list, his laid-back face dimmed again. Lily was dead. Tim and Daniel wouldn't be happy about that... He just hoped her death hadn't occurred in their presence or they wouldn't be able to forgive themselves.

Tim's luck tended to extend to those he wanted to protect, but there was a limit to it. In the face of the unfathomable power of this game's creator, it would be commendable if the teenager managed to protect himself.

Because of Lily's death, Jake had lost his opportunity to get a Perfect Rating on this Mission. Regardless, there was nothing he could do about it and he hoped the Oracle System would have some measure of common sense regarding the final verdict.

Because of this tragedy, Jake was at a turning point. He could choose to put all his efforts into protecting those still alive, or he could add new people to that list. And preferably people who were in the same

Rounds as he was, so that he would be able to step in if things went wrong.

Since the Oracle System was basically a supercomputer devoid of emotions, it was quite likely that the number of people saved mattered more than the number of losses.

Ultimately, Jake chose the second alternative. If someone wished to be saved, he would do his best. Of course, he wouldn't sacrifice himself for free. For a Fluid fee, he could combine business with pléàsuré.

With his plan decided, Jake drew another Role and Challenge Card and this time fate took pity on him. The card he drew was exactly what he was looking for.

[Challenge Card: Save a Villager from a Monster attack. Rewards: Letters of Nobility (a prerequisite for the Role Card: Lord.)]

He didn't know what this Lord Role was yet, but based on the feudal definition, a Lord had to protect his serfs against a set amount of taxes. It was definitely a Role for the strong, and one that suited him perfectly.

'Svara draw a Role card if you haven't already.' Jake ordered Svara remotely through the bracelet.

'Why m- ? Okay... ' A sleepy voice complained from the other side of the line.

After a short silence, she declared with renewed glee,

'I drew the Musician Role card!'

‘ A shame...‘ Jake sighed as he tried to mask his disappointment. It would have been too good if she too had drawn the card he needed. ‘What does it consist of?’

Lazily, Svava transferred the card’s contents directly to him so he could peruse it in person.

[Card Role: Musician (Legendary): Can bewitch up to one creature, Monster, or Villager per Cycle with his or her instrument if the conditions are met. On Monsters and Villagers, the Instrument may not be enough. Requirements: Musical instrument + sheet music + ability to play the given instrument.]

Jake drew a cold breath. It was a good Card! Its properties matched its title as a Legendary Role, but the requirements for obtaining it were just as strict. While the effect on participants was unpredictable, the guarantee that the spell would work on any creature was a complete game changer.

There were not only giant boars in the forest! Even so, once enough of them had been tamed, they would become a powerful force to be reckoned with.

Arguably, Jake assumed that this Role was perfect for Players like Will who were heavily reliant on Charisma. If he could infuse this type of Aether into his tune, the odds of a successful spell would certainly be increased. All that remained was to hope that the businessman could play an instrument... Or that he was a quick learner.

‘Keep this card for now and try to get a musical instrument. ‘ He finally instructed the young woman. ‘You can go to the Carpenter and see if he can make that. ‘

‘All Right...‘

Jake sensed her rancor, but he ignored her grumbling. He was starting to realize that there were no silly jobs in this Monster Game. As the game progressed, the importance of each Role became clearer, forming a complex synergy.

This morning he did not go to the forest. Instead, he made a new wooden sign and wrote his new offer of the day on it: ‘Close protection day and night. Price negotiable. ‘

Hu vft jzaour oval dmz dpr, rmo uknuhoare qphv, gpo jvur vu zuopzrut f iaooiu ifouz vu jfl lpznzalut om dart ovfo lmqumru jfl fizuftw fo val tmmz, zuftare msuz val ruj laer jaov f hmrouqnifoasu uknzullamr.

‘It’s you!’ Jake gasped as he recognized the intoxicating figure outside his house.

With her long, shimmering dark hair, her full bosom, her skin pale as snow yet with a healthy glow, her fleshy lips and ruby irises, it was impossible to mistake her for anyone else in this Village.

She was the one who had called back to order the little girl who had pounced on him. Sarah would have instantly recognized her as the gorgeous woman co-leading the vampire faction with Wyatt.

Separated from the other Lily and the rest of her gang, she had lost some of her magnificence and appeared to be haunted by an affliction only she knew about. She was still wearing the same burgundy satin dress and despite her flawless makeup, Jake noticed that she was showing signs of dehydration and malnutrition, which should be impossible.

Hearing someone call her name, the young woman interrupted her reading and frowned as she recognized the newcomer.

‘Are you the one who wrote that sign?’ She asked filled with misgivings. While her face held a faint hope earlier, her defensive attitude told him that she had already changed her mind, no matter how absurd it might seem.

‘It’s indeed me.’ Jake replied placidly. ‘If you can pay 1M Fluid Units, I’ll protect you without fail until tomorrow morning.’

‘That’s... expensive for such short term protection.’ She crossed her arms indignantly.

‘That’s the price.’ Jake grunted apathetically. ‘Like I said, I’ll protect you from ‘anyone’. Being a Player yourself, we can sign a Contract which should be an excellent token of trust.’

Tvu wmpre jmqfr vulaofout dmz f duj luhmrtl, gudmzu fhunoare ovu tufi.

‘You keep me healthy until tomorrow morning and you’ll get your million, I promise.’ She swore coldly. ‘Now let’s sign the Contract.’

‘Wait a minute.’ Jake held up his hand, dampening her spirits. ‘Jake held up his hand, dampening her spirits. ‘Those weren’t the terms. The deal was to protect you no matter what the cost from all enemy threats. Guaranteeing your health under any circumstance has a completely different meaning.’

A troubled look, slightly tinged with anger, flickered across the young woman’s features, but she quickly regained her icy composure.

‘Two million!’ She snorted, gritting her teeth.

‘3 million and you can’t maim, poison or kill yourself in any way. If you prevent me from protecting you in any manner, the contract will be void and I keep the Fluid. This includes...’

Upon hearing the enormous number of clauses in their Contract, the young woman's competitive edge vanished instantly. She thought she had a chance to rip him off, but she realized that the man in front of her, despite his bully looks, was more devious in business than the most evil hucksters she could remember.

In the end, she reluctantly signed the agreement. Jake could scarcely believe his luck. Such a bargain?! Was there really such an insecure Player that she was willing to pay 30% of her Fluid to survive just one extra night? His hunch told him that there was something fishy going on, but the offer was too good to pass up.

'What's your name anyway?' Jake realized he still didn't know who he was dealing with.

'Carmin.'

The young woman didn't bother asking who he was. After all, his name was on the door. Perhaps his performance the night before was the primary reason she was willing to visit him.

With the Contract signed, Jake went first to Kewanee's house to pick up his share of potions and in exchange sold her the bulk of his previous day's pickings. He then went to Susan, the Butcher, to get rid of his boar carcass. He then continued his shopping spree and exploration, chatting with any villager willing to converse.

All the while, Carmin followed behind him silently, her perfect body shaking imperceptibly.

In the course of the morning alone, the robotic voice sounded 5 times to announce infractions. Since the beginning, close to 15 participants had already gone to the Pit at least once, and the process was only getting faster.

Jake himself had to plug his nose with two cotton balls to avoid being influenced by the pheromones of his protégée. The Ordeal may have been in full swing, but a heady fragrance, full of promise, followed her wherever she went. It was as if staying presentable and attractive was more important to her than achieving a good Ordeal Rating.

A few minutes before the noon vote, Jake also ran into Peter Brady, somewhat dumbfounded. Brady had survived the pit for the second time in a row. Nevertheless, he had lost most of his swagger. Dressed in rags and barefoot, he wandered the streets with a vacant stare and no concern for anything.

The next moment, Jake caught sight of the crowd gathered around the fountain and he confidently looked for a free seat among them. His arrival attracted the attention of some of the Villagers, including Gordon Mason, the Bailiff, who practically shat his pants when he saw him.

A few murmurs were exchanged, and when his identity was made known most of the attendees shrank away from him with frightened or apprehensive faces.

Jake sneered at their reaction, but he was more than happy to have an entire side of the amphitheater to sit on. Kewanee joined him just after with a flutter of anticipation.

‘You really came? You’ve got balls, I’ve got to admit. ‘

‘I came. Let’s see, if they still have the guts to vote against me in my presence. ‘