

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 4: The Purgatory

### Chapter 425 - The Roles' Meaning

[The three new Enforcers elected until the next vote are Wacko Tyne, Feng Xun and Laksmini.]

The three names were unknown to the crowd and Jake had to admit he was somewhat disappointed. Monitoring the crowd's actions allowed him to single out the three lucky ones with surgical precision. Their giddy reactions, far from being an effusion of glee, reminded him of the dread and outrage an innocent man would feel if he were sent to the gallows unjustly.

'Why am I an Enforcer?! I didn't volunteer!' A young soldier barely of age with a shaved head immediately panicked when he heard his name.

He groveled before the Bailiff, hugging the bottom of his pants and refusing to let go.

'Get off of me! You're embarrassing us!' The rogue officer snarled maniacally, trying to shake off the intruder with a few stiff movements.

The urge to deliver a few well-felt kicks was not lacking, but it would result in a trip to the Pit. Something he absolutely wanted to avoid.

'Wacko, stop it. This is a waste of time.' A female soldier with latte-colored skin patted his back and helped him to his feet.

'You don't have to be afraid.' She added, seeing him refuse to let go.

Jake identified the woman who had just interceded as Laksmi, another native. Feng Xun was also a Rivean, but was part of the Titan Pearl's technical staff.

Mufrare, jaov ovu ukhunoamr md Lfclqara, jvm vft qfarofarut lmqu luqgifrhu md hmqnmlpzu, ovulu ruj ErdmZhuZl nmlut rm ovZufo om vaq.

'I have to admit, it's a bummer. ' Jake clapped his hands softly in praise of their courageous display. 'Your colleague is right. You don't have to fear me. I'm allowed to defend myself, not attack you for no reason. As long as you stay out of my way, nothing will happen to you. '

The soldier clinging to his superior officer's boots instantly stopped whining. Raising his head, Wacko saw the jeering looks of the spectators and realized the absurdity of his conduct. Covered in shame, he simply dried his tears and ran out of the Village.

'See you tomorrow. ' Jake waved his hand to the crowd and strutted out of the main square under the wary eyes of the other villagers.

Carmin walked after him, but when he stopped a few seconds later, she nearly bumped into him. Jake turned his head one last time to Carl and Gordon and claimed menacingly,

'If I was one of the Monsters, and I mean if I actually was one of them, keep an eye out tonight. '

Carl, who had been able to remain steady until now, immediately became livid, while the sly little officer, who had barely regained his composure after that long hour of voting, miserably lost control of his bladder. For one long minute, all that could be heard was the

unmistakable splash of a trickle, but Gordon was already past caring about all that.

When he finished his emptying and fell shakily into a pool of his own pee, Jake laughed and went on his way. Gordon blacked out again when he heard that laughter, an ignominy that would haunt him in his worst nightmares.

Jake feared for a brief second that the game's AI would hold him responsible again, but this time it left him alone. The officer had truly passed out on his own.

A few minutes after leaving the square, Kewanee who had tagged along unexpectedly brought up,

‘Did you notice Carl’s reaction when you threatened him?’

Jake and Carmin nodded thoughtfully.

‘The way he watched for the Inquisitor’s attention for a fleeting glance?’ Jake inquired casually. ‘If I’m not mistaken, Carl works for the Inquisitor. He just wanted to know if he could count on his protection.’

‘That’s bad news, isn’t it? I mean, if you are the Monster...’ Kewanee teased him gently before realizing her allegation.

Jake paused and stared intently into her eyes.

‘You think I’m one of the Monsters?’ He asked coolly.

Kewanee, who was usually quite at ease, momentarily lost her confidence.

‘No, I mean, would you tell us if you were?’ She finally retorted with her own question.

‘No.’ Jake replied impassively before starting to walk again.

‘You’re not one of the Monsters.’ Carmin uttered icily, speaking out for the first time or so since the Contract was established.

Jfcu jfl qwloadaut gw ovu loZmre lurly md hmrsahoamr ar vuz smahu. Tvuzu jfl rmo ovu liaevoulo tmpgo, rmZ juZu ovuzu frw diphopfoamrl guozfware f iau mZ vulafoamr. Jplo vuz imdow, ahw dfhftu fl ad vu mjut vuz qmruw.

‘What makes you say that?’

‘The Roles.’ She spat enigmatically. ‘The initial distribution of the Roles may seem random and based entirely on luck, but that’s not entirely true. Most are, but not all.’

‘Develop.’

To be fair, Jake was also buying into this theory. Some Roles were indeed more useful than others, but some were so crucial that they required a certain skill set beforehand.

For example, the Witch Role seemed like a perfect match for the Native American Kewanee. He didn’t know how she fought yet, but she seemed to know herbs and concoctions long before the Round began.

Tayyar, the Hunter, also seemed to be an expert with a bow and it was clearly not the first time he had hunted. Conversely, someone like Jake could fill most of the Roles, but Forest Warden was definitely the one that gave him the most freedom.

Not everyone could take on this role and make the most of it. For one thing, the Forest was dangerous, and voting against the Forest Warden was enough to eliminate it or threaten it. On the other hand,

Jake was not given an omnipotent Role like Comedian or Monster either.

Overall, the creator of this Purgatory seemed to have rigged the dice to make the game more interesting, but still respecting the inclinations of his players. Following this logic, the Monsters were probably either murderers or people with the potential to be so.

The Purgatory was a place that judged sinners, and this Monster Game, with its rules and corruption, was the perfect cocktail for revealing the true nature of everyone.

‘Carl took on the Confessor’s role. His residence is the village chapel. ‘Carmin explained with a superior air. ‘The Fluid Wielders who form the Inquisition are probably a religious caste or sect serving or controlling the Consortium. The Six Brotherhoods don’t seem to worship any gods, but the Fluid Masters and Grand Masters of renown are highly respected. They are the closest thing to a deity and many people worship them. ‘

‘How do you know that? ‘ Kewanee asked, not really convinced. She felt foolish for not noticing until now.

‘I’ve... been chatting with some of the passengers. ‘ Carmin replied evasively without going into too much detail.

Jake ignored the two women and continued to explore all possibilities.

‘If the first Role isn’t completely random, it’s not impossible for him to worship the Inquisitors. ‘ Jake finally concluded before adding, ‘But does the Inquisitor know him? There were eight of them to begin with and they seemed to be on their own mission. I’d be surprised if they interacted with the passengers, let alone the Titan Pearl soldiers. ‘

‘Unless...‘

‘Yes, unless Carl is a mole placed here deliberately.‘ Jake stated with 70% certainty. ‘The second possibility is that someone in his family or another acquaintance is a high-ranking Fluid Wielder. The last possibility is that they didn’t know each other before this round, but the Inquisitor decided to use his influence to weave a web to his advantage. I find this hard to believe, though. The Inquisitor was the only person at the vote who actually didn’t vote and it was reportedly the same yesterday. ‘

Indeed, if there was one person Jake distrusted, it was not the Bailiff or the Confessor, but the indecipherable Inquisitor. At least, he was the only native in the Round with any chance of killing him.

After establishing their conspiracy theory, Jake and Kewanee parted ways, with Kewanee deciding to lock herself in her house. The Bailiff had the key, but she was confident she could defend herself against the three selected Enforcers.

Jake then went to the tannery to visit Svara. He asked her if she wanted to join them for safety or go her own way. In the end she refused, saying she had to process the skins and furs she had acquired this morning as soon as possible.

It was fortunate that after Tayyar’s death, the other two Hunters had become much more courteous and reasonable towards the girl. Having negotiated a fair deal, she could now start her business.

By questioning her a little bit, he was able to verify Carmin’s theory. Svara came from a Nawai tribe whose technology was archaic. In many areas, it did not go beyond the stone age, but in the field of textiles the young woman was exceptional among her peers after having survived a very unusual first Ordeal.

The first Ordeal was often a warm-up that went straight to the new players' biggest deficiencies. Already knowing how to fight, it was her almost debilitating ignorance that the Ordeal tackled by making her study all sorts of crafts.

The young woman didn't just know how to sew and make clothes. She also had some decent knowledge of blacksmithing, weaponry, farming and other areas. She had also learned to read and count during that first Ordeal. Before that, she was ashamed to admit it, but she was nothing more than a beautiful monkey with fluorescent hair.

The rest of the day went smoothly, with Jake providing 'protection' for Carmin, who grew paler and more feverish as the day went on. He did try to get her something to eat, but her condition kept getting worse.

When he ran out of ideas and darkness fell, Jake offered her to stay at his place for the night, which she graciously accepted. Had he known beforehand what kind of 'cure' was required to help her, he probably would never have invited her to sleep over...