

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 429 - Green Lava

‘And now?’ Carmin asked in a barely audible whisper. Her voice was so weak, one could have thought she was mute.

She never heard his answer. As Jake opened his mouth to speak, her eyes rolled back and the bloody aura surrounding her faded along with her consciousness. Staggering dangerously, Jake steadied her, then laid her on the ground before she could collapse.

As he carried her he realized how light she was, the vampire weighing barely heavier than a feather between his arms. As he laid her down, he saw her skin wither and her muscles melt away, like a kite with only the frame left.

[She has overdrafted her body. But don’t worry, vampires usually have few weaknesses compared to humans. They can’t die as long as they have their heads on their shoulders.]

‘So, I don’t have to do anything?’ Jake quipped, pleasantly surprised.

[I didn’t say that.]

‘So what now?’

[We’ll have to give her some blood.] Xi let out a long, exasperated sigh. [Otherwise, her body will remain in hibernation for several centuries before withering away for good. It’s a survival mechanism for when their bodies are starving. A vampire of this level can last

about 500 years in this state, but she's far from being in top shape...
If she lasts half a century, that'll be pretty good.]

'I see. But in that case, why didn't she just drink the blood of the animals in the village or even the monsters we just killed?' Jake asked the question that was bothering him the most.

Xi mulled over this riddle for a moment before answering,

I don't know, but it's a good thing she didn't consume the blood of those parasites.

'Corruption?'

[I'm afraid so.]

Jake wasn't against saving her, but he was reluctant to slit his wrists. He had given blood once on Earth, but not out of charity or altruism. The truth was that he didn't want to owe anyone anything. If he had an accident and needed a transfusion, he would have a clear conscience.

It was selfish and childish, but it was the real him. He could have sacrificed a fraction of his Bloodline Aether to form some Blood Essence for his comrades, but he had refused to make that small donation so as not to compromise his own growth.

Ultimately, he was far from an exception. In retrospect, none of his companions had sacrificed anything important for the rest of the team. If they had, Jake's pride would have prevented him from taking advantage without reciprocating.

And now Jake was faced with the choice of abandoning Carmin to her fate or giving his precious blood to revive her.

[By the Oracle! Stop waffling on for nothing!] Xi rolled her eyes as she watched him sink into a stupid dilemma. It's just a little blood! You can regenerate several liters in a few minutes if you focus your Vitality on your bone marrow. You can always make her pay for it later. She's unconscious anyway. You can even force her to sign another Slave or Pet Contract if you want.]

'Yeah... Right. ' Jake scratched his head awkwardly.

With Xi's admonition, Jake managed to convince himself to be generous, and slashed his right wrist with one of his claws before bringing it to the sleeping young woman's bloodless lips. A drop of blood dripped with difficulty, then nothing more.

Examining his wrist, Jake found out with a jaded face that the cut had already coagulated.

'Fuck. Of course, this had to be made even more unpleasant...' He grimaced in a bad mood.

In the end, slicing deeply into his wrist did the job and he contracted his arteries' sphincters to increase the blood pressure. With his telekinesis, the ejected blood formed a scarlet river wafting through the air to Carmin's stomach.

As soon as a drop of blood touched the vampire's lips, her face flushed with color. A heartbeat more deafening than a rocket at takeoff hailed her return to life, and in a few seconds her emaciated body returned to its original splendor, like a hastily inflated blow-up doll.

Then, she opened her eyes. The pupils dilated, she licked her lips ecstatically and moaned,

'More!'

Carmin pounced on him and he immediately cut the blood valve, instead grabbing her by the throat and slamming her down. She struggled, trying to bite his fingers, until he clamped down on her jaw.

‘Enough. ‘

Incapacitated and with no blood to consume, the glare inhabiting the vampire’s eyes subsided and she regained some semblance of lucidity.

‘You can let me go, I won’t attack anymore. ‘She declared icily a few moments later after the smell of blood had cleared up.

‘I’m glad. ‘ Jake snorted as he flaunted his bruised wrist in front of her face. ‘You’re healthy now, so we don’t owe each other anything. ‘

Surprisingly, Carmin blushed and looked away instead of getting angry.

‘The fućk is wrong with you?’ Jake mumbled in annoyance.

What little appreciation and good feeling she might have for him vanished immediately with those few words.

‘Hmmp. ‘She harrumphed before turning her back on him.

‘Whatever. ‘

Jake had other fish to fry rather than endure the whims of a high-class vampire. If he’d spared the last monster, it wasn’t out of compassion, but for a specific purpose: to explore.

Waov ovu Fipat frt Auovuz hmrofqarfout, vu vft imlo val nzaqfzw uruzew lmpzhu frt jaov ao val qufrl md nzmezull. Hu vft ojm iflo zulmzo lmipoamrl iudo, gpo vu nzuduzzut om zudzfar dzmq plare ovuq vuzu ad nmllagiu.

As soon as Jake saw the greenish lava, he knew his chance had come. Without a horde of parasites to bother him, he now had plenty of time to investigate the place.

First of all it was necessary to know that green lava existed even on Earth, though perhaps not as vivid as this one. Through long and complicated geological processes (subduction and orogeny, for example), conditions favoring the reduction of iron and the appearance of minerals such as chlorite and epidote could indeed give lava this color.

Serene, he walked to the shore and dipped his fingertips into the lava as a normal bather would take the temperature of the water. Carmin's eyes widened as she watched him do this, but she refrained from commenting. After all, she had already seen him immolate himself in his own fireplace.

Shhhhhhhhh!

His fingertips instantly began to sizzle, pestilential, opaque fumaroles immediately engulfing him.

'This lava is toxic.' Jake realized as he plugged his nose with his free sleeve.

It wasn't just because of the smell that he thought that, but because he could smell that this one wasn't natural. This magma also contained high levels of radiation and his scan was inoperative on it.

'But it should do the trick.' He concluded with a satisfied look after a few more tests.

[I suspect this lava is partly produced by energy from the station's reactors.] Xi analyzed. [That would explain the radiation, at any rate.]

Jfcu rmttut, ovur omme fhoamr.

Oblivious to Carmin's astonishment, he threw off his clothes and plunged headfirst into the lava. His head resurfaced a few seconds later and he took the opportunity to give the vampire some instructions.

'Watch the galleries. '

Not really worried that she would try some trickery against him in the Pit, especially now that they were separated by lava, Jake submerged himself again and closed his eyes.

This lava had a surface temperature of about 2500°C, which even for him was close to his limit. Deeper down, the temperature climbed to unbearable levels.

If he didn't activate his Stone Skin and forget to direct his Constitution and Vitality Aether to his extremities he could really die. Even with these precautions, the pain was barely tolerable, but the thought of giving up didn't even cross his mind.

His time was limited. He had to make the most of it while he could.

Having already thought about his training strategy, Jake didn't just nap, read his manuals or review his techniques. This time he deployed his Spirit Body outside his body and used it to absorb heat with. This was the first time he had tried this method, and he bitterly regretted it.

'Aaarrggh, cough, cough! '

The stinging pain made him open his mouth and he swallowed lava accordingly, nearly choking to death. Fortunately, his Myrtharian physique could produce its own oxygen in this hostile environment. As for his digestive system, it had nothing left to prove.

Hal Snazao Bmtw jfznut ar ovu ifsf, guhmqare lm arhfrtulhuro ovfo Jfcu ovmpevo dmz f luhmrt ovfo val Impi qaevo uknimtu. Bfhc om zufiaow, vu ommc f loun gfhc frt zuhfiagzfout val ozfarare quovmt.

He pulled his Spirit Body back into his brain, using only a few tendrils of mental energy to absorb the outside heat. At the same time, instead of letting his body passively absorb the ambient heat, he made good use of his Heat and Radiation Manipulation to redirect it to his brain.

This was also the first time that Jake had favored one organ over another, usually a strong advocate of balanced builds. Focusing all that heat on his gray matter challenged his neurons and he nearly passed out. If he hadn't mentally prepared himself, he probably would have given up.

Gradually, Jake forgot his pain and everything around him, and a long struggle began between his own willpower and the lava threatening to consume him. Disconnected from the world, time flew by without him realizing it, until much later when the robotic voice broke him out of his trance.