

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 4: The Purgatory

### Chapter 430 – Changes In The Village

[Both convicts, Jake Wilderth and Carmin Liche have successfully served their sentences. They will be returned to their respective Villages in 3, 2, 1... 0.]

The pulling force that had dragged them into the abyss did not come from below them this time, but from above. Before Jake had time to gather his wits, he was already out of the lava, soaring some ten meters above the emerald magma.

After spending so much time with his eyes closed in molten rock, he blinked in a daze, unable to acclimate to the dim lighting of the Pit. Without the fiery embrace of lava to invigorate him, he felt uncomfortable, like a newborn baby.

Nevertheless, Jake was still lucid, and with a mental scan, he got all the information he needed. He didn't notice that he had performed this mind sweep without thinking about it, something he needed to do consciously not so long ago.

'Why did you finish off the Hunter?' He asked chillingly to the vampire rising into the air beside him with no sign of struggle whatsoever.

'I didn't. It killed itself.' She shrugged, displeased by his low opinion of her.

Staring at the monster's corpse more closely, he did notice that the creature had suffocated itself. Being unable to move in its rock prison, it had apparently managed to stop breathing for long enough to die.

Normally, a biological survival reflex prevented people from committing suicide in this manner. It was a feat Jake didn't think he was capable of yet, despite his excellent Body Control. His desire to live was too strong.

Unlike Carmin, who was more than happy to leave this shithole, Jake resisted the anti-gravitational pull with his telekinesis long enough to retrieve his armor and machete. The vampire had been thoughtful enough to fold them near the shore for when he got out, and from the looks of it she hadn't done anything else.

This forced him to re-evaluate his opinion of the young woman. As the invisible force pulled them up, Jake took the opportunity to put on his clothes. For a brief moment, they thought they were going to crash into the ceiling of the cave, but just like the wooden floor of his house, the ceiling opened in two to let them through.

The journey up took about as long as their descent into the abyss, and a while later the two survivors were back in the Village's central square. A dazzling sun blinded them as soon as they arrived.

The artificial star was at its zenith, and Jake immediately caught sight of the crowd staring at them from their bleachers. The daily vote was about to take place and rather than fretting over their freak status, he paid more attention to the number of absentees.

'How come there's so few people? Did something happen while we were away?' He wondered.

[You should ask yourself how long you were down there.] Xi chided him gently. [You were down in the Pit for five days. One more day and Carmine would have tried to suck your blood again.]

It was only then that Jake noticed how much the vampire had lost. She didn't look sick like the time she tried to bite him, but she wasn't in the best shape either.

Regardless, it was no longer his concern. He had kept his end of the deal. If Jake had a flaw, it was that he did know how to hold a grudge. It would have been very different if she hadn't tried to drug him to bleed him dry.

'I've fulfilled my part of the Contract. You're free to do whatever you want.' Jake waved Carmin off before choosing a vacant step to sit on, leaving her to stand at the fountain like a complete stranger.

The vampire put on a dejected face, but she didn't stop him from leaving. She, in turn, chose a vacant spot opposite him and waited for the vote to end.

Jfcu zuhmeraxut dfqiaifz dfhul fqmre ovu rfoasul, lphv fl ovu Bfaiadd, ovu Hufiuz frt ovu CmrduUllmZ, gpo film rmoahut qfrw numniu qallare. Mmlo rmofgiw, ovu IrypalaomZ.

Looking around for Kewanee, he found the Indian woman heading towards the square with Svara. Both women had heavy bags under their eyes and had also lost a lot of weight. Until proven otherwise, they did not need blood like Carmin to sustain themselves.

When they saw him, their eyes almost popped out of their heads and they ran to him excitedly.

'You're still alive! It's a miracle!' Kewanee cried out, pinching him all over with caution as if he might disappear at any moment. She then

gave him a playful look and hugged one of his dangling arms not forgetting to rub her modest chest against it.

‘Stop it.’ Jake said curtly as he saw her groping him without the slightest restraint.

‘Oh... Sorry. I don’t know what got into me.’ The Indian apologized hastily. She then paused on his face, then added, ‘You look different... Less human. It was already the case before, but I feel it even more now. It’s... kind of hot.’

Jake frowned, but remained silent. He knew exactly what was going on. His psychic training had brought significant changes to his Spirit Body, but the Corruption was the real culprit.

They weren’t aware of it yet, but it was affecting them too. Kewanee was not as tactile a few days ago and certainly not as bold. She was outgoing, but with an obvious coyness.

‘I told you he was alive. You didn’t believe me!’ Svara complained loudly as she saw the Witch acting like everything she’d said before was just a bunch of hot air.

Compared to the Native American, the Nawai Player was still the same person. If Corruption lifted their inhibitions, then it was clear that Svara was innately honest, with no darkness in her heart

‘How could I take your word for it?’ Kewanee retorted shamelessly. ‘Even if you were telling the truth, no one has ever stayed in the Pit this long. I feel a little safer now that he’s back.’

She tried to wrap her arm around him again, but a stern look from Jake stopped her in her tracks.

‘Hmmm?’ Jake sensed an immense pessimism in the Female Player’s voice beyond her frivolous attitude. ‘What have I been missing the last few days? Where has everyone else gone?’

‘They’re either dead or qualified for the Second Round.’ Kewanee revealed with a shudder.

‘Mostly dead.’ Svava spat without regard for her image.

Their reunion had drawn the crowd’s attention. Now that there weren’t many people left in the Round, everyone still alive was being watched closely.

Paradoxically, Jake and Carmin’s expulsion into the Pit had done them a world of good. The natives were no longer as hostile toward him, and Gordon Mason almost had a pleading expression when he looked at him. If he could grovel at his feet and get his forgiveness, the crooked officer would surely have tried.

When the two women filled him in on the last few days, he immediately knew what was going on. When Jake and Carmin had been sentenced to the Pit, the murders had not stopped.

At the same time, the Corruption had continued to spread and the crimes had multiplied. The Village was now in a precarious state, with the slightest accident likely to degenerate into a pitched battle at any moment.

By the morning of the fourth Cycle, two more murders committed by the Monsters had been reported, and two more the next morning. Meanwhile, the chosen Enforcers had successfully executed the victims of the vote, eliminating six unlucky ones who had nothing to do with the nightly killings.

Io jfl mr ovu qmzrare md ovu lakov tfw ovfo ovu efqu vft ozpiw ofcur f opzr. Tvu Irypalaomz vft iudo ovu Vaiifeu fl ovu dazlo nfzoahanfro om ypfia dw dmz ovu luhmrt zmprt. Ao ovfo qmquro usuzwmru vft zufiaxut ovfo vu vft guur mru md ovu Mmrlouzl fii fimre.

It shook everyone up, but apart from Drastan and Avros Valruc, none of the players would have had the guts to go after him anyway. As for the natives, they feared him as much as they revered him.

After the Inquisitor's departure, Carl the Confessor, the only person to communicate regularly with him, became the new suspect. It turned out that he had hidden his game well, and he survived the Enforcers' pursuit after the Villagers voted against him.

A new twist was added to the story when the next night, no one died, but a house was burned down. The inhabitant inside had become the first Vagabond of the Village, forced to spend his nights outside.

Needless to say, he didn't last long. He passed away the very next night.

As for Carl, he had been exonerated in an unexpected way. Almost convinced that he was one of the monsters, Drastan, the black man in armor, had attacked him in broad daylight, attempting to hack him in half with no warning.

The robotic voice had then called him to order and the hidden function of his Barber role had been revealed: The Barber could attack one person per Cycle, but if that person was not a Monster, he would immediately become attackable and lose his privilege.

The warrior was now a public enemy, attackable by anyone at any time of day or night, but at least Carl had regained the good graces of the other natives.

So why were the remaining villagers so anxious after the Inquisitor left? Because of last night, the eighth night since the Round began.

With 0 deaths and one death respectively on the sixth and seventh nights, 11 Villagers had been murdered in the last night alone. The Corruption's influence had finally taken its toll on them as well, and none of the survivors here were completely innocent.

Cpzzuroiw, Kujfruu frt Ssfzf vft guur luro om ovu Pao mrhu ufhv tulnaou ovuaz emmt rfopzu. Kujfruu vft ovzmjr f ruj Eknimlasu Pmoamr fo f lmitauz jvm immcut fo vuz ovu jzmre jfw, jvaiu Ssfzf vft ozaut om lozfreiu f Hprouz jvm vft guur zannare vuz mdd.

However, the most anxious of all was Gordon Mason, the Bailiff. No one knew why he was so terrified, but ever since Jake left he had been afraid of his own shadow. Rumor had it that he had been attacked on the third night, but the robotic voice had not rewarded him with any reputation points.

Counting the victims of the monster murders and those in the Pit, the remaining Villagers numbered only 27 now, including Jake and Carmin.

---