

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 438 - End of The First Round (part 3)

‘...If you know, why bother asking?’

‘Because your answer might change my decision.’ Jake pretended to unsheathe his machete for extra effect. ‘Show me your Fluid Card. If you refuse, you’ll be picked as a villain in the noon vote and I can promise you that not only will I get what I want, but I won’t be as polite and accommodating as I am now. Of course, you can always qualify if you have enough Fluid.’

In response, a ghostly killing intent shrouded the room, and the temperature sharply dropped several degrees. This was the first time Jake had found himself on the receiving end of an intimidation attempt through mental pressure.

‘You really think you’re something, don’t you?’ Ostrexora scolded menacingly in a throaty voice.

Her hair bristled as if gravity had reversed and her feet lifted above the ground. A greenish halo enveloped her body and you could almost see the wall behind through her dress.

Jake’s face turned solemn, but that was usually foreboding for the others. His own killing intent began to bubble up from his own body and the cold room bathed in ghostly green glow was brutally contrasted by a searing heat.

The spirit power exerted by Ostrexora was immediately squeezed by an even more oppressive force and soon a scorching heat reigned in

the small house. The ghostly halo enveloping her was now limited to only 10cm from her body, the rest of the room being swamped by Jake's released mental power.

'I am dominating you.' Jake yawned matter-of-factly.

Ostrexora remained nonplussed by her predicament, which sparked Jake and Carmin's suspicions. He couldn't attack her before the vote, but that didn't mean she would have a better chance afterwards. Unless, of course, she was hiding a secret weapon for later.

'You're overthinking this.' The female Player snorted as she guessed what was bothering him. 'I don't need that to defeat you.'

The greenish halo surrounding her suddenly shone forth and Jake's fiery aura was blown away like a small summer breeze meeting a tornado.

The room turned cold again in an instant and their eyelids became momentarily heavy, their senses constricted by a primal feeling of fear that was anything but natural. Shrill wails assaulted their eardrums, but the screams seemed to echo directly inside their heads.

Jake considered activating his Berserk mode to salvage his ego, but then changed his mind. Even if he activated Bloodline Ignition, he wasn't sure he could win a spiritual duel. This exchange had finally given him an understanding of what kind of opponent Ostrexora was.

Ostrexora was a Monster from the start. Not because she had drawn the Monster Card, but because she had always been one. If he wasn't mistaken, she wasn't human and was in fact some kind of Evil Ghost.

Dpzare ovuaz dazlo hmrzdmrofoamr, vu vft uloaqfout vuZ Snazao
Bmtw iusui om gu guojuur 11 frt 12, gpo fdouz vuZ gZpofi nmjuZ-pn,
vuZ gmtw vft guhmqu hmqniuouiW uovuzufi, aqnmllagiu om tuouho

jaovmpo ovu Ekozflurlmzw Puzhunoamr lofo mZ f tutahfout Auovuz Scaii.

In this form, Jake rated her Spirit Body between level 20 and 25. Each additional level of Spirit Body was not a simple matter of addition. Tangible, measurable effects would arise as it evolved, and if he wasn't mistaken, Ostrexora's Spirit Body could wreak immense havoc with its very existence.

The Poltergeist effects that some hoaxers sometimes mentioned to scare people were no joke in her case and there was a remote possibility that her mental stats were also superior to his. He still couldn't say clearly if the Mental Aether stats alone were enough to advance the Soul, but they couldn't be too low.

'I'll come back after the vote. I'll let you make your decision in the meantime.' Jake stepped down first. As soon as he withdrew his Apex Predator Glyph, the inhuman screams racking him to the bone stopped as well.

Carmin took one last cold look at Ostrexora and Laksmini, then followed Jake without a word. Once far enough from the house and after reuniting with Svara, she asked,

'Why did you let her win? I know you could resist if you wanted to.'

'Because it wasn't necessary.' Jake explained lamely. 'Ostrexora is even more stubborn than I am. I wanted answers and I got them. She is indeed a Monster, but she has some glaring flaws. If I'm not mistaken, she will choose to qualify before the voting is over.'

'Her flaws... Did you notice?' Carmin paused.

'Yeah... I was wondering how our Roles were determined and I think I have some semblance of an answer. It doesn't matter if we're a monster in the morphological sense. In which case, you and I would

have been chosen for the Monster Role. What really matters is our darker side.

‘Take Susan for example. Pretty, sweet on the surface, but upon inquiring I learned that after all her years in the military she never got promoted after reaching her rank of Private First Class.

Apparently she is known for her rudeness and repeated insubordination. Sexual harassment from her colleagues and superiors must have been a factor, but over time she built up a lot of resentment. She probably dreamed of killing them all more than once. With the Corruption’s influence and the power granted by this Monster Role, she grew wings and let her overflowing spite run rampant. ‘

Ssfzf fiouzrfouiwl ofZut fo ovuq ar hmrDplamr gudmzu lvwiw zfalare vuZ vfrt. Wvur lvu emo ovuaZ foouroamr, lvu lnmcu pn.

‘I don’t believe in that theory. ‘She argued cautiously. ‘I think everyone’s heart harbors a certain darkness. No one is really a saint. Susan Burn may have had all the makings of a good Monster, but I’m sure Gordon or Carl would have done just as well. ‘

She was right. With Gordon’s underhanded and vengeful nature, combined with his inferiority complex and cowardice, it was quite likely that he would have made an excellent Monster if given such power.

‘ Well, then other criteria come into play, but I’m convinced that our true nature remains the main criterion. ‘ Jake stated with equanimity. ‘Someone who can create a game like this is not someone we can understand on our level. I wouldn’t be surprised if we were just pawns on a chessboard. We think we’re in control, but we’re just following the plan laid out for us.‘

Jake took a breath to steady himself and closed with one final prediction,

‘Ultimately, this Monster Game is just a human experiment where the creator of this place tests his Purgatory. Believe it or not. Sooner or later, we will all be judged for our actions. If you want to survive, don’t try to win this game. Instead, find a way to opt out of it.’

On the way back, the trio fell into silence, pondering over his last words. When they arrived home, they found that Kewanee had regained consciousness. Once on her feet, the rest was simple.

They walked her home and with the herbs Jake had scavenged she made a batch of Healing Potions. As soon as the pot was ready, she downed one of the vials and all her wounds instantly disappeared, except for her fatigue.

The blood and nutrients she had lost would take some time to recover, but with their Player vitality there was nothing to worry about.

‘Now, Kewanee, it’s your turn to tell us the truth.’ Jake obliged her to spill the beans as soon as he thought she was healthy enough.

Huz suzlamr md usurol hmzzmgmzfout val vwnmovulal, rfquiw ovfo Olozukmzf vft artuut ozfrldmzqut vuz, gpo mr ovu dmpzov tfw. Tvu eimmqw jmqfr jfl fdouz vuz nmoamrl frt vft hmuzhut vuz arom laerare f Cmrozfho jaov vuz. Hfid md ovu Pmoamrl lvu nzmtphut fl f Waohv guimreut om Olozukmzf frt ovu Cmrozfho jmpit gu sfiat dmz ovu uroazu Oztufi fl imre fl lvu jfl loaii fiasu. Io jfl rm jmrtuz lvu vft ozaut om euo Jfcu om uiaqarfou vuz.

To survive, she had also been forced to accept being turned into a Monster. To this day she still got goosebumps thinking about it. Becoming a Monster was not as simple as taking on a new Role Card.

The victim was infected for real. The monster had to assume its monstrous form and in this state bite or claw its victim deeply. The teeth and claws carried a powerful poison that rendered the transformation exceedingly painful and she had feared she would lose her mind back then.

Ever since, she could feel a link connecting her mentally to Ostrexora. It was vague and didn't really influence her decisions, but it was very much there. Just as Jake thought he had it figured out, she clutched his wrist tightly and from her shaking he knew how terrified and overwhelmed she was.

'Jake. Ostrexora isn't like the other Monsters. She doesn't kill brainlessly. During this Round, she's only been preparing her forces. She only recruits women. You weren't around for the last few days, but in addition to the Inquisitor, there are two other women who have managed to qualify without attracting attention. Helene Ingaes the Teacher and another Miner named Ann Strande.'

'Impossible. They never came back from the Pit.' Svara shook her head.

'But do you even know why they were sent there?'

The Valkyrie flashed a puzzled look for a few seconds before exclaiming,

'No way!'

'Yeah, they attacked Ostrexora in broad daylight and paid the price for it.' Kewanee revealed grimly.

Jake, who had missed all the interesting gossip during his five days in the Pit, wasn't particularly moved by all the twists. All he wanted was something concrete.

‘And so, how did they qualify if they didn’t come back? And how do you know about it?’