

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 448 - New Allies

After a long argument, they eventually found common ground. Jake agreed to let her and her allies live here, and in exchange she swore under Contract not to harm his Villagers and to defend the latter in case of attack.

He also forced her to reveal her Initial Role: Clairvoyant. The details of this Role were as follows:

[Villager: Clairvoyant (Unique)(Upgradeable): Can see the Roles of one participant of their choice each Cycle.]

This was only at level 1, though. No matter how hard Jake tried to convince her, she refused to disclose her current level. He did, however, insist that she reveal the circumstances of her Monster Role, or their previous agreement would be void.

This precaution saved him a lot of trouble later on, as it gave him a salutary insight into what they might face in the near future.

[Monster : Alpha Monster(Upgradeable) : This monster can kill other Monsters and attack a second time after the Monsters have gone to sleep. Monsters transformed by an Alpha Monster cannot harm it in any way. The Alpha Monster's night form is also superior to that of normal Monsters. The more Monsters it has underneath it, the stronger this form will be. Requirements: Contaminate 3 inhabitants directly or 6 in total (Pyramidal).]

This Role Card revealed two important things to him. The first was that normal Monsters could not attack each other, which made it easier for him to understand why Kewanee had ended up in such a predicament during the previous Round.

The second was the Monsters' potential to evolve. Jake already knew that their Monster form got stronger after each kill, but he didn't know to what extent. Now he knew that they could also evolve by meeting certain conditions.

The word 'pyramidal' meant that the villagers infected by the Monsters that Kewanee had bitten were also considered to be her underlings.

Apparently, the restriction of their freedom at night had not changed. The number of attacks remained limited and with the sole exception of the Vagabonds, even the Monsters were forced to return home at a certain time. For the normal Monsters, it was before midnight.

Despite their freedom, the Vagabonds' position was not to be envied. All of their Roles, if they had any, were unusable, with rare exceptions, as was the case with Jake at the moment. Monsters could still transform, but they would no longer be able to attack houses.

At first, Ostrexora was against sharing all this information and even wanted to impose a time limit on their deal, and spare only those she 'deemed worthy'. Naturally, Jake had refused outright.

The Village belonged to him and she knew for a fact that she would not be accepted anywhere else. Indeed, because of the other Village Idiots, Henchmen, Confessors and other Investigative Roles, the other Village Lords had a multitude of methods for cracking her identity.

Avros and his gang might have accepted her, but for some reason she seemed to loathe the Australian to the core. She didn't want to be associated with the Inquisitors either.

'Where are Helene and Ann?' Jake then asked. In addition to Laksmi and Kewanee, these two women were two other Monsters that Ostrexora had contaminated and he wanted to keep an eye on them.

The austere woman frowned when she saw that Kewanee had divulged everything to him, but in good faith of their new collaboration, she did not withhold anything.

'Ann is in the Mine looking for Fluid Gems, while Helene has gone to visit other Villages in search of children. A teacher without children has no chance to reach her full potential.'

The Fluid Gems were a pitch-black crystal closely resembling a Fluid Core, but not confined to an ovoid shape.

'Good luck to her.' Jake snickered.

The only confirmed living child of the Ordeal was Tim and he was by his side. Maybe Carmin's sister was alive somewhere, but she would have to find her first.

With the deal done, Jake scrambled down the hill. Although he wasn't afraid of the ghostly woman, he felt uncomfortable in her presence. It was as if something in the air was making him feverish and that he would end up getting sick if he hung around her too long. From Tim's twitchy shivers, he clearly felt the same way.

With nothing else to do for the day, Jake waited for his companions to return in front of the Castle. He couldn't show his face too much and risk attracting the attention of their raiders. It was up to Will and the others to act as scouts for a change.

Even if he didn't intend to show himself, he couldn't leave either. As soon as Isbeus realized he was still alive, she and her inquisitors would return to finish the job.

Will hadn't had time to explain everything to him, but it was possible to annex a Village without killing the Lord, and in fact without fighting if the Lord chose to submit. Alternatively, the Village could be conquered by destroying all important structures and rebuilding the Castle or the Bailiff's residence by a Mason from their own Village. Stealing the Lord's letters of nobility or falsifying them was also a solution.

Fortunately for him, Avros and his group had come only to destroy and ransack. These morons seemed to have no ambition other than to see the world burn. Jake didn't know if they had always been like this or if the Corruption affected their cognition, but he wasn't going to complain.

Maybe they were expecting to destroy his Letter of Nobility by burning down the Castle, but tough luck for them, he carried it with him at all times. He didn't know what material the letter was made of, but the ink hadn't smudged after his forced dip in the Lake.

In the middle of the afternoon, a group of curious Players and natives from another Village appeared at the entrance to the Village. They were armed to the teeth, one of them even carrying a bazooka on his shoulder. In all, he counted nine people.

Their leader had the typical look of a veteran field soldier, with a khaki cap, sunglasses, off-road boots, a bulletproof vest, and a recognizable uniform. He was no longer young and should have been enjoying a comfortable retirement in an office at his age. Jake recognized the Earth emblem sewn onto his epaulet, as well as the silver bar betraying his rank of First Lieutenant.

Fzmq f talofrhu, vu lfj ovu mddahuz laiuroiw mztuz ovuq om uknimzu ovu zpggiu jaov vfirt laerfil, ovur ovu lmitauzl lniao arom ezmpnl md ojm mZ ovzUU om arsuloaefou ovu fzuf.

Jake watched them calmly without trying to intervene. Sooner or later, they would make it to the Castle. After determining that they were not the same group as before, he decided to wait for them there.

When they sighted him, they pointed their guns at him and one of the guys at the back of the group took the liberty of pulling a turned-off tablet from his backpack. His comrade turned it on with a tiny lightning bolt. No doubt a quick way to recharge it in this place without outlets.

After a few seconds, the soldier holding the tablet relaxed visibly.

‘Earthling.’ He said.

The officer did not let his guard down yet.

‘What Faction ? A criminal record ?’ He inquired impatiently.

‘Myrtharian Nerds. No, apparently not.’ The other soldier promptly informed him.

Only after hearing this reply did the lieutenant relax in turn.

‘Put down your weapons!’

Tvu movuz lmitauzl vulaofout dmZ f luhmrt fdouz zuhuasare ovu mztuz, gpo usuropfiw hmqniaut. Tvuw vft lmiat ozplo ar ovuaz iuftuz.

‘I am Pavao, from Croatia.’ The lieutenant introduced himself in a friendly manner, without offering a handshake. ‘I’ve heard of you.’

‘Hmmm?’ Jake displayed a bewildered look. What had he done now to make himself known?

‘Don’t worry, there’s nothing wrong with you. Colonel Hale asked us to enter the Ordeal at the same time as you. There are two other teams participating as well.’

Jake was not thrilled when he heard this. Ruby’s so-called adopted aunt was still trying to recruit him, or at least determine if he was worth the money. He didn’t bother to ask how they had determined the day of his Ordeal.

With the Oracle, it was child’s play if the level of authority was high enough. No doubt there were higher ranking people than him at New Earth.

‘What do you want?’ Jake didn’t have time to socialize.

The lieutenant much preferred to deal with this type of person.

‘We want to occupy this Village, ours was destroyed yesterday by some Monster Village.’

Jake raised a puzzled eyebrow, but he couldn’t flinch at the risk of losing the upper hand.

‘Please look elsewhere. I am the Lord of this Village.’ He declared stiffly.

The soldiers looked at each other before snickering nervously. Jake, being a good man, did not take offense and let them laugh until they had quieted down. Only the officer remained unruffled.

‘Forgive me for being tactless, but you are alone and we are a whole team. Besides, we have two Masons to rebuild everything and the proper blueprints.’ Pavao declined apologetically.

‘Who said I was alone? My friends will be back any minute.’ Jake retorted nonchalantly. ‘Actually, even if I were alone it wouldn’t matter. I alone, am enough.’

The man frowned but didn’t get carried away. Instead, he conversed with his companions for a while before walking back to him.

‘Can we stay?’ Pavao suggested. ‘Let us see what you are capable of before we make our decision. If you’re in over your head, I hope you’ll agree to let us take over.’

‘...Sure.’ Jake accepted numbly.

He was sorely lacking in manpower anyway.

At sunset, he met up with his cousin Vincent, and a little later with Will, who told him some good news. Enya and Esya did not return in time and thus prepared themselves to spend their first night under the stars.