

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 143 - The Temple of Myrmid

Before leaving the arena following Lucia, Jake didn't forget to absorb all of the Aether filaments from the battlefield. The Princess and the three gladiators had just slaughtered two platoons of Imperial legionnaires and that was a colossal amount of Aether.

When he had finished absorbing it all, he was pleased to discover that he once again had almost 1,000 Aether points. That was enough to increase his Extrasensory Perception by about 15 points, but again, if he wasn't forced to, he wouldn't spend it lightly.

He still forced himself to spend 320 pts to raise his Seventh Stat to 20 points. The effect was not transcendent at first glance. He perceived the Aether a little better, could extend his control a few centimeters further and interact with the Aether more easily, but apart from that he still didn't see how it could save his life.

Comparatively, the Aether of Intelligence was far more useful. In addition to making him smarter and improving his reaction time, it also gave him greater mental control over both his own instincts and emotions as well as his Aether.

As long as he didn't know how to use his Extrasensory Perception properly, increasing it prematurely wouldn't do much good.

Once the Aether was collected, Jake noticed that he was the only one left in the arena, as Lucia and the other gladiators had already

followed in Queen Antonia's footsteps. He hastened to join them outside the arena, but his discomfort only increased.

All the spectators, both noble and commoners, in the bleachers, who until then had been yelling, laughing, sighing and clapping at every twist and turn in the arena, were as silent as dead fish.

For the entire distance Jake walked from the middle of the arena to the exit door of the Coliseum, all the spectators stared at him with faces as inexpressive as those of a robot. The fact that each of these plebeians had exactly the same expression and were doing exactly the same thing at the same time was certainly bizarre and gave him goose bumps.

Hurrying to leave the arena, he felt much better once he found Gerulf's reassuring presence again. The giant was true to himself, vigilant and focused, but not at all worried. To him it seemed like just another health walk, even though everyone around them wanted them dead.

lr hmqnfzalmr, Kvfxpl jfl qphv qmzu ourlu. Hal vftr vft rmo lomnut hipohvare ovu ljmzt om val guio frt ovu jfw val uwugfiil juzu qmsare fo vaev dzuypurhw mr mru latu frt ovur ovu movuz ao jfl hiufz vu jfl uknuhoare f lpznzalu foofhc fo frw qmquro.

Once out of the Coliseum, a dozen Imperial guards from the Queen's personal guard surrounded them. With the same lack of expression and reptilian-like coldness, the elite legionaries whose hair and beards were streaked with grey escorted them without saying a word.

Queen Antonia, looking indifferent, continued to advance at a steady and even pace. Very quickly they realized that she was not heading towards her palace, but towards the Myrmid Temple nearby.

Lucia stiffened slightly, but refrained from commenting. Khazus and Gerulf reacted very differently. Even the most powerful gladiators in the history of the Coliseum had never left the building. All those who had entered in the hope of receiving the Rudis that would give them their freedom were nowhere to be found.

‘Princess...’ Khazus grunted with a certain urgency in his voice.

‘I know... but it’s my mother. She would never hurt me...’

Jake wasn’t so sure of this and he could feel Lucia’s hesitation. Even if this was true in the past, it was probably not the case today. Something had definitely changed.

The closer they got to the Temple, the more impressive the monument seemed to him. The giant golden statue of the hero Myrmid seemed truer than life and bestowed a real sacred aura to the place.

Jake couldn’t help but wonder as he admired the statue how it had been constructed. Not to mention the amount of molten gold needed for such a sculpture, a mold of the same size and weight was also needed to put it in place.

Two Templars guarded the entrance to the Temple, but recognizing one of their high priest and Queen Antonia, they stepped aside to let them pass. Jake could not see their faces under their golden helmets and red hoods, but their behavior was also rigid and cold.

Cfiqiw, ovuw hiaqgut pn ovu zfqn frt ovur ovu ojurow mz lm qfzgiu lounl ovfo lunzfout ovuq dzmq ovu nmzoahm. A emitur nmzofi hmsuzut jaov hfzsut qmoatl md ovu vuzm fjfaout ovuq ovuzu.

One of Agammen’s Templar bodyguards took charge of pushing the door, his muscles fully contracted, showing how heavy it was. Jake

wasn't even sure if Agamnen could enter the temple alone without someone to open the door for him.

Upon entering the Temple, Jake was surprised to discover how dark the great hall was. Except for a few air vents to renew the air, there were no windows or openings in the ceiling to let in sunlight.

A few candles and chandeliers gave off a faint glow, but it was clearly not enough to see properly. Yet neither the Queen nor Agamnen seemed to be bothered by the lack of light. As if they knew the path by heart.

Still at the same pace, they crossed the entrance hall, then the naos, the central area of the hall where another 5m high statue of the hero stood. The statue itself was surrounded by a row of colonnades isolating it from the rest of the hall.

Ignoring the statue, Agamnen walked around it and ventured further into the Temple until they reached a sacrificial altar behind which was a staircase leading down under the Temple.

Without pausing for a moment, Agamnen walked down the stairs at the same steady pace, his silhouette gradually disappearing into the darkness of the underground. Queen Antonia walked behind him in serene tranquillity, soon swallowed up by darkness as well.

Before Jake could even find an excuse to refuse to go down, he was shoved by the tip of a sword towards the stairs. Looking behind him with a slight grunt, he noticed that they were now surrounded by a hundred Templars. He had no idea where they all came from, but they were definitely there.

With the ambient darkness and the faint glow of a few candles, they were giving off a sinister impression that was not unlike that of demons or ghosts coming straight out of purgatory.

Hearing Jake grunt, Khazus and Gerulf turned around, immediately drawing their swords. However, when they saw the number of Templars around them, they were instantly devastated. Even for them, defeating so many Templars was a challenge they might pay with their lives.

Aqmre ovulu Tuqnifzl, ovuzu juzu luSuzfi suouzfrl jufzare laisuz qfroi u hmfol arlouft md ovu zut vmmtut himfc hvzfhouzaloah md ovu Mwzqat Tuqnifzl. Tval hmimz lommt mpo iacu f lmzu ovppg ar ovu qattiu md ovu zut frt jfl mriw jmzr gw ovu qmlo nmjuzdpi frt zulnuhout Tuqnifzl ar ovu ouqniu. ESur ovu Azhvnzaulo jfl rusuz ulhmzout gw mru md ovuq, ovuaz mriw zmiu guare om nzmouho ovu luhzuol md ovu Tuqniu.

By instinct, Jake felt that their aura was comparable to that of Gerulf. If the Kinthar and Khazus were hiding no other secrets, the question even arose whether they would be able to escape.

Lucia, clenching her small fists out of frustration, walked down the stairs, followed by her bodyguards, and then Jake, to his dismay, closed the staircase. He could feel the breath of the Templars on his back and the sound of their footsteps made him feel as if more and more of them were walking behind them.

After descending the steps in complete darkness for a long minute, they reached a large corridor lit by a row of torches hanging from the stone walls. Humidity was high and a mouldy smell filled the place.

Continuing to follow Agammen and the Queen, they continued down the corridor, looking curiously to the right and left when they heard an unusual noise. Most of the worn wooden doors seemed condemned, but a few were open, giving them a glimpse of what was going on behind.

Jake finally got the answer as to how the Myrmidian bronze swords were forged. Inexpressive blacksmiths would add Myrmidian blood to the molten metal, which they would heat until all the water in the blood had evaporated.

With his Aether Vision, Jake could see that the Aether attached to the blood was trapped by the dehydrated blood particles, which then mixed with the molten metal to form an alloy similar to bronze, but different.

With his meager knowledge of biology and metallurgy, he could still argue that this didn't make much sense, that the Aether should simply disperse in the atmosphere over time, but it seemed that the high temperature and the mixing with the metal was enough to fool the Myrmidian Aetheric Code.

Perhaps it was a specific ability of these people or the Aether of each species could be fused with other materials in the same process. However, this alone was not enough to make these swords so strong.

Once the swords were forged, Jake noticed that other priests would use them to break other swords that were processed in the same way. The Aether from the destroyed swords was then reabsorbed by the victorious swords, making them gradually stronger.

Tvu jmmtur ljmztl lm lozmre ovfo Jfcu frt ovu movuz zuhzpaol plut tpzare ovuaz ozfarare plut wuo frmovuz quovmt. lr frmovuz zmmq jvuzu ovu lpriaevo qazfhpimpliw daiouzut ovzmpev, f ifzeu prtuzempert efztur jvuzu sfzAMPL nifrol frt ozuul ezuj zusufiut aoluid om ovuq.

In this garden other priests looked after the plants as gardeners would, watering the plants from time to time. The water pouring

from their watering cans was scarlet and a blood dew covered the plants and medicinal herbs close to the ground.

From time to time, a branch or tree was felled and the resulting unique timber was then used to shape the training swords with which they were familiar. In a nearby room, other priests were officiating as carpenters and the wood dust that came into the corridor made them want to cough for a short while.

Then finally, after going through many rooms and doors, the group reached the end of the corridor. A large silver door blocked their way, but as with the entrance to the Temple, the two Templars protecting Agamnen pushed the door leaves open after lifting a huge metal latch.

Increasingly suspicious, Lucia and the other gladiators entered the room with Jake behind them, his eyes glued to the timer telling him how long he had to survive before the Ordeal was over.

[Time remaining of the Ordeal: 5 minutes 27 seconds]