

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 144 - The Hidden Truth

It was way too long. Jake's survival instinct had started to roar louder and louder as they went deeper into the catacombs under the Temple and he could sense that something horrible was about to happen.

Once Jake was inside, four of the Silver Templars entered behind him, and then a BANG sounded behind him that startled them. The latch locking the metal door on the other side had been lowered again. They were trapped.

Turning his attention to the room he was in, Jake saw nothing more than strange dark metal tanks standing in the middle of the room without any ostentation. These tanks simply looked like big vats about two meters wide and reaching chest height. A kind of lid made of the same material prevented them from distinguishing what was hidden inside.

Still without saying a word, Queen Antonia suddenly took her daughter by the hand and guided her towards one of the vats. The two Templars who opened the door silently lifted the lid without being ordered to do so. The circular piece of metal was extremely heavy and despite their incredible strength, Jake could hear the two porters panting with difficulty.

Once the lid was completely removed, a liquid that looked as black as night with the dim ambient light was revealed. It was too dark to see what it was or what else was inside, but on a regular basis the

still liquid would stir slightly without warning, an unidentified object splitting its surface.

‘To inherit the throne, you must be baptized in the Myrmid’s Vat like every Emperor before you.’ Antonia declared coldly, still holding her daughter’s hand with the firmness of a vice.

‘I... I’ve never heard of this ritual. Anyway, I don’t care about the throne. I-I don’t want to be Empress.’ Lucia stammered uncomfortably as she tried to step back.

‘You don’t have a choice. It’s your duty.’ Her mother replied in an even more icy tone. ‘Willingly or not, you will enter this vat.’

Carefully walking towards the tank until he was next to the Princess, Jake decided to use the new ‘Scan’ function on his bracelet for the first time. He sighed mentally at the thought of spending one Aether point, but right now he was quite rich so it was an acceptable sacrifice.

The bracelet flashed briefly and then became silent again. For a moment he thought the scan hadn’t worked and was about to call the Oracle’s service department to tell them his four truths, but at that very moment a prompt appeared.

[WARNING! Daeulomzl tuouhout. lqputafou zunfozafoamr md fii Pifwuzl nzuluro ar ovu Oztufi ar 120 luhmrtl. Suut Wmzit XG26 987 àllaqaifoamr nzmomhmi urefeut.]

As he read the message, Jake’s eyes popped out of their sockets.

‘WHAT!’

The moment his bracelet triggered the Players’ repatriation message, his bracelet suddenly became apparent to everyone in the room,

flashing several times per second, pulsing an intense red light comparable to that of the Cube that had sent him here.

When the Queen, Agamnen and the other Templars saw the bracelet on his wrist, a terrifying change occurred. The golden eyes of the Queen, the priest and all the other Templars were replaced by a silvery glow and their arms and legs began to change shape, taking on a metallic texture.

Remembering the behavior of the spectators in the arena after the Queen's arrival, the fact that the Predictions of his Oracle had been failing since the beginning of the day and perhaps since much earlier, as well as the fact that they hadn't encountered any high-ranking Players in the Coliseum capable of interfering with their Paths, he understood everything.

Digestors. If there was one thing the Oracle System couldn't calculate, it was the Digestors. From the first day he received his bracelet, he had been confronted with the limitations of the bracelet in front of a simple mouse. If the Shadow Guide didn't react at all, there was only one possible explanation:

Every legionary they'd faced in the arena, from common soldier to General, was a Digestor or controlled by one. In a split second, he read the scan report and his face distorted:

[Tank filled with an amniotic fluid in which are bathed a parasitic type Digestor called Brain Eaters. In larval form, they are relatively harmless until they find a host. With their sharp jaws, they can infiltrate through any hole in a living being's body, then after drilling the skull feed on its brain].

[By devouring the brain they acquire memories that allow them to simulate the behaviour of their host. They continue to grow by devouring their host until they reach their adult form where they can

reproduce and lay their eggs. They can remain dormant for months or even years until the Laying Queen awakens them, the host body behaving normally as the deceased did when he was alive].

Wvur vu daralvut zuftare, jvahv jfl fiqmlo arlofrofrumpl jaov val lofol, vu zufhout arlofroiw. Dzfjare val ljmzt, vu ojaziut fzmprt ovu Pzarhull om zufhv ovu Qpuur, tuhfnaofoare vuz jaovmpo vulafoamr. Tvu Daeulomz arlatu vuz jvm jfl rmo wuo dpiiw fjfcu tat rmo vfsu oaqu om zufho ar oaqu.

‘Jake, what are you doing?!’ Lucia screamed in shock. ‘You just killed my mother!’

Ignoring her, Jake thrust his sword into Antonia’s skull, then with a pry opened the skull in half. A sort of translucent grey miniature human, but much more hideous and with multiple tentacles and dendrites connecting him to the rest of the uneaten brains appeared before their eyes with a shrill scream.

‘That’s not your mother.’ Jake replied curtly before stabbing the creature with his sword again, killing it instantly.

While the Templars and Agamnen were still transforming around them, Jake began to speak very quickly:

‘Listen to me carefully. I’m from another world, I’m going to disappear in a few seconds so you don’t have to worry about me, I’ll survive. The creatures in that vat that controlled your mother and the other Templars are called Digestors. Soon, like mine, your world will be absorbed into the Mirror Universe to fight them. Heliodas is doomed, the only thing you must do now is run as far away as you can.’

‘And what are you gonna—’

With his sword pommel, Gerulf knocked the Princess out without hesitation. A strange heat began to radiate from his body and the earth deformed around him as if to form a pedestal.

Grabbing Khazus with his other hand, he nodded his head to Jake and with a leap that shook the earth, he hit the ceiling of the room, sliding through it as if it were quicksand. Jake had finally figured out how the Kinthar could bury himself in the dirt so cleanly.

Gerulf was without a doubt the most mysterious being he had ever met in this Ordeal. Simple-minded as he was, he knew how to recognize sincerity. As implausible as Jake's words may have been, he had taken the threat seriously and reacted accordingly.

RufiAxare ovfo vu loaii vft f duj luhmrtd iudo om vmit mr frt ovu quofi tmmz guvart vaq guare gimhcut vu zplvut om ovu tmmz mr ovu movuz latu md ovu zmmq, zfqqare ao jaov fii val qaevo. Tvu tmmz jfl primhcut frt mnurut mr ovu dazlo ozw.

Closing it again behind him, he actually found another latch to lock it. He lowered it just in time, the door starting to shake shortly afterwards due to the impacts of the Digestor Templars behind it.

‘RUN!’

A thunderous deep voice that sounded as old as the Universe itself echoed behind him, almost giving him a heart attack. Slowly turning around, his hairs standing on end and shivering all over, an inconceivable sight that he would never have dared to imagine appeared before him.

A giant. A giant about ten meters high with olive-colored skin and golden eyes was shackled by huge chains of a mysterious alloy to the walls of the hall made of the same metal. He was sitting chained

in a strange metal seat, the room in which he was sitting resembling the cockpit of a spaceship.

The chained giant wore strange pieces of armor very different from those used by the Myrmid Empire, looking more like the plates of a futuristic spacesuit. But this face... was unmistakable. He had seen it everywhere hundreds of times since the Ordeal began.

This giant... was the Great Hero Myrmid. But right now, there was nothing grand about him. His body was emaciated and his expression was one of intense despair.

‘RUN!’

Hearing the giant speak again, Jake suddenly noticed the silvery shape moving behind his skull. He then became aware of the masticatory sounds he had ignored until now. A silvery paw leaned against Myrmid’s head and his skull tilted slightly forward.

A horrible sight was then revealed. The top and back of the skull had been removed and Jake could see the creature devouring his brain with appetite. The Giant’s Vitality was so high that the pieces of devoured brains regenerated instantly, allowing the victim to survive but also serving as an infinite source of food for the Digestor that occupied the place.

Jake was already completely terrified, drenched in sweat as if he had just stepped out of a pool. The creature suddenly stopped eating, becoming aware of the intruder’s presence. With an enthusiastic shriek, the silver humanoid mass entered Myrmid’s head, disappearing inside.

‘RUN!’ The hero’s voice echoed one last time with greater emphasis.

At that moment, the giant's golden irises were replaced by a silver glow, cold as death, and the chains came off as if by a miracle. The giant smiled so hard that his cheeks were torn open, revealing a row of teeth that were as sharp as his ears. Another shrill cry rang out and a psychic blast hit Jake's mind head on.

Paralyzed and helpless, he fell to his knees, his mind traumatized and numb, unable to utter a single coherent thought. His vision blurred as the monster moved closer to him step by step. When he lost consciousness, he did not even hear the notification of the system that saved his life.

[Remaining time of the Ordeal: 0 seconds]

[Repatriation of the body immediately.]