

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 74 - The First Ordeal begins!

Now that the dunes had emptied, the most fearless aliens began marching towards the Red Cube. In a matter of minutes, thousands of aliens clustered around the huge structure, suspiciously staring at each other.

Everyone seemed to be able to enter the Red Cube according to Cho Min-Ho's words, but they still needed to start the ordeal in one piece. Not all of these aliens had been lucky enough to have an alien of their species having participated in the previous Ordeal. If they believed that they were all competing with each other, it would be natural to show some hostility.

As a result, Jake and his group had no intention of entering the Red Cube first, willingly leaving the lead to the more reckless or stupid aliens. As Aslael had explained to them a few days earlier, the first four Ordeals were between similar species.

So in principle, there would only be humans in this first Ordeal. Nevertheless, if an alien species was genetically similar enough to be recognized as a race (or a different phenotype for those who believe this term to be racist), the possibility existed that they would be shipped to the same world.

Jake doubted it, however. At least for the First Ordeal, he was confident that there would only be Earthlings with them. At least, if

there were other human species, they would be sent to different areas or their interactions would be kept to a minimum.

There was another revelation from Cho Min-Ho that had also greatly disrupted his plans. According to the scenario and identity planned by the Ordeal, their equipment could be confiscated from them.

There went his plan to load liters of Digestor Blood in case something went wrong.

As the first four Ordeals were considered tutorials to prepare them and increase their chances of survival in the Mirror Universe, the risks were much lower and the objectives simpler. On the other hand, the restrictions were significant. This was to prevent the strongest from spoiling the Ordeal of the weakest. Possession of a gun in a medieval world would destroy the formative purpose of the Ordeal and could seriously disrupt the normal course of it.

It might not be obvious to everyone, but the Ordeal could also put them in competition with the other participants, but that was not the primary goal. The main mission was always individual, but the way to accomplish it could vary endlessly.

The only thing he could count on once he made it there would be his Oracle device and his Aether. With his loot from last night, he had again accumulated 21 pts of Aether, which could be considered his trump card in case of unforeseen circumstances.

There was also a good chance that Tim would be sent somewhere else, given his young age. So would the elderly. Women were also reported to be subject to different treatment, but this depended on the cultures of the world to which they would be sent.

Mufrjvaiu, ovu qmlo nmjuzdpi frt rpquzmpl fiaur dfhoamrl vft guepr om lypfggiu mSuz jvm jmpit vfsu ovu vmrmpz md urouzare dazlo.

Fmz ovu dazlo oaqu, vu zufiaxut ovfo ovu Efzoviarel juzu dfhopfiw nzuuow lopnat.

The overpowered humanoid alien who had pursued Yerode and Lamine was uttering a deafening whale sound, while its interlocutor in front - a huge, multicolored soap bubble the size of a man - was babbling a cloud of bubbles without Jake being able to tell whether it was calm or angry.

But the most surprising thing about all this was that they understood each other smoothly, in a way that eluded him. He could see them pausing between communications to translate and digest the messages exchanged, before speaking once again.

The diplomatic approach between these two super species ultimately failed. Losing patience, the thousands of luminescent dendrites of the humanoid alien pierced the bubble, cracking like a whip. The soap bubble then burst with a loud 'pop' before immediately reforming itself, albeit slightly smaller. It returned to normal size after a fraction of second.

Enraged, the bubble suddenly swelled to the size of a two-storey house and then abruptly condensed to the size of a marble. The 'bubble' spoke again, releasing another cloud of bubbles. But this time, instead of carrying a message, they exploded by depressurization when they reached the alien opposite.

**BOOOM!**

A noise similar to a chain reaction of firecrackers exploding one after the other resounded at the foot of the cube, blowing away the curious spectators with the force of a tornado. Those far enough to avoid being blasted, but too close to escape unharmed were completely knocked out, their eardrums, if they had any, bleeding enough to feed a family of vampire.

As for the target of the explosion, it survived by barricading itself behind its dendrites, but it had to be said that many of them were now much shorter. A new wave of discussions then ensued, the exchange this time being much more courteous.

Lower species such as humans could not but stand aside in the face of such a display of power. Who knew that a simple bubble could be so devastating? This confirmed Jake's decision to enter the Red Cube at the very end.

It did, however, raise new concerns. The first four Ordeals were between humans and their survival was guaranteed. But what about the fifth and subsequent Ordeals? Could they compete against this bubble and this alien with thousands of dendrites?

At equivalent Aether, humans were too weak to compete against these monsters. If Aether density was the only criterion deciding the world chosen for the Ordeal, he'd run into these aliens sooner or later.

The two monsters in question, by the way, seemed to have finally come to an agreement. They entered and disappeared inside the cube at the same time, like pebbles falling into a pond. Then followed their comrades, and then the other dominant alien species. After a good half hour of jostling and small fights that didn't kill anyone, only humans and other primitive species remained.

Even then, Jake let the impatient ones pass, only walking towards the Red Cube when only his group and a few other stragglers were left. When it was his turn, he gave his teammates a final recap, wishing them good luck, before entering the cube with a determined stride.

Contrary to what he imagined, he felt no resistance, no sensation of liquid or viscosity. It was as if the gigantic Red Cube was in fact just a Hologram. However, when he wanted to step back out, he found nothing but nothingness.

The inside of the Cube was pitch black and silent. He could no longer feel his body when he tried to touch himself, and he could no longer hear his voice when he tried to speak. To be frank, he was no longer breathing and did not feel the need to. He wasn't even sure he had a body.

After a long time that felt like forever, with only Xi and his dreams for company, information finally appeared in his mind, coming from his Oracle System.

[Participant: Jake Wilderth, Earthling.]

[Successful Ordeals: Zero.]

[Awaiting matchmaking for First Ordeal. Species allowed: Earthlings.]

[...]

[Mfohvqfcare hmqniuou, Fazlo Oztufi tuouzqarut.]

[Type: Historical: Peplum/ Fantastic]

[Aether density: \*0.8 or 8 pts]

[Number of participants: 8,658,435]

[Background:]

[The Myrmid Empire and its people the Myrmidians believe they are the descendants of the hero Myrmid the Great. They see all other people as inferior beings, only fit to be their slaves. They are a

warlike race. The Myrmid hero's blood that flows in their veins makes them stronger with every victory under certain conditions, and weaker in defeat.]

[To become stronger and satisfy their desire for conquest, the Myrmidians are at constant war with neighboring kingdoms and lands, plundering and pillaging the resources they need to thrive. The most valiant enemy warriors are enslaved to fight in their arenas, with the promise of one day gaining their freedom and being blessed by Myrmid the Great if they prove their worth].

[The Throsgens, a barbarian people at war with the Myrmid, were recently defeated in the Myrmid Empire's final campaign against the barbarian peoples of the North. The war is still raging, but they are constantly losing ground, though fiercely resisting. Each defeat leads to the Myrmid Empire's acquisition of many prisoners, who are then sold back to the highest bidder by appointed slave traders].

[In this Ordeal, you will be one of those newly-captured Throsgen slaves. You await your fate in a dungeon of an Insula in the coastal city of Heliodas.]

[Main Mission: Survive two months.]

[Purfiow dmz dfaipzu: Nmru.]

[Benefits and Specifics during Mission Time: ]

[-Myrmid and Throsgen's Language Mastery]

[-Altering the appearance to look like a Throsgen.]

[-Blessing of the hero Throsgen: Sturdy Body = Strength +10, Vitality +10, Constitution +10, Perception +3]

[May fate work in your favour.]

Hardly had Jake finished reading and memorizing all these data that a bright ruby coloured light blinded him, engulfing his whole being and consciousness in the process. When he awoke long afterwards, the smell of urine, sweat and faeces attacked his nostrils.

He was in a dungeon. The smell inside was nauseating, his tongue and lips were parched with thirst and his stomach was crying out for food. The First Ordeal had begun.