

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 75 - What it means to be a Throsgenian

When Jake opened his eyes, the first thing he noticed was that he wasn't alone in his cell and that it was dark. The sun had just risen, but apart from a tiny dormer window with bars that let in a bit of light, it was pitch black. Surprisingly, he could still see clearly.

About twenty other prisoners were waiting to be disposed of in the midst of their waste. Most of them were still sleeping. By scrutinizing carefully, he finally recognized with great difficulty next to him Kyle and Yerode, the leader of the mercenaries. Why with difficulty? Because their appearances were somewhat different now.

In addition to the dirt that covered them, their almost naked bodies except for a loincloth were also suffering from advanced dehydration. Nevertheless, that was not what made their identification so challenging. Their hair was now snow-white and their bones had been visibly altered. Even Yerode, who was of African descent, had much paler skin now.

Instead of thin and slender features, Kyle now had a wide manly jaw and the build of an American footballer. Their arms were slightly longer, their hands and fingers wider. Their forearms and biceps were more massive and their legs were slightly shorter. Their noses were also longer.

All these details did not profoundly change their appearance and they could easily recognize each other without any possible

confusion. However, it was confusing to see such a change in such a short period of time. Raising a huge hand in front of his face, Jake was able to confirm that he had not been exempted from this treatment. He also realized that one hand could not be moved without the other. He was handcuffed.

As he tried to get up with difficulty, a resistance and the rattling of chains prevented him from completing his motion. He also had irons on his ankles and his ankles were connected by a chain to two other prisoners: Yerode and another guy. They were stuck together for better or worse.

Yerode, who was also awake, growled as he was pulled by Jake's brute force.

'I swear, if you keep pulling on your chain, I'll kill you on the spot.' The African mercenary threatened him in a very bad mood.

First he woke up in the middle of a cell covered in urine and feces and now he had to put up with being chained to a crazy idiot. Bad luck for him, Jake wasn't the sociable type either, and certainly not in a good mood either.

Pulling with all his strength with his leg, Yerode, taken by surprise, swung forward to land headfirst in the half-dry feces of a former prisoner or long gone slave. His arms were handcuffed together and he hadn't been able to catch himself properly and some of it ended up in his mouth.

'Cough, cough! You're a dead man!' Yerode uttered a war cry, completely enraged. He hadn't been humiliated like that since his military service in Kenya.

lr zulnmrlu, Jfcu ommc f loun gfhc jfztl jaov fii val qaevo, qfcare ovu quzhurfzw jvm jfl loaii dmpz-iueeut ar f nluptm nifrc nmlaoamr lian

fefar. Hu zuezuouout val fhoamr, ovmpev, larhu fdouz ovfo Yuzmtu gpqnut arom vaq vuft dazlo, lurtare vaq om ovu ezmprr ar opzr.

Falling on his back, he couldn't use his hands shackled at the front to catch himself, and consequently felt a compact substance of dubious content splashing on his back when he landed on the ground. Furious too, Jake slammed into him in turn sending him flying back against the stone wall.

After that, the two brutes went on with a series of Greco-Roman wrestling holds, punching and kicking each other viciously when they found an opportunity to do so. Jake had not forgotten to whom they owed their group's attack the night before, and therefore did not hold back his blows at all.

Yerode, who had no idea who this madman was, had simply decided that he hadn't lived like a tyrant for two decades only to be humiliated by a greenhorn ten years younger.

The fight went on for a long time before footsteps forced them to interrupt their score-settling session. By tacit agreement, the two men sat back down against the cold stone of their cell, once again simulating the behavior of lethargic and dehydrated prisoners.

The noise of their fight had awakened almost everyone in their cell, and everyone was staring curiously at them. If for Jake and Yerode it was just another fight, for the spectators these two bullies were more terrifying than two ferocious hungry beasts.

The alteration of their appearance, combined with the blessing of the hero Throsgen had transformed their already hardened physique into real killing machines. The impact of each of their blows made a resounding sound and their endurance seemed inexhaustible. As for

their speed, they were like two jackhammers trying to puncture the other.

Even after their terrible fight, they were barely bleeding and no apparent bruising covered their bodies. Despite the violence of their confrontation, no vital blows had been delivered. Jake may have been less experienced than Yerode, but he made up for it with a superior constitution and vitality.

Yerod's forte was his agility and constitution, for like Lamine, he excelled with a gun. His physical strength was barely superior to Jake, which was not enough to compensate for the latter's advantage in vitality.

Finally calming down and catching his breath, Jake had realized after this fight that the hero Throsgen's 'Sturdy Body' blessing was completely different from what he had originally imagined. The bonuses of Vitality, Constitution and Perception had not inflated his Aether stats, but his Body Status.

Tvu ozfrldmzqfoamr md val fnnufzfrhu arom f Tvzmlaurafr film luuqut om uqnvflaxu lofqarf frt ompevrull. Al f zulpio, vu jfl iudo tpzare ovu Oztufi oaqu jaov f gmtw ovfo jfl priacu ovu mru vu vft gudmzu urouzare ovu Rut Cpgu.

His Body Status had changed profoundly. The changes were not limited to a simple Vitality +10, Constitution +10 and Perception +3, but his stats were now compared to the average Throsgenian.

[Height: 1.81 meters (+0,05)]

[Weight: 82kg(+15)]

[Strength: 19.3(+20) points.]

[Agility: 15.5(-2) points]

[Constitution: $19.2(+20+10=+30)$ points]

[Vitality: $19.6(+10+10=20)$ points]

[Intelligence: $16.1(-3)$ points]

[Perception: $11.6(+5+3)$ points]

Unmr talhmsuzare val ruj nvwlahfi lofol, vu hpzlut. Nm jmrtuz vu emo lm uflaiw hfzzaut fjfw jaov Yuzmtu. Hu vft iaouzfiw imlo msuz 30 IQ nmarol tpzare val nvwlahfi fiouzfoamr arom f Tvzmleurafr.

By consulting the vital parameters of his Status, he found that his Testosterone levels were more than ten times higher than those of a normal human and his Cortisol was abysmally low. Testosterone was the dominance and aggressiveness hormone found in men and women of power. An excessively high dose was correlated with increased aggression. Conversely, a low Cortisol level betrayed a strong resistance to stress or a relaxed state and was generally inversely proportional to Testosterone.

Simply put, in both humans and animals, individuals were generally dominant and fearless, or submissive and stressed. Such abnormal levels associated with his declining intelligence explained his eagerness to fight for dominance against Yerode, even though it was exceptionally stupid and counterproductive in their situation.

Yerod had also realized the problem with their actions and now looked gloomy. Unlike Jake, he had never been a particularly gifted genius. His good decisions were based on his composure and experience. With his new intelligence stats, he was now slightly retarded by Earth standards. Had he not invested one Aether point in Intelligence a little earlier, he would have been severely handicapped.

From the confused expressions and foolish looks of the other prisoners, they all suffered a severe drop in IQ. Kyle was a student at the university and Jake could only pray that his intelligence had not fallen to too critical a level.

Luckily for him, the Playboy was still in his right mind and with a nod he confirmed that he was fine. Jake was unsure if the other Throsgen slaves in their cell were participants in the Ordeal, but at least two of them had lost their minds, behaving like two not-so-smart gorillas.

Jake, Yerode and Kyle were wondering what the point was of reducing their intelligence in this way for an Ordeal that was supposed to prepare them to survive in the Mirror Universe. Unfortunately, they would have to deal with it. Meanwhile, the footsteps had stopped a few meters from their cell.

A man dressed in an outfit similar to a Roman legionary opened the rotten wooden door of their cell with a large, rusty, old-fashioned key. He was wearing a bronze breastplate, a navy blue tunic down to his knees under his armour and a pair of sandals. A glaive was also stored at his belt. An open helmet made it possible to distinguish the face of their jailer.

The man was young, less than thirty years old, but there was a cruelty and viciousness in his face that even Yerode could not match. His nose was crooked, his complexion greyish and his teeth yellow.

Jake could not help praying for the Myrmidians when he saw this man, hoping for them that this soldier was not the finest specimen of their kind.