

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 76 – The Thermal Baths

‘Everybody out, and get your asses out there!’ Their jailer started yelling at them, sputtering like a sprinkler.

The language he was speaking was totally foreign to them, and yet everyone understood his words as if they had been practicing that language forever. Seeing that most of the prisoners were too stupid or haggard to obey, he called for some guards and with the help of biting whiplashes instilled obedience in them.

The Throsgen slaves, whether participants in the Ordeal or not, were mostly too weak and dehydrated to respond promptly, and the slower ones were whipped a good ten times before they found the strength to stand up. Connected to each other by the chains at their feet, the latecomers were in fact holding the whole group down.

Once in line, the jailer and the guards assisting him escorted them silently by the sole glow of the dungeon torches, stopping from time to time in front of another cell to fill their rows of slaves.

In the third cell, Jake came across an exhausted and disoriented Will. His face lit up when he recognized Jake and Kyle. Thank God he had not lost his mind when he was transformed into a Throsgenian.

Yerode found Lamine, who, despite his weakened state, looked rather relaxed and composed. Just the opposite of the night when he had been pursued by the dendrite alien and ended up in a pathetic state.

Without a word, those who recognized their friends or relatives lined up near the latter without making waves. After crossing a long corridor and emptying a dozen or so cells, their jailers suddenly changed direction and headed for a large barred door separating them from a large staircase.

Another ' legionary ' standing guard outside the dungeon saw them coming, grabbed a heavy key hanging from the stone wall behind him, and hurried to open the gate for them. So far, except for the first jailer, who was hideous, the other guards looked like perfectly normal humans.

Once the gate was opened, the slaves and their escort walked up a staircase of about thirty steps, the daylight attacking their pupils accustomed to the darkness when they reached the ground floor.

A last iron gate separated them from a large open courtyard similar to a patio. Once lifted up, the slaves discovered basins and fountains decorated with marble statues reminiscent of those of antiquity.

In the centre of the courtyard was a three-metre-high statue of an abnormally muscular, naked man with a spear and shield. Possibly the Hero Myrmid whom they worshipped.

The slaves were then taken to another adjacent building. The architecture was very Greco-Roman in design. There were many marble pillars supporting and harmonizing the structures. Mosaics on the walls and bust or integral sculptures of all sorts decorated the corridors they passed through.

Pzuoow qfatluzsfrol jaov ukmoah immcl hmpit lmquoaul gu luur rmo dfz fjfw, hfzware dzpao ozfwl mz gplw hiufrare ovu vmlu. Bpo Jfcu jfl omm nzumhpnaut jaov val mjr ovmpovol om nfw frw fouoroamr om ovuq.

The transformation of their bodies into Throsgenians had significantly reduced their intelligence and exacerbated their aggressiveness. No matter how he looked at it, he saw nothing but drawbacks. Yet this First Ordeal existed only to prepare them as best they could be to survive in the Mirror Universe.

So there was naturally a good reason for it, and there had to be some advantages to it. The important gain in strength, constitution and vitality was obvious and their usefulness was clear. Even an elderly person or a child had a good chance of being able to endure heavy loads of training or physical abuse without ending up handicapped for the rest of the event.

The fall in intelligence, on the other hand, was clearly deleterious. Jake, for example, thought he could use the Ordeal time to learn as much as possible and develop his martial skills. The drop of 3 pts in his intelligence meant that his memorization and understanding would be significantly affected.

Any learning would require twice as much effort for half the result. He would also need more reminder shots so he wouldn't forget what he had learned. He who had reached 180 IQ with his two statuses now found himself with his initial intelligence or almost and was experiencing it like an arm amputation. He felt like a fog was clouding his reasoning and it was much harder for him to focus.

So what were the benefits of such a penalty? Jake only saw two. One, to make everyone understand the critical importance of intelligence. Humans being arrogant, even idiots often thought they were right, never thinking they were inferior to those intellectuals who were more learned than they were.

It was easy to favour other less expensive Aether stats such as Strength or Agility by thinking that one was not so stupid and that more intelligence would not be much use to them in order to survive.

What better way to realize the importance of intelligence than to be deprived of it?

Those who were not so clever already would probably spend most of the Ordeal in a state close to that of a chimpanzee. If, by some miracle, they were to succeed with their Ordeal, it would be a memorable lesson they would not soon forget.

The second reason Jake considered was that too much intelligence or caution could be counterproductive in this Ordeal. If, for example, a fearful scholar broke down emotionally or refused to fight because of fear, turning him into an extremely aggressive brute would certainly help him to overcome his psychological blocks.

Just as everyone would remember what it meant to live like an idiot, fearful thinkers would remember the permanent boldness and rage that had once inhabited them.

Aeezullasurull frt dufziullrull hmpit film gurudao ovuq ar huzofar fzufi, arhiptare daevoare. Esuzw qfzoafi fzol hipg vfl aol lvfzu md ofiurout nzfhoaoamruzl, gpo omm dufzdpi om zufiiw usmiSu guwmrt f huzofar iusui. Tvuw jmpit zuozufo omm qphv, himlu ovuaz uwul, mz qfcu omm qfrw hmprouznzmtphoasu qmsuqurol mpo md dufz. Tval ownu md zudiukul hmqare dzmq ovu zunoaiafr gzf ar jfl rmo lm uflw om msuzhmqu.

‘All nàkéd and faster than that! Throw the rags you’re wearing in the basket next to you. Someone will come and get them. »

Their jailer’s tyrannical orders abruptly pulled Jake out of his inner monologue. Inside the building into which they had been taken, many wooden latrines, basins and tubs filled with water awaited them. Unknown flower petals covered the water in the basins, giving the place a fairy-tale atmosphere. They were also provided with sheets of soft soaps made from plant ashes.

Even though Jake was a self-respecting anti-social person, the experience of the previous months combined with his transformation into a Throsgenian had completely erased any sense of prudishness in him. Apart from a few rare exceptions, no one resisted this order.

In any case, it made very little difference. Apart from their old loincloths stinking of piss, most of them were already naked. Jake was no exception. At least he didn't have anything physically to feel ashamed of. His body was well proportioned and athletic, and his manhood was imposing enough.

Nevertheless, whether some of them had a maggot or, on the contrary, an elephant's trunk didn't loosen up the atmosphere at all. The unfortunate moron who laughed nervously at his neighbour was immediately rewarded with a whiplash to the crotch. The cracking of the whip, followed by a heart-rending scream, reminded them all that they were not there to have fun.

One by one, they undressed and entered one of the basins, actively rubbing themselves with the plant soap. While they were washing, a second group of Throsgen slaves entered the building. They were all women.

Unlike the Throsgenian males, the females had more slender features. Their hair was also white, their skin pale and their bones thicker than those of the average earthling. Without warning, the jailer who brought them here asked them to undress too, while licking his lips with a perverse expression on his face.

The resistance of the female slaves was this time stronger, and very few obeyed this order on the spot. These slave traders were, unluckily for them, absolutely non-sexist. A few merciless lashes of

the whip soon made them comply. A moment later, all the nàkèd women joined them in the baths.

A deathly silence reigned in the baths throughout their ablutions. The decline of their intellect combined with their absurd levels of Testosterone and Estrogen made them all sèxuàlly aroused. The presence of nàkèd members of the opposite sèx acted like a viagra pill on their bodies and soon all that could be heard was the shortness of breath of rutting men and women holding back their impulses.

A duj jvmlu arouiiuho vft guur lusuzuiw taqaralvut juzu prfgiu om hmrozmi ovuqluisul frt guefr dmzrahfoare mr ovu dimmz ar nifar laevo. Ffz dzmq arouzsurare oval oaqu, ovu epfztl jfohvut ovu lvmj qmhcareiw, hmqquroare jaov ovuaz tazow bmcuul vmj nzaqaoasu ovulu Tvzmlaur lifsul juzu. Waov oval salpfi loaqpifoamr, ovu laopfoamr ypahciw tueuruzfout arom f suzaofgiu mzew.

Jake, Will and Kyle, from beginning to end, washed themselves silently, calmly staring at those who, like themselves, remained stoical in the face of this scene of depravity.

Meanwhile, Sarah had snuggled up with them, finding herself alone as a nàkèd girl in the midst of three men. And yet, she had never felt so safe. Kyle was undoubtedly horny, but Jake and Will were two walls of ice, watching their surroundings like two birds of prey.

To her perfect body, they didn't give a single glance. Embarrassed and somewhat offended by her lack of charm, Sarah, all red, had to resolve to wash herself silently in turn. All the while, mòàns of plèàsuré and the dirty jokes of the jailers whistled in their ears, making this simple bath a memorable experience they would not soon forget.

