

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 77 - All ready to be sold

After a long time that seemed interminable to them, and where the few who could not resist scrubbed and rinsed themselves in silence, the ordeal finally came to an end. All these people, having given in to their impulses, gradually emerged from their trance, and their dilated pupils and euphoric expression gradually gave way to shame and dread.

About thirty percent of the slaves in the baths had resisted their impulses, but very few had done so with the stoicism of Jake and Will. To resist this kind of temptation, being intelligent was not enough. Otherwise all mentally handicapped people would be potential rapists and all geniuses would be virtuous. The real problematic factor was the hormonal changes exacerbating their biological desires and urges.

To give a more telling example, if someone killed the most important man or woman of your life in front of you, you would naturally feel sadness, anger and rage. The desire for revenge would inevitably seize you, whether you are stupid or not.

Normally, even the most intelligent and peaceful ones would want to take justice into their own hands. The Law of Talion (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth), which has existed since ancient times, illustrates this precept.

Now imagine if these emotions were amplified ten or twenty times. Everyone would react like rabid beasts, until justice was done. The reptilian brain would totally dictate our behavior. The current situation was similar but driven by an entirely different desire.

As such, Jake and Will could be described as strong-minded. Although Jake was once lazy and procrastinating, he was also an extremely stubborn person. In the same way that he hadn't dared a few months earlier to check out the women in the street, he could easily ignore the orgy around him.

Scanning the debauched in search of people like him, he eventually noticed a few interesting individuals who stood out from the crowd. Yerode and Lamine, in spite of their strength, had absolutely not resisted this strong stimulus. The two former mercenaries were fornicating to their hearts' content, happy to release their frustration from last night.

Jake suspected them to be perfectly sound of mind, but considering the treatment of women in their group of criminals, this kind of practice might not be a first for them. Maybe they just decided to take advantage of the moment.

The other possibility was that their intelligence might have suffered from the transformation into Throsgenian, but it would be foolish to count on that. Idiotic and impulsive or not, they were still dangerous.

Four people fell into Jake's sights. The first two were a couple of Asians, probably Chinese. Possibly brother and sister. Unfortunately, they had never been good at differentiating between people from different Asian countries, and the world had become so cosmopolitan over time that it was a waste of time to determine nationality based on appearance.

The Asian man was in his twenties, with a well-trained body reminiscent of martial artists. His face was rather banal, neither ugly nor beautiful, but not unpleasant to the eye. His hair was cut short, perhaps because of the confinement of the last few months on Earth. His behavior towards the young woman was extremely protective, watching every man approaching them with suspicion.

The young woman accompanying him was extremely cute and of a similar age, perhaps a little younger. About 1.65 meters tall, her body was slender and well-trained as well. She had few curves, but these were not non-existent either. At least, from what Jake had been able to see by ogling her, she had nice tits and flawless skin with no moles or birthmarks. She seemed extremely stressed and worried, but not terrified.

A third individual, Jake's size and typical Middle Eastern physique, but who could just as easily have been from North Africa, or any other country, looked sinister in stark contrast to the ecstatic looks of the fornicators around him. He seemed resentful of the whole earth and ready to fight at the first opportunity. Yet he continued to scrub himself meticulously with plant soap, ignoring the debauchery rampant all around him.

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The way he scanned the crowd was similar to Jake's and was reminiscent of a seasoned military man. His expression and upright posture indicated that he was used to commanding men and being

obeyed. Jake did not feel any panic or anxiety from him. Only concentration.

Besides these four people, others resisted temptation as best they could, but none stood out like these people. When the general excitement ended and a silence of shame replaced the drunkenness of *pléàsuré*, their jailers stopped arguing with each other and started whipping them to wash more actively.

A few minutes later everyone was perfectly clean, and the water in the basins had become completely opaque and cloudy. Soap and dust as well as other fluids had mixed with the clear water of the baths. Naturally, Jake, his group and other sane people had left the pools long before they became tainted by all those lecherous dimwits.

The sad consequence was that these few people were much cleaner than the others, smelling of soap and already dressed in clean cotton tunics that matched their size, while the others had *bàrèly* had time to rinse. In such a short time, a number had visibly failed to scrub all their dirt and still smelled a little bit.

The latecomers had to stick to lower quality tunics, sometimes with holes and often not to their size. Jake didn't know if this would affect the rest of their Ordeal, but being presentable was certainly a significant plus. In any case, some seemed to regret their actions and despite the loss of intelligence, a good number were taking the full measure of their actions.

Even Jake was reluctant to invest 16 of his 21 points from the previous night to increase his Aether Intelligence by one point. This would not restore his initial intelligence, but the effect would be visible on every cognitive function. Memorization, speed of

information processing, calculations, visualization, orientation, semantics, comprehension, nothing would be forgotten.

This was the advantage of Aether stats over Body stats. The former amplified the latter, while the latter were only an average arbitrarily calculated from different variables. In order to increase his Body Intelligence by one point, a marked increase in memory could be enough despite the stagnation of his other brain functions. In this respect, Aether was much more reliable.

‘All line up, you dirty Throsgen primates! You’ve been allowed to fornicate like the beasts you are! Now we want obedience.’ The ugly, yellow-toothed jailer suddenly barked at them, his spit flying all over the place, including his teammates.

Once the ranks were properly formed, they were escorted elsewhere, back through the inner courtyard of the Insula patio to another nearby building. Inside, to the delight of their taste buds, a buffet awaited them.

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‘You have an hour to fill your belly to your heart’s content. After that, it’s off to the main square of Heliodas to be sold. A meal like this may be your last, so I advise you not to waste this chance to fill your stomach.’ Another grumpy legionary standing guard inside the building explained the rules to them.

‘No shoving, there’ll be plenty for everyone! »

A few impatient men were rewarded with the bite of the whip when they rushed at the food without their jailer's approval. The orgy had apparently not taught everyone a lesson. Besides, someone who had already been an idiot before the Ordeal was now unlikely to shine by his brilliant decisions and common sense.

Jake and his group ate in silence, chewing the food slowly so as not to clog their digestive system. They preferred fatty meats and fish, vegetables and fruits to regain their energy instead of stuffing themselves with bread as some did.

Jake was finally able to experience what great Constitution and Vitality truly meant. His digestive system was constantly releasing astronomical amounts of hydrochloric acid and enzymes that were breaking down food at all speeds.

His teeth, strength and speed of chewing were also incomparable to that of the past. He devoured an enormous prime rib by chattering his teeth as if he was shivering, the piece of meat disappearing in a few minutes, bones included. The latter had simply tasted as crispy as potato chips.

Once the slaves were all sated, the jailer cracked his whip again to re-form the ranks. The large group then set off once more, heading for the large Heliodas market square to be sold.

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