

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 82 - Slave auction (part 2)

The next batch of slaves was different from the previous ones. The men were young and sturdy and the women prettier. But what was particularly striking was the eyes that were absolutely devoid of the slightest despair. Apart from calmness, curiosity and sometimes exuberance could be distinguished in these Throsgenians.

Jake wasn't among this batch, nor any of his group. He did, however, recognize the fifty-year-old Slavic looking man he had noticed for his composure during their ablutions in the thermal baths.

This man had a ripped physique, but his age had no doubt contributed to introduce him earlier. Other slaves had black lines of frustration on their foreheads, probably because being put up for auction so early meant that they were worth less than the high-end slaves reserved for the final.

‘Dear Heliodian citizens, we are now moving on to more serious things. ‘Toleus teased them with a confident smile. ‘As you can see, these Throsgen slaves are of a very different quality. The men are tall and strong. They'll be able to handle heavy workloads and make loyal recruits. Some of them were even members of the Throsgen army.

‘The women, on the other hand, will be able to share your bed, but don't think they're harmless. Throsgenian women participate in the war effort on the same level as men and are trained in the arts of

warfare. They are also stronger than the average young adult Myrmidian. You would be wrong to underestimate them. »

A flurry of murmurs swept through the audience who seemed thrilled and engaged in discussing how much gold they could afford to spend prior to the final batch presentation. When the silence returned, their jailer went straight to the point and announced his prices.

‘The whole lot of twenty slaves starts at 400 gold pieces. If no one is interested in the entire lot, the slaves will be auctioned individually for 20 gold pieces. »

With some disappointment, no one made an offer to buy the entire lot of slaves. Toleus therefore had to proceed with the individual auction of the slaves. It was at this very moment that the event took an unexpected course, which years later would still put a smile on the jailer’s face.

Adouz ovu lfiu md ovu dazlo ojm lifsul - f qplhpifz qfr jaov f tpii efXu frt f wmpre jmqfr jaov vpeu gzèàlol ezmoulypuiw lozuohvare vuz oprah jvahv juzu lmit dmz 27 frt 38 emit nauhul zulnuhoasuiw- ovu dadow-wufz-mit qfr jaov imre jvaou vfaz frt f juui ozaqqut gufzt lounnut dmzjfzt mr ovu nifodmzq.

‘Now here is a very special Throsgen slave. He was captured in the last campaign and single-handedly slaughtered more than ten legionaries of our sixth cohort before being neutralized by our Primipile (Centurion of the First Cohort of a Legion, the most decorated).

‘He is an older slave, but worth his weight in gold if you need a competent bodyguard or a new champion for your ludus. He will also make an ideal sacrifice...‘

Upon these words, Toleus bowed slowly towards the emaciated old man dressed in a blood-red toga edged in black. The Pontiff of the great Myrmid Temple. The latter remained completely placid, making a slight nod from left to right to show his disinterest. Relieved, the jailer spoke again.

‘In this case, the first bid is set at 30 pieces of gold.’ The decurion Toleus announced promptly.

Jake missed none of their interaction. He hadn’t forgotten the low risk of being sacrificed in his current mission. Now he knew who he had to be wary of. Unfortunately, he didn’t know what the criteria for sacrifice was.

The key point was that their jailer had seen fit to seek the priest’s opinion before proceeding with the bidding. This meant that this Throsgenian’s exploits were sufficient to suggest him to the Temple as a sacrifice, and the Temple seemed to have priority when it came to acquiring suitable candidates.

The other important point was that they apparently had a pre-established identity in this world, of which they knew nothing. Jake was certain that the fifty-year-old slave was a Player by virtue of his perfect self-control betraying great intelligence. He had no proof and yet he would have put his hand to it.

If his identity was ordinary, there would be no consequences. If, however, like this participant, he had a worthy palmares to his credit, he was perhaps already in danger. The mission did not specify whether he had to act to prove his worth. Perhaps he should simply let Toleus do his job and wait patiently.

The participant obviously shared the same idea since he chose to stand still, his face totally deadpan and unconcerned about the

attention on him. Or at least his Oracle urged him to behave that way.

Tvu qattiu-feut qfr ar jvaou omef, jvm hfzzaut f çvêlo dpîi md emit jaov vaq frt jfl fhmqnfraut gw ovzufourare gmtwepfztl, arouzsurut dmz ovu dazlo oaqu.

‘50 gold pieces for this slave. »

Toleus’ eyes widened wide open in an instant. One of the big fish had taken the bait. By the looks of his bodyguards, the man must have been an influential Lanista of Heliodas, and his guards were none other than renowned gladiators from his Ludus.

The dark-skinned giant to his left in particular was extremely well known in the Coliseum milieu. His fingernails and toenails were clawed and his bone structure was not much different from that of the Throsgens. A kind of Southern Throsgen if such a thing existed. He seemed to have absolute respect for his master.

His master, by comparison, was much more banal. Short, grayish hair, partially bald, the frail, sedentary body of a nobleman accustomed to luxury. In spite of this, his attitude was serene and assured in front of the princess, pontiff of Myrmid and other nobles.

‘50 gold pieces once, 50 gold pieces twice, 50 pieces...’

‘100 pieces of gold!’ Livia’s voice rang out at the last second.

The lanista in white toga frowned, then shrugged his shoulders, choosing to withdraw. This slave was promising, but it wasn’t worth it to alienate the Emperor’s eldest daughter.

As for Toleus, he was now grinning up to his ears. Who would have thought that the princess would suddenly spend so much money on

a vulgar slave past his prime? Unless she was a better judge of character than they were?

Then followed the sale of the other slaves in the batch, each with its own twists and turns. Each participant had an identity and a background provided for him by the Ordeal. By what miracle the Oracle was organizing their arrival in this world, Jake was unable to say, but it was perfectly done.

[Tvuzu fzu lusuzfi ovumzaul hazhpifoare fqmre ovu Pifwuzl. Id l vft fhull om qw quqmzaul, l qaevo gu fgiu om ouii wmp qmzu.] Xa, dmiimjare val ozfar md ovmpervo, lnmcu jaovmpo jfzrare, lofzoiare vaq.

‘Your memories? What do you mean by that?’ Jake asked her interested by this new information.

[All of the Oracle’s AIs are created and duplicated from real Players and Evolvers among the best in the Mirror Universe. Somewhere in the Mirror Universe, a living Xi is chasing her dreams...]

Even though he couldn’t see Xi’s face, Jake could feel her bitterness. Feeling alive, but knowing that one was only a duplicate consciousness, modified to guide the new Evolvers, could be disconcerting.

Jake thought of something and a horrified expression covered his face.

‘Does that mean the Oracle System can duplicate my consciousness at any time?’ He inquired in a panic.

[It can.] Xi confirmed without hesitation. [But, even without all my memories, I remember that it needs your consent, and the

compensation is more than worth it. Very few would turn down this offer. Many Evolvers and Players see it as an honor.]

‘Phew...’ Jake breathed a sigh of relief. He doubted that he could accept having his mind cloned ad infinitum, even though he was at the end of his life.

‘So, what’s the prevailing theory about these Ordeals?’ He chose to bounce back on his original question.

[That these worlds are real. They’re not virtual realities, they’re not matrices. They’re Seed Worlds. What’s debatable is whether these worlds already existed or whether they were created simply for the Ordeal.]

Jake couldn’t see how an entire universe could be created from scratch in such a short period of time. This world was obviously adapted to earthlings and inspired by elements of their own history and folklore.

[You think that because your knowledge is limited. After a few Ordeals and years in the Mirror Universe you will think differently. However, it’s possible these worlds already existed and the Oracle simply decided to send you there.]

[Another theory, similar to your String Theory, is that everything possible and imaginable exists in the Mirror Universe. Likewise, the Dark Universe is composed of an infinite number of Seed Worlds. No one has been able to count them.]

[I think very few Evolvers know the true answer, not even the original Xi. But there’s one thing that Evolvers and Players all agree on. The Oracle is almighty]