

## Judgement Day

This story was inspired by my meditations on Jesus' command to "Enter by the narrow gate.

It was Judgment Day!

It seemed that Drael had been waiting his whole life for today to come. At the tender age of 6 revs, he had been looking forward to this day for most of it. It was his first day to appear before the judges, to receive his first judgment, his first (he was sure of it) orb. (Actually, the orb was more like a disc, but since it symbolized the orb of the heavens, they called it an orb anyway.)

He scrubbed every inch of his slick, mottled green skin until it hurt. Even under the fourth limbs on either side, where nobody would ever see. It was difficult to reach, and it tickled a little, but he was going to be certain to be at his best on this most important day. He looked at the pictures on his wall, of his progeny, gleaming with their many golden orbs, and he stood a little taller, his upper eye now on a level with the lowest of the images. Soon he would join those who had been so rewarded. One day soon, he too would be all but invisible beneath his armor of golden light.

For just a moment this thoughts went to his friend Ntuk. As the Day of Judgment had drawn closer, Ntuk had become more and more distant. She'd talked less and less, and had seemed decidedly unhappy. When he'd asked her about it, why she was so melancholy, Ntuk had just looked sadly from beneath the folds over her lower eye without speaking. Drael just didn't get it.

When at last he thought he was ready, Drael had propelled himself into the larger living space where his progeny waited with great pride. They looked down at him through the small openings left for their eyes among the many orbs that they wore, and gurgled happily. Today he would continue the tradition of family excellence with his receipt of a first golden orb.

Bundling themselves into their transport, Drael and his family traveled the short distance to the local Judgment Center. At the center there were the usual number of transports, but a great many more people as families gathered for this special day. All the boys and girls of the DakMar people who had come of age in the last rev would be judged for the first time this evening. Ordinarily, DakMarans came in as it was convenient each day to receive either an orb or a bog, as the previous day had merited, but today, because it was special, they thronged together as the First Orb lowered itself toward the horizon.

With the happy rolling gait that was typical of his three legged species, Drael trundled ahead of his progeny toward the center. In the crowd at the door, he spotted his friend Ntuk and stopped short. Suddenly it was clear why Ntuk had not been as happy to see

the advent of this first Judgment Day. She was accompanied by what Drael thought were her progens, and they all moved slowly, Ntuk's progens in particular. They were covered in bogs, almost as heavily as Drael's mother and father were with orbs. Here and there a bit of gold shone through the gray lumpy bogs, but for the most part they were covered with the shameful evidence of their failures. Drael knew that his progens had bits of bog on them as well, but well placed orbs had soon hidden these imperfections from view.

Drael had never seen his friend with her progens before. They had known each other only through their days in Ed. He swallowed his first inclination to call out, and drew back, letting Ntuk's gray family pass without recognizing him. He was afraid that if he were seen associating with such a shameful clan, his own orb might be in jeopardy. How awful it must be for her, he thought, living with such parents. Drael hoped that Ntuk's occasional slip up in Ed would not lead her down the same road her parents had obviously followed.

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From that day forward, things were never the same between the two. Drael had received his orb, but Ntuk a first bog. In Ed the next day, Drael had smiled to Ntuk, encouraging her, but had refrained from talking to her, as this was a part of the code. Bugged people were to be shunned. If they weren't, what incentive would there be to seek orbs?

Drael watched as Ntuk struggled with her lessons, with her athletics, and watched as, each day, another small bog appeared somewhere on her body. Occasionally she arrived at Ed wearing a new orb proudly, but there were always so many bogs on her that Drael never again felt as though they could be seen together. Either Ntuk just wasn't able to do enough for an orb each day, or she didn't care. Drael truly hoped that she didn't care, that she wasn't concerned with the symbols of shame she wore each day. It made it easier for him to shun her.

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Revs and revs passed, and Drael lost track of his friend. His own career had carried him to heights that even his progens had not anticipated. He had collected as many orbs as anyone, and was covered from the top of his topmost eye to the soles of his three pods with them. The infrequent bog had been quickly hidden from view by the cascade of golden discs. From time to time, he had even received one of the Megorbs, a disc three times the circumference of the others, and he wore those proudly, placing his other orbs so that they would not cover them. Drael's children grew up to follow in his family's gracious footsteps. His wife Mleni and he had lived well.

At last the day came for his Passage, the day that came for every DakMaran. He embraced his wife (she would be making her passage soon, too) and his children, and boarded the Great Transport. Hundreds of others walked with him up the gangway toward the huge vehicle, toward the Unknown.

Drael looked around at the people in the crowd around him. He saw some who were covered in orbs, shining like golden armor, and others who were like Ntuk's progeny, almost entirely swathed in the filthy gray bogs of failure. Many others had such a mixture of the two on themselves it was hard to know which predominated. They wore their orbs so skillfully that they may have had many more bogs than orbs, but it was impossible to tell. Drael decided that he should stick with those whose virtue was most obvious.

Indeed, all the creatures on the Great Transport tended to seek people like themselves, among whom they felt comfortable, just as they had done before the Day of Passage. That is, all but one.

One of the mass of gray, shameful DakMarans actually left her group and wandered over toward the shiniest group. She called out, "Drael? Drael, did I see you in there?"

Drael would have been seen to blush a furious shade of blue if he'd not been covered in orbs when he heard his name. Some of his new companions kidded him, pushed him out, saying, "Go ahead! See who it is. Bet it's some old lover of yours! She must have cost you a few bogs!" Drael shambled across the deck of the transport toward the bog-ridden woman.

"Do I know you?" he asked.

"It's Ntuk, Drael. Yes, you know me! And I barely recognized you at all. I wouldn't have, except that I've followed your career in the dailies, and I thought that those Megorbs must have been yours."

Drael resisted an urge to sweep up his old friend in a tangle of multi-jointed arms. He couldn't be seen, even during his Passage, to be too close to one so shamed.

"It's good to see you. I'm.... I'm sorry, though, about, well, about...." His voice trailed away and his upper eye rotated posteriorly as he felt Ntuk's years of shame.

"Don't be," she said. "I'm fine. All these bogs used to be a horrible weight, but not for the last several revs. Really, don't worry."

"But, how... How do you get by? I mean.. How do you not.. I.."

Ntuk laughed. "You haven't been listening in your Gatherings, have you? Or do you bother to go?" She took his silence as an admission that it had been revs since he'd been.

“It’s okay. It doesn’t matter now, but if you’d listened, you’d know why, how. I don’t think I can explain it to you before we reach the Unknown, but you’ll understand when we get there.”

Drael thought for a moment about what he’d heard at Gathering. It had all seemed so pointless. In the first Gathering Place, the teachings had been about things that would never earn you an orb, so he’d left and found one that taught about how to use the Gathering itself to collect an extra orb or two. Even that, though, had become a waste of time. There were better ways to spend his time in pursuit of the next orb. All in all, the teachings had mostly faded from memory.

Ntuk looked through the openings left for Drael’s eyes and saw his incomprehension. “Don’t worry, Drael, it will become clear soon enough. I think you’d better get back to your friends. They appear to be losing patience with you.” With her second left appendage Ntuk pointed to the golden group whose behavior had begun to shift from mild laughter to jeering. Drael shook himself from his stupor, said his goodbyes, and went back to his kind. Ntuk watched him go, her lower eye winking sadly.

It took almost three days to reach the Unknown, and when they did, there was a mood of joy on the part of some, apprehension in others, and pride among the most golden. They took their accustomed place at the head of the ramp that led down from the Great Transport to the gates to the Unknown. Behind them were grouped the most joyful, most of whom were covered in bogs, and the apprehensive, who were mostly those whose mixture of gray and gold was the most confusing.

Ntuk watched as the orb covered group descended the ramp and were stopped at the first gate. She watched as they shouted and waved furiously, and as they were ushered aside to a waiting area. In the waiting area there were some others also, most of them also clad in gold.

The guide summoned Ntuk’s group next. They were mostly the shameful, though some of the mixed bunch, and even a few who appeared to be more gold than gray. They walked happily, (some even did that hilarious skip that you can only do with three legs) trying not to run toward the first of the gates. When they reached the gate, the next of the guides stopped them as started to speak.

“Welcome!” she said. “There are a few things that you should know before you pass.”

“We know!” shouted someone from the back of the bunch. “We know!”

The guide chuckled and said, “I think maybe you do! What is it that you know?”

“No more Judgment!” shouted another. “We have to take off all our bogs to get through the second gate,” chimed in a third. “Even the orbs have to come off!”

“Well!” said the guide, grinning as one can only grin with a vertical mouth. “I don’t seem to have anything to do here. You have it right. You may pass through this first gate, but if you do, you MUST leave all your bogs and orbs in the inner chamber. The second gate will repel anyone who tries to go through with anything more than nothing at all.”

“Yea!” cheered the assembled DakMarans as the guide stepped aside and they tumbled through the door. Ntuk cast a sad glance behind with her upper eye as she entered, and saw Drael and his companions still arguing and gesticulating wildly with their multiple arms with the guide in the waiting area. “In time,” she thought to herself, “I’ll see you on the other side in time.”

“Enter by the narrow gate.” Jesus - Matthew 7:13a

Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.” Jesus - Matthew 21:31