

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 100 – Provisional Ranking

On the evening of the 7th day of training, Priscus, cool and dashing in his armor, called them to gather in the main arena. He held in his hands a yellowed parchment sheet with the provisional rank of the recruits on it. This would determine whether or not they would finally get enough to eat tonight and in the days to come.

The tension was palpable. Not all of the slaves had suffered physically as much as Jake and the other Players who had to undergo more intensive training because of their stats. The reason was obvious: They all ate the same food, but some trained harder.

Some slaves had even managed to gain a little muscle. The Throsgenians had levels of testosterone and growth hormones through the roof that would have been considered doping on Earth. Despite the intensity of the training, the weaker ones had managed to progress since the food portions were adapted to their profile.

The consequence of all this was that the weakest had a healthy glow while the strongest seemed to be at the end of their rope, heavy dark circles under the eyes, skin on bones. That was why this ranking was so important. If they didn't get the place they wanted, they would have to force it out of someone else.

‘Good evening, recruits. I hope the training is going well. It’s less than eight weeks before your first fight at the Coliseum, so don’t slacken off... ‘

The lame gladiator knew how to cheer them up. Half the slaves looked at him as if they would punch him in the face at any moment. Satisfied with their expression, he announced the long-awaited ranking.

‘Rank 497: Lircam!’

No one showed up. The poor guy had been in the infirmary for three days straight after a badly executed weight-lifting exercise that seriously injured his lumbar vertebrae.

‘Rank 496: ...!’

Again, no one answered, nor did the subsequent ranks. All of them had been wounded at one time or another. It wasn’t until rank 477 that the real last one was announced.

It should be noted that beyond rank 100, the latter was of no importance. All these recruits would be paid one silver coin a week, not counting their daily portion of diluted blood.

Rank 51 to 100 doubled the salary, or two silver pieces. Food was also a little more plentiful, with meat or fish from time to time. Rank 21 to 50, three pieces of silver. And finally 5 silver coins for ranks 11 to 20.

Most of the Whites got provisional ranks above the top 100. Yellows were often ranked in the top 100, while Oranges were in the top 50. There were 18 Reds, 16 of them in the top 20. The other two had been wounded by Yerode and Lamine in friendly fighting, suffering an unforgivable setback in their progression.

Kyle placed 16th. His Aether stats weren’t very high, some Orange Players were outclassing him, but his performance had been judged

excellent by his coach Hector. He was aware that he was in danger of losing his place, but it didn't matter.

After all, a recruit or gladiator who was challenged and then defeated did not exchange his rank with the loser. The defeated would simply drop one place in the rankings, while the winner would take his former position.

Since a gladiator could only be challenged once a day, he was certain to remain in the top 50, even if he and everyone above him was defeated. Of course, this was impossible.

Al dmz ovu omn 10, ovu 10ov frt 9ov juzu prcrmjr om ovu gfoofiamrl. Tvuw juzu rfoasu Tvzmlaurafrl jaov arouiiaeurhu gâzêiw lpnuzamz om ovfo md f emzaiif, gpo jaov zuqfzcfgiu duzmhaow frt daevoare lcaii. Tvuw juzu jfzzamzl ofcur nzalmruz tpzare ovu iflo qaiaofzw hfqnfaer ar ovu Nmzov ovfo Huhomz vft gzmpevo gfhc dzmq f rufzgw omjr md Huiamtfl jvuzu movuz fphoamrl vft guur vuit.

Elias was awarded Rank 8 and Jake Rank 7. The top 10 had unlimited access to starch and vegetables, but above all the pay was incomparable. The 10th was paid 10 silver coins, and each rank above was paid 10 more coins, up to the first rank whose wages reached 100 silver coins or 1 gold coin.

It was worth noting that professional gladiators bearing the mark of Servius Cassius from 100 to 108 were also paid 1 gold coin, indicating that the best of the recruits had nothing to envy them.

Miya, the skinny woman not talking to anyone, was ranked 6th, and Hugo the Player friendly with everybody was ranked 5th. Lu Yifeng was 4th, Yerode 3rd and Lamine 2nd. Lastly, Lu Yan was predictably on the top step of the podium.

Jake was in a great mood. He'd eat his fill tonight. With his digestion speed and metabolism, he would finally be able to start a huge muscle-mass gain. The real question was whether he would rest on his laurels for today, or challenge another gladiator.

There was indeed a difference among professional gladiators. The Myrmidian blood that was provided to recruits was diluted in a certain amount of water at a ratio of 1:200. Gladiators on the other hand were given blood diluted at a minimum of 1:100. So they theoretically progressed twice as fast.

The top 51-100 were given blood diluted to 2/100, the top 21-50 to 3/100, and then 5/100 for the 11-20 rank. From rank 10 to the top rank the purity of the blood increased significantly until it was pure at the 1st place.

The privilege of picking an opponent was always given first to the last in the ranking. The last one in question shamefully lowered his eyes when Priscus asked him if he wished to challenge someone, his mute answer more than clear.

Since ranks beyond the top 100 recruits made no significant difference other than the prestige of saying you weren't so bad, most refused to fight. After all, if you weren't confident of defeating the 99th, it was better not to. At least that was the reasoning of the fools.

The slightly smarter ones targeted and defeated all without exception an opponent above them whom they were confident they could defeat. After all, a single victory against an opponent matching their strength was better than a full day's training. This daily challenge was their only legitimate opportunity to face someone.

Tvur ovu dazlo tpuil guefr, ufhv plare ovu jmmtur jufnmrl ovuw vft guhmqu dfqiaiaz jaov msuz ovu nflo juuc. Pzalhpl fhout fl zuduzuu

frt f hzfhc md val jvan mr ovu lfirt jmpit laerfi ovu lofzo frt urt md ovu daevo.

The first fights were between White recruits and it was a pitiful sight to see. More than once Jake looked away, the sight of it was unbearable.

Two recruits with a questionable sense of self-preservation knocked each other out by abandoning all defense. Two others dropped their weapons after a few exchanges, the melee ending in a heated ground fight that looked more like two gays celebrating their reunion after a long absence. Some people may have liked it, but Jake was not one of them.

On the other hand, the fitness level of the recruits at the bottom of the rankings was pretty bad. After a minute or two of twirling around in panic, the two recruits would often end up panting and short of breath, staggering around as if on a good bender.

The 100th managed to keep its place in the end, proof that there was a certain gap between the Whites and the Yellows. At least this one kept its calm and didn't give the impression of being desperate. After his victory, he challenged the 96th and won.

The challenge requests followed one after the other, as the fights became more technical and fierce, especially during the transitional duels in the rankings, where the position would secure more resources.

Kyle was challenged in turn by the 24th and after a long fight lost the duel, falling back to 25th place. The one who had defeated him was from the Orange group, under the charge of Krona. His Aether stats were much better, but his technique was not up to the Reds. The Playboy's defeat was therefore completely normal.

Despite the fact that Jake and Elias were in the White group, no one challenged them. A 3 year old child training from the cradle had no chance of defeating an adult athlete holding a weapon for the first time. There were impassable gaps.

Comparatively, Miya and Hugo were each challenged once, but managed to keep their rank. Miya had excellent agility and virtuoso dexterity with her dagger. One might wonder what she was doing in life before arriving on B842.

Hugo was slower, but his strength was high. Perhaps the highest of the Players present. He had chosen to adopt the Samnite style, armed with a large shield and a heavy sword more in keeping with his style.

Eiafl tuhatut rmo om daevo ovfo raevo. Jfcu jfl hmrdaturo ovfo ovu dmzquz dazudaevouz hmpit tudufo mru md ovu nzmdullamrfi eiftafomzl md ovu iptpl, gpo vu lpzuiw vft val mjr zuflmrl.

Jake's turn to fight then came, and his gaze lingered for a moment on a certain gladiator. He had found his target.
