

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 102 - A tough battle

Jake took a deep breath and then began to advance cautiously towards his opponent with the shield up and his guard up. He didn't know the true stats of the fighter in front of him. Even if the Oracle thought he could win, it would be foolish to underestimate him, since he himself didn't know what he was really capable of.

He didn't have to wait long for the answer. Rufus slalomed towards him in a few jumps with a springiness and agility superior to that of a cheetah. Jake could barely keep his eyes on him.

A gust of wind whirred to his right, followed by the high-pitched whistle of a sword slicing through the air.

CLANG!

He narrowly blocked the stroke with his shield. His feet had remained anchored firmly into the ground, he had not been destabilized or pushed away. He had held on. Strength, check! He far surpassed his opponent's strength and that was the sine qua none condition for a chance of victory.

Unfortunately, it was too early to rejoice. His opponent was a veteran of the ludus, and had vast experience. Realizing that the rookie was a tough piece of work, he immediately changed tactics.

An avalanche of blows started raining down on Jake, so fast that he couldn't understand a thing. In less than 10 seconds, his legs and

arms had been slashed 7 or 8 times despite all the successful parries with his sword and shield.

‘Fuck!’

It hurt like hell! He knew from the start that he was going to take the beating of his life today and that his sanity would be put to the test, but it was worse than he imagined. If he hadn't experienced a bullet in the shoulder a week earlier thanks to Lamine, and followed a week of draconian training, his former self would surely have given up immediately.

The cuts were not that deep, no more than half a centimeter. Not deep enough to threaten the life of a normal man, but dangerous enough if left untreated. The blood loss could have been substantial.

Luckily, he wasn't a normal human being anymore. After each cut left a few drops of blood, the blood would stop dripping. Thirty seconds later, coagulation had taken effect, and a clot had formed which completely stopped the bleeding.

It was however without counting on the presence of Rufus. Rufus had never been a good-hearted Samaritan. After the first blood had been spilled, he attacked with even more ardor and strength, determined to gain the upper hand.

Thirty seconds later, when the first lesions had barely stopped bleeding, dozens more had been added. None of Jake's strikes had hit his target, but not for a second did he cease fighting back.

Each time he would strike with all his might, raising a tornado of dust with the violence of his blows. Rufus would dodge them with no problem, but every time he felt the wind hitting his face he couldn't help but break into a cold sweat.

Despite his suffering, which far exceeded that of a public flogging, Jake held firm. Gritting his teeth, he tried to connect with his Shadow Guide like never before. He focused on it with all his strength to ignore the pain and remain conscious. Gradually, his consciousness went into a state of flux and his reflexes gradually took over.

Superior Agility, contrary to the image sold by video games, did not mean being faster. Pure speed depended on strength. Especially explosive strength. The reason why fighters with slimmer physiques were faster and more durable than heavier bodybuilders was mostly related to their mass.

In other words, the gain in strength due to muscle gain had a physiological limit beyond which it became disabling. This was more commonly referred to as the power-to-weight ratio.

Jake had seen his strength multiply rapidly over the past few days, and he had unconsciously held on to this restrictive mentality. That because his Agility was inferior, then he was slower. This belief had been reinforced by seeing Lu Yan or Lamine fighting.

But he was wrong all along. His technique was simply wrong. He moved and hit like a normal human, because he had been conditioned to move like that. Lutex's training had been of little use to him except to fill in some of his gaps.

And the reason was obvious. He was not a recruit like the others. If he hadn't practiced against Elias he probably would have wasted his time completely. As he tried to imitate his Shadow Guide, he dived deeper and deeper into himself, focused on every nuance, every movement of his muscles.

As the battle progressed, the wounds continued to add up, but a transition occurred in his responses little by little. His body curled up on itself, becoming more and more compact, his legs spread slightly, taking strong support against the sand. His muscles contracted to an unprecedented degree, his veins swelling with the influx of blood.

His agility was sufficient to enable him to control his body in an exceptional way, and as he experimented and applied his discoveries, this control became more and more refined. His muscles were now so hard that Rufus' gashes could only cut into his skin.

The gladiator sensed that something was wrong when he felt the difference on contact. His last few strokes made him feel like he was hitting a huge rock. He was familiar with this technique of controlling his muscles to stiffen, but at this level even he would have cramped in seconds.

It was even worse than sprinting at full power and holding your breath. Such an intense overall muscle contraction blocked blood flow, congesting the muscles and violently increasing blood pressure. And yet the recruit in front of him was still standing.

Jake, on the other hand, was holding his own because of his extreme constitution, but he felt something was still missing. From the beginning, he had always tried to imitate the Shadow Guide's gestures down to the last detail, but he felt he still had something else to imitate. An emotion.

Anger. Rage. Fury.

He was surprised that the Oracle could suggest such abandonment of self in such a perilous situation. Instead, he would have thought

calm would prevail. But the Shadow Guide didn't want him to lose his calm, just let his rage explode.

And so he did. The previous months had been some of the most stressful of his life. He had no news of his cousin or his uncle. He had to train endlessly, learn endlessly, fight endlessly, he who was originally laziness incarnate.

Hu vft om dmzhu vaqluid om ofic om numniu, om hmqqprahfou, om ukozfho ardmzqfoamr, om dmzq fiafrhul frt dzaurtlvanl, om gu hmrlofroiw jfzw, vu jvm jfl mzaearfiw lm imruiw. Aiovmpev vu omme ao pnmr vaqluid fii oval oaqu, val ypauo qmmt jfl mriw fnnufzfrhu. A iaooiu gzuuxu frt ao jmpit gu gimjr fjfw.

And so he let his anger rise. He thought of all the people who had ruined his life. Those who had caused the death of his parents and orphaned him. His cousins who humiliated him because he yearned for nothing. The Digestors who had invaded his planet and forced him to join an intergalactic battle that he never gave a damn about. That fucking alien spaceship that had come out of nowhere to get him out of his quiet life. Lamine who had shot him in the night and Yerode his boss.

At that point, he couldn't see the positive the Oracle had brought him. That the Oracle had pulled him out of his mediocrity, cured him of his procrastination. That he was finally able to communicate decently, that his life had a purpose now. That he no longer had any limits preventing him from reaching his wildest dreams.

The rage rose again and again, until it crystallized into the face of Rufus, his opponent. At that very moment, his adrenal glands began to release an astronomical amount of adrenaline, supported by his enormous vitality and constitution.

His heart began to beat faster and faster, reaching 900 beats per minute. His skin became red from the induced hypertension and his body temperature rose sharply by several degrees.

The movements of Rufus' two blades, which until then had been almost impossible to follow with the eyes, suddenly reappeared. The gladiator was still incredibly fast, but he was no longer so frightening. The adrenaline level was so high that he no longer felt pain at all.

When Rufus' sword grazed his shoulder again he saw red. All the accumulated tension exploded all at once, his 148.5 points of strength displayed in all their glory.

He pounced forward at 15 times the speed of a normal human, leaving a geyser of sand behind him. A fraction of a second later, he smashed the flabbergasted gladiator who had not repositioned himself properly with a backhand shield slap.

CRACK!

A sound of broken bones accompanied the collision, despite Rufus' successful parry. Experienced, the gladiator jumped back, using the strength of the attack to increase the distance. But this was without counting on Jake's wrath.

Armovuz lniao luhmrt ifouz, vu hvfzeit fo ovu eiftafomz fefar iacu f zfhare hfz, oval oaqu ljareare val jufnmr jaov ovu uknimlasurull md f lnzare. A vmzzagiu hvaqu lmpert om gu vufzt zfre mpo ar ovu fzurf, frt Rpdpl cruj zaevo fjfw ovfo vu hmpit rusuz gimhc ao.

Going all in, he shifted slightly, swinging in turn, not to block the attack, but to retaliate. He had already faced stronger opponents than him in the past. At that speed, he could simply let the rookie kill himself on his blade.

His plan worked, but he didn't escape unscathed. One of his sword had remained stuck horizontally in Jake's belly, trapped two centimeters deep by his abdominals. The hand originally holding the sword was unrecognizable, his fingers having been practically torn off by the force of the blow. His shoulder had also been dislocated and the tendons ripped.

The recruit was seriously injured, but he had lost.

Ready to admit defeat, he turned to Jake to congratulate him, but what he discovered was the scythe of the reaper coming to reap his soul. Immediately after failing his previous attack, Jake had turned around to charge a second time. Rufus' sword was still stuck in his belly, but his own sword was about to slice his head off.

Rufus' blood froze, convinced that his time had come. Then, as if by some miracle, another blade blocked that of Jake's. Relieved, the gladiator recognized Khazus' muscular arm. The man had just saved his life.

'Jake, winner!'

Hearing those words, Jake's anger melted away. He looked around and realized the arena was covered in blood. His blood. As his adrenaline and heartbeat returned to normal, he fainted under the dumbfounded gaze of the spectators.