

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 106 – Masochism! This is the way!

Gerulf, Ludus' number 1 and former champion of the Coliseum, did not train with the other veteran gladiators. He was rumored to be taciturn, stingy in words and easily irritable.

The number of gladiators he had sent to the infirmary or irreversibly handicapped was uncountable. And yet Servius Cassius placed complete trust in him. To the point of making him his primary bodyguard.

The Kinthar, a kind of Southern Throsgenian who had long since been enslaved, had, despite his bestial and predatory tendencies, a loyal and reliable character. Although his intellectual faculties were rather restricted and his vocabulary limited, the warrior had a kind of instinct and innate wisdom that was comparable to a gift.

When Jake entered Gerulf's private training grounds under the provocative gaze of Priscus, he felt like a baby zebra entering a tiger's cage. That was almost right.

The dirt field was quite spacious for one person, about the size of an Olympic swimming pool. Despite all the space, the place looked like a no-man's-land after being bombarded by multiple mortar shells. The sand and dust was darker there, much like ash.

At the time, Jake thought Gerulf hadn't arrived yet. But as soon as Priscus left, leaving him alone in the area, he became aware of the

breathing sounds nearby. The noise sounded more like a wheeze than normal breathing, yet he couldn't find anyone in the direction of the rasping sound.

After squinting his eyes for a moment, he finally noticed something out of the ordinary. The ash-coloured dust floor was rising and falling at a steady pace a few yards away from him, but the inhalations and exhalations were so far apart that this movement was difficult to perceive. If Jake wasn't so tense, he might not have noticed anything.

Not knowing what to do, Jake opted for silence. He stood still, waiting for the Kinthar to come out of its hole and finish whatever he was doing. Fortunately for him after a few minutes, the rhythm of Gerulf's breath changed, quickly followed by some movement.

The Ludus number 1 slowly emerged from the ground, the grey dust covering his body further emphasizing his barbaric bestial appearance. Ignoring Jake, the dark-skinned giant went to the nearby fountain to fill the available bucket, which he then poured over his skull to rinse himself. After a few empty buckets, he had regained a presentable appearance.

Finally noticing Jake's presence, the bare-chested Gerulf walked towards him. The champion was more than a head and a half taller than him and his biceps were the size of his thighs. When he began to inspect him more closely, a musky smell attacked his nostrils. He also noticed the extremely wide jaw and the lower canines protruding from his closed mouth.

When Gerulf saw that the newcomer hadn't pissed his pants, he gave a satisfied growl.

‘So you’re my new sparring partner? Nice to meet you. ‘Gerulf reached out his hand with a polite and kindly attitude he didn’t expect.

The Kinthar had a thick accent to be cut with a knife, but it didn’t sound as terrifying as the rumors had it. However, he instantly changed his mind after accepting the handshake.

Even with his theoretical strength of more than 140 points, Jake had to muster all his strength not to have his hand crushed by the brute’s hand which was twice as wide as his own. Although he tried to stay calm, his breath had sharply accelerated and he was sweating slightly.

‘Not bad! ‘ Gerulf complimented him when he discovered that he hadn’t flinched. If his sparring partner couldn’t stand a handshake, there was no point in considering a fight.

‘Warm up, we’re starting in five minutes. No weapons, just hand-to-hand combat. Give your all. ‘ Gerulf ordered with a certain dullness in his voice. He obviously had little hope that Jake could meet his training requirements.

Taking this sparring as a life and death struggle, Jake took Gerulf’s instructions with the utmost seriousness. He warmed up as best he could with fast dynamic movements to quickly get his body temperature up. He also reviewed all the techniques he had learned, visualizing an opponent even faster than Rufus.

‘The 5 minutes are up. Come on.’

The giant stood in front of him towering with no guard at all. Despite all the apparent openings, Jake felt as if he was looking at an indestructible fortress with no gaps. Realizing that he was going to get his face smashed anyway, he managed to relax.

After taking a deep breath, he charged.

**BANG!**

**Splash!**

When a bucket of cold water was poured over his face, Jake woke up with a gasp. Completely disoriented, he tried to figure out where he was and why he was dozing in the dust. As he crossed Gerulf's moderately worried gaze, his memory came back to him and he remembered that he had been knocked out.

It was a punch from another world. When Jake rammed the giant with a blitzkrieg approach, the giant had simply grabbed his fist and then retaliated with his own uppercut. The punch had come at lightning speed from down to up, hitting his chin and sending him flying seven or eight meters into the air. His brain had yo-yoed into his skull, causing an immediate concussion.

Gerulf had then towed him to the fountain to wake him up with a bucket of water. All in all, less than a minute had elapsed.

'You can go... Too weak... I might kill you next time.' The champion of the Ludus sighed, clearly disappointed in saying these words.

The giant was indeed unable to control himself, but he loved to fight. Whenever he fought, his ferocity would come out and he couldn't contain himself until the target was destroyed. After a blow like that, almost all of his training partners used to flee him like a plague when they hadn't gone completely brain-dead.

But Jake was different than his previous partners. Even though he was a rookie, he wasn't really banged up. His brain had been shaken violently in his skull causing a loss of balance and consciousness, but nothing was broken.

Despite the strength of Gerulf's uppercut, Jake still had all his teeth and an intact lower jaw. This showed that the Kinthar warrior was still able to show some self-control. If Jake managed to stiffen his muscles as he had done against Rufus and get angry, he would have a chance to put up a decent resistance.

'I'm not going anywhere. The fight's just beginning!' Jake declared valiantly before rushing Gerulf again without warning.

BANG!

Splash!

BANG!

Splash!

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In the end, he was knocked unconscious about a hundred times until his speech became totally incoherent and he began to see the white light of the tunnel to the afterlife during his brief phases of unconsciousness.

On the surface, he had simply been a punching bag, but he had not let go of anything until the end. At first he would get knocked out in one blow without understanding what had happened to him. Then, little by little, he had managed to enter the state of mental excitement he was trying to reach. It was no longer anger this time, but a primal state of excitement and rivalry.

After being knocked out about fifty times, he succeeded in dodging one blow, then two, until finally holding 4 exchanges and taking two blows the hundredth time before losing consciousness.

Seeing his pupils dilated and his expression haggard at his hundredth awakening, Gerulf decided that it was enough for today

and carried him on his shoulder like a sack of potatoes to the infirmary.

Emptied of his strength, Jake had immediately fallen back into unconsciousness, being dragged along by the gladiator like a dead weight. Naturally, he was declared forfeit for his fight of the day and lost a spot. The irony was that Lircam was the one who challenged him, thinking he was doing the right thing, but since Jake didn't show up, he was declared the winner.

Of course, Jake didn't lose any Aether for his defeat that day, quite the opposite. After all, he was fighting Gerulf at the time and had given everything he had. He had given his best that day, and he felt no sense of failure. Just the peace and contentment that only a feeling of accomplishment could provide.

As for Servius Cassius, he couldn't help smiling when he heard Gerulf's praise for Jake's bravery. Priscus, who had attended the discussion without saying anything, could hardly believe his ears. So there was someone in this world who was masochistic enough to get knocked out a hundred times by someone and ask for more...

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