

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 110 – Will's Message

An hour later, Jake was back in his own room, meditating on the Oracle Coach's evaluation while sitting cross-legged on his bed.

Night had fallen and most of the recruits and gladiators were busy enjoying their meals. Since he had defeated a professional gladiator and joined the top 50, he was eligible for the rooms of the highest standard. That meant he was now residing on the upper floor well away from the other recruits.

His 'room' was actually a real apartment with living room, bedroom, kitchen and toilet. The latrine at his disposal was connected to the aqueduct network, which could be considered a real luxury in an Ordeal like this one.

For the first week he had to settle for using a chamber pot when he had an urge and this was particularly repulsive for a 22nd century Earthling. It was another of the many reasons responsible for the depressive state of many of the recruits.

The furniture was also of better quality and he had a real bed. He was also allowed to order his meal directly through the few servants who were assigned to provide these services and who were constantly roaming the floor waiting for an order.

This was the reason why Gerulf and most of the top 20 gladiators hardly ever ate with them in the cantina, preferring the quietness of

their apartments. All they had to do was snap their fingers to get the food of their choice, which was much more convenient for them.

True to his routine Jake ordered all sorts of dishes for his usual feast. As his stats increased and his training intensified, his appetite grew increasingly out of control. Most of his evenings were now devoted to eating to renew and expand his energy reserves.

About twenty minutes later, a slave entered with a cart containing the requested dishes. Jake recognized the slave bringing the food as one of those who had given up on the first day of training even before it began. Judging by the slave's jaded and bored expression, he seemed to regret his choice.

After finishing his service, the slave gave him a slight bow before retiring in silence. Jake paid no attention to him and began to fill his first plate. His jaw was now so strong that chewing on bones seemed as simple as eating potato chips. As a result, his tastes had begun to change.

His digestive system had also changed significantly. The one time he had eaten too much, he had had acid reflux for an entire evening, and what he could tell by the intensity of the smell was that it was not good for a normal human to be puked on by him. His gastric juices might not yet have been as corrosive as pure sulphuric acid, but it did itch.

While he was biting into a roast chicken leg, or at least some kind of chicken-like bird, Jake remembered that he hadn't had time to open Will's letter. Mechanically, he put the chicken leg down and wiped his hands on a napkin before he retrieved the letter in question.

Calmly he undid the wax seal preventing access to the letter, then once it was in his hands he proceeded to read it. Will's letter had

only a few words written in English, and when Jake finished reading them, he immediately spat the piece of chicken into his mouth, causing it to crash like a cannonball into the stone wall in front of him.

‘Don’t eat the Ludus’ food tonight. Danger. ‘

A trace of blood tarnished the scroll, as if its author was wounded. It seemed Will had heard something he shouldn’t have, but he still chose to tell Jake despite the risks.

He had managed to give the letter to Creece in person, which meant that despite his injuries his status within the House of Quintus had not been compromised yet. There remained the possibility that the blood was not his and that he had obtained this information at the cost of a few dead bodies.

‘What the hell are you doing Will?’ Jake couldn’t help but whisper out loud.

Now that Jake knew something was wrong with his food, Jake focused on his Shadow Guide. The Path that was supposed to ensure his survival and safety was still active. Yet he hadn’t felt anything special while eating his chicken. Maybe Will was wrong.

Hu ovur opzrut val foouroamr om ovu sfzAMPL talvul fsfaifgiu om vaq, hFzudpiiw jfohvare dmz hvfreul ar val duohv fooaoptu. Tvu nmpiozw jfl mc, fl jfl ovu dalv. Tvarel hvfreut jvur vu nzuourtut om oflou ovu zmflo guud, ovu gzuft frt ovu jaru.

Jake didn’t consume alcohol, but he had got into the habit of ordering wine and emptying the contents of the jug into the latrine to make it look like he was a wine lover unable to do without the famous drink. Since then, a carafe of wine was brought to him every evening with his meal.

As for bread and red meat, he swallowed colossal quantities every day to feed his high metabolism. Although he rarely wasted food, it was one of the foods that was least likely to be overlooked.

They were really trying to poison him. No! It wasn't him they were trying to get to. Remembering Cassius' words earlier, Jake put on his leather armour and a pair of boots that he had bought previously with his wages. It wasn't much, but it was better than nothing.

Unfortunately, he and the other recruits were not allowed to carry a weapon outside of the arena and training hours. They had to gain Cassius' trust to do so, or hold guard duty. And even then, weapon carrying was extremely controlled.

Carefully, Jake tucked his ear to his door for the slightest suspicious noise. Hearing no sound, he slowly opened the door, hoping not to be noticed. A squeaking door due to badly oiled hinges immediately ruined his attempt at discretion. Luckily, he was alone in the hallway.

Most of the recruits and gladiators should have finished eating by now or should have been on guard duty.

By now, most of the recruits and gladiators should have finished eating or be about to. Jake would normally have expected to hear some racket from the gladiators' incessant chatter and laughter. At that time there was usually a lot of activity in the Ludus where everyone was relaxing from their long day of training.

And yet the corridor was mysteriously empty, only a heavy silence answering him.

'Don't tell me they've poisoned everyone?'

It was impossible! At least the Players had their Oracle to protect them from such dangers if they used it properly. Even if their intelligence had decreased with the transformation into Throsgenian, they couldn't have been that stupid? Could they?

To find out for sure, Jake went to the door next to his own that corresponded to the apartments of Lu Yifeng and his sister. He didn't trust them completely, but the siblings had shown their good faith all along the Ordeal. Whatever their plans, they really wanted to form an alliance with him. It would make no sense if they were responsible for these poisonings.

Knocking at the door a few times, he waited patiently for an answer from the other side.

'Who is it? Did you order something Yan'er?' Jake recognized Lu Yifeng's wary voice. His little sister's weak voice was heard just afterwards.

'No, why?'

'Well, I'll check...'

Hearing the footsteps coming closer, then stopping on the other side of the door, Jake heard the latch come up, then the door creak. The annoyed face of the young Chinese boy appeared in the gap of the half-open door.

'Jake? What are you doing here? You want to talk about what Cassius said? Don't worry, we already have a plan.' Lu Yifeng started spouting off without waiting for an explanation.

'I'm dying to hear your wonderful plan, but we have another problem.'

'Jake interrupted him by raising his hand. 'My food has been poisoned...'

‘... What?!’

Lp Yadure aqputafouiw tzfeut vaq arom ovuaz zmmq frt imhcut ovu  
tmmz guvart vaq. Hal pnluo uknzullamr jfl fii gpo emru.