

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 111 - Danger

Once inside, Lu Yifeng asked him again to make sure it was not a dream.

‘Are you sure?’

‘Certain... I don’t hear any noise in the building either, it’s not normal. The majority should be at the cantina having dinner or going back to their rooms or dormitories. Something is going on.

‘By the way, how come you didn’t notice anything if you don’t have any symptoms?’ Jake asked the question that was tapping him, suddenly finding them suspicious. ‘You haven’t eaten yet?’ »

‘We don’t eat Ludus’ food. We buy all our food through Creece with our own wages. ‘Lu Yan answered this question in place of her brother. ‘We’ve never trusted anyone. AS soon as we could afford our own food, we did. »

The salaries of the top 50 were more than enough to finance their own meals. He could have done the same, but the idea never crossed his mind. After all, he had a Path activated to protect him from that kind of trickery.

And let’s face it, the deal with Cassius was too good to not exploit to the fullest. Without food of such quality and abundance he could never have progressed so fast, nor endure the daily beating of Gerulf.

He had slept more often in the infirmary than in his own room in the last month.

‘You say someone tried to poison you? Do you know if the poison was lethal or just meant to weaken us?’ Lu Yan suddenly asked him, coming back to the point.

‘How should I know?’ Jake replied with a sneer.

He had some knowledge of botany from months of cramming under Xi’s tutelage, but it was limited and he had forgotten much of it since then. That was the problem with the human brain. One would forget over time, especially when the subject matter was not interesting at all.

‘Take me to your room, I’ll take a look at it..’

Without wasting any time, Jake complied with her request. Quietly, the trio returned to Jake’s room to examine his food.

‘Now that I see what you’re eating, I almost regret that you didn’t poison yourself with it..’ Lu Yifeng sighed enviously.

‘Stay focused.’ Lu Yan, who was already inspecting the meat, interrupted him curtly.

‘At your command, sis!’ His older brother answered in a falsely obedient tone, accompanied by an exaggerated military salute.

The young woman rolled her eyes before resuming her work. AS Jake did earlier, she used her bracelet to assess which food was poisoned in an instant, then approached a few samples under her nose to sniff them.

‘Cyanide. It’s light and well-hidden with the smell of meat, but I can smell a faint hint of bitter almond. A small dose is lethal to a human.

With a normal serving of food you'd get away with it, but that's impossible with your current appetite... »

Cwfratu? Jfcu zuquqguzut ovfo ao jfl nmllagiu dmz f vpqfr om guhmqu aromkahfout gw ufoare omm qfrw luutl mz dzpao naol. Tvuzu juzu f duj lphv mhhpzzurhul. Esur ad mru jmrtuzut jvfo atamo hmpit ljfiimj vfid f hpn md fnniu luutl gw fhhaturo, ovu vpqfr gpiilvao jfl rm imreuz ar ypuloamr.

Cyanide was one of the first poisons in human history, obtained by crushing and grinding fruit pips or pits. The poison was recognizable by its distinctive bitter almond fragrance, but this was often concealed and covered by the smell of other foods or sauces. In this case, the sauce in which the roast beef was immersed was the culprit.

After checking all the dishes, Lu Yan found the same discreet scent emanating from the wine jug. The smell was almost imperceptible in the bread, the crushed almonds having been skillfully mixed with the flour.

‘Someone wanted to kill you. We need to check on the other recruits and gladiators in the Ludus. If they've all been poisoned with cyanide the situation is worse than I thought... ‘

‘What do you mean? ‘Jake wasn't sure what she was getting at.

‘Based on our experience with the VR game Trial World, the First Ordeals are supposed to be relatively safe. Never would the Oracle plan a scenario where you could get poisoned so easily. We've got our bracelets to prevent these accidents, but it's impossible to keep an eye on your Shadow Guide at all times. »

Indeed. Even Jake couldn't mimic his Shadow Guide all the time. It required a sustained effort of attention and most of the time it was in

the background ready to pop up at his request. The Paths were active, but he would follow them broadly when the situation was not urgent.

It was perfectly possible that he had made crucial errors during this Ordeal by simple carelessness or misinterpretation of the signals and gestures sent by his Shadow Guide.

If Jake could make such mistakes, other Players were doomed to follow suit, not to mention all of the recruits and native gladiators who did not possess an Oracle. If everyone's food had been poisoned, many were doomed to fail their Ordeal prematurely. This went against the formative intentions of the First Ordeal.

'In that case... there is only one possibility.' Jake concluded out loud as he paced back and forth in his living room.

'It was another Player who poisoned your food. Anyone in mind?'

'Yifeng scrutinized Jake's expression, but saw no sign of epiphany.

The appearance of the slave bringing him his tray flashed before his eyes for a second, but he spontaneously eliminated this hypothesis. He may have been a Player, but he was too weak. Even if he had hidden his true intentions, it was not worth depriving himself of the gladiatorial training and the effects of the Myrmidian blood.

'Apart from Yerode and Lamine, I don't know anyone here who would want to harm me, but I don't think that's their style...'

'There are plenty of reasons why someone might want to harm you. Your ranking, your reputation in the Ludus or simply the danger you represent as a Player. But it could also be due to—'

‘ Whatever, we don’t have time to dillydally. We need to check on the status of the other recruits. ‘ Lu Yan cut short her brother’s line of reasoning.

As the siblings put on the second-hand legionary armor they’d bought, Jake thought of another detail, and a big one at that. They were unarmed. They weren’t even allowed a butter knife in their rooms. He immediately shared his idea.

‘We’ll have to consider going through the arena. The room where the equipment is stored is locked, but that shouldn’t be a problem for us. ‘

All of a sudden, Lu Yan, who was putting on her armor in a relaxed manner despite the two men peering at her, stood up alertly. Her delicate ears trembled for a second, then she urgently placed her hands over the two men’s mouths. Once she was sure they would remain silent, she gently withdrew her hands. The difference in Perception between them was obvious.

Yifeng and his sister still hadn’t finished putting on their armor and had to postpone it. Yi Feng hadn’t had time to put on his boots while Lu Yan was still in her bra. Within a few seconds she put on her leather breastplate, even if she couldn’t strap it on, it was better than nothing. Her brother, however, would have to make do with going barefoot.

Footsteps were approaching and the trio could finally hear some voices coming from the staircase linking the ground floor of the recruits to their second floor. Upon recognizing them, Jake and Lu Yifeng turned livid.

They were familiar with the top 5 gladiators, but that didn’t mean that they hadn’t memorized the looks and voices of other important

gladiators. Among the approaching voices, Jake recognized the voices of the 6th, 7th, 9th, and 11th ranks. If they really had to fight against this group in an enclosed space like this, their chances of surviving the confrontation would be slim.

‘Fimus, I don’t even know why we’re wasting our time checking the dormitories. By that time everyone should be done eating. Even if one lucky person decided to fast tonight, it wouldn’t make any difference to our plans. ‘

‘Shut up, Plintus! If we wanted to be low-key, it’s over!’ The second voice barked at his comrade, making even more noise.

‘Shut up, you two. The orders are clear. Inspect the rooms. ‘ A deeper voice growled menacingly, ending the quarrel of the first two.

The last voice was that of Carbo, number six in the rankings. Fimus was 9th and Plintus 11th.

Jake had no intention of meeting them now. His Shadow Guide was showing signs of agitation, which only happened when his life was directly threatened. In this case, he had promised himself that he would never dither. The siblings were of the same opinion.

As the quartet climbed the stairs, the trio tiptoed out of Jake’s apartment and rushed as quietly as possible to the window at the end of the corridor. When Carbo’s watchful eyes scanned the first floor corridor, he found no one.

The trio had jumped down.