

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 113 - A Great Warrior living out his last moments

Unable to do anything to help the unconscious gladiator, Jake gritted his teeth and decided to move on. On Earth, the antidote to hydrogen cyanide was inhaled amyl nitrite as the first treatment, followed by intravenous sodium nitrite. Where would he find these things in a world as primitive as this one? So this man was on his own.

His alertness was at its peak when he left the dark corridor he was standing in, one which opened directly into the cantina. The dim light of the torches gave him a sad sight. A large number of recruits and gladiators were still present, but unconscious. Their plates were still half full, a sign that they had been poisoned.

The recruits seemed to be simply taking a nap, their arms resting on the table as pillows for their heads. Their expressions were relaxed, and a dribble of drool sometimes came out of their half-opened mouths. This was not like the previous gladiator's cyanide poisoning, but the effect of a sleeping pill or a strong anesthetic.

Gladiators bearing the Ludus mark had been treated differently. Again, most still had their hands clenched against their throats, as if they were choking. Their blue faces showed signs of advanced cyanosis and it was clear that most were already dead.

But that wasn't what alerted Jake and the siblings. There were people missing. Too many people. Of the four hundred and some

recruits, a number were missing and all were among the top 100 recruits. On top of that, very few of them were Players.

As for the professional gladiators, if they had actually dined in the cantina as usual there should have been at least a few dozen of them. Surprisingly, however, there were only a dozen.

Even more shockingly, five of them had had their throats cut and were bathing in their own blood. Each of them was a Ludus veteran in the top 40. It was obvious that because of their high stats, the poison had not had the desired effect. They had been seriously weakened, but with their sharpened senses they had soon realized that something was wrong.

A battle had then started in which the victims had fought against the culprits of this plot. The current horror scene showed that they had lost the fight with their life.

Among the victims, Jake recognized one in particular. Lutex, the trainer of the Whites. The potbellied gladiator was miraculously still alive.

The man was bathed in a pool of blood, leaning against one of the marble columns supporting the covered courtyard in which the cantina was located. His pale, exsanguinated face showed that he had already lost too much blood. To Jake's surprise, the number 5 of the Ludus was still conscious, but he seemed paralyzed.

When Jake approached him, he instantly knew why. In addition to the effect of the poison, the tendons in his arms and legs had been severed. His belly had been sliced open so that, because there was no abdominal wall, his intestines were hanging down slightly. The gladiator's throat had also been partially slit. His breathing was

sluggish and wheezy and his body was sweating profusely. He was at death's door.

Without his incredible Constitution and Vitality, he would have died long ago. It was even possible that without the effect of the poison parasitizing his healing that he might have survived. But as it was, his prognosis looked bleak.

If Jake had an antidote and something to bandage and suture his wounds, he would have had a chance to save him, but unfortunately this was not the case. All was not lost if they could access the infirmary, but neither he nor the siblings were optimistic.

Jake crouched close to the warrior and took his hand to take his pulse and was able to confirm that his heart was beating weakly but still steadily. Despite the fact that his heartbeat had dropped below 10 beats per minute it was a perfectly acceptable pace for someone of his level. Jake's resting heart rate was similar.

Despite the fact that Lutex was unable to move, Jake could read a kind of distress in his eyes, but also a kind of... warning? Unfortunately, even using his Oracle, he was unable to identify the slightest danger. His Shadow Guide was peaceful which meant that his life was not directly threatened.

Jake used to give his Shadow Guide a few seconds head start in response to a threat. This allowed him to always be prepared to react to the first blow. It was very difficult to attack him by surprise if he was focused. Only in combat was the Shadow Guide set to execute the Path a few tenths of a second before the actual action.

In any case, Lutex's eyes were wide open, his pupils as tiny as possible as a sign of fear, but it could also have been an effect of paralysis. In any case, Jake was powerless to help the poor guy.

Despite his incredible strength, everyone reacted the same way to death.

‘Jake! There’s someone else still alive!’ Lu Yifeng exclaimed excitedly, almost forgetting they were supposed to whisper.

Losing interest in Lutex, who was running out of time, Jake turned his attention to the direction Lu Yifeng’s finger was pointing. At one of the tables, he found Lu Yan trying to support an extremely thin young woman with rather athletic muscles.

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He finally realized that only official gladiators had been targeted, the recruits having ingested only a powerful relaxant. This ruled out the possibility that the Sextus were trying to weaken the Throsgenian slaves in preparation for the future games of the Coliseum.

Jake was surprised to see her still standing. He didn’t think her constitution and vitality were so high. The young woman had clearly hidden her game. It was not particularly shocking, but still a surprise. It made him realize that he couldn’t possibly trust the prowess shown by the other participants.

Jake may have ended up being the honest one. His only advantage was that the fights against Gerulf were actually conducted in a closed room. Apart from Cassius and Priscus, no one was allowed to see their fights.

If Jake had wanted to, he could probably have reached the top 20, but he would have lost the benefits that each victory brought him. Rising the rankings quickly would have increased his rewards, but

he would have had far fewer enemies to face and each of them would have been stronger than him, causing counter-productive defeats for his stats. Giving his all against Gerulf every day was enough of a stimulus.

Not completely gullible, Jake carefully checked the young woman's barely started plate and saw nothing suspicious. She had eaten only a piece of her bread and according to her the first symptoms of intoxication had appeared on the other gladiators and recruits at that time.

The gladiators still conscious and able to fight like Lutex were the ones who had joined the cantina and started dinner last. Miya was one of those people. Her relatively high constitution had allowed her to cope with mild symptoms. After the slight paralysis, fever and feeling of suffocation, she was gradually regaining her strength. However, she could not walk or stand up unassisted. She could barely speak, but her speech was jerky and slurred.

They could not afford to take her with them to the armoury beside the arena. Lu Yan, who did not particularly like to fight, volunteered to stay with her and protect her in case the enemies who had defeated Lutex returned.

His brother promptly objected, saying that those who could put Lutex in this state were opponents they could not afford to face without weapons to defend themselves. Even armed, the best tactic against such enemies was to flee.

Nevertheless, after a few minutes of whispered arguments between brother and sister, Lu Yifeng finally complied. The plan was that Lu Yan and Miya would continue to fake unconsciousness through cyanide poisoning, just playing dead around one of the tables and a partially eaten plate.

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‘We’ll be back in no time.’ The young Asian boy promised his sister, hugging her as if they would never see each other again.

‘I know...’ She rolled her eyes at her brother’s overreaction.

Jake waited until their ridiculous farewell ended with the expressiveness of a block of marble before making his way to the arena. This time they would no longer be able to keep a low profile. For at least a few meters, anyone monitoring the patio would be able to see them crossing.