

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 118 – Seventh Stat Unlocked!

Gerulf firmly blocked the access to the main residence, but his enemies and the entrance routes were too numerous. Despite his strength and stature, the giant could only defend one gate.

Unfortunately for him, he had never been good at numbers or strategy. Assailed by an army of mobs, he could only do what he could do best. Smash skulls and cut off heads.

Jake thought it was absurd that so many enemies would sacrifice themselves foolishly just to hold one man. The Kinthar was strong, but holding him at bay with spears or sifting him with arrows would have been more than enough.

As the guards were overrun by their traitor brothers and the black hooded invaders, more and more enemies crossed the surrounding wall and then the gardens. They then climbed the walls, crawled over roofs and balconies or infiltrated through the many corridors. Gerulf alone was containing half of his invaders, eliminating many of them before they could reach the building.

But it was impossible for him to hold back all of them. Gradually stronger fighters appeared to restrain him, often guards he had known for a long time and with whom he used to have 'friendly' fights.

Regrettably, the moments that Gerulf remembered as moments of brotherhood were for these guards only nightmares whose

psychological after-effects they still carried today. Bringing down Gerulf couldn't make them happier.

The problem with all this was that in addition to holding back only part of the stream of invaders and traitors, Jake noted that there were very few recruits and official gladiators that he recognized.

Those who were loyal or uninvolved who were able to help Gerulf were either unconscious, at death's door, or dead.

Remembering how Carbo and his acolytes had come to check out the gladiators' apartments earlier, he had little hope for those homebody gladiators who had chosen to eat alone in their rooms.

The recruits and gladiators involved in the conspiracy had inevitably organized and prepared their scheme well in advance. Some of the gladiators involved had been frequenting the Ludus for years, a sign that it had been brewing for a long time. He didn't know why the time bomb only exploded today, but it wasn't important.

Jake hesitated for a short moment between helping Gerulf or going to the rescue of Cassius at the risk of being attacked by all the traitors at the same time. Any gladiator in the top ten was a mountain he had no chance of defeating without a long, hard fight from which he wouldn't emerge intact.

On the other hand Gerulf was starting to slow down and despite his dark skin Jake could discern that something was wrong. The whites of Kinthar's eyes were bloodshot and his chest was rising and falling at a much higher frequency than he remembered. He had indeed been poisoned.

Yet Jake was confident that cyanide was not enough for an individual like Gerulf. His sense of smell was that of a wild beast and his constitution and vitality was so high that the only time he had seen the giant bleeding was when he bit his own lip.

This was one of the worries of having huge, pointed canines. If he wasn't careful, he would sometimes bite his lip or cheek. This happened during one of their fights because of the Kinthar's excitement and Jake remembered that the wound had stopped bleeding in just 2 seconds. Since this incident, Jake estimated Gerulf's Vitality to be almost 1000 points.

This was an impossible value to imagine and if Jake based himself on his own Throsgenian characteristics, Gerulf's strength and constitution must have been at least as high. Without an extremely powerful and almost odourless poison it was impossible to weaken Gerulf in this way.

Seeing that the giant was starting to cough up blood and slow down, Jake felt that he had no time to procrastinate any longer. Like a ghost, he dived among the mobs backstabbing them unscrupulously with his new sword.

Jfcu fhoasfout ovu fpomqfoah vfzsuloare md Auovuz, frt fl vu jvaziut ovzmpsev ovu uruqw hzmjt frt hpo mdd iaqgl frt vuftl, daifqurol md Auovuz guefr om dimfo omjfztl vaq, f vfm md jvaou iaevo urhmqnflare vaq ovfo mriw ovu Ozfhiu gufzuzl hmpit luu.

One strike, one kill. That was the present Jake's state of mind. Like a tuning machine without emotion, he cut and sliced through everything within range of his sword, choosing a new target immediately after each new kill.

Within minutes, Jake had cleared part of the driveway leading to the lobby like a bulldozer would have done. He looked like a red demon, as if he had just bathed in a pool of blood. Except for his white teeth and blue-green eyes he looked like a miniature Gerulf.

Recognizing Jake, the Kinthar uttered an enthusiastic battle cry, his vigour renewed. The old guards of the Ludus, who had managed to

contain and harass him as mammoths were hunted in prehistoric times, had well-developed instincts and immediately smelled danger.

One of them, just a little too close, however, reacted a fraction of a second too late and was smashed by Gerulf's enormous sword, whose blade was blunt but super-heavy. At that point it was more of a club than anything else.

Meanwhile, Lu Yifeng, Lu Yan and Kyle had chosen to collaborate to rescue Khazus. If Gerulf was in such a critical situation, Ludus' number 2 was not to fare any better. Gerulf's stats were unbalanced, favouring resistance and vitality. Khazus was different.

As a Myrmidian, his attributes were more evenly balanced and his vitality and constitution certainly inferior. If he had been poisoned his situation might very well be as catastrophic as that of Lutex.

Unfortunately, it was a fact that Jake no longer trusted the siblings. Whether they succeeded or not in rescuing him, he had to concentrate on the opportunity before him, namely to collect Aether. Angry at himself for his naivety and stupidity, he continued to invest all the Aether he could get to boost his Intelligence. He didn't want to make any more stupid mistakes. He hoped that better stats would give him the analytical coldness he desperately craved.

And it did. Every extra point of Intelligence Aether added transformed the mentality and the way he saw the world in ways that were hard to imagine. The difference was hard to see when the progression was gradual like it had been over the last month, but it was different when it was increased several times in just a few minutes.

The techniques he had difficulty performing, the blurred and imprecise memories, his ability to concentrate and infer which was fickle, all became clearer and smoother. The Aether of Agility helped to improve his reflexes and slow down his perception of time, just like the Aether of Intelligence, but it worked in a different way.

Tvu udduhol md ovu ojm lofol msuzifnnut, gpo ovu lrouiaeurhu film efsu vaq fr ftfnofgaiaow frt arlaevo ovfo Aeaiaow fimru hmpit rusuz nzmsatu. Al vu dmpevo, fii ovu daevoare lcauil vu vft iufzrut tpzare ovu Oztufi, jvahv juzu quzuiw zudiukul, ezftpfiiw guhfqu nzmdahauro, gpo qmzu aqnmzofroiw, vu darfiiw duio ovu qurofi gfzzauz ovfo nzusurout vaq dzmq primhcare val Susurov Sofu.

Like an animal too dumb to understand that the red light from the laser he was chasing had its source elsewhere, when Jake reached 30 Aether points of Intelligence he realized that he had been looking in the wrong place all along. The Aether in him had always been there, he was just looking in the wrong place.

A purple glow in his pupils awakened and his perception of the world changed, offering him infinite possibilities. He realized then what an amazing power Lu Yan had and how she had lied to him.

He felt the flow of Aether within him attached to each of his cells, how it divided into many similar but distinct currents. All of this was occurring in his mind, and he was of course unable to understand anything about the Aetheric Code that made up those currents.

However, just as one didn't need to know the wavelength of light to be able to recognize colours, Jake had no difficulty differentiating between them. Depending on the area of the body and the way the Aether interacted with it, he could easily distinguish one Aether from another.

He then focused on one of the streams of Aether now evenly distributed in his cells and with a thought took control of it.

[Seventh Stat unlocked!]
