

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 119 - Slaughtering Foes

Against his expectations, the exploit did not give him the pleasure he had hoped for. As he connected to his Aether, he realized that his mental connection to it was feverish and unstable. When he tried to interact with it and manipulate it, the effect was as fleeting as a pebble falling into a pond. His flow of Aether undulated slightly before regaining its stillness.

Moreover, the Aether he felt was too difficult to perceive, like a kind of very fine smoke. He had to concentrate with all his strength by closing his eyes to feel anything. At least on this aspect, Lu Yan had not lied. Extrasensory Perception was of little use once it was unlocked.

The Aether he barely sensed in his body was undetectable outside his body. If he focused only on his extrasensory perception, he felt as though he were just a dimly glowing light bulb in the dark. An unpleasant experience that was absolutely forbidden to anyone suffering from claustrophobia or achluophobia.

In any case, he had no time to test the limits of his new faculty. His time off had offered a brief respite to his enemies, who had taken advantage of it to distance themselves from him and surround him.

Nevertheless, his slaughter had not been in vain, relieving Gerulf sufficiently to allow him to catch his breath a little. Despite the

symptoms of unknown poisoning he was suffering from, the speed at which the giant was reaping lives had not diminished a bit.

However, much to Jake's chagrin, it wasn't enough. No more invaders dressed in black had climbed the perimeter wall in a few minutes, but the number of enemies inside the Ludus was still high. Nearly 500 warriors, not counting all the recruits, gladiators and guards who had betrayed Cassius.

Their numerical superiority might have seemed overwhelming, but in the Myrmid Empire what mattered was the strength of the warrior. A first cohort Primipile could probably single-handedly decimate the 10th cohort of a legion. The balance of power between the loyal guards of the Ludus and the invaders in black was similar.

Most of these hooded enemies brought confusion, but posed little threat to these battle-hardened guards. The problem was that it blocked them in place, preventing them from rescuing their master. The traitors could then take advantage of their immobility and the fact that they were engulfed by cannon fodder to finish them off.

Jake estimated that the invaders would eventually win the battle on the surrounding wall within two to three minutes, and then the traitor guards still alive would come to the rescue of those tasked with fighting Gerulf. So the guards had to be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Now that his Aether of Intelligence had passed the 30-point mark, he was able to assess the situation in a new way and take into account many more things at once. His crude attacks with approximate technique resumed with doubled intensity, but this time with near-perfect movement.

Each sword stroke would take the life of an enemy without him seeing it coming whether he attacked them head-on or from behind.

Even though his Aether of Strength had not increased, his ability to concentrate had reached a whole new level allowing him to recruit more muscle fibers during each attack, all with increased synergy between each part of his body.

Of course, his sword technique was far from perfect, but the difference between his way of fighting and that of ten minutes earlier was comparable to that between a novice and an initiate. A gap that was not impassable, but big enough for his enemies to feel the change.

The men in black continued to throw themselves at him and Gerulf as if their lives didn't matter, forcing them to continue to slash and dash tirelessly. The duo's movements were so fast and violent that the air whistled with each stroke of their swords, constantly throwing sliced limbs and sheaves of blood into the air.

After what seemed to him to be an interminable period of time, the flow of the enemy began to dry up, a consequence of the fact that no new enemy had climbed the walls. Confident that he could eliminate these cannon fodder to finally assist Gerulf who was struggling more and more, he accelerated his pace, reaping lives endlessly.

The poison's effect was steadily increasing as each new guard joining the battle was more competent than the previous one. Some of the men in black were also formidable, and on several occasions Jake recognized the characteristic reflection of a legionary's golden breastplate under their black cloak.

Tvu Mwzqatafr iueamrl juzu prtuz ovu fpovmzaow md f Luefou zunmzoare om f Guruzfi. Aii ovulu nzuloaeampl nmlaoamrl juzu plpfiiw mhhpnaut gw mpolofrtare Mwzqatafr jfzzamzl.

Ekhunoamrfiiw npzu gimmt arhzufut ovu iacuiavmmt md guare f

nmjuzdpi Mwzqatafr frt ovuzudmzu fii iueamrl prmdadahafiiw luzsut mru md ovu rmgju hifrl.

This could only mean one thing. A noble clan was behind it all. And to mobilize a legion like this in secret, it could not have acted alone. The Emperor and his imperial legion was absent, but that didn't mean they could act with impunity.

Dodging a stab to his plexus by ducking forward, Jake slipped in under the guard of the last surviving attacker by grabbing his arm, then headbutted him by getting up with a jerk. The victim's nose sunk into his skull, taking half of his teeth with it. The defeated enemy then slid slowly to the ground, clinging weakly to his killer's armor before letting go and never getting up again.

Jake was short of breath despite his stamina and dripping with the blood of his enemies. The fight had been more intense than he had anticipated, forcing him to focus and fight beyond his previous limits.

But the reward was well worth it. In addition to the impressive amount of Aether his bracelet had collected, his Aether stats had also gained about 7 points after defeating all these foes. If those hooded men had been stronger, he could have gained much more.

All in all, there were over 300 dead bodies lying around him, and he reckoned he was responsible for half of the carnage. Gerulf had slaughtered the first half of the enemies as one would harvest wheat, but soon the arrival of elite warriors and former fellow gladiators had neutralized his influence on the battlefield.

Jake had long since lost his shield, which was somewhere stuck in the rib cage of one of the invaders. The round shield in question had been deformed by the many blows and had become unusable.

Calmly he picked up a second sword and looked around to assess the situation.

The hall and the gardens had almost become silent again. Apart from a few shouts and growls, only the clattering sound of a few swords still pierced the silence. It was not necessarily good news though. It meant that a winner on the walls had been decided and they would soon be joining forces.

Cassius' residence and that of the servants was in a much less optimistic situation. The cries of distressed men and women rang out unceasingly, barely muffled by the thick stone walls. A cacophony of all sorts of sounds reached him, from the greasy and perverse chuckles to the desperate cries of the maidservants.

In the servants' residence the resistance had ceased, but the din of the battle still raged in Cassius' residence. Only Priscus and Gerulf had their own rooms on the top floor of the building, but other hand-picked guards occupied some of the rooms on the previous floors.

Aiovmpev Cflapl tat rmo ozplo ovuq hmqniuouiw, ovuw juzu ovu mrul jvm vft lvmjr ovu qmlo imwfi hvzfhouzl ar ovuaz fhoamrl frt guvfsampz. Wvur ovu fifzq jfl lmprtut, fii ovmlu jvm vft ulhfnut ovu nmalmr bmarut ovu daevo, mdour gimhcare mdd fr uroazu hmzzatmz lareiu-vfirtutiw.

Sadly, most had fallen victim to the poison, and even the elite guards were not immune to bribes and corruption. Half of the guards who escaped the poison were indeed traitors, and soon the few loyal warriors found themselves stuck in a fight with an uncertain outcome against their former colleagues.

But even after all this time, all the enemies that slipped through the net in the form of Jake and Gerulf, the recruits and gladiators who

betrayed the Ludus, and all the betrayer guards, the residence was still standing.

The swords continued to clash and every now and then Jake could hear the outcry of pain or rage from someone inside. Yet, the hubbub caused by all these cries and blade clashes was beginning to clear up, indicating that the battle was nearing its end.

As Gerulf slowed down more and more and began to show advanced signs of exhaustion, Jake rushed to the Kinthar to assist him and the battle resumed, the balance between the two forces restored.

The plan suddenly changed when a high-pitched scream from the top floor balcony broke the stalemate that had just set in.