

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 121 - The Most Ridiculous Death

In a split second his Constitution spiked to 100 points, but although he still had a hundred points of Aether left to spend the stat in question refused to increase further.

[Aether Constitution limit reached! Enhance your Aetheric Code to improve further!]

Jake didn't have time to wonder what that meant as at that very moment he rammed into the stone wall like a rocket. Curled up in a ball and with his arms crossed in high guard to protect his face, he expected to be mashed to a pulp, but instead the wall immediately crumbled.

His bones as hard as metal reverberated with a great GONG and he passed through it as if it were only made out of wallpaper. Even so, his soft tissues were not and he was expecting a painful landing. To his surprise, it was not the case.

He crashed into the crushed section of the wall, which had itself buried part of Servius Cassius' desk room. He was bleeding almost everywhere and his skin was covered with bruises and echymosis. His forehead also had a nasty bump and he felt slightly dizzy.

Shaking off the dust and debris covering him, Jake coughed once or twice before leaning on his swords stuck into the ground to get up. At that very moment, a huge stream of Aether invaded his body, giving him a very pleasant feeling of rapture and elation.

'Mmmm? What's happening to me?' Jake asked himself mentally puzzled.

His Aether stats had just increased by almost 10 points again, with the exception of his Constitution, while his Aether storage had just gained another 30 points. Confused, he raised his head and finally realized the mess he'd just gotten himself into.

The room was crowded. On one side to his right stood a Servius Cassius badly wounded and pressing a nasty stomach wound. His face was pale and clenched his teeth in pain. In spite of his wounds, he continued to look at his opponents with an air of defiance, holding them at bay with the tip of his sword.

In front of him stood a Priscus in an even more miserable state. The veteran's body was covered with deep lacerations, a pool of blood at his feet. Like Gerulf, the old Myrmidian had bloodshot eyes and heavy, wheezing breath. His posture was also tense, as if he was bloated or had a stomach ache. He had clearly been poisoned too.

Behind Cassius and clinging to his arm, a young woman he recognized as the one he had met in the infirmary by chance a month earlier was hiding behind the visibly distraught Lanista. The presumed Princess Lucia. No wonder she was so worried that he had recognized her identity when they accidentally met. Lucky for her, Jake was not of this world.

Opposite the cornered trio stood two warriors in shimmering golden armor and helmets wrapped in a hooded Red Cloak. Myrmid Templars?! Jake swallowed heavily, wondering when they had infiltrated the Ludus and what to do to escape. One Templar outside was already more than enough.

Fortunately, Jake didn't recognize the distinctive reflection of a Player's bracelet. Their expression was also colder, focused on their objective, which was to defeat the foe standing in their way, namely Priscus.

Besides these two formidable warriors, Jake also recognized Hector the number three as well as a few other famous gladiators from the top 20. Most of them were badly wounded, proving that even a weakened old lion was better than a pack of hyenas. Priscus had obviously fought hard for his skin, returning ten blows for a wound in return.

An indefinite number of corpses consisting of recruits, gladiators, overconfident Players whom he vaguely recalled, and other men dressed in black formed a human carpet in the room all the way to the end of the corridor outside. Cassius, Lucia and Priscus had defended their lives by retreating until they found themselves cornered here.

Jake noticed at a glance that the Aether, who was supposed to be levitating above the corpses in the corridor, was not there, a sign that a Player had already robbed the place. Yerode? Or Lamine maybe? It could also have been another Player who had hidden his game well and that didn't matter for the moment.

At that very moment, all eyes were on him in awe, looking at him as if he was a UFO. Hector lowered his gaze to Jake's feet, and Jake couldn't help but look at them too, wondering what was wrong. When he saw what lay beneath him and a mountain of debris, Jake couldn't help but exclaim:

‘What the... FUCK!’

The two swords on which he had leaned to get up were stuck deep between the shoulder blades of a corpse. Jake looked down and

recognized the dead body as Krona, number four in the Ludus. He had just accidentally killed the Ludus' fourth best gladiator!

No wonder he got so many Aether in one fell swoop! Full of doubts, Jake wondered if Gerulf was really that imprecise. If the seemingly missed throw was intentional, it was downright terrifying!

'Cough, cough, well done Jake.' Priscus broke the silence to give him his first praise since his arrival in the Ludus.

His negative opinion of Jake and the other recruits in general had faded away, replaced by a *désiré* to laugh. While he was busy fighting the two Myrmid Templars, Hector and Krona had taken advantage of the diversion to make a pincer attack on Cassius and the princess under his protection.

Powerless, he had been forced to allow himself to be wounded so that he could continue to protect them. Even so, they had finally succeeded in reaching the Lanista who was himself shielding Lucia, putting an end to any hope of survival.

The situation had been completely reversed with Jake's masterful arrival. Krona had been buried by the stone wall and before he could even understand what was happening to him, Jake had followed, crushing his spine at several hundred kilometers per hour.

Not content to have completely disabled him and left him for dead, Jake had then planted his swords in both of his lungs in order to support himself to stand up again. Krona's post-mortem face was forever frozen in an expression of incomprehension and resentment.

It was the most ridiculous death for a renowned gladiator that Priscus had ever witnessed in his entire career. And that was what put the veteran in such a good mood and gave him a sudden urge to burst out laughing.

But soon he resumed his solemnized look. Jake's miraculous landing gave them a welcome respite, but the situation was still critical. Jake may have defeated Krona by a stroke of luck, but Hector and the two Myrmid Templars were still there.

Pzalhpl jfl hmrdaturo ovfo vu hmpit tudufo ovu ojm Tuqnifzl ad vu jfl ar nuzduho hmrtaoamr, gpo vu jfl rmo. Hu hmpit nzmfggiw vmit mpo dmz f jvaiu, ovur uSuropfiiw ulhfnu, gpo ovfo jmpit gu aqnmllagiu fl imre fl vu vft om nzmouho Cflapl frt Lphaf.

Luckily for him, Jake wasn't stupid. He had learned his lesson with Lu Yan and Miya earlier. If he got emotional and tried to save everyone, he'd get himself killed. The only chance Priscus had of surviving was to give him a wide berth. Gerulf was willing to sacrifice himself so that his master and Lucia could live, just like Priscus and that was the main goal of the Coach Side Mission as well.

Staring briefly at Cassius and then at the young woman as if to convey his intentions, he abruptly broke the deadlock by grabbing Cassius and Lucia on his shoulders like two sacks of potatoes, giving them an experience similar to the one he had enjoyed a minute earlier with Gerulf. The only difference was that he didn't intend to throw them out the window to see how far and fast they could fly.

Pleased with Jake's initiative, Priscus immediately stood in front of him to ward off the deadly blows of the two Myrmidians. Jake then took the opportunity to calculate an ideal Path to escape and save them, then decisively jumped onto the balcony and then onto the roof in a double jump, just like Mario would do after consuming a Mushroom.

A moment later, Jake and his two burdens had disappeared into the night like ghosts, any chance of chasing them wiped out by Priscus' fierce opposition, who was blocking the access to the balcony slowly showing his canines.

' How about I show you why in my time in the arena I was nicknamed the Dismemberer ? 'The lame gladiator proclaimed as he licked his lips.

Utterly indifferent to Priscus' attempt at intimidation, the Templars kept the same deadpan face. Not so for Hector, who turned pale as he awkwardly took several steps backwards.

After that, the fight on the balcony flared up again, making them forget Jake's fleeting presence a moment earlier.