

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 122 - Finally Someone Trustworthy

The Jake who leapt off the roof was nothing like the one who had jumped into the battle with Gerulf a few moments earlier. All of his Aether stats had been boosted by his victories, his physical attributes having been upgraded by about 16 points, and his Constitution reached the 100-point mark.

His Intelligence had crossed the 30 point mark, while his Perception had also increased slightly. In addition to this was the acquisition of the Seventh Stat, Extrasensory Perception. On top of that, he still had a little more than 100 Aether points available to invest at any time.

Determined not to waste Priscus' sacrifice, Jake used his Shadow Guide as a compass to quickly flee in the optimal direction. Sprinting and bouncing on the roof of Cassius' residence like a kangaroo, each of his footsteps would crush some of the brick tiles that made up the roof and shake the building. For the sake of discretion this was a failure.

The Templar Player, mired in a fight to the death against Gerulf, didn't fail to notice him and fired arrow-for-arrow in his direction without wasting any time. Jake was far enough away and responsive enough to not be fooled, though, and jumped directly from the roof on the other side of the building for cover. The arrows whistled in the air above him, raising a gentle breeze and then continued their trajectory to infinity and beyond.

This gave Gerulf the diversion he needed to shorten the distance to his opponent, however, and a split second later the Templar had to draw his sword to block the huge blade of the furious giant.

Jake, on the other hand, had neither the time nor the inclination to witness this fight. His Shadow Guide hadn't reacted to the approach of the arrows, proving once again that the Oracle wasn't infallible. He had jumped off the roof in a hurry, and it was the first time he had ever jumped from so high. If he hadn't had such high agility he probably would have crashed when he landed. He probably would have come out of it intact thanks to his constitution, but his two dead weights might have died as a result.

Once in the garden behind the building, Jake sprinted at breakneck speed, the sudden acceleration pressing the skin, hair and lips of Cassius and Lucia backwards, giving them a funny expression.

Their current grimace reflected that of a person with vertigo after a few loops on a roller coaster. Their pale faces and frequent gagging indicated that they were about to vomit.

Urdmzoprfoiwiw, oval jfl rmo ovu oaqu om lomn. Gzftpfiiw fhhuizfoare, Jfcu zufhvut val omn lnuut md 400 frt f duj caimquouzlnuz vmpz, ovur zfhut om ovu zulaturhu md ovu zuhzpaol frt eiftafomzl om vatu Cflapl frt Lphaf.

For a brief moment he thought of simply jumping over the walls and telling them to hide somewhere in the bushes until the battle was over, or even run away with them as far away as possible. But he realized that this was the worst strategy to adopt.

Once the enemy had Players working for him, it was extremely easy to find them. If someone wanted to find the Princess, the Oracle would show him the Path. In other words, there was no ideal hiding place. No matter how clever he was, it wouldn't make any difference.

In that case, what better way than to simply put them somewhere where it would be easy for him to defend them. That was the current plan that his Oracle was following, and the Shadow Guide was heading back to his former residence to do just that.

Jake was bound to meet Carbo and his acolytes, but after the previous battles he wasn't so worried. It would certainly be an uphill battle, but he could certainly win it.

'We can go to my sister Livia's house...' Lucia proposed in a weak and exhausted voice.

'Cough, cough, no way!' Cassius countered with blood spattering on Jake's armor much to his regret.

Jake quickly assessed the possibility with the Oracle, and then refused. He could indeed keep them safe there for a while, but the Oracle had still opted to defend them here in the Ludus. If Servius Cassius' Ludus was infested with spies and traitors despite his precautions, Princess Livia's Ludus was unlikely to fare any better. Not to mention the possibility that Livia could also be part of the conspiracy.

'My sister would never hurt me!' Lucia protested at the reaction of the two men. She couldn't see Jake's face, but his silence said a lot about what he was thinking.

It didn't matter. The more enemies he killed, the stronger he would be. Seconds later he reached the residential area of the recruits and gladiator. Without losing his momentum, he bent his legs slightly and leapt into the air more than eight meters high to land on one of the carved frescoes decorating the outside of the building.

Tvu ifrtare jfl rmo suzw lcaiidpi jaov ojm iafgaiaoaual mr val lvmpituzl frt vu gâzèiw qfrfeut om hplvamr ao lpddahauroiw om

nzuSuro ovu Lfralof frt ovu jfrouf nzarhull dzmq lqflvare ovuaz lcpii fefarlo ovu lomru jfii.

He then quickly climbed up the facade to the roof, which he crossed in a few steps and then slid down the wall across the patio to the window from which Jake, Lu Yan and her brother had jumped earlier to escape from Carbo and his three sidekicks.

Jake then dropped them off one by one, letting Cassius go first. He then went in through the window in turn, checking behind him to make sure no one had seen him go in. Luckily the courtyard was as deserted as ever, the blaze and the clash of swords and shields in the main residence capturing the full attention of any potential witnesses.

When Jake looked down the corridor on the first floor where his room was located, he could not help but be astonished at the scene. It no longer had anything to do with the clean, sparkling hallway he had fled.

Half of the wooden doors had been smashed or broken down, sheaves of blood had repainted the floor like an abstract painting of contemporary art, but above all there were corpses. Corpses everywhere. Most of the stone walls had also been cracked, when they were not fully destroyed.

In the middle of the corridor, sitting on what appeared to be a pile of human corpses stood a broad silhouette. Hugo. He was the jovial recruit who got along well with everyone. When Jake recognized the bodies he was sitting on he couldn't help but sigh.

Carbo, former number 6 of the gladiators and his three companions, the 7th, 9th and 11th ranked, composed this flesh sculpture that served as a chair for his Ordeal fellow comrade. Their expressions

of indignation and the seriousness of their wounds showed that they had fought hard for their lives before finally dying.

The tall, chubby fellow with the sympathetic features was also at the end of his rope, but still very much alive. He had a few nasty wounds, his large bronze shield was totally unrecoverable, but he had won the battle. He had obviously managed to avoid the poisoning.

To be on the safe side, Jake went ahead of Cassius and Lucia to check on Hugo's intentions. He didn't look like he was in any condition to fight, but one could never be too careful.

'Traitor?' Jake only said one word to test the big guy.

Lmmcare pn fo vaq frt giarcare luSuzfi oaql fl ad vu jfl tfxxiut,  
Hpem laqniw zuniaut:

'I wouldn't be in this state if I was.'

'You could also be a traitor among traitors.' Jake replied. 'What proof do I have that you haven't betrayed them too?'

'I can give you access to my Oracle to prove I have nothing to hide.'

Jake thought it was a valid reason, he would never have taken that risk himself anyhow. He then slowly approached the big man to put his bracelet on his without ever stopping pointing his sword at him. With their Oracles in contact, Hugo accepted the request for access as promised and Jake was able to confirm that he was clean.

At least his Oracle Rank was the same as his own.

'Xi, is it possible to fake his Oracle Rank?' Even though Jake was pretty much convinced Hugo was on his side, he still asked the question.

[No. Even if there's still the possibility that my memories have been altered, I'm 99% certain it's impossible. Anyone who can fake his Oracle Rank is an enemy of the Oracle. If a Player has the authority to change his Rank, then he is on a mission for the Oracle, of that I am certain.]

‘Good.’

He could finally trust someone in this damn Ludus.