

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 123 – Anticlimatic end

‘Are you the only survivor in the building?’ Jake asked without much hope, leaning against one of the cracked corridor walls to keep an eye on the window to his right and Hugo to his left.

‘Of course. The gladiators who weren’t killed by Carbo and his group won’t make it through the night, though. The poison did too much damage to their bodies. If they’re not dead yet, it won’t be long now. Thomas, on the other hand, is still alive. He fought with me, but was badly wounded. He’s resting in his room while I stand guard. He needs emergency care.’

‘Thomas...?’

Jake suddenly remembered that it was Kyle’s rival, the one he lost to every time. Surprisingly, this Thomas had survived and wasn’t one of the traitors. That was the second good news of the night.

Hugo looked at the two people behind Jake with curiosity. He obviously recognized Cassius, the owner of the Ludus, but the emaciated young blonde woman with olive skin raised his doubts. Nevertheless, he had the good sense to keep his questions for later.

After that, Jake briefly inspected Thomas, who had already lost consciousness. Hugo had made makeshift bandages with the help of his Oracle, but first aid was not his specialty. The wine and alcohol

had been poisoned, so he hadn't even been able to use them to disinfect the wounds.

He then instructed Cassius and Lucia to stay in his room to avoid being exposed through the corridor's window, but asked them to keep in mind that the stone wall could still be destroyed.

Remembering how Jake had accidentally killed Krona, the two took great care to sit in Jake's room against the corridor wall and not the outside wall.

Jake then checked Servius Cassius' wound, and it turned out it wasn't that bad. The gash was bleeding heavily, but no vital organs had been touched. As long as Cassius continued to compress the wound until proper care could be found, he would survive.

Coming out of his chambers, Jake leaned against the corridor wall again, his hands firmly clasping the hilt of his two swords as he waited for a hard fight. Every second he expected to see Hector, Yerode and Lamine or one of the Myrmid Templars appearing at the top of the stairs or behind the window.

The seconds, then the minutes passed horribly slowly, Jake and Hugo's vigilance at its peak all the way through. Jake quickly explained to Hugo what had happened to him and the Templar Player he had met. He refrained, however, from broaching the subject of Lucia's identity. He revealed that the Oracle was not infallible, but he didn't discuss why.

Hugo was no genius, but he was no fool. Jake didn't trust him yet, but it wasn't necessary as long as they could help each other.

After a long, indefinite period of time, Jake, who was sweating profusely from watching for a new enemy, suddenly realized that no

one would come for him. Listening, he also noticed that the screaming and the clash of swords had stopped.

Cautiously, Jake walked to the window with his swords raised and ready to parry an arrow or a surprise attack, but no foe was waiting for him behind in ambush. The fire that had raged a few hours earlier was beginning to die down and many slaves were busy spilling buckets of water to contain the flames.

The main residence of Cassius and his wife was essentially in ruins because of the fighting, while the servants' residence had been practically reduced to ashes. Not gullible though, Jake consulted his Oracle to ascertain the safest place for Cassius, Lucia and himself and realized that there were multiple Paths depending on how he phrased it. The Ludus was totally safe.

There was still the possibility that an enemy Player could evade the Oracle's Prediction System, but it meant in any case that the enemy army had been defeated or retreated. Reassured, he signaled to Lucia and Cassius that they could leave the room.

Tired but relieved, the duo followed him outside, Hugo closing the guard behind them with a vigilant attitude. Walking slowly but surely to the entrance hall of the residence where Gerulf had fought, Jake recognized a familiar silhouette.

Gerulf was now sitting on the floor with his back to him. The flame's glow in the night reflecting on his dark skin covered with blood crusts made him look very solemn and mysterious. Around him lay hundreds of corpses, many of which Jake could boast of being responsible for.

In front of the Kinthar, an arm was lying among ashes and broken marble. Jake would have recognized it among a thousand because it was the arm of the Templar Player. How could he be so sure of

that? Simply because the Oracle device was still visible in the form of a bronze armguard. The Aether glow was impossible to mistake.

Jake didn't know what happened when a Player or even a normal Evolver had the limb to which his bracelet was fused cut off, but it certainly wasn't good for the victim.

'Xi, any thoughts?'

[The Oracle device merges with your body and mind, not just your arm.] Xi began to explain in a professorial tone.

[Part of the metal making up the bracelet circulates in your bloodstream like a symbiote. However, the alloy making up the bracelet is very special and a number of functions rely on this material.]

[When the arm wearing the bracelet is severed, much of the metal making up the Oracle device is lost. The direct consequence is the deactivation of all functions requiring Aether and the loss of all the Aether stored inside the bracelet. Restoring its condition is no small task and carries a penalty].

'In other words, as strong as this Player may be, he screwed up completely. Serves him right. 'Jake chuckled in a good mood.

[Don't underestimate him because he failed. If he fought Gerulf willingly, there are only two possibilities. Either he was promised a reward commensurate with his sacrifice if he knew he would lose, or he was given the Oracle's Mission to defeat Gerulf at any cost.

Whether or not he failed means that there was a probability of success, even if it is a very small one. Are you confident that you can defeat Gerulf, even if he's poisoned?]

Indeed, that did not call into question the strength of the Templar Player. Gerulf's body was covered with deep cuts and most of his

bones were broken. His jaw was fractured, his mandible hanging limply without being able to close his mouth. The giant's breathing had subsided, a sign that his body had overtaken the poison, but victory had clearly not been that simple.

Even an arrow faster than the speed of sound had failed to pierce his skin, and yet he had still ended up in such a state. Even with one arm, it was still an enemy that Jake had no chance of defeating. He still picked up the bracelet for further inspection, though.

'How you doing, buddy?' Jake casually asked the giant as if they had just finished their sparring bout for the day.

Opening his eyes, the Kinthar grunted in response.

'I've sheen beshter days. Need shleep. Heat... Undgerground...'

After that, Gerulf sank back to sleep and didn't talk anymore, but Jake had got the message, despite his broken jaw making it difficult to articulate.

Under the shocked gaze of Cassius, Hugo and Lucia Jake carried the giant on his shoulders to his usual training field and put him down on the ground. He then retrieved a shovel from a nearby box and dug a hole in the grey earth. He then rolled Gerulf's body inside and closed the hole.

Jake then planted a dozen torches around Gerulf's 'grave' to give him the warmth he needed before walking away with a satisfied look on his face as Hugo looked on in amazement.

'Sleep well, Gerulf.'

After that, the group met on the top floor in Cassius' office, Priscus and Khazus bandaging their wounds with many groans. Lu Yan, Lu Yifeng and Kyle were at their side, seemingly free of wounds.

Considering that Khazus had survived, they had achieved their goal and yet their expressions were gloomy.

‘What has happened?’ Jake asked Kyle, the only person in the trio he felt he could trust, or at least who feared him too much to deceive him.

Glancing hesitantly at Cassius behind him, the Playboy said gravely:

‘I’m sorry for your loss. Licinia is dead.’