

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 129 - The Final Day

The next 19 days proved to be an ordeal not only for Princess Lucia but also for Jake and all the other Players. With the Coliseum games being maintained, they were doomed to fight in a situation where their defeat was foreseen and desired.

Servius Cassius of course knew that they were plotting against him and didn't know who had given the idea for these games to the Crown Prince of the Sextus, but it didn't matter. A few days later, Gerulf had finally emerged from the ground fully recovered and with his help the Lanista had been able to investigate much more actively.

There was no longer any doubt that the noble clans knew that he was holding the missing princess. The Quintus and the Tertius had probably fomented the attack, their objective being to recover the princess in order to put pressure on the Emperor.

According to the latest news, Creece was working for the Tertius, who were known to have control of part of the army and also had an excellent spy and intelligence-gathering system.

They worked closely with the Quintus, who were the richest noble clan with trade agreements throughout the Empire and beyond. The reason Creece had not opened Will's letter and prevented him from informing Jake of the poison was simply because he was undercover. The Quintus did not know that Creece was a spy for the Tertius before the attack on the Ludus began.

Miya was working for Crown Prince Lucius. The latter didn't give a damn about saving his sister. He barely knew her, and had no talent for fighting like his father. For a long time, he had been preparing to sell his throne to the highest bidder at the death of his father.

In his view, the fact that Lucia was the 'favourite' princess of the Emperor was a sign that she was more important than he was and that Augustus intended her to inherit the throne. He could not be further from the truth, but it was reason enough for him to be jealous and hostile towards his little sister.

When Quintus Helvius had contacted him with a few other noble families and told him where Lucia could be and what their plan was, he had not hesitated for a second. The nobleman had immediately changed the program of the Coliseum originally planned to destabilize the Luduses of Cassius and his sister Livia.

Meanwhile the noble clans had gathered to plan an attack on Cassius' Ludus. The reasons were many and even after a week's investigation, not all the answers had been found.

The Temple of Myrmid, which was mainly run by the Primus and Secundus, wanted Gerulf. He was the perfect sacrifice that had eluded them for far too long. The other clans wanted Lucia to put pressure on the Emperor, but also to neutralize a formidable opponent.

Miya who worked for the Crown Prince of the Sextus had played an ambiguous role. She had indeed poisoned the recruits, but they had been completely spared, having taken only a harmless sleeping pill. The reason given was that they needed living Throsgenians for the games. When Jake had read Priscus' report, he could not help but look daggers at Lu Yan.

The young woman in question had assumed an expression of doubt, oscillating between embarrassment, shock and regret, but Jake was no longer fooled by her game. It didn't matter how sincere she was, as long as her Oracle Rank was higher than his, he would avoid her like the plague.

Jake was the paranoid type at heart, who didn't trust easily. If there was an Aether Skill that could read people's thoughts, that would be the first thing he would try to acquire.

The cyanide had been prepared on the spot in the kitchens. Many of the traitors in charge of making the meals had simply preserved pits and seeds and then poisoned the gladiators and loyal guards of the Ludus. Ricin had been introduced by Creece and supplied via a delivery from a merchant working for the Quintus.

Finally, the Quartus had mobilized several cohorts of one of their legions to attack the outer walls. The gladiators and traitor guards worked mainly for the Quintus and Tertius, that was the final conclusion. The fact that their blood supply had been robbed was clear evidence. No nobleman would give his blood to be traded. There was no problem, however, selling other people's blood, and it was an extremely profitable market.

Yuzmtu frt Lfqaru vft guur zuhmeraxut fl ruj zulaturol md ovu Tuzoapl tmqfar frt Jfcu lplnuhout ovu ojm quzhurfzaul vft guur lutphut gw ovu zujfztl nzmqalut gw Czuuhu. Tvu hzmmcut frt tuhuaodpi rfopzu md ovu Sqpeeiuuz lpaout ovuq juui frt vu jfl rmo fo fii lpznzalut ovfo ovuu emo fimre lm juui.

There was one advantage, though, to this mutiny, and that was the attention Cassius was paying now to those who had remained loyal. Even the recruits were entitled to abundant food and better qualities, and the blood they received was less diluted.

This was nothing for Khazus and Priscus since they gave blood of their own free will, but the fact that the blood supply had been stolen obliged them to have a lot of blood drawn in a short period of time. Even if it was nothing with their Vitality, to have blood drawn like that was a real sacrifice on their part.

Over the next 19 days, Jake continued to train by supervising Lucia's training and with the noble blood he received his Aether of Strength, Agility and Vitality reached the 100-point mark a few days after the Ludus attack. Only Intelligence and Perception were left to max out, but these stats were much harder to stimulate.

As for his body, it was no longer progressing or barely progressing at all. He was as muscular and athletic as his genetics allowed, and continuing to train physically served no purpose other than to maintain his body. That's why he spent the rest of the preparation working on his techniques and practicing meditation.

As he got to know Lucia better, and since he had to remain at her beck and call under all circumstances, he ended up spending most of his evenings talking to her and playing a strategy game popular in the Empire, 'Heroes' War', which was a kind of complex chess game based on the mythology of this world.

Facing Lucia in this game was like sparring with Gerulf. It was impossible to win, but as long as you didn't give up and did your best, you would reap incredible benefits. His Intelligence, Perception and even his Extrasensory Perception were boosted quite a lot.

If it wasn't a priority to increase the Princess' fighting prowess, he probably would have forced her to play with him from morning to night. Cassius had praised his initiative to train the Princess. The

Lanista was pessimistic at first, but when he saw her increase her strength tenfold in just one day, he changed his mind.

At last they learned one morning that the Ludus of Livia had also been attacked, proving that the noble clans originally did not know where the missing princess was hiding. Only Hector and a few Myrmid Templars had seen the princess and this showed that they had not shared the information with the other clans.

The attack on the Ludus of Livia meant that they knew all about the romance between Queen Antonia and Cassius' father, who was the real father of the two princesses.

Pzarhull Lasaf vft lvmzoiw fdouzjzftl salaout ovu Lptpl md Suzsapl Cflapl ar luhzuo om talhpll f qpopfi nifr dmz ovu ruko gfooiul ar ovu Cmialupq. Szfzv frt ovu movuz Pifwuz jvm immcut iacu f dmzquz qaiaofzw qfr fhmqnfraut vuz frt Jfcu jfl lpznzalut om talhmsuz vmj qphv lvu vft hvfreut. Waov vuz lvarare fzqmz, ojm ljmztl frt vuz fiuzo gpo hmqnmlut uknzullamr, lvu omm luuqut om vfSu prtuzemru arourlaSu ozfarare.

Under Lucia's urging, Cassius had allowed the two sisters to spend some quality time together, and Jake had to stand guard while the two young women continued crying and laughing endlessly.

As the date of the Coliseum games drew nearer, the atmosphere in the Ludus became more and more oppressive. It was obvious that Cassius was becoming more and more anxious, while Gerulf, Priscus and Khazus were less and less present, constantly patrolling the surroundings of the Ludus.

When the morning of the 60th day dawned, not a single Player still present in the Ludus exchanged a single word. Everyone put on their armor, even though only Jake, Hugo, the siblings, Thomas and Kyle had been allowed to carry weapons before reaching the Colyseum.

Cassius then gathered all the Throsgenian recruits qualified to participate in these games and gave them a grandiloquent speech to give them some courage, reminding them that the survival of the Ludus as well as their own depended on their victory. Jake listened to the speech with one ear, but couldn't help yawning repeatedly, attracting the glare of Priscus and Khazus.

When the speech ended, the group of slaves led by Cassius finally set out for Heliodas, their equipment and aura comparable to that of the first cohort of the Empire. The final day when their destiny would be decided had arrived.

[Time remaining in the Ordeal: 3 hours and 56 minutes]