

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 132 - Let the battle begin!

BADUM! BADUM! BADUM!

The drums' thud was much louder now that only a grid separated them from the arena. The beating of the drums hammered into their skulls, almost plunging them into a kind of tribal and hypnotic trance.

For Jake, the rhythmic and heady sound of the drums helped him to calm down and remain in the semi-meditative state he had learned to appreciate when he was practicing his Extrasensory Perception. For others, this reminded them of how close they were to dying.

Pssssssssssssssssshhhhhhhht!

Alerted by the sound of flowing water, Jake turned around to find a shaky recruit peeing himself. He was looking straight ahead as if nothing was happening, but his tense grimace, sweat, and chills indicated how terrified he was. He was the only one who lost his temper like that, but no one dared to make fun of him under the given circumstances.

Indifferent to this person's fate, Jake stretched his head towards the gate to try to catch a glimpse of the crowned heads in the bleachers. Unfortunately, the only bleachers he could see were occupied by the common plebeians of Heliadas.

‘Ladies and Gentlemen! ‘A powerful baritone voice echoed directly over them. The voice was so mighty that it sounded as if it were using a megaphone. Jake suspected the Imperial Lodge was right above them with the other noble clans.

‘The blood of these brave warriors has been spilled! Some have died at the hands of their foes while others have been filled with glory at the sheer might of their swords today! But all of these duels were nothing more than an amusement compared to what we are offering you now! ‘

**BADUM! BADUM! BADUM!**

The resounding sound of the drums backed up the speaker’s silence, creating a mysterious and intriguing atmosphere that captured the attention of his audience. Apart from the drums, the Coliseum was completely silent except for a few whispers here and there.

‘As you know, war rages far to the north of the Empire. ‘The presenter resumed with an air of suspense and mystery. ‘ In these icy, snow-covered lands reside a primitive barbarian people barely able to speak their own names. It is our Empire’s duty to show them the way! To bring them the knowledge and glory of our illustrious hero Myrmid! It is the duty of every Myrmidian to prove our worth by facing them! For such is our nature! ‘

With each sentence, the orator’s tone rose in intensity with the clear intention of exalting the crowd. This was not his first public performance.

‘Alas! These Throsgenians proved to be more formidable opponents than anything we’ve ever known before... Their physique is robust and their ferocity unparalleled. The first battles ended in bitter defeat! But that was without the reinforcements of our Imperial

Legions! AS soon as His Highness Augustus and General Flavius attacked with their invincible armies, the Throsgenians were immediately repulsed.

‘What I propose to you today is to relive this legendary battle where General Flavius brought these hordes of primitive barbarians to their knees!’

The overexcited shouts of the audience resounded right after the presenter’s words. The show they had come to see was finally about to begin. When the crowd calmed down again, the voice shouted out once more.

‘ Let the Throsgenians in!’

**BADUM! BADUM! BADUM!**

The metal grid separating them from the arena suddenly began to squeak, then a rattling of gears activated as the grid was slowly raised. When the only obstacle separating them from the arena was gone, Jake stepped decisively into the arena, draped in his coyote fur.

A iaevo zfar guefr om dfii mr vaq fl vu urouzut ovu ifzeu lftrw dauit. Tvu fzurf immcut usur gaeuz rmj ovfo vu jfl arlatu. Baeuz ovfr f dmmogfii dauit. Hu immcut pn frt lfj f hiplouz md gifhc himptl, ovu gipu iaevo md f diflv md iaevorare lozufcare fhzml l ovu lcw dzmq oaqu om oaqu. Tvur imjuzare val uwul liaevoiw, vu lhfrut ovu giufhvuzl ar lufzhv md ovu rmgiu hifrl. Hu vft rm ozmpgiu dartare ovuq.

Looking behind him, from where the presenter’s voice had come from, he recognized the lodges of the nobles. These were more spacious, with real leather seats that looked comfortable. They were also sheltered from bad weather by a carved marble roof. The

largest imperial lodge in the middle was occupied by several thrones aligned, occupied by personalities that he had no trouble recognising.

The Crown Prince occupied the central seat, and although this was the first time Jake had ever met him, his haughty air was not enough to hide his resemblance to Princesses Lucia and Livia. Next to him he recognized Agamnen, one of the high priests of the Temple of Myrmid, as well as a few other luminaries, including Quintus Helvius and another man he did not know. Cassius and Lucia were nowhere in sight.

While Jake watched them, he was watched in turn, and one of the imperial guards in charge of the prince's security did not like what he saw. Some of these Throsgenians made him uncomfortable, something that only happened to him in the presence of a legate or general.

He was in charge of protecting the prince, but felt like a lion in a cage with hyenas. Agamnen was closely protected by two elderly Myrmid Templars, and if on the surface they were only there to protect the old priest, he didn't trust these fanatical brutes.

As Cassius' recruits entered the arena, Lucia's gladiators and a few other Throsgenians chosen to complete the number also entered through other entrances. For the second time since the Ordeal began Jake saw Sarah again, but to his surprise he saw someone else he never thought he would meet here. Will Hopkins.

The former businessman with glasses was more muscular than before and seemed more determined and hardened. However, his body was covered with wounds and half-healed bruises. Although he showed no sign of it, he was pale and his breathing was slightly

jerky. No doubt, warning Jake had not been without consequence for him.

‘Can you fight ? ‘Jake whispered beside him without looking at him so as not to draw attention to them.

‘Don’t worry about me. My injuries won’t affect me. ‘Will promised, clenching his teeth.

‘Oh?’ Jake kept his other questions to himself. They’d have plenty of time to catch up at the end of this Ordeal.

Waovmpo lfware frwovare, Sfzfv jficut hfiqiw omjztl ovuq, dmiimjut gw ovu 50-wufz-mit Vacare-iacu Pifwuz jvm vft film guur gmpevo mpozaevo gw Pzarhull Lasaf. Hu luuqut om euo mr juui jaov ovu wmpre gimrtu frt val fooaoptu fnnufzut om gu dzaurtiw omjztl ovuq.

‘Erwin Gunther. Former astronaut with the rank of Colonel. I had retired shortly before the Earth was transported. ‘ The middle-aged man with the neatly trimmed beard shook hands with Jake, Will and Kyle without the slightest change of expression. His handshake was firm and decisive, as one might expect from a former military man.

Sarah and Erwin both wore fur from an unknown creature on their shoulders, proof that they had agreed to embody the Throsgenian commanders with the risks that this entailed. No other gladiators in Livia’s Ludus were wearing fur although there were a number of Players present.

In any case, Jake had no time to study his new allies or plan anything, since at that very moment the speaker’s voice rang out again. The man in question was obese, pink-skinned like a pig because of alcohol abuse and high blood pressure.

His golden hair was ridiculously curly and his light blue toga was covered with floral patterns. And yet, despite his ludicrous appearance, his baritone voice had an incredible trunk, resonating to the farthest reaches of the Coliseum without any assistance.

‘Behold these two hundred ferocious barbarians! These are the weapons their people used to fight our Empire! So as not to disrupt their tradition, we have returned their equipment! ‘

No one in the crowd dared to laugh or make a remark, but not everyone was fooled. Some of them had their own Throsgenian or Kinthar slaves and although the weapons they forged were rather rudimentary, they still made excellent blacksmiths. The empire wanted an easy victory. It was more of an execution than an exhibition.

‘While these Throsgenian barbarians occupied the plain of Eridor, laying siege day and night to the camp of the 3rd legion, General Flavius finally went into action with the elite of his legion. Witness this legendary battle once again. Bring in the Myrmidian legionnaires!

‘Let the battle begin! ‘