

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 81 - Slave auction (part 1)

This Livia was a sublime young woman with long light brown hair, olive-coloured skin and golden irises sparkling with mischief.

Unlike the merchants, nobles, politicians and priests present, she wore no toga.

Although she wore a white tunic just like them, the usual toga worn over it had been replaced by a bronze breastplate. Two symmetrical felines facing each other adorned this one. Instead of the characteristic sandals of the Heliodian citizens, she wore closed leather shoes with protective bronze plates extending to her knees like leggings.

Apart from that, she wore a metal shoulder pad on her right shoulder forming the head of a roaring smilodon. A sword with a black leather sheath without flourishes rested at her belt and a long navy blue cape was floating behind her, attached to her armour by two gold fasteners again in the shape of a feline's head.

Under her left arm and wedged against her chest, she was holding a bronze helmet with a navy blue crest reminiscent of the phalanxes of ancient Greece. Despite this resolutely warlike appearance, her thighs, biceps and wrists were adorned with golden metal hoops and her fingers with rings studded with precious stones. Her nails were also varnished red and her angelic face delicately made up.

It was a contradictory appearance that was sure to attract attention. Jake couldn't help but wonder if it was all a masquerade or if this princess was actually able to wield the gladius sword hanging at her hip.

Regardless, many seemed to fear her, as her presence had brought discomfiture to many of the merchants and nobles present. Even Toleus, their jailer, looked gloomy.

'Please don't mind me. 'Livia relaxed the heavy atmosphere with a gentle wave of her hand. 'I'm only here to watch. »

Hearing this, Toleus and most of the nobles present visibly relaxed. There was still hope. Not everyone was bothered or disturbed by the appearance of the princess, but if she decided to compete for these slaves, their purses would suffer bitterly.

The Emperor's eldest daughter was known to hate games of politics, to be a determined woman who loved men's hobbies, with a loud laugh that flouted all decency. She was also known to be extremely tough in business.

She was so passionate about gladiatorial combat that she established her own Ludus, the gladiators she trained being among the fiercest in the kingdom. The fact that few dared to oppose her when she chose a slave was certainly not a coincidence.

'In that case,...' Toleus, the auctioneer bowed respectfully to the princess, 'Let the bidding begin! »

'This first batch of Throsgens slaves containing ten well-built men and ten fertile and eye-pleasing young women starts at 200 gold pieces. As you know, Throsgenians have limited intelligence, but their physical prowess is superior to most Myrmidians. They also

make excellent sex slaves, easy to excite and control with a few precautions.

‘If no one is interested in this lot, the slaves will then be auctioned individually starting from ten gold coins. »

Even before one of the potbellied merchants in the front row had time to raise his hand to name his price, an authoritative woman’s voice crushed his.

‘200 gold pieces, I’ll take them!’ The princess declared in a tone that would not tolerate any refusal.

Toleus’ face crumbled in an instant. ‘This bitch!’ He should have foreseen that she wouldn’t give up the competition so easily. If the princess was absent as planned, he could have earned at least 350 gold coins from this lot. If she monopolized the next lots like this one, he could consider himself lucky if he wasn’t torn apart alive by General Flavius when he would return.

In spite of the dominant attitude that did not grant the slightest respect to the attending audience, no one dared to outbid the princess’ stake. Worse, no one dared to show their displeasure with a sigh, a clench of teeth or a frown. For her, the auction was no different from a fixed-price fruit and vegetable stall.

‘200 gold coins once? 200 gold coins twice?... 200 gold coins three times, sold out!’ If he didn’t have to keep a poker face at all times, Tolus would surely have bawled his eyes out.

‘Ahem...’ Clearing his throat, the jailer forced himself to continue the bidding. ‘The next lot...’

Extremely deceitful and not born of the last rain, Toleus adopted a delaying tactic. The next batches of slaves he put on the stage were

not as good as the first. The men were older and the women were unattractive, even downright ugly. He hoped that this way the princess would get bored and leave, assuming she was just lucky.

Unlucky for him, the latter was of legendary patience and certainly experienced in negotiations. The best slaves had definitely been saved for last and she was well aware of the futile tactics these slave traders would attempt in her overbearing presence.

The next slave lots were timidly contested by less influential merchants and nobles who simply needed obedient slaves to farm their land or slaves who were not too wild to share their beds.

Whether children, men or women, the Myrmid empire had few taboos, since adulthood was considered to be reached at the first signs of puberty. Moreover, a slave had no rights. If paedophilia was perceived as an obscene crime by the majority, no paedophile would be concerned if his victim was one of his possessions.

It was in these moments that Princess Livia showed her big heart. As soon as an orphaned child appeared in a lot, she would immediately hog it with great intimidation and smugness. When a child was accompanied by his parents or siblings, she would buy the whole family.

It was rumoured that the slaves under her protection had relatively peaceful lives except for those destined for the arena. Even those who fought in the arena did so of their own free will.

The princess offered them very favourable conditions and treated them wonderfully. It was not uncommon for indebted Myrmidian citizens to choose to fight for her ludus, becoming slaves for a set period of time.

Indeed, contrary to what movies suggested, gladiators rarely died in practice. Their training and instruction was expensive and time-consuming. If the benefit was not worth the cost, no Lanista would allow a fight to the death.

Ahhaturol lmquoauql vfnurur, ovmpv, frt tufov daevol juzu zuepifziw mzefracut. Tvu lofcu frt hmqnurlfoamrl juzu laqniw qphv vaevuz. Bpo ovulu juzu zuluzsut dmz lifsul frt jaiiare eiftafomzl mr hmrozfho.

Since the princess had decided to buy all the children, which were often unsold because they were unsuitable for prolonged manual labour, Toleus had regained some colour. The batches of slaves he presented in turn had little potential, with few merchants outbidding the original bid more than once or twice.

Yet it seemed that the reputation of the Throsgenians' great robustness had already been well spread among the upper echelons of the empire. Older slaves who should not have exceeded 7 to 10 gold coins regularly sold for more than 15 gold coins, an unexpected profit that illuminated his day. If the princess left satisfied before he exposed his top-quality merchandise, he had a good chance of being promoted upon his return.

Regrettably, he had gotten too excited too quickly, and the princess' apparent lack of desire to leave soon left him disappointed. Instead, as if stirring sand over his wounds, the Princess walked away for a brief moment, only to return a moment later with a glass cup full to the brim of a pomegranate-colored local fruit juice.

Conceding the obvious, the auctioneer realized that the sale would end in failure. He had finished selling his junk. It was time for him to bring in his luxury goods, hoping that some of them would stand out

enough to stir up the competitive spirit of those whales that hadn't said a word since the beginning of the auction.

One of them, easily recognizable, wore a blood-red toga edged in black, a silver chain with a pendant depicting the hero Myrmid, and a sacrificial dagger at his waist. The man was extremely old, his face bloodless and emaciated as if all the water had been drained from his body. A high priest pontiff of the great temple of Myrmid.

Another was wearing a much more modest white toga, but at the sight of the chest full of gold he carried, and the menacing bodyguards at his side, he was not there to joke.

A third, obese young man, but with the same olive skin and long light brown hair as Princess Livia, was watching the events unfold with an amused look. He wore a ceremonial armour of gold and silver with canine coats of arms resembling hyenas. Compared to the Princess, it was obvious at first glance that it had never served him.

If Toleus managed to arouse the interest of these three men, he could turn this auction nightmare into a disguised blessing if he could curry favour with them. The only thing left to do was to pray that the next batches wouldn't disappoint them.

And in those batches, there was Jake and all the other Players bidding their time.