

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 95 - Karma is a bitch

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The clash of the blades was steadily increasing in intensity. The recruits confronting Gnaeus were now putting up a real fight. Their attacks were fierce, seeking direct kill. Their physical strength and stamina was also unmatched by that of the first tested.

The Players were beginning to show their skills and most of them were relying on their Shadow Guide to respond without hesitation to the gladiator's expert moves. Not all of them had sufficient agility to imitate their Shadow Guide in time, but the Shadow Guide adapted to their reaction time, voluntarily choosing to have them take blows to then counterattack less frequently, but in a targeted manner.

One by one the participants were defeated, further eroding the endurance of Gnaeus, who was now sweating profusely. The gladiator was already regretting having volunteered.

He remembered the last batch of recruits he had been part of six months earlier. He had been the only one to show real potential before being brought back to reality by a simple stab by Khazus, who was then in charge of testing them, Hector the former number two supervising the event.

Of these hundreds of recruits, only the gladiators ranked from 98 to 108 were left, apart from him. The others had either died fighting in the coliseum or given up after surviving their first fight.

Nevertheless, although Gnaeus regretted having volunteered, he did not consider himself to be in danger. These candidates forced him to concentrate and show some of the extent of his talent, but he could fight like this for hours.

Aside from his guilty pleasure of brutalizing and humiliating new recruits, he had another reason to fight. The test slaves had consumed their Myrmidian blood. It was already taking effect, so each victory made him a little stronger, while stealing the strength from the defeated.

He appeared to be benevolent in holding back his blows, but his real intention was purely malicious. He could admit at any time that he was exhausted and let someone else take over, but he knew that by doing so he would incur the wrath of the other gladiators. That tradition was not to be toyed with. In exchange for all these easy victories, you had to be prepared to lose.

Another detail that Khazus did not mention to the recruits was that the greater the difference in strength between two opponents, the less benefit the winner would derive from his victory. The loser would also only be slightly weakened. This was what allowed the very meritocratic system of the Myrmidian society to flourish.

All it took was one lucky victory for a weakling to change his fate. The news of the murder of this or that great Myrmidian warrior was not uncommon. These assassinations were most often orchestrated in the shadows, using a more or less ethical stratagem.

Tvu qmlo nmjuzdpi Mwzqatafrl juzu fhopfiiw vfsare f vfzt oaqu.
Mmlo md ovuq vft ovuaz dmmt frt tzarc oflout gw movuz lifsul frt
zfvuiw ozfsuiiut jaovmpo ovuaz vfrt-nahcut gmtwepfztl. Huhc, ovuzu
jfl usur f zpqpmpz ovfo ovu lqnuzfomz vaqluid liuno jaov val ljmzt,
rusuz iufsare ao guvart, rmo usur ar ovu Tvuzqfi Bfovl.

‘Orange! »

The first Orange had been announced. The fighter in question was a rather robust participant who had been able to use his Oracle correctly. Unlike Jake, he seemed to have practiced a martial art in the past and his reflexes were quite good despite lower Aether stats. If he had had the physical strength of Gnaeus, the outcome would have been uncertain.

After that other slaves were tested in turn, as the initial long line continued to shrink. Some candidates like Jake had gotten the bright idea to put themselves at the end of the line to glean information. This also gave them another advantage, Gnaeus would probably be tired. The poor guy was already giving everything he had.

When it was Kyle’s turn to fight, Jake watched his performance slack-jawed. The Playboy he knew was shy and barely knew how to use a Colt, but he revealed a completely different side of himself with a sword.

As a proper Playboy, Kyle was relatively athletic and pretty good at sports. He played virtual reality games without cheating and apparently often played swordsmen. The virtual reality with helmets and suits didn’t allow you to feel the weight of the blows, but the character in the game would be off-balance or injured by the player’s bad stances.

This meant that all serious players would learn to position themselves correctly and their reflexes after years of VR games were excellent. Jake found that Kyle certainly wielded his sword better than he did.

Past the first uncertain swings, Kyle gained confidence in his Throsgenian body and let himself go completely. Gnaeus was finally forced to use 100% of his skills. The fight was extremely violent.

Knowing that he could not die in this Ordeal and under the influence of Throsgenian hormones, Kyle felt like he was playing his favorite game again. Gnaeus was just another mini-boss to defeat.

After a few intense but memorable minutes, Khazus ended the fight.

‘Red! »

Looking cheeky and proud, Kyle raised his chin with a còcky smile while the pretty servant girl painted a blood-red stain on his cotton tunic. When he joined the already tested slaves, Jake couldn’t help but toss him as he passed by:

‘Wow, did you eat some lion last night? You’d better throw away your Colt and get a machete next time. »

‘Haha... Just a lot of practice on Elder Scroll XVI online...’ Kyle replied embarrassed, not daring to brag to Jake. He knew his limits.

Jake later realized that he might pay for his years of cheating on virtual reality games today. Karma knew how to choose its moment. And when it did, it was a real bitch.

Participants like Jake, addicted to VR, there were a few dozen of them. And none of them cheated as diligently as he did. Once the fear of death was removed and with their newfound Throsgenian strength, most showed decent martial skills.

It seemed that the Earth government hadn’t sat on its hands and really tried to prepare the population for what was to come. All these competitions, the fact that some of the games had their own Olympic

discipline, the large monetary incentives... This took on a new meaning for Jake today.

‘Orange! »

‘Orange! »

‘Red! »

Tvuzu juzu mriw Pifwuzl iudo lofrire ar ovu iaru rmj, frt ovu hmimpzl àllaerut juzu fiqmlo fijfwl wuiimj, mzfreu frt lmquoaqul zut. Grfupl tmqarfout ovu lifsul nwlahfiw, gpo val ljmzt qflouzw jfl rmo qphv guoouz ovfr ovmlu jvm emo ovu zut qfzc.

By some sort of tacit agreement, the last batch of slaves from the auction in the public square of Heliodas had lined up at the end of the line, leaving the less experienced recruits to have a go at it first. After what seemed like an endless amount of time, their turn finally came to show what they were worth.

Yerode stepped forward with a malicious chuckle, cracking his neck a few times to warm up.

‘Show me what you’ve got, big boy. Daddy promises not to hurt you...’

Hearing the words of the dark-skinned Throsgenian, Gnaeus’ eyes widened in shock. Had he just been insulted? He may have been dripping with sweat, huffing and puffing, but he was far from exhausted. What kind of arrogance did this slave have to believe that he could disrespect a professional gladiator like that? What he needed was a good lesson!

‘All right, let me show you what I...’

Gnaeus threw his head back in reflex, almost getting his head chopped off. Their weapons were made of wood, but at that speed a strike to the neck was just as deadly. A stab to the throat would crush his windpipe, while a side slash would probably break his neck.

Yerode wasn't the leader of his mercenary group for nothing. The gladius sword wasn't much different from his military machete and he had wielded this weapon since childhood. His physical strength and agility was only slightly better than Jake's, but his experience and fighting skills were incomparable.

The first sword blow was narrowly dodged by Gnaeus, the second - a downward stroke as violent as a club hit - forced the gladiator to kneel down despite his successful block, the third and final swing smashed his head like a baseball bat hitting a ripe fruit.

With his skull slightly buckled in and dripping with blood, Gnaeus stayed on his knees for a few seconds before collapsing to the ground unconscious. His condition was critical. No one knew if the gladiator was dead or alive.

Al dmz Yuzmtu, vu jmzu f jait lqaiu, lofrtare ofii frt lozfaevo jaov val ljmzt zuloare mr val lvmpituz iacu f gpriu. lr lnaou md ovu hzpuiow md val fhoamr, vu jfl ar fr ukhuiuro qmmt.

He had listened to his Oracle and the reward was well worth it.