

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 96 - Black and White

Well worth it was of course relative. Gnaeus was not yet dead, which meant his Aether could not be harvested. The natives of this world couldn't tell if he was alive or dead, but it was simple for the Players. The diluted Myrmidian blood he had consumed had negligible effects and above all, Yerode was far superior physically to Gnaeus.

The main reason he was in such a good mood was because he had achieved his goal. His main rivals who would be tested after him would have a much harder test, as an easy victory like his had become impossible.

He was obviously not the only one who had the idea to sabotage the test bout of the other participants. The problem was how to pass before him without resorting to violence? The consequences of such a scramble would draw Khazus' attention and the consequences would have been much worse. Therefore, Jake, the Asian siblings and Elias had all chosen to accept this small loss.

The Oracle's problem was that it was not giving any real plans. Just a Shadow Guide to imitate. If it proposed actions that its owner deemed dangerous, he/she had every right to ignore them. Naturally, the Oracle could not be wrong. The perfect Path, which was flawless at the time, would then become obsolete. A new Path was then generated, taking into account the new intentions of the bracelet's wearer.

The real problem was that Jake wasn't confident in his ability to defeat a Yerode wielding a sword. Especially since this time Lamine was there to assist him, unlike their fight in the dungeon where they were chained together.

'Mmmm... he's still breathing. Well, take him to the infirmary.

'Khazus ordered two gladiators to carry him there on a stretcher, not particularly saddened by his comrade's condition.

'What is your name, Throsgenian? The number two of the Ludus then turned to the winner of the duel with a certain severity in his eyes.

'Yerode. 'The cruel participant held his gaze, unhindered by the gladiator's heavy stare at him.

'Yerode... There was no need to hurt him like that. Be glad you were facing Gnaeus and not a veteran gladiator. Red!

Khazus turned to his fellow gladiators, checking to see if any of them wanted to volunteer to replace the poor battered victim. Much to his disdain, no one volunteered.

'It's more fun to watch! 'A gladiator ranked 106th sniggered with embarrassment.

'And pigs can fly?! Just say you're afraid of getting smashed!

'Another older man scoffed at him scornfully in response.

Ignoring the two men's sideshow, Khazus contemplated the opinion of the ludus veterans. Unfortunately, neither of them seemed enthusiastic about taking on the role. The test supervisor sighed long and hard, resolving to test them himself.

'Next! »

It was Lu Yifeng's turn this time. The young man had a well-trained body, comparable to that of a high-level martial arts practitioner. According to their revelations of the previous day, he was also a professional VR player, although incomparable to his sister.

The stance he adopted with his wooden sword was steady and his gaze determined. Seeing Khazus step forward with a sword in his hand did not manage to break his composure. He was used to fighting opponents stronger than him.

'Attack me! »

BANG!

Lu Yifeng seemed like a nice guy at first glance, but his actions were extremely decisive when it mattered. This was the most important quality for a serious fighter or gamer. Knowing how to seize every opportunity. Well, that was the most important quality for success in life.

Lunging forward, the tip of his blade trying to pierce the heart of Khazus ended in failure. The veteran gladiator yawned at the attack, only intercepting it with his own sword. Although Yifeng was thrusting hard with both arms, the supervisor's blade remained motionless, neutralizing the young man's strength.

Realizing that he was absolutely overpowered physically, Yifeng instantly changed his tactics. He began to make a series of technical and unpredictable moves, drowning lethal attacks amongst an overwhelming number of feints and diversions. The movements were somewhere between kendo and fencing, with the addition of inventions of his own.

Regrettably, Khazus was an impossible wall to cross. After a few seconds of curiosity about the rookie's original techniques, he soon

began to retaliate too. Like Gnaeus with the first tested slaves, his attacks gradually gained speed, forcing Yi Feng to slowly reveal his potential. The difference was that the young Chinese was considerably stronger.

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Nevertheless, he was confident that he had more Aether than Lu Yifeng. His agility was not much better than Jake's, and his lightning reflexes seemed to be based on learned automatic reflexes rather than conscious decision. This indicated that his perception of time was inferior to that of Jake.

The conscious reaction time of a normal person was about one second, while that of the best fighters could be as fast as 0.2 seconds. However, it was a mistake to believe that they perceived time five times slower. The speed of information processing in their brains was the same. Only their reflexes differed.

Lu Yifeng had excellent reflexes. His blocks, blows, and counters were appropriate, but rigid. Soon, the blows raining down on him became too fast for him to respond adequately, and he felt like a ship in the middle of a storm. A few minutes later, the verdict rang out:

‘Red! »

Lu Yifeng was dripping with sweat, his legs were shaking and his breath was short. He was at the end of his rope. This confirmed that his Constitution and Vitality were also inferior to Jake's, as was Yerode.

His sister Lu Yan was of a completely different style. It turned out that despite her higher Oracle rank, her intelligence and her unlocked seventh stat, her combat prowess was mediocre.

Her stances, techniques, composure and grace were superior to those of her brother, but her physical condition was inferior. Her agility was similar, but her strength was significantly lower, despite a greater overall Aether quantity.

Without doping, a man's physical strength was generally 40 to 60% higher than a woman's for the upper body, and 25 to 30% higher for the lower body. This meant that strength wise Lu Yan needed 50% more Aether to compete with her brother.

In the short term this was not a problem, but it would become a serious issue for women in the very long term when Aether's stats would become high. If she couldn't find a solution to compensate for the difference in Body Status, she would have to redouble her efforts to remain competitive in the future.

Nevertheless, Jake was given the opportunity to understand what it meant to be an extreme prodigy. Despite her physical inferiority, her gestures were only rigid at first. After a few dozen exchanges, her technique changed, feeding on Khazus'. After being put in difficulty by a movement, the young woman would rectify her posture, not allowing such an opportunity to recur.

'Oh...'

Khazus was genuinely interested now. It was the first time he had seen a recruit capable of adapting and reproducing his movements despite such a physical gap. After a few minutes, which left the young woman on her knees, leaning on her sword planted in the ground so as not to collapse, the fight ended.

‘Black!’

It was the first time such a colour was announced. Even the other gladiators were speechless. This color had only been called out twice in the past by Priscus. When he had tested Gerulf ten years earlier, and then Khazus himself two years ago. It took one monster to recognize another.

If this woman was so exceptional, they were not to disrespect her. She would quickly outshine them in the months and years to come. It would be a foolish mistake to stand in her way.

‘Next!’

Jake then stepped into the middle of the arena. Like the siblings he was prepared to lose to the invincible boss that was Khazus. Even mimicking his Shadow Guide with the body control provided by his Agility stats, his stance was that of an amateur.

Over the previous four months, he had practiced all kinds of movements to increase his fitness or lose excess weight, but he had never had any opponent to practice with. His theoretical knowledge was decent, but his practical experience was non-existent. All his fights against Digestors he had won thanks to his stats, brute strength and animal instincts.

Facing Khazus, the soul of the Digestor he had consumed affected him slightly, inciting him to bite the carotid artery or tear out the eyes of his opponent. He suppressed these erroneous instincts as best he could, focusing his attention on the gladiator facing him.

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‘White!’

