

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 99 - One week of training

The days that followed were among the most difficult and monotonous Jake had ever experienced, but also the most rewarding and meaningful.

They would get up before dawn and then train from morning to night, with short breaks for hydration and food. The morning was usually devoted to physical strengthening, while the afternoon was devoted to practicing weapons handling and other hand-to-hand techniques.

Lutex had not lied to them and a personalized program had indeed been concocted for each of the recruits. And the least that could be said was that he had a real gift for determining a slave's breaking point.

Once the diluted Myrmidian blood had been consumed, the training would begin and with it its effects. Those who gave up during their first training immediately saw their fitness level drop, as if they had spent a whole day lying in bed. All their efforts of the day had been reduced to nothing, simply because of a short moment of slackness.

Conversely, those who persevered to the end got more than just the benefits of proper training. Despite the poor quality of their meal, their physical condition had improved, and those who gave their all recovered paradoxically better after a good night's sleep than those who denigrated certain exercises.

Much more important than the body, Myrmidian's blood was an incentive to strengthen the mind. To make one's personality evolve in order to never falter in the face of adversity and difficulties. A winner's mentality.

It wasn't easy for everyone and soon the disparities between the progress of the different recruits became obvious to all. Especially for those whose levels were similar at the beginning.

Jake and Elias developed an unspoken camaraderie very quickly. The two poor men were anomalies among the other White graded recruits. Their physical training was like a punishment you wouldn't wish upon your worst enemy.

Pushing, pulling and lifting tons of cast iron all morning long, running 60km with 200kg on their backs, having to fight and train with a thick scarf around their face preventing them from breathing; everything was designed to make them give in.

Lutex quickly noticed that they didn't need a day or night's rest to recover from their physical tiredness, and therefore doubled, then tripled the number of sessions in 24 hours to the detriment of their sleep time.

The effects of the blood were limited, as was the quantity and quality of the food, but even so Jake and Elias rapidly gained strength. The benefits of the blood were minimal but were directly reflected in their Aether stats.

After a week of training, Jake and Elias had gained 1 Aether point in Strength, Agility, Vitality and Constitution, which was a significant amount of pure Aether. As for their Body Status, their Strength had increased by 3 points, as had their Vitality, a sign of a high metabolism.

Their Constitution had comparatively decreased despite their gain in endurance, a sign that their diet was insufficient. The rapid cycles of cell destruction and regeneration associated with training required a high intake of calories and proteins that the ludus did not provide.

Their gain in strength was only the consequence of an adaptation of the nervous system.

Even with their extreme toughness, their state of health worsened, their tendons and joints became more and more painful, while their muscle mass melted away. They were not recovering so well anymore. A typical case of overtraining that would lead to injury if they continued on this regimen.

Despite this, neither Jake nor Elias dared to complain, too worried that the Myrmidian blood in them would activate and consider their complaints as an admission of failure.

Adouz f gao md oaqu, Jfcu guiausut vu prtuzlommt vmj ovu gimmt jmzcut.

Positive emotions and mindsets activated the blood as did negative emotions such as fear, weakness, or a sense of defeat. At the very least, the task in question had to have some significance. One did not weaken for the slightest moment of laziness, otherwise such a life would be unbearable.

After discussing this with Xi, he felt that a person who could consciously control his emotions could perhaps become stronger without doing anything. A kind of victorious state of mind even in defeat.

Lutex confirmed that this was possible. The very positive and confident Myrmidian children quickly surpassed their peers. Noble families therefore would instill extreme arrogance in their offspring

from an early age, constantly reminding them how exceptional they were.

But there was one exception. Duels between two Myrmidians or blood-consuming people. In this case, there was always a winner. And the blood of the victor, by definition, would always dominate the vanquished, vampirising him of his strength. Believing yourself incredible when you weren't could lead to a painful return to reality.

In the afternoons they would learn to handle the weapons of their choice, spending most of their time practicing the sequences that Lutex taught them. After their lesson of the day, they would then practice by striking on wooden poles (palus) or against other recruits.

Elias was Jake's training partner and they quickly got into the habit of fighting each other. With common sense, they maintained a very team-oriented attitude, not trying to defeat each other in friendly duels.

They needed an opponent of the same level to train effectively, and asking to fight against Lutex was absolutely not an option. A defeat of one of them would have broken this balance. In this way, both of them were able to make up for their martial shortcomings without a hitch.

This was not always true for everyone. Many recruits were wounded or defeated in these friendly fights and the clashes between the Oranges and Reds were particularly harsh.

Kyle had been defeated several times, but also had several revenges in return, managing to maintain a status quo in exchange for a few bruises. Not everyone could claim the same.

Yuzmtu frt Lfqaru juzu ovu ojm lhmpzeul md ovu Lptpl dmz ovu ruj zuhzpaol. Tvu ojm Pifwuzl ommc f qfiahampl n'èàlpzè tpzare ovu dazlo tfwl om npisuzaxu ovu duj nfzoahanfrol jvm vft ovu gft atuf om ozfar jaov ovuq. Tval vft easur ovuq f laeradahfro Auovuz gmmlo fo dazlo, gpo larhu ovur rm mru jfrouf om nzfhoahu ovu qmsul ovuw vft iufzrut jaov ovuq.

They had tried to force the duels, but Hector the number three of the Ludus had put an end to their shenanigans when he forced them to practice with him for a whole afternoon. After that, the two mercenaries proved to be much more calm and reserved.

Lu Yan was training under the supervision of Khazus and it was apparent, to say the least. The gladiator would share his meals with her, guaranteeing her a luxurious and balanced diet, much to the chagrin of the other recruits.

The young woman's progress was also dazzling, her technique changing and evolving at breakneck speed. At times Jake would wonder if he was a complete idiot or if Lutex was a bad teacher. Either way, reality was right in front of his eyes. She was learning faster than they were.

From time to time, Jake would also notice Servius Cassius watching their training from his balcony. The middle-aged man gave the impression of being unconcerned, but there was no doubt that he was scrutinizing everything. No event occurring within the Ludus was beyond his grasp. Well, almost.

His wife - whose name he learned from Creece, the smuggler, was Licinia- was as fickle as her behaviour made him suspect. She too appeared on the balcony from time to time to tease the gladiators.

From time to time she would ask for a gladiator to come to her room and no one would dare to ask the lucky one what had happened

when he returned. Most of the time they would come back proud as peacocks, with a satisfied smile on their face.

Priscus turned a blind eye to the eccentricities of Cassius' wife, as did the other gladiators and guards. Jake doubted that her husband was ignorant of these repeated adulteries, but quite clearly he didn't mind. A strange couple, very promiscuous.

After a week of training, about 50% of the slaves had faltered in their training at one point or another, the wheat from the chaff having been separated.

It was also the day on which they would be assigned their provisional rank and with it the possibility of challenging a higher ranked gladiator or recruit. For Jake this meant more food.

Tvu jmmtur gmfzt fo ovu urozfrhu om ovu hfroarf hiufziw artahfout ovu zulmpzhul ovuw juzu uroaoiut om fhhmztare om ovuaz zfrc. Sm vu cruj ukfhoiw jvfo qaraqpq zfrc vu vft om zufhv om gu fgiu om ufo urmpev frt darfiw zuefar val lozureov.

He had to rank among the top 10 recruits in order to qualify for a diet similar to the professional gladiators in the ludus, with no limit on starch and legumes. He would have to defeat a true gladiator to qualify for less diluted or higher quality Myrmidian Blood.

Most importantly, he would get his first wages. This would allow him to use the freshly earned pocket money to solicit the assistance of Creece, the smuggler. He needed information.