

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 170 - Digestor herd

Without wasting any time, the group departed. Alas, after a few kilometers Jake quickly became frustrated by Will's slowness. If he had gone hunting alone as he had originally intended, he probably could have covered five or six times that distance.

This was the price he had to pay for spending most of his Ordeal scribing for a crooked Myrmidian. Jake was really wondering what Will got out of it, because he was absolutely certain that this was what the four-eyed man wanted.

And unlike others, he was a man who had proved he wasn't shy or lazy about trying. He could also be counted on, or at least he had proved himself to be trustworthy until now.

So Jake couldn't bring himself to leave him behind. He didn't have many friends, but he knew someone worth befriending.

However, exasperated to see him sweating profusely at the modest pace of a world-class marathon runner, Jake couldn't help but ask the question on the tip of his tongue.

'Will, when you wanted to be a scribe in the first Ordeal, please tell me you had a plan.'

Will almost stumbled when he heard Jake's question, but made up for it neatly at the last minute. Searching for his words, he finally answered in a tone that was meant to be cryptic:

‘A plan? Not really. The only thing I know is that I wanna survive like everyone else, but I also want to prosper as a business man on this planet. My Oracle Paths have always been defined that way. Showing that I spoke Myrmidian to get the attention of Quintus Helvius was what I had to do to get my way. It ended badly, but that was the idea. ‘

Jake remembered the warning letter that Will had managed to get him through Creece, but he had indeed found the man with glasses a few weeks later in the arena to be sacrificed. Quintus Helvius was the fat Myrmidian who had bought Will at the auction back then.

‘How’d you get caught anyway? With the Oracle, it shouldn’t have been so hard to sneak a letter through, right?’ Jake picked up on the subject, mentioning the detail that had piqued his interest at the time.

Will’s face darkened as he recalled the events.

‘There was a weird guy at Quintus’ house. Several actually... At the beginning of the Ordeal, I could still talk to them and the atmosphere was quite positive. I was learning things and I could get some diluted Myrmidian blood. Helvius was very satisfied with my work.

‘Then, one fine morning, everything had changed. Everybody was cold with me, I was getting very formal responses. Nobody spoke, it was scary. Even the chatty instructor who taught me the basics of combat changed overnight.

‘My Oracle device wasn’t working properly either, often making mistakes. After a while I noticed that every day a few slaves and servants would disappear inside the villa, never reappearing again. One evening I heard the cry of one of the slaves and followed them. I

saw her begging as Quintus Helvius ate her alive. I knew something was wrong so I tried to escape.

‘As I returned to my room, I heard two guards mention their plan to poison the recruits and gladiators of the ludus of Servius Cassius to retrieve someone and I wrote a letter directly to warn you.’

‘What about the blood on the letter?’ Jake asked, remembering the blood on the scroll.

‘I had no choice. One of Quintus’ trusted men checks the servants’ mail. One of the only ones still normal, by the way. He valued me and gave me permission to give the letter to Creece, who passed it regularly.’

‘I thought it was good, but at the last moment and without warning he bit me on the arm, as if he wanted to eat me. I killed him with the dagger I had hidden to escape, but immediately afterwards the guards rushed as if they had witnessed everything and I was taken prisoner. I had time to put the letter in the right basket and Creece came to collect the mail without suspecting anything.’

‘End of story. The rest you know. A few days later they took me to a shabby place to be trained to fight in the arena. To be honest, I was super relieved to be out of that building full of cannibals, even though I ate porridge until the end of the Ordeal after that...’

Well, Jake was the only one who knew it was most likely Digestors. These Brain-eaters could remain in hibernation for years, gradually affecting the personality of their host and awakening abruptly. They would then devour the brain and take control of the nervous system to the point where they could perfectly imitate the behavior of their victims.

Since Will and Sarah had not survived until the end of the Ordeal, he proceeded to recount to them what they had missed. They were stunned when they heard the truth and Will looked pale when he realized that he had spent weeks living next to undead people possessed by Digestors.

This only strengthened their resolve to exterminate them. Will was still using the sword that Jake had made for him from a Digestor's forearm, while Sarah now possessed a blood-red blade gladius similar to the one used by the Myrmidians.

Jake didn't know if she had used her Ordeal's credits to acquire it, but this sword looked formidable compared to his machete.

Speaking of Digestors, Jake, who had the best hearing by far, finally heard the shrill cackling that these monsters had the secret to. He warned Will and Sarah at his side and the group moved into battle position, each drawing their weapons. Even Crunch had his claws out, adopting a fierce countenance for the first time.

Sprinting in the direction of the high-pitched shrieks, the group finally reached an open plain with no trees or tall magenta-colored grass. There were a few shrubs, but they could clearly discern their surroundings.

The pack of Digestors were waiting for them in large numbers. This was a far cry from the few Digestors that Jake had faced with Will and Amy. There were enough Digestors in front of them to form a herd. The only problem was they weren't sheep.

However, the fate of these 'sheep' would be the same: to be eaten or to make clothes. To be exact, Digestors' corpses could be used for a lot of things.

Hearing their footsteps all the Digestors turned in their direction. Jake counted over a hundred of them, all of them at least rank 2 by their size. These creatures were as repulsive and uncomfortable as ever, and a few larger and more intimidating monsters were visible in the rear guard, as if they were the shepherds of this herd.

‘There are too many of them. We need a plan.’ Will said with a worried expression, mechanically putting his glasses back on.

Except he hadn’t needed glasses since his Perception had reached 25 points. He didn’t have a choice. During his Ordeal, he couldn’t see much without his glasses, despite the Perception bonus brought by the Throsgen blessing. He had to accommodate his sight by constantly squinting. Thanks to the Myrmidian blood he was consuming, his efforts had been rewarded and his senses had improved.

In response, Jake, Sarah and Crunch headed straight for the Digestors bunch. Jake stormed into a group of Digestors at missile speed, ripping off limbs and crushing bones, metallic scythes and chitin as he went.

When he lost his inertia, he grabbed a Rank 3 Digestor as heavy as a small car by the leg and used it as a club to smash all the monsters around him to a pulp. The monster tried to change the shape of its lower legs, the silvery metallic texture covering them suddenly bristling with thorns.

Jake, far from being disturbed, concentrated his Yellow Constitution Aether in his hand, then the Red one to temporarily increase his grip. The metallic texture cracked instantly, the silvery thorns having no more effect than a hairbrush on his skin. When he was tired, he threw the half-dead monster to the ground and decapitated it with a machete.

Sarah and Crunch weren't bulldozers like Jake, but they were just as deadly. The movements of the young blonde didn't have the grace of a dancer, but they were accurate. One or two strokes were usually enough to take out a Digestor and her movements were fluid enough so that she was never stuck in a perilous position.

As for Crunch, he cleverly followed his master, finishing off the dying Digestors that Jake hadn't deigned to kill and pouncing on the isolated creatures too focused on the man demon that was slaughtering them to bother with a cat.

When one of the monsters happened to notice Crunch, a scratch was enough to break the metal scythes ending their forelegs, while a bite was enough to tear off a significant portion of their flesh, most often their heart or throat. The Digestors' anatomy had many variations, but the vital organs were more or less the same, even if their location differed slightly.

Meanwhile, Will was still frozen in place, watching his companions decimate the Digestors' herd before his eyes. Seconds later, he finally awoke from his trance.

'Fuck, if I just stand here, there won't be any more of them in a few seconds. 'Will cursed as he slapped his cheeks a few times with both hands to pull himself together.

A moment later, Will also threw himself into the fray, blithely slashing Digestors after Digestors as if it were a competition.