

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 47 - First aid

As Amy and Will's battles had come to an end, there was another that was nearing its climax. The attrition tactic Jake had adopted had proven to be an excellent choice.

However, the Digestor had proven to be far more resilient and intelligent than in his wildest scenarios, to the point that he himself looked no better than the monster facing him. Indeed, this Digestor was not like the others.

Although slower, it had no decisive weaknesses and could quickly change the shape of its arms to suit the situation. It never rushed, maintaining a defensive posture. This forced Jake to focus his forces on areas he would have called the creature's greatest strengths, prolonging the confrontation beyond what he thought was possible.

The creature was gasping for breath, countless cuts all over its body. Its tail had been severed and one arm was missing. As for its remaining shield arm, it was cracked and seemed inert, hanging along the monster's body. The white glow in his eye was flickering faintly, while his one eyelid was gradually closing. Jake had almost bled him to death.

His strength was almost gone too, and without the Aether he had absorbed, he was convinced that he would have reached his breaking point long ago. The difference was minute, but the difference in stamina became more and more apparent as the battle progressed.

When he felt like he was about to give in, a flow of vitality flowed through his body, giving him the boost he needed to keep fighting.

Without his new agility, he would never have been able to avoid each blow for so long. The creature wasn't absurdly fast, but still fast enough to require his full concentration. And yet with 24.8 Agility, it was as if its movements were more than twice as slow as it should be in his eyes. It could only be imagined for a normal human.

But this time the moment had come to end it all. The monster was on the verge of losing consciousness and no longer had the strength to raise his remaining arm to defend himself.

Jake distanced himself, patiently waiting to catch his breath, trying to ignore the cries of the second blind Digestor, who was wriggling not far from him. The pain must have been truly unbearable to have kept it from joining the fight for so long.

Naturally, it hadn't occurred to him that his lazy cat was a notorious torturer, loving to play with his helpless prey. Usually it was mice, but since the Digestor Mouse the retired stray cat had had to curb his instincts. So what if this 'mouse' was a little bigger?

Finally, Jake sprang up, the machete pulled back against him, with the tip aimed at the creature's half-closed eye. A second later, it was over. The machete pierced the eye and then the skull of his opponent with full force, sending it straight into a world of endless night.

The creature twisted once, a mass of Aether appeared over its corpse and it was over.

With a sigh of relief, Jake ignored the Aether and walked towards the blind Digestor. Dumbstruck, he discovered Crunch playfully mistreating his victim, who probably had too much pain in its eye to bother with the cat scratches.

Unceremoniously, Jake thrust his blade into the monster's punctured eye, and after two jolts, the monster passed away, another stream of Aether appearing on its carcass. This time he absorbed the Aether via Compress. He also collected the Aether from the other Digestors that had been slaughtered.

Remembering that he had left Amy and Will to their fate, he wondered how they were doing. Sweeping the plain around him, he eventually found Will's body next to the remains of a Digestor. The monster had been dead for a long time, but Will was also in bad shape. Maybe even dead already.

Checking his pulse, he was able to disprove his theory. The pulse was weak, but Will was still alive. With the scythe still in place, he realized his right lung was slowly filling with blood. On the other hand, the scythe prevented the hemorrhage from spreading. Blood in the trachea and he would have choked to death.

His breathing was congested and his face and extremities were cyanotic from lack of oxygen. If he did nothing, Will would die within minutes.

Thinking about the possible solutions, Jake saw only one viable one.

Digging through his pack, he took out his first aid kit, as well as several vials of blood from the first Digestor he'd encountered, which was probably far more effective than the blood from the smaller ones. He forced Will to drink the contents of the vials before promptly removing the scythe belonging to the monster's arm.

He applied pressure with sterile compresses to the large damaged veins and arteries, then withdrew the blood filling the lung with a syringe and catheter for blood donations, which he connected to an empty bag. Jake was truly prepared for any situation.

He filled a blood bag that way. When the lung had been emptied of most of his blood, he connected the bag to another tube and catheter, then after tapping to remove the air bubbles, he pricked the cephalic vein in Will's arm to infuse it with his own blood.

Luckily, Will's veins were exposed, so he managed to do without a tourniquet.

With the infusion in place, he took out a needle clamp and suture thread and began to patch up the man in the suit. His new agility gave him incredible dexterity for someone who had only practiced on meat and some fruit.

Jake wasn't a doctor, although the Oracle had made him eat more books than he wanted on the subject. Even if he had advanced notions of first aid, he would have considered this situation hopeless under any other circumstances. Especially because this kind of operation required an aseptic environment and sterile instruments.

However, with the blood of the Digestors, he was able to maintain his optimism. The boost in vitality and constitution multiplied the chances of survival.

A few minutes after ingesting the silvery blood, Will had already lost his cyanotic complexion and his breathing was gradually regaining amplitude. One of his lungs was still functional, so as long as the bleeding from the punctured lung was stopped he had a good chance of recovering.

In a healthy person, the blood coagulated in 4 to 8 minutes on a small notch. Heavier injuries like these naturally took longer, but with the stats boost and biodegradable sutures, Will's condition eventually stabilized.

It would take him several days to recover, even if he consumed the blood of these monsters. Maybe he'd have sequelae, but at least he was out of the woods. This new world offered a thousand and one ways to die, but it also gave them the means to survive. A ruthless but fair world.

The Aether in B842's atmosphere was also almost twice as concentrated as on Earth. It would take days or even weeks for their Aether stats to change significantly, but the little Aether absorbed had greatly improved Will's vitality.

When Jake thought of all his actions devoid of indecision, he couldn't help but think how mysterious the Oracle Paths were. He had followed them without

flinching to increase his chances of survival, cramming everything he was told to learn.

Even when he was treating Will a few minutes earlier, he was instinctively mimicking his Shadow Guide.

The irony was that only a few months later he was applying all that survival knowledge, but to save someone else's life. Aside from bandaging his wounds after his morning fight, he had survived that night's battle completely unscathed.

With Will's survival assured, he went back to his pack and set out to find Amy. He found her several hundred meters away, lying in the grass near a stream, asleep. Her face was peaceful, as if the horrors of the day had never happened.

Not wishing to wake her, he covered her with his sleeping bag, before returning to work on the Digestors' dissection. The experiment had proved that their blood was useful, and he intended to vamp them down to the marrow before they had shed their last drop.

A twinge in his heart seized him as he thought of all that wasted blood. The plain had been repainted in silver last night and there would surely be many more such as this one.