

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 48 - Campfire Barbecue

A few hours later, Jake wiped his sweaty forehead with a satisfied grin. All of his vials were full, and at one point he had even chosen to fill one of his two bottles with blood. It was past midnight.

He had noticed that Digestor blood wasn't clotting, or at least it didn't seem to be clotting now. The blood was somehow alive, but frozen in the state in which the Digestor was dead.

The meat was also cut into rather thin slices and wrapped in cellophane paper, but if he hoped to keep it longer, he would have to salt it, dry it and smoke it.

He didn't like the idea of starting a fire in the middle of nowhere, but at least he couldn't hear any more shrill cackle. He might not get that chance again.

Returning to the forest to collect wood, from which they had just escaped, he took the opportunity to take a good shit. It's never mentioned enough in survival stories, but the adrenaline rush during a fight speeded up the intestinal transit. And in a wild environment where ferocious beasts were roaming around, it was better to seize the opportunity when it arose.

Jake came back a few moments later, near the abandoned meat, took a look at Will and Amy to make sure everything was all right, and then got to work. A quarter of an hour later, a vigorous fire lit up and warmed the plain.

Using longer branches and string, he made a spit, or rather a hanger, which he used to suspend the slices of silver meat, which he did not forget to salt generously beforehand.

The taste probably wouldn't be great, but at least he wouldn't have to worry about starving to death in the days to come.

When he had smoked and dried enough meat, he dismantled and reassembled his spit to bring it closer to the fire and started roasting the rest of the meat.

As far as seasoning was concerned, he had found several rosemary bushes on the way, which he had cheerfully plucked. There was no way of knowing if this Rosemary came from the Earth, but it looked, tasted and smelled just the same.

Taking a frying pan out of his pack, he then tried to stir-fry the strange pink potato-like tubers he had discovered earlier.

Half an hour later, the meal was ready. The meat turned out to be better than anything he had ever eaten before, and for an upstart like him who had been buying only the highest quality for three months, this was no small compliment.

He even wondered how such delicious meat could belong to such a monstrous and repulsive creature. In the end, he concluded that nature had its own justice.

In addition to being delicious, he felt his tiredness fade and his vigour grow as his stomach filled up. The sautéed 'pink potatoes' were also excellent, tasting like the sweet potatoes of the earth.

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His Aether Vitality and Intelligence were both significantly boosted. His Vitality had doubled, while his Intelligence had gained one point. These bonuses seemed to be temporary, but their effects on metabolism and alertness far exceeded those of coffee.

By the way, blood tripled Aether Vitality for several hours, if consumed immediately after the Digestor's death. This morning's Digestor's blood only doubled it. The effect seemed to diminish with time.

If he drank it regularly, he had a combined Vitality between 76.4 and 51, which explained the rapid healing of his ribs and cuts, combined with his Constitution.

As for the nutritional values strictly speaking, even the most advanced GMO strains (early 22nd century, not 21st century) could not claim this result.

The saying 'you are what you eat' also applied to the rules of this world. Anything that had been permeated or born of Aether probably had the same energizing effects.

The only surprising thing was that he had already tasted these potatoes when he first discovered them, and the effects didn't seem so incredible. Maybe the cooking had something to do with it? Or the amount ingested?

It gave his Cooking Skill a new perspective. He'd long wondered why areas like informatics, which he considered himself professionally qualified in, were only entitled to the proverbial 'You're not a novice anymore.'

Aside from trivial skills that you could do/not do, which capped out at 50 points, anything below that was considered Novice proficiency.

Jake was now really curious to taste a dish prepared by a 'Master' as judged by the Oracle System.

Now that he finally had a moment's respite to settle down, he took the opportunity to check the latest System notifications.

After the previous battle, his Authority Level had been promoted to Rank 2 (23 600/100 000), with the grade of Private. According to these observations and Xi's confirmation, this did not bring him any particular perks.

The reason was as follows. The Oracle Overseer had prematurely unlocked the Aether Vision function to assist them on B842. As a result, the expected reward for his promotion had been delivered in advance.

As for the military rank itself, a Private had no particular authority over the Recruits, and other Civilians lvl0. This was also the case in a conventional army on Earth, unless they were invested with a new authority such as under martial law. Both Recruits and Privates were merely pawns obeying a superior officer. The only difference was the standing.

According to Xi, however, it was not useless. It conferred certain advantages, especially during Ordeals. Some taxes were also cheaper, including entry into the Oracle Shelters.

As for his Aether storage, the harvest had been good. He had slaughtered twelve Digestors lvl1 close to lvl2, while the two big ones that closed the march were near lvl3.

Since the experience for raising the Oracle rank and the amount of Aether of the Digestors killed were correlated, he had therefore 23.6 more Aether points, or 23.8 all in all.

Confronting an entire pack of Digestors made him realize that it was too risky to keep his Aether to increase his Intelligence or Perception.

Besides, it was also risky to use it for no reason. For example, if he came across a huge group of Digestors that he couldn't defeat, great strength/speed wouldn't help him escape if those monsters were the tireless type.

In such situations, increasing the Constitution was the solution. More stamina, a tougher body, and a better tolerance to temperature and climate changes. Also, he would better withstand starvation and dehydration.

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In any case, despite the risks involved Jake could not take this decision lightly. In the end, he opted to keep his Aether again. If he got eaten before he could react, he probably would not have survived anyway with or without that Aether.

After his meal, Jake felt perfectly rested, even though he hadn't slept since his arrival on B842. The meat and pink potatoes were simply incredible. Crunch was also extremely vigorous after its own meal.

His pet had actively contributed to his dissection session. The black cat, who he would have sworn was somewhat bigger, was now gnawing on a Digestor bone like a dog would have done.

Yet Jake did not have the chance to meditate further on the matter because at that point Amy joined him around the campfire. She had large dark circles under her eyes, but her expression indicated that at that moment she was mostly hungry. The smell of the roasted meat must have woken her up and drawn her here.

'Help yourself.' Jake said, in his usual nonchalant tone.

'What kind of meat is this?' Amy asked, giving a suspicious glance at the spit.

'Meat.'

'...'

'...'

'... I'll have some, if you don't mind.' She finally replied, breaking the silence.

'Please, help yourself.' Jake replied, without losing up one iota.

Scrutinizing the roasted meat more closely, Amy's expression changed drastically. Scanning the corpses of the Digestors, she noticed that one of them had been completely gutted and dismembered, and aside from the bones, there was not much left.

Then noticing the dried and smoked meat in the cellophane, she understood where the roasted meat came from and displayed a sincere expression of repulsion.

‘What did you think? That I actually thought about bringing a roast beef when I was shipped here? I’m sorry to disappoint you, I didn’t.’ He retorted dismissively.

Realizing the stupidity of her behavior, Amy felt shame overwhelming her, then pulling herself together, helped herself to the potatoes, which she placed on a disposable napkin that Jake had provided, and used the knife he lent her to carve herself a piece of meat.

She stared at the meat for a long time before deciding to take the plunge. When the cut of meat landed on her tongue, her eyes suddenly popped out, and she began to eat voraciously.