

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 51 - Aether Skills

They took turns going in, killing one beast at a time. At first, the process was long and tedious, involving long pauses to give Will and especially Amy time to recover from their emotions.

But over time, the slaughter became faster. Will eventually regained his initial peace of mind, while Amy stopped crying after killing one of the chickens. The act left her pale and lost for a moment, but she was now able to bounce back.

Soon there were no chickens or roosters, and they went to the rabbit cages and the ordeal began again.

The rabbits, unlike the chickens, were adorable, and taking their lives cost Amy even more. The sobbing session started all over again when she had to wring the neck of a newborn rabbit, and this time it took Will's help to console her.

These animals gave little Aether individually, but with their large numbers it became significant in the long run. As always, Jake simply stored it, while Will and Amy absorbed them directly.

Few rabbits tried to escape. Jake suspected their Oracle devices knew they wouldn't survive, and instead, incited them to let themselves be killed. If that was the case, it called into question the reliability of the Oracle, and it was best not to overthink it.

If ever there was a happy one in this situation, it was Crunch. The black cat clearly wasn't suffering from the same moral dilemma as Amy. The few rabbits trying to escape became its playthings, then its snack.

Then they moved on to the ducks, the geese, and then the turkeys. When there were no small animals left, they took care of larger animals, whose necks they could no longer wring with their hands alone, or at least with difficulty.

They then began to slit their throats, or in Jake's case, behead them to ensure their immediate death. Having a stun gun would have made things easier, but this was a farm, not a slaughterhouse.

The sheep and goat pens turned into a bloodbath within a few hours, so much so that the metallic smell saturating the air frightened the cattle in the last pen, the largest of all. But paradoxically, once again very few tried to escape.

Oddly enough, at this point, one could have imagined that the trio would have been totally disgusted or even traumatized by the horrors they had just committed. This was not the case. At least not for Jake.

If Jake was feeling weary and disgusted with himself as he performed these acts, he was actually in a pretty good mood. He could now feel the influence of the Digestor's Aether on him. If a fraction of Digestor's soul and memories affected him in this way, it gave him a good idea of what was going on in the head of one of these monsters.

The Digestors were undoubtedly the enemies of all life forms. Maybe they even attacked each other for all he knew.

Will and Amy at some point changed completely as well. Disgust gradually faded, giving way to indifference, then a certain kind of enthusiasm.

Not because they had psychotic tendencies, but because their Aether Storage was gradually filling up and that meant a much better chance of survival.

Especially for Amy, she was exhibiting an unusual behavior. In the midst of a calf killing, she suddenly took off her sweater and T-shirt, continuing the slaughter session in her bra for Jake and Will's greatest delight.

She swung her saber faster and harder than ever, and seemed ecstatic, her pupils dilated, as if she was under the effect of a steroids+amphetamines+LSD combo.

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At that very moment, Jake finally understood what Aslael meant by the fact that their Aether Code had been modified when they were assimilated on planet B842. The weaker they were, the more their Aether Codes would be modified to balance their odds.

Unfortunately, they had no control over these changes and they were, at least at their level, irreversible. Amy seemed to be endowed with some sort of Frenzy skill.

Maybe her victory over a Digestor the day before wasn't just a fluke. Perhaps Her emotional breakdown had activated this new talent.

Jake still hadn't felt the slightest difference and felt better than ever. This was because by the Oracle's standards he was in the top of the human race, and the only change in this case was the removal of genetic and physical defects.

He hadn't really had time to examine himself from every angle, but the few moles or scars that he could remember had indeed been erased.

"Amy stop for a second, how are you feeling?"

Red-faced and ecstatic Amy ignored his question, continuing to absorb Aether with great saberplay. He had to yell to get her out of her trance, and when he yelled, she blocked her ears shortly afterwards with a pained grimace.

"Raagh! don't scream so loud. I'm not deaf!" She cried out, her face trembling with anger.

Her reaction was so disproportionate that he could determine the effects of this strange skill even more clearly. The Red and Indigo Aether composing her aura, indicated that her Strength and Perception were magnified, and it clearly showed.

The impact on her strength was obvious, but the impact on her perception led to some complications he hadn't thought of.

The Perception Aether or Indigo Aether were the most expensive to produce, requiring 32 points of pure Aether for a single point of Aether Perception. At first glance, this only concerned the amplification of the Senses. Unfortunately, emotions had to be considered as sensations as well. Pain too, perhaps.

The consequence was to make a person unprepared for it suddenly hypersensitive. Her mind was overwhelmed with information and was unable to stay in control.

"All you have to do is listen. " Jake retorted in a stern tone. "Now tell me what you see, what you hear, and what you feel."

Jake's tone didn't allow for any form of challenge. Remembering that he was a professional killer of alien translucent monsters, Amy managed to pull herself together and began to describe what she was feeling.

"It's, it's magic." She mumbled, trying to concentrate.

"I've always had great eyesight, I had a 12/10 on my visual acuity tests, to say the least... But now... It's like watching a black-and-white movie and suddenly switching to color.

"Everything seems more real. The colours are richer, I feel like I see an infinity of nuances that I didn't notice before. I see details in the distance, which would have been blurred or invisible, and perhaps even new colours, which I can't describe. In fact, I didn't know they existed."

"Please continue. What do you hear?" Jake encouraged her.

"I hear much better, maybe too well. I have trouble distinguishing and separating the sounds I hear, so much so that I have trouble focusing my attention on anything.

"But the worst thing is, I think, the mixture of all my amplified senses. The friction, the changes in temperature, the contact of the wind, the smell of grass, blood, and even my emotions. I feel edgy and the mixture of all these sensations has like a psychedelic effect on my mind, to the point that I feel like

I'm on a cloud. At the same time, I feel terrified because I have no control over it all. "

Jake calmly digested the young woman's revelations, making many inferences from her words.

Jake was able to conclude definitively that the Aether did indeed behave as an amplifier and therefore the result depended on the fundamentals of the person being amplified. Infinity multiplied by zero, it was still zero.

In other words, according to this logic, a blind person could not hope to regain his sight by considerably increasing his Aether Perception. Unfortunately, it also meant that people were not equal to equivalent Aether, which would seriously complicate his assessment of the future dangers.

Will, for example, had bad senses and even wore glasses. If he had the same skill as Amy, he would only regain normal vision at best. Will even admitted to having little or no sense of smell. The metallic smell of the blood around them didn't bother him much either.

Amy, on the other hand, was in perfect condition and much more sensitive. The result had exceeded the immediate analysis capacities of her brain and would certainly require an adaptation time more or less consequent.

It was even likely that an excessive amount of Perception Aether could overheat and then short-circuit their brains and drive them into madness if they abused it. This explained why the Intelligence Aether was cheaper. By developing the brain early, one was better able to withstand the effects of increased senses.

Either the Oracle voluntarily lowered the cost to prevent most of them from becoming senile due to some wrong Aether investment, or the Perception Aether had effects branching far beyond what they had observed.

Jake immediately took the necessary steps to deal with these findings.

"Listen to me, Amy. Take a break and try to calm down. Now look in your Status if you have a new skill you didn't have before."

"Mmm, nothing in my Body Status." She replied frowning.

"Check your Aether Status, then." Jake advised her in exasperation.

"Oh, there is indeed a new line. The skill name is Frenzy." She exclaimed, with unhidden glee.

For the originality of the name, well, they'd seen better. But at least it suited her situation.

"Okay, now try to see if you can control it."

Amy began staring at the floor, twiddling her thumbs in embarrassment.

"I can't... It activates whenever I'm under the influence of strong emotion. You just have to wait..."

"Pfft." Will burst out laughing, seeing her cute reaction. It was like a child saying she didn't like chocolate cake, but her mouth was still smeared with the chocolate cake mysteriously missing from the table.

Amy, still under the effect of her competence, burst out laughing in turn, rolling herself across the bloody floor, while Jake, as morose and socially awkward as ever, could only pray for a Digestor benefactor to come and get him out of this mess.