

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 56 – Only six left

Kyle's group couldn't say the same thing. After a forced march in the middle of the night, with a significant sleep debt, without the help of additional Aether and the knowledge of the revitalizing properties of Digestor's blood, they were clearly suffering.

The child was mute from the start, and that he was not well was obvious. He was taking it upon himself, like all of them. Exhaustion forced them to take more and more frequent breaks, and the lack of visibility turned every shadow into a frightening monster, adding palpable mental tension to the fatigue already present.

From this point on, they rediscovered the remains of the wounded pigs that Jake had finished, as well as the Digestors' much more frightening paw prints.

The potbellied man advised them to stop there while they still could, the trio being surely dead and digested by now. Kyle ignored him and hit the road again, clutching his Colt tightly.

The rest of the group followed in silence.

The only good news was that they were getting closer to their goal, and at only 4:30 in the morning, the sun was already rising. Kyle had stopped ignoring his bracelet after treating Loana. The Status tab was vital, as was the Mapping function, which summarized the distance they had traveled. Each tab and function was undoubtedly

extremely important to survive peacefully on B842, and he would try to take care of these as soon as he would feel up to it.

At last, at 5am, with the chilly air and the dawn sun well established in the purple sky, they reached the same steep ground bearing that blocked Jake's progress. More dead pigs, but otherwise silence.

If they had been paying the slightest bit of attention, they would have noticed that only one of the three pairs of boot prints had climbed the slope, and that the same boot prints had just as quickly hurtled their way down to flee in another direction, with the other two pairs of prints on their heels.

Unaware of the danger, they entered the slope without suspecting anything.

At the top, a breathtaking sight. Dead Digestors as far as the eye could see, the corpse of two huge bears, and in the distance a big weird rock. A feast of Aether free for consumption!

The blood of the group did only one turn before freezing, but not for the same reasons. The Playboy was delighted with such a buffet, but couldn't help feeling a kind of inexplicable apprehension, holding him back from rushing. Sarah felt the same anxiety that could not be allayed.

This was not the case with the potbellied man. Glory smiled upon the fastest. Knowing that such a chance would not come again soon, he rushed forward, realizing the dash of his life, propelled by his greed.

Hu ljiimjut fii ovu Auovuz ar dzmro md ovu loprrut efxu md ovu zulo md ovu ezmpn, jaovmpo usur plare val gzfhuiuo. Waov rm hmquoaaoamr, vu juro dzmq mru gmtw om ovu ruko, duuiare vaqluid guhmqare qmzu nmjuzdpi ovfr vu vft usuz guur. Al vu

guhfqv lozmreuz frt qmzu urtpzare ovfr vu vft usuz guur, val nlwhvu hmroarput om talomzo aoluid.

His tiredness vanished, his arthritis? A bad memory. The excitement increasingly irrepressible and his mental state totally under the grip of the memories contained by the Aether of the deceased, he ventured further and further, until he reached the feet of the rock.

If he didn't have the morning sun right in his eyes, he could have realized before it was too late what the bright contrast was hiding from him.

Falling on a third bear corpse, he burst out laughing before collecting his due diligently. Turning around briefly to taunt the rest of the group who had not moved, he was galvanized to see them mutated in stupor.

So stunned, in fact, that their lower lips trembled, their faces were pale and sweaty. The kid with the Colt, and the blonde bitch were so disgusted by his attitude, that they were slowly but surely going down the slope backwards, as if to tell him that they were letting him savour his victory for this time, but that they would keep an eye on him.

Only when the rest of the group began to adopt the same behaviour, including the child, did he begin to think that something was wrong. His Oracle device was also raining down a cloud of warning notifications on him.

'Strange, they seem to be afraid of me...' He noticed during a flash of rare lucidity.

When the rest of the group started to run and disappeared from his sight, he began to worry, but didn't get offended. They abandoned

him. Nevertheless, loneliness had always been the price to pay for those at the top, and he fully accepted the consequences of his actions. He just had to...

A viscous liquid ran down his smooth scalp. A hot breath smelling of rotting meat swept over his body, making his clothes hum. Even a jerk like him, who was particularly slow on the uptake, could activate his brain when the situation demanded it.

He understood everything. And when he understood, he defecated all over himself while all the sphincters in his body relaxed at the same time and his nervous system abandoned him.

Trembling and sobbing, chanting 'Mercy, God have mercy on this miserable sinner...' barely audible, he slowly raised his head. These were his last words. For a fraction of a second he saw a huge tongue and translucent fangs covered with coagulated silvery blood, then it was nothingness...

At the same time, the Playboy was running for his life, not caring whether the rest of the group followed or not. This terror... The Digestors terrified him, but never in his life had he felt such despair.

He would forever thank his parents for giving him such heightened senses. He had first recorded the presence of the strange rock without paying attention to it, then with his growing apprehension, he had focused all his attention on it, ignoring the masses of Aether and the fool rushing at them.

When the idiot had approached the mound of unknown nature, his brain had finished deciphering those shapes, allowing him to ignore the contrast created by the sunlight.

At that moment, the rock had moved. A bear. A bear bigger than a dinosaur. Its fur was coated with red and silver dried blood, creating

a symphony of motley colours with the pronounced brown of its hair scarcely dominating.

On the part of the rock that remained inert, a titanic Digestor corpse, covered with shattered chitin armour, his body broken as if it had fallen from a mountain several thousand metres high.

The bear and the Digestor had fought to the death and the bear had prevailed. One point for the mammals of the Earth. Hooray.

Kyle had fled immediately, scampering off like a hare in front of a tiger, following the same path as Jake and his two companions in a very similar situation. Sarah was on his heels and the rest followed a few dozen meters behind.

‘GRRRROOOOAAAAAARRRRRRR!!!! »

His heart stopped beating. The potbelly man was dead. Serves this envious jerk right... Only six left. A despicable thought came over him: Only five more sacrifices so that he could live.

Hu vfout vaqluid dmz ovarcare iacu ovfo, gpo val iadu jfl jmzov qmzu ovfr frw md ovulu numniu. Fmz val dfqaiw, vu jmpit vfu lvmjr qmzu luid-lfhzadahu, gpo rmo dmz lozfreuzl mz hmrsuraurhu dzaurtl. ESur ovu ezmpnaul jvm dmiimjut vaq lvfzut f laqaifz qurofiaow. Hu vft ovu Cmio, iphcaiwm dmz vaq.

Running with nothing to worry about but breathing, he didn't realize that the sun was high in the sky now, that trees were becoming scarce and that translucent cyan sand had replaced grass and mud. At breakfast time in the morning, they reached the edge of the deciduous forest and discovered a blue desert stretching to infinity.

Three pairs of recognizable boot prints formed a trail that disappeared where the horizon merged. He stared at each surviving

member of his group for a long time, his gaze stopping almost hypnotically on Sarah and she on his own.

They were exhausted, they had only a few days of food, and an arid desert lay before them. But it was desert or forest. And the forest meant Digestors and giant bears.

With his decision made, he walked in Jake's footsteps, hoping to find the trio again very soon and that this new day would offer a better alternative to their hell.