

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 58 – Water

‘Hmm, can we travel with you?’ Kyle asked in a neutral voice, but with eyes begging.

It had been a long time since he had lost his arrogance and attention-seeking illusions. Sarah, his long-time sexfriend, terrified him so much that he didn’t dare take his eyes off her for a moment for fear that she would knock him out in his sleep and steal his Colt. To survive, he had to swallow his pride.

Jake stared at him for a long time without saying anything. Amy and Will didn’t say a word either. They felt a mixture of embarrassment and pity when they saw the pitiful state of their old and brief traveling companions. But that was the end of it.

By choosing to abandon them, they knew in their hearts that this group was doomed. The mere fact that they had not been completely eradicated came as a surprise to both of them.

After all, not everyone had a bloodthirsty warrior capable of wiping out a squad of Digestors single-handedly. A squad of Digestors like the one they faced on their first night on planet B842 would have been enough to eliminate them ten times over. So they were lucky.

If Amy’s former coworkers could hear her thoughts, they’d probably vomit blood, including Kyle. Luckily, they were completely oblivious to all those morbid thoughts.

Only extreme fatigue and the faint hope that Jake would take them under his wing kept them from collapsing. After a few seconds that seemed interminable to the six lethargic survivors, Jake answered.

‘ You can.’

The shaggy-bearded man, whose eagle eyes terrified them, then gave a decisive look to Will and Amy, who understood the message immediately.

After two days of travelling with the taciturn hermit, the duo was slowly getting used to his expressions and gestures. Their leader wasn’t very talkative, but each of his moves had a meaning they’d be foolish to ignore.

The trio picked up their things and set off again. Amy, still feeling a certain affinity with her recent, but superficial friends, fell behind Jake and Will in explaining the rules of their group.

‘I will not apologize for leaving.’ Amy cut Sarah off as she saw her mouth opening.

‘Just looking at you is enough to make me feel good about my decision. If you want to take it out on someone, take it out on your own lack of lucidity.’

Hearing this, Kyle felt the red of shame rise in his face, but he remained silent. Indeed, his group had followed him, thinking of his Colt and his comely appearance more reassuring than that of the silent barbarian in front. They could only blame themselves.

Hal lvfqu hfqu dzmq ovu dfho ovfo, fo ovfo qmquro, vu vft duio aqnmzofro, jmzovw md oval foouroamr, ovarcare vu jfl ovu nuzduho nuzlmr om iuft oval ezmpn. Yuo vu vft uknuzaurhut ovu lozureov md ovu ifoouz dazlo vftr frt hmpit vfsu hvmlur om bmar vaq. Bpo val

uem vft emour arsmisut frt vu vft npo val iadu frt ovfo md val
ezmpn ar tfreuz.

Sarah's face was singing a symphony of very different emotions. Far from being red with shame, she displayed the supreme and disdainful arrogance of a woman expressing her contempt for an inferior being.

'You bitch!' The luscious blonde cursed, spitting out all her venom.

'I'm the reason you've made some friends. If it wasn't for us, you'd still be all alone in your nerd orphan hole. You abandoned us without embarrassment and even now you're still behaving like the bitch you are!'

Amy was left speechless, letting her former friend pour out her rage and hatred, all with a spitting-rain far from the elegance usually displayed by this sexy blonde. There was indeed a time for everything, and certain shocks often revealed a person's best or worst. It wasn't hard to determine which part of Sarah's personality had been revealed.

When she finally ran out of breath after shouting angrily, which happened very quickly given how tired they were, Amy spoke again.

'I don't care what you think. I chose to live, you chose your own path. I'm only speaking with you to inform you of the rules in our group.'

'Rule number one: Anything Jake says is law.'

'Second rule: Don't slow Jake down. He's the leader of the group, but in truth he isn't leading us, we're following him. He doesn't need us to survive, we need him. Do I make myself clear?'

The six survivors stared at her blankly, their lower jaws falling on their shoes. Never would they have believed that the shy Amy could

show such assurance and authority. Even Sarah kept her trap shut for once.

Very clear...' Kyle confirmed, thinking deep down inside that it was better than he thought. Basically, as long as he could keep up with the barbarian, whose name was Jake, he had a chance to survive.

Soon, however, he spotted a few subtleties in Amy's lyrics.

'If we just follow him, how does it go with food, water or Aether?'

Kyle had, of course, noticed the weird sabers Amy and Will were carrying.

'Of course, you'll have to figure it out.' The young woman with the blue strands replied with a cheerful smile.

'If there's more food than he can carry, you're free to help yourself, and as for the Aether, you'll have only what you've killed yourself. I will use his exact words: If time permits, he can teach you how to fish, but he'll never give you fish.'

'In other words, we are in an arid salt desert right now, and the only water and food we have is the one in our backpacks. Until we leave this place or secure a sustainable source of food, don't even think about asking him to share his food.'

Clearly, he wants to get to the Red Cube as soon as possible, and his life is a priority. We are not his friends, minions or servants, we are the vultures that fly in the wake of a predator to feed on the carrion he does not deign to eat...'

After this tirade, there was a moment of hesitation, then an admiring whistle from Sophie, the brown nurse with UV charred skin, broke the silence.

‘Who knew little Amy had such eloquence!’ She exclaimed in shock. Until then, she had thought that this girl was a bit off in the head.

Aqw lqaiut liaevoiw ar lnaou md vuzluid, ovur dmzhut vuzluid om dart vuz nmcuz dfhu, gpo dfaiut, usuropfiw prfgiu om cuun vuz dfcu ompev fooaoptu. Ffhut jaov vuz dfaipzu, lvu opzrut fzmprt frt ozmoout f ypahc loun om bmar Jfcu frt Waii ar ovu iuft.

Too stunned or too tired to complain, the six survivors walked back on her heels.

They were soon disillusioned. If the barbarian was more convenient than they had imagined, there was a sad counterpart to that. He wouldn’t wait for them. Yet none of them had slept that night for the sole purpose of catching up with them. Combined with the previous sleepless night, they had only had a few hours’ nap in two days.

The average human showed signs impossible to ignore after 36 hours of sleep deprivation and several days were necessary to make up for this lack, even with sufficient rest.

This meant that their condition would worsen significantly further by the end of the day and they would have to maintain the same intensity for as long as Jake felt able to do so. This was a real problem, as he was walking as fast as they were running and his every step was swallowing up the distance in an alarming way.

If they knew that Jake had already taken pity on them, slowing down significantly from the pace they had planned at the start, they would probably have fainted. Sometimes, ignorance was a blessing, and with the conviction that they were safe, they persevered, pushing their limits.

As the day progressed, the six survivors were frequently heard emptying the contents of their flasks and bottles in big gulps. Will

politely advised them to save their water, but when his recommendation was ignored, he shrugged his shoulders and simply moved forward without looking back.

‘Let them.’ Jake said when Will returned to his side. ‘They need to learn on their own.’

‘I’m especially worried about the child, who is not responsible for anything. His condition worries me... ‘

Indeed, the boy’s complexion was pale, he was dragging his feet behind the group and hadn’t been sweating for some time. While the lifestyle of the last two days was certainly strenuous for healthy adults, it was absolutely detrimental to a growing child. If he did not stabilize his situation quickly, his health would pay the consequences irreversibly.

‘Isn’t there something we can do for him?’ Amy asked, joining in their conversation. She too felt sorry for the kid.

‘There is.’ Jake replied in an indifferent tone. ‘But he’s not the problem in this group. He doesn’t waste his water and his mother is also suffering trying to save hers for her son. It’s the others who are going to get us into trouble sooner or later.’

‘I estimate that if we don’t get out of this desert in three days, they will run out of water. We are not much better off than they are, but with our stamina and this temperature you will only suffer from dehydration after three days without water, about a week before our situation becomes an emergency if we ration. A little more if we drink our urine...’

‘Of course, all this is only true if we keep this pace. Under the best conditions, you can easily last about ten days if you don’t have an electrolyte imbalance.’ (Official record: 18 days for the curious).

Amy and Will made faces when they heard him talk about drinking their urine, but it was a fact that they were in much better shape than the other group.

One, they had absorbed a good amount of Aether, two, they had eaten and drunk Digestor meat and blood, which were extremely nutritious, and finally they had been able to rest the night before, if not sleep well.

If they felt thirsty like everyone else, a few sips were enough to calm them down, and it had to be said that they did not sweat as much, thus wasting less water.

In the end, Jake's estimates were only estimates. Even a normal human could in some circumstances go up to four days without water, although two was a more reliable benchmark. Moreover, even without water, they were left with the water contained in the food, juices and sauces in the canned food they had taken with them.

In the end, the situation was not so bad. The important thing was to get out of the desert quickly. And according to his deductions, the Red Cube was close.