

The Oracle Paths

Volume 5: The Last Tutorial

Chapter 534 - Where is He?

Not for long, though.

No sooner had they rejoiced than the cackling broke out again, this time with a venomous inflection. In the midst of the river of flames spurred on by Jake's unrestrained bombardment, some unreasonably tough Digestors were even scrambling to get up with heartbreaking yelps of pain.

Jake frowned as he witnessed these monsters recover from his downpour of ionized gas spheres. Their hideous bodies were blistered, their skin and muscles had melted, revealing bones with a silvery sheen underneath, but they were very much alive.

Squinting his eyes, he saw that these creatures, or at least what was left of them, were convulsing as if they were having an epileptic fit. The flames that were licking at their bodies and charring them at a slow rate scorched what was left of their bodies, but instead of reducing them to ashes, a portion of their energy was sucked into their cells. Their veins began to glow in a familiar way and Jake recognized this as the manifestation of an Aether Skill similar to that of his Myrtharian bloodline.

‘ Holy shit! They're mutating.‘

Within seconds, he saw the few lucky survivors of this spectacular plasma shower rise to their feet in a bipedal position, their limbs regenerating at a speed visible to the naked eye.

Their silvery forearms were constantly changing shape, a slightly translucent Batracian skin allowing a glimpse of their incandescent vein network as well as robust legs capable of reversing the direction of their joints at will. The single baseball-sized eye on top of their tiny head regenerated before glowing red ominously. A huge lower jaw with long, thin, sharp teeth separated from the rest of the skull, making it look as if the monster's tiny head had been rent in half by its own weight.

Given the speed at which the tips of their limbs changed shape and their sudden growth spurt to three meters in height, Jake immediately identified them as newborn Fire-Spitters. These Rank 1 and 2 Digestors had evolved into Rank 3 Variants in less than a minute.

Having just gotten a first class look at the mutation potential of these monsters, Jake gasped and solemnly reminded himself not to underestimate these creatures, no matter how weak they might be for now. With the current Aether density, Rank 1 or 4 made almost no difference. They dropped about the same amount of Aether. However, it would be a mistake to lump them together.

Jake and the felines could certainly handle either one, but the refugees could not. They had a fair chance of winning against a Rank 1 Digestor one-on-one with a good melee weapon or firearm, but they would die 10 times out of 10 fights against a Rank 4 Digestor if they didn't have at least some heavy artillery.

Fortunately, these Fire-Spitters were only Rank 3. They were not completely invulnerable to heat. Despite their mind-numbing mutation, the flames got the upper hand, and when their evolution came to an end, only three of them were still alive, but they had only a breath left in them.

Still, that didn't stop those three Fire-Spitters from fighting back with shrill, hateful shrieks. In front of the dumbstruck refugees, three fireballs shot up from the flame river and flew straight at their dashing leader hovering in the sky.

BOOM!

Their hearts skipped a beat as the fireballs hit him and generated an impressive fireworks display, but the next moment they turned slackjawed as they beheld the flames being rapidly suckèd into a siphon that was none other than their leader's mouth.

When Jake reappeared, the flames had vanished and he let out a small burp of satisfaction. He was completely unharmed.

'You don't know when to quit, don't you?' He snarled as he slashed the air with his empty hand.

Almost simultaneously, the three Fire-Spitters' heads were bisected in half. Their blobbering eyes burst into a stream of silver blood as the red glow inside died out with regret.

The refugees cheered but it was then that the rest of the horde came upon them. Brandishing their new weapons, they let out frantic cries to build up their courage, but Jake could still see a few of them retreating stealthily as if they could escape the battle by feigning participation.

Exasperated, he ignored those guys and focused on those who held their ground. Some of them had already peed themselves and were shivering like they'd been thrown nàkèd into a blizzard, but at least they weren't running away.

'Very good. We can still do something about you guys.' Jake muttered indistinctly. Speaking telepathically to his companions, felines included, he commanded,

'Eliminate Rank 2, 3 and 4 Digestors first. Let a few Rank 1 Digestors through so these refugees can get their hands on them.'

'Copy that.'

'Understood.'

Ssfzf priuflvut vuz dmpz Svftmj Wmisul frt nahcut mpo f lozmre Daeulomz dmz ufhv mru. Sv uuzluid tzuj vuz ljmzt frt tfzout dmzjft om f Rfrc 3 Daeulomz. Waov f ezfhudpi frt qflouzdpi tfrhu, lvu jvaziut fqmre ovu qmlrouzl, liahare ovzmpcv laruj frt qplhiu proai lvu zufhvut vuz ofzeuo.

Feeling a gust of wind ruffle her hair, the female warrior ducked almost parallel to the ground at the last moment to dodge a deadly blow and bounced back just before smashing her face, diving between the creature's legs and rolling behind it, not forgetting to slice its hocks.

The 9-foot tall humanoid Digestor fell to his knees and with a lightning backhanded sword slashed his head.

As for the monsters she had crippled by severing their tendons, they became perfect training targets for the courage-seeking refugees. Needless to say, it was much easier to find it when the monster in front of them could no longer move.

These wounded Digestors were ripped apart in no time and because these refugees had never held a weapon, they suffered more than they needed to, sustaining multiple nonlethal but painful wounds before succumbing.

MEOW!

Turning his head, Jake saw a black fur ball resembling a huge sea urchin bouncing around like an inflatable ball in the distance.

Zooming in on the ball of fur, he vaguely recognized the features of his cat Crunch, but his demeanor was quite different at that moment.

Curled up in a ball, its fur was bristling like a porcupine's and its hair had grown to several meters long. Hard and sharp like long rods of tempered steel, he had literally become a several ton steel ball covered in spikes.

Its long tail had also changed shape, extending and retracting in a spiral like a long spring that it used to catapult itself. Once launched, Crunch was unstoppable, and Jake could see trees and Digestors alike in the distance being knocked down like pins by a bowling ball.

Next to him, his partner Thomas 'O Malley, the cheetah, was just like a lightning bolt, so fast that his outline was almost impossible to follow even for him. After his silent passage, there would remain nothing but a supersonic boom and corpses without heads or with their throats slit.

The other felines were not outdone. Duchess, the female leopard Crunch had a crush on, was less expansive and preferred to ambush her targets soundlessly. She didn't kill much compared to Crunch and his buddy, but the method was particularly chilling.

Dropping down from a branch like a ghost, the strongest Digestors targeted would die almost instantly, stripped of their life force. The most shocking thing about this was that the other monsters in the area never noticed that one of their own had just fallen. By the time they reacted, Duchess was long gone in search of other prey.

Bagheera, the black panther, shared the same style and Jake had time to catch a glimpse this time of how the feline killed his targets. He simply grazed them lightly with one of his claws, causing an unquenchable bleed that his victims were unaware of. It was painless

and instantaneous. The blood loss was nothing to speak about but death would ensue almost immediately afterwards, long before these Digestors were depleted of their blood.

Remembering Mufasa's Nergal's Claws and Fangs, which had a Bleeding, Corrosion and Liferain effect, he got an inkling of how these felines were able to become such efficient hunters.

Spying on the other cats, he discovered that with the exception of Crunch, who was an anomaly with his eccentric style, they hunted their prey pretty much in the same way. Unfortunately, he also noticed that some of them had a bad habit of playing with their food for an unnecessarily long time. When he saw that the lynx Toulouse and the Siamese cat Berlioz were still bleeding alive the same monster for a good two minutes already, he yelled,

'Stop playing and get to work!'

Noticing Jake's displeasure, Mufasa roared at his two subordinates and they meowed resentfully before turning back into efficient killing machines. The four probationary cats were under the supervision of the four lionesses Nala, Kiara, Sarabi and Zira. While protecting them, they taught them the art of hunting by letting them practice and finish off wounded Digestors.

As such, the four lionesses were also excellent tutors for the refugees. Quite a few of them benefited from their leniency and scored a few kills. The Aether they gained allowed them to improve their Aether stats for the first time in their lives, and this surge of power gave them the addictive rush of adrenaline and dopamine that Jake and the other Evolvers were so fond of.

Calmly overseeing the battle, Jake finally relaxed when he saw that it was going smoothly. He was not twiddling his thumbs and using his extreme dexterity and perception, he would headshot any strong

Digestors with an air bullet before they reached the edge of their base. Mufasa and Shere Khan did the same, killing the most dangerous monsters and maiming those too weak to warrant dirtying their claws.

BANG!

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Then, he noticed another thing.. Kyle was nowhere in sight.