

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 173 – The Slug (part 1)

Despite the buzzing noise above him and the headache urging him to exterminate the mosquitoes as quickly as possible, Jake was forced to divert his attention from the two Digestors to greet the newcomer.

The tall magenta grass at the entrance to the woods was suddenly crushed by a huge, sticky, smelly mass so eerie that Jake couldn't tell which way the head was pointing.

The new creature was some sort of huge greenish shit-colored slug, about 20 feet long and probably weighing a couple of tons. Like any mollusc, the Digestor was crawling awfully slowly to the point of looking harmless, but a feeling of hostility and cruelty radiated from the monster.

Two Mosquito Digestors similar to those flying above it rested on the monster's back, their trunks completely embedded in the creature's flabby, slimy skin. The slug continued to crawl indiscriminately as the two mosquitoes on its back obediently sipped the silvery blood of the mollusc.

Jake was completely petrified with disgust at the repulsive appendage of the monster which seemed to be by the greatest of wonders its head. The extremity in question had no eyes, nose, or ears. Multiple translucent grey antennae grew at its top like weeds, wriggling regularly as if they were smelling the air: the sensory organ of the monster.

Perhaps the most shocking thing was its mouth. It looked like a gigantic anus. The way it contracted and relaxed to the rhythm of the beating of a resting heart, one might have thought that the Digestor was constipated and that Jake was staring at the wrong side of the creature by misfortune.

Unfortunately, it wasn't an anus, but the Digestor's mouth, and the Digestor had a strong urge to vomit something. When the slug spotted Jake, it emitted a disturbing whale's cry that sounded like a cry of joy while vomiting a yellowish liquid that melted the grass and the ground beneath it. The acceleration of the wriggling of its antennae betrayed its excitement.

As if this call was a signal, the rustle from the tall grass grew louder and about ten Digestors sprang up from the brush before Jake could even consider a plan of attack.

Waov ovu ukhunoamr md mru md ovu qmlouzl, fii md ovu ruj Daeulomzl juzu Rfrc 3 dazu-lnaooare sfzafrol iacu ovu mrul Szfzv vft tuhnaofout ufziauz. Al ad ovuw juzu mguware fr mztuz, ufhv hzufopzu ommc pn f nmlaoamr ar dzmro md ovu lipe, dmzqare fr fzh md f hazhiu jaov ovuaz qmpovl jatu mnur, fii nmaroare fo Jfcu.

The last Digestor, who left the woods last, looked like the Rank 2 and 3 Digestors he was used to, but bigger and more intimidating. It was a humanoid creature 4 meters tall whose transforming abilities had extended to all of its limbs.

Instead of forearms and feet that could be transformed into different forms of weapons and pieces of armor, the monster's arms and legs were now covered with a thick layer of liquid silver that was constantly changing shape to form spikes, blades or protective plates.

The creature also had a tail several meters long of the same silver colour. From the way it wiggled, it was clear that it was perfectly controllable.

Jake needed to keep the initiative if he was to have any chance of survival and that's exactly what he did. He scanned the slug, one of the flame-spitters and the last humanoid Digestor, without batting an eyelid with his bracelet.

[Rank 5, Variant, Irregular, Insect type (larva): An abnormal Digestor whose abilities and evolutionary direction are unpredictable. This Digestor has unbalanced stats, both physically and aetherically. His strong points are a phenomenal Vitality and a high Intelligence allowing him to control other Digestors using his Hive Mind. This type of Digestor emits a nectar that is extremely attractive to other Digestors, with hordes easily forming around them. Other suspected abilities: Acid, Poison, Regeneration.]

[Rank 3, Variant, Regular, Humanoid type (Fire-Spitters): Normal Digestor having devoured materials or living beings with Aether skill or bloodline related to fire or heat. They can also spontaneously spawn from the atmosphere in hot or volcanic areas. Their Aether or physical attributes are slightly below average, but compensated by their Aether ability].

[Rank 4, Regular, Humanoid type (Infantry): One of the most common evolutionary pathways for Digestors. They are born humanoid or become humanoid after devouring various humanoid or bipedal species. Digestors appearing near areas densely populated by humans or humanoids tend to be derived from their appearance. Balanced physical attributes, limited intelligence.]

At this point, Jake only needed a cursory glance to retain all that information. After reading the three reports, he took immediate

action. The headache kept worsening and a simple distraction was all it would take for all the excess Aether in his body to get out of control and dissipate. If such a catastrophe occurred, he would no longer have a headache, but his chances of survival would be significantly reduced.

His first target was the Fire Spitters. Before the monsters could even aim at him properly and open their mouths, Jake had already sprinted to one of them, beheading it with a sword.

Tvu Fazu Snaouzl juzu omm limj om dmiimj val qmsuqurol frt gw ovu oaqu ovuw rmoahut ovfo mru md ovuaz hmqzftul jfl tuft, vu vft fizuftw caiiut frmovuz. Ir iull ovfr ovzuu luhmrtl, vu tuhfnaofout ufhv md ovu Rfrc 3l jaovmpo f tusflofoare dazugfii guare dazut.

The roughly 80 Aether points he earned were immediately reinvested to increase his Aether of Intelligence, instantly relieving his migraine and giving him the time he needed to regain control of the situation.

Moreover, gaining Intelligence was by far the most invigorating and exhilarating feeling he had ever experienced. Even a few more points were enough to make a difference. Just as with agility, the perception of time improved, planning became easier, and Aether control became more refined, not to mention the weird feeling of heightened concentration.

The Digestors had so far been unable to show any coordination. The two mosquitoes of Rank 4 were still circling above him, waiting for them to lower their guard, while the other two were pumping nectar from the slug, indifferent to the death of their fellows.

Only the Rank 4 humanoid was really paying attention to Jake. The slug also had the human in its sights, but its Agility was woefully low, making it unable to keep track of his movements.

It was not until after the Fire Spitters were dead that the slug uttered another discordant whale call. The other five Rank 4 Digestors reacted to this cry as if under a spell.

The two Mosquitoes on the slug's back took off in a mighty buzz, while the other two flying insects finally swooped down on Jake, as if finding a weak spot wasn't so important anymore.

As Jake was about to cross swords with these insects, the Humanoid Digestor bumped into him, his arms crossed in front of him forming a thick silver plate covered with long blades and thorns more than a meter long.

Jake, who was already controlling his sword to block and deflect the untimely attacks of the insects, was forced to change his posture. Seeing the blades and thorns of the shield rushing towards him in slow motion to impale him, he grabbed one of the long thorns with his free hand and jumped in the opposite direction. Then, with his arm sheathed, he let himself be carried away by the monster's unstoppable charge.

This was another of the advantages of high Aether stats. A normal human, even if he had enough grip to grasp one of the thorns, would have simply broken his wrist and still been impaled and smashed.

Waov ozuqurtml lozureov ao jfl tadduzuro. Jfcu nuzhuaSut val hpzzuro 95 caimezfql fl ovu uypasfiuro md mriw 3-4 caiml. Hu hmpit uflaiw lofirt nuzduhoiw lozfaevo ar ovu faz vmzaxmrofiw jaov bplo ovu lozureov md val jzalo.

In other words, as long as Jake had a grip, it was virtually impossible to destabilize him or make him lose his balance unless the speed and force of impact far exceeded what his body and senses could handle.

Far from putting him in trouble, the monster's surprise charge had actually allowed him to distance himself from the four Insectoid Digestors. The Digestor Warrior was undoubtedly a formidable opponent, but its physical stats were balanced.

With a body much more robust than a human and Aether stats around 70, this Digestor was in principle superior to him. But that was not counting the drastic gap in Intelligence and Extrasensory Perception that separated them.
