

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

### Chapter 178 - Stampede

From afar, with darkness everywhere, the new Digestor looked like a huge firefly. A sinister greenish-yellowish light pulsed from its abdomen at regular intervals. The light would then spread like a multitude of sparks through the venous network within the translucent body of the creature.

This was from afar and in the dark. When a huge, red lightning bolt suddenly struck a nearby tree in the woods, the flying creature suddenly came under the spotlight and for a brief moment revealed its terrifying appearance.

Jake gasped when he glimpsed its true form. What the hell was that ? Except for the firefly's bouncing abdomen, this horror was a mix between a giant pterosaur the size of a Boeing and an abomination from another world.

Three pairs of wings with a wingspan the width of a football field and eight pairs of webbed and clawed legs. The last pair was large and sturdy enough to support the weight of the creature on the ground, while the other fourteen thin and long legs seemed capable of changing shape and stretching like those of the other Regular Digestors. Seven silvery eyes of different sizes and placed in a completely anarchic and asymmetrical way completed this nightmare vision.

In the end only the creature's long beak, except for being pointed and as hard as a diamond, seemed somewhat normal, its shape reminiscent of a pelican.

Jake doubted his mission for the first time. This Digestor was still too far away to be scanned, but it didn't look like what he expected from a Rank 6. The evil aura that emanated from it was colossal and suffocating.

Each flapping of the wings blew the trees away, deforming the sturdiest and tearing the frailest out of the ground. If there was such a gap between Rank 5 and 6, humanity simply had no chance of surviving.

So it was at least a Rank 7, but that didn't mean it was good news. If there were already Rank 7s within a few miles of the Oracle Cities, only a few days after his arrival, his plan to peacefully accumulate Aether was no longer valid at all.

Looking back quickly, Jake realized that he hadn't come across a single Digestor of Rank 0 and 1 since his arrival on B842. Kyle and Sarah's group had been chased by a few Rank 1s, but in Jake's case he hadn't come across any.

Before his Ordeal, he had only encountered Rank 2 Digestors, maybe one or two Rank 3 Digestors, counting the two stronger Digestors he had faced in the first fight with Amy and Will at his side. He had also seen a Rank 4 Humanoide Digestor fight a bear, but that didn't count.

The Digestors were evolving fast. Too fast. If he stuck to the introduction of his manual about Aether, the absorption and merging of many Seed Worlds had multiplied the number of intelligent living beings on this planet by an unknown factor.

All of these intelligent life forms attracted Aether by their simple brain activity and by increasing their Aether stats, more Aether was attracted to this planet. The density of Aether on B842 would continue to increase faster and faster as the Evolvers and Players became stronger, especially after each Ordeal.

Jake had only been physically on B842 for 4 days, but that was enough time for some desperate or hurried Players to finish 3 or 4 Ordeals. With the atmosphere getting richer and richer in Aether and more prey to hunt, these Digestors had probably started to proliferate like bacteria in a petri dish.

Id ovulu qmrlouzl juzu nzmezullare ovfo dflo... lo jfl fizuftw omm ifou dmz qmlo Casaiarfl. Tvuaz mriw hvfrhu jfl om urouz fr Oztufi aqquafouiw mz vfu f euruzmpl nfozmr easu ovuq ovu Auovuz ovuw ruutut om lpzsasu fr ukhpzlamr mpo md ovu Svuiouz.

Jake didn't intend to lose this race against time. Either way, he had to find a way to outrun the Digestors. And preferably faster than the other Players and Evolvers. And for that, the solution was quickly found. He had to enter a second Ordeal.

Despite his long inner monologue, only three seconds had elapsed, but it was enough for the Pterosaur Digestor to flap its wings twice. Each flapping of the wings had blown dozens of trees and had brought the creature a kilometer closer, causing a deafening din.

Jake was dying to scan it, but to get any closer would be a death sentence. At the third beat of the wing, the gigantic Digestor hovered over the soldiers in armor engaged in a bloody battle against thousands of Digestors.

The Slug was too slow in the face of the retreating speed of these veterans with their Aether stats maxed out and had already been outdistanced, quickly receding into the middle of the horde. Without

the paralytic gas, the two Ducal Guards had regained much of their fighting ability and had begun to turn the tide by eliminating one Rank 4 Digestor after another.

One notable fact that amused Jake despite this terrible situation was that more than half of the Digestor's corpses had actually fallen victim to the Slug's poison. Except for the few Rank 3 and 4 Digestors accompanying the Slug and having taken their precautions, all the other Digestors seemed to be completely unaware of this ability.

Most of all, the Slug did not seem to be worried about them much either. The level of cooperation between these creatures was obviously limited to not devouring each other. Only Digestors with intelligence and crowd control abilities seemed to be able to tame them.

Jake took back his thoughts shortly afterwards. As if to prove him wrong, the huge, flying Digestor nosedived into the middle of the horde. The impact on the ground generated a huge blast that threw hundreds of Digestors and trees around in the air.

Whether they were Rank 2 or 4, none of them could withstand such a shockwave. Even Jake had to change trees when the branch he was standing on suddenly broke.

When the rain of Digestors and shrubs stopped, Jake could finally see clearly and what he saw left him speechless. The Pterosaur Digestor had impaled the Slug that had given him so much trouble with one of its front legs turned into a brooch for the occasion.

Tvu diware qmrlouz gzmpevo ovu qmiiplh om val nuiahfr gufc frt fl ad ovu nmmz lipe jfl bplo fr fnnuoaxuz, ovu Daeulomz emggiut ao tmjr ar mru gaou, jaov f rmalw ljfiimjare lmpert dmiimjare zaevo fdouz.

For a brief instant, there was a short silence where no one dared to make the slightest movement on the battlefield, be it humans or Digestors. Then the giant Digestor uttered a tremendous shrill scream as ominous as that of a T-Rex, which created another deafening gust of wind.

At that very moment, as if the Digestors had just been granted amnesty, the horde started moving again, attacking the guards with renewed vigor. But this time, the supposed Rank 7 was staring at the group of humans attentively without blinking his eyes. And seven asymmetrical eyes staring at you like that would have terrified anyone.

For the first time, the training and good order that had allowed these veterans to resist this horde of enemies was broken. Selfishness and survival instinct kicked in and since some of them were ready to \*\*\*\* two young women just minutes earlier, it was obvious that this armed group was not just saints driven by a noble cause.

As soon as the Rank 7 stared at them, the most selfish/frightened ones abandoned their comrades without hesitation. Their Aether stats of Strength, Agility and Constitution were for the most part the same. Getting a few seconds ahead of the others would determine who would survive or die today.

As if the rest of the warriors were waiting for that signal, a second wave of soldiers abandoned the formation and seconds later a stampede ensued. The two Ducal guards escaped faster than anyone else, disappearing with the first deserters.

Soon only the two princesses were left on the ground with their hands tied behind their backs. Their desperation was at its peak, and seeing the horde of Digestors descend upon them, they couldn't help but close their eyes and pray for an end to it all.

The two sisters tried to use their Fire Ball skill, but fear prevented them from focusing, not that it would have made any difference.

When they thought it was all over, the whistle of a heavy projectile sounded next to them, hitting something near them a split second later. When they reopened their eyes, they discovered a barefoot young man with worn-out clothes, covered in blood and sweat. The Digestors about to devour them had been impaled by heavy spears.

The two sisters recognized Jake immediately, Enya for her transaction with him and Esya for the way he had publicly reprimanded his cat in the Mission Hall earlier.

Al ovuw jmrtuzut jvfo val arouroamrl juzu, vu ezfggut ovuq zmpeviw iacu ojm lfhcl md nmofomul mr val lvmpituzl gudmzu lnzaroare ar ovu lfqu tazuhomr fl ovu movuz zprfjfwl.