

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 1: The Oracle

### Chapter 28 - Digestors and Dream Aether

First, he focused on his mental link with the Oracle device, checking what all the messages he had received during and after his battle were about. There were many notifications, so he went back to the oldest one to get a clearer picture.

[You killed a Digestor rank 0. Your Authority Level is automatically promoted to the next higher rank.]

[Authority level: Recruit (rank 1), 0/10000]

‘What the heck?!’ Jake snapped, his eyes bulging out as he read the first line of data.

He remembered Xi’s words congratulating him on his victory, and the term ‘Digestor’ had indeed been mentioned. What he was sure of was that Xi had never used that word before, although it would have clearly been much appreciated by him.

So why use this term all of a sudden? The only logical explanation was the increase in his Authority Level, whose promotion must have been effective immediately after the monster’s death.

‘Xi, I have a lot of questions for you.’ Commanded Jake, with a patibular expression, leaving no room for a no.

[I’m ready, Jake.] Xi sighed, long prepared for the upcoming interrogation.

‘Okay, first question, what the fućk is a Digestor?’ Jake asked. Sure, that shit knew how to digest fast!

[...]

[The explanations I'm about to give you are still limited by your rank as well as my own knowledge on the subject]

‘Do your best.’

[All right. To sum them up in one sentence, they are the enemy of us all. The reason why every living being has been given an Oracle device is indirectly related to their existence.]

‘I guess I should have known better. Receiving those Oracles for free was too good to be true.’ Jake commented, bitter-faced.

[It's more complicated than that. Primitive races like the ones on Earth are not supposed to receive Oracles so early. The invasion of your planet more than 22 years ago had far-reaching consequences.]

‘We've been invaded? I figured the government response was too quiet when the alien ship handed out the Oracles out of nowhere.’

[You were invaded, but not by the aliens who delivered the Oracles to you.]

‘I understand why those aliens came to help us if they're at war with the Digestors, but why did the Digestors come after us then? In your own words, we're primitive. If they're such a threat that these highly evolved aliens need our help to defend themselves, it doesn't make much sense.’ Jake said, putting his finger on what was bothering him.

[And that's the limit of what your rank of Authority allows me to reveal.] Xi stopped him, cutting off his thoughts.

[What I can say, however, is that the Digestors found you. When sufficiently evolved life forms are concentrated in one place in too great numbers, you give off a kind of signal that is very appealing to them.]

‘Then why now and not sooner?’ Jake shrugged. ‘If we’re talking about evolved life forms, back in the age of dinosaurs the animals were much more massive and the flora much denser, with richer oxygen content.’

[What I mean by advanced life forms are sentient species, with sufficient intelligence. It generates something that attracts them, but once they find you, whether you’re a human or the stupidest sea anemone they devour everything the same.]

‘Okay, I get it...’

He didn’t get it at all. Since when did thinking or being intelligent emit a signal strong enough to be detected from the depths of the Universe? That would have been known by now, and they would have all become telepaths.

[I can’t explain it yet. But you’ll understand when the time comes.] The AI tried in vain to appease him.

[Just keep in mind that the Digestors have only one goal. To feed. They need more and more energy, and they use it to keep growing and evolving. Their evolution has no limits, as long as they have energy available.]

In fact, he had seen first-hand how this mouse had developed before his eyes after ingesting the flesh of the deceased psychopath.

‘Even though these creatures can evolve by feeding on their victims, it’s not enough to make them a threat to an alien race as advanced as the one that created the Oracle.’ Jake argued, pointing out another incongruity.

[ Indeed. ] Xi admitted with a sad tone. [The problem isn’t the Digestors per se. Across the universe, there are life forms so mysterious that even the most powerful Digestors would be powerless against them.]

[The real problem is the way the Digestors appear and multiply. Digestors are born out of nothing, feeding on primordial energy. They take on the appearance of the flora and fauna of the surrounding planets. They start out as small animals or

plants, and then when the available energy increases or they have fed enough they move in different directions].

[Some like this mouse just evolve as a predator. More massive, faster, stronger. Others will become contaminators, turning their victims into new Digestors. To do this, the least dangerous will develop a simple poison, such as venom, while the worst will emit bacteria or viruses.]

‘ Shit...‘ Jake swore when he heard the last sentence. ‘So, interrupt me if I’m wrong, a Digestor out there could make me a zombie in its service just by releasing its remastered version of the Coronavirus ?

[Basically, yes.] Xi confirmed his concerns. [These Digestors, however, are very rare and this is an obstacle to their own evolution, since by turning their prey into Digestors they lose access to their food source. Consider that they are not your problem at the moment. Those who contaminate by contact with their claws or fangs, on the other hand, you have to be prepared for that].

[The simplest way is to increase your Constitution and Vitality, or more specifically your immune system. With proper precautions and the right medication, it’s the safest way to deal with a Digestor infection.]

Io qftu lurlu, gpo ju juzu emare gfhc om ovu nzusampl hflu jvuzu Jfcu jfl jmrtuzare vmj om arhzuflu val arouiiaeurhu guwmrt vpqfr iaqaol. Xa vft omit vaq ovfo vu jmpit vfsu fr uiuquro md frljuz gw arhzuflare val iusui md Apovmzaow.

‘OK, Xi. But how do I do that?’ Jake took advantage of the AI’s response to change the subject. ‘Even if I decide to train my àss off for years, I doubt the strongest athlete can survive or endure a virus produced by an alien species capable of constant evolution.’

[You’re right. That wouldn’t be enough.]

[Earthlings are considered inferior species precisely because you don’t know how to use the primordial energy we call Dream Aether or Aether for short. ]

‘Dream Aether? What is that? Radioactivity? An elementary particle or radiation perhaps?’ Jake couldn’t see what more primordial energy could exist based on his knowledge of physics.

[None of the above.] Xi denied. [Remember when I explained that the Digestors were born spontaneously out of nothingness? They tap into the Dream Aether. To get enough energy to spawn, on Earth it takes about 22 years...]

‘Oh, I see... I guess your alien friends came to help us, but they missed all the ‘eggs’ the Digestors left as a parting gift.’

[That’s exactly what happened. Digestors are not born from eggs, this is a very complex matter. If this were the case, the number of Digestors being born would stabilize after a while. This is not the case.]

‘Then where did they come from?’ Jake wondered out loud.

[Authority level insufficient. Do note that any area where Digestors spawned from the atmosphere without warning will continue to generate them forever.]

‘Holy crap...’ He cursed for real this time.

Their planet was ruined for good. No wonder it was being absorbed into tiny pieces somewhere. Probably the cosmic version of recycling.

‘Okay, so what is this Dream Aether we humans are supposedly too stupid to use?’ Jake started the conversation again, hoping to take his mind off it.

[Aether is the cleanest primordial energy you can get. It’s abundant, even on Earth, even if it’s nothing compared to other places.]

‘If there’s so much of it, why hasn’t anyone ever talked about it?’

[Let me ask you a question Jake. What should be the qualities of an ideal clean energy to use?]

‘Mmm, I’d say easy to use, not wasteful.’

[And how do you detect energy of any kind ?] Xi asked again, guiding his thinking.

‘By an observable effect, heat, light, or movement...’ Jake, had finally figured out what Xi was trying to explain.

[That’s right. The perfect energy is undetectable. No waste, no manifestation of its existence. You could be bathing in an ocean of Aether right now, enough to create another Big Bang, and you still wouldn’t notice anything.]

[That brings us to the Oracle’s other notifications after you’ve upgraded your rank. Your bracelet has unlocked some new features that you won’t be displeased with and are specifically dedicated to the management of the Aether.]