

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 38 - Aslael (part2)

‘You were all tagged when you came in here. You have all received a gift: A line of Aetheric Code. With it, you have a chance to survive and participate in the great epic that is life on Planet B842.’ Aslael declared with a round of applause...

At these words, Jake frowned. If the other group seemed lost, this information gave him some answers. He had indeed felt irrevocably changed from within when his apartment had shifted here. From what he had just heard, that was a good thing.

‘It is a good thing, indeed.’ Aslael confirmed his mute conclusion, which again upset the other group, not understanding who he was addressing.

‘If you don’t understand poor souls, please raise your rank. I will only say what cannot be known otherwise.’ The Jester complained wearily, feeling the toll on his mind after talking with these inferior monkeys for a few minutes.

‘Since you’re too dumb to sense the Aether, there’s no need to think about it. You’ll realize soon enough that something has changed inside you.’

‘The Oracle is a righteous being. If you are strong, it will not change your Aetheric Code, but will simply correct your genetic defects. Any history of family illness? Good news for you, you won’t have it. Of course, what is a genetic defect for you is not necessary one for the Oracle.’

One of the balding man on the playboy’s side showed clear relief hearing that. Honestly, the scared and well-fed dude seemed like he had diabete or hypertension, maybe both.

‘If you’re weak, on the other hand...’ At that moment, he stared at each member of the playboy’s gang one after the other, mischievously.

‘Well, your Aetheric Code has indeed changed. The good news is that it will help you survive here. The bad news is you have no control over it.’

‘Take this cat for example.’ Aslael said, pointing to Crunch who was taking a nap next to his owner.

The gaze of the other humans changed when they noticed that this barbarian, covered in digestor blood and armed to the teeth was accompanied by a cute pet. Suddenly, he was not so scary anymore. Deep down, some of them almost assumed he was a trustworthy person.

‘It is impossible for a cat to operate its Oracle device efficiently. Most animals are given upon their arrival here an Aetheric code similar to that of the Digestors. Simply by eating, they will become more massive and more efficient. On the other hand, they have little control over the morphological and psychological changes engendered.’

‘Aetheric Code is not Genetic Code, but the former can affect the latter, if the code is written in a way that enables it. Embedding complex aetheric code is never without risk.’

The dead-fish eyes had now given way to ghostly faces a revenant would not have disparaged.

Saevare fefar, Alifui ovur naoadpiiw uknifarut usuzwovare Jfcu fizuftw cruj fgmpo ovu Auovuz frt vmj om urhmtu ao om arhzufu aol foozagpoul, gzufcare val nzmqalu om zusufi mriw ovu qaraqpq fqmpo md ardmzqfoamr zuypazut.

‘Hence the reason why the basic Encoded Aether that your Oracle devices manufacture is preferable. The changes in your genetics and in your appearance are subtle. By checking your Aetheric or Body Status, you will realize that an increase in one does not significantly affect the other.’

‘But in the long run you will be different. Maybe taller, or heavier. With too much Aetheric imbalance, you may instead become too light or have an oversized skull or ears.’

‘No consequences are irreversible with the Oracle’s technology. But whether or not you can afford the price is an entirely different matter.’

‘For those who don’t get it after all this explanation, this is what Encoded Aether looks like.’

As he said this, a red ring tattoo around his wrist lit up, and a filament of red light, emitting a deep sound, escaped from it and gushed into the palm of his hand.

Suddenly, invisible pressure embraced the Aether, compressing it to the point of looking like a tiny red star. A crystal about 2mm in diameter floated from who knows where to the particle of light and merged with it, giving birth to a ruby-like jewel. This Oracle representative had impressive telekinetic powers.

‘And this is money!’ Aslael cried out, proud of his one man show.

The magic trick caused the three cowards in the other group to scream in surprise and horror. The little boy, on the other hand, was in awe. The playboy, the five young women and the man with glasses didn’t react, which confirmed his hypothesis that they had confronted a creature and thus seen his Aether after its death.

‘I told you we should have come closer after killing that filthy monster...’ The Playboy scolded the young women with a tone full of reproach.

‘You couldn’t have known it was beneficial’, One of them, a blonde of 170cm with a voluptuous chest and the shape of a model, tried to justify herself.

‘Yes, you can...’ Jake sneered contemptuously in his head. What else was the AI of the Oracle for?

‘That bug still killed half our class before you could take it down with your Colt. And without your gun, we probably wouldn’t have made it.’

‘Mmpff, it doesn’t matter, what’s done is done.’ The Playboy sighed, visibly soothed by the thought of being acknowledged by these beautiful young women.

‘What did the creature that attacked you look like?’ Interjected Jake, who was following the discussion attentively.

His voice was hoarse, because he had lost the habit of communicating in the last three months. His only contacts were with Xi and his Shadow Guide, and they communicated mainly through thought. His deep voice surprised the Playboy and his companions, but not the man with glasses, who answered.

‘When we were taken here, we were in a shopping mall.’ Explained the man with the glasses, in a much softer voice, contrasting with Jake’s.

‘Only a fraction of the mall was washed away where we were, but there were more than 30 of us when we got here. After doing a little scouting, we spotted the blue beam and decided to go there.’

‘Unfortunately, halfway there a strange grey creature, the size of a big wolf, chased us. It was moving much faster than us and could change the shape of its forelimbs into different sharp objects.’

‘It killed about ten people before Kyle managed to put a bullet in its head. But in the meantime, we lost the rest of the group, and if they didn’t get here, I’m afraid they’re dead.’

‘Hmmm, your creature is different from the one that attacked me. Mine... was bigger...’ Jake concluded, reasoning aloud with an analytical coldness that petrified the members of the other group.

‘Bigger? With the size of a wolf, more than ten people are dead!’

‘It’s entirely possible.’ Aslael added, in an amused tone. Their distress seemed to make him happy.

‘To be completely honest with you. Every living creature has its own set of bacteria, germs and parasites. A World, or if you prefer, an Oracle is no exception.’

Seeing the explosion of thought in Jake’s mind, the Instructor realized he had made a blunder.

‘Oh m-my... I spoke too much again.’ Aslael stammered, hiding his mouth with both hands like a tattletale caught revealing a secret.

‘Well, these creatures you have met, we call them Digestors. They are born spontaneously out of the Dream Aether that our World exhales and therefore make up the atmosphere of this place. The closer you get to the outer edge of the Mirror Universe, the higher the density of Aether, so much so that for the moment your human bodies cannot survive it.

‘Not because of the Aether itself, but because of its effects on the physical laws that are magnified, including gravity.

‘Aether density being low around here, you are unaware of its presence and the Digestors being born around here are small and fragile.’

‘Small and fragile...’ Everyone’s expressions became sinister when Aslael uttered these words. Half their group had been decimated!

‘Nevertheless, you are also breathing this Aether right now, about twice as dense as on Earth. This is contributing to making you stronger. You will recover faster from your injuries, and assuming you survive by staying in this area, you have good chances of living two hundred years.

‘This passive Aether does not appear in your Status. Depending on where you are it fluctuates and that Aether is quickly lost if you return to a poorer place.’

‘B842 is at the entrance of the Mirror Universe, near the Dark Universe. This planet is so large that even if you moved at the speed of light for several years you couldn’t make it full circle. In other words, here’s my advice: ‘Don’t look for your loved ones, leave it to fate.’

Hearing this, Jake became slightly depressed. However, his depression was short-lived. He soon saw another, more promising solution.

‘There is, of course, a way to find your friends.’ The Instructor nodded appreciatively to Jake again.

‘Become stronger and head for the Oracle cities or the Cubes. ‘So that brings me to the three futures that lie before you: Civilians, Evolvers or Players.’