

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 5: The Last Tutorial

### Chapter 527 - Deep Scheme

When he met his comrades down below, Jake looked glum. His face spoke volumes and neither Will nor Svara asked him any questions. As for Kyle, he was too busy healing his wounds to worry about their future troubles.

While Jake and his group were thinking of a plan, the other factions also sent scouts to inspect the Transportation Tower and each of them came back with the same defeated and depressed expression. A dark and desperate mood soon set in among the survivors.

Yet they did not leave the Inner Shelter. Bhuzkoc and Shaktilar may have had a large number of subordinates in the Outer Shelter, but it had long been infiltrated by many Digestors. Jake and his group had no reason to cross the force field and expose themselves to unnecessary risk.

‘There’s something that’s been bothering me for a while.’ Jake said after a while pacing around, once Bhuzkoc and the other factions had pulled away from them.

They had finally decided to head to the Outer Shelter to regroup their forces and increase their chances of survival. If they could also eliminate the undercover Digestors it would kill two birds with one stone.

‘What do you mean?’ The eyes of Will, Svara and a few of the felines lit up as they saw him come out of his daze.

‘Remember when Sarah’s Floating Island was swamped by those Space Digestors? Jake reminded them calmly.

Will and Kyle nodded their heads as they recalled that tragic incident. If their reaction was initially lukewarm, a flash of understanding struck them the next instant.

‘The explosion!’ They both exclaimed with shock.

Jake responded with a big smile as he saw their enthusiasm.

‘That’s right. The Yellow Cube on her island self-destructed as a safety precaution.’ He acknowledged their reasoning while pointing to the dim Yellow Cube on top of the Transportation Tower. ‘If it’s not a Digestors trick, my guess is that the Oracle hasn’t given up on this place yet. Deactivating these Cubes is just a temporary measure to discourage these creatures.’

‘How so?’ Svara asked with a question mark on her face. Aside from training and fighting she usually didn’t care about such complicated things, and the felines who shared this personality trait were greatly appreciative of her initiative.

‘Digestors are attracted to Aether sources.’ Will completed the explanation. ‘If the Aether Core is deactivated or at least its Aetheric signature is hidden, we can assume that the Cubes are no longer appealing to these low-level Digestors.’

‘Only low-level Digestors, though...’ Kyle grunted as he tested the strength of his freshly healed leg. To his hmmmphs of pain, he still had quite a bit of work to do to restore it perfectly.

Will grimaced at the playboy’s snarky remark. Couldn’t this useless guy just shut up and concentrate on his injuries instead of spoiling the

mood? Nevertheless, he had to admit that the latter was right. He wasn't always talking nonsense.

'I also don't think this tactic will work forever.' Jake nodded uneasily. 'It worked because these low-level Digestors are too stupid to do sophisticated thinking. To them these Cubes and us aren't that different. We're still sources of Aether and nutrients. But if more advanced and intelligent Digestors show up here, I have no doubt that they will know what to do with these Yellow Cubes. At that point I'll be surprised if the Yellow Cube doesn't explode, dragging down the Shelter and us with it.'

'I'm not thrilled with that reasoning, but it makes sense...' A deep, raspy voice with a heavy accent sounded behind them.

Turning in the direction of the noise, Jake and the others spotted the gigantic humanoid boar figure of Grash. Despite his good relationship with the giant, Jake immediately became wary as he saw the Evolver approaching. After all, he was one of Bhuzkoc's men.

'No need to worry anymore, I've left his faction.' Grash sighed as he stabbed the heavy sword into the ground before sitting down with a fresh canister of cleaning alcohol in his hand. Bringing it to his mouth, he gulped down the equivalent of two or three liters of the elixir in a few gulps before sadly revealing. 'My brother is dead. I just shot him.'

Jake and the others showed a slight surprise at the news. They weren't familiar with him at all except for Jake, but even he didn't understand what such a revelation had to do with them or his withdrawal from the Bhuzkoc faction.

As if he knew what was on their minds, Grash began to explain his purpose for being here and working with this Nawai chief. After listening carefully to his story, they gained a better understanding of his intentions.

‘What an àsshole!’ Kyle cursed through clenched teeth. He had stomped his foot so hard just now that he had almost broken the bones in his leg that had just bàrèly knitted together. His hatred for the Nawai had already shot through the roof.

Grash’s story in a nutshell was pretty simple. Like Kyle and many other Evolvers of varying degrees of talent and courage, he had faced and survived five Ordeals without ever giving up hope of finding his people. Unlike the Playboy, he had managed to get most of his relatives to safety, but his brother had suffered a fate similar to Maeve’s, though far more enviable.

His brother had become Bhuzkoc’s subordinate after signing a Slave Contract and proving himself over a period of time. Nope, it wasn’t Grosh despite their similar appearance and species, but theses pig-like aliens were not uncommon in this Shelter. His brother’s name was Grush and Jake could only marvel at the creativity of this species in their choice of names.

After finding his brother, Grosh, like Kyle, had tried to negotiate with Bhuzkoc and fortunately, since he was not a woman or one of his sèx slaves, they had signed an agreement that was acceptable to both parties. His arrival coincided with the Dungeon Digestor incident, and the Nawai leader had eagerly offered to free his brother in exchange for three months of his service. Naively, Grash had agreed.

A few minutes earlier, Grash had gone to visit his brother to bring him to safety, but instead made the awful discovery that his brother Grush was nothing more than an empty shell housing a Digestor Parasite. This thing had his memories and behaved almost like him, but it was not his brother.

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Unfortunately, that didn't make him any less sad and depressed. Even though his brother had been dead for some time, he still felt as if he had just slayed him with his own hands. With his brother dead, the contract he had signed with Bhuzkoc had become invalid and he had left.

Patting his back to console the giant, Jake couldn't help but ask him the crucial question.

'Do you have an estimate of how long your brother has been under the control of this Brain Eater Digestor?'

Somewhat caught off guard, and half-drunk, Grash thought intensely as he squinted his eyes before answering in an uncertain tone, my brother was still alive two days ago I'm sure of it.

'So it's all recent...' Jake muttered, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

'That's consistent with the fact that we didn't notice anything during our previous visit.' Will said with a serious expression. 'That's not exactly good news...'

Indeed, it reeked of an end-of-the-world plot. If the Digestors had invaded the Shelter a long time ago it would have been paradoxically reassuring. It would have meant that they needed time to build up their numbers here. But if all of this had happened in the last few hours, then they were in far greater danger than they imagined.

'To pick up on your earlier discussion about the Yellow Cube...' Grash stated suddenly as he remembered what they were discussing when he arrived. 'There is one obvious thing you didn't mention. The Yellow Cube is momentarily disabled not destroyed or dysfunctional.'

We can't use it to leave, but if necessary the Oracle can still use it to get more Evolvers here. Based on my experience, help should arrive sooner or later if the Oracle hasn't abandoned this place.'

'How can you be so sure of that?' Kyle asked with some doubt.

Grash laughed, seeming to recover surprisingly well from his brother's death. Maybe it was a racial trait or just his personality.

'You too will know all these things after you finish your Fourth Ordeal.' He confessed in a mysterious tone. 'This may be the first time I've been trapped in a Dungeon Digestor, but I know everything there is to know about it. I and all the other Evolvers who have completed their Fourth Ordeal have been briefed at length on the subject. Bhuzkoc and the others are also in the know.'

Jake and Will's faces darkened as they heard this. It meant that despite their apparent panic, none of these faction leaders were ignorant about what was going on.. It was only them and the other refugees who were kept in the dark.

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