

## Oracle 611

### [Chapter 611 - Where Are The Bosses?](#)

As that reddish glow deepened in his eyes, the Nosk's ferocity only increased, but somehow he was getting slower. This was not obvious given their terrifying speed, but it became more and more clear as the fight dragged on.

The luster of the long hair-like dendrites was also dimming, their bluish radiance slowly but surely fading. These translucent tentacles were the Nosks' innate energy reservoirs, and they could even plug them into their own people or an available power source to recharge their batteries.

In addition to having a portable power source that was hard to gauge, this Nosk was unlike any that Jake and Will had encountered in the past. This one was a huge albino Nosk over 3 meters tall and its armor covering every inch of its body was far more advanced and intimidating. It was a genuine technological jewel, which unfortunately had no use here.

To overcome the vitality of such a Nosk, it was clear that the miasma swirling around him was not as harmless as it looked from their safe position under the shield. The Nosk was resisting these miasmas by freezing them with the absolute zero zone isolating his body from their reach, but his terrifying ice magic was woefully limited in its success.

Then Jake saw it. When the Nosk missed his target. Or rather, when his blade deliberately struck the void in the wrong place.

The alien fought like all Nosks with a black blade produced by an accessory on his wrist gauntlet. His blades were virtually indestructible, but he had already generated more than a dozen of them to carry on the fight.

When he thrust the black sea with all his might to no avail, the thirteenth blade generation snapped and the alien imperceptibly lost his balance. He recovered immediately, but the demon took the opportunity to break through his guard and grab one of his almost extinguished dendrites. The monster, shrouded in wisps of dark energy, yanked and the appendage was torn off.

A white liquid giving off a bright light disturbed the blackness of the slimy ocean, but the pain snapped the Nosk out of its frantic torpor. Briefly regaining his senses, his gaze focused coldly on his opponent and he attacked again, the broken blade already replaced.

Jake and Will breathed in loudly as they saw the alien's incredible composure. His death was imminent, but his emotions hardly fluctuated despite the perverse influence that the miasma and other demonic spells cast by this demon probably had on him.

"He's a great warrior." Cekt complimented, his eyes glinting with admiration. Then suddenly thinking of something, the Wendok's face darkened and he let out a long sigh. "If all the Evolvers in the Mirror Universe were like this Nosk we certainly wouldn't be in as bad a situation as we are today."

Jake thought he heard deep despair in his master's words, but it was only a fleeting impression. When he probed the little alien's expression, Cekt had returned to normal.

Cekt continued to silently observe the duel, not trying to save the Nosk or kill the Digestor. Instead, he took the opportunity to teach the two humans accompanying him a few things about his experience as an Evolver and Player.

"You see the reddish aura hidden under the miasma enveloping the demon? That is its Spirit Body. The demonic form it uses to fight physically is conjured by its spiritual energy. If you don't have the proper mental techniques, you can rely on electricity, heat or light, but their effects are very weak on this type of demon. The best thing is to understand what they are born from and what emotions they draw their strength from in order to counter them with what they abhor. Obviously, being fearless or even enthusiastic in front of a Demon of Fear is out of reach for a beginner. In this case, a good spirit, a holy artifact, holy water from an angel, a saint, a much more powerful Evolver, or an Aetherist dabbling in Holy or Cleansing Spells will do the trick very well for a minor cost."

"Ah, the Nosk has fallen into an illusion again. It looks like he's fighting coherently and intelligently, but it's just his powerful instincts. Notice the untimely tremors of his muscles? These spasms are the symptoms of the sheer dread in him. If I am not mistaken, in his illusion he is drowning or suffocating. Because he is unable to dispel the illusion, he has no choice but to ignore the symptoms, but that is obviously no small feat..."

"I'm sure you're wondering how he can still fight with that evil aura having corrupted almost his entire mind?" Cekt chimed in for the umpteenth time as the Nosk managed to land a miraculous hit against the miasma demon.

"In fact, he relies on his True Will to keep himself grounded. It is a very special energy that the soul generates to protect the things that define it, but it can also take other forms, like the ones this evil spirit uses. The dark energy weapons they condense seem normal, but they are enhanced by his True Will of Killing and True Will of Fear, which are similar but different from what you usually call killing intent. In theory, if an attack barely touches you these special intents derived from the True Will stat can literally kill you if the will to live of the person in front is insufficient. The True Will of Fear, on the other hand, will make every assault unconditionally terrifying, causing flabbergasting, paralysis and sometimes cardiac arrest."

Jake and Will passively listened to the teachings of the old Aetherists, absorbing all this information like sponges eager for knowledge. Nevertheless, the duel eventually came to an end and the free lesson came to an end.

The valiant albino Nosk was now on his knees, threatening to collapse if he did not have his two blades connected to his wrists as temporary crutches. The icy radiance erupting from his body had dried up and the light from his dendrites was completely extinguished. Only one of them still emitted a faint flicker, but it was like the recalcitrant flame of a candle blown by the wind of a hurricane.

The demon in front no longer hid its appearance under a cloak of black smoke and its palm was pressed against the alien's forehead, its eyes glowing with a deeply evil demonic gleam. Spiritual fluctuations emanated from the place where they were both connected, as the demon voraciously consumed the mind of its victim.

The defeated warrior, powerless, had already lost the ability to fight. If Cekt didn't intervene, he would undoubtedly die here in anonymity and general indifference. No one would ever know that a valiant Nosk warrior had fought his last battle here.

Jake and Will could hardly describe what they felt, but they could not help but feel sick to their stomachs as they witnessed the demise of such a warrior. Subconsciously, they saw in the doom and gloom unfolding before their eyes a foretaste of their own demise.

By accepting to play the sordid game of the Mirror Universe, by standing up against their destiny, it was perhaps the end that awaited them all without exception at the end of the journey.

"Ahem, that was a good fight. Thank you, for your selflessness." Cekt broke the tragic mood with a dismissive sneer, as he strode purposefully toward the demon as if he were walking through his own backyard.

"Now, scram."

Cekt shooed it off with an impatient wag of his hand and the Digestor became a shapeless pile of miasma again, then the dark smoke dispersed completely with the rest of the miasma on the floor never to reappear. The little alien was as invincible as ever.

Saved by the Aetherist, the Nosk immediately regained consciousness and his wild eyes focused on Cekt with unprecedented sharpness. It was as if he was blaming him for ruining his death.

Finally, after a short reflection, the Nosk thanked him for his help and declared that he was now indebted to the little alien, who remained completely stoic.

How many people had Cekt saved in his lifetime? Thousands? Millions? The people who owed him were so numerous that he didn't even count them anymore.

Perhaps in deference to the Nosk's efforts and commitment to his long struggle, the dead demon dropped something. In addition to a crystal sphere, there was also a long spear forged from blood-colored steel. The weapon was enveloped in black miasma saturated with a sinister energy and aura.

"As expected from a Floor Boss." Will sighed enviously.

"It wasn't the Floor Boss." The Nosk protested apathetically in a choppy, guttural accent.

Jake and Will gasped as they learned that this monstrous demon was not the floor boss.

"Uh, where is he then?" The businessman asked politely.

"I don't know."

This answer took them by surprise. It was strangely similar to that of the White Drake they met on the Fifth Floor.. It was as if from the Fourth Floor, the next bosses of this Dungeon had vanished.

[Chapter 612 - You Have An Oracle Device. Use It.](#)

"It seems that these monsters are able to sense when their ship is sinking." Cekt stroked his goatee wistfully. "I might have underestimated them."

"Aren't they subordinate to the Dungeon Digester?" Will inquired uneasily. "I thought it could control them like it did with the grey orc archer on the First Floor when they ambushed us."

The old alien tutted at him ungraciously before kindly pointing out his mistake,

"That's where you're wrong. The Dungeon doesn't actually breed these Digestors. Digestors can spawn from nothing by accumulating ambient Aether because they are already there from the start. You can think of these unborn Digestors as eggs, spores or even a dormant computer virus waiting to activate. The Dungeon Digester simply centralizes these stray spores in the Mirror Universe and voluntarily supplies them with the Aether, and the genetic and Aetheric data required to guide their evolution. Without the Dungeon, these Digestors would have spawned sooner or later, but in the wild, and with random appearances. Their Aether levels would also have been at their lowest, slightly below the local Aether density.

"Because of this shaky start, their cognitive faculties would have been too limited and their evolution completely random depending on what they devoured or experienced. It is only after having developed a brain capable of feeling and questioning that they would have taken their evolution in hand, but often at this stage it is already too late and most of them would remain failures. Stupid and farcical abominations doomed to be controlled by their more evolved peers.

"By directing The Digestors' development, the Dungeon is undoubtedly bestowing a great boon upon them. The fact that this Dungeon used intelligent Evolvers as a reference to solidify its Nexus made it more dangerous. Even the goblins of the Second Floor have the potential to become devastating Digestors if given the time and opportunity."

The Nosk, listening intently from the side, had regained his color and his frigid aura was quickly regaining its vigor. His dendrites were beginning to light up again one by one, emitting a bright white flicker.

"In other words, the Dungeon Digester does not control the Digestors it creates, it only hosts them and gives them orders. The warrior grunted matter-of-factly with no respect for the demon creator who had almost sent him to his death. "In the end, this Dungeon is just a higher-rank Digester."

"Yeah... But a Rank 13, so please know your place." Jake rolled his eyes, blown away by the Nosk's quiet arrogance. "By the way, what's your name? Can't call you, you or hey all the time."

The Nosk Warrior took no offense and replied proudly, exposing the many striations on his right forearm after removing his gauntlet. There were 27 in total, 27 scars.

"My name is Khug' Kagamai, Master Hunter of the Khug' order. If I had defeated this demon, I could have received my 28th mark."

As he spoke these last words, the alien was clearly dejected, but he immediately felt better as he thought back to the spear he had just obtained. Although Cekt had finished the job, the Aetherist had left him to pick up the loot.

Jake and Will felt nothing as they heard him talk about his 28th mark. What did that mean? That he had only killed 28 enemies so far? It didn't matter. There were more pressing matters at the moment.

As with the White Drake, they questioned the Nosk, who despite his taciturn and solitary nature was willing to cooperate. The alien probably didn't converse very often, and his lamprey mouth wasn't really

adapted to produce this kind of sound. The result sounded guttural and slurred, more like a stomach growl than a human voice.

Still, Cekt remained all smiles, obviously used to dealing with all types of individuals. The Nosk had regrettably not crossed anyone. He was one of the few, who had passed the Fourth Floor Boss head-on without using any tricks, but had deemed it too weak to become his 28th mark. The Floor Boss also knew how to recognize a deadly enemy and had turned a blind eye, just like for Crygo and the Taotie.

"Did you kill the Fifth Floor Boss?" Jake asked.

"No. I heard from Crygo that Darkplume took care of him, but it managed to escape. Crygo and the Taotie preferred to stay farming on the Fifth Floor, but she pressed on. She should have been the first to reach the Sixth Floor."

Jake and Will thought back to the beautiful giant female peacock that had chatted with the whale as an equal, raising a hurricane with a flap of her wing. That bird did have what it took to survive here.

"A giant peacock you said? What did it look like?"

Cekt's brow furrowed at her physical description and he scanned the floor again with his senses but found no sign of the female peacock.

"She's gone." The Aetherist sighed regretfully.

"What's the big deal?" Jake asked with a startled look. He had never seen the little alien so frustrated.

"Nothing." Cekt shook off his tumultuous thoughts with a deep exhale. "This peacock is nothing, but her powers are interesting. It's a rare bloodline to get. I'm curious what opportunities she encountered in her Ordeals to evolve like this..."

The Aetherist said no more, but as the Nosk knows nothing more about the matter, it was time to get back on the road. Unlike the White Drake, Khug' Kagamai insisted on accompanying them. His warrior's instinct compelled him to confront the entity at the bottom of this Dungeon.

The quartet, therefore, set off again, wisely letting Cekt's mobile shield carry them. Spinning like a shooting star, they searched the dark sea up and down for the entrance to the Seventh and final floor. Based on the distance of the explosion they had felt on the Fourth Floor, that was the conclusion the Aetherist had reached.

This time, the little alien did not settle for a global mental scan, but a focused investigation of small areas. When Cekt concentrated his vast consciousness into a single beam, his mental power could literally see through the most opaque of materials and the Dungeon Digestor walls were no exception.

About a minute later, they found the entrance sealed by Hecate to the bottom floor.

It was ironic that like the Fifth Floor, the entrance was at the very bottom of a liquid expanse. The only catch was that unlike the Fifth Floor, where drowning was relatively easy, this black sea was filled with a substance so thick and dense that although drowning was possible, the drowning person would be stuck like a prehistoric mosquito in amber just a few feet beneath the surface.

This sea was as deep as the one on the Fifth Floor and without an inordinate amount of power, it was illusory to even dream of reaching the seabed. Without going through the dedicated path, reaching the Nexus was simply impossible. Now that the entrance was sealed, it would take at least the power of an Oracle Guardian to force the passage.

Cekt obviously knew about the traitor Kokoon, but neither White Drake nor Khug' Kagamai had come across him. If he had passed by, he had been as stealthy as a ghost. This was of course not surprising for an Evolver of his caliber.

As soon as the Aetherist found the entrance, he impatiently waved his cane and the vortex was restored, a wormhole forming once again in the heart of the dark sea. The little alien's consciousness shot through the tunnel unimpeded and he finally got a clear view of the situation on the Seventh Floor.

His wrinkled face immediately showed a deep weariness, as if he had not expected to find anything else there all along. Turning to the two humans, he warned them,

"There's nothing to see down there. The one you are looking for is long gone. Kokoon is gone too."

Jake and Will's hearts sank and they became livid but they had already mentally prepared for it.

"What about the Nexus?" The Nosk asked impassively, not caring about their grief.

"Gone." Cekt replied flatly. Addressing the two humans again, he asked, "You still want to go down there?"

Jake and Will exchanged a look, then nodded resolutely. So much for going all the way down. As long as Hecate was alive, all hope was not lost for Kyle's soul.

"Is it possible to check if someone's soul still exists? Or even locate it?" Will asked nervously. He was apprehensive about the answer.

Cekt, expecting a much more serious question, burst out laughing loudly.

"Is it the worry that has made you dumb? He teased gently. "You have an Oracle Device. Use it."

The businessman bugged for a brief moment, then realized the idiocy of his question. Because their bracelet was malfunctioning in Digestor territory, they had forgotten the omniscience of the Oracle System. As long as an Evolver was wearing their bracelet, there were no everlasting secrets.

Jake had other considerations. Cekt hadn't said he would help them find Kyle. If Hecate was as formidable as she had made herself out to be, then her Oracle Rank was obviously far above his. If she really did hold Kyle's soul, then to find him they would have to surpass her.

By then, would Kyle still be able to be saved? Jake didn't have much hope. He was making fast progress, but at the risk of his life. Hecate was obviously progressing even faster or her starting point was much higher.

Worst of all, not having found Bhuzkoc and not knowing if he had been killed, they couldn't even free Maeve from her Slave Contract.. All Jake could promise himself was to prevent her from falling back into the hands of such a master.

## [Chapter 613 - One Survivor](#)

A moment later, the quartet emerged from the vortex leading to the seventh and final floor. With the Nexus gone, this cavern, less spacious than the previous floors, was plunged forever into darkness.

It was not a mystical blackness due to dark miasma or occult magic, but a very natural obscurity. Because there was no light source, they simply could not see.

Compared to the extreme weather or downright evil conditions on the other floors, this place was nothing special at all. It was really just a small cave.

Without any source of light, even the highest Perception could do nothing. This was only true, however, for those who could only see the spectrum of visible light. Because Jake could discern infrared, he was not completely blind.

A battle of unprecedented proportions had raged here and the rock and rubble had not yet fully cooled. Jake could still get an idea of where he was by combining that with his mental sense and Aether Vision.

Still, Cekt conjured up a dozen more light orbs to properly illuminate the area and what immediately stood out to them was the gaping hole in the center of a huge rock sitting in the center of the cave. It wasn't until they examined it more closely that they realized it was actually a gigantic head.

Despite its tall size, the albino Nosk was only reaching below its nose. It was a wonder how this thing managed to fight in such a bulky cave.

This head was concealed under a silver chitin exoskeleton of incomparable density, forming a monstrous helmet reminiscent of the prehistoric skull of a dragon covered with protruding horns combined with the sophistication and elegance of an Oracle Guardian's futuristic headgear. Its eyes and the face underneath could not be seen.

"This is the Dungeon Digester's avatar." Cekt stated solemnly, his usually jovial face streaked with dark thoughts. It certainly brought back unpleasant memories.

"Is it a Floor Boss?" Will asked curiously as he studied the huge head. Even after its death, this chitin helmet was still shrouded in a tyrannical aura capable of suffocating the feeble-minded to death.

"Not strictly speaking, but it's just the same." The Aetherist was not rattled by the question and answered honestly. "A Floor Boss is still a Digester. The Dungeon Digester is able to control and influence them, but it uses the superiority of its Rank and its incomparably powerful Spirit Body and Soul to achieve its ends. In theory, if they evolve enough, they can evade its authority and leave, as I think has unfortunately happened with the Floor Bosses on the last three floors.

"The Dungeon Digester's avatar is a soulless entity that it can possess and control at will. It is the last bulwark protecting the Nexus where the Dungeon Digester's soul is kept and the Dungeon therefore puts the vast majority of its efforts and attention into its creation and improvement."

Turning to Jake, Cekt gave him a teasing look then said,

"This avatar has your eyes, and your teeth."

Jake did not appreciate the joke. This Dungeon had gone so far as to plagiarize the original to create superior versions. If he were on earth, he would have sued it for copyright infringement or at least demanded some kind of royalty, but here he had to settle for the mockery of a wrinkled, hideous alien barely reaching his knees...

"Its thick skin comes from a Taotie, the spots on its feathery beard from a Simorgh, its flat, squashed snout from an orc or a feline, its ears... a goblin or an elf? It could also be some kind of demon..." Cekt continued to list his features while staring at the chitin helmet as if he had no trouble seeing through it.

After hearing him list all the notable anatomical details of this head and their potential origin, they concluded that it was an imperfect attempt to combine the best bloodlines from its Dungeon to create the ultimate monster. Since it was dead, it obviously hadn't worked.

"It unfortunately, or rather fortunately, didn't have enough time." Cekt commented glumly. "That avatar wasn't finished and his Aether Code was completely unstable and overloaded. It probably crumbled on its own after a few attacks. An authentic avatar has the rank of the Dungeon Digestor itself. If given enough time, this avatar would have reached Rank 13. At this level, even I would be obliged to fight seriously..."

Jake and Will shivered as they heard his last words, but the Nosk merely snarled fiercely, as if to prove that he feared nothing and no one.

The rest of the body was nowhere in sight, as if it had been stuck in the ground, unable to extricate itself completely from the ground before perishing. This was misleading, however, as bits of chitin here and there told them that this thing had definitely delivered some lethal blows before succumbing.

As proof, several hooded corpses lay on either side of the cave. Most of the time, there was almost nothing left of them but a few bones or fragments of weapons and armor, but that was amazing in itself.

The cave was unusually spared considering the might of the participants in this clash of titans, but according to Cekt this was quite normal. The walls of the cave were the body of the Dungeon itself and they could regenerate quickly.

Behind these walls flowed huge rivers of silver blood, some as wide as the galleries they had ventured into. There was enough energy in that blood to sustain the structural integrity of the Dungeon even after its death.

Upon learning this, Jake could almost see the illusion of a dollar bill fluttering behind the businessman's pupils.

"Thi-this is Rank 13 Digestor Blood, right?" Will stuttered nervously as he rubbed his hands together with a greedy smile laden with nefarious intent.

Cekt momentarily lost interest in the chitin skull and levitating up to his face, violently brought his cane down on the top of his skull.

"Stop dreaming!"

"Ouch! Damn it, it was just an innocent question!"



Jake couldn't help but chuckle as he watched the businessman lose his distinguished and scholarly composure. Although he did not ask the question again to avoid taking a cane stroke, his own interest was plastered all over his face.

Knowing full well that the two humans would not give up so easily, the Aetherist brandished his cane and began to lecture them with a stern expression,

"First of all, this is not really Rank 13 Digestor Blood. This blood obviously exists in small quantities, but it is diluted to spread to the far reaches of its territory. I've already checked, and the actual Rank 13 Digestor Blood has already been stolen..."

"Second... If you want to take the rest you will have to compete with the other local behemoths. Now that the Dungeon Digestor hegemony is over, the wisely behaving Rank 12 and 11 will start their infighting again. That blood will be the first thing they'll fight over. That kind of troubled waters you'd better leave it to the high-rank Evolvers and Oracle Guardians who will take care of the aftermath. As the saying goes, don't eat more than you can chew."

Will was clearly not convinced by this explanation, but with the Wendok's unreasonable and temperamental nature he preferred to keep a low profile. Jake did the same. In the end, it was only a little silver blood. Was it worth risking his life?

The group continued to search the cave from top to bottom, finding nothing of note except more hooded corpses and broken artifacts. Even their Oracle Devices had been recovered.

When they were about to end the search and head back, they heard something, or rather someone, sneeze near them.

"Bless you." Jake replied robotically before freezing.

Alarmed, he turned around in the direction of the sneeze, but saw only an unbroken, lukewarm wall. He was not crazy, however, and he was certain of what he had heard.

The others had heard it too.

Cekt floated to the wall and a beam of mental power pierced the wall, probing its depths for miles. His eyes widened slightly in disbelief as he found the cause of the previous noise.

Expertly waving his cane, he formed a circle in the air that began to slice through the wall as if a spatial rift had cleaved the fabric. Beyond a few meters, the rock left place to a kind of sticky and compact grayish mucous.

Some blood capillaries the size of their thighs hinted at the precious silver liquid that Will so ardently desired. A stern look from the old alien, however, dissuaded him from running out to fill several bottles.

After drilling for about fifty meters, they did find someone.

A human.

The individual was badly injured, but still conscious. All his bones were broken and his body was completely embedded in the rock. Reconstituting the facts, he had probably been hit by a very heavy blow, then crashed against the wall of the cave. His speed must have been such that he had broken the

wall and disappeared inside. The wall had then regenerated itself over him before he had time to recover his senses.

Cekt didn't know who it was, but Jake and Will recognized him at once because of his double golden star-shaped pupils and his long aquamarine sword.

This man was Garrow Wyte, the one who Will said had saved their lives by scaring Hecate into fleeing. Despite his undoubted talent and power as a swordsman, that hadn't stopped him from taking a nasty beating.

If they had not discovered him in time, he would have died buried alive, probably of asphyxiation.

### [Chapter 614 - Sworn Enemies](#)

Jake and Will were most shocked by the extent of his injuries. Not so much for their severity as for the fact that they were not healing. A high-ranked Evolver of this level should have attained at least an Aether Vitality and Constitution consistent with his reputation.

Little did the two friends know that this Garrow was one of those players that went for a full glass-cannon build. The speed and offensive techniques of this swordsman were formidable but his defense and endurance left something to be desired.

Of course, that was only from the perspective of an Evolver of the same league. To Jake and Will, his Aether stats should have made him exceptional, even without a bloodline.

In other words, it still didn't explain why his condition seemed to be getting worse by the second. His skin had turned a greenish hue and his veins had turned black, as if his blood had coagulated into coal. His sneezing was not accidental, but it wasn't to get their attention either.

Garrow was sneezing and coughing for real. He wasn't faking it, and his symptoms were those of someone with a severe respiratory virus. Between the first sneeze and the time they had unstuck him from the gray mucous membrane he had begun to hyperventilate alarmingly.

At this rate, he would eventually suffocate with or without the Dungeon walls previously preventing him from breathing.

On the other hand, his skeleton had indeed been blown to pieces by a blow of unreal power, but his tight-fitting black armor combining some type of leather, straps and metal plates had held up. Although this kind of damage was visually more impactful, it was nothing compared to the evil that was eating away at his health.

No matter how bad his fractures were, Garrow should have started to regenerate by now. But something was stopping his body's natural healing process.

Jake scanned him with his bracelet and was able to confirm that he was indeed poisoned, or rather infected. At first he thought it was a specific poison or virus, but the situation was much more complicated than that.

There was not only one virus and there was not only one poison. Moreover, these entities were not explainable by conventional science.

Although the molecular structure of these poisons were recognizable under the light of a microscope, namely polyamines and other charybdotoxins usually found in venomous spiders and scorpions, they were imbued with corrosive properties and a lethality far exceeding their natural toxicity. It was as if these things had their own Aether Bloodline, or rather they had been fused, strengthened and boosted by other Aether abilities.

The viruses were of the same ilk. Although they were alien viruses, they were in essence enhanced cousins of the worst stuff on earth. Still, it wasn't enough to kill an Evolver high-Rank in a short period of time as was the case here. Whoever had created these things was a highly dangerous individual.

Even Cekt grew sullen as he examined the swordsman's wounds.

"This Kokoon didn't go easy..." He groused to himself as he quickly pressed several vital points on the warrior's body with the tip of his cane.

It was less obvious on Citro, who was an extremely tough Oracle Guardian, but on an Evolver like Garrow, it was an unstoppable and deadly biological weapon. It was a safe bet that it was this poison that had killed the Dungeon Digestor's avatar.

Filaments of emerald light coursed through the wounded man's body from those vital points touched by the tip of his cane, and the greenish skin returned to its proper color. The blackened veins regained their usual healthy redness and the swordsman's labored breathing evened out.

Garrow was out of the woods.

All the while, the human had remained conscious but unable to speak. His mind was also paralyzed and he was unable to mobilize any Aether. When his vocal cords were finally repaired, he thanked them sincerely, without holding out on his immense gratitude.

"Thank you for your invaluable help. If you hadn't come in time, I would have used my Oracle Teleport to send me away from here, but God knows where I would have turned up. Paralyzed and lost in Digestors territory, I would have likely died..."

His tone was very factual and humble as he said this, but the cold sweat oozing down his face betrayed that he was definitely not optimistic about his chances of survival.

"Doesn't an Evolver of your standing have the Oracle Heal skill?" Will asked candidly.

Garrow's face turned ghastly upon receiving this question. The urge to slap the impertinent businessman briefly crossed his mind, but he restrained himself by virtue of the fact that this was one of his saviors.

Cekt and Jake also gave Will a dumbfounded and pitying look. His lack of tact was jarring. The Aetherist's reassuring presence seemed to have rendered him a bit too bold.

Not knowing if the businessman was a complacent bastard or a truly naive and ignorant jerk, Garrow still made an effort to answer, so as to avoid offending them.

"As you know... the Oracle Heal costs 1,000 times the healing cost of a Green Cube..." The swordsman rasped with a livid look, about to faint as he thought of what it had cost him. "I had to wait 5 minutes

and 16 seconds between the moment I was injured and your arrival. I used the Oracle Heal 11 times and the Oracle Detoxification 7 times in that time frame... I'm broke."

Jake, Will and even the Nosk inhaled sharply as they learned the sad truth. These last three words were spoken with a dry throat and a trembling voice, full of deep despair.

How much Aether did it take to use the Oracle Heal eleven times in a row? Jake remembered that to heal a whole but heavily damaged body, the Green Cube fee was about 10M Aether points. In other words, the Oracle Heal had charged 10B Aether points per use.

If the Oracle System had judged the swordsman's injuries to be even more serious, the bill might have been even higher. Jake didn't know how much the Oracle Detoxification skill activation cost, but he doubted it was much less.

The most despairing part of all this was that those Oracle Skills hadn't worked. The skeleton had remained broken and the viruses and poisons had continued to spread.

"This Kokoon is a traitor. I'll report what happened here when I get back." Cekt solemnly promised Garrow, though he had no intention of compensating him. "You can thank your bloodline or you'd be dead like the rest of them."

Garrow's face darkened when he heard him mention his bloodline, but he took it upon himself not to let it show.

"But the demon I was chasing survived." He confessed with clear shame and disappointment.

A demon? Jake and Will perked their heads up hastily.

"Was it the veiled woman?" Will asked with a restless tremolo in his voice.

Garrow considered the businessman seriously for the first time and answered slowly,

"It is indeed her. The archdemon Hecate, but some people think she's some kind of goddess. She was my prey. She's the only reason I came here. Everything that happened in this Dungeon was not on my agenda."

Jake and Will had finally gotten a lead. The swordsman seemed to know her well and was used to tracking her. Maybe they could work together.

Will went on to tell what had happened to their friend and why they were looking for her as well and Garrow didn't change his expression throughout the explanation. Jake, on the other hand, was hearing most of these details for the first time and was inwardly shocked.

Will had only just arrived on the Fourth Floor battlefield with Fumdalf and his bunch of creatures when he had found Kyle, but the carnage was already in full swing and he had just witnessed a strange scene to say the least:

Kyle viciously slitting his own sister's throat while screaming the name "Bhuzkoc." The Bhuzkoc in question was standing a few feet sideways, astonishment plastered all over his face.

The next second, Kyle had come to his senses and realized the horror of his crime. Bloodshot eyes and convulsing with grief, he had let out a heartbreaking wail of rage before bursting out with overwhelming hatred towards himself and the one he believed to be responsible.

At that moment, a stunned Bhuzkoc had appeared in his field of vision and he had pounced on him like a kamikaze gone mad. Already in his ogre form, the Nawai tyrant was unexpectedly unable to react, as if something invisible inhibited him from moving.

Only Will in the distance had noticed the sinister red glimmer in Hecate's amused eyes, passively observing the tragic scene like an indulgent spectator before a hilarious play.

Kyle had then, under the influence of his emotions, delivered hundreds of sword swings, lacerating, mutilating and dismembering little by little the helpless Nawai warrior. When Bhuzkoc seemed to be finished, the force preventing him from moving had miraculously disappeared and his inalienable thirst for life had been embodied in the form of a downward war hammer strike of phenomenal power.

The ogre had put all his Aether into it and activated all his Warrior Aether Skills to maximize the destructive potential of this attack. It was a suicidal, fury-laden blow that he hoped would push Kyle into retreat, but the Playboy was like a demented bull and he had just gritted his teeth and continued his upward slash fearlessly.

The result was that Bhuzkoc had been decapitated, but Kyle's head had been nailed into his own torso, completely reduced to mush. His rib cage and internal organs were also pulverized and flattened in the process.

The two sworn enemies had killed each other, in front of a Hecate smiling ominously.

### [Chapter 615 - Silly Question](#)

"What next?" Jake urged him to continue. This suspense was not good for his mental health.

Will's face contorted as he explained the rest of the story but failed to hide his perplexity.

"And then... Bhuzkoc caught his head in mid-air with the arms of his headless body, then reconnected it to his neck... I'm sure Kyle's Spirit Body witnessed the scene."

"So the bastard survived?!" Jake cursed, paling with anger. He clenched his fists so hard you could hear them grinding from a hundred meters away.

Will stood in silence for a while, then sighed.

"No. Hecate blasted him with a flick of her wrist before he could even take three steps. Then she pulled some kind of lantern out of nowhere, and the souls of Kyle, Bhuzkoc, and the other recently dead Evolvers were sucked into it."

"And that's when I made my entrance." Garrow nodded, corroborating Will's version of events. "I saw her use her lantern too. It's a Silver Aether Artifact capable of storing the Souls of the dead as well as the living. I don't know what she does with it, but it is a formidable weapon. In addition to the energy she draws from it, which is practically inexhaustible, this lantern can spawn other demons. The army it can mobilize in an instant far exceeds that of Nelekai.

"I'm afraid your friend's soul will not be the same if you wait too long. If it is what I believe, Kyle's soul must be ravaged by guilt and hatred after killing his sister and failing to avenge her. Conversely, I am pretty sure that Bhuzkoc believes that he failed to kill Kyle and was killed by him. These kinds of illusions and theatrics are child's play for Hecate. Almost second nature. Sowing chaos is her specialty.

"I'm sorry I was too late." Garrow apologized solemnly.

Jake and Will fell silent for a long moment after that, their minds in turmoil. It was hard to tell what was really going through their minds, but the urge to save Kyle was pitted against an overwhelming sense of helplessness and failure. Both of them knew that they were not up to the task as it was.

Without them realizing it, Maeve, still on Jake's back, had woken up. In order not to interrupt the conversation, she had restrained herself from moving, but upon learning the truth about her brother and Bhuzkoc, she unexpectedly began to struggle, going so far as to bite Jake's neck to free herself.

The problem was, Jake's neck was so hard that she cracked her teeth, but more importantly... she was tied up.

To be able to move and fight freely, Jake had long ago tied her tightly to his body. To make sure she didn't fall out during a high-intensity fight, he'd done it thoroughly. Without using his powers, Jake himself would have found it difficult to break free of those bonds.

"Get off me! Peeh! I must avenge Bhuzkoc! Kyle, you bastard! I hope you rot in hell!" The young woman began to scream, even spitting hatefully at him.

Jake was not Kyle. He didn't feel an unconditional affection for this girl. As soon as that ingrate spat at him and insulted her brother who had sacrificed everything for her, he saw red. His Apex Predator Glyph activated immediately, and a deadly aura that turned the air as thick as oil shut her down.

Undoing her restraints with a thought, he threw the insolent woman to the ground and glaring darkly at her, he said distinctly but icily,

" Do you want to die ?"

It was quite the cold shower for Maeve. Her mind still brainwashed by Bhuzkoc's latest abuse and instructions momentarily took a back seat, her survival instinct vigorously taking over.

She was used to dangerous and unstable people. Bhuzkoc was clearly one of those people, but after the initial conditioning phase he had done no harm to her, although she had believed many times that he would act on her, especially in his ogre form. His anger, his desire to kill was directed at everyone.

But Jake... She clearly felt that despite his respect for her brother, he would not hesitate to kill her if she crossed the line. This kind of killing intent was laser focused on her and there was no ambiguity about his resolve to carry it out.

Faced with this near death experience, Maeve gasped nervously for half a minute, but she managed to calm down with a lot of deep breaths. Then at long last, she coughed,

"No..."

"I didn't hear you." Jake turned a deaf ear.

"No!"

"Do you hear anything? I still don't hear anything."

"NO! I want to live! Damn it..." She screamed in rage.

Then she burst into tears. She realized once cold headed that she had just lost her brother by her own fault. If she had been less foolish and helpless, if she had resisted a little more, if she had not lost hope, she would have noticed the brainwashing that the Slave Contract was gradually subjecting her to.

In the end, without being aware of it, she had developed a real Stockholm syndrome. Cherishing the rare moments of kindness that Bhuzkoc showed her, confusing his lust with affection, the times when he didn't beat them with kindness. Worse, when he sadistically killed and tortured other women, she had come to feel satisfaction in thinking herself different.

It was only now that Bhuzkoc was dead and his soul imprisoned far away from her that she was slowly regaining her lucidity. The brainwashing due to the orders received under the authority of the Slave Contract was still there, but the orders that were still effective had lost their compulsory quality.

She could now ignore them and make a distinction between her own emotions and desires and those that had been instilled in her without her knowledge. And the contrast was so great, so striking... That pain, shame, guilt and despair overwhelmed her in an instant, her recently restored lucidity melting into nothingness.

Her face became lifeless, frozen in a deathly pallor, her arms hanging limply along her waist. If it weren't for her heart still beating at a slow and steady pace, they might have thought she had just died of a heart attack.

Jake, Will, Garrow and Cekt watched the scene with a constipated expression, but made no attempt to console her. The little alien even gave a thumbs up to his disciple's eloquence.

"Oh my... It seems we have a lady-killer among us... Literally, haha..." The gremlin continued with his tasteless jokes, earning himself a dark look from his disciple.

"Where were we?" Jake refocused the conversation with a straight face, decisively leaving the young woman to mope around by herself. They would have time to console her once they were safe.

"What happens next after Garrow arrives and Hecate leaves." Will recapped spiritedly.

The sequel was just as they had imagined it, but with one subtlety.

Garrow had indeed chased and battled with Hecate from the Fourth to the Sixth Floor, and had even seen her assassinate the colossal flying whale Crygo with a cryptic and uncanny technique. After grazing it with a gentle caress of her fingertips, the enormous cetacean had collapsed unconscious, its carcass sinking down into the vortex leading to the Nexus Floor.

Having been delayed by the miasma from the Sixth Floor, the swordsman had wasted almost a minute in locating and then traversing the wormhole and the fight against the Dungeon Digestor's avatar was already in full swing when he arrived.

The subtlety was that even before Kokoon arrived, Nelekai, Hecate and the group of hooded individuals serving Lost Divinities were already taking a nasty beating.

The Avatar was immature, but it already had the power of a Rank 10.5, with Aether stats close to 500,000 points. On top of that, it wasn't the result of a failed evolution, nor an evolutionary dead end, but a humanoid Digester combining and surpassing their powers that had only one drawback: its bulky size.

"Our only advantage was that the Dungeon Digester is unable to copy our Souls and the Glyphs, Soul Classes and Spells that come with them as long as we don't deliberately use those techniques against it." Garrow revealed with a shudder at the mere thought of it. "Although its Aether and Body stats were well above ours on paper, we had the advantage of numbers and our Aether Artifacts to rely on."

"Even if you had used those techniques, he wouldn't have copied them." Cekt corrected absentmindedly. "Only a Rank 5 Aetherist or higher can dabble in the Soul. Dungeon Digestors have an innate talent for it, but everything they create comes from their instincts."

"The True Will of Destruction or their Soul Classes such as Mirror Universe Destroyer or Eater may seem terrifying and unfathomable to us, but it's something that all skilled Digestors naturally awaken by atavism once their evolution passes a certain threshold."

"If however, the possibility of your Soul and Soul Glyphs being copied worries you, then it means you're trapped in a mature Rank 15 Dungeon Digester and in that case believe me... That's the least of your worries."

Garrow didn't overreact, obviously privy to something, but to Jake and Will it was premium information capable of shaking their convictions. Even Maeve, whose soul seemed to have already left her body, became alert again upon hearing this.

She realized that even if she was saved, she was not yet out of danger. If she wanted to survive, she would have to do much more than rely on others.

"Oh, silly question." Jake asked Garrow, deliberately changing the subject to dissolve the depressing atmosphere installed by his master. "Why are you chasing Hecate if it's not too intrusive?"

The answer, though shocking, turned out to be logical and self explanatory.

"Because of my Soul Class. I'm a Demon Slayer.." Garrow stated with a sparkling smile.

### [Chapter 616 - Meeting Old Friends](#)

Jake and Will were stunned by the cliché sounding name of this Soul Class, but after a second thought they agreed that this was a fitting occupation for the swordsman. No sooner had he arrived in the Dungeon than he had immediately offended a necromancer, then after losing track of him immediately refocused his attention on his original prey, an authentic archdemon.

With the discussion over, the group searched the Nexus Floor one last time for any loot left behind, but it had all been destroyed during the clash with the Dungeon avatar. According to Cekt, if an Aether Artifact was strong enough to survive such a confrontation, then Kokoon would not have ignored it anyway.



In the doubt that other survivors or victims would have met with the unfortunate fate of ending up trapped in the Dungeon's mucous membranes like Garrow, Cekt did a rigorous and thorough scan of the nearby floor walls, but it turned out that the swordsman was the only exception.

Funnily enough, it was this forced confinement that had probably saved his life. Kokoon had spared no one. Of the few hooded Evolvers found among the dead, there was little left but a few scraps of equipment.

Coming up empty-handed, the group finally began their climb back to the surface. With the protection of a Rank 3 Aetherist, they were all relaxed and could finally enjoy each Dungeon floor for its unique scenery and landscapes rather than for its inherent dangers.

All the Digestors had been wiped out and there was nothing left to be gained. Left fallow, the Dungeon would become a natural underground haven that would soon be reclaimed by other Digestors.

Even after the Dungeon Digestor's death, Digestors would not stop spawning, but they would no longer have any special advantages or attributes at birth. Their appearance would become partially random again, and it would be up to them to devour other prey to build their own path and perhaps mutate into something exceptional.

When he reached the Second Floor, Cekt smiled mysteriously and said something that aroused his disciple's dormant curiosity.

"By the way Jake, before coming here I also had to rescue two other disciples of mine. This will be the opportunity to introduce them to you. With you, there are seven of you in total and you represent my last generation of students. There is only one at the moment who is qualified to study with me, but I hope it won't be long before you join in either."

Jake wondered why he was telling him about all this. The little alien wasn't the type to make him jealous, nor was he the type to arouse his competitive spirit in order to pressure him to excel. All Cekt wanted was results. However, what he announced next shook him to the core.

"On my way here, I also met two friends of yours who claim to know you. They were looking for you. One was a young blonde woman carrying a blood-red sword, while the other was a ridiculously large mini giant who somewhat resembled you."

Jake and Will first thought of Sarah, the young woman they had expelled from the Myrtharian Nerds, but that didn't fit with the description of the second individual. The second person could just as easily be one of his cousins like Kevin, whose build matched.

"Can you describe the man to me?" Jake inquired in a hesitant tone.

"Sure..." The gremlin paused for a painfully long time to build up the suspense before finally blurting out. "Three meters tall, built like a mountain of muscle, dark and shiny skin like Essence Bronze, a long mane as silver as a full moon, irises of the same color, a square and protruding jaw, long translucent protruding canines and claws to match. His body temperature is like a burning furnace and his skin smells like volcanic rock and coal. Not very talkative, the man seems to be a simpleton and a bit of a fool, but his gaze is wise and clear, free of all temptations.

"You know how to choose your friends." Cekt concluded with approval.

Jake and Will exchanged a stunned look. How could they forget that memorable Kintharian?

Will had only briefly glimpsed Gerulf alongside Servius Cassius at the slave auction that marked the very beginning of their First Ordeal, but Kyle and Jake had sung his praises extensively. Jake, in particular, owed his life and his current success to him in more ways than one.

Not daring to believe it, Jake then thought of the young blonde woman accompanying him and his face went rigid with shock.

"Lucia and Gerulf!" He exclaimed in disbelief.

"It would seem that you know them well, indeed." Cekt thoughtfully stroked his goatee with a satisfied smile, pleased with the effect of his announcement.

Maeve was unimpressed at the news, but when Will explained that Kyle and Jake had been trained by Gerulf and that their faction's Myrtharian Body passive came from that giant, her reaction changed dramatically.

She herself owed her life to this Passive Skill, or the non-existent atmosphere, high temperature and inhospitable radiation of the Fourth Floor would have ended her adventure prematurely. She was intrigued by such an individual.

After that, Jake and Will were more than eager to get back to the surface and the Wendok didn't have the heart to mess with them. The translucent shield that served as their mode of transportation suddenly shot skyward, hurtling into the ultra-wide hole that Cekt had previously created with his Inference Spell.

A blink of an eye later, they were back on the surface. The conical, spiral mountain that once marked the entrance to the Dungeon had been completely wiped out by the Aetherist's Inference Spell.

The weather was as horrible as ever, the thick black storm clouds still blocking the sun from beaming down on their faces, but the anxiety and apprehension that had stuck with them for the past few days was all but gone.

The first thing the group saw as they emerged from the hole was the Dungeon's survivors clustered together around an imposing six-armed Oracle Guardian. What immediately struck them was the pitiful number of survivors.

Of the tens of thousands of beasts and thousands of Evolvers and refugees that had entered the Dungeon, only a handful remained. A few hundred at most.

Sympathetic, but not overly concerned about their fate, Jake and Will anxiously searched for the rest of their subordinates. When they spotted Svava and a few dozen familiar faces, they finally relaxed.

The duo immediately began a head count, but as they did so, their faces soon darkened. Of the nearly hundreds of refugees who had entered the Dungeon with them, only 43 remained.

Of the promising recruits, only the old spearman Ingranus and the Egean Nicolet, who had strangely outlived Diccon and Takoyaki, remained. The orphans Kelly and Khal had also survived, but they still looked haggard after losing a piece of their soul to Urul Tak's Soul Spell.

Apart from them, the goblin couple Xort and Niss had made it out, as had the former redheaded prostitute Secyone and her two sons. Overall, all the survivors looked more confident than before and their Aether aura had noticeably deepened.

There was only one person that Jake was surprised to see still alive, but not so much because he was standing there with them, but because he was standing there alone.

He was, of course, talking about the cowardly, spineless swindler that Grash had gone out of his way to protect. The pig-like orc was nowhere in sight. By comparison, the con man had a look of remorse and self-hatred in his eyes. He looked like he had been crying.

Jake's heart sank as he guessed what had happened. If the scammer wasn't an evil Oscar-winning actor, then the candid, benevolent orc was probably dead.

Jake and Will quickly became inconsolable, but they weren't wracked with guilt either. It was just how the Mirror Universe worked. No matter how many precautions they took, no matter how prepared they were, when the day came they could only rely on themselves.

Even in his desire to save Kyle, Jake had still failed. If he had chosen to save these refugees instead, maybe he could have saved some of them, but that might have delayed his own progress. Who knows if it might have led to his death a few days or weeks later?

There was no point in dwelling on or reminiscing about the past. It was better to keep moving forward. Only by becoming stronger could he prevent such a tragedy from happening again.

Sweeping his eyes over the other survivors, Jake was taken aback when he saw the Taotie Digestor. This abomination had been gorging itself all day as if the Dungeon was its own backyard, then quietly surfaced unnoticed once help arrived. They had underestimated this monster.

Garow squinted menacingly as he glared at the creature, only he knowing what he was truly thinking. According to his account, the Taotie had also been encountered on the Sixth Floor during its pursuit of Hecate. The monster had not chosen to follow them to the last floor, preferring to devour the miasma while inhaling it greedily as if it were normal air.

It was simply astounding for the Taotie to have escaped Cekt's vigilance on the way up as on the way back. Its ability to erase its presence was top tier.

Will then joined his new friend Fumdalf and the few creatures he had enlisted and invited the few surviving Nawai warriors to travel with them.

As for Melkree, the Dryad had already weighed the pros and cons and made her decision. With her subordinates all dead, she no longer had a faction to protect, and Jake had sufficiently proven that he was not a malevolent psychopath.

She would join the Myrtharian Nerds.

Shaktilar being Jake's slave, he obviously had no choice either.

Jake then nervously searched for the two familiar figures he was unable to forget and after much hesitation his gaze finally landed on two solitary individuals, a man and a woman.

## [Chapter 617 - Its Me](#)

Gerulf had not changed. If Jake were to describe his transformation... He would simply say that Gerulf was even more like Gerulf than before. His face with its intimidating, bestial features was unchanged, but his lower canines had grown, as had his claws.

He also wore heavy hoplite armor with a gladius at his belt, and held a rectangular shield and spear that made him look anachronistic among the crowd.

His musculature and growth spurt, on the other hand, had exceeded the bounds of reasonableness. In the past, the giant towered over him by two heads, and it was still the case today.

To his dismay, he still had to lift his head to look him in the eye, but it made him smile instead. Time flew, the world changed perpetually, but there were also things that remained the same. Strangely, this brought him some solace he didn't even know he was craving.

But that didn't mean that Gerulf was stronger than he was. Jake had never been a pure Kintharian. In fact, he wasn't even a pure Myrtharian anymore since the Silver prefix was added to it. He was a hybrid among hybrids.

Even without scanning the Kintharian, Jake could tell at a glance that Gerulf was physically at least as strong as he was. While at the time Jake was far too weak to gauge the extent of the Heliодas champion's abilities, he could now clearly estimate his level.

Alas, it was only in terms of Body Stats, and only in terms of Strength, Constitution and Vitality. As for Agility, Intelligence and Perception, it was crystal clear that Gerulf was no match for him.

Besides, his Aether stats were drastically lower than his own. No matter the hardships endured to stand before him today, his world where the Myrmid Empire ruled only had an Aether Density of 8 back then.

For the record, the Kintharians did not have the Self-Aether Encoding Skill. Their potential was limitless, but only as far as their Body Stats were concerned. Without external aids, these born warriors were constrained by the Aether density of the world they lived in.

Jake could see the Oracle Device on Gerulf's wrist, and it was the only reason his Aether signature matched those of other refugees who also had Aether stats slightly above 100 points.

In contrast, Lucia's Aether aura standing next to the giant blazed like a supernova blowing up in the middle of a moonless night. Shockingly, her Aether fluctuations surpassed his!

Jake couldn't help but be impressed when he saw this.

It wasn't just her Aether stats that had improved. Lucia was no longer the emaciated young princess with the bloody, sickly face he had met in the infirmary of Servius Cassius' ludus.

She was now a gorgeous and resplendent woman from whom emanated a coldly determined and imperturbable aura. She was also wearing a hoplite armor characteristic of the Myrmidian army, but of better quality and on the light side.

The barely drawn blade of her gladius was blood-red like Sarah's sword. It was a Myrmidian weapon forged with her own blood and able to grow alongside her in battle. The Aether contained in this sword was aligned with her own aura.

Like Gerulf, she had to go through hell to stand in front of him at this very moment.

It was less obvious with Gerulf, who was already an over-trained adult when they first met, but Lucia had aged. Not that she had grown wrinkled, or that she was uglier than before, quite the contrary. But Jake could safely assume that she was at least two years older than when they last met.

She was no longer an immature, desperate princess, but a mature, experienced young woman whose character had been forged in the flames of war. The scar running down her face from her right forehead to the corner of her left jaw and down to her right eye and the underside of her nose left no doubt about it...

Jake could almost visualize the Digestor scythe plowing into her face after Lucia failed to avoid it completely. Outstanding Aether Vitality did not make one superhuman. If that injury had closed up during a fight, there was nothing strange about a permanent scar like this.

Not everyone was like him and Gerulf, with an inhuman body capable of recovering perfectly from any injury with a little fertilizer and light.

Gazing quickly over the rest of her body, he spotted similar scars on her forearms, with a particularly nasty one splitting her throat from left to right. She had barely survived a beheading strike.

Despite her war wounds, Jake found her no less beautiful. After his own Ordeals, he had become indifferent to the laughable aesthetic standards of a peaceful society.

Moreover, without exaggerating, Lucia remained as beautiful as the photoshopped supermodels of the Earth before their forced transfer on B842. Her smooth olive skin, even slightly glistening, her long silky hair tied up carelessly so as not to disturb her during battle and her golden irises shimmering like cat's eyes in the dark gave her a charm and a natural charisma that Will definitely couldn't match.

Combined with her temperament, her scars were almost invisible to Jake and other Evolvers who had been through similar dramas. Especially since removing those scars was a breeze once on B842.

"Are you... Jake?"

A melodious, yet hesitant voice interrupted his thoughts. While Jake was sizing up his two old friends, they were also watching him.

They weren't the only ones who had changed. If their changes were already shocking, his own were just mind-blowing.

Gerulf had recognized Jake immediately thanks to his overdeveloped animal instincts, but Lucia had the greatest difficulty superimposing the image of the brave young slave who had made such an impression on her with that of the killing machine standing stoically before her.

Almost a meter taller than before, his musculature was compact and daunting, but not grotesque and cumbersome as Gerulf's could be. His pale bronze skin, silver mid-length mane sprinkled with golden streaks matched his galactic irises elegantly.

Although his translucent claws and fangs resembled those of the Kintharian, they were nowhere near as disproportionate and didn't make him look so bad. If a woman had a kink for ridiculously beefy guys, Jake could even be called handsome.

But compared to his appearance, it was mostly the murderous, savage aura that naturally rose from him, coupled with the metallic smell of dried blood permeating his armor that made him unrecognizable.

The hesitation in the voice of Lucia was thus quite natural.

More moved than he would have thought, Jake nodded with a tired smile,

"It's me. I told you I'd survive."

His killing intent faded, and Lucia could finally confirm that the fierce giant before her was indeed her old gladiator friend. Her eyes became moist, the corners of her eyes involuntarily filling with tears.

Sticking her spear in the ground, she ran to him and threw herself into his arms, momentarily taking his breath away. It was also a good excuse to hide her tears.

"I'm so happy to know you're alive!" She yelled, trying to hide the tremor in her voice. "When the Digestors were exposed and started slaughtering everyone, I thought for a long time that we were doomed. It was your last words that convinced me to hang on for dear life and take up arms."

Jake let himself be hugged dumbly, trying to remember his exact words. With his current intelligence, remembering a few sentences was no challenge, but it wasn't the case back then. Fortunately, his Aether Intelligence had already reached 100 points at the time and this moment was particularly heartbreaking. As he rummaged through his memory, they eventually came back to him.

"Listen to me carefully. I'm from another world, I'm going to disappear in a few seconds so you don't have to worry about me, I'll survive. The creatures in that vat that controlled your mother and the other Templars are called Digestors. Soon, like mine, your world will be absorbed into the Mirror Universe to fight them. Heliodas is doomed, the only thing you must do now is run as far away as you can. If fate allows, we will meet again."

Refusing to listen to him, Gerulf had then knocked out the young woman, leaving her no chance to answer him. To hold on, she had clung to this one promise all this time.

Now Jake was even more stunned and bewildered than Lucia. How could he have imagined that it would be these few words spoken in a hurry that would galvanize her in all her future battles, pushing her to persevere to meet him again.

He had no idea how many times she had repeated these words to herself after losing her family. When Jake had killed her mother before her very eyes, her world had fallen apart. When she had woken up far from Heliodas, she had learned that the capital of the empire had fallen and that the Emperor was dead, defeated by the sacred priestess of Throsgen.

The empire was ablaze, facing the double threat of the Throsgenian, Eltarian and Kintharian rebels, as well as the internal endemic caused by the proliferation of Digestors. Her older sister Licinia had not escaped either.

Everything she had known seemed destined to disappear.

Jake could feel just how fragile her candle of hope was. Subconsciously, he returned the hug.

Gerulf was not as expressive and emotional as Lucia, but as he walked up with heavy steps, Jake lifted his head and a gruff grin greeted him.

"I'm glad to see you again." The giant declared in a deep voice that resonated like an earthquake.. You've grown strong, but to me you'll always be the little champion of Heliodas."

### [Chapter 618 - Arent You Supposed To Be Dead Already?](#)

"And you will always be my first mentor." Jake grinned happily. Glancing secretly in the direction of a certain Gremlin, he then whispered, "At least you actually taught me something."

"I can hear you!" Cekt's croaking voice suddenly boomed in his left ear as if the alien had just teleported to him. When Jake reflexively turned his head in the direction of the noise, he was dismayed to find that it was indeed not just an impression.

Judging by his sulky countenance... the old alien was offended. Lucia also sensed that something was wrong because she let go of his embrace and stepped back with a self-conscious look, although with her olive skin it was hard to tell if she was blushing or not.

Master and disciple clashed with their stares, and Gerulf could almost see an electric arc forming between the two. Comically, because Cekt was so small he was forced to look up and this gave the illusion that he was the disciple and Jake the master. Because of the blank and guiltless expression of the latter, it was really quite confusing.

The arrogance and stubborn pride of a Myrtharian facing the infamous capriciousness of an old Wendok of cosmic renown. The outcome of such a dispute was a foregone conclusion.

Bam!

Jake didn't give an inch, but in return he reaped a vicious cane blow on the top of his skull. In addition to the searing pain that made him see double for a few seconds, a frightening bump the size of an ostrich egg swelled on his skull, almost looking like an exotic hat.

A bump like that on a normal human would have been treated with the utmost seriousness, but on Jake it was more of a cosmetic annoyance than anything else. With his Vitality, he could heal this type of injury in an instant if he focused.

Glaring at his master, Jake waited for the lump to subside, but his expression changed when he saw that the pain and the lump were not diminishing. Becoming solemn, he checked his Oracle Status, but found nothing wrong.

'How did he do this?'

As Jake and Xi tried to make sense of this sorcery that even the Oracle Device couldn't detect, Cekt cackled childishly,

"Don't bother. You're still too wet behind the ears if you think you can stop one of my techniques. Just behave yourself and it will go away in an hour or two."

Jake became stern, but what could he do but accept his punishment. Lucia couldn't take it anymore and started giggling. Gerulf gave him a look of sympathy, but he seemed to be relishing his fate.

At least, even on B842 there were things that didn't change. Jake was still someone's whipping boy.

"Meowhahaha!" A burst of laughter closer to a muffled mewl came thundering in to Cekt's sadistic chuckles and Lucia's reserved mirth.

Who else could it be? It was obviously his beloved cat, Crunch.

Gerulf and Lucia looked seriously at a huge ball of black fur almost as massive as an elephant. The chubby, short-legged feline was rolling around on the ground, obviously in the throes of an unprecedented seizure.

Perched on top of him, a moody orange turkey waddled on top of him as the cat kept rolling on the ground to stay in the same position, like a house mouse running on a wheel for exercise.

Undoubtedly, it was Lord Phenix. Both of them had survived the Dungeon.

If the turkey was so disgruntled, it was obviously because not all the chickens, ducks and other fowl in his original gang had made it out. Their numbers were greatly reduced, and only a plucked swan and a young one-legged hawk were left. The rest had ended up in the stomachs of the goblins and orcs of the Second Floor.

What was a Lord without his retinue? He had every reason to be cranky.

Just as the laughter seemed to be going on for a while, another couple of footsteps approached them and Jake saw two humanoid aliens, a man and a woman, whom he was meeting for the first time.

The man was not human. At least by human standards he would have been considered extremely repulsive, if not downright terrifying. His body was beefy, about Jake's size but with the absurd build of Gerulf. His feet ended in dark hooves and his skin was covered in dense, short-haired red fur. His face was less hairy but with large nostrils and two long horns curved on either side of his skull that could serve as excellent coat racks.

But the most striking thing was not his morphology, nor his mech suit or his futuristic glasses full of gadgets, but the ten mechanized arms connected to a device placed along his spine.

This guy was most likely a scientist.

The woman at his side could have been mistaken for a normal human, and even a very pretty one if it weren't for the fact that her skin, her hair, her clothes were literally plastic white. The only exception was the bluish light animating her irises. Each of her movements, though graceful, was accompanied by clicks and clanks that were imperceptible to a normal Evolver, but clearly audible to Jake and anyone else with fine hearing.

This woman was an android.



"It would appear that another disciple has joined the ranks of those caned by Master." The horned alien guffawed loudly as he pulled out a jar of ointment from his Space Storage, which he handed to Jake as he prescribed in a practiced manner, "Apply the ointment until it penetrates and do not touch it again. The pain should pass right away, but it will still take ten minutes for full resorption."

Jake did not hesitate to apply the ointment to his football-sized lump. His instinct was to pop it as if it were a nasty blister, but his common sense dictated otherwise. The bump was filled with blood... It was his body's way of protecting itself, isolating and expelling the afflicted blood.

After he finished applying the ointment, the pain immediately subsided and he thanked the horned alien profusely. The altruistic scientist nodded as if nothing had happened, while the female android took over the introductions.

"My name is Siri, a Delcron android. The horned Vrusug who just helped you is Syrbarun the fifth disciple of the B842 generation. As for me, I am the third disciple." She began to recite with a soft and hypnotic voice, but not robotic and monotonous as he had originally imagined.

In any case, there was no condescension, in his two fellow students. And their Aether fluctuations were comparable to his.

"You can call me Syr." The Vrusug said as he shook his hand. "Welcome aboard."

Only now did Jake learn that he was the last disciple recruited by Cekt. At least, that's what he thought. As Syr and Siri quickly explained to him, neither of them were qualified to study with the Aetherist. The bits of information they had might not be up to date, and Cekt was the type to recruit new disciples on a whim.

Apparently, this Master was not the most reliable mentor when it came to teaching and ethics. However, Jake didn't complain. Surely not all Aetherists were willing to go to such lengths to save disciples they barely knew.

One can't have it both ways.

Listening with a distracted ear, Cekt straightened up with his fists on his hips and lifted his chin with dignity, then bragged,

"If you want to learn from me, stop complaining and work hard. The day you can cast an Aether Spell instantly without any help, I will welcome you with open arms."

Siri rolled her eyes as she heard the alien preach the gospel with fervor.

"You heard him. None of us are qualified."

Familiarizing themselves with each other, they chatted freely for about ten minutes, exchanging information about their recent adventures in their respective Dungeons. It turned out that Jake and his group were not the only ones unlucky.

What had happened to them had happened everywhere else. Thousands of Oracle Shelters had fallen to the Digestors before being rescued just as quickly by the dispatched Oracle Guardians.

Cekt knew a little more, of course, but he told them it was none of their business. Annoyed that they were trying to worm the truth out of him, he announced that it was time to leave. It was time to go home.

Lucia and Gerulf obviously wanted to talk more with Jake, but they too knew that this was not the time. When it was time to leave, Will and the rest of the Myrtharian Nerds gathered around their leader. This also included a recalcitrant Shaktilar, a resolute Melkree, and a vigilant Fumdalf and Nawais.

When Lucia and Gerulf spotted Will, their eyes widened violently.

"You... aren't you supposed to be dead already?" The blonde warrior asked with a bewildered look.

She vividly remembered his miserable end in the coliseum. He was one of the last survivors and his performance had been admirable for such a poorly trained gladiator.

Will winced when she reminded him of that first embarrassing death, but he knew she meant no harm.

"We weren't there for real. For you it was real, but for us it was nothing more than a simulation, a test." The businessman explained concisely.

"We'll have plenty of time to discuss it when we get back." Jake cut him off emphatically.

"I remember you were hanging out with four other gladiators at the time, one burly guy, another cute guy, and two siblings.. I guess they're alive too then?" Lucia inquired, leering at him playfully.

#### [Chapter 619 - Digestors Are Far Too Different From Us](#)

Jake was somewhat caught off guard by this unexpected question, not really knowing how to answer it. It took him some serious effort to remember who she was talking about.

Not everyone he hung out with at the time was a Player. There were also some real natives among the gladiators from his first Ordeal. However, if he had to pick four people that he actively hung out with and that had at least accompanied him to the Colosseum battle, then the choice was much more limited.

While looking for a stout man a little fat in his memories, the image of a thirty-year-old man with short red hair and the face strewn with freckles formed in his mind. It was Hugo, and after the final showdown in the Coliseum, they had never met again.

Jake didn't know what had become of him. Maybe it was worth finding out when they got back. They didn't know each other that well, but the Scotsman was a comrade who could be trusted.

The cute guy... It could only be Kyle and both Jake and Will became gloomy again as they thought of the living hell that awaited the Playboy's soul.

Once upon a time, Kyle was indeed a cute guy, a bit of a loser, who had endured gladiatorial training before making a decent performance in the arena. That Lucia had kept this mediocre, albeit positive, impression of him was not surprising.

Thankfully, he had changed since then. They had all changed.

It was regarding the two siblings that the question became more difficult. Visualizing Lu Yan's smug, hateful face, Jake couldn't help but sneer,

"I haven't seen Hugo since then, and Kyle's situation is a bit complicated to explain. As for the siblings... If Lu Yan isn't dead she must be somewhere torturing kittens or baby seals, or whatever it is that looks innocent and breathes as long as she can get a tiny bit of joy out of it. As for her brother, he's always where she is."

Hearing his scathing reply, Lucia hastily closed her mouth, bottling up all the questions she had planned to ask him. The desire to recall the good time had completely faded away.

Only then did she remember how Jake had Hulk-smashed the Chinese woman to death after Lu Yan had kill-stolen his target. It had deeply bothered her at the time. Weren't they supposed to fight together?

Today, she knew that the action of finishing off the enemy, although seemingly well-intentioned, was literally like trying to steal meat out of a tiger's mouth.

Aether. She had learned the hard way how precious this resource was. If she had known about the Oracle at the time, this incomprehensible twist would have been crystal clear to her.

Following this, the survivors set out under the Aetherist's protection. The Oracle Shelters in the area had been largely destroyed, but the huge Black Cube orbiting hundreds of kilometers above them was pretty much intact.

This one housed many stacked layers of Oracle Cities accessible via the Oracle Playground's Orange Cubes. Cekt, Citro, Kokoon, Lucia and Gerulf had all arrived here through one of its Yellow Cubes.

As during the Dungeon exploration, Cekt used again his telekinetic shield as a means of transport. Only this time, its diameter was greatly increased to accommodate the entire group of survivors.

Once everyone was inside, the translucent sphere shot off into the sky, immediately becoming a tiny dot when seen from the ground. The Black Cube, which had lost its invisibility camouflage due to the constant sabotage of the Digestors, quickly appeared in their field of vision.

A handful of seconds later, the shield began to decelerate without a sound, the people inside feeling no counterforce despite the sudden braking. They crossed the outer barrier of the Black Cube unhindered, getting for the first time a global view of the station.

Cekt relaxedly chose the Oracle City with the largest buildings and the highest ceiling to fit everyone's body type. It was once the Oracle City reserved for giants and other bulky behemoths unsuited to normal cities.

Not to mention Lucia and Gerulf, even Jake and the other survivors looked at the buildings with interest. Although the Digestors had ravaged almost everything, they could still tell from the ruins how oversized everything here was.

It was as if they were Lilliputians or Smurfs in the middle of a human village and everything seemed huge.

If Jake and Gerulf, who were almost 3 meters tall, reacted like this, then people and creatures of more modest size could only be intimidated and humbled by these relics of a not so distant past.

The gang of three formed by Lord Phenix and his two minions, a featherless swan and a one-legged hawk, had stopped gobbling and chirping to the delight of the nearby refugees whose ears had been begging for mercy.

The landing was smooth on the Transportation Tower roof, the only building still standing, and the force field holding the spherical shield was disabled, making them free to move again as they pleased.

"My mission ends here." Cekt stated happily, unable to hide how fed up he was with doing this babysitting job. "Citro, I'll let you handle the report, I still have one more disciple to check. Don't forget to embellish my exploits and glorify my importance as much as possible. I want that old party pooper Oros to cough up some of his fortune. With all the Aether from the taxes he collects, he can share a little..."

Rather than protest and get into a fruitless debate with the temperamental Wendok, Citro let out a weary sigh and replied limply,

"Sure..."

The valiant Oracle Captain left soon after, shoulders slumped as if he carried the weight of the universe on his shoulders. Without saying goodbye to anyone, he disappeared after touching the Yellow Cube.

When Cekt hovered hurriedly towards the Yellow Cube with the firm intention of leaving, Jake and the two disciples had the same alarmed reaction,

"Master, wait!"

Cekt stopped dead in his tracks with an annoyed grimace, turning around and glaring at them.

"What do you want? You're safe now. Don't bother me until you can cast an Aether Spell."

The only reason he had let Syrbarun and Siri tag along was because they were the only ones to save. Now that he was forced to work overtime, he couldn't have any dead weight with him.

Syrbarun and Siri backed off with a defeated and resigned face, but Jake did not give up. He needed to discuss something specific with Cekt.

"Master, can we at least come to you to perform a transgenic operation? I'm willing to pay for your services if I have to." He begged as he materialized a vial filled with blood, which he desperately dangled before the alien.

This was his real goal. All this time, he hadn't forgotten Tim's request and he still had his blood sample containing his Beskyrian Bloodline.

This was not a very urgent matter initially, but Jake, Will, Svara, and surely Kyle himself were fully aware of the role the Luck Aether had played in this Dungeon. Without that little nudge of fate on multiple occasions, perhaps they would have been dead long ago.

As such, Jake owed the child a debt of gratitude and he held the Beskyrian Bloodline in much higher regard.

Cekt didn't care about anything except when it came to his favorite subject, new Bloodlines to study. Snatching the vial from him before he could react, he immediately equipped a pair of glasses even more advanced than those of his disciple Syrbarun and began to observe the scarlet liquid.

"Beskyrian blood. It should be from the kid who was traveling with you." Cekt guessed as he thoughtfully smoothed his beard. "Ambitious, but perhaps a bit too much. I'll have to study all of this before I can give you a final answer. I'll contact you if I have any news. I'm going to need another sample of your blood, though."

Jake hadn't even responded when he felt a fleeting tingle in the crook of his elbow. His most bulging vein had just been drained of 100 milliliters of blood. It wasn't just normal blood, but his Blood Essence.

He immediately felt weaker, the progress of his Bloodline of the last few days completely erased. An uncontrollable feeling of anger immediately began to bubble up inside him, threatening to erupt and destroy everything.

"Don't cry." Cekt patted his head as he dropped a tiny black crystal into his hand. "Take this. It's called a Bloodline Aether Crystal and it's priceless. Your Master is no saint, but I don't mistreat my students."

The rage stirring his heart subsided at once as he felt the warm, smooth touch of the crystal in his hand. Syrbarun's jealous but not malicious gaze made him realize how precious it was and he instinctively closed his fist, stowing away the black crystal in his Space Storage.

"I have one last request to make." Jake said with renewed respect to his master.

"What now?" Cekt snorted impatiently.

Jake then materialized several canisters filled to the brim with silver blood.

"Digestor Blood?" The Wendok recognized right away. "What do you want to do with it?"

Jake thought the Aetherist would understand his intent, but the latter was apparently not as quick-witted as he assumed.

"Those Fourth Floor Digestors were practically clones of me. They had the same powers. I'd like to know if my Bloodline can be extracted from them as well and transferred to other people."

Cekt stared at him for a long time with an odd expression, then shook his head.

"You're not the first to think about it, but forget it. You have absolutely no idea what you're getting into." Cekt dissuaded him sternly. "A Bloodline transfer is possible, but on the basis of prior compatibility. These Digestors.... are far too different from us."

### [Chapter 620 - The Will Of A Myrtharian](#)

Lucia and Gerulf, who had been listening quietly on the side, were having a hard time following this conversation, but witnessing a blood sample deal while hearing the talk about Bloodlines was intriguing.

This discussion reminded them of a significant event that had occurred two years ago, just hours after Jake's disappearance. It had affected them so much that the memory had become ingrained in their minds.

Jake didn't notice their strange behavior, too focused on challenging the Aetherist's logic.

"I don't get it. Digestors or not, they're living beings like us. Biologically speaking, I don't understand what makes them different from other aliens." Cekt's last disciple began to object with several very rational arguments.

Syrbarun and Siri were not the Aetherist's disciples for nothing, and they nodded as if in support of what he said. Anyone with a functioning brain and a minimum of knowledge on the subject must have been wondering about this.

Cekt remained silent, refusing to answer, but that only fueled Jake's determination to get an honest and sincere reply, not just an excuse pulled out of a hat.

"I'll understand if it was a strange bloodline based on an alien species radically different from my own, but I've already ascertained that my Myrtharian Bloodline is an auxiliary support bloodline. If only the most essential component of it is used, it can be integrated with any alien or creature. "My faction's Myrtharian Body Passive skill is an application of this, and all of those Digestors on the Fourth Floor are an even more glaring example. Among these Digestors, there were even plants with my powers. I refuse to believe that an Aetherist would be more incompetent than a fucking Nexus that's only a few days old, right? Unless I was wrong about everything and a Rank 3 Aetherist doesn't amount to much..."

Syrbarun and Siri inhaled sharply as they listened to his litany. The seventh disciple of their generation was a little too sharp-tongued for his own good. Once started, Jake was unstoppable and his spittle of certainty and righteousness drenched the face of an increasingly grim gremlin.

An expression of pity dawned on the faces of the spectators. Syrbarun sighed in sympathy, while the android Siri simply closed her eyes, refusing to see what was about to come. Even Garrow, who was straining his ear lonely from a little further away, stiffened as he saw the infuriated aura building up behind the Wendok.

'Jake, it's a good thing to have a keen mind, but having brains is also knowing when to shut up.' The Demon Slayer lamented as he too looked away from what was to come.

Contrary to what they had feared, Jake did not get a cane stroke this time. The Aetherist's bad mood only worsened, but it didn't explode.

After letting him spill his breath in an interminable pamphlet about why he should consider his idea, Cekt waved his wand and a complex Aether Symbol pressed against Jake's mouth like a strip of tape before disappearing.

Jake's speech came to a premature end as he became unable to open his mouth. His angry, indignant gaze soon rivaled that of his master.

"Listen to me, Jake. I won't say it twice." Cekt said with a warning tone, while erecting a sound barrier around the group. "It's possible, and it's not complicated. But don't do it unless you want to betray the Mirror Universe and lose your humanity."

Staring at the others present, including Lucia, Gerulf, his two followers, Will and Svava, the little alien stated darkly,

"Normally, we don't discuss this kind of sensitive subject with low-rank Evolvers like you, because it doesn't benefit you in any way except to flood you with despair. With two exceptions, you have all completed your Third Ordeal. So you must have personally experienced the dangers of Corruption in one form or another. The Digestors' Corruption is far more insidious. You don't see it, it doesn't change you immediately, not even in the mid-term, but you can't get rid of it. It's not just a curse or a spell affecting your emotions and desires, but something that rewrites your very nature on a level I can't even remotely explain.

"The reason you are not being briefed on this danger is because you can't protect yourself from it, and neither can I. The Mirror Universe is losing the war against the Digestors not just because of our numerical inferiority, but because simply fighting them is like slowly becoming one of them. This is an insidious Corruption, which surpasses any form of persuasion. Eventually, even by doing nothing, we will probably be annexed, simply because the remaining survivors will be Digestors themselves."

There was no censure from the Oracle System this time. The authority of a Rank 3 Aetherist was sufficient to reveal this information to them.

The stunned silence that followed paled in the face of the traumatic shock that had just struck the audience dumb. Syr and Siri were livid, Will was bewildered, Lucia and Gerulf were confused. The only ones who had any semblance of composure were Fumdalf and Garrow, the only ones who had completed their Fourth Ordeal.

However, Garrow in particular was frowning as if this pessimistic version differed from what he had been taught in the past.

The only one who had a strong desire to speak, but was unfortunately unable to do so, was Jake. The Third Ordeal Corruption had not managed to drive him mad, so why worry about a long-term Corruption. Until then, he had plenty of time to find a solution.

Of course, he didn't dwell on the fact that the Mirror Universe had been around for trillions of years and that countless talented geniuses had tried to overcome the fate that destiny had in store for them all, to no avail.

Seeing Jake's jaw muscles clench with all their might to such an extent that a network of lava veins began to glisten around his lips, Cekt's face twitched in annoyance, but out of spite he waved his hand, dispersing the Spell of Silence.

"What more do you want to say my dear disciple." The little alien asked with a sinister gleam in his wide, bulging yellow eyes.

Ignoring his master, Jake massaged his jaw with a relaxed expression, grunting in contentment,

"Ahh, it feels good to be able to speak again."

"If you don't have anything more interesting to say, I'm leaving!" Cekt bellowed loudly, this time giving him the second cane stroke he deserved.

Bam!

"Ouch! Damn it! What the hell, fucking old coot! Did you forget to take your meds this morning?"

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Sigh... Syr, Siri and Will facepalmed, while Gerulf nodded approvingly, with a look like,

'That's how you teach discipline.'

Lucia and Svava gave the "undisciplined" a sympathetic look, but neither stepped in between the master and disciple to get him out of trouble.

A few moments later, a breathless Cekt and a Jake whose head now resembled a bunch of flowers glared at each other. At the same time, and contrasting with this perilous tension, Lucia was smearing the ointment on the bumps of a Jake meekly letting her do the work.

"If you had let me talk instead of hitting me for no reason, we wouldn't have wasted so much time." Jake lectured the old man righteously as if his master's violent outburst was merely a forgivable symptom of his impending senility.

Naturally, Cekt had no trouble guessing what was going on in the back of his disciple's head, and he gritted his teeth angrily, barely restraining himself from delivering a far more lethal caning blow.

"Then say what you have to say!" The alien bellowed like a deaf man.

"Very well." Jake smiled with a holy, laid-back disposition, acting as if the beating he had just taken was a distant dream. With his cauliflower head, all his efforts at poise were of course doomed to failure...

Noticing that his master was about to cane him again, he stopped quibbling and got serious again.

"I will follow your instructions." Jake promised solemnly. "But if what you say is true, why go on living. If we're doomed to become Digestors or die resisting them, why not hasten things? The ones I met didn't seem so unhappy."

Garrow, who had been standing back with his arms crossed, suddenly snickered,

"Because that's our instinct. If I tell a farmed calf that its only fate is to end up as a hamburger steak at the slaughterhouse, what options does it have? It can either commit suicide right away, or continue eating. Except that the more the calf eats, the bigger it becomes, getting closer and closer to the day of slaughter. To survive as long as possible, the calf can choose to eat less to delay the inevitable, but it cannot starve itself completely. If by some miracle it decides to fight, then perhaps it can become a Corrida bull, but the same end awaits it at the end of the line. That's the situation in the Mirror Universe today."

"Good analogy!" Cekt gave a thumbs up in approval.

Jake refused to relent.

"Instinct or not, I believe that as long as there is life there is hope." He asserted with conviction, his Myrtharian nature spurred by this never-ending challenge. "The Oracle still stands, so Corruption or not, there are still people in the Mirror Universe who haven't given up. Xion Zolvhur is at least a billion years old and he was still himself. If he can do it, so can I!"

This was Jake's indomitable determination.. The will of a Myrtharian.



