

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 466 - Revelation (part 3)

Both Players were quite taken aback by this shocking development.

‘I thought he was your son. How can he be a Digestor?’ Jake snarled, not trying to contain his disapproval. The Vampire was equally unconvinced.

Fully expecting their negative reaction, Hade was still somewhat disappointed. Stifling a weary sigh, he reconfirmed this unnerving truth.

‘Nylreg is my son and he is certainly a Digestor. As for the reason... I’m afraid you’ll have to find out for yourself. I have my theory, but the Oracle won’t let me share it with you. Perhaps he was born with it, perhaps it was his mother who was affected first, or perhaps he came in contact with or was infected by some of our guinea pigs... But to know what he truly is... You will have to earn that right.

‘So to speak, Nylreg has never really behaved like a Digestor. The first time he behaved abnormally was, unfortunately, one time too many. He stole some parasites we had created without anyone noticing, and then incubated them in his own body. Why he did this, I don’t know as of yet, but what I do know is that after that he has never been the same. He survived his incubation and the parasites he created regarded him as their mother, obeying him at the drop of a hat.

‘As for what happened next, I don’t need to draw you a picture. The first Converters matured, allowing the Corruption you know today to spread rapidly through the station and beyond. It quietly infected all but a few of my people, but their Fluid sensitivity made them more vulnerable to the Corruption than the others. With his Digestor nature, my son’s power also grew rapidly. His character began to deteriorate, he spoke less and spent a lot of time in his Fluid Artifact. I thought for a long time that he was suffering from being the only child and just needed friends, but I couldn’t have been more wrong.

‘When he turned 10, the incidents and then the random deaths resumed. Panicked, I searched the station from top to bottom looking for the culprit(s), but it didn’t work. When I found the source of the evil... I wanted to eliminate it immediately, but my son stopped me. Or rather... everyone. The Fluid Masters that I treated as my brothers suddenly glared at me with unmistakable contempt and hostility, as if I were a stranger who had just murdered their parents. I still remember their names and faces at that moment, so cold and alien compared to their usual joviality...’

With a dazed look on his face, Hade blinked and took a sharp breath to compose himself. Somehow, these memories were still haunting him.

‘They escorted me to my son, who was playing as usual in his Fluid Artifact. I didn’t dare believe it, but deep down I knew what would happen. Proudly, Nylreg invited me into his ‘Purgatory’, which he used to call Dreamland, and showed me the results of his years of experimentation. I have never regretted offering a gift so much.

‘Because what I found inside were authentic Digestors, as well as an army of Hunters, Converters, and Controllers covering the ground to the far reaches of this artificial dimension. The most horrifying thing

was that despite the fact that my son was a psychopath, the joy and pride he took in showing me his creations was genuine. The smile he gave me at that moment was the same innocent smile I remembered from years earlier. But none of this shocked me as much as what followed.

‘Wendy, my deceased wife whom I never thought I would see again stood before me, smiling exactly as I remembered. I don’t know how he got his DNA after her body was cremated, but make no mistake, that thing was not my wife. It was a Digestor like any other, cold as a reptile and devoid of any maternal instincts. The only emotion I could detect in this creature was a compulsive hunger to devour me, to assimilate my genes and my Fluid in order to become stronger, to evolve into a more perfect lifeform.

‘In retrospect, I certainly should have reacted differently, but I killed it in one fell swoop. I slaughtered everything my son had created in one breath and watched as what little childlike humanity remained in his little eyes was extinguished, replaced by the alien coldness that belongs only to these monsters.

‘I was hoping it would end there, that we could talk about it, but unfortunately it did not. The whole station ganged up on me and I was forced to flee. Nylreg was not yet as strong as I was, but his Digestor abilities quickly strengthened as the battle went on and he fully embraced his true nature. My men assisted him, along with all the parasites under his control.

‘I ended up mortally wounded and fled. However, I fulfilled my duty. I decapitated Nylreg. It wasn’t until years later that I realized that his death hadn’t ended the problems and I returned to the station.

Everyone had long since been killed and my former men had joined Minerva’s service under various identities. I didn’t meet my son that day, but I eliminated all the parasites thriving on Yotai Shien 3. I

repeated this routine several times a year, continuing to exterminate these creatures until I realized that their numbers and strength were growing faster and faster.

‘That’s when I realized that maybe my son was still alive. After another purge, I was ambushed on the way back by my former men, Minerva and my own son, who was 16 at the time. By this time, he was already as strong as I was. I survived, but the injuries were severe. I gave up trying to fight them. I cleared the electromagnetic storm preventing them from leaving the station, but against all odds my son restored it to hide his own activities.

‘I retreated to a place far away from any conflict and devoted myself to my training. The Corruption had affected me badly and I was a shadow of my former self. If I didn’t do something, I would sooner or later fall into madness too. I converted my Fluid to Aether and prayed for someone to hear me. About fifty years later, the Oracle did hear me.

‘I hoped he would neutralize my son and save my universe, but that is not what happened. My world was simply classified as a Level 2 Endangered World. An Oracle Guardian materialized in front of me and listened patiently to my report after giving me a bracelet. He then left to investigate the situation by himself and returned a few days later.

‘It was then explained to me that this world would be put under surveillance but that they would not intervene until the situation became critical. Instead, they decided to hold Ordeals there and I would be the supervisor. Obviously, an agreement was also made with Nylreg, because he never created Digestors again. Over the past century, Nylreg and his parasites have faced hundreds of thousands of Players like you, but few have come close to the truth. Some have

interacted with Minerva or her minions, others have traveled to the planet where the rift first appeared 140 years ago, while others have joined research labs to study the anatomy of these monsters. This endangered world is just one of millions that is used to prepare young Evolvers for this multiversal threat.

‘This Ordeal is special, because I was the one who asked for backup. Nylreg contacted me 2 years earlier to inform me that he was tired of playing and wanted to end it. ‘You rejected me for who I am, and I reject this world for the same reason. But you are still my father, so let’s not miss this last chance to say farewell to each other. Whatever the outcome of our meeting, whether I get my answers or salvation, whether this world survives or falls apart I will leave.’

‘Those were his very words... I deferred what he said to an Oracle Guardian and this Ordeal was scheduled in a hurry. You were asking me earlier why you weren’t repatriated? The answer is simple, you are the bait. This space station is currently surrounded by an entire armada of Oracle Guardians and they are waiting for something. Whatever it is, I hope you’re long gone when that thing arrives. Nylreg... Can’t leave this world by himself.’

Jake and Carmin remained tongue-tied for a long while after that tale. Thinking back to that final sentence, they shuddered with horror. The idea that an army of Oracle Guardians were using their relative immortality to use them was enough to make their blood run cold.

Subconsciously, Jake looked around with trepidation, even going so far as to use a scan to locate these glorified warriors, but to no avail. If these guys could be detected so easily, they wouldn’t have earned their standing as Oracle Guardians in the first place.

He didn’t know if Oracle Guardians were all equally powerful, but if they were anything like the one that had chaperoned them at the

beginning of his Second Ordeal, then they weren't an opponent that the current Jake could compete with.

Exhaling slowly to rid himself of his nervousness, Jake forgot his other questions and reported what they had seen and learned while questioning Seren. Hade, now acting like Sigmar again, showed no surprise, as if he'd been expecting it for a long time. Nodding, he said gravely,

'I have already made the necessary arrangements. Go back to your Village and wait for the result tomorrow morning. If you still want to fight, I won't stop you. But I need you elsewhere.'

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'Take this artifact with you, it will show you the way.'