

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 493 - I Guess I Still Have To Fight

The bright flash of light that followed was so powerful that no one could withstand its glare, not even Jake. He had already closed his eyes as a safety precaution and as per his plan he activated the Oracle Shield skill, which had so far never been used.

[Oracle Shield lvl1: An indestructible spherical force field enveloping the owner of the Oracle Device will be generated. Maximum range: 0m. Effect duration: 5 seconds. Aether Cost: 200M Aether pts per activation.]

A supple yet indestructible silver force field wrapped around his body like a second skin and he waited nervously for the blast to come. He almost expected to experience some form of pain, discomfort or at least be shaken a little, but the shield did its job.

When he opened his eyes again a short time later, the explosion was already over and the shockwave was already past him. He fretted for a second about his friends who had escaped in Emiwan's shuttle earlier, but no unpleasant notifications darkened his mood.

Nylreg did it instead.

When the heat and radiation levels dropped to normal levels, Jake opened his eyes to find that he was currently alone in space. Boris was nowhere in sight, and it cost him a scan to detect his presence swiftly.

The only catch was that the tattooed Player wasn't the only one who had survived. Nylreg was floating a few miles above him, covered in a thick halo of dark energy cloaking his body and face. From what little he could tell... Sigmar's son was unharmed.

As for Boris, he had an Oracle Skill called 'Dephasing'. Along with Oracle Shield, Oracle Heal, Teleportation, Invisibility, etc., it was one of those skills that could save the Players' lives if used at the right time.

If each world was a radio frequency, this Skill basically allowed the user to modify that frequency to avoid any form of interaction with the real world. It was the ultimate dodging technique that low-level Players like them had no chance of countering.

In some worlds, there might even be different planes of existence, such as that of the Spirits, the Dead, etc., where this type of skill was useful. This Oracle Skill was less expensive to use than Oracle Shield, but also not as reliable. At high levels, Evolvers and Players would completely discard it, deeming it obsolete.

Jake waited a bit more before scanning again and when the temperature was within acceptable limits, he deactivated his Oracle Shield. In a matter of seconds he had consumed over 600M of Aether point and it made his heart ache to just think about it.

Hu vmnut dmz lmqu zulnaou mz ovfo fo iuflo Nwizue jmpit gu tfqfeut urmpev om easu pn ovu hvflu, gpo vu tulnfazut aqputafoui w jvur vu lfj ovu dpzamp l Fipat Gzfrtqflouz hvfzeare fo Bmzal jvm jfl himlulo om vaq.

Manipulating light to produce imperfect invisibility, Jake quietly sprang into motion, hoping only that the enemy's attention had been fully drawn to Boris.

Without daring to make the slightest sound, he watched with trepidation as Nylreg pointed his index finger at Boris and a huge black laser of energy as dark as the space they were in shot out and engulfed the tattooed Player before continuing its endless journey into the cosmos.

There was no explosion, no noise, no flash of light, but Jake was able to track with his Myrtharian Sight the overwhelming energy contained in those rays. It was not Aether, not Fluid, and certainly not radiation or heat, but it was definitely capable of killing. He was utterly convinced that whatever the target was, it would be destroyed instantly.

And when he spoke of destruction, he didn't mean something like shattered, mangled or irreversibly damaged. No, he was talking about genuine destruction. Whatever touched that black laser at the end of its course would cease to exist in any form.

This violated Lavoisier's fundamental law of physics, which states that nothing can be destroyed or created, only transformed. If this went back to the original Aether source, it was still to be determined where the Aether around them came from. Therefore, this could indeed be considered true destruction.

[True Will of Destruction. A classic move among high ranking Digestors. No matter how many times I see it, it always gives me the same creeps.] Xi's voice spoke with emotion in his head as he was focused on Nylreg's strike.

With the tension of the last few seconds he had reopened his mind to the female AI without even realizing it.

Without taking his eyes off the spot where Boris had once been, Jake's face turned grim at the realization that the tattooed Player was

nowhere to be seen. If he wasn't dead, he really hoped the warrior had been repatriated to B842 in time.

'Expand, Xi.' Jake urged her, involuntarily stiffening as Nylreg riveted his gaze in his direction.

'He saw me!'

Before the explosion, he would no doubt have fought to his last breath, but now he knew that fighting Nylreg in his current state was impossible.

[Don't Bother.] Xi immediately ruined his hopes. [At your level, you can't counter this unless you acquire a specific Aether Skill or your True Will develops enough to have a substantial effect. True Will represents your inner self. It embodies and defends your beliefs, and it does more than just protect your memories or your principles. The Will of Destruction is one of the hardest to awaken and cultivate, but it is also one of the hardest to counter. When Nylreg imbues his attacks with it, all of his techniques, even the most insignificant ones, will become capable of completely annihilating everything they touch.]

[If you want to survive, run away or use your Oracle Shield.]

Jake winced as he thought of all the Aether he would have to spend. Converting all his remaining Fluid, he still had about 19.5B Aether points. It sounded like a lot, but the Oracle Shield consumed 200M Aether points every 5 seconds.

In the worst case scenario, he could keep it on for about 8 minutes.

And unfortunately, this one was likely to be used much sooner than expected. Nylreg was flying at him with teleportation-like speed and

would be on him in less than 5 seconds despite the gap he had managed to widen between them.

'Fuck!'

BANG!

The Oracle Shield enveloped his body in extremis and his vision went black as his body was washed away by a huge Destruction Laser Beam. The silver force field began to flicker alarmingly, but held on to his greatest relief. However, his Aether consumption per second skyrocketed and Jake's hatred for Nylreg soon reached an all-time high.

About ten seconds later, Nylreg lowered his finger and Jake cautiously deactivated his shield, only to reactivate it shortly thereafter when Nylreg attacked him again. It was only after ten more seconds that Sigmar's son stopped his attacks, and began to circle around him with an annoyed expression on his face.

He was glaring at him as if he were a big, ugly còckroach, and it made Jake snap at him.

'Fuck you Nylreg! Stop picking on Players who are a seventh of your age and grow a pair of balls.' Mad with rage, Jake immediately called him names while giving him the finger.

Nylreg's hard face twitched and he raised his index finger again.

'Fucking degenerate who can't give up the toy his father gave him for his 5th birthday. Are you a child ?! Are you that poor ? When are you going to grow up, you àsshò- Fuck!'

Jake didn't finish his sentence and reflexively ducked his head before remembering that he was well protected behind his shield. This time

the black beam lasted for a long time and it wasn't until he spent 1.8B Aether points that his vision returned to normal.

Seeing the lost Aether, Jake drew a sharp breath and gnashed his teeth on the verge of mental implosion before resuming to revile Nylreg and all his ancestors. Sigmar, who hadn't asked for any of it, also received his fair share of flak.

Jake did not know exactly what he hoped for by provoking him like that, but it was his only way to hurt him and most of all it made him feel good. It wouldn't replace the lost Aether, but at least it made him feel a little better. Just the helpless rictus of rage on his face was worth every point and was more than enough to bring a smile to his face.

But this time, Nylreg did not attack him again nor did he take offense. The apparent anger inside him subsided and his facial muscles relaxed into a mocking smile.

Slowly he turned his head in a certain direction in the distance and Jake's cōcky smirk faded away, replaced by an inexplicable panic, which he did his best not to show but in front of an old bastard like Nylreg it was simply hopeless.

Wvfo Nwizue jfl efxare fo jfl ovu tazuhōamr jvuzu Erwf, Elwf frt ovu movuzl juzu.

'Let's see if you'll keep hiding like a turtle with that arrogance of yours when I slaughter every last one of your comrades.' Nylreg suddenly burst into a sadistic, gloating laugh as he rubbed his hands together in excitement. 'Didn't you fight until now precisely so that they could survive? Then watch me exterminate them or try to stop me. It will be fun. You puny humans are truly a pitiful species.'

Jake's superficial hatred for him became heartfelt and genuine for the first time when he received this ultimatum, but it was a chilling cynical coldness that flitted across his face instead.

'Do you really think I'm afraid of you?' He retorted word for word, squinting his eyes with a cruel glint in his eye. 'I meant every insult I said. Yes, you're a kid, a pathetic loser and a fucking failure. You may have thought you were smart with your Monster Game and your Purgatory experiment, but any idiot with more than 2 functioning neurons would have realized at this point that it's a metaphor for your own miserable existence.'

'You pit us against each other by exposing us to Corruption and revel in watching us perjure ourselves as we betray our principles and our loved ones. But the truth is that you are in the same boat as we are, but on a deeper level. Way too deep. When we return to B842, this Corruption will be purged from our minds and we will be ourselves again, but you... You will remain the same, because your Digestor nature is part of you. You can't deny yourself, even if you long for it with all your heart. You killed your mother at birth and committed all sorts of atrocities, but for a long time you tried to resist your instincts and still seek recognition from your father, like a needy child who has been neglected.'

'But you can't, right? You've tried, but you can't do it anymore and you've convinced yourself that it's not your fault and that it's just not feasible. To convince yourself of this, you agreed to organize these Monster Games, which repeatedly proved to you that resisting the Digestor Corruption, even a lower form, was impossible. Every time a participant gives in to his or her dark side, it reinforces your own belief and comforts your weakened ego. When in fact, what you truly hope and fear more than anything is that one of us actually manages to overcome it. If that were to happen, the meaning of your whole life

would be called into question. Let me give you the scoop: It's already happened. Right now, I want to kill, steal, destroy, and commit all sorts of unspeakable atrocities, but I still know who I am. I'm Jake Wilderth, and I'm still myself. I won't let you kill my friends.'

After this long litany, a river of tears streamed down as Jake saw the 2.4B of Aether points this speech had cost him. Still, it was worth it! Nylreg's mouth was hanging open so wide that he could have stuffed an egg in it.

BAM!

The next second, a thunderous storm of punches fell on the Oracle Shield. There were no tricks, no Fluid or Digestor techniques behind these blows. As the force field rippled, blood from Nylreg's flayed fists soon painted the protective shield.

Jake returned a contemptuous, scornful look as he saw him bust his own hands on his Oracle Shield, but when Nylreg finally calmed down they inevitably went back to square one.

Adouz iuooare mdd loufq, Nwizue efsu vaq mru iflo eifzu frt jaovmpo nfware vaq frw dpzovuz qart vu ovur hvfzeut arom ovu hmlqml, hfzzware mr jaov val mzaearfi nifr. Suuare oval, Jfcu laevut frt fo iflo tufhoasfout val Ozfhiu Svauit.

'I guess I still have to fight... Fine. Let's see how far I can go with my back to the wall...'

Xi also sighed in his mind and said gently,

[I'm also with you.]

Jake chuckled at this, but his spirits rose slightly.

'You always are.'

