

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 496 - Jake vs Nylreg (part 2)

Jake was taken aback, but he did give the question some serious thought. So far all he knew about them was that the Digestors came from outside the Mirror Universe, that they were attracted to areas of high Aether density, and that they could also spawn from the Aether in the atmosphere without any prior warning.

The closest analogy he could make was that of a virus destroying and spoiling everything in its path, or that of a fungus spore hatching anywhere after it had been sufficiently nourished. Of course, there were no spores and no visible contamination, making this plague virtually impossible to overcome.

The war against the Digestors dated back to the creation of System A0 probably trillions of years ago and what he was sure of was that the invasion of these aliens had never stopped and the Oracle had always been on the defensive this whole time.

‘I’m not sure. Enlighten me.’ Jake ultimately answered with sincerity. He could sense that Xi also shared his curiosity, but that from her gloominess she seemed to already know the answer.

Nylreg scrutinized him intently for a short while before remarking nonchalantly,

‘You are not stupid. I’ll give you that. Since this is my last Ordeal here, I guess I can tell you a bit more. Digestors... come from beyond your world. All of us are born from the so-called Dream Aether and our

initial morphology is random, mostly small. The spawn location is also arbitrary. About 30% of all Rank 0 Digestors die at birth because of a mismatch between their spawn location and their morphology. For example, imagine a small bird popping up on the ocean floor or a mouse coming to life in the troposphere. You have seen and felt how the Fluid's fabric is connected to this entire universe. If you are receptive and talented enough, you can gain insight, knowledge, powers and memories. The Dream Aether is not much different. Where there are humans, humanoid Digestors will appear, and that goes for any species.

‘However... Even if statistically speaking some of these Digestors will become exceptional, they are still invaders. They are rejected by the Mirror Universe and your Oracle. However, what would happen if a Digestor were to spawn in someone or something's body? What if it was an embryo, a fetus, or even an egg?’

Jake's eyes widened slightly when he heard this.

‘You spawned in Nylreg's fetus while it was still in the womb. That's why she died from it and he went crazy.’ Jake realized in disbelief.

He could only imagine what would have become of him if a Digestor had spawned inside his own brain while he was asleep.

‘You're a parasite.’ Jake declared with disgust. He understood better the hidden purpose of this Ordeal.

Far from being offended, Nylreg laughed softly as he stared earnestly at a distant point in the cosmos.

‘You're wrong.’ He finally rebuffed him. ‘If I spawned in a human like you, I would indeed be. A Rank 0 Digestor spawning in your body would surely die right away as your Spirit Body and Soul are too strong to tolerate our existence. In other words, we cannot occupy

your space to be born. You have nothing to fear on that score. Before we are born, our consciousness revolves around one thought: We seek to be born and devour. Once born, an unspeakable hatred towards this world compels us to destroy it. It is as if we were programmed to do so.

‘When a Digestor spawns in an embryo, it is no longer necessary to accumulate Dream Aether to condense a physical body. Our rudimentary souls will simply be born as they are and merge with the embryo or fetus. Yet, because we have not absorbed enough Aether we will remain dormant for a number of years. You should know that before spawning a Digestor can remain in this suspended state for decades.

Ottiw urmpev, Nwizue lptturiw efsu vaq f qufraredpi immc frt lfat,

‘If the world’s Aether density is too low, the host could suffer painful physical ailments and still behave like a normal human. However, upon awakening his or her Digestor side, he or she will slowly begin to change. Ring any bells?’

Jake pursed his lips without answering, but the fleeting image of an ugly disabled young woman with long white hair flashed in his mind. Then he was reminded of her captivating pearly eyes. He remembered her left eye filled with a deep marine blue, but most of all her right eye of an abnormal amethyst color.

When he looked back at Nylreg, his golden eye and Ruby’s amethyst eye seemed to overlap. Although Jake was deeply shocked, his reaction was somewhat different from what the Digestor had expected.

He was angry.

'Did you know Xi ?' He mentally asked his Oracle AI with a hint of disapproval.

Xi hadn't spoken, but through their mental link he was able to sense her emotions when Nylreg had made that last revelation. Her feelings were complicated, with a dominant tinge of grief, but she was definitely not as surprised as he was.

[The real Xi knew that.] She sighed wistfully. [As soon as Nylreg spoke, the corresponding memories came back to me. I had once known a woman like that in the past. It ended very badly.]

Jake would have liked to ask so many more questions, but Nylreg didn't give him the chance. The extraordinary alien aura he had slowly built up was abruptly retracted, and his skin quickly turned pale, almost translucent like the many Digestors Jake had faced in the past. Like his sixth pair of fingers, his other fingers lengthened and became covered with a sort of natural silvery chitin. In an instant, the humanoid Digestor was transformed into a heroic silver knight.

What little remained of his cloak was torn to pieces as two large symmetrical membranous growths sprouted out of his shoulder blades. Like a jetpack or jet plane, some segments at the ends were more bulbous than the rest, and a soft, golden, plasma-like light leaked out from them.

Tm daralv, ojm imre emitur vmzrl md fgmpo ojurow huroaquouzl
bpoout mpo mr ufhv latu md val dmzuvuft frt fo ovu nifhu md val
eifguiif ovu lcar omzu ar f talopzgare jfw om lnao mpo ovu urmzqmpl
Fipat Gzfrtqflouz Cmzu ovfo vft guur lm dfz ovu lmpzhu md val
nmjuzl. Adouz lnaoare mpo ovu Fipat Cmzu, ovu lnfhu guojuur val
uwul himlut frt val luhmrt uwu opzrut wuiimj fl juii.

Nylreg then closed his eyes with a long, drawn-out rasp and Jake's sense of danger grew stronger. Slowly but surely he increased the

distance between them but he had only moved back a few more meters when his enemy brusquely reopened his eyes and stared at him with the same human warmth as a sea anemone.

‘Thank you for listening to me.’ He declared apathetically, his so-called gratitude missing from his face. ‘Alas, it is time to end this. Nylreg has done a lot of research on the Digestors in hopes of getting rid of me, or rather his own nature. It’s all in the Purgatory. That’s why... I have to get it back. I hope you’ll forgive me.’

‘And now... Die, please.’

With a loud bang, Nylreg’s body slipped out of position and almost instantly reappeared before Jake. Unfazed, he punched forward at a seemingly slow speed but that was in fact awfully fast. Jake didn’t even have the time to fully process what was coming at him when he was already spitting blood several miles away, his internal organs completely ruptured.

Braced from the start for the absolute worst, Jake let his Aether Sun Core and the lava from the Purgatory invigorate him while he focused on his Myrtharian Sight to spot the enemy. Nylreg immediately followed up with a second blow, but this time he reacted in time.

A whip kick went straight for the left side of his head but he managed to throw his torso back to dodge in time. At almost the same time, Nylreg’s other knee drove mercilessly into his liver and continued its upward trajectory until multiple cracks rang out as his ribs snapped one after another.

Jake then retaliated with a sideways sword swing to the throat but his opponent merely parried the attack with a finger before coiling around him like a vicious python to snap his arm with a sharp twist.

Inhaling sharply to stifle the pain, Jake ignored his wounds and a heat blast burst forth from his body to push back Nylreg who was

stuck to him, but the latter simply protected his face under another layer of silver chitin to absorb the blast. He then immediately connected with a nasty headbutt.

With a sickening crack, Jake's head was thrown backwards and he began to feel dizzy. In the seconds that followed, he used up all of his skills, all of his gut instincts, and all of the techniques he had ever learned to no avail, and his injuries escalated to unsafe levels. The enemy's defenses, speed, reflexes, fighting instincts and strength outclassed him in every way and without his Accelerated Healing passive and Nylreg's leniency, he would have been dead long ago.

Tvu ifoouz jfl hiufziw nifware jaov vaq iacu f hfo jaov f qmplu frt ovfo suzw ovmpevo jfl prgufzfgiu dmz vaq.

His ego and pride could not bear such humiliation! The helplessness he felt at that very moment transported him back to the anxious days of his youth when whatever he did was never enough and he felt he had no control over anything. When he had received his bracelet, he had sworn to himself that he would take his destiny into his own hands and he refused to perish like a loser, even if it was only for a tutorial.

As he rapidly went through the memories contained in the silver wisp that had merged with his Soul, Jake searched through them for a technique that would get him out of this mess, to no avail. There was plenty of knowledge and techniques to control the Spirit Body, but they were either too advanced or too rudimentary to be of any use here.

That one brief instance when he split his attention ended up being his undoing. The metallic sheen of one of Nylreg's claws suddenly flashed before his eyes and his left arm was torn off his chest. Jake fought back, spraying a jet of white plasma in his face, but he only hit an

afterimage, the enemy having already reappeared behind him, his claws ready to sever another limb.

Slash!

His left leg was deeply lacerated and remained attached to his torso only by a flap of flesh.

Clang, clang, slice, slice!

Jake miraculously managed to parry two clawed swipes with Sarah's sword, but on the third strike Nylreg went straight for his remaining arm. The arm carrying the sword was thrown out into space like a meteor and with no way left to defend his remaining leg was severed in turn with what was left of the other one.

He was now nothing more than a man with no limbs.