

# The Oracle Paths

## - Chapter 994: How Is It Even Possible? |

### Chapter 994: How Is It Even Possible?

Whether it be the scorching heat, the swirling tumult of the plasma storm, or the lethal radiation, every previous metric had been amplified tenfold, rendering Jake's earlier adaptations futile. Jake wouldn't have been taken aback if the ambient temperature and pressure had surpassed the heart of a supergiant star.

The frigid chill Jake once radiated after absorbing and converting all this heat and kinetic energy couldn't keep up, and he was incinerated, vaporized before his brain could process his fate. His body was already utterly disintegrated, reduced to a fine slurry of subatomic particles.

The moment Jake had bellowed an open threat at his unseen foe, it was his mental sense that had roared, the resultant psychic shockwave lost in the plasma storm like a pebble in a pond.

Despite this, the main culprits aided by the Dungeon Digestor distinctly heard his words, a cold chill gnawing at their spines, their hair standing on ends.

"At least, he's dead," Syrbarun exhaled in relief, calmly observing the holographic screen displaying live what had become a hellhole, hostile to any form of life.

Rigel, standing by his side, pursed his lips as if to object but thought better of it.

Behind him was a horde of Sinewshades standing at attention, motionless, and silent, awaiting orders.

Among them, the iconic figures of Drakon, Epsilom, and Lyra stood unmoving and rigid as gargoyles, their gaze devoid of emotion. If one looked towards the Sinewshades, some distinguished themselves with familiar auras or remnants of equipment.

One of these monsters bore a more delicate figure, resplendent with a conqueror's aura, its thirst for victory forming a tangible intent surging forth around it. The gladius sword with its scarlet blade hanging absurdly at its waist clashed with its grotesque appearance. Its twin bulges of flesh swelling on its chest were equally hard to ignore.

Another of these monsters was almost identical to the others in size and muscle, but its former dark hair still clung to its scalp, giving it a comical appearance. Its black combat suit was well preserved, indicating this Sinewshade was a recent addition.

"Should be good now, right?" Syrbarun asked, licking his lips with anticipation.

"Let's wait until the end of the plasma storm before drawing any hasty conclusions," Rigel flatly declined.

Because of the blinding light produced by the plasma storm, they had been unable to monitor what was happening inside the room for some time. Due to the extreme conditions capable of melting standard Voidsteel with ease, the Dungeon Digestor too had withdrawn its consciousness, relinquishing this part of its territory.

This was their plan from the start, a minor sacrifice they were willing to make to eliminate the two problematic threats: Jake and Saros.

"I can't believe we had to do this to kill a fucking fourth-Ordeal Player like us," Syrbarun complained once again, eyeing the colossal damage to the Magnetic Resonator.

"We can't help it. His bloodline and strength have far surpassed our projections,"

Rigel said with a nonchalant shrug. "All the capable Voidshifters and Sinewshades have been requisitioned to contain Cekt. As for the Dungeon Digestor, it's immature and needs all its energy for-you know what. It's a miracle that it's assisting us at all. For a Rank 3 Aetherist, this Wendok sure knows how to bluff. The two Voidshifters he dispatched to aid us are already proof that the plan has veered from its initial course. But regardless of whether we succeed or fail, our objective has been achieved. That's why the Dungeon Digestor decided to fast-forward the proceedings with this clumsy ambush that severely damaged its structure, all in an effort to take out the enemy."

Syrbarun snorted in disapproval, his anxiety inexplicably refusing to leave. Feeling on edge, he unconsciously began squeezing the silver sea urchin-like object in his hand, as if it were a stress ball.

An ultrasonic sound, inaudible to human ears, permeated the surrounding Voisteel walls, but to his neighbor Rigel and the other Sinewshades, the noise was as grating as someone clashing cymbals right next to their ear at 4 A.M.

Witnessing this, Rigel didn't utter a word, although internally he was itching to unscrew the offender's head with his massive stone hands.

"This is the third time in six minutes you've ordered the Voidshifters to act," the Gorgonite chided, a hint of irritation seeping into his stony voice. "Don't you think that's enough?"

Syrbarun's face twitched, but brushing aside Rigel's rebuke, he lifted his chin and snapped back, "I am well aware that the Voidshifters aren't exactly keen on taking our orders, and that these time disruption spells are exhausting, but something just doesn't sit right with me this time."

"Hmm? Your Digestor instinct?" Rigel raised an intrigued eyebrow, akin to a perfectly sculpted piece of amethyst.

The minotaur in a mech suit shook his head. "Not at all. It's the instinct of my host."

Rigel frowned at his half-baked excuse. "Are you fucking kidding me? Your host is a damn Vrusug. A stupid herbivore, good for nothing but chewing cud. If you let its instincts influence you, you'll end up fearing anything with claws and teeth. Pull yourself together!"

Syrbarun stiffened under the rebuke, but instead of wisely acknowledging it, he reflexively squeezed the silver sea urchin in his hand a fourth time.

"..."

"..."

As with the first activation of the Magnetic Field Disruptor that Jake had witnessed, the plasma storm generated by the collision of the two opposing magnetic fields lasted a full hour, if not more. It was as if the Dungeon Digestor wanted to ensure they were well and truly dead after sacrificing an entire section of the Magnetic Resonator.

To anyone who could see the 3D hologram of the latter, it would appear that an entire area of several hundred kilometers radius had been hollowed out, akin to a giant cavity next to the Conversion Chamber. This colossal void was now filled with incandescent plasma under high pressure, with temperatures reaching upwards of 200 million degrees Celsius at the coolest points.

This was the price to be paid to dispose of Jake and Saros. If the Dungeon Digestor could have directly trapped them in the funnel, designed to withstand such conditions, it would have done so, but alas, it was nearly impossible.

If a plasma storm had occurred while Jake was still in the funnel, he would have immediately retreated, having ample time to cross the barrier erected on the surface even before the Magnetic Resonator could plunge towards the event horizon of the black hole.

After what felt like an eternity, the Magnetic Field Disruptor finally ceased emitting and what remained of the Magnetic Resonator corrected its orbit, distancing itself from the black hole's event horizon. As soon as it moved away, the clash between the magnetic fields ceased, and the black hole stopped spewing out plasma. Similarly, the plasma

already trapped in the funnel ceased being stimulated, and its temperature and activity level began to drop gradually.

The plasma storm was officially over. The Conversion Chamber, which had never stopped operating at full tilt, continued to hungrily absorb the superheated plasma to convert it into Aether, and soon the white-hot plasma filling the enormous cavity where Jake and Saros had been began to recede, much like the sea after high tide.

As the plasma rapidly withdrew from the ravaged zone, Syrbarun and Rigel held their breaths, their eyes glued to the screen before them with rapt attention. The Vrusug's fingers were ready to squeeze the silver sea urchin in his hand at the slightest anomaly, and while Rigel appeared unperturbed, his sea urchin was also in hand, ready to be activated at any moment.

"A-are they dead?" Syrbarun stammered nervously, his bovine eyes wide, searching for their corpses.

"Don't bother," Rigel tsked. "You won't find anything after a plasma storm of this magnitude. If you do find something, it means we've failed. You should be praying we find nothing. That's the way it should be."

Syrbarun didn't immediately nod in agreement as the Gorgonite had expected. As the silence stretched on, Rigel turned to look at him, and his face abruptly stiffened upon seeing the Vrusug's jaw drop and his trembling, sweat-covered face.

A scandalous and terrifying possibility surfaced in his mind, and following the minotaur's gaze, Rigel reluctantly turned his resigned eyes to the holographic screen that his companion was fixated on. Seeing two familiar figures appear on the screen, his face froze, paling in turn.

"H-how is it even possible?!"

## **Chapter 995: You're Going To Die**

An hour earlier, just as Jake was being atomized to oblivion by the ferocious plasma storm...

Jake and Saros were cornered in a room that had become a furnace of blistering heat, chaotic winds, and world-ending radiation. The brightness had escalated to such magnitude that even if Jake still possessed his eyes, he wouldn't have been able to see beyond his nose.

As a twisted stroke of irony, he still had them. Amid the indiscriminate, all-consuming destruction of the plasma onslaught, three organs of Jake had survived the catastrophic annihilation that his body could not. They weren't his bones, resembling long black diamonds threaded with veins of silver-blue light, nor his Voidsteel chitin scales. Instead, it was three unexpected organs: his two eyes and his pineal gland.

His eyes, usually a weak point for most species, turned out to be the most resilient organs in his body, owing to their optimization to handle his Cosmic Sight. This bloodline ability rendered his eyes as sturdy as an Aether Artefact, though his status did not specify the grade.

Jake now knew they were about half a grade tougher than the hardest material he could currently conjure through his Chitin Scales and Cosmic Manipulation. Just enough to withstand the plasma storm for a fraction of a second longer, their resilience nearly equaling a Silver Aether Artefact's defense.

As for his pineal gland, it served as a substitute for the Aether Soul Core he had lost upon acquiring his new bloodline. In many cultures, this endocrine gland located at the brain's center, responsible for producing melatonin, was rumored to be the seat of the soul, a delicacy for quite a few mythical monsters.

For Jake, it seemed this pineal gland had finally lived up to its promises, drifting like a black gem in the roiling ocean of incandescent plasma. His soul had long since sought refuge within it, controlling his body from the safety within as the heat kept rising.

Nevertheless, his eyes didn't survive much longer, melting and dispersing in the plasma storm like a dandelion in the spring breeze within a breath's time.

With only his pineal gland remaining, Jake was utterly bereft of his senses within and responded with the only thing he could still do: he unleashed his vitality.

The dangerously glowing pineal gland then emitted a radiant white-gold-emerald light, combining his understanding of the Life Element and his Constitution and Vitality Aether. His metabolism kick-started immediately.

Given his current Vitality, Jake could regenerate his entire body in less than 0.05 seconds, provided he had even a single intact cell left. Thanks to his Grade 10 Energy, he could even regenerate his body 16 times in a row before starting to feel the consequences.

0.05 seconds was an eternity amidst a plasma storm heated to hundreds of millions of degrees, hence Jake had activated another defensive measure prior to this.

"Artefact Incarnation: Purgatory."

His pineal gland, now enveloped in a majestic white-gold-emerald halo, burst forth with a radiance thousands of times brighter, abruptly rewriting reality. The blinding white plasma storm ebbed, making way for a strange city floating amidst space.

Upon its appearance, an intangible force field in the shape of a dome immediately covered the city, effectively isolating it from the plasma storm that threatened to engulf it again at the slightest sign of weakness.

The design of the city vaguely reminded Jake of his own Floating Island, though there were differences. A mysterious, black steel building stood majestically at the center of the structure, reminiscent of some sort of extraterrestrial temple. Its surface was threaded with veins of black-blue-silver light, creating an

indescribable environment where the laws of physics behaved oddly.

Had Lucia or anyone else from his past Ordeal been present, they would have instantly recognized the structure dominating the landscape's center, for it was a monument bestowed to each victor of Quanoth's final battle—a Silver Mana Artefact. This defensive artifact not only served various auxiliary roles for its owner, but also proved indispensable for their survival.

In addition to being an Aether generator equivalent to a Grade 8 Aether Core, capable of producing billions to trillions of Aether points daily, based on local Aether density, the stored Aether was converted into an energy perfectly compatible with its wielder. As a soul-bound artifact, these sanctuaries could neither be sold nor traded, for it would require an Evolver of unspeakable idiocy to

wish to rid themselves of such an invaluable asset.

The sanctuary that Jake had conjured in the heart of the Purgatory was not the genuine artifact, but an illusory replica emulating its properties. The true Sanctuary still resided within his Space Storage. While he could have summoned it to shield himself from the raging plasma storm, the physical damage it could sustain, unlike his illusory Purgatory, would leave him with nothing but regret.

As he fretted over the endurance of his mental construct, a breathtaking woman with mid-length black hair and intense crimson-black eyes suddenly materialized before him in her jade armor.

"Xi, tell me how my Purgatory is holding up," Jake requested, his voice taut with worry.

Fully aware of the direness of the situation, Xi wasted no time and briskly responded, her eyes glittering with a joyous spark that stirred his heart.

"Given that your Grade 10 Energy and Cosmic Attribute extend to your Artefact Incarnations, your Purgatory is currently converting heat, radiation, and even plasma

into usable energy to sustain its upkeep. Unexpectedly, the extended range of the Purgatory has significantly boosted its absorption capabilities."

"Great!" Jake cried out, his fist clenched in triumph and his face alight with a vibrant grin. But the smile faded instantly when he scanned his surroundings and found no trace of Saros. Logically, by deploying his Purgatory, the alien should have been encapsulated within it.

"Did he escape? Or is he already dead?" Jake's countenance darkened at the contemplation of the latter, not so far-fetched possibility.

"No, that's not it." Xi shook her head. "When your Purgatory expanded, the plasma receded for several kilometers without resistance. The room you were in wasn't that spacious... This indicates that the Voidsteel walls confining you have given way."

Cursing himself for not considering this, Jake facepalmed. The Dungeon Digestor's insidious plan had caught him so off-guard that he had inadvertently overestimated the creature. Fortunately, it too had its limits.

Recognizing that the Dungeon Digestor had also paid a hefty price to eliminate them instantly soothed his perturbed spirit.

"Still... How long is this plasma storm supposed to last?" Jake grumbled, his countenance bleak as he noticed the shield of his Purgatory starting to crackle ominously.

Although the forcefield's protection filtered the excess radiation, making it less evident, Jake's heightened perception had already taken note of the increasing brilliance of the white plasma at the edge of his illusory domain.

This indicated that the conversion chamber's funnel was still relentlessly pumping more plasma into their dead-end room, presumably their final resting place. More matter in a finite container would invariably lead to rapid pressure and temperature increases within it. At least until it gave way.

Xi had already pointed out that the plasma had begun to erode the nearest Voidsteel walls, expanding its playground, but the plasma's escalating intensity implied that its density was increasing faster than the expansion of its container.

No need to be a genius to see where this distressing conclusion was heading."Fuck. The Purgatory won't hold." Jake concluded at once. "Xi, we need a better solution."

Having gained a bit of time, their confidence was somewhat restored. For starters, Jake still had his real Sanctuary, a safe haven like a turtle's shell if the situation took a drastic turn.



But he quickly dismissed that idea. The round shield that Saros had summoned was also a defensive Silver Aether Artefact, but it had lasted only a few seconds against the plasma storm. Admittedly, it was an ordinary artifact, its worth given by its materials and attribute bonuses to the wielder, but it was still silver grade.

His Sanctuary was superior, able to activate a protective energy shield in emergencies at a substantial Aether cost, but Jake preferred not to test it.

As he pondered a solution with Xi, his vision abruptly blurred and when it stabilized again, his eyes widened in shock as a mountain of incandescent plasma crashed into his face.

"DAMN IT!" Jake cursed, realizing he was falling prey to another temporal distortion.

He could not discern the exact extent, but his perception of time had surged so swiftly in an ephemeral moment that one might almost say his consciousness had been hurled into the future. Several minutes into the future, to be precise.

His body was instantaneously disintegrated, even faster than before, but this time, he was prepared. With decisive quickness, he re-summoned his Purgatory, taking refuge within it before his body even began regenerating.

A moment later, Jake reappeared unscathed in the same spot, a grave and ugly expression on his face. He hadn't expected that the entity causing these temporal distortions could reach him within his Purgatory World.

That changed everything.

"Xi, let's hurry, we only have a few minu-

SLAM!

He didn't even finish his sentence when his vision shifted again, a sea of plasma raining down on him the next microsecond. His body was obliterated instantaneously.

When Jake finished regenerating his body within his Purgatory a moment later, his earlier confidence and bravado had evaporated.

Xi's hologram reappeared at his side, a serious expression etched on her beautiful face as she solemnly declared,

"Jake, forget the plasma storm. We need to deal with these temporal distortions first. Otherwise, if it continues like this, I can assure you, you're going to die."



## Chapter 996: My Counterattack Is Just Beginning

"No shit, Sherlock! Yeah, as if I didn't notice the previous three disintegrations."

Jake's words dripped with heavy sarcasm as he laughed with the desperate intensity of a man teetering on the edge of madness.

"I get your sarcasm, but remember, I'm on your side," Xi chided, her finger jabbing sternly at his chest.

Jake's face hardened before a sheepish smile crinkled his features. "Sorry, Xi. I'm a bit on edge..." he apologized, inhaling deeply to regain composure.

Just as he was about to offer a more genuine apology, his vision blurred horrifyingly. Not just blurred, but accelerated so fast it became a chaotic jumble of color and light. Nearly instantaneously, Jake was once again engulfed in a blinding whirlpool of plasma.

"Hsssshhh!" This time, he felt the disintegration as his eyes instantly melted away.

With a final desperate effort, Jake activated his Purgatory spell, but not before his pineal gland had eroded by over a third of its initial mass.

When Jake reappeared unscathed, his body having regenerated instantaneously for the fifth time, he was a pitiful sight, dripping with sweat and radiating palpable anxiety.

"These distortions are happening faster and f-"

He didn't even have time to finish his observation before his vision blurred again. This time, neither Xi nor he had time to panic; he had just finished regenerating his body. Barely a second had passed between the previous temporal distortion and the next.

"Mmmphhh! FUCK! That hurts!" Jake cursed as his pineal gland evaporated by half before he could regain enough senses to reactivate his Purgatory.

Both Jake and Xi could foresee what their enemy was trying to achieve, which is why his blood ran cold as his vision blurred for the seventh time, with the reconstruction of his body barely underway.

'This bastard is trying to trap us in a perpetual distortion loop,' Jake realized before searing pain ignited every nerve in his body.

Just before his vision blurred this time, his survival instincts finally overcame his shock, triggering two countermeasures. First, he activated the Lucid Aetherdream mode to monitor all abnormal Aether fluctuations. Second, he transmuted all the available Aether

to boost his Intelligence and Extrasensory Perception to unprecedented levels, focusing especially on his Spirit Body.

He had already figured that his physical body was too compromised from the successive disintegrations to be reliable. However, his Aether stats were already near their physiological limit, causing his Spirit Body, and even his soul, to rapidly overheat under the attribute boost.

He was risking everything on this last-ditch effort. Either his Spirit Body and soul would disintegrate before finding a counter to his enemy, or he'd discover how to resist or put an end to the temporal distortions and then have all the time in the world to regenerate the spiritual damage with his Grade 10 Energy and Life Element.

In addition, he had entrusted the reins of his body to Xi to activate the Purgatory in his stead, choosing to discard his own physical form to vanquish his enemy.

'Cosmic D Starfeyrves Trance,' Jake thought, a sinister, undetectable ripple of energy emanating from his pineal gland.

This was the first time he had willingly entered this state on his own. Adapt or die trying!

In this heightened state of spirituality, Jake's perception of reality shifted drastically. When the seventh temporal distortion hit, things unfolded differently.

First, he distinctly perceived the way these distortions assaulted him in spasmodic jolts, rather than continuously accelerating his sense of time. It clarified why his Purgatory was repeatedly disabled, rather than perpetually maintained, every time his consciousness appeared to be thrust into the "future."

"But knowing this doesn't give me back my control over my Purgatory," Jake observed with an eerie calm given the circumstances.

The abrupt slowing of his time perception, due to these spasmodic distortions, sent the already deployed Purgatory spiraling, as it received his commands via high-frequency spirit pulses with lag. This latency was enough to disrupt the illusion world.

Within his heightened state of awareness, Jake witnessed as a withdrawn spectator how Xi barely managed to activate Purgatory with only 20% of his pineal gland's normal mass intact. He foresaw that the next distortion would likely prove fatal.

He also watched firsthand as the eighth distortion struck before his body had even the slightest chance of beginning its regeneration, his pineal gland alone regaining its integrity. Yet, Xi astounded him with remarkable clarity of mind, retrieving from his Space Storage not his biomass, but several of the remaining Portable Fortresses.

She then nestled Jake's pineal gland into one fortress, that one into another, and so on, until they had assembled six layers of steel fortifications, each bolstering the last.

With Xi's swift action, Jake managed to weather the eighth temporal distortion. The Oracle AI held out hope of reusing this emergency method by sacrificing even more of its defensive artifacts, but the ninth temporal distortion turned out even more ruthless.

It struck almost immediately following the eighth. Essentially, Xi hadn't even invoked the Purgatory, nor begun to heal his pineal gland when it was thrust back into the midst of the plasma storm, now achieving infernal temperatures.

A wave of despair overwhelmed Xi at the sight, truly believing it was the end for them, but Jake's deep and assured voice suddenly echoed in her mind.

"Thank you, Xi. I'm taking over."

He doubted his chances, but after "dying" eight times, he had finally found a countermeasure. During the seventh temporal distortion, he had gained a more immersive understanding of his predicament, though still had no clue how to counteract these temporal distortions.

The quick fixes he considered involved temporarily amplifying his cognitive speed, but he was already nearly maxed out. His Lucid Aetherdreamer state already gave his Aether stats an astonishing overall boost by subconsciously tapping into the Aetherdream, and none of the Aether spells or artifacts he possessed could outperform that.

Jake was on the verge of giving up, realizing that even by amplifying his perception to its limits, he still couldn't detect a trace of the Time Element. But instead of surrendering, he decided to think outside the box by deciding to measure its flow.

His mind wasn't reliable due to his chaotic time perception, but there was a constant reference on which he could base his calculations: the plasma storm.

With each disintegration, his body would fall apart more and more, indicating that the temperature and turbulence of the plasma were increasing substantially each time. Since he could estimate how much energy and plasma the Magnetic Resonator produced, and pumped into his location, the rest of the calculation was child's play.

In a flash, Jake was able to retroactively calculate how many seconds into the future his consciousness had been projected after each distortion. He expected nothing, but the truth struck him profoundly.

The temporal distortions were getting shorter! Or to be more precise, his body and mind weren't affected as long or severely as they should've been.

Shedding light on this new element, Jake instantly understood why. He was adapting! Or the enemy responsible for this charade was beginning to tire!

In either case, this foe had noticed and decided to time its Time Spells ever closer to the end of the previous ones, wrongly giving him the impression that his resistance was increasingly futile.

Had Jake not performed these calculations by chance, he could have fallen for it. Tough luck for this enigmatic adversary...

Now he knew that he was not the one being cornered.

The eighth distortion came then, but fortified by his initial insight, Jake had another revelation. If he could only perceive time by measuring its indirect effects, why not measure the impact of these distortions on space itself?

For unlike the Time Element, for which Jake had no talent, his bloodline granted him a weak Space Affinity. That was all it took for him to set his plan in motion.

During the eighth distortion, Jake calmly observed how space stretched imperceptibly within a radius of a few cubic meters around his body. It was strikingly similar to how space-time stretches near a celestial object of significant mass.

It was an indescribable sensation. The sort that one needed to personally experience to fully comprehend this notion of space stretching.

Enraptured by his epiphany, Jake hadn't attempted anything at that moment, but when he felt Xi's panic at the approach of the ninth distortion, he finally knew what to do.

"My counterattack is just beginning," Jake chuckled sinisterly as he gently tugged the space around him with a sliver of spirit energy.

Focusing his mind, he felt the very spirit of space start to elongate suddenly, and as though he was compressing an accordion between his hands, he squeezed the ends of the warped area in the opposite direction, effectively counteracting the enemy's temporal distortion.

Xi felt a thrilling surge of jubilation upon realizing that Jake had truly found a counter, but promptly recalling her role, she decisively activated the Purgatory a ninth time to regenerate Jake's body.

The adversary must have felt panic set in, for a tenth, then an eleventh distortion attempt struck in quick succession. Jake, however, staved off each attempt with a monarch's calm and grace.

Finally, Jake's unscathed body reappeared at the Purgatory's center, a smirk of vindication lending a devilish allure to his face of fey beauty.

"My turn, now."

## Chapter 997: The Voidshifter

Jake's eyes shot wide open, his declaration of war mirrored within their widening pupils. Their spiraling vortex of silver obscurity flared, casting an eerie aura that seemed capable of piercing and laying bare the deepest secrets it touched.

The Aetherdream unfurled before him again, its myriad bundles and filaments of intertwined Aether replacing his normal vision. Yet this time, Jake did not entirely surrender himself to this otherworldly perception. He held onto reality, straddling both worlds.

In this state of limbo, Jake's acute reading of the Aether and his godly mastery over it were not as pronounced. However, it carried the advantage that he wouldn't risk being swept away in the ethereal currents.

Admittedly, it was a humble concession for Jake. Despite the pride in his cognitive abilities, he still struggled to make sense of his surroundings when observed through the unerring lens of the Aetherdream.

Assuming he could discern what each Aether pattern, filament, and rune meant, the vision the Aetherdream presented was indeed the absolute truth, reality as it genuinely was. But processing in his mind what the Aetherdream was showing him was the crux of the matter.

It was akin to playing a video game by watching the screen versus directly reading the binary codes scrolling in millions of ones and zeroes. Although the latter method would provide a player with the ultimate understanding of the game, mechanics, and ongoing events, was it feasible?

Because in the Aetherdream, everything was reduced to Aether and information.

Concepts of distance, space, and time ceased to exist in their expected forms. Instead, they were represented through intricate constructs of Aether. It was profoundly baffling, enough to drive a lesser mind mad. Even Jake himself felt the creeping nausea and vertigo threatening to force a retreat.

Straddling both the real world and Aetherdream at the same time was the compromise Jake had found through rigorous training, pulling the best from both realms given his

current level. The darker, more elusive currents of Aether were no longer as perceptible to him, but at least he didn't entirely lose his grip on reality.

To find evidence of a Time Aether Rune or Symbol, Jake knew this would likely be inadequate, as he had found nothing earlier in his perfect Lucid Aetherdreamer mode. However, he had long since relinquished hopes of a breakthrough in that aspect, and it was not what he sought now.

He wanted to detect a spell's trace, recently cast upon him through the aspect, and it was not what he sought now.

Aetherdream, to trace it back to the spellcaster.

"I already know how to counter these distortions, now all that's left is to isolate the spiritual impulse commanding these temporal distortions to target me," Jake mused coolly, a hint of a smirk tugging at his lips.

Long-distance spells or techniques that seemed to spontaneously manifest away from the caster weren't truly spontaneous. Just like his telekinesis, there was always a high-frequency spiritual impulse or an invisible spirit thread enabling the transmission of its mental commands.

To become genuinely untraceable, the caster could resort to more obscure methods, like teleporting their spiritual impulses multiple times to obfuscate their tracks - an equivalent of a spirit VPN. However, such spirit techniques were rather high-level and more draining and risky for the mind than they seemed.

Jake was certain the perpetrator of these distortions, whether a Voidshifter or not, was incapable of such feats. If they were, they would have attacked him outright with a soul attack instead of devising such an intricate stratagem.

Sensing the twelfth distortion following the eleventh almost immediately, his body tensed with anticipation, like a starved spider sensing its prey stepping willingly into its web.

"Hehe, found you." Jake's grin grew wicked as he watched an odd, enormous ripple of indescribable-colored Aether roll towards him at a pace that bordered on static.

Within the Aetherdream, this type of Aether was commonplace but entwined into translucent tendrils so complex that even his keen mind strained to decode what he saw, to the point of throbbing.

Jake had theorized these represented space within the Aetherdream, or at least the initial layer he had barely begun to probe thanks to his Soul Class. However, these runes were so complex, cryptic, and solid that he dared not meddle with them for fear of causing irreversible effects.

This was why he was content to rely on his Level 1 Space Manipulation, achieving similar effects without scorching his neurons.

Yet, even though he lacked the courage to tamper with these omnipresent translucent Aether runes, he had other intentions for observing them.

The ripple propagating through them... Despite the lack of evidence, Jake instinctively knew this was how the enemy cast its temporal distortion upon him.

'Truly impressive,' he thought, his smirk fading as he realized that he could no spiritual fluctuation within.

It was as if the enemy had flawlessly blended its spiritual energy with this quiet spatial wave. Given that Jake couldn't even detect it despite his high perception, he deduced that its nature was akin to a gravitational wave-its wavelength so broad as to become undetectable.

Had Jake not been on high alert for any changes in the Aetherdream, he might have remained oblivious.

It made sense, though. If this mysterious foe had projected its mental sense into the plasma storm without any subterfuge, the engaged spiritual energy would have been wasted, obliterated in an instant.

"Pity for you, I am not just anyone," Jake declared ominously as he transitioned fully into the Aetherdream.

"Aetherdream Travel."

His body, safe within the Purgatory until now, vanished, causing the latter's collapse. From within the Aetherdream, Jake-transformed into a stream of Aetheric data-flew fearlessly toward the approaching Aether wave, timing his next move with its frequency to merge with it.

Moving by merging with various Aether currents was a perk of his Aetherdream Traveler Soul Class Skill. In the Aetherdream, gauging the distance to his enemy was nearly impossible at a glance, but Jake was certain that if he traced back to the source of this Aether wave, he would find his target.

Transmuted into a tumultuous flow of Aether, Jake let himself be recklessly carried upstream, diving straight into the tsunami-like Aether ripple. This process seemed risky and complicated from the Aetherdream perspective, but its consequences in the real world proved to be more tangible.



Thus, from the perspective of the normal world, Jake-having vanished inexplicably-reappeared almost instantly in an unknown, cramped space right before a vaguely humanoid, mist-like creature.

As the hunter and prey locked eyes, they froze, both shocked by the other's appearance but for different reasons. Jake was merely surprised by the less monstrous morphology than he had anticipated, while the creature was in the throes of panic, not having expected to be uncovered so abruptly even in its direst predictions.

'How beautiful... So this is what a humanoid Voidshifter looks like, eh,' Jake muttered inwardly, his eyes narrowing as he took the measure of his sworn enemy.

The monster, which had caused him so much trouble, stood taller than the average human, its figure a distorted reflection of a human silhouette. Its skin had a faint translucent quality, like frosted glass, under which the pulsing silver veins of its circulatory system were visible, glowing with an uncanny luminescence.

Its limbs, though more conventionally arranged than expected, ended in elongated fingers tipped with claw-like anchors. One of these anchors, however, was retracted, revealing a more human-like hand. The face retained a nearly sorrowful humanoid quality, the eyes akin to the silver orbs of its progenitor, their gaze unsettling.

The Voidwalker's armor was more streamlined, fitting the humanoid frame like a second skin, lending it a hauntingly regal appearance. The armor's ornate patterns were reminiscent of cosmic bodies-spiraling galaxies and constellations adorned its frame like a stellar mantle.

The Voidshifter's eyes widened in bewilderment, recoiling subtly, but immediately afterward those intelligent orbs bulged out, replaced by pure, unadulterated terror, as the Purgatory realm swallowed his vision whole, severing his connection with the exterior world.

The creature's first instinct was to retaliate in panic with a Time Freeze Spell, but even though this Time Spell was somewhat different from the previous distortions, Jake was already mentally primed for it.

Before the temporal fluctuation could even reach him, Jake sinisterly murmured, "Aetherdream World."

This was his third Soul Class Skill. The most overpowered and unfathomable among them.

On the surface, nothing appeared to transpire. An imperceptible ripple silently overlapped with his Purgatory and the trapped Voidshifter within. The bewildered and frightened Digestor was none the wiser, unknowingly sucked into this secondary domain without a clue.

Then, the temporal fluctuation of his Time Freeze Spell finally hit its intended mark. To the Voidshifter, victory was already in the bag, or at least it would provide a safe passage for escape.

Except, the very next instant, a surge of disbelieving despair overwhelmed him as Jake, unaffected by his Time Spell, strolled nonchalantly towards it, hoisting it violently off the ground by its throat.

## Chapter 998: Making A Killing Again

"Shhrrriiii!"

The Voidshifter's throttled shriek rent the air, the sound wave assaulting the ears of his strangler and eliciting a fleeting grimace from Jake.

"Go on, scream," he taunted, his voice shadowed with malevolence. "You won't be leaving alive, not while you're in my grasp." His grip tightened cruelly.

It didn't feel as if he was holding flesh and bone, but rather something akin to an exceptionally dense cloud. Cosmic bodies, no larger than a marble, brushed against his palm and fingers. But he shrugged off the peculiar sensation, his face a mask of icy indifference.

A smirk curled the corners of his mouth, a hint of mockery dancing in his eyes as he anticipated the next Time Spell. Yet, in response to his terror, the Voidshifter ceased to resist, its body going limp.

Raising an intrigued eyebrow, Jake couldn't help but compliment the creature that had given him a run for his money.

"Just as I would expect from a Digestor capable of casting Time Spells. You're smart." His genial smile faded into frigid harshness. "You've realized you're powerless in my dreamworld. Here, I dictate the rules. You must be puzzled as to why your magic doesn't function as it should, why even your limbs are

unresponsive, why you're on the verge of retching when our gazes meet."

He was merely stating the obvious. Jake possessed substantial control within his Purgatory domain, but when it overlapped with his Aetherdream World, it turned into something far more terrifying.

His double domain became his "dream," and within a dream, all is possible. Forget the laws of physics and logic. The only reality was what Jake deemed to be true.

What made this ultimate Soul Class Skill so dangerous was that, like any dream, the dreamer's state of consciousness was skewed, preventing them from realizing that something was awry. This is where his other Lucid Aetherdreamer ability came into play.

It was not a sleeping spell, but something far more insidious, subtly influencing the mental state of those ensnared in the claws of his Dreamworld.

Hence, Jake's compliment towards the Voidshifter was sincere. For it to realize that it was under the effect of a powerful illusion capable of warping reality, this Digestor had earned his respect.

Of course, Jake expected as much, since all his Soul Class Skills heavily relied on his mental attributes. Whether it was his mental stats, Soul Strength, Soul Power, Spirit Body, or Spirit Energy, everything mattered. Given that this Digestor needed a powerful and sharp mind to cast the notoriously tricky Time Spells, such awareness was a given.

Still, this was the very reason Jake felt a pang of disappointment. He wanted to witness the Voidshifter's struggle, to relish his vengeance, but it appeared it wouldn't happen today.

Not merely due to his Aetherdream World, but because without it, he was unsure he could dispose of a Voidshifter endowed with such tricky and abnormal powers.

But like all overpowered abilities, his Aetherdream World had a hefty cost.

In this case, the price was not mere Aether, but both his Spirit Energy and Soul Power. Simply put, his True Will was rapidly draining in this godlike state. And the backlash from expending his True Will was crippling mental fatigue and a drastic decline in other critical mental parameters such as his willpower, determination, and perseverance. If his Soul Power dropped too low, it could even impact his mood, memories, and personality, leaving him a mere shadow of himself.

Therefore, it was with a grimace of disappointment that Jake decided to linger no longer, to bring about the end of his adversary. A killing intent surged, and he lifted his gaze to meet the Voidshifter's once again, the creature still gasping silently.

As their eyes locked, a silver glint in the monster's pupils abruptly dilated, its impending doom shattering the ceiling of emotions.

"SHHHRRRR!!!"

The creature's body suddenly radiated an engulfing black light, filling Jake's field of vision. Simultaneously, he felt a repulsive and corrosive forcefield slowly push his fingers from the monster's neck, which they had been strangling.

Through his heightened senses, Jake recognized this was not simply a forcefield, but space itself expanding between him and the Voidshifter. As he witnessed the creature's form warp and expand, his hairs stood on end in alertness and he darted backward at full speed.

BOOOOOM!

The Voidshifter fractured and shattered into tens of pieces before Jake, who was unable to prevent it despite his dual domain. He had no clue how the Digestor had temporarily freed itself from his Aetherdream World, but from what he had just seen, it was a high-risk escape tactic.

It was akin to severing one's legs and arms merely to secure a brief window of survival.

Jake pondered how the space's stretching could cause the creature to be torn apart. But upon noticing a tiny spatial crack zigzagging through the air where the Voidshifter previously stood, he understood what had transpired.

'So, it was not just a self-destruction, but an act of stretching local space to such an extent that it would rupture.'

The Voidshifter's body exploding was merely a secondary consequence, insufficient to kill such a Digestor. When Jake saw the shattered remains of the creature being rapidly sucked into the spatial crack, he finally realized the monster's intentions and dashed forward like a missile, scooping out as many bloody pieces as he could with his own hands and Cosmic Force.

In the end, he managed to keep the Digestor's intact right forearm, barely saving it from complete annihilation.

Despite his swift reaction, over 90% of the Voidshifter's body mass managed to escape into the spatial crack before it closed. Jake hesitated briefly, considering infiltrating the spatial crack to hunt down the creature and finish it, but he refrained.

"Fine, I'll let you live this time. As long as you don't come back," Jake snorted disdainfully, teleporting back into the plasma storm with his spoils in tow.

With his Purgatory active, Jake did not fear the storm as he had previously, and he endured patiently the escalating rage of the elements from the comfort of his Sanctuary.

However, realizing that his Purgatory was already showing signs of strain after just a few seconds, he decided to take advantage of the situation.

He had not noticed earlier, being bullied by the pesky and cautious Voidshifter, but wasn't this situation familiar? Hadn't he benefited from a very similar environment on Quanoth?

Jake's eyes gleamed with dollar signs as he thought about the killing he was about to make.

Indeed, he planned to use all this plasma, heated to hundreds of millions of degrees, to mass produce a new batch of Aether Cores.

Jake was a specialist in this field, not new to the game. He hadn't crafted new Aether Cores in over a year, but his mental prowess had evolved to such an extent that it was as simple as breathing.

With a mere thought, he drew at maximum capacity the Aether continuously produced by his Grade 10 Energy Body. He then set to condensing several hundred Grade 1 Aether Cores per second.

As he continued to generate new batches with astonishing efficiency, he multitasked to engrave a collection of Energy Conversion Spells and sometimes other enchantments or Aether Encodings, depending on the effect or type of Aether he wished these new Aether Cores to produce.

As soon as the first batch of enchanted Aether Cores was ready, he expelled them from his shrinking Purgatory. Once they left his Purgatory World, Jake had no way of knowing their fate, but that was of no concern.

Unfazed, he continued to create and send these batches of Aether Cores into the plasma storm. Not even a few minutes later, Jake's lips curled up as he realized the constraints taxing his Purgatory were not growing as quickly.

"These Aether Cores are growing fast." His face beamed as he made a quick mental calculation.

However, he had spoken too soon. Seconds later, the artificial sky of his Purgatory collapsed, and a blast of chaotic, white-hot plasma descended directly upon him.

To survive, he had no choice but to interrupt his crafting session and seek refuge in the Aetherdream.

Without a second thought, he teleported to where the Voidshifter had previously hidden, having memorized its location within the Aetherdream. There, he calmly awaited the recovery of his Purgatory and spirit energy while continuing to fabricate new Aether Cores.

Once they were restored, he returned to the plasma storm by teleporting back into its midst and repeated the process. In the end, he only had to retreat three more times over six minutes before the physical constraints of the plasma storm stabilized.

Five minutes later, the temperature and radiation emitted by the storm began to recede slowly at first, then more rapidly. An hour passed, and when the Magnetic Field Disruptor finally deactivated and the plasma began to recede, Jake and, miraculously, Saros reappeared unscathed, floating in the void within a ravaged cavity several hundred kilometers in diameter.

Drifting with them were tens of thousands of Aether Cores, all ranked between Grades 6 and 8.

This baffling and absurd spectacle greeted Syrbarun and Rigel when they finally regained clear visibility after the plasma storm had dissipated, leaving them utterly stunned.

But what horrified them the most was the familiar arm that Jake held tightly in his hand. Wasn't that the arm of the Voidshifter under their command?!

## Chapter 999: My Pleasure

"Tch, had I known these Aether Cores could be used so defensively, I would have made a few before finishing my fourth Ordeal." Jake exhaled with a sigh of emotion, sweeping his hand through the air to recall the tens of thousands of energy orbs drifting about.

He had assumed he'd outgrown such oversights, but yet again, he had been overly self-assured. Upon acquiring his Grade 10 Energy, crafting new Aether Cores had fallen to the bottom of his priorities. It was only now that he realized their value, regardless of a lower grade.

[It's not truly your fault.] Xi's melodic, soothing voice began to comfort him. [Auræ specifically forbade you from leeching the energy of other stars, and you're well aware how heavily regulated this practice is in the Mirror Universe. With your Grade 10 Energy, you could've easily created millions of Aether Cores, but upgrading them beyond Grade 3 would've taken an enormous amount of time, hindering your ability to accumulate Aether Points in the process. Besides, it would've affected your training and research.]

"Sigh... I know, Xi, but it's still frustrating." Jake forced a bitter smile. But soon enough, his smile turned genuine, and he erupted in boisterous laughter, "Hahaha, so that means I've legally pillaged the equivalent of a small star! At least, I've been compensated for this crappy day, although I'd rather have avoided it if it could return Lucia and the others to normal."

In the same breath as his sour laughter, he scanned the vast, partially melted Voidsteel cavity alertly and stiffened as his eyes landed on the familiar figure of a certain Oracle Guardian. Unharmful at that!

Jake's forced laughter abruptly choked in his throat, and with a glowering gaze, his voice turned icy cold as he gritted his teeth,

"Saros! Don't think you'll get off lightly just because you're an Oracle Guardian. If you don't give me a good explanation, I swear I'll make you regret it here and now."

This was not an empty threat. Recent battles had given Jake a taste of his true capabilities, and he felt confident he could give this alien, assigned to monitor and report his every move, a solid beating if he cast aside all hesitations.

This dramatic venture into the Magnetic Resonator had at least taught him one thing: The Oracle Guardians, or at least Saros, were not all they seemed.

Their gear was around Silver Grade, but basic at best, heavily reliant on the performance of its materials. It had little or no enchantments offering abilities, and Jake didn't even think the alien's attributes were significantly boosted. Their actual worth might be even less than that of some Advanced Aether Artifacts.

On the other hand, while Saros's race, the Khaanul, were bred to serve the Oracle, with adult baseline strength equivalent to an Eighth-Ordeal Evolver, it was referring to an average one.

Saros wasn't representative enough to make a final judgment on his species, but from what Jake had observed from his master Cekt's attitude toward them, most Khaanuls were probably just high-level small fries.

The fact that Jake was relatively confident he could take one of them out was already a start, even though he himself was an anomaly among anomalies. After all, we were talking about punching four Ordeals above his weight!

As for Saros himself, his face contorted several times under Jake's persistent, menacing gaze, fully aware of the human's, or rather demon's, grievances. It was not just the hostility and apparent killing intent, but the severed Voidshifter arm held in one of his hands that set him profoundly ill at ease.

When had he found time to hunt this Digestor? During the plasma storm? If that were the case, he needed to drastically reevaluate the target assigned to him.

In the end, Saros chose candor. Shrugging, he confessed, "Apologies for earlier, I panicked. To be honest, I wasn't sure if I could pull through myself. My entire set of Silver Aether defensive artifacts were obliterated within seconds, and my means of survival... it was a last-ditch effort."

"And what was this... ahem... last-ditch effort, if I may ask?" Jake queried, a challenging glare still lingering as he cleared his throat.



Saros was prepared for this question, responding without flinching, "A one-time-use Phasing Scroll. All Oracle Guardians receive one complimentary scroll upon their initiation, but to procure another requires to fork out a lot of money. Most of us never manage to obtain a second. The scrolls have a price but no market, for only seasoned Aetherists, enchanters, and engravers well-versed in Space Magic and Space Aether Spells can craft them. To get one, you must journey to a high-level magical world, preferably Ephemeron on A4 of System 1, the capital and the home of the Ancient Designer, Grishaam Jakam, for your information. "Returning to the point, the Phasing Scroll allows me to shift my body onto a plane slightly parallel to reality, as if I'm on a different frequency. Once the scroll is torn, the effect lasts about ninety minutes and only works on one person. I don't mean to justify my actions, but understand that had there been another option, I would not have used it. If I endure another plasma storm like that one, I'll be left defenseless, with no other choice but to use my emergency teleporter to get as far away from here as possible. By staying here to complete my mission instead of fleeing, I've already taken an enormous risk."

"Oh? Sounds quite convenient." Jake remarked with an impassive, borderline hostile, tone. "And am I supposed to believe that you genuinely only had one and couldn't risk touching us before tearing the Phasing Scroll? Let me guess. Doing so would have unpredictably shortened the scroll's effective duration, and that was a risk you were unwilling to take? Fucking hypocrite."

Jake didn't truly mean what he said. After all, he and Saros had been strangers mere hours ago. Nonetheless, by accusing the Oracle Guardian in this manner, he hoped to guilt him enough to secure some form of compensation, or at least a few favors.

And indeed, while the Khaanul suspected Jake's scheme, he had no other choice but to bite the bait to fulfill his mission. The truth was, he wasn't supposed to let Jake die.

His mission commanded him not only to monitor Jake but to protect him, even at the cost of his own life if necessary, so long as he hadn't incontrovertibly betrayed the Mirror Universe.

Moreover, by surviving the plasma storm, Jake had proved they were at least equals. If he reported what happened, he'd likely be replaced by a stronger Oracle Guardian and severely penalized.

Meanwhile, getting dismissed for professional misconduct by the person he was supposed to oversee would leave an indelible stain on his resume.

"I apologize for abandoning you in such a cowardly manner earlier. It was disgraceful," Saros apologized, bowing 90 degrees to a taken-aback Jake. "It won't happen again."

Jake was so taken by surprise at the apology that he momentarily forgot his comeback. Instead, he absentmindedly nodded, his lips pursed and his mind already elsewhere.

Lucia's unrecognizable appearance flashed through his mind, and the creeping dread he had momentarily forgotten amid the plasma storm's danger came rushing back.

'Fuck! How could I forget that the true culprits are still alive somewhere?' He berated himself.

Casting a sidelong glance at Saros, who remained bowed, Jake's brow twitched, but he then ordered grimly,

"Apology accepted. Stand up. We still have perpetrators to eliminate and friends to save-or avenge, as the case may be."

Saros straightened up, his alien face a blend of stern and cruel expressions, crying out for vengeance after receiving Jake's pardon.

"No need to search, I know where they are," the alien declared with confidence, causing Jake to jolt with pleasant surprise.

"For real?"

"I never jest when it involves work," Saros retorted grimly. "Not all Oracle Guardians can say the same, but since I was assigned to monitor a potential future Digestor, they provided me with the necessary equipment and Oracle Skills to cover any eventuality. While my Phasing Spell was active, I wasn't idle. I had all the time to trace and follow their signal. It was coming from somewhere directly beneath us. If we charge straight down, we're bound to encounter them sooner or later."

"Then, let's get them, shall we?" Jake chuckled ominously.

"My pleasure..."

The next second, as if their minds were one, they vanished from their location, shooting straight down like falling stars toward the newly melted floor, one hundred and fifty kilometers lower than before...

## **Chapter 1000: Rigel, I Hate You**

"D-did he kill it?" Syrbarun stepped back from the holographic screen unconsciously, his hand squeezing the silvery urchin with trepidation. His gaze was riveted to the alien limb that Jake held aloof in his right hand.

Rigel held his silence, maintaining a stern facade, but the slight quiver coursing through his stony frame belied his composure.

"It's not answering my calls," Syrbarun gloomily announced, his eyes bloodshot and complexion pallid from futilely compressing the device in his hand.

"Mine neither..." The Gorgonite admitted reluctantly, after a beat.

Upon hearing this, the minotaur's visage crumbled, and in a fit of rage, he slammed the silvery urchin to the ground. It ricocheted off the walls, pinging a hundred times before coming to a stop.

"Fucking horns and hooves! We don't even know this slippery Voidshifter's name!"

Syrbarun suddenly blurted, his composure slipping away in the face of panic.

"They're all so unreliable!"

"Wow, now you're using the same ridiculous curses as your host. Be careful not to turn into a real Vrusug. That would indeed be a disgrace for our species," Rigel mocked. The dig, however, was more to distract from his own unease than anything else.

But the mask of arrogance soon faded as he gazed at the screen, his Gorgonite body tensing like a cat ready to pounce. His expression somber, the silver light in his eyes noticeably dimmed as he commanded, "We need to leave. NOW!"

At that very moment, the reassuring presence of the immature Dungeon Digestor retracted from their position, abandoning them as if they were obsolete commodities. Cut off from their powerful backup, their hearts sank and their legs felt weak.

This could only mean one of two things: Either the Dungeon Digestor was facing a threat that required its full strength, or it had concluded that they were beyond saving. The latter was what they dreaded most.

Dungeon Digestors were just like that-rational to a fault. It was never personal, but damn, it stung when they were on the receiving end!

Regaining his composure after the initial panic, Syrbarun realized that Rigel had already begun to scram, his army of Sinewshades following in response to the pulses from his silver urchin. That prick had even taken Epsilom and Drakon with him!

Fortunately, they could still control them with their own silver urchins, even without the Dungeon Digestor's help. Thanks to these devices, they were seen as a sort of alpha to these creatures.

The effect on the Voidshifter was less pronounced, serving as a dubious short-range leash but a subpar communication method if the Digestor strayed beyond a few kilometers. That's why they hadn't been able to prevent the creature from mutinying after its defeat by Jake.

If the Voidshifter had been closer when ambushed by Jake, it would have likely fought to the death. Perhaps the creature had foreseen its defeat and deliberately distanced itself from its masters...

"Don't leave me behind!" Syrbarun cried out, stomping the ground in indignation.

With another pulse of his silver urchin, he commanded his own obedient Sinewshades to follow. Being aware that his host wasn't exactly a creature of grace, he mounted the most massive one and spurred it into a gallop with a flick of his tongue.

His steed was a six-legged mutation, bearing semblance to a gorilla and possessing a heft akin to an elephant. From the creature's odd aura, grotesque appearance, and the fact that it still donned its iconic visor helmet, one could surmise that this beast was once a proud Oracle Guardian in its living days.

Even an Evolver of such caliber had not withstood the virus and eventually degenerated into a Sinewshade! Rigel, too, had his mount of similar stature, finding safety upon it.

"Damn it, that bastard! He's using me as a diversion!" Syrbarun grumbled, grinding his teeth in frustration as he realized his comrade had already sped ahead, the distance between them growing with each passing moment.

Deep down, he prayed fervently that Jake and the accompanying Oracle Guardian wouldn't catch up too soon. Unfortunately, he was a realist at heart and knew that their fired-up enemies would find them any second.

'I have no other choice if I want to survive, I must-'

BANG!

The thick Voidsteel wall some kilometers behind was brutally slashed open. Twisting his head, the Vrusug's heart nearly dropped as an absurdly fast Spatial Blade burst forth, zooming straight towards him. He thought his end had come, but the projectile dispersed a few meters after penetrating the wall, having exhausted its energy.

Syrbarun heaved a sigh of relief, unconsciously wiping his fur drenched in sweat with the back of his gauntlet. But then, the sight of the two individuals he dreaded the most nearly made him soil himself a second time.

'Fffffuck! Rigel, I hate you!' The minotaur cursed internally. But he knew he was in a precarious situation. One wrong move, and he'd perish on the spot.

The moment Jake barged out of the breached Voidsteel wall, his eyes darted around, seeking their quarry, before settling on Syrbarun's retreating back for a fraction of a second.

Caught in the crosshairs of what his Digestor instincts perceived as an apex predator, the Vrusug froze, nearly tumbling off his mount. Thankfully, the giant Sinewshade was incapable of feeling fear, maintaining its pace, its brain too decayed to allow any self-awareness.

Whooooosh!

In that instant, Syrbarun reflexively looked back to gauge how much time he had.

But immediately, his eyes bulged out of their sockets, and his silver pupils dilated as Jake's claw rematerialized mere inches from his face.

Terrified, he squeezed his silvery urchin once more, and a dozen Sinewshades threw themselves in Jake's path, selflessly sacrificing themselves, while his mount sprang aside with terrifying agility.

BAM!

Despite their efforts, the monster's hindquarters were hit, its coccyx, sacrum, and surrounding areas caving in, while Jake's retracting claws tore away chunks of flesh, bone, and viscera.

For a brief moment, the massive zombie Digestor lost control of its lower half when its spinal cord was severely damaged, affecting its mobility. This moment was enough for Syrbarun to comprehend the existential threat he faced.

Throwing all reason to the wind, he squeezed the spongy device in his hand like a man possessed, and the next moment, the tens of thousands of Sinewshades forming his close guard converged on Jake, forming a momentarily impregnable tide of monsters.

Seeing this, Jake snorted and swept them away with a dismissive backhand, a wall of Cosmic Force crashing them all against the wall to his right. The wall was instantly painted with gory silver when the creatures were flattened upon impact.

However, right behind them, more robust and sizeable Sinewshades fearlessly threw themselves into the fray, one after another, sacrificing themselves for their master without a hint of self-preservation.

These ones, however, could not be squashed with telekinesis without some effort, and Jake soon found himself entangled in a brawl with dozens of Sinewshades whose physical prowess was close to his own.

Close, but not quite. Their Real Physical Stats might have been around 1 to 10% of his own, but combined with their outrageous vitality, they were like cockroaches-impossible to exterminate unless they were perfectly disintegrated, body and soul, down to the last particle.

Their impressive strength indicated that in their living days, all these monsters were at least Evolvers with six to eight Ordeals under their belts, depending on their talent. Perhaps even more if their physique wasn't their main focus.

So Jake finally had a clue about what had happened to all the personnel of the Magnetic Resonator. However, despite this revelation, he still had many doubts.

In his mind, a structure of such importance should have been protected by elite troops before it fell under the Digestors' sway. He doubted that these Sinewshades could claim such a status. As strong as they seemed physically, Jake could sense no special energy emanating from them. Alive, their bloodlines must have been quite weak, even weaker than the virus that had turned them into Sinewshades.

Moreover, a true elite troop in the top 0.001%, with eight Ordeals on their CV, should theoretically have been hundreds of times stronger than a basic Oracle Guardian like Saros, if not more. If Jake had encountered one of them, his only option would have been to flee with his tail between his legs.

For this, he felt a pang of gratitude but couldn't suppress his lingering questions. Where had these elite forces gone, unless he overestimated the importance of this Magnetic Resonator?