

The Oracle Paths

Volume 1: The Oracle

Chapter 32 - Interlude(part 2)

A few seconds after the pillar of light disappeared, the audience gradually regained its sight. When all the spectators in their stands finally gazed at the creature in the center of the podium, they were speechless.

Some of the aliens participating in the meeting had a disconcerting non-humanoid anatomy, but there was a kind of harmony, which gave the feeling that somehow it made sense.

The Oracle Overseer was a life form that defied common sense. Far from being a terrifying monster like the Oracle Knights guarding the stage, it was a rachitic creature that confronted them.

Barely 2 feet long, the alien was hovering slightly above the ground, sitting in some sort of tiny shuttle chair levitating by some sort of process. The head, barely bigger than a golf ball, and his long neck as thin as a bamboo stem about half the length of his body, gave the impression of looking at a harmless tadpole. The rest of the body, less than a foot long, was hidden under an opaque tunic. The creature's skin was batrachian grey, glossy because of an unidentified viscous substance oozing from its pores.

The alien had no eyes, no mouth, no nose, and no ears either. And yet, everyone in that giant amphitheater could feel the creature's piercing gaze, exposing their souls as if no secret could escape it.

As for the Earth delegation, the businessmen and enthusiastic politicians had lost some of their magnificence, now shivering as if they had just undressed in the middle of an arctic blizzard. No one was prepared to such a dominating aura.

However, while the aura of the Oracle Overseer was overwhelming, there was no hostility towards them. The latter was content to float calmly in his armchair, his tadpole head undulating calmly from right to left.

After a moment that seemed interminable to them, a frail hand, looking like an iguana's paw with two extra fingers, pulled itself out of the tunic, waving to get their attention.

'Welcome to Planet B842. I am Oros, the Oracle Overseer responsible for this planet.' The tiny alien introduced himself, his high-pitched voice echoing directly into their minds.

The voice seemed to come out of nowhere and everywhere at once. Even more surprisingly, each species present could understand its words without the need for translation. And yet, if anyone had been able to record the sounds emitted by the alien, they would have only obtained strange discordant frequencies, closer to sonar than a human voice.

'You all know why I'm here today.' Oros stated with a formalism bordering on indifference. He would have given its speech in front of an anthill with exactly the same phlegm.

With these few words, he had rekindled the anxieties and fears of all races in the stands. The President of the Earth was more ashen than ever, sweating profusely.

'My time is precious to me, so I won't delay any longer. I am here because Planet B842 will end its growth phase in a few hours.' The Oracle Overseer announced, marking a time of silence to let the audience digest the news.

Whispers, clicks, squeaks, chirpings, and vibrations of all kinds began to swarm through the room. Each alien delegation was extremely disturbed by the revelation, sometimes excited, sometimes displaying an expression of desperation.

According to their estimates, they should have had a few more weeks or months before the planet B842 stabilized. At least 20% of their home planets were still intact, and while their societies had already degenerated into chaos and anarchy, they still had many things to look forward to, such as transporting food, fuel or weapons to planet B842.

Otherwise, all their capital would probably be lost. Two tanks parked next to each other in a military base on Earth could end up on B842 separated by tens of thousands or even millions of kilometers. As for finding gasoline? No need to dream. A tank in the middle of the wilderness without fuel was no better than a pile of wrecks.

Planet B842 had absorbed all the exoplanets of their Seed World to form a single giga planet. There were billions of such planets at the very least, which made the probability of even running into another human extremely low.

The chance of running into other humans wasn't zero, though. The absorption of a Seed World was not totally absurd, and usually the pieces of Earth were not too far apart from each other.

The problem was that this assimilation was done in the same way as when one picks up Scrabble letters. A piece of land in Japan could end up side by side with a Tunisian supermarket. According to information gathered by Earth's special forces, there were often at least a dozen alien races sharing their new territory, all of which represented only a tiny part of planet B842.

The end of the absorption phase meant the end of their preparations. The few bases on B842 that the Earthlings had consolidated were barely enough to house a few million humans, most of them skilled soldiers and sometimes their families.

Many promises had been made to maintain the loyalty of these troops and non-combatant personnel, including guaranteeing the safety of their families and a place for them at one of the bases on B842. The announcement of the Oracle Overseer rendered their promises null and void.

‘The reason this phase had to be abruptly accelerated is of course because Rank 2 and 3 Digestors have begun to appear in your homeworlds and the 10 or 20% of these unassimilated worlds are unable to restrain these monsters.’ Explained Oros to the outraged crowd in front of him.

‘Their Aether concentration is too low, limiting the fighting strength of the lesser species you are. On the contrary, if a low Aether concentration limits the number and power of the Digestors at birth, they have no impediment to their evolution, as long as they have enough to devour. Your countrymen have become their livestock and this must not be allowed to continue.

‘At least on B842, the Digestors will be stronger, but the Aether concentration is also much higher and still rising, as you may have noticed.’

Indeed, even those old politicians with one foot in the grave, on Thelma for just a few weeks now, were showing strength and stamina worthy of athletes in their 20s. Naturally, they didn’t want to go back to Earth, since it meant becoming old fogies again.

As for the increasing Aether concentration it was indeed a phenomenon mentioned by their elite on the field. If they didn’t know why or how, it was now a well-known fact that the more evolved and concentrated the life forms were, the more Aether abounded.

Twenty years earlier, as on Earth, there were only a few rare Digestors lvl0 spawning from the atmosphere. Today on planet B842, Digestors were at least rank 1 and posed serious problems for their armies, since they could emerge directly in the middle of their base.

‘That won’t stop the Digestors or the local fauna and flora that has adapted over the past 22 years on B842 from eliminating your fellow citizens, but at least they will have a chance to fight the rank 0 and 1 Digestors that are already rampant.

‘After all, the Oracle is with them. It’s up to them to put it to good use.’

‘But that’s not, alas, the only reason I’m here.’ Oros warned in a prophetic tone.

‘Now that B842 is soon stabilized, the countdown to your diplomatic immunity will begin. Neither the Oracle Knights nor I will interfere with your actions on this new planet.

‘You can kill each other, enslave each other, wage war, devour, or fornicate, it matters not to us. However, it also means that we will let the Digestors do as they please, letting them proliferate unsupervised.

‘In any case, your diplomatic immunity will end in five years. After that, the other planets in System ZZ831 where B842 is located will be free to visit you...’

A deadly silence fell over the audience. Some already intended to exterminate their neighbours, but they were not fooled. If they were invaded by the inhabitants of planets that had been part of the Mirror Universe much longer than they had, they would be heading for disaster.

‘If you have consulted the catalog in one of the stores associated with the Oracle System you certainly know that the Oracle does not condemn slavery. In the Mirror Universe absolutely everything has a price tag.’

Right at the end of his sentence, a grotesque form the size of a grown man emerged from the void a few feet above the ground, a rift opening from nothingness allowing the Digestor to be born.

The shapeless mass fell on the podium, twisting for a few moments before taking the shape of a sort of translucent arachnid. Before the trash had even had time to make its first cry, an immeasurable pressure of several hundred tons fell on it,

reducing it to pulp. Where her body had been splattered, the ground, made of an alien material, but certainly harder than steel, had sunk several meters.

The Earth delegation swallowed their saliva with difficulty as they watched this demonstration of power. This poor Digestor had picked a very bad time and place to disturb an Oracle Overseer right in the middle of his speech. God rest his soul. It was the first time they had ever empathized with a Digestor.

‘If by some misfortune, I should intervene to get you out of trouble, as I just did by eradicating this unwelcome Digestor, know that you become the property of the Oracle System. Every plant, human and animal will be catalogued in our database and available for purchase by anyone who can pay the price in Aether.’ The Oracle Overseer cautioned them in a sinister tone.

‘The Oracle has no need for creatures unable to evolve despite wearing an Oracle device. Of course, there are ways around these rules, and I leave it to you to discover them.’

‘I bid you farewell, and please pray that this encounter will be the only one. I hate to go down to these godforsaken places.’

After that, another pillar of blue light struck the stage, blinding them again. When their eyesight returned, the Oracle Overseer was gone.