

The Oracle Paths

Volume 1: The Oracle

Chapter 31 – Interlude (part1)

Somewhere in the Mirror Universe a few months later.

The sky was blue, the suns yellow, the moons purple. Except for a few details, it felt like we were on Earth. Well, almost.

A strange mass was floating in the sky several hundred kilometers above the ground. Surprisingly, oxygen remained plentiful, despite the lack of vegetation. And the temperature was quite mild, notwithstanding the extremely high altitude.

On this gigantic floating island, several thousand kilometres in diameter, a flourishing city stood in its center.

The city conveyed a feeling of absolute order, which only a city technologically thought out from A to Z could provide. On the other hand, there was also a sense of unspeakable anarchy.

Its periphery was almost completely occupied by camps, buildings, military bases and factories of all kinds. What all these structures had in common was that no two were alike.

The second thing they had in common was that their inhabitants did not look alike either! Villages made up of wooden huts or tents made of animal skins could be found in abundance. Sometimes the people in these camps looked like humans. Sometimes, on the contrary, they looked like nothing a sane person could imagine.

Within all these camps and fortunate bases, a heavily militarized pseudo-city struggled to find its place in the midst of all these alien civilizations.

On the roof of one of the function buildings, one could recognize the American flag fluttering lightly in the morning breeze. On other similar buildings, the flags of all nations could be seen.

Soldiers from different nations were anxiously patrolling around the electrified fence securing the HQ, the large dark circles under their eyes showing high stress levels and a preponderant lack of sleep.

‘It’s D-Day...’ sighed an Italian soldier with broken English. ‘I hope my family is well.’

‘Don’t tell me about it. To private soldiers like us, they never say anything.’ Spat out another man, with the Turkish flag printed on his uniform.

‘I’ve heard that an Oracle Overseer is coming down on Thelma to deliver his verdict and tell us what’s in store for us.’ Added another with a more feminine build. ‘From the beginning, the government dealt with locals and representatives of the Oracle on Thelma, but it was mostly robots and AI’s with no conscience or ambition.’

‘Yes, the first time the government will meet a heavyweight since the invasion of Earth 22 years ago. I wonder how it’s gonna turn out.’ Grumbled a fourth with darker skin, calmly greasing his gun.

‘Anyway, it means that the planet B842 we’re on is nearing the end of its àssimilation phase. Given the size of this planet, if you haven’t taken your loved ones to safety before, don’t expect to see them again in your lifetime.

‘Sorry Ricardo, but if your family’s not on Thelma, you’re out of luck.’

‘Fuck you Icham! I don’t need you to get depressed.’

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rfoasu nifruo guare zfrtmqiw tuhmqnmlut frt zufluqgiut om qfcu pn oval nifruo B842 fzmprrt jvahv Tvuiqf Ilifrt mzgaout.

If someone foolhardy enough ventured to the edge of this floating island and peered out into the void, he would discover a strange planet resembling a mosaic, and extending continuously at a glance.

It was by far the largest planet that all these extraterrestrial races had ever colonized or contemplated. A planet so absurdly huge that gravity should have crushed any living thing that set foot on it. And yet, it was not.

To return to the events on Thelma, in its center, futuristic skyscrapers thousands of feet high stood proudly, announcing their supremacy to the rest of the world. Between all these skyscrapers a huge black cube, even more massive than these ones, was slowly levitating above the ground.

In front of it a cohort of costumed politicians and heavily armed soldiers were advancing cautiously towards the metal monster, sweating bullets for the upcoming gathering.

Among them was the current president of the Earth Government, a bald Russian man in his sixties. Other representatives of the main Earth forces escorted him, such as an old Chinese general or a commander of the U.S. Army. Influential businessmen, all of them billionaires, were also accompanying them.

When they positioned themselves under the cube, the latter descended abruptly upon them, engulfing them under its mass of darkness.

The representatives of the Earth Government felt their blood freeze as the darkness covered them, but it did not last. A wink later, they were in the middle of a strange floating platform, with enough chairs to accommodate them all.

Once they were all settled, the platform, looking like a flying saucer seen from below, rose quickly to join the thousands of other similar objects floating in a circle around a gigantic podium. Each of these platforms was occupied by different life forms, representatives of their own species.

This podium was cylindrical, as high and wide as a 30-storey building and its top was spacious enough to house two basketball courts.

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Their true appearance could not be distinguished under their suits, helmets and armour covering them from head to toe. One thing was certain, however, these guards were not human.

Nearly four metres high, their torso had four arms, one of them holding an energy shield covering two-thirds of their body, while another arm carefully held the pommel of a blade still in its sheath. The other two arms were crossed, displaying an undisguised contempt.

The silvery-metallic suit of unknown material seemed indestructible, all vulnerable points of the anatomy being covered by ornate armour plates. These lines of patterns were composed of thousands of incomprehensible runes, emitting a modest bluish glow. Their helmets vaguely resembled the helmets of the ancient Greek phalanxes, but the space leaving the face visible had been replaced by a kind of opaque black liquid.

About ten minutes after the arrival of the Earth Government, one of these guards, the one with a golden pattern on his shoulder pad resembling a ring or bracelet from which a sort of arborescence sprang, made a movement towards the agitated crowd for the first time.

‘Silence!’ he bellowed in a voice so low that the cube rattled as if it had just been inserted a huge vibrator. ‘The Oracle Overseer is coming!’

Very few people in the audience understood what the threatening alien was saying, but each platform had at least one robot interpreter sent by the Oracle System to translate his words for them.

There were automatic translators that could be worn to the ear or integrated directly into their Oracle device, but their cost was unaffordable for these poor

people of different species shipped here as a vanguard before the rest of their planet.

When the assigned interpreters finished translating the words of the Oracle Guardian, two reactions appeared in the audience. The first paled with terror, while the second trembled with impatience.

Naturally, the reaction of the Earthlings was mixed. The old generals were worried, but determined to face the worst, while politicians and investors were optimistic, hoping to do well. The poor Earth President elected for the year, meanwhile, was shitting his pants.

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He had experienced first-hand how one of those Oracle Knights squads had effortlessly massacred the Digestors, against whom they could do nothing. He remembered how his predecessors had struggled to get a few bracelets, or to negotiate a reprieve for their planet.

He remembered how great powers such as the United States, China, and Russia, which were on the brink of World War III, were forced to form a united government and appoint a leader or else be immediately considered too primitive to interact with representatives of the Oracle.

To be classified in this category would have been a doom for their planet, since they would have been immediately transported to planet B842, which at the time was much smaller, losing all chances of preparing for the inevitable.

On the surface, this would have been advantageous. Planet B842, being smaller and not growing any faster after assimilation of planets occupied by primitive life forms, would have been theirs alone, allowing them twenty years more time than other alien civilizations.

The problem was that while the military could handle such a situation, civilians could not. It would have been a hecatomb. What the Oracle System considered to be primitive life forms could be monsters as big as dinosaurs. If you included the Digestors spawning incessantly with the higher level of Aether, it was just impossible.

All alien civilizations smart enough to make that decision had chosen to delay. They used this precious time to develop their elites, create a foothold and learn more. They also used the time to build relationships with different races.

The elite soldiers they had sent to planet B842 over the past 22 years had evolved beyond human limits, condensing Aether crystals to slowly but surely develop Earth's financial capital in the Mirror Universe.

The problem was that these elites, after a certain point, did not want to contribute any more of their hard-earned Aether. After all, the Aether was the most valuable resource on B842.

Maintaining loyalty and controlling these special troops had become a daily headache for these politicians, having never crossed the shadow of a Digestor. Using a Cube on Thelma, regardless of its size or color had a cost in Aether. Heck, even joining Thelma cost an arm and a leg.

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The Oracle Overseer was finally here.