

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 39 – Civilian, Evolver and Player

‘First of all, a first obvious point should be made. You’ve all been Evolvers to some degree since the day an Oracle device merged with you.’ Aslael calmly disclosed.

‘Also, even if you don’t want to, you won’t have a choice. Since by the very nature of the Digestors we can’t prevent them from spawning everywhere. Even if you were to stick your head in the sand, one of them might well appear in your own home.’

The three old scaredy-cats kept shivering like they were suffering from a high fever. Those monsters were too terrifying! How could they fight those things?! They were afraid of their own wives... A Digestor? There was no need to talk about it.

‘Evolver’ simply means to actively pursue self-evolution, to become the best version of yourself. In that, the role of the Oracle device on your wrist has not changed.’ The Jester reminded them, shrugging his shoulders.

‘This naturally involves the accumulation of Aether, which is also the only currency recognized in the Mirror Universe. A red crystal like the one I made in front of you is worth ten kilos of gold here.’

‘I’m giving you this example as a comparison so that you may understand that choosing to avoid the risks associated with obtaining Aether is tantamount to taking a long detour.’

Jake had no problem with that line of reasoning. Even if a man's passion or dream was to be a great painter, on a cosmic scale even that person would need Aether to increase his intelligence, dexterity and perception to stand out.

Even if a male or female model had such futile ambitions as being Miss or Mister Mirror Universe, Aether would be necessary to improve constitution and vitality. Skin texture, complexion, hair shine and so on were mainly dependent on metabolism and health.

'If you truly wish to escape conflict and put your life and destiny in the hands of other brave people willing to sacrifice themselves for your selfishness, there is a solution. Become a civilian.' Asrael continued his explanation.

'To assist you during your stay on Planet B842, a large number of Oracle Shelters have been set up every two hundred kilometers. These are the only places where Digestors cannot spawn uncontrollably without paying the price.'

A hopeful look pervaded the three balding men as well as the middle-aged woman and her child. She hugged her son with wet eyes, relieved of enormous stress.

'However, we are back to the previous problematic. The price of the properties and rents are in Aether, not to mention the entrance fee to the city. These shelters are rather large but without Aether you'll be sleeping in the streets. You will understand very quickly that apart from the Aether, the rest is of little value. Barter exists, but it will only keep you alive for a while.'

One of the guys had totally lost it. His wobbly legs gave way, causing him to fall on his butt. The exhausted mother hugged her son again, hiding her despair from the child.

'Returning to the status of Civilian, there is another piece of information I did not reveal. This planet has diplomatic immunity for the next five years. After that, B842 will become a subject of speculation and invasion by other species. You will become commodities with a price.'

‘You can already check your value in the Oracle Store in the nearest city. Becoming a Civilian without status or faction means that at the end of this period you lose all your rights.’

As the Instructor threw bombs after bombs, the face of each interlocutor became more and more ugly. Even Jake was uncomfortable. He understood that despite Xi’s benevolence, the bracelet under his skin was no different than a tracker for the Oracle, which transferred its data in real time.

‘Nevertheless, there are ways to escape this dire fate.’

Aslael clearly knew how to play the carrot and the stick to keep them on their toes.

‘The first, and I sense some of you will break into tears, is to redeem yourself. Just for the record, even a living hamster on B842 costs 500 red crystals or 500 units of purified Aether.’

‘The Oracle has no use for slavery, but depriving a living being of freedom has a price. If you become someone else’s slave, know that you probably didn’t deserve the price he got you for.’ Aslael taunted them sardonically.

‘Fuck you’ Jake thought very hard in his head.

‘I heard that!’ The Jester laughed, not the least bit outraged.

‘Anyway, these merchants are gentlemen. The problem is the others. Those who see you as ideal prey for the hunt, as a people to be eradicated or subjugated, they’re the worst.’

‘So you have to ask yourself, how can you stand up to these alien Evolvers who’ve had so many years to perfect themselves?’

‘Two ways, which are interconnected. Increase your Authority level or Oracle grade if you prefer, or become a Player.’

‘For the first way, be aware that it is impossible to buy or obtain information about an individual with an Oracle grade higher than yours. Beyond rank 6 and as long

as you perform your duties, you can no longer be bought and your territories and faction are under the protection of the Oracle.'

'A civilian identified as being part of such a person's faction is also protected. That was what I meant when I said I would put your fate in the hands of others more worthy. The paradox is that this is somehow becoming someone else's servant.'

The cowards seemed to be relieved again. Joining a faction simply meant reuniting with members of the Earth Government. As long as the Earth Government existed, they'd be safe.

Aslael sneered as he read their minds, but he had seen trillions of similar individuals over his thousands of years. When hysterical fear took precedence over the will to evolve and make their way through this chaotic world, their fate was sealed.

Only three or four seemed fit for the role of Player. As for going far... Only two.

'And then we have the Players.' Aslael broke the silence again.

'You may not know it, but our World, the egg remember? (the Dark Universe+Mirror Universe), is at constant war with other Worlds whose borders touch.'

'For reasons far beyond your level of authority, these Worlds compete with each other in a way that should be familiar to you. A game.'

'Each of these Worlds has an Oracle and periodically they battle by sending troops into artificial sub-worlds created specifically for the occasion. These worlds created from scratch by the Oracle are inspired by all the data drawn from the minds of the life forms under their jurisdiction.'

'Simply put, we put you in a scenario you don't know anything about in advance and give you some goals. Scenarios, architecture, time, technology or magic may seem familiar to you in these worlds. After all, the Oracle gets those ideas from all of you.' Aslael clarified.

It didn't seem that bad from Jake's perspective. He didn't quite grasp what these Oracles were getting out of this little game they were playing.

'It doesn't matter what the Oracle gets out of your efforts. What matters is what you do get out of it.' The Instructor replied in a playful tone.

'The Oracle does not give rewards. That's what you've come to understand after all these months of familiarizing yourself with your bracelets, isn't it? The rewards offered by the Coaching function are only what you naturally get for your efforts, right?

'Oracle Ordeals are different. The better your performance, the better the final reward. When you find out about the real price of these Aether rewards in an Oracle store you'll understand why so many choose to become Players.

'These Ordeals follow a sequence, with the difficulty increasing by one notch each time. The difficulty is based on Aether's level.

'If you fail an Ordeal, it's Game Over. If by some miracle you survive, you will be known and respected for the number of Ordeals you have successfully completed.

'In the Mirror Universe, these accomplishments give you many passes. You should also know that as long as you are in the race with at least one successful Ordeal, you are under the protection of the Oracle as well.'

'And lastly... The first 4 Ordeals are considered a Tutorial. You cannot lose your life and can even attempt the next Ordeal after a failure. If with these conditions, you still want to be a miserable Civilian, then maybe you are indeed no better than that ...'

And this time, in saying these last words, Aslael exerted such an overwhelming spiritual pressure on them that it made no secret of the contempt he held for this kind of vermin.

The weak had no place in the Mirror Universe.

