

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 500 – Interlude

Somewhere in the vast Mirror Universe was a gigantic planet wandering lonely in an ocean of endless emptiness. Because of its size and the sheer absence of any point of comparison, one might have thought that this planet was moving slowly or perhaps not moving at all, but it was in fact frighteningly fast.

This planet was B842, from System ZZ831.

In high orbit around this planet, well above the altitude where most of the Floating Islands and Thelma were, a huge ring-shaped spaceship was drifting around without any protection or escort. But this was not recklessness.

In addition to the abundance of hyper-advanced heavy weapons that lined the warship, on board were the Oracle Overseer Oros and a few hundred Oracle Guardians. Next to these powerhouses, the huge ship was no different than a wooden shack and served simply as a base of operations.

Although the interior was a disturbing pristine white that betrayed Oros' maniacal penchant for cleanliness and purity, the comfort and amenities provided were exquisitely luxurious, thought more for the enjoyment of the oligarchs than an impending war.

In the most spacious office of all, but paradoxically devoid of furniture so as not to affect the immaculate whiteness of the setting, an Oracle Guardian was kneeling with his head bowed in front of a

small creature about two feet high with a long neck and a small head barely wider than a golf ball. This one was sitting comfortably in a kind of metal bowl levitating one meter off the ground which seemed to serve as a means of transportation.

This creature was obviously Oros, B842's temperamental Oracle Overseer. At that very moment, although its head had no eyes, nose, or mouth, its expression was definitely one of anger. It wasn't something that could be determined by observation, but a gut feeling conviction.

'What did you just say Garos?!' Oros vociferated as it lifted its three small, nail-less fingers to grasp the air. The sturdy Oracle Guardian immediately began to choke. 'You know I don't like to joke about these things. If an operation of this magnitude really did take place involving the Players under my jurisdiction without my knowledge, I swear on my honor as Oracle Overseer that heads will roll... Speak! And I want the truth this time.'

Despite the harsh treatment, Garos continued to pretend to suffocate. At his level he didn't need oxygen to live and his Constitution and Vitality were so high that he wouldn't be able to choke to death even if he wanted to.

His acting was the pathetic solution he had found to placate the ill-tempered Giwok, Oros' species, and the latter had tacitly consented to this method of relaxation. Nonetheless, this time the little alien was really pissed off and it was best not to hassle him any further.

'Everything I said is true.' The Oracle Guardian coughed, feigning a grimace of misery. 'A covert operation did take place in the Ordeal World XVR842167445 to capture the Seraphim Verxes and a young Trojan Digestor. The operation failed. Verxes escaped with the Trojan

Digestor after killing 12 Oracle Guardians. Only Faeyr, the captain of the squad survived as well as the few Players present, who had the foresight to duck under their Oracle Shields upon his arrival.'

Oros, who was about to strangle him again with his telekinetic grip, had a sudden change of heart upon hearing this.

'Faeyr? A big guy with a long neck like mine?' The little alien asked with an excited air.

It sported a special fetish for any race with a long neck. One only had to look at the exotic garden it had built in the ring-shaped spaceship. There were all kinds of alien creatures that it had developed a curiosity for and what they all had in common was that they had very long necks. If one explored the garden carefully, it was even possible to find a couple of giraffes.

Faced with this question, which went against the tide of his previous mood swing, the Oracle Guardian Garos looked up involuntarily, but he was still quick to answer,

'It is indeed a Sauropod from System VK456. Herbivorous and peaceful at first, it has evolved over the Ordeals to reach its position. Recently, he has come to the attention of Ancient Designer Aas, who has accepted him as a new disciple.'

'Hmmp, it means nothing!' Oros harrumphed as it slumped back into its seat. 'Aas is certainly a great man and I can't compete with him, but that's the problem. Ancient Designers like him are in another stratosphere compared to the rest of us commoners.

Becoming his disciple probably means that he has officially joined his faction and has been given free reign in System A5. Disciples like that, Aas has trillions of them. If you ask me, he has never met His Majesty Aas in person. I have!'

The little alien then began to recite with pride and fervor all its feats of arms and if one was to believe it, it had saved the Mirror Universe from total annihilation on multiple occasions. One might even wonder why it wasn't yet an Ancient Designer himself.

Of course, Garos was careful not to point this out. If he was still at his post today, it was because he had the tact and observation skills to do the job. When Oros finally ran out of steam, Garos hastily added,

'I don't think you were the target of this operation. Verxes killed Faeyr's brother and Faeyr hates him to no end. If I may say so, I suspect he was used to undermine Aas' authority. There are many who covet the secret of the Cube technology, and there is nothing like discrediting a half-senile Ancient Designer to undermine his authority and force him to show his face.'

The little alien stroked its chin with a serious expression and for a short time there was silence in the white room as it mentally went over the entire report. After a moment, it said grimly,

'Even if I wasn't the target of all this, I don't like it when the Players under my jurisdiction are put in danger. In the end, one of them is well and truly dead. Ostrexora was eaten by the Trojan Digestor and her soul was completely digested by it. Even the Oracle can't resurrect her without reproducing a perfect clone and you know how flawed this method is... As for the female Player from Lost Divinities... Even though she did survive it's going to be hard for her to recover. Lost Divinities is even more of a headache to deal with than the case with Aas and Verxes and they don't like it when we mess with their people either.'

'What do you plan to do, then, oh venerable Overseer?' Garos asked with a flourish. One might have detected sarcasm in it, but Oros clearly appreciated that kind of phrasing.

‘Nothing.’ Oros blurted out complacently. The Oracle Guardian could almost picture its smug face despite its lack of mouth, eyes, and eyebrows.

‘ We watch and adjust. On the other hand, I want Jake Wilderth, Wyatt Griffiths and Boris Slominsky to make their next Ordeal on Quanoth. The core members of their factions are also invited if they choose to participate as a team again.’

Garos accepted the order without batting an eye, but inwardly he couldn’t help but have reservations. In the end, he was unable to refrain from remarking,

‘Venerable Oros, I know you are a subordinate of Yalanue, but this will cost you a lot of your quota.’

‘I know that, but there is no better Fourth Ordeal than Quanoth for these Evolvers. Yalanue will grumble a bit as usual, but all it takes is one of them to rise above and she’ll be praising my bravery and wisdom until the end of time.’

Pausing for a second, Oros let out a deep, burdened sigh, not quite in character.

‘We are finished Garos. I may be a Rank 1 Oracle Overseer and you a respectable Oracle Guardians, but you and I both know that’s as far as we’ll go. We are not weak, but we are too attached to life to enter a new Ordeal or wage battle with the Digestors on the Outer Rim. These Players may be weak now, but theoretically speaking one of them could outperform us in less than a month by completing an Ordeal every day. If we can get the graces of one such player, we won’t have to fear the future. Who knows, one of them may be the new Oracle...’

Garos frowned, but refrained from disagreeing with him. Despite his optimistic words, Oros knew full well how remote such a probability was. To put it mildly, it was more accurate to say it was zero.

The Oracle Guardian then went on to report on a whole host of topics, eventually adding several hundred new names to the list. After that, he bowed respectfully to the little alien and withdrew to carry out the small Oracle Overseer's wishful orders.

Time would tell someday if they had made the right choice.

Far away from here on B842, two figures were trudging slowly through a desert of ocher soil. One of these figures was tall and massive, his build and musculature so large that the young woman walking beside him looked like a child in comparison.

Far behind them lay the ruins of an ancient temple where thousands of Digestor corpses lay in the center of which lay a small handful of human corpses wearing armor similar to that of the Greek phalanxes. All of these victims shared distinctive physical traits, including their long blond hair and golden eyes, as well as their trademark tanned skin.

They were undoubtedly Myrmidians. So that these two individuals struggling in the desert could escape, they had given up their lives.

Several days later, the duo stopped in front of a desert plain identical to all those they had crossed in the past days. However, a relieved and excited expression flashed across the young woman's face. She apprehensively pressed her hand into the air in front of her and it miraculously slipped out of her sight, though she could still feel it.

Withdrawing her hand, she nodded to the towering giant behind her and the two of them proceeded to unfasten their long-traveled cloaks,

thus unveiling their appearances. When the cloaks touched the other dust, they scattered as if they had never been worn.

Ao mrhu qmrlouz lvzaucl uzpnout ar ovu talofrhu, gpo rmru md ovuq nfat frw foouroamr.

The giant had a long, silver mane and eyes of the same color, dark, leathery skin, and long, translucent fangs and claws that made him all the more terrifying. In contrast, the gentle, peaceful expression on his face was somewhat out of place. He carried no weapon.

The young woman at his side was a pretty blonde with golden eyes, her skin barely lighter than all the Myrmidians lying in the ruined temple. There was a certain innocence and kindness about her that the violence of the last few years had not managed to completely supplant. Under her Myrmidian armor exposing her slender legs, her once puny and immaculate body was now shapely and covered with scars, but this did not take away from her beauty. Quite the opposite.

As the two disappeared together inside their first Oracle Shelter, the young woman's whisper echoed through the now truly deserted desert.

‘Jake, here we come.’
