

## **the goddess with the bad hip**

by iztopher

Aveyond, through its Oracle's eyes.

Written for the RPZine Maker project! I've never been part of a zine before and I was ecstatic to be able to bring Aveyond into this one.

Shoutout to Danny and Ishti for betareading this for me!

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In the temple that was the heart of Aveyond, there lived a woman with no name. She teemed with introductions anyways. She was called anything from an old woman with a bad hip to the Goddess, depending on what the situation called for.

Usually, though, she was the Oracle.

It was the truest of her titles. There was much more to her than her wrinkled smile and aching side, but her history was shorter and her abilities weaker than often assumed. The world of Aia was not born of her, although she was the one to raise it. No matter how much she, or anyone, would like her to, the Oracle could not simply snap her fingers and make things happen. She could only understand what must happen, where the strings of fate were supposed to come together, and do her best to thread them.

"Take the Sword of Shadows. It is your destiny."

Sometimes, Aia risked fraying into a hundred half-endings. In another life, the Oracle feared the lavender-braided sword singer had set down her blade and took the hand of the very evil she was meant to destroy. But the Oracle did not have to contend with that life; at least not this version of her, at least not today. She was greeted instead by the ending where the sword singer and sun priest joined hands only after the hard-won battle. She watched from afar as they ushered in a new era of prosperity.

As Thais was rebuilt stronger than ever before, Aveyond itself began to falter, as if to prove it had outgrown its protector. The Oracle woke each day to a temple closing in on itself, the surrounding landscape shrinking inch by inch, until one morning she passed through the threshold to find herself in the lilac fog of the mists.

In the world blossoming around her, few knew of the Oracle of Aveyond or the druids she once guided. Instead, they came to worship a singular Goddess. Humble towns and hungry empires alike raised statues of a tall, lithe young woman. She supposed she may once have been that figure, but she suspected not. She could not remember a time when her back didn't hunch with age, when she couldn't look through her skin to see blue, bulging veins.

And so, to the two half-frozen elflings, the old woman with the bad hip downplayed the importance of the boy's task, the impossibility of the girl's. Iya, her name was, had already had her hope stolen away - the last thing she needed was to be told her journey was all but futile.

"Iya Tiki, I... owe you an apology."

A good mother should hope her children can live without her one day. A goddess, perhaps, owed her people the same. Iya needed to stitch herself back together - and to guide her to that opportunity, the Oracle needed to give her the tools and faith that she could.

Iya regained her spirit and returned home, Ean by her side. The Snow Queen's heart thawed. And Aveyond, too, found its strength and warmth once more as Aia believed in it again.

Stories surged, and with it, the grass outside of the temple grew, though softer and more controlled than before. What was once a wild, dangerous landscape, home to prowling griffins and stinging bees, became a carefully

curated garden inhabited by harmless bunnies and helpful priestesses.

The world was too far along in its stitching to veer off track; more structured, more certain now. The next time a group of travelers came seeking aid, the Oracle saw each of their threads clean and clear.

“Te’ijal, is that you? It’s been years.”

“Not enough, unfortunately. I have bad news.”

It was rare that the Oracle was gifted familiar faces, but the beaming vampire and the stern-faced paladin before her now echoed back three centuries. This time, though, the new girl they were with, as in over her head as the last, was not destined to save the world.

She was doomed to destroy it.

And this time, unlike the famed Rhen Pendragon, there was no predestined hero to save the day. There was only one possible ending to Mel Darkthrop’s story. The Oracle knew what must happen.

And so the world fell - but only for a moment.

The Oracle saw to it that Mel took the Staff of Destiny into her hands, and with it, a demon into her heart. But she also saw to it that Mel’s friends - not destined, but no less determined - knew to save her. And as swiftly as the world was captured, it was broken free, and the Darkthrop Prophecy ended with a tidy knot.

That was the Oracle’s duty. She found that the world required it less and less of her every century. Its patterns were already in place; villains vied for power and heroes saw them vanquished without prophecy to lead them. Aia was outgrowing its goddess. She could set aside responsibility and, for the first time, take up recreation.

Boyle the Horrible was not destined for anything - certainly not his aspirations of world domination. But the Oracle would have liked to see him follow in his ancestors’ footsteps and save the world.

“You put the world in danger.”

“Maybe I did, maybe I didn’t...”

The Oracle knew the world well enough to calculate her risks. She had learned to trust its people enough to rise to the challenge, and she knew that sometimes goodness needed to be nurtured. Surely it wouldn’t hurt to nudge a villain towards redemption and let the pieces fall. Boyle and his friends did not disappoint.

At the end of the day, or year, or century, the Oracle loved Aia too much to leave it to its own devices. Simply setting aside needle and thread did not always still the hands. So the goddess with the bad hip stayed alert and ready for when it needed her, and found opportunities to meddle when it didn’t.