

Oz 8000 Biospheres: Portrait of a Refuge

by

Shannon Perry

JESSIE

Hurry up, it's almost time!

GREG

I'm trying, but my snack won't settle down.

JESSIE

Settle down? What are you eating?

GREG

Caterpillars. Found `em in the marshy bit of the bioswamp. Don't touch!

JESSIE

Don't worry. I wasn't going to ask you to share, yuck. But they're rather cute.

GREG

Yeah, well, they sting like the dickens, so you might want to pull that paw back.

THEO

Are you sure you should be eating those? It looks like some sort of mutation of the *Acharia stimulea* or common saddleback. They are venomous.

GREG

And delicious.

ALBATROS

And also mildly hallucinogenic, I think. He ate one while we were harvesting them in the swamp and was convinced he was a unicorn for about 8 minutes. Robotic creatures do not "frolic" well. How venomous would you say they are, Dr. Theo? On a scale of ouch to undetectable but looks like a heart attack?

LBF

Allo! Am I too late? Ooo, what is the stripey horse fellow eating? Are they anything like le escargot? How do you say... snails?

JESSIE

Totally! Grab a handful!

OLIVIA

Shut up, it's starting! "The Oz 8000 Biosphere: Portrait of a Refuge." Refuge? More like refuse, I say.

NARRATOR

No matter where you live it, life can be extremely stressful. And while most people can escape the stress of their day-to-day lives by walking out the door to attend an evening at the opera or ballet or simply stroll through their gardens, those who walk out the door of a space ship will be instantly sucked into the vacuum of space, suffocated, and frozen. Not very relaxing!

JESSIE

Opera or ballet? What "most people" is he talking about?

JULIE

Members of the Narrators' Guild are so overpaid.

NARRATOR

We're really not.

NARRATOR

In order to provide the residents of these long-haul, multi-year journeys a place to refresh body, mind, and spirit, the creators of the Oz 8000-model ships included vast, domed structures commonly known as biospheres. In 399 of the 400 Oz ships, according to Gated Galaxies, the biospheres are a delicately calibrated ecosystem, containing just the right balance of flora and fauna to provide the ship with a rich supply of oxygen. And in the adjacent greenhouses, sophisticated hydroponic systems grow fresh fruits and vegetables to please the palate of anyone who happens to be awake.

GREG

Do we have greenhouses?

OLIVIA

More sort of "grey" houses, really...

LBF

Do we have a snail house?

JULIE

The bioswamp is full of leeches, do those count?

JESSIE

I thought you couldn't see from in there? How do you know that?

JULIE

Ever heard a grown zebra scream?

NARRATOR

Imagine being thousands or millions of light years from Earth and sitting down to a bowl filled with brightly colored carrots, lettuce, radishes, tomatoes, broccoli, and celery, seasoned with olive oil pressed from your own tiny grove of olive trees!

GREG

Or, in our case, a bowl of jalapeno caterpillars...

THEO

And swamp bread. With kudzu jam.

ALBATROS

Something amiss with the swamp bread, Dr. Theo?

THEO

Not at all. And again, I appreciate you baking so many loaves in the shape of my initials, but there's really more here than we can eat before it goes bad.

JOE

Badder.

ALBATROS

I beg your pardon?

JOE

No offense to your creativity and skills, Miss, but nothing saves bread that's made from swamp stuff.

NARRATOR

Sheltered by thick, ionized and tempered glass to protect the fragile life within from the ravages of space, these spheres must have been glorious. Every earthly ecosystem had a sort of "mini-me" in space: tropical rainforest, grasslands, tundra, chaparral, even desert - all found a home on these flying arcs.

JESSIE

Oh, that's pretty. Too bad you can't see these "artist's renderings," Julie.

JULIE

Oh, I'm watching it down here, actually. I'm sitting in a tree just outside the entertainment room, and they've got it playing on the megascreen. I'm pretty sure Tyberius thinks he's in Mystery Science Theater 44 thousand.

NARRATOR

Sadly, we must assume all those magnificent spheres perished, as one by one, the Oz ships failed under mysterious circumstances entirely caused by their on-board crews or natural disaster wholly unrelated to Gated Galaxies or its subsidiaries, officers, or agents. G2 accepts no responsibility or liability for loss of liberty, limb, or life due to incorrect use of machinery, gross negligence, intentional or reckless misconduct. By simply existing, you acknowledge that life is inherently dangerous and often fatal and absolve Gated Galaxies of any and all injury you may incur whilst voluntarily

engaging in the hazardous activity known as living.

JESSIE

Sooooo faulty parts, no user manuals, and a giant bomb on board can't be held against them, is that what we're saying?

OLIVIA

Or crappy captains.

JESSIE

Oy! Speaking of, where's ours?

[door]

MADELINE

What did I miss? Ugh, what is that smell?

JOE

You're going to have to narrow that down. Lots of candidates in here.

NARRATOR

We were able to contact the Oz 13, which some people know as the Oz that never left the ground. When the tower failed to fall away, the ship simply sat and burned on the launching pad. Derelict and destroyed, the ship was thought to be abandoned until it was discovered that two men had moved in and claimed squatters' rights.

RAYMOND

It's pretty great, actually. Once we cleaned out all the pods, anyway. We've got tons of room.

JORDACHE

We mostly live in the biosphere. It wasn't too damaged by the fire. I like the meadow, Raymond prefers the forest.

NARRATOR

What do you eat? And where are your pants?

JORDACHE

I don't really like pants.

RAYMOND

Yeah, it's really better not to ask him about pants. Right now we're living off the ship's stores. Mostly campfire food like beans and s'mores.

JORDACHE

We figure once those are gone, the gardens and the greenhouses will give us plenty to live on.

NARRATOR

But no pants.

RAYMOND

Don't ask about the pants!

JORDACHE

Pants are evil. They represent all that's worst in the world. No. Pants.

NARRATOR

While most of the Oz ships have met an untimely fate, one, rather unique Oz ship remains. Of the 400 ships launched, only one had a more ... experimental biosphere. This is a story of that ship. This is the story of the Oz 9.

[mumble]

One bloody documentary they give me and what's it on? Yep...

EVERYONE

Hooray! Yay! Woo hoo!

LBF

I am certain he has said that before....

OLIVIA

How would you know? You weren't here!

NARRATOR

In place of the more standard biosphere, the Oz 9 was outfitted

instead with a bioswamp. Complete with brackish water, marshes, bogs, mangroves, kudzu, and just about everything you'd find in an estuarine environment, the Oz 9's bioswamp teems with life.

JULIE

Are mosquitoes really "life"?

JESSIE

Not if they land on me, they're not.

LFB

How similar are leeches and snails? Theo If you're hungry, you can have my sandwich.

LFB

What is in it?

THEO

No idea. I've come to the conclusion that if I ask, I'll starve.

JESSIE

How do they know we're still up here? We haven't had contact with G2 in ages.

NARRATOR

How do we know the Oz 9 still exists while all the others are just frozen, silent space debris?

GREG

Well, that's just spooky. It's like he's watching us.

NARRATOR

I am, of course.

MADELINE

Ugh. Don't even say that. Creepy.

NARRATOR

Fortunately, the cameras in Oz 9's bioswamp have continued sending pictures back to G2 HQ.

EVERYONE BUT THEO
WHAT?! Cameras? Where?

THEO
Seriously, did NONE of you pay
attention during the onboarding
meeting?

MADELINE
Onboarding meeting?

THEO
Yes! The one you were supposed to be
running!

LBF
Monsieur Snooty Pants is going to be
so happy the whole entire world has
seen him fly.... Into the wall! HA!

Everyone

[laughter]

Jessie

Where are Colin and Leet, anyway?

Joe

Holed up in an empty pod bay, working
on Colin's eye lasers, I believe. Leet
is the least flammable among us, so I
left them to it.

Narrator

Let's take a closer look at some of
the more colorful inhabitants of the
Oz 9 bioswamp.

Madeline

Oh, let's not....

Narrator

Unfortunately, the audio from the
bioswamp is pretty patchy, so we may
not be able to hear everything.

Olivia

Pffft. That's just lazy editing.

Narrator

The snowy white egret of Earth is a type of heron that develops a cascade of fine plumage during mating season. Unlike their terrestrial cousins, whose diet consists mainly of fish and rodents, the Oz 9 egrets are great, savage beasts who have perhaps more in common with their distant pterodactyl relatives than the modern egret. With tusks, razor-sharp talons and wingspans in excess of 3 meters or 9 feet, they hunt in flocks, herding their prey off cliffs or into the swirling pools of the swamp to drown. Good lord, am I reading that right? Tusks?

LBF

Ah, at last, the good bits!

Jessie

You really are just a blood-thirsty bugger, aren't ya?

LBF

Awwww, merci!

NARRATOR

Let's watch as this smaller flock chooses its prey. Rooting around in the bog, there's a herd of wild boar that, according to G2's astrolimnologist, Dr. Charles Tucket, were somehow accidentally introduced to the Oz 9 bioswamp. Instead of choosing the smaller, weaker members of the herd, these egrets like a challenge. They've chosen to go after the herd's matriarch, the largest and fiercest of the group.

MADELINE

I can't watch.

JESSIE

Says the captain. Pffft.

NARRATOR

Having chosen their prey, the egrets begin to circle, lower and lower.

DR. CHARLIE

Now, their hunting isn't just about killing and eating. It's also a chance to show off their hunting prowess to other egrets. So what you're seeing is part strategy and part mating ritual. Sometimes a few will... uh, skip dinner and go straight to dessert, you know what I mean....

NARRATOR

Feathers in a frenzy, the flock becomes more and more agitated. They swoop, dive, and spiral, banging their venomous tusks together... Good grief. This is ridiculous.

MADELINE

venomous?!

ALBATROS

Yet another venomous thing. Goodness, we really are in Oz. How delightful!

DR CHARLIE

Yeah, that tusk business is part of the mating dance, far as we can tell.

NARRATOR

...intent on driving their chosen target into the swamp to drown, or perhaps into the bog to get stuck in the quicksand...

JESSIE

There's quicksand in there?!

JOE

And some mudpots. Stuff bubbles up to the surface from time to time. Found a couple of nice shirts in there.

LBF

Ooooo, I don't want to see this part.

Poor piggy. Oooo! Perhaps we can make BLTs? Boar, lettuce and tomato?

OLIVIA

You know, I think this is happening now...

NARRATOR

Having melded into a giant swarm acting with a single mind, a single purpose, the egrets are unstoppable. The massive sow has been separated from her herd and is desperately searching for cover.

DR CHARLIE

It's all instinct and prey drive now. Them egrets is formidable, but don't count out that sow. There's a reason she's in charge.

NARRATOR

A strange rustling in the nearby foliage catches her attention. Could this be the help she so urgently needs? Speaking of the foliage, we had the chance to speak with botanist Dr. Ben Marshall about the plantlife that was chosen to journey to a new planet aboard the Oz 9.

JESSIE

Now?!

BEN

Uhhhhhhh....

JULIE

Oh, crap; I didn't know about this!

[laughs]

Poor Ben doesn't know an Oxalis triangularis from an oak tree!

THEO

Ha ha ha ha! Good one! Oxalis!

JESSIE

Nerd humor.

NARRATOR

Can you be more specific, Dr. Marshall? Why exactly did you land on this combination of flora?

BEN

We, uh, wanted symbiosis. Also, spontaneous....foliage ... ation. That's... the technical term for ... a really thick cover of ... leaves to protect against solar radiation.... and....give the critters something to hide under.

JULIE

"Foliage-ation." Genius.

ALBATROS

Your husband isn't very clever, is he?

JULIE

Hey! He's just ... not a botanist.

ALBATROS

"Foliage-ation"?

JULIE

Or very good under pressure.

LBF

He is a very handsome fellow, your husband. Needs a moustache, though.

JULIE

NO.

OLIVIA

Did I mention that this is actually happening right now in the bioswamp? Anybody?

NARRATOR

Thank you for your input, Dr. Marshall. Clearly you have a bright future as a public speaker.

BEN

Okaaaaayyy....

JESSIE

Oooo, good snark!

DR CHARLIE

What is in them bushes?

NARRATOR

The egrets are now in attack formation, wingtip to wingtip, surely the most terrifying sight in the swamp and what the fuck is that?! Something has just come crashing out of the bog! The egrets have reversed their attack formation and are scrambling to stay out of reach, and the boar is running for her very life back towards her herd. It's all tail and teeth, and what is that thing?!

EVERYONE

shouts of surprise, holy crap, it's the alligator, is it even bigger? etc.

DR CHARLIE

Well, I'll be damned, Fat Albert made it! Damn! Looks like I owe Jimmy twenty bucks. I cannot believe it!

NARRATOR

You put an alligator aboard a spaceship. On purpose.

DR CHARLIE

That there is Fat Albert. We scooped him up from my cousin's outdoor bathtub and stuck him onboard as a joke. He weren't no bigger than a tadpole, but lookit him now! Now, don't look at me like that, no one thought he'd survive the launch, much less turn into that monster.

JOE

How fast is that thing growing?

THEO

Exponentially. It's a good thing we have the mold to keep it calm.

NARRATOR

The wild boar is running flat out as quick as she can go, but that alligator is amazingly fast. Capable of bursts in speed reaching 30 miles

an hour on dry land....

DR CHARLIE

Uh, Albert there is clocking in excess of 60 em pee aches.

NARRATOR

What???

EVERYONE

What????

NARRATOR

Hang on, there's a human in there! At least, I think it's human.... All I can see is chest. Can we pull back the camera a bit? A bit more....

OLIVIA

Leet! Get out of there!

NARRATOR

Nope, I still see just chest. Pull all the way back, Jim. That's it. It appears that a member of Oz 9's crew number seven- Albatros Seven? Olivia Ehhhhhhh.... Narrator IT specialist Leet Haxxx- Olivia That's Hax-x-x, idiot. Narrator I know. Just trying to minimize confusion. Narrator ...is standing between the massive alligator and its plump and juicy target.

LBF

Now I really want a boar LT....

NARRATOR

The alligator has slowed, uncertain of this new player on the field. It is a threat? Or just the promise of a much MUCH bigger meal? It opens its mouth to take in the scent of this new and unfamiliar element.

OLIVIA

Lucky bastard. Leet does smell yummy.

NARRATOR

Why is it swaying back and forth like that, Doctor?

DR CHARLIE

Oh, uhhhhhhh.... That's new. Clearly it's an attempt to hypnotize this fellow, so Albert can either take him down, or get around him. Yeah, that sounds good. Oooo, he's crouching. That ain't good.

NARRATOR

The alligator has now assumed a standard readiness pose, signalling his intention to strike. Mr. Haxxx isn't moving, though; it's become a battle of wills. Who will blink first?

DR CHARLIE

You're joking! That beast weighs easy three-quarters of a ton, probably more. Blink, you idiot, blink!

OLIVIA

Oy! Who's he calling an idiot?

JOE

The guy trying to stare down a 1500 pound alligator to save a wild pig.

OLIVIA

Fair point.

NARRATOR

The alligator has lowered its immense tail, shifting the weight to its back legs in preparation to lunge. We've already seen what this monster can do. Does this idiot- sorry, does this man have a chance?

DR CHARLIE

Nope.

NARRATOR

The alligator opens its mouth, readying that powerful jaw to crush the man's head or snap his neck with a bite strength of over 2000 pounds per square inch. Even if he were made of literal steel, he wouldn't be able to withstand the pressure of those ferocious teeth. He lunges...!!! Ok, now what the hell was that? Was that a

laser beam? It just glanced off that alligator's scales-

EVERYONE
shouts of alarm, please!

DR CHARLIE
Scutes. Not scales.

NARRATOR
IS THIS REALLY THE TIME?

ALBATROS
There's always time for accuracy. Good for you, Dr. Charles.

NARRATOR
But boy, Albert did not like that. He's heading back for the underbrush in a hurry, and the boar is nowhere to be seen. But what fired the shot?

DR CHARLIE
It looked like a human being! Flying!

NARRATOR
Surely that's impossible! Dr. Marshall, your thoughts?

BEN
Oh, yeah, that's a drone. We... put drones on the Oz 9 so we could have some control in the bioswamp. I guess someone on the ship thought it'd be funny to dress it like a person. I'm actually controlling it from my phone. Watch this.

NARRATOR
Nothing happened. [pause] Still nothing. [pause] Nothing. [pause] You sure you're controlling the lasers?

BEN
Dude, do you know how far away that ship is? Give it a minute.

OLIVIA

[on intercom]

Colin, fire your lasers, please.
Quickly. Doesn't matter where, just
not at Leet.

BEN

There. See? Totally me. Not some human
with mysterious super powers.

JULIE

That's my boy....

NARRATOR

Well, that is a relief. That's all we
have time for. Please join us again
next week when Narrator 2-

NARRATOR 2

Wooo hoooo, Narrator 2, that's me!!

Narrator

Gets to narrate an utterly sensible
documentary on the defense mechanisms
of coral. [pause] Bastard.

Narrator

Well, there it was. My great
opportunity to impress the heads at
BBC, and what was I documenting?
Idiots in a swamp. Swamp idiots. Well,
if you enjoyed this, please feel free
to review it. Maybe someone at the BBC
will see it ... someday.

You've been listening to Eric Perry as
Joe, Aaron Clark as le Bichon Frise
and Ben, David S. Dear as Dr. Theo
Bromae and Dr. Charles Tucket, June
Clark Eubanks as the Albatros, Kevin
Hall as Greg, Iri Alexander as Julie,
Shannon Perry as Olivia and Madeline,
Raymond Morse as Raymond, Jordache
Richardson as No Pants Guy, Kyle Jones
as Narrator 2, and me, Richard
Nadolny, as your Narrator

Our music is composed and performed by
John Faley; our artwork is by Lucas
Elliott. Oz 9 is written and produced
by Shannon Perry.

Thanks for hanging with us through our between-seasons hiatus. If you'd like to support the show, and earn our everlasting gratitude, you can find us at Patreon dot com slash Oz 9 podcast, all one word. We have some fun goodies to share, including an upcoming by-invitation-only live read-through on Zoom. Season three starts July 19th! Till next time, space monkeys, Narrator out!