

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 1: The Oracle

### Chapter 1 - The Day everything changed

‘Beep...Beep...Beep...BEEP!’

SMASH!

‘Fucking morning... ‘ A man sighed, his eyes still half-closed as his alarm clock crashed to the floor.

His clenched fist was transfixed on the bedside table where the damned object should have been. Usually, he would have gone back to sleep, convincing himself there was still time. Not this time.

That didn’t happen often. It should have made him think.

This morning, the young man untangled himself surprisingly well from his blankets. Rising shirtless, six feet tall, and over twenty years old, the first thought you’d have when you saw him would have been that he was... average looking.

Despite being slightly overweight, he looked good with his clothes on. Someone observant enough might perceive the outline of a few muscles, remnants of an ancient past where he was willing to work out and moderate his junk food intake. But today, his motivation was running out.

His skin was pale and he had dark circles under his eyes. He played too many video games and worked daily on the computer. A little acne, not a lot, but enough to show that he was going off the rails.

A brown mane, never touched by scissors, and a two-week-old thick beard decorated all these flattering features. Fortunately, his face still had some potential.

Fine, sharp traits and smoldering eyes contrasted with his lack of delicacy. From time to time, a sad melancholic glint would replace it, quickly stifled by a frown.

This young man's name was Jake Wilderth. Orphaned since the age of three, his parents had died in the fake Third World War in 2084 like many others. He was 25 years old today. Raised since then by his uncle Kalen with his cousin Anya - his uncle's daughter - his childhood had been a quiet river. Well, almost.

The Wilderths were an old family, not aristocratic or bourgeois, but arrogant and demanding enough to give a hard life to their descendants. Why would you ask? No family heirloom, no historical secrets, no great cause to defend. Then what was it? Pure pride.

The Wilderths all had one thing in common. They were smart. Not miraculously smart or geniuses of the century. It was actually a standard IQ of 130 or higher.

Some might say that genetic didn't matter so much or that IQ was not a good measure of intelligence. Emotional intelligence was, after all, much more useful when it came to being successful in life.

Yet, when it became a generality in a large family, it changed everything. When a child was limited or mentally retarded, the parents would be much more tolerant, letting them do what they wanted. There would be no requirements.

When the child was exceptional, in contrast to the previous example, parents would become strict. On the one hand, they would not want their child to waste his or her talent. On the other hand, they would often unconsciously transfer their own failed dreams to them.

With the Wilderths, there was a third consideration. Not to embarrass themselves. If you were more successful than your cousins, aunts or uncles, that was fine, but

you couldn't be less successful. The mockery born of comparisons would nip any form of happiness in the bud.

That's what happened to Jake. His uncle was benevolent and his cousin Anya protective. He grew up peacefully. Yet, whether it was because he was introverted or because the death of his first parents affected him, he had few friends. The excellent facilities at school made it easy for him to go to university, but never taught him to cram and work hard.

The sheltered life created an indecisive and procrastinating mindset. He had no idea what he wanted to do with his life, as increasing pressure from other family members made him increasingly uncomfortable. Like many lonely and asocial nerds before him, he found a way out of reality by reading, binge-watching and playing video games.

It wasn't so bad. As an intelligent and logical man, he chose to link his future career to his current pleasures. He then enrolled in a university specializing in programming and informatics.

Unfortunately, he soon got bored. The volume of learning was incomparable with the amount of work in high school. Even for him, it required some effort. The pleasure of playing video games and the pleasure of making them were as far apart as possible. The consequence of this was that he dropped out.

He tried a few curricula such as management or cybernetics, but the boredom was still strong. He came out with a degree in cybernetics and programming, with his uncle discreetly using his circle of acquaintances to save this sinking ship of a nephew.

This academic path might have seemed strange at the beginning of the 21st century, but not in the 22nd.

The technology of quantum computing was mature. The limit predicted for the miniaturization of transistors by Moore's Law had been solved. The performance of computers had again improved rapidly.

Artificial intelligence and bioengineering had made huge advances.

Nano-cybernetics was also on the right track. Earth had managed to create its first colony on Mars more than 40 years ago. 3D printing was perfected, even allowing organs to be duplicated or recreated using donor cells as ink. And yes, medicine had also developed a lot.

Fortunately for the people of Earth... We could still feel the ravages of the fake Third World War everywhere. Even 25 years later.

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Rich countries such as the United States or China adapted easily, making the necessary investments to protect key coastal cities such as New York or Shanghai. Poorer states have had to relocate part of their population inland, suffering a net loss of territory.

Oil, water, precious metals or gemstones: as the world continued to drain fossil energies, their market value continued to skyrocket. Naturally, conflicts became more and more frequent.

In 2084, the Third World War was about to break out.

On May 14 of that same year, a terrible war did indeed break out, but it was far from what it should have been. Even today, the mystery had not yet been completely solved.

To sum it up in one sentence: Every major city was annihilated in a single day. Moscow, Tokyo, Paris, Washington, London; the names of every capital city one

could think of had been erased from the face of the Earth. No explanation was given. No adventurous war reporter crossed the military cordon that cut off civilian access to these areas.

Indeed, many people had testified to seeing dazzling nuclear mushrooms blooming in most of these cities. However, many incongruities had quickly manifested themselves through millions of strange testimonies.

No government could completely silence the voice of its people.

The first anomaly was that all contact - whether by telephone or the Internet - had been cut off a few days before the nuclear missiles were fired. Some family members, friends and lovers who made a phone call to people living or working in these big cities had simply heard a loud static noise before hanging up without being able to intervene.

After communications were lost, no one came back. Even these days, the governments had not yet given a satisfying justification to the victims' relatives. Add to this the weird evidences via photos or phone videos of psychedelic rainbow light coming from these places, or the few pictures of uncanny airships.

People didn't need more to speculate and go with a theory of their own.

The terrorist or Third World War theories were, in fact, the less popular. The dominant one was the alien invasion. Not on account of the rare peculiar ship pictures or government silence, but because an Earth Government saw the light of day soon after.

If you once had in your life any interest in history or politic, you then probably know that even if there was a clear loser from either side, negotiations should have taken a long time. Months if not years before agreeing for a consensus. Especially in the theoretical case of a Third World War in which many countries would be involved.

However, it happened. The Earth Government or United Earth Government. Created in barely four days, every religion and power speaking out from the same voice.

Understandably, this new Earth Government couldn't give no response at all either. They chose a rarely seen solution in politics: temporize. Two years after the 'False Third World War', as it was called now, the stabilized government made an announcement to pacify the mobs. It was rebroadcasted so many times that Jake could recite it by heart, in spite of his young age back then.

'Earth citizens,

'What happened on the 14th of May is so unprecedented that it is impossible to be summed in a few words. Regrettably, we are unable to reveal the whole of what transpired at this time. As, we are still investigating to this day. What we have uncovered so far is likely the only news worthy of the term 'earth-shattering' to the point that most people, including us, are woefully unprepared to even hear it. However, in spite of that fact, in the years to come, the way we live will change. We will adapt and prepare for what is to come.'

'A day will come, in approximately two decades from now, where our changes must be solidified. It will be a point of no return, so our wills must be as iron. As, even we do not know the exact day of our reckoning.

'But, whether it is one year earlier or two months after our projection, that day will come. From then on our lives will be forever changed.

'It is our hope that we will all be ready.'

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Jake, that was now brushing his teeth, didn't know that this morning when he woke up, his life would take a turn he could never have imagined. The day everything changed.

The 16th August 2106.

