

The Oracle Paths

Volume 1: The Oracle

Chapter 16 - Missing cases

[Rewards:]

[- First good impression on Ruby Hale. She will remember you.]

[- Communication skills: +1 (Having fun and talking normally is enough to crack your shell of loneliness)]

[Authority level: +5% (5/100 before next rank up)]

By themselves, the rewards seemed to be lacking. However, it was needed to consider the fact that there were no real mission's rewards except for the increase of his authority level experience gauge. The rest was what he obtained by his own efforts. Even his communication skill improving was not so strange.

He was an introvert, solitary and cynical, with an apathetic attitude for about everything. Just forcing himself to follow the Path of this mission had constrained him to go out from his comfort zone. Add to this that Ruby was the opposite of his physical ideal, he truly had pushed himself beyond his limits.

At least at the beginning. After a while, he had finished by enjoying it, which made this mission effortless towards the end. He could sort of feel that his behavior had a breakthrough at some point. He acted more natural and didn't feel like he had to force himself to keep the conversation and the fun going. He also found out that things he judged boring or uninteresting could turn out very differently when done with the right persons.

Strangely all of this was enough to push his communication skill up to 5 points instead of the former 4 points. The average adult human having 10 points he was still considered abnormally bad at communicating. According to Xi, even a somewhat shy person could lie or act normally when needed. Comparatively, Jake could not.

First, being asocial made him far less expressive than the average person. Even if he found one million dollars under his pillow by waking up one morning, he probably wouldn't even smile. But he would be really happy inside. It was a typical issue with nerds and people isolating themselves too much.

They could easily use smileys, emoticons or abbreviations like 'lol' or 'lmao', but their real face behind the screen would always be deadpan. In the long run, it would create discrepancies between what they really felt and how they were behaving. Jake was no exception.

5% of the points needed to rank up his Authority level was not bad either, but without any repercussions on his current life. He would need to satisfy many more of the Coaching's whims before seeing real changes.

'Xi, what does improving my Oracle rank can do for me? Should this be one of my new priorities?' He inquired his favorite A.I, getting her out of her slumber.

Svu vft guur laiuro rufziw ovu jvmiu tfw.

[It is very important. But I can't tell you exactly why as your authority level is insufficient.] She explained patiently. [What I can tell you though is that improving your Oracle rank has many uses.]

[Firstly, you will be less and less restricted when it comes to search for information. The higher your rank, the more detailed the information you can get. I will also be able to answer more freely.]

[Secondly, only the most basic functions of your Oracle device are currently unlocked. These available functions can also be upgraded.]

[It also does what the term implies: it gives you more authority when it comes to interacting with other Oracle devices. Remember about putting Oracle devices in contact with each other? The higher rank will be able to access most information, like the Status and ongoing Paths, without actually getting the consent from the other bracelet's owner.]

The authority level was much more important than what he had imagined originally. His rank zero would be fine for the time being, but as more people would rank up their Oracle, he would become more vulnerable.

After cleaning the VR store and putting in order all the VR equipment, Jake said goodbye to Harry and Camille. He wasn't aware of the difference, but they both felt subconsciously that his jaded face was a little bit less blank today.

Jake came back home without meeting any mishaps. Crunch was nonchalantly sleeping on his bed pillow, not even one ear pricking up when he opened his front door. This black cat didn't care about anything as long as he was well-fed and had a roof over his head. In this aspect, they were very similar.

Intrigued by the news concerning the society changes caused by the Oracles, he turned on his TV, while making himself at home.

The society was plunged into chaos. Miscellaneous incidents kept coming one after another. Some 'smart' guys discovered they could get any private phone number just by wishing to call the person of their choice. Their Shadow Guide would tap the number before them and they would just have to imitate it.

The Earth's President, ministers, actors and actresses, singers and other celebrities passed an awful day as a result. Fortunately, they soon figured out that it was possible for their Oracle A.I to filter the incoming calls by themselves. Same as blacklisting a phone number, but much more efficient as it could determine thanks to the Coaching ability if answering the unknown calls was actually beneficial.

As Jake didn't have many friends, he didn't worry about this. It also had positive consequences though. He could now easily contact anyone. Even Ruby that he just

met today, he could call her right now if he wished for it. Of course, he wouldn't do that.

Another news startled him. However, it didn't have anything to do with the Oracles. There were less and less stray cats and dogs. Other common city birds like pigeons, sparrows or crows were also becoming scarcer.

The hiccup was that this phenomenon had been noticed for several months already. It was just that as time kept flying, it became more and more evident and the scientists became more and more alarmist.

When he heard this, Jake couldn't help but remember the frightening mouse dragging an agonizing and limbless cat in the darkness. Were the disappearances of these animals such a coincidence? Even if he was twice more stupid, he wouldn't think so.

However, there was something even scarier with this matter. The arrival of the Oracle devices should have given an easy solution to find a satisfying explanation. For example, if you remembered any of these stray animals, or if one of your pets was declared missing, you could wish to meet them again in the shortest way.

If this wish didn't have any valid Path, you could try 'where has my pet died?'. From this, you could even find who or what killed it. Only if his death was natural, from a disease or something of the same kind, could Prediction give no results.

The issue was that statistically speaking, all stray cats and dogs couldn't go missing for the same reason. Moreover, in this case, dead bodies would have been discovered. There would be clear signs of an epidemic. Wild animals wouldn't drop dead for no reason. There would be precursor symptoms like hair loss, fever, bleeding, inflammation, abnormal behavior and so on.

So why couldn't they even find one creature or person responsible. If they were prey for another predator, it should have been identified since then. After all, the Oracle bracelets were that powerful. Yet, they didn't.

The risk was too high, and the implications of his guess too dreadful. Jake reminisced the agonizing cat traits, then wished he could find its murderer as soon as possible.

Bpo Pzutahoamr lofwut qpou. Nm Pfovl juzu dmpvt. Hu aqqutafoui w jalvut om dart ovu qmplu tazuhoiw. Soaii rm zulpiol. Hal evfloi w vwnmovulal vft guur hmrda zqut.

'Xi, can a creature on Earth be excluded from the Oracle's calculations? Don't lie to me.' He ordered with a hoarse voice.

[...]

[It should be impossible.] She admitted.

'It should, but it is clearly not.' He grunted with frustration. 'This mouse had no Oracle device and now it can't be found with a Path if I wish it. I want the truth. And don't tell me my Authority level is insufficient. If I die because of this, you will die with me as we're bound together.'

Xi kept her silence for a while. Jake didn't know if she was consulting her data base or reporting something to the Oracle Overseer above her. After what seemed to be an eternity, she answered.

[...] She sighed. [Authority level insufficient.]

'Fuck!'

[Listen to me Jake. Your instincts are not wrong, but I can't report this to the Oracle Overseer. If I do —Authority level insufficient—... Humans need more time. You need more time to adapt. Raise your Oracle's rank and follow the Coach. This is your only hope.]

