

The Oracle Paths

Volume 1: The Oracle

Chapter 17 - The way to survival

At this precise moment, Jake felt a visceral fear coursing through his body, goosebumps all over his skin. As good at procrastinating as he was, he couldn't ignore such an urgency. Lazy people could postpone chores and duties, but not threats to their life.

He was too perturbed to undertake anything this evening. He couldn't even muster the energy to cook something. In the end, he just got to bed early. Tomorrow would be a better day.

On waking, he felt in great form, but his mood was grim. The right move in this situation was not so clear anymore. There were already things on Earth that the Oracle's predictions didn't take account of.

The Oracle should have turned his dull life into an exciting one, full of hopes. Instead, he was back to square one. What was he supposed to do now?

Xi told him to follow the Coaching ability's recommendations. But the latter was silent this morning. From what Xi said the day before, she couldn't report the situation to the Oracle Overseer for his own good. However, his personal Oracle naturally included in his calculations everything he knew. Bullshit quests like push-up sets or running a few kilometers had been replaced by insufferable mutism.

His stress was rising, but no satisfying ideas came to him. Jake did one thing, though. He sent a message to Camille, his superior at work, informing her he would be absent for a prolonged period. Personal reasons.

He wasn't worried about lacking money. His investment was already showing great promise. His forty thousand dollars had high return potential. He didn't know it yet, but a big firm had worked on a warp drive engine for three decades in vain. A success would allow humans to build spaceships able to travel faster than light.

Light speed couldn't be surpassed, but space and time could be deformed with enough energy. The warping engine made such a feat possible. There were many hurdles to overcome, such as finding an energy source powerful enough, choosing the adequate materials or just solving related mathematical formulas.

This firm had been on the verge of bankruptcy for years, surviving thanks to international subventions and donations. With the Oracles' appearance, they overcame their last obstacle.

You could imagine the impact of such a technological advance when the patent was registered. Jake was now a happy stockholder of this company. His initial investment had already doubled and would exceed his four hundred thousand dollars' objective in three days at the latest.

Unfortunately, it was useless. Jake had the intuition that he wouldn't have the chance to enjoy his wealth for long.

He didn't turn on the TV this morning. The news would only be worst. Time has come to take his fate into his own hands. The Wilderths were smart. That was the absolute truth he was confident of. However, it was also his shackle. The one that made him indolent and passive. It made him doubt himself.

He took a deep breath, then began to formulate a series of wishes. 'I want to survive', 'I want to become invincible' gave no results. It made sense. The Oracle couldn't give an impossible Path. Even he wouldn't believe it if such a Path existed.

Therefore, he tried more reasonable wishes. 'I want to improve my survival chances.' 'I want to become smarter.', 'I want to become a better version of myself.' It was nearly not as impressive, but it would do the trick.

The Prediction ability activated and Paths were calculated. This time, the Paths produced were sophisticated. They were all similar, but still slightly different according to where the emphasis was put on.

After testing these wishes with different deadlines, he realized these Paths would take years, but he would get the first benefits in a few days. Priority was given to what could immediately increase his survival rate. The Paths had to be safe too.

He finally set his choice on a shorter Path. However, it would still take close to six months. It was under the assumption he would not slack off even once and follow it to the letter.

[Rewards:]

[Strength + 10, Agility +10, Constitution +10, Vitality +5, Intelligence +3, Perception +1]

[Learning of multiple survival-related knowledge and skills.]

It was hard to imagine how many effects it could bring to one's life. It wouldn't turn him into a superman, but it was certainly an unreachable goal for most humans before the Oracles' arrival.

Three points in intelligence were dubious. It would basically make of him one of the most intelligent guy on Earth.

Such Paths were interesting because they were in fact subdivided into many steps with their own Coaching missions. The reason was that they could be done in any order, although it would be wiser to work on them simultaneously.

[-Mallamr: Iqnzmsu wmpz crmjuteu frt lpzsasfi lcaiil.]

[Authority level: +40%]

A long list of books or activities to perform was given to read and learn by heart. It was not worth considering. With his procrastinator mindset, he would give up far too soon.

[-Mission: Improve your communication skills.]

[Authority level: +30%]

[-Mission: Improve your body and brain]

[Authority level: + 30%]

As soon as he turned on the Paths, he realized it would be painful and costly. His cheap vegan blends were considered unsuitable for his objective. First, he would have to go shopping again. Second, he would have to prepare and cook all his meals. He also had dietary supplements to buy he knew nothing about. Basically, it would cost him an arm and a leg.

If you added to the equation the books and the potential lessons he would have to pay for, he would have been ruined in an instant without his prudent investment. He was also asked to buy illegal weapons. In France, you could hardly get hold of firearms without having a specific license. Bladed weapons were different, but swords or katanas were mostly collectibles.

Concerning firearms, Jake could call his uncle Kalen. This gentle-looking middle-aged man had a military background and used to be a colonel. He had retired early in order to begin a career in politics. It was a failure but he still had many contacts.

Ladu jfl dpil md lpznzalul. Hu vft rmo hfiiut val prhiu dmz qmrovl frt jfl rmj fgmpo om easu vaq f hfii dmz ovu luhmrt oaqu ar ojm tfwl.

Uncle Kalen answered at the first beep.

‘Hey, Jake! I was thinking I wouldn’t hear your voice before a few months with all the money I lent you.’ The old colonel teased with a somewhat happy tone.

‘worry not, you will have your money with interests in a few days.’ He guaranteed. ‘I am calling you for another reason. I need some firearms and a lot of ammunition.’

Uncle Kalen who was trimming the vegetal hedges around his villa dropped his shears upon hearing his nephew's demand.

'Have you lost your mind?! What do you want a fire weapon for?'

'Obviously, to protect myself.' Jake said solemnly. He also decided to warn his uncle. 'You are not stupid uncle. The government secrecy, the alien spaceship, the recent news. Question your Oracle, you will naturally find some anomalies in his answers.'

'If you don't have a gun, you should get one too.'

Kalen pondered over his words for a while. Maybe, he remembered some recent news or perhaps he was interrogating his own Oracle right now. After a few minutes, he had taken his decision.

'All right. I will have to ask my old friends, but I can definitely get you a proper license. Recently, the darknet has been too risky, so don't try to look there.'

Jake almost facepalmed. Did this old fox really think he was working for the mafia or something? He didn't even know how to access the darknet! True, he was an eminent cheater at video-games. Yet, except for that and a tiny little bit of illegal downloading, he was a lawful abiding citizen.

Afterward, they exchanged small talk with each other before hanging up. Jake also tried to contact his cousin Anya to warn her too, but she couldn't be reached. It was not unusual coming from her, so he didn't fret about this.

Jake spent his morning taking care of his grocery list at the commercial center. The previous shopping cart he had kept with him from his last outing was still faithfully accompanying him. When he finally came back home, he had become poor again. However, it was just temporary. His bank account would be back at full health in a few days' time.

He fed his cat, relaxed for an hour or so and at last took a deep and resolute breath. The laziness was strong in this one. It wouldn't be easy for him to act the opposite

of what his instincts told him. He got dressed in a training outfit that he hadn't worn since his university days.

At first, he wanted to wear a loose short and tee-shirt with the intense heat, but the Shadow Guide had decided he wouldn't do anything right by himself.

When Jake got out of his apartment, he was dressed as for a winter workout, even wearing a parka above his outfit. He was

sweating like an old pig brought to a slaughterhouse. His motivation was already leaving him. He wanted to go back.

But then, he walked by next to the dark back alley that was still giving him nightmares. He couldn't hear any noises inside. He was convinced. There were no stray cats in this lane anymore. The fear struck him back at full power, leaving him panting heavily. When he calmed down, he vowed to himself he would never let a mouse or any other monstrosities fućk with his mind.

His determination rose again. His first training of a long series had begun.