

The Oracle Paths

Volume 1: The Oracle

Chapter 18 - New routines

At that time, Jake made a decision. He would copy each of his Shadow Guide's move till the very end. It would be tough, he would feel bored, may want to give up, but it was the old him. Most people giving in would always be assailed by doubts and uncertainties.

Doubting is a powerful thing. It protects you from doing stupid mistakes, prevent blindly trusting and misjudgment. However, it was also your worst enemy as it fed on fear and low self-esteem.

Overweight people would dream of losing weight, but they would fail or give up midway. Ignorance, wrong diet choices could be a reason for these failures, but despair was the trigger making them abandon. And what was the best fuel for despair? Doubting one's self.

With the Oracle, you had the certainty that you were following the most perfect slimming program. It was personalized and would naturally be a success if followed. Popular diet trends were enticing, but if the immediate benefits were not as good as imagined, your willpower would crumble.

In psychology, there were several mechanisms implicated that made the failure rate so high. For example, the 'I've come this far, might as well finish' and 'selling off your future' excuses. They worked in tandem.

In a moment of weakness, you eat one slice of pizza, then two, and finally the entire pizza. But it's ok, because 'tomorrow, you will make up for it'.

An attitude of denial was also a classic. 'Just once is ok', 'I won't gain weight with just one ice cream'. This kind of denial.

The Oracle prevented these setbacks. Because it was always right. If you acted differently from your Shadow Guide, you were wrong. It made you responsible for your failures.

But for this to work, you needed to have at least this little bit of faith in your bracelet. Jake precisely intended to do that.

The shadow fetch started to run and he obediently followed. You just had to look at him to figure out how bad was his fitness.

This footing was a long tunnel with no end. Jake could only look up to the inexhaustible shadow, always pushing forward as if it was nothing.

After an unknown amount of time, he collapsed on a sidewalk. In front of him, was an enormous physical fitness center. The biggest in New Paris. It had all the facilities you could wish for.

A 50m long swimming pool, a weights room, special rooms for dancing, martial arts, yoga, and reshaping programs. The equipment was top notch and there was a wide range of activities to choose from. This place would be like a second home for him in the next days.

Jake was already tired, but the Oracle didn't care. He took a gym bag with him, so he had everything needed to train there. Special drinks, gainers, supplements, he was ready.

Snmzolqur frt jmqur juzu rpquzmpl vuzu. Tvu daorull iusui jfl film ypaou vaev. Svzaqnl iacu vaq juzu rmo hmqqmr. Id rmo dmz val qfl md vfaz frt ojm-juuc ovahe gufzt, vu jmpit vfsu duio prhmrdaturo fgmpo val qfriorull.

[Mission: Get yourself a trendy haircut and shave!]

[Reward: You won't look like a beggar anymore.]

[Authority level: +0.1%]

‘...‘

‘Xi... It is your doing? Right?!‘ The ‘beggar’ accused her with a grief-stricken face. He was the kind of person to hold grudges for the slightest grievances.

[It is not me. Why would I care about your hairiness?] She retorted with an air of disdain.

‘Then why has the Coaching ability proposed this mission just now and not this morning when I went shopping?’

[Because it would have been useless. The mission appeared because it makes you uncomfortable. If it gave your future missions all at once, what would be the point? You wouldn’t even understand why you must do them.]

‘All right... I get it, but I’ll do this tomorrow. I’m drenched with sweat, right now.’

[Al wmp jalv, qflouz. Nm], nzmhuut jaov wmpZ ozfarare.]

‘...‘

There was indeed a hairdressing salon in this fitness center. He just had to schedule this before working out the day after.

Afterward, he passed his worst afternoon since the time his cousins mocked him at a Christmas family dinner where all the Wilderths were gathered.

Imitating the Shadow Guide, he pumped iron, stretched, did some high-intensity interval training, stretched again and so on. Paradoxically, it was not so ‘hard’ that he couldn’t carry on with the exercises. It was precisely the issue.

The Path knew his stuff. The weights were rather light, the resting times long enough. However, there were many things he was discovering for the first time. Battle rope, jump rope, throwing weights, mobility and balance training, some weird yoga and breathing techniques.

There were also many physiological movements to practice like punching, kicking, rolling or climbing. All in all, it was a well-thought training, with no details overlooked.

At some point, Jake ceased to ponder over the logic behind all these strange exercises. He was getting jeering glances from other gym adherents nonstop, yet he didn't care. He was too focused on his task.

Funnily, he was not the only person practicing exercises that didn't seem to make sense. Every human was treading their own path and as a result, abnormal behaviors were sort of becoming the new norm.

When he arrived home, his nerd body was dead tired. His energy has been spent and despite the absence of muscle stiffness and soreness, he felt like his body had been run over by a bulldozer.

Jfcu ommc f juii-tuluzsut lvmjuZ gudmzu qmsare mr om ovu ruko loun. Tvu ruko ozafi jfl rmo uflauz ar ovu liaevoulo. Ir dfho, ao hmpit gu usur vfzlvuz.

A little reminder, Jake's Cooking skill had 1 point when the average human being had 4. Cooking pasta or rice was ok, but anything else went far beyond his field of expertise. He would have to focus and follow the Shadow Guide moves very carefully.

He didn't have knowledge of what recipe he was following. His cooking talent was almost inexistent for two simple reasons: no interest and no dexterity. He was not good with his hands and his few girlfriends could confirm it...

When boredom could struck him even during the most intimate act, you could easily picture what kind of shitty face he was doing right now.

Well, he was sobbing. Chopping onions and garlic.

The Shadow Guide was performing some awesome knife skills, slicing the vegetables at high speed. As he tried his best to follow his prodigious doppelganger,

the meal was taking form. It was a simple stew with big slices of chicken meat and a varied selection of vegetables.

Not the appetizing dish he was dreaming about. However, there was no doubt that it would turn out as a balanced healthy meal. The fragrance fuming from the cooking pot was stimulating and tempting his senses. This stew was full of promise.

The unexpected revelation was that cooking encompassed many subskills. You needed an acute sense of observation, the ability to discern different scents and cooking sounds. Good control, knife mastery, knowledge of each kitchen instrument, recipe knowledge were all part of the same main skill recognized by the System.

Jake had no idea how the Oracle calculated the final score, and it didn't really matter. What he knew though, was that his Shadow Guide was not content with simply showing off. It wanted Jake to throw himself emotionally into the act of cooking.

When the Guide was seemingly immobile but was, in fact, taking a whiff above the stew, Jake could feel it. It was not foolish imitation. The real feat was to achieve the same way of thinking the Shadow had while cooking. It was an extremely focused state. If he didn't know better, he would have thought the latter had gone 'all in' on poker with only a pitiful pair of two.

Adouz fr vmpz mz lm, laqquzare fo qutapq ouqnuzfopzu, frt tulnaou qfrw qalofcul, Jfcu hmmcut ovu gulo talv md val iadu. Esur Czprhv jfl ħċċirġ val ianl frt tzmciare msuz ovu hmmcare nmo. Oru hfo frt mru vpqfr lofzut fo ufhv movuz iacu ojm qmzofi uruqaul, wuo ao jfl rmo imre dmz Czprhv om zuquqguz jvmlu vfrt jfl duutare vaq.

Jake was not a selfish person (at least not with a cat), so he took out two plates and served generous portions for both of them. Truth was that he wasn't free to gorge on food as he wished. The Path was still active. The amounts of food were controlled, there was nothing left to chance.

The meal proved to be delicious. However, the pleasure he was expecting didn't come. Indeed, he couldn't even eat in peace. In order to improve his intelligence, the Oracle had concocted for him many mind games he couldn't skip.

They were simple routines like brushing one's teeth, writing and eating with one's opposite hand, reading upside down, focusing on the present moment or learning survival-related knowledge. However, when he practiced them all, it took a toll on his brain.

When he went to sleep, Jake wished to die and never wake up. He had barely survived his first day. Nonetheless, he knew that the following months would only be worse, never better.

So next morning, Jake woke up on time and his life became hell again.