

The Oracle Paths

Volume 1: The Oracle

Chapter 19 – Video-games and reality

The next morning the nerd shaved. Nothing to be proud of, but it proved that he was taking the Oracle missions seriously. He was not used yet to his new lifestyle. Cooking was time-consuming and his heart bled each time a fresh fruit or vegetable was consumed. If not for the promise of the soon to come investment returns, he wouldn't have been able to persevere.

Jake didn't get his haircut, though. There was no urgency, and it shouldn't affect in any way his future chances of surviving. It was easier for him to endure a Spartan training rather than to socialize with new people. Shaving was already a good compromise on his part.

The following weeks, Jake lived like a zombie, his schedule deprived of any breaks. He would first cook a balanced breakfast, then jog to the fitness center before continuing with his workout. Back at home, he would then have a shower, cook again for finally cramming all the evening whatever survival-related knowledge the Oracle wanted him to learn.

The good news was that it showed quick results. The Oracle was not the perfect coach for nothing. Every action he was needed to perform had a logical explanation behind it.

After a week only, his intelligence rose by 1 point. Cramming, focusing and silly mind-games all day had, despite all expectations, really made him smarter.

His cooking skills quickly improved at first, as each meal meant a new recipe to discover. However, after a while, it began to slow down and then stagnate.

His physical condition had the same problem. His endurance, strength, and flexibility improved significantly in the first few days. To his great surprise, not once did he suffer from muscle aches and pains. Alas, such a curve of progress could not last indefinitely.

The initial lightning progress was exhilarating for Jake. Unfortunately, reality had that touch of bitterness that a game would never have. In real life benefits, progress, and knowledge were not eternal. It was as if we were constantly walking up an escalator in the wrong direction, the slightest pause threw us backwards, making all our efforts meaningless.

After three weeks of intensive training and dedication, Jake's new status was now as follows.

[Specie: Homo sapiens (Primitive humanoid species)]

[Age:25]

[Height: 180cm]

[Weight: 87kg]

[Health: Healthy]

[Strength: 11.5(+1.5) points (Normal male: 10 points).]

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[Constitution: 11.5(+2.5) points (Normal male: 9 points).]

[Vitality: 11.5(+2.5) points (Normal male: 10 points).]

[Intelligence: 14.5(+1.5) points (Normal male: 10 points).]

[Perception: 10.5(+0.5) points (Normal male: 10 points).]

Such increases might seem superbly pleasing, but they were in fact only the result of an immediate adaptive response by the body.

The gain in strength? A simple adaptation of the nervous system. His muscle mass, its quality had not fundamentally changed.

His constitution and vitality? Of course, so many cardio-vascular exercises, the transition to a nutritive but balanced diet, as well as adequate sleep hygiene were destined to succeed.

The number and size of mitochondria increased rapidly, as did tolerance to lactic acid. The number of red blood cells and blood volume could also be adjusted in record time. This was the main reason why, even today, endurance athletes still physically prepared themselves at high altitudes when a competition was to take place.

Some doping products such as EPO had similar effects. However, these rapid adaptations were just as short-lived. Returning to sea level, combined with an abrupt cessation of sport, could ruin your physical achievements in just a few weeks.

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Even his perception had improved. Less computer use and greater awareness of one's environment had undoubtedly played a role.

Concerning his skills, he had gained new ones and significantly evolved in others. Paradoxically, despite his apparent devotion to the Path, his procrastination skills had not diminished one iota. However, it was now being suppressed by two skills he already had before: Rational thinking and Common sense.

These skills were not exceptional in their own right. Anyone with a functional brain, not parasitized by absurd beliefs, should have a correct level. Sadly, it only took a few psychological shortcomings to put these to one side.

Indeed, Jake's common sense was as bad as one could imagine. To procrastinate and indulge to such an extent, you had to have an undeniable talent for ignoring

what should never be. Escaping from predators by burying his head in the sand was a good summary of how he lived before meeting the Oracle.

Had he changed already? No, not really. Such profound personality changes took a considerable amount of time and awareness.

Nevertheless, the Oracle deserved some credit. A full-time program like his had the same effect on him as good behavioral therapy.

Of the many skills he had acquired, the majority were actually related to the various functional movements he had practiced during his training. Jumping, footwork, boxing, dodging, all kinds of acrobatics, and finally all kinds of survival skills.

They included lighting a campfire, recognizing medicinal herbs and using them properly, getting water or food, making basic traps, and making clothing or leather from fur and skin. In addition to this, he also learned first aid, sewing, and even how to identify all kinds of materials. Even with an IQ now close to 145, this was not a task that could be accomplished in such a short period of time.

After three weeks, the skills he had been practicing looked something like this:

[Krmjiuteu frt Scaii Mflouzaul:]

[Rational thinking and common sense: 100 points (Normal human: 10). Most people think they are always right or full of common sense, but how many of them actually act sensibly? You've always been a logical person. No absurd beliefs or superstitions cloud your judgment, and you are open-minded. By overcoming your procrastinating instincts, you have brought the common sense you have neglected to the forefront. Note, however, that it was fear that led you to go against your true nature. Without it, or in the face of stronger stimulation, you could fall back into your old ways.]

[Informatics: 76 points (Normal human: 8 points). You're not at the Novice level anymore.]

[Cyber engineering: 51 points (Normal human: 1 point). You are not a Novice anymore.]

[Communication: 5 points(+1 chap 16) (Normal human: 10 points). Being solitary for too long given birth to social anxiousness. You can barely talk with your workmates and clients. Your body language and word choices rarely convey your true intention. You also don't have the confidence nor the oral skills needed to perform a public speech or holding a conference.]

[Acrobatics: 68 points (normal human: 10 points). You could only do a backflip, but you added some new strings to your bow. With good coordination and balance, you can now quickly adapt your movements to most situations. Gymnastics competitions are a long way off, but at least you don't look like a potato when you roll.]

[Fighting: 16(+9) points (Normal people: 5 points). You have a ferocious side inside you. You don't play by the rules. Should a hypothetical fight break out; the groin, throat, and eyes would be your instinctive targets. You're not courageous, but don't have any fleeing instinct. All those gestures you've been practicing recently have given you a good foundation. You still don't know anything about martial arts, but no one can say you can't throw a punch.]

[Cooking: 21(+20) points (Normal human: 4 points). Cooking morning, noon and evening real gourmet meals worthy of the name have allowed your talent as a cook to shine through. Your understanding is still rudimentary, but at least you've stopped using your microwave. A small step for man, but a big step for you.]

[Survival: 34 (Normal human: 0-2 points). It would be arrogant of you to think that you can survive a naked winter in Siberia, but at least you won't risk foolishly poisoning yourself by eating the wrong berry. If the environment is not too hostile and you have a solution, you will be able to grasp it.]

He had many other skills, but they were not significant enough to be mentioned or were included in the calculation of the level of mastery of the above skills.

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One morning, he just decided to have a well-deserved day-off. On that day, he didn't train, didn't cook, didn't learn nor review anything as he should have. The day after, he discovered the appalling truth. His attributes and skills had regressed. Not much, but he had lost 0.1 point of intelligence and one or two points in most of his knowledge-dependent skills.

His procrastinating instincts then returned to full power. The common sense that had enabled him to stay on course collapsed, giving way to a deep despondency. After three weeks of relentless training, he had long since forgotten that mysterious mouse. The fear that was supposed to drive him into action, forgotten. He returned to his original lazy, indolent self.

What Jake didn't know, however, was that the rest of the world, which he had ignored throughout his ordeal, was no better off than he was.