

The Oracle Paths

Volume 1: The Oracle

Chapter 2 - Global panic

In the past, Jake was used to having a plentiful breakfast before going to work. A bowl of milk, a nice amount of cereals, a fruit and maybe a cup of tea or coffee. The typical French breakfast. Sugar before everything else. However, it was more than five years ago, when he was still living at his uncle's villa.

At this time, he didn't have any sense of food value. He was well-fed, with nothing to worry about. What Jake didn't care about in those days was that after the False Third War, when all the notorious and big cities were bombed, there had been a genuine shortage of space and manpower. More than half of every country's population had lived in these towns and capitals.

Areas within tens of kilometers radius around these places became wastelands. The inland, usually less populated and normally reserved for agriculture or pasture, became the new metropolis. Capitals and other famous cities were rebuilt, taking, for the most part, their old name with a slight nuance to flag-up the transition to the new era.

Paris, where his parents worked and died, was resuscitated as New Paris. It was built right in the center of France, a place with originally nothing but cows. Needless to say, it took up a lot of space. Far too much in fact. That meant less arable lands.

Thus, food abundance came to an end.

The 'good news' was that depending on the concerned countries the population was halved. That was something to rejoice about. Cough... always being optimistic. Positive attitude in all situations.

It should have been fine. Less space, fewer people, the winning combo. The reality was a bit different.

With fear, people copulated like rabbits. In twenty years, the average couple churned out three to four babies, sometimes five or more. Welfare was quite generous at first for those that lost a close relative or friend, sometimes even losing their job. The false sensation of safety during the beginning of the nuclear winter made panicked people even crazier.

Demography got right back to the numbers before the False World War, but food production didn't increase as fast. As a result, all food-related stuff naturally saw its prices rising sharply.

For those that couldn't afford them, vegan powder blends became their new best friend. In a *désiré* of not discarding eating *plèàsurè*, insects were also part of these 'Happy-Meal' ingredients for all those that couldn't suppress their carnivorous instincts.

Junk drinks and food were still affordable, though...

Anyway. No breakfast for Jake. This shit twice a day was disgusting enough. Ah yes, do not forget the iodine tablet twice a day. The radiation level was still above normal. Without medicine and nanobiotics advances, cancer would have killed a good part of the survivors remaining.

He soon came out in a hurry from his studio well located in the uptown of New Paris. Well, the truth was most districts were about the same. The city was new after all and built in a short time. Other than a few exceptions, accommodations were basically all social housing within the first years.

He jumped in the first cab he caught, quickly relaxing as the scenery passed by the window. The driver was like a mute, also lost in her own thoughts. A middle-aged woman with dark hair grizzled by worries and sleep deprivation.

He never arrived at his working place.

Just a few minutes after he got in the car, a pure white flash turned the world around him into a blinding white. A sound of screeching tire made his hair stand on end, as the taxi owner dug her heels in. Jake's head banged into the front seat as the vehicle came to a standstill.

Stars whirled around him, adding new dazzling colors to the flash afterimages on his retinas. Screams from all sides were hammering his skull, stopping him from getting a grip on himself. Other sounds of pile-ups and car crashes didn't help to alleviate his mind.

After a while, his sight came back and with it a scene of disaster. A few people were having an epileptic seizure on the sidewalk because of the sudden burst of light. One unlucky boy got one in the middle of a crosswalk. Here was how the first pile-up had happened.

Armovuz tzasuz nfracut frt juro mdd-zmft, lozacare f duj ezfrtqmovuzl euooare mpo md ovu ezmhuZW lomzu, gudmzu uqguttare vaqluid ar fr uiuhozah nmiu. Nm ruut om lfw, vu jfl rmo ovu mriw mru imlare val hmqnmlpzu. Tvuzu juzu gimmt frt msuzopzrut suvahiul usuzwJVUZU. Io ozpiw jfl f tzuftdpi laevo.

Then, he raised his eyes, where the flash came from. They immediately popped out of their sockets as what he saw was so unbelievable, that he could hardly keep himself in check.

A silver metallic sphere was floating in the sky. Mysterious futuristic blue lines of light roamed over its smooth and polished surface. It was also huge. Gigantic enough to cover the whole of New Paris with its shade. But even more impressive, you could catch a glimpse of an even bigger sphere far higher in the sky. If his intuition was right, it was bigger than the moon!

Good heavens! It was a spaceship. A fucking alien battleship. They were reliving Independence Day movie right at this moment. Rapidly, other bystanders noticed the sphere ships. A new wave of screams and shrieks resumed with greater intensity.

However, it didn't last for long. The blue lines of light quickly thickened, becoming brighter and brighter. After what seemed to be an eternity, something sprang out.

Millions of bat-sized silver spheres gushed out, spreading out fast toward the ground. Toward them.

People didn't need more to turn around and initiate the dash of their life. Jake even saw an eighty-year-old hunchback with a walking stick, suddenly throw it away before sprinting like a teenager under steroids. Adrenaline could make a miracle happen. Though, this old guy would surely pay the price of his feat afterward.

Jake didn't run. He had never been especially courageous, but he was not cowardly either. Most of all, he was rational. These spherical drones were absurdly fast, almost breaking the sound barrier, so why run away? These machines would be on them in ten seconds at the latest.

In fact, they were even faster. Before realizing anything, a silver sphere was on him. A blue light scanned him silently. Then the same lines appeared on its surface. A black metal liquid streamed out of them, flowing toward his right arm. The liquid circled around his wrist for a while, each revolution drawing it closer to his wrist.

A few seconds later a new shiny limited Apple watch edition, ahem alien bracelet was occupying his right wrist. Glancing around, he saw many people that had a vacant look at their new ornament. Some fools were still in a full-speed dash, running like there was no tomorrow. They were soon caught up by the drones as well.

Tvu laopfoamr ypahciw luooiut tmjr. Pumniu juzu lrfnnare mpo md ovuaz dufz lofou mru gw mru. Tvuzu juzu loaii gimmt frt hmznlul fii fzmprt ovuq, gpo fpovmzaoaul hmpit tufi jaov ovfo.

To their greatest delights, the drones flew back to the silver sphere, that in turn soared, vanishing as abruptly as it came, like a fleeting memory. The enormous moon ship also flashed by, disappearing like a spark. It left a bad aftertaste to everyone.

It was their first official encounter with extraterrestrials, a historic date, but it had already ended. It was time to go back to reality.

People that had to write accident reports wrote them, those that had to call their insurance or ambulance called them. Fortunately, in the 22nd century, most vehicles were driving autonomously, and emergency procedures were almost totally automated.

The few car crashes were due to passionate drivers that didn't want to give up their guilty pleasure. Most bus or cab drivers didn't even drive their own car. They were just sitting by, cashing in their customers.

'Vzzzzt! Vzzzzt!'

His phone vibrated in his short's pocket, playing some epic tune much more pleasant than his alarm clock. Although smartphones were now powerful enough to compare to supercomputers from the beginning of the 21st century, they basically didn't change much. Waterproof, malleable like chewing-gum, nice holograms, but inherently the same.

He answered the call. It was his cousin, Anya. Three weeks since they last talked.

'Jake tell me you're ok?' she said with a tremoring voice full of worry.

'The number is not available now, please try again later.'

‘Fucking asshole!’ She yelled enraged. ‘Here I was, worrying for nothing, damned idiot! What I am supposed to do with you?’

‘I’m fine, thanks. I’ll call in sick for today. I need to examine this thing on my wrist. I won’t be able to work like this anyway.’

‘Ok Jake, you certainly won’t be the only one taking a day off. I need to hang up. Call me if you need me! Bye!’

Anya calls were always like this. She would check on him and then would end the call just after. They were closer when they were young, but she had a full-time work at the Earth government that took all of her time. Today’s event should have put her under even more pressure.

At last, Jake called in sick without issue, then came back home.

The time has finally come to discover what secret this alien bracelet was hiding.