

The Oracle Paths

Volume 1: The Oracle

Chapter 22 - Let's get this party started!

Jake brooded for a long time over the reasons behind Paul's invitation. He had always been inclined to party, but a little voice in his head was whispering to him that things would be quite different this time.

Jake decided to take it easy for the rest of the afternoon. He didn't have enough time anyway to accomplish anything substantial. For the first time in several weeks, he turned on his TV.

Completely obsessed with his Path, he hadn't paid the slightest attention to his surroundings. He knew that the world was going badly, after all, he was ardently following this Path for this very reason. Letting himself be distracted by some news, a lot of alarmist ones at that, would not have done him any good.

Jake wasn't fooled, though. After the first few days when the streets were emptier than usual, they had become bustling again.

However, it did not last. The alleyways were not empty, many people kept on going to work or attending to their business, but there were some details that would catch the eye of a discerning eye.

Like the game 'Spot the difference', the situation might look the same at first glance, but when you really compared the details, the differences were striking.

First of all, the silence. The birds stopped singing, the dogs stopped barking, the crickets and the cicadas also stopped chirping.

If we pushed the paranoia even further, there were almost no insects. Temperatures were still warm in early September, flies and mosquitoes should have been ruining his life. After all, he had sweet blood, or at least a smell they liked.

However, this was not enough to conclude anything. It would no doubt fuel conspiracy theories, but there may have been more rational explanations that he didn't know about.

But that wasn't the only strange thing. Small and large businesses were closing down one after the other. Large food stores were increasingly affected by stock shortages.

It started with occasional delays in deliveries, especially of fresh fish, and then it spread to other foodstuffs. Now, meat, fish, fresh fruit and vegetables were no longer supplied on a regular basis.

Prices, which were already high, soared again. If Jake hadn't suddenly become an upstart, he would have been affected by all this. The key point was the rumour that something weird was going on in the provinces outside New Paris.

No one really knew what was going on there. The poorest households were protesting in the streets, complaining that their income was no longer enough to cover their food needs.

At the same time, everyone who had relatives in these remote areas reported being unable to reach them. Without exception, voicemail messages were immediately received as if the smartphones were turned off or cut off from the phone network.

The government was not helping at all. Military personnel had been deployed in the heart of New Paris, allegedly to stop the riots and ensure the safety of its citizens.

The problem was that they also controlled the entrances and exits of the city. Well, just the entrances in fact. The highways were only congested in one direction. No one, except for a few heavily guarded transport trucks, could enter the capital.

Jake had neither news of his cousin nor his uncle; but unlike most of the people involved, he was not worried that much. Indeed, it was not uncommon for them to be out of town and unreachable for weeks at a time.

His cousin Anya was working for the government anyway and probably knew a lot more about the situation than he did. Even though she would be subject to professional secrecy, he was convinced that, in the event of real trouble, she would not leave him in the dark and would bring him up to date.

Al dmz val prhiu Kfiur, vu vft guur zftam laiuro larhu Jfcu vft oannut vaq mdd fgmpo ovu sfzAMPL frmqfiaul vu vft rmoahut.

Asserting that he did not think about it would be a lie, but moping would be an equally noxious mistake.

He had almost forgotten about the stray cat-eating mouse. The memory trotted in one corner of his head, but over time it had become blurry, less frightening. The fact that he had never again encountered such rodents also had a part to play in this.

On the flat screen, a report was discussing the net increase in criminal activity since the arrival of the Oracles. Serial murder, **** and petty theft of all kinds had multiplied like a roach colony in the air ducts of an unsanitary housing project.

Despite the fact that the police could easily find the culprits with the help of their Oracles, many crimes were committed every day. The reason for this was obvious: the rush of adrenaline that accompanied taking a risk combined with the satisfaction of fulfilling a Coach's mission.

A serial killer was probably receiving all day long challenge missions to carry out more and more sophisticated crimes, or with increasingly strict conditions. Some

Paths might even allow to escape all suspicion, or have innocent people charged, regardless of the existence of the Oracles to refute these false accusations.

Moreover, the experience given by the Oracles to increase the Authority Level was proportional to the difficulty of the Paths achieved. Some of these fugitives still at large may have already promoted their rank to the next level.

Jake turned off the television when the report advised every citizen to stay home after nightfall. It sounded dangerously like a curfew.

When it was finally past 7:00 p.m., Jake began to get ready. He put on a simple white shirt, stretchy black pants and a pair of suede shoes, no less comfortable than his sneakers. His clothing style lacked any extravagance, remaining functional and comfortable.

His idle instincts having a hard life, he made do with an old-fashioned comb-over. He inspected himself in the mirror for a brief moment, a contented smirk on his face, before setting off on his walk.

Czprhv aermzut vaq fii fimre, ofcare f tuun rfn. Tvu dmzquz vmquiull hfo vft efarut juaevo frt jfl rmj iasare val nflvf iadu jaov eplom.

It was the first time he had ever been to Paul's house. His parents were among the fortunate few who owned an old villa prior to the construction of New Paris.

It was originally an old cottage lost in the middle of nowhere, but after the site was chosen to become the new capital, it became a popular piece of real estate.

Refusing to sell, the old residence had remained the same throughout the years, sticking out like a sore thumb among all the skyscrapers in the city center.

Besides being located in the heart of the business district with all amenities nearby, the police station was in the same street, ensuring optimal security. The other good thing was that it was less than twenty minutes walk away.

The red sun was fading away on the horizon, giving way to night when Jake reached his destination. A high gate and an intimidating wrought-iron fence isolated the house from ordinary people.

Jake rang the intercom to announce himself. Seconds later, the gate opened with a shrill squeak that made his ears bleed. A little lubricant to smooth out the joints would have been nice.

A short paved road and a fallow garden separated him from the mansion. As he walked those few meters, he noticed a doghouse, but no dog was nearby. As night fell, the old stone cottage looked like a haunted house.

Fortunately, the atmosphere changed completely when he walked through the front door. A piece of deafening pop-electro music immediately assaulted his eardrums. Multicoloured strobe lights really gave the feeling of entering a nightclub.

‘Hey! Jake, you came! I can’t believe it. ‘Harry, sipping his beer near the lobby, was thrilled to see him.

Budmzu val fzzasfi, vu jfl hvfooare jaov ojm movuz qur. Pfpf Bfcuz, ovu mjruz md ovu vmplu, frt Tvazp Agaqqmif, frmovuz md val hm-jmzcuzl. Bmov ezuuout vaq ar opZr.

Paul, whom he had met earlier, only nodded his head. Thiru, for his part, shook his hand with a strong grip. The smell of musky spice immediately attacked his nostrils. Or in fact, it did not?

Thiru Abimbola was a tall black man, 1.9 meters tall, obese and his skin was constantly oily and oozing with sweat. He was the fruit of a hazardous union, an Ethiopian father and an Indian mother. He had inherited his father’s skin colour and his mother’s straight hair.

His parents ran a restaurant mixing their two cultures, which together with his poor body hygiene gave him an exotic body odour to keep it poetic.

He wasn't an asocial nerd like them, quite the opposite. However, he had a peculiar character, manifested by a self-confidence that was absolutely disproportionate to what reality would suggest.

Nevertheless, life was full of surprises. Tonight, Thiru smelled good. He was well dressed, had his hair done, and had even lost seven or eight kilos since the last time they had seen each other. He was still obese, but it was still an incredible transformation, worthy of praise.

All in all, and unlike Paul, Thiru was another of those people to whom the Oracle had given wings.