

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 1: The Oracle

### Chapter 25 - Flirting with Camille

Jake was stunned after Paul's speech. The Earth was shrinking at this very moment and he hadn't noticed anything all this time. According to him, his planet wasn't really disappearing but was actually being absorbed or transported somewhere else.

The problem was that if it was just the Earth being transported, there would have been some pretty obvious anomalies, like the disappearance of the moon or the sun, perhaps a change in the constellations.

None of that occurred. However, according to the story of Paul and his friends, some places on Earth were being replaced by lands that were far too strange to exist on their planet.

This meant at least one thing. It didn't make any sense! Even if the Earth was connected to parallel worlds or different spaces were superimposed on top of each other, the result should be much more chaotic.

Jake's feeling was that the Earth was gradually shattering into pieces like you would smash a puzzle into thousands of fragments. These pieces of land were then randomly recombined with other pieces belonging to other worlds.

There was no evidence to support his theory, but without knowing the reason, he was almost convinced that his instincts were right. This kind of visceral certainty was not something he could ignore so easily.

Between the disappearing animals, and more recently the humans in small towns and villages, there was plenty of room for paranoia.

Even if there were strange monsters like that terrifying mouse or that cannibal Chihuahua, the truth was that there weren't that many of them. The first sociopath or serial killer that would come along was probably killing more than these mutated animals.

If pieces of Earth could disappear like that, transporting humans should be even simpler. Since he had discovered the existence of the Oracle devices he found this hypothesis more than plausible.

'Paul, I appreciate you revealing all this to me, I really do.' Jake thanked him from the bottom of his heart. 'But it still doesn't explain why. What do you have to gain by telling me all this? »

This time even his own friends looked at Paul curiously. Kanye, Elisa and Sarah trusted him, but it was the first time the trio met Jake.

Pfpi vft tulhzagut Jfcu fl f suzw mztarfzw uqnimwuu, jvmq vu gâzèiw cruj gw rfqu. Yuo ovuaz dazlo aqnzullamr md vaq jfl suzw tadduzuro.

About six feet tall, rather good-looking, with sharp muscles. He had a strange way of expressing himself, rarely smiled and showed little emotion. But other than that, he was rather calm and took them much more seriously than they had initially hoped.

'As I told you earlier, you are in one of my Paths.' Paul explained embarrassedly. 'When I came back to New Paris, I couldn't sleep for the first two days because I was so tense. I was so afraid of dying or being kidnapped in my sleep that I had become completely insomniac.

'At some point, I made a wish. To survive this end of the world. I understood right away when I saw you practicing in the room that your Oracle had given you a similar Path. The only difference is that mine wanted me to meet you beforehand and tell you all of this. »

‘You mean to tell me that according to your Oracle, inviting me tonight and revealing all this information directly increases your chances of surviving what’s coming next?’ Jake summarized, unable to fathom the logic behind this plan...

‘Apparently. But, don’t ask me why, I haven’t the faintest idea. So many possibilities... »

Indeed, there were many possibilities that could justify this meeting. Just going to Paul’s house could have a decisive impact. These revelations could help him to alter his plans, or they could just blow away the flames of his fear, preventing him from relaxing and falling back into his customary laziness.

After this revelation, the quartet returned to the living room, carrying with them the much-awaited pizzas. They tried to have fun and enjoy the party with everyone as if nothing happened.

Jake had lost his interest in that party and was barely able to look the part, falsely chuckling at Harry and Thiru’s jokes. Maybe to forget his anxieties or to do like everyone else, he started to drink more and more.

At first, the atmosphere remained reserved and friendly, then as the evening progressed, beers and wines were replaced by shots and cocktails of strong alcohol, such as tequilas or mojitos.

When Jake’s blood-alcohol level exceeded a certain threshold, he finally began to disinhibit and relax, suddenly becoming much more expressive and cheerful.

He then decided to return to his original plan while he was still sober enough to do the Living Missions to improve his communication skills.

The missions were nonsensical, simply challenging his comfort zone.

Unfortunately, he could not choose his missions. He had to fulfill the conditions of one challenge in order to discover the next one.

[Mission: Hold eye contact with one of the present girls for at least 10 seconds, then wink at her teasingly.]

'Oh, crap... I don't think I've had enough to drink yet.' Panicked Jake, instantly pouring himself a shot of vodka to give himself some courage.

Half an hour later and after three, maybe four more shots, Jake was finally tipsy, with a renewed courage that only alcohol had the secret.

'Okaaaay, here we go! »

Not caring at all about the consequences, he finally began to reason like the rational egoist he had always been. He probably wouldn't see any of these people again, so why bother with the consequences.

Jake scanned each of the guests, trying to catch the attention, even briefly, of one of the women nearby. Miraculously, Camille was looking in his direction. Before he even realized that he knew this person and that she was his superior, he had already stared at her for more than five seconds.

To his great misfortune, Camille maintained eye contact, seeming to be amused by his reaction. Unless she wasn't looking at Jake, but at someone or something behind him? Holy shit! She just smiled back at him. Either way, the alcohol was going to his head, and considering Camille's flushed face, she wasn't much sober either.

[Mallamr: Hmit uwu hmrofho jaov mru md ovu eazil nzuluro dmZ fo iuflo 10 luhmrtl, frt ovur jarc fo vuz ouflareiw]

[Mission accomplished, perfect rating.]

[Authority Level: +1%]

Without even realizing it, he had accomplished his mission. Jake became aware, that he had unconsciously followed a Path to properly time his wink and attitude. It seemed that by being more alcoholic than usual his spontaneity in using the Oracle had increased.

Encouraged by this first success, he started the second mission.

[Mission: Engage in conversation with Camille with an original compliment that she would be proud of, but not used to hearing.]

Jake drew a deep breath. Between holding her eyes and complimenting her directly, there was a chasm that his shyness couldn't cross. He drank another shot, then poured himself another drink before taking his courage in both hands and accosting Camille.

To his great despair, Camille hadn't stopped staring at him, watching his strange quirks. As he walked towards her, all of his neurons were working at the same time in search of the perfect opener. Alas, his usual cleverness seemed to have deserted him.

Desperate, he decided to continue with his Oracle, mimicking his Shadow Guide once again.

'How are you doing, Camille? We never took the time to really talk. I wanted to apologize for leaving work so abruptly, I guess it hasn't been easy to replace me. ' Jake began, in a cordial tone, and ran his hand through his hair with an awkward look on his face that made him seem troubled.

'Don't worry about it. At first with only Harry to run the center it was complicated, but after a week no one came in, so we closed the shop. ' Camille relieved him of his guilt with an encouraging smile.

' Thank God. I was afraid you were angry with me. »

'No, no, don't worry bout it. I'm not the type to hold a grudge for so little. »

'Anyway, I just wanted to say that your curly hair looks great today. Combined with the dress you chose, you look lovely. ' Jake finally managed to reach his target.

[Mission: Engage in conversation with Camille with an original compliment that she would be proud of, but not used to hearing.]

[Mission accomplished, perfect rating.]

[Authority Level: +1%]

One more mission accomplished. It was time to move on to third base.

‘Thank you, Jake, you have no idea how good it makes me feel to hear that. I spent so much time curling them up, I didn’t think anyone would notice. »

‘I’m not very good at finding the right words, but I’ve always been attentive to the details that nobody pays attention to. You can get a lot of information just by looking at people. ‘Jake boasted, with an embarrassed smile.

‘Really? If I point out this person, what do you guess from their appearance?’

‘Camille decided to test him at his own game, showing him Kanye’s older brother, who had broken the ice with them earlier that evening.

‘Hmm, with his looks and clothes he’s...‘

After that, Jake continued to chat with Camille, taking on missions that were increasingly difficult for an introvert like him. When the difficulty became too great, such as when he had to invite her to dance or pull something out of her hair, he would use it as an excuse to go back for a drink.

Camille drank with him and without realizing it, they became closer and closer. The problem was that as his level of drunkenness increased, he began to diverge more and more from the Paths he was supposed to follow.

With the help of alcohol, he found ideas of his own to satisfy the conditions of his Missions, but he also increasingly revealed his true nature, an unfiltered cynicism and black humor.

This did not displease Camille, entranced by his new personality. She realized for the first time that Jake, the least cooperative employee in her VR center, was in fact an exciting person to listen to with a personality full of nuances.

Then finally came the fateful mission. Kiss Camille. At this point in the evening - it wasn't even midnight - Jake was so drunk that he couldn't even tell his right from his left. He was totally freewheeling.

Unfortunately, that didn't stop him from having an adrenaline rush, his heart pounding. For the umpteenth time, he excused himself and ran to the toilet to empty his bladder. A few people were waiting their turn before him, so he waited. Meanwhile, the previous drinks were still taking effect.

When he finally came out of the toilet, he had completely forgotten about Camille and fell asleep on one of the sofas like a drunk homeless man on a sidewalk.

When he woke up a few hours later, he was sober and feeling better. Dazed, the memories of his exploits with Camille came back to him and he started to panic, looking for her.

A nfzo iacu vaq vft tzprc omm qphv frt vft emru om gut ar ovu epulo zmmql. Tvu movuzl juzu loaii tfrhare mZ hvfooare msuz f tzarc.

A few seconds later, he finally found Camille, and with her Thiru. They were intertwined and glued together on the dance floor like two octopuses giving each other mouth-to-mouth.

At that moment, Jake threw up.