

The Oracle Paths

Volume 1: The Oracle

Chapter 27 - A fight to the death

First, Jake activated 'Prediction' to obtain the perfect plan. His reaction time was not yet good enough to follow his Shadow Guide during a fight to the death. His actions would be too slow, delayed far too much to respond adequately to his opponent.

However, he just needed to know the first move. One move, one kill, that was his plan all along.

The Path emerged, revealing the perfect move to perform. The Shadow Guide preceded his movements by a brief second, but remained, totally motionless, adding to his already high stress.

Jake tried to stay focused, forcing himself to take long breaths. Whether he would see the sun this morning or not, depended entirely on his composure.

After a few minutes that seemed endless for him, the Shadow Guide finally showed some changes. A movement was finally shown to him. A clean and efficient hit, if perfectly executed, to kill the mutant mouse instantly.

The move seemed simple at first, but was strangely complex. To be executed correctly, it required a well-trained body and excellent coordination. Anyone could watch a tutorial video on the internet explaining how to perform a break dance figure or a technical gesture from a choreography. But how many could do it right the first time? That was Jake's current situation.

To succeed, he needed to be more focused than ever. The three weeks of training to do all sorts of weird moves finally made sense. Besides the physical conditioning it provided, it prepared his body to respond to the commands of the Shadow Guide.

The horrible translucent creature continued to ignore him, too busy reveling in his prey. Jake could see chunks of his attacker's flesh being chewed into the creature's jaw and then slide down the esophagus as the beast swallowed.

The digestion was awfully fast, with the ingested food dispersing into the monster's stomach and then the small intestine like an effervescent tablet into a glass of water. After that, the nutrients would enter the bloodstream, reaching every cell in the body in a few heartbeats. Jake couldn't believe his eyes.

Worse, he could see the creature's body changing second by second. It wasn't obvious at first, but after a few minutes of feasting, it was slightly different. A little bigger, but nothing excessive. On the other hand, its claws had grown a full centimeter longer and seemed sharper than ever before. There was also a strange silvery glow pulsating in the monster's eyes.

It was too much for Jake's nerves to handle. He gritted his teeth and took action. There was no room for error and he was so focused that he felt like he was living the scene in slow motion.

He let himself tip forward, then when his body formed a 30° angle with the ground, he pushed with all his strength on his legs to pounce on his target. At the same time, he slashed forward with his knife raised, aiming for the neck. If he succeeded, the beast would be decapitated with a single stroke. If he failed, he would be on his own.

And to fail, he failed. When he was less than fifty centimeters from his initial target, the mouse looked at him on alert. Its mouth was still chewing and full of blood, but there was only fierce rage and malevolence on its face. Absolutely no fear could be felt, just an undisguised disdain for a creature disturbed during its meal.

Before Jake could understand anything, his knife plunged into the dead serial killer's shoulder instead of his intended target. No blood spatter this time, the victim being completely exsanguinated. The mouse had fully vamped him already.

In response, the mouse jumped on his face after dodging the killing stroke by twisting its own neck like a snake. For a brief millisecond, Jake was overcome with despair, thinking, 'It's over'. Then his reflexes took over and remembering the futile death of his previous attacker, he raised both arms to protect his face and neck.

The creature hit its left arm instead of its head, and then bit the first lump of meat within jaw's reach. The mouse had a chewing strength comparable to that of a tiger, and if the beast had been any bigger, it would probably have ripped off its arm.

Instead, he kept his arm, but the rodent's teeth went into his biceps, stopping upon contact with the humerus. Simultaneously, the damn thing clutched like a gold digger at the arm of a billionaire, lacerating his tattered arm with its claws.

The Shadow Guide was now useless and Jake's pain was so paroxysmal that he couldn't have paid attention anyway.

But paradoxically, in his suffering and sense of helplessness, he reacted in the most banal but terribly effective way against this carnivorous ersatz of a koala that was mistaking his arm for a tree trunk.

'Will you get off me, you piece of shit?!' Jake screamed with an unbridled rage gushing out from the depths of his soul.

The alley was narrow and he was trapped between two walls to his left and right. He slammed into the nearest wall and performed the most violent backhand stroke of his left arm in his entire life.

The outside of his arm crashed against the concrete wall at full power, the mouse serving as his airbag. The first impact loosened the monster's teeth. The second

impact caused the monster to squeak with pain, relieving Jake of his own. On the third impact, the rodent let go and slid down the wall, half knocked out.

The next few minutes Jake released all his frustration from the past few weeks. He kicked and kicked the mouse, like a football player would kick a soccer ball for a penalty.

Adouz ovu dazlo duj gimjl, ovu hzufopzu lomnut lhzufqare dmz emmt.
Urdmzoprfoiww, ovu gmtw loaii buzcut gw zudiuk dzmq oaqu om oaqu frt Jfcu
vft rm arouroamr md iufsare frw zmmq dmz hvfrhu. Hu hmroarput om lozacu
proai ovu qmrlouz jfl rmovare qmzu ovfr f daru gimmtw qplv lnifoouzut fefarlo
ovu jfii.

In his moment of madness, he didn't notice the Oracle's notifications scrolling one after the other. Only his survival instincts governed his body, and it told him to continue until he was certain that the enemy had been annihilated. And with a mutant monster like that, he could expect anything, conventional logic not necessarily being a good advisor when dealing with alien things.

Finally, after an incalculable time and when he was so out of breath that he couldn't stand upright, Xi's soft and reassuring voice chimed in his ears.

[You can stop, Jake. The Digestor is dead.]

The physically and mentally exhausted young man didn't notice at that moment the strange energy evaporating from the corpse and being sucked through his bracelet. If he could see the phenomenon, he would have described it as a kind of silvery stream of light.

If his eyesight was even better, and he could zoom in and out a few quintillion times, he could have discovered how this energy formed a kind of code. An energetic code, like the DNA was a biological one.

But as these strange symbols were being swallowed up by his bracelet in an uninterrupted manner, they were infinitely compressed losing their structure and becoming pure energy again.

A moment later, Jake finally crossed the threshold of his door. He had left the half-eaten corpse of the criminal and the crushed carcass of the mouse as they were in the middle of the alley. If a passerby discovered the scene of carnage the next day, he was good for PTSD.

Jake disinfected, then dressed his wound, which was starting to hurt like hell again now that the adrenaline was going down. After that, he slumped down on his couch, looking lost. That night had definitely been way too eventful for him. Crunch for once seemed to sense his master's distress and trotted beside him, sniffing his bloody shoes, only to finally curl up on his lap, purring with satisfaction.

Jake couldn't be sure, but he could have sworn that the cat had recognized the smell of the mouse on his body. The damn thing had been a nightmare for both the owner and the cat, and knowing it was gone was extremely soothing to their minds. Only for the cat's, though.

As for Jake, he couldn't help thinking that mutated monsters like that one, there must be thousands of others in New Paris alone. A few weeks before, the mouse was already brave enough to attack alley cats, but not yet bold enough to attack him, a human. That night had changed all that.

He now had proof that these monsters no longer feared his kind, and that meant that any walk in New Paris was now a matter of life and death. He couldn't wall himself off at home if he wanted to continue training, but his unarmed days were behind him.

Uncle Kalen's weapons had been delivered some time ago. From guns to assault rifles, from military knives to nano-carbon fiber katana, he was equipped enough to take on an army.

Now it was time to find out what all the notifications that had flashed before his eyes during his fight to the death were for.