

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 33 - Welcome to Planet B842

‘Beep beep! »

A disheveled human form blindly fumbled with one arm over his duvet in search of the screaming alarm. 7:00 a.m. Some time ago, he would have made himself a champion breakfast before going to the gym. But not this time.

Three months had passed since the day he killed his first Digestor. It was now December and the icy atmosphere had little to do with the temperature.

When he had asked Xi three months earlier how to get Aether and overcome his physical and mental limitations, the answer had been quite simple. Killing Digestors.

Problem was, it was easier said than done. His victory over that infernal mouse was more a matter of luck than martial skills. If the rodent had been one tiny bit smarter and more responsive, his corpse would be rotting in that alley instead of that creature.

Far from overcoming his fear of the monster, the nightmares full of Digestors and rodents of all kinds had started all over again. He quickly realized that killing this mouse hadn't changed anything.

He was still the same insecure Jake, inclined to procrastinate. There was one difference though, the urgency to survive.

By the next day, he had resumed training and survival lessons, continuing to follow his Shadow Guide. He had literally become the shadow of his Shadow. Who was the shadow of who was open to debate.

While he was deadlifting weights in the middle of his training routine, he had asked Xi a question that had been bugging him since the day before.

‘Xi, why do I always need to train if the Aether can do the same job?’

[Because you don’t have any Aether.] Xi had taunted him laconically.

‘Oh... Good point.’ Jake had grunted, feeling ridiculous.

[There’s another reason. I told you the Aether was pure energy, but that’s a simplified explanation. Think of it more as a catalyst or an amplifier. One point of Aether in strength won’t literally increase your strength by one point.]

‘I’m not sure I understand.’

[Assuming that the Aether ratio on Earth is 10, and your strength is worth 10 points, adding one Aether point will actually increase your strength to 11. But if your strength is 20, one Aether point will increase your strength to 22.]

[Your body soaks up Aether and makes good use of it, but your body, or matter in general, is still the main vector. The encoded Aether at your disposal has no special quality except to bind the Aether to the parts of your body that need it.]

[An infinite amount of Aether can give infinite energy to a single particle, but that particle needs to exist first. At least, that’s all you need to remember for now.]

Xi had also advised him to set his stats in Aether points rather than physically comparing himself to others of his kind. At first this might be confusing, but he would soon realize why this was preferable.

Switching between Physical and Aether statuses would allow him to keep tabs between his Aether levels and the actual level of his body. For example, the human

body could hardly exceed 30 points of strength. It was a biological limit. Same for intelligence, the highest IQ recorded was 234 points, or 23.4 points.

Tvu emmt rujl jfl ovfo Auovuz frt gmtw gamimew juzu arouzfhoare jaov lmqu lwruzew. Tm efar qplhiu, dmz ukfqniu, ovu gmtw ruutut om ozfar vfzt, lplofarare qplhiu tfqfeu. Waov f nzmnuZ tauo frt urmpev zulo, ovu qplhiu jmpit gu zunfazut, guhmqare lozmreuz ovfr ao jfl mzaearfiw.

More Aether in vitality, for example, would result in an increased metabolism. As a result, digestion, recovery and muscle synthesis would be faster. It would then be possible to train more often, shortening rest periods.

The same was true for the constitution or strength. A better constitution or muscular strength would make it possible to lift heavier and longer, allowing better stimulation.

So that's what Jake did. He practiced night and day, forgetting his distress and fears and dedicating himself to his self-development.

For the first few weeks, his daily routine remained much the same as the previous month. Then the strange phenomena described by Paul began to visibly affect New Paris.

Houses began to disappear, roads became shorter and shorter, and chaos set in. People stopped working, staying shut up at home with their loved ones.

At the same time, criminals and delinquents began to proliferate without a sufficient police force to keep them in check.

Jake continued to go to the gym and shop for a while, always carrying a gun and a military knife with him. Maybe because he had a different aura after killing a Digestor or because his physique had become quite fit, no one messed with him.

Then the day came when new land came in the way between his home and his gym. In panic, he spent more than 8 hours wandering around with the help of his Oracle before finally returning home.

After that, he rushed to the nearest supermarket and robbed it by filling a huge shopping cart, before hurrying home. Since then, like everyone else, he had been stuck at home.

Jfcu hmroarput om aqaofou val Svftmj Gpatu, nzfhoahare frt iufzrare fo vmqu. Tvu Svftmj Gpatu lvmjut vaq vmj om plu usuzw dazufzq ar val nmlullamr, vmj om vfrtiu f cradu. Hu nzfhoahut fii lmzol md ouhvraypul frt qmsuqurol faqut fo saofi nmarol.

After two months, he hardly dared to look out the window anymore. The city of New Paris had become unrecognizable and apart from a few buildings, he didn't recognize much of anything.

Then one morning he realized that a building near his home was two stories lower. Another was missing a section. He then realized that even at home, part of his apartment could disappear at any time.

Becoming half paranoid, he began to sleep in the living room in the middle of all his food rations, weapons and ammunition. Even Crunch seemed to have understood his master's concerns and began to sleep only on the sofa bed in the living room.

Thus Jake and his cat spent the third month together. When Jake woke up this morning, he didn't look like the nerd he was four months ago. He was still the same shut-in but not for the same reasons.

His hair needed a good chisel, and his two-week-old beard was also a sign of his slackness. By contrast, no skinny-fat body or acne linked to overindulgence and sedentariness could be seen this time. He was ripped as fućk.

More than once in the last month the Digestors had climbed the wall of his building and after killing the eighth one, something had died inside him. As the Digestors got bigger and bigger, more deformed and vicious, there was nothing left in him but apathy.

When he got out of bed, he knew right away that something was wrong. He got dressed urgently, putting on the clothes he had planned for the situation. He put on khaki military trousers, a black t-shirt, a bullet-proof vest and a thermal jacket.

He grabbed his huge backpack, which contained everything he needed to survive comfortably in the wilderness. From a tent to spare clothing, his bag weighed well over 30 kilos. He could not carry all his weapons, but he had a few knives, a long machete, two 9mm pistols and an assault rifle.

Loaded as he was, Jake realized it was ridiculous. He could never take all of this with him. But at least it made him feel safer.

Crunch was standing next to him, watching him with his ears down, visibly scared. Jake didn't have a plan for his cat. Even though he had become attached to it after all this time, he couldn't see how to guarantee its survival.

After all, it was just a cat. He could only hope that the Oracle had a solution to guide pets in such situations.

Suddenly, the flash of light that could never be forgotten from four months ago struck again. He felt something stirring inside him, as if an entity against which he could do nothing was redefining the very definition of his existence.

Then the uneasy feeling disappeared as it had come, giving way to quietude. The black cat also turned his head in all directions, searching in vain for the origin of this quirk.

At last, when he regained his sight, Jake took his courage in both hands, and with heavy breathing approached the window. The sight he saw there took his breath away.

His apartment was in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by unknown landscapes. Even the other apartments in his building had been sent somewhere else. He didn't live on the ground floor, and yet his apartment was now at ground level. He had left the Earth. He was now alone, on his own.

[Welcome to Planet B842!] Murmured Xi, in a soft and compassionate voice.