

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 1: The Oracle

### Chapter 6 – Risk and Reward

[I will now introduce 'Coaching' the last feature of Guidance.] The Oracle AI declared solemnly.

By now, many questions were piling up in Jake's mind. His legs were twitching on the sofa and his head wobbled back and forth. That was what happened when he was slowly losing his cool. A strong impulse of impatience was tickling his self-control, making it harder and harder to ignore.

However, he knew somehow — because of their mind link perhaps— that the AI didn't want to be interrupted. He had a hard time believing that the personality of his Oracle A.I was the fruit of his own mind, configured to make their relationship the most ideal and smooth.

When he tried to reminisce, what was the perfect woman in his dreams, he couldn't help but admit that both of them had one common point. Their voice. But that was it. He was not a submissive person. Introverted, uncommunicative, he was. However, although he had not yet decided what kind of woman he liked, he was pretty sure he wouldn't want her to ignore him like she had already a few times .

He didn't modify the A.I settings though. Maybe, it was his legendary laziness that was tricking his mind. Or else, he consciously didn't know that he needed such a woman around him. That was even creepier, understood this way. In this case, it would mean that he had absolutely no secret garden to protect his most shameful secrets.

[Coaching is one of the most useful function of the Oracle. It will accompany you for every decision you take. Every opportunity, every chance, the Coach will help you to weigh the pros and cons. It can be turned on or off at will, but do accept that it can't be totally deactivated.]

[Coaching is the Oracle feature of Guidance that will lead you to meaningful choices, allowing you to become a better version of yourself. If Prediction and Shadow Guide are wish-fulfilling abilities, which only exist to assist your will, Coaching has for purpose to help you to evolve further.]

[It will display in an understandable way the possible Rewards and Punishments normally following your decisions, should you perform them until the end. This way, it gives you a better understanding of your choices' implications.]

[However, that is only potential rewards or punishments. You could badly perform or change your mind midway. Even when you're walking along a Path, the potential rewards displayed would only be under the assumption that you perfectly accomplish it. Otherwise, you would only obtain a fraction of the full Rewards or, if you completely failed, probably nothing but the Punishments.]

[Do consider the weight of your decisions before flinging yourself into a dead end.]

[As aforementioned, it can be turned off. Though, not completely. The Coach will always show itself when there is a key opportunity for you.]

[These opportunities will always be in agreement with what you truly seek deep inside yourself. Whether it is love, wealth, power, recognition or something else you truly desire, the Coach will always highlight for you such opportunities when they manifest.]

[I jaii rmj fhoasfou ovu Cmfhvare dufopzu.]

A buzzing sound splitting his head combined with the usual mass of blue light, to which he was slowly getting used to. A new wave of information assaulted his mind, shedding light on his ignorance. Once again, he instantly knew how to operate Coaching. With a thought, he turned on the Coach.

Nothing happened.

However, it did not mean that nothing changed. He tried the same Predictions as before, like 'How to seduce an actress of his choice in the shortest time?'

He chose one from an A-list, Sarah Olsen. Not a woman to his taste, but an unreachable one. The typical fortyish-year-old famous actress, with a successful career, a loving husband and three children. Logically, an impossible feat. But Prediction still worked. The Path still existed, though there was now the Coach's pinch of salt complementing the latter.

[Rewards:]

[-Seducing Sarah Olsen.]

[- Communication skill +24]

[Acting skill: + 76]

[Etiquette skill: +27]

[Suid-ulouuq: +88]

[(list of skills improving) ...]

[- Basic attribute: Strength +1, Agility +2, Constitution +1, Intelligence +0.5 (More data available if needed)]

[Fame: +375]

[Punishment:]

[- Attempts on your life: death 51 hours after succeeding the Path, if tried as it is.]

[- Getting married, raising her three children as a househusband.]

[Quarrels and divorce as soon as you stop following the Path.]

[Infamy: +648 Ex-husbands' fans will want your death, together with all fans of Sarah Hilton shipping the original couple.]

[Risks: Life imprisonment, wounds, death, losing your job.]

[Pzmgfgaiaow md lphhull: imj]

[Probability of failure: very high]

He took a deep breath. He was already sweating profusely, shivers up his spine when he got to the Punishment part. If he was to blindly throw himself into this Path, he could as well shoot himself a bullet in the head right now. The result would be the same.

He promised himself to never turn off the Coaching ability. He liked having the chills from time to time, but he would never play with his life.

As an optimistic person, Jake would rather focus on the rewards.

'It really looks like a game.' He couldn't help thinking the Oracle device had enticing game-mechanics.

The only difference was that these rewards were not Quest rewards, but the logical consequences of walking through a Path until the very end. There was no checkpoint or difficulty level. He couldn't know all the steps from a Path, but the Coach was giving him some clues.

The first clue was his skills and basic attributes' improvement. It was telling him that this Path would take quite a long time to finish. From the first steps that he could already see, he would have to follow harsh training to get a physique to the taste of Miss Hilton. Simultaneously, he would have to take some acting lessons at the theater and learning quite a few things. At the very least, he would need a few months.

To be honest, he could get the same rewards, minus Sarah Hilton, just by doing the preparation steps. There probably were shorter Paths to select, requiring killing or blackmailing maybe. However, he would never try them.

On the one hand, he was not a criminal, and on the other hand, there was no escape with the Oracle. Policemen had Oracle bracelets too. They could easily wish ‘How can I catch the culprit in the soonest time?’. Then they would never lose your location, whatever you try, the same way a compass would always point out the North.

[Dm wmp vfsu frw ypuloamrl?] Tvu Ozfhiu A.I flcut jaov ovu lfqu hpou smahu. Nm taltfar jfl vattur ar ao dmz mrhu.

He had many of them in fact, but he controlled himself. He would have all the time to ask her everything he craved knowing. First, he would ask her name. He could not call her Oracle AI forever. That would be awkward.

[My name is Xi.] She answered gravely as if her name had a deep meaning for her.

Damn, it was supposed to be a simple AI? My àss! Configured to be best suited for him? It WAS a real person. He was doubting it before, but the name confirmed it. Not even in his wildest fantasies had he dreamt of such a short foreign name.

‘Nice to meet you Xi. Any surname?’

[Just Xi.]

‘...’

[ I see where you are coming, so I will spare you wasting your time.]

[ Your Authority level is insufficient.]

[ Us, AI are all interchangeable pawns. As authentic as I can seem, my actions are restricted by the Oracle.]

‘You are always saying that my Authority level is insufficient! Then how can I raise it?’ That was the answer he was burning for.

[By making good use of the Oracle. The Coach will show you the way if you know how to interpret his advice. Become a better version of yourself. That is the only way to figure out what lies beyond your small world.

[If you perform repeatedly above your normal self, eventually your Authority level will be promoted.]

Jake got goosebumps for a long time after Xi final declaration. He felt the adrenaline rush flowing his bloodstream, making his heart pumping stronger and faster.

If you were proactive, confident and successful in life, you couldn’t understand how a disillusioned introvert with a high IQ felt on a day-to-day basis. He was too perfectionist, too scared of being rejected or failing anything he could undertake. He was also too smart, too down-to-earth to attempt anything he wasn’t one hundred percent sure to accomplish. His life was basically riddled with doubts.

This Oracle System was palliating all of this. Fundamentally, his life didn’t change yet. But now, doubts had been replaced by certitudes. From now on, he would never lose his Path.