

The Oracle Paths

Volume 1: The Oracle

Chapter 8 – Encounter

‘How is this possible?!’ He exclaimed, puffing loudly. ‘Did the Oracle make him do this?’

[Without a doubt.] Xi said with what he imagined to be a very lackadaisical face.

‘But how? There is a difference between ringing a doorbell and discovering some bills, to bring them back to me.’

[Not really.] She refuted without the slightest hesitation. [For this cat it was probably coming all down to ‘I want to be safe’, ‘I’m hungry’ or ‘I want to be taken care of’. It doesn’t need to understand why it does these things, as long as it understands that it has to do them to get what it wants.]

[It is still surprising that it has tolerated his double Shadow Guide so fast. Lions learn quite fast when they’re imitating another one, but they naturally form prides with up to twenty lioness and cubs. They work as a social group. Cats are rarely friendly or cooperative, especially with cats outside their parents, brothers and sisters. Its intelligence for a cat is quite high.]

Jake rolled down his eyes. He had seen the intelligence attribute of this stray cat. Nothing to strut about.

[Intelligence: 3 points]

Compared to a human he would probably be considered as deeply retarded.

[You are wrong.] Xi refuted him again. [Cat and human brains have a different structure. If a cat is less intelligent than the average human, they also have aspects

in which they are better. Like for example, picking different smells, or body balance.]

[What you have to look at is its intelligence compared to a normal cat. He has about 3 points. According to my data, the average cat has only 2. Do I have to explain to you the difference between a human with 100 IQ and another with 150 ?]

‘Thanks, but no thanks.’ He grunted, not enjoying the whiplash of sarcasm.

Indeed, viewed from this perspective, this cat was one hell of a genius. You could probably teach him quite a few circus tricks even before the Oracle devices’ appearance. Anyway, he earned 500 bucks today! All his previous anxiety was gone, replaced by blissful joy.

He finally felt moved by this black cat.

‘All right, you can stay here for the time being. I’ll consider you paid your rent for this month.’ He nodded to the cat.

He didn’t know if the cat understood him, but its ears that were down straightened up again.

‘So how should I call you ? Any idea Xi ?’ He consulted the Oracle AI. With her database, she should at least have a few ideas to suggest.’

[Authority level insufficient. I can’t make a decision in your place.] She refused to help. [However, I suggest to choose a name that fits his nature, behavior or physical characteristics. It would make his name more impactful.]

‘All right, I have one perfect name for him then. He was doing crunching noises like crazy while eating can tuna, so I think ‘Crunch’ will be a perfect name.’

[The name has been accepted and recorded by the cat’s Oracle. After a while, he will associate ‘Crunch’ to himself. Crunch has also been added in your Oracle Status as your Pet. It will allow you to check his information at any time.]

[Do note that 'Crunch' can also register you as his Pet. There is no hierarchy between species for the Oracle. Only authority levels. You should be glad that it is not intelligent enough yet to reverse the contract between both of you.]

'Huh, what contract?' He rose to her words with a scowl.

[Nothing you have to worry about for now. It will maybe become relevant in the future. It is beneficial for you, anyway.]

'Ok, I don't care anymore. I'll take it easy for today. But now that I have a new guest, I guess I should go shopping a little bit to the supermarket. There it is! How I wasted my day-off, at the grocery store...' He sighed.

'Let's do it fast.'

Tvu jufovuz jfl lhmzhvare omtfw, dpil-lpqquz hmqgarut om eimgfi jfzqare vft qftu ovu hiaqfou guhmqu vfzlvuz ovfr usuz. Wvfo jfl mrhu f ouqnuzfou hiaqfou vft opzrut arom f ozmnahti mru. Tm qfcu ao laqniu, ao jfl uaovuz lhmzhvare mz zfarare gphcuol.

Jake slipped a pair of sneakers on, then got out as he was, clothed plainly. A white tee-shirt and cheap jeans. Except for his new black and shiny bracelet, there were no distinctive signs. No tattoos, no piercings. His unkempt hair that needed a good cut could perhaps be considered as such.

Now he had to decide what to do about this cat. Let him inside his home alone? Or take him with him to the supermarket? In the end, the cat chose for him. As soon as he headed for the front door, Crunch followed him like a faithful dog.

After all, it was originally a stray cat. The street was his previous home.

He wished for how to finish his shopping in the shortest time and Prediction quickly gave a result. A fetch of himself appeared, guiding him efficiently. Coaching gave him a quick report of the expected risks and rewards, and thankfully everything was fine. That should be an easy matter.

It was supposed to be.

Jake hurtled down the stairway leading to the street level. He lived on the fourth floor. A bulletproof glazed door prevented access to the inside of the building for the non-residents. He just realized that the cat also somehow had to pass the entrance before climbing the stairs to his front door. He wouldn't even be surprised if the cat had used the elevator.

Although the temperature was near 40 degrees Celsius, the sky was blue, with no clouds on the horizon. The supermarket was a bit less of 10 minutes away on foot, so he took the decision to walk. The Shadow Guide that was waving to a cab immediately adjusted to Jake change of mind.

Not even three minutes after leaving his apartment block, Jake became painfully aware of how empty were the streets. The alien ship terrified people early in the morning and now most of them took a day off like him, opting for staying with their close ones.

He just realized how weird he was.

Hu lvmpit vfsu guur jmzzaut fgmpo fii oval fiaur gpiilvao, gpo vuzu vu jfl, duuiare fiqmlo omm vfnw dmz val mjr emmt. Ogsampliw, vu hmpit duui lmquovare jfl jzmre jaov ovulu Ozfhiu tusahul, gpo jvfo jfl rmo dpccèt pn ovulu tfwl?

Global warming, nuclear winter, lost his parents when he was a baby, take your pick.

Anyway! Jake strutted alone in the street and he liked it. In a way, he experienced a kind of freedom and peace that he rarely enjoyed. It would not last forever.

In the end, his purchasing took him the rest of the morning and most part of his afternoon. The grocery store was practically empty, only one female cashier holding down the supermarket.

Jake bought many things, not only the cat essentials. Litter, cat kibble, scratcher, claw clippers, he got them all. He also bought some beef meat for the first time in a year. He had probably forgotten the taste of a good flank steak by now.

No vegan campaign in the early 22nd century. Everyone was vegan by default. Considering the meat price, the cattle lived in better condition than him. Well, at least he was alive, while this beef steak would finish in his stomach, before being pooped to oblivion.

However, it didn't mean humans were not the livestock of some other species. Survival of the fittest. Alien ships, remember? His paranoid side was manifesting again. It was time to go home.

The sun was still high in the sky when he walked back. As nobody cared, he just left the store with a shopping cart, intending to bring it back the next day. A lazy man always knew how to save himself.

When he was halfway from home, something happened.

'Hiiiiissss', 'MEOOWWW'

Twناهfi hfo daevol. Hu vufzt ovuq vallare frt lnaoore fo ufhv movuz dzmq ovu gfhc fiiuw mr val zaevo. Io jfl ypaou tfzc ovuzu frt ao hmrozflout jaov ovu gzaevo latujfic aipqarfout gw lprzfwl vu jfl jficare mr.

This good Crunch should have been one of these proud cats fućking around undefeated, as despite his short legs, he was surprisingly exempt from scars. Most stray cats had some tears on their ears or small scars on the nose.

He immediately understood how wrong he was. Crunch was shaking behind his leg, his straightened up hair and arched back showing he was on flight or fight mode. It didn't quite fit his previous placid temper.

Suddenly, there were scratching and biting noises, followed by a sharp cat shriek. Another cat yelped, there were some muffled noises closing to them. A few seconds later, a horrifying sight froze his blood.

One Siamese alley cat came out of the darkness covered in blood. It was crawling, missing both of its hind legs and an eye. It didn't make even one meter outside the dark alley, before falling dead on the ground a few meters in front of him.

Then something even worse happened. The dead cat was dragged back inside and devoured, letting both him and his new cat partner frozen under the summer sun. And what was the monster that did this?

A mouse. Just a little mouse.
