

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 1: The Oracle

### Chapter 7 - A guest

Jake had so many questions to which he wanted the answers, but at the same time, he was so afraid to hear them. He couldn't help thinking there was something wrong. How could such benevolent aliens offer to every human a device that was technologically so many years ahead in the future? It didn't make any sense.

No gift came for free.

Xi was ceaselessly invoking his insufficient authority to deny his right to the truth. She was obviously hiding an ominous secret that couldn't be revealed at any cost. To understand what was the purpose of these Oracle bracelets, he had to think outside of the box. What was the direct effect of such a gift in the long run? For one person, it was a blessing, but at the planet scale, the implications were totally different—

‘DING DONG’

Before he could get distressed any further, the ringing of a doorbell resounded loud and clear in his living room. His doorbell.

He wasn't waiting for anyone. At this time of the day, he was supposed to be at work. No one had any duplicate key, not even his cousin. As a proud shut-in, he wouldn't give any spare key to anyone, subject to be surprised at the wrong time, doing the wrong thing. In addition, he didn't trust anyone, not even himself.

Jake stumbled toward the door with a wary face. Thinking about the tumult that was sure to happen, he finally chickened out, running back to get a knife in the

kitchen. He then walked prudently on tip-toe until the front door. He then sneaked a peek behind the peep-hole. Nobody.

Upset, he walked back to the living room, collapsing into his sofa. It was far too much stress in one morning. But then, the doorbell rang again. Twice in a row.

‘DING DONG, DING DONG’

He sat up abruptly, his eyes wholly open. This time, no precaution was taken. He rushed to the front door and slammed it open. Before him, to the left, to the right, still nobody. When he was firmly convinced that the electronic bell was buggy, his peripheral sight caught a movement. A black mass of hair. He looked down at his feet.

One wretched man and one wretched cat glared at each other for the first time. The first duel of stares of a long series. After an undetermined amount of time, the stray cat looked away, quickly charging inside the studio.

‘What the hell is this fućking cat doing?!’. He yelled enraged, running after the feline.

This situation was ridiculous! A stray cat rang his doorbell, waiting for Jake to open the door. Had his life become a joke for good? Even alley cats could creep into his condo without showing him the slightest respect.

Smmr, ovu lozfw hfo jfl lhzfohvare val hifjl mr val iufovuz lmdf, qfcare vaq hzw gimmt oufzl.

‘Shhhh, get the fućk out of here!’ He screamed at the cat, stomping and making noise in order to stimulate his fleeing instincts.

Unfortunately, it was not a stray cat for nothing. It had his fair share of interactions with other humans and he knew how to distinguish real hostility from helplessness.

Jake threw in the towel soon after.

Resigning himself, he focused on the stray cat appearance. It was a black Himalayan Persian cat. Long hair, short legs, a red nose flat as if it had been punched at birth. He cast a quick glance below. It was a male, no doubt about this. No girl would be so tousled and dirty. Although it would be an absurdly cute ball of fur after a good bath, it still had nasty yellow eyes with vertical slits, preventing any compassionate feelings to kick in.

Should he just catch him in his arms with force and throw him out? Or perhaps, he should try to compromise and give him something to eat. He didn't have any cat kibble, but he could still give him a can of tuna or something of that kind.

He went back into the kitchen, finally putting his knife down into its drawer. He was spending a good part of his money on junk-food deliveries, so he had almost no real food into his kitchen storage space. Even so, he still found a few cans of tuna at the bottom of one of the cupboards. He opened it, poured the content into a small plate, and filled a bowl with water. He then set them down on the floor, just beside the front door.

The perfect plan.

The black ball of fur was already l~~ick~~ing his lips when he uncapped the can of tuna. At last, when his long-awaited meal touched the floor, it galloped with his short paws toward the food.

Staring at the cat engulfing the food as if there was no tomorrow, he finally relaxed. He had noticed the little black ring at his front-right leg. An Oracle device!

He reminisced the Earth President's speech an hour ago. He had mentioned 'every living being' when talking about the Oracle bracelet. It was not a mistake.

While the cat was devouring his meal, doing unexplainable crunching noises — nothing crispy in tuna—, Jake interrogated Xi.

'How does the Oracle work for animals?' He asked with a puzzled expression. 'You can't expect them to read the Status screen, right?'

[It is very simple.] She answered with a steady voice. [Even for you, whether it is Status, Prediction, Shadow Guide or Coaching, they are always displayed in the most understandable way.]

[ A logical math-oriented person will see numbers or percentage, a younger child would read or hear simple words instead, like ‘Good‘ or ‘Very good‘ . A baby would have a feeling instead of a value, but some functions would be locked to avoid him to fry his brain.]

[Animals with low intelligence enter in the same category as human babies. Depending on their privileged way to communicate, it will use pictures, smells or intents to point out the right direction or solution to them. However, most animals will make very limited use of their Oracle.]

[Cats for example often see new cats as enemies or mating partners. They officially don’t succeed the mirror-test that consist to recognize yourself in the mirror. As a result, they won’t accept the Shadow Guide help and would hiss or attack it. For them, this fetch is just another cat that doesn’t have anything in common with them.]

[After a few days or weeks, with the Oracle help like smells, pheromones and other comforting tricks, the cat will accept its Shadow Guide and starts to improve.]

[This black cat is an exception.]

Jake, that was listening to Xi while watching the stray cat eating, frowned after hearing her. Pets were not as popular as before since the False Third War. Cat and dogs kibble were almost as expensive as meat. In a world, where most people couldn’t even afford to buy any of them, it had become a luxury. Otherwise, how could a Persian cat barely survive in the streets ?

‘You mean he had used the Oracle to find my home because he was hungry?’ He asked with an undisguised surprise.

[Certainly. If not, that would be a genius cat. Though, considering he came just a little time after you all received your Oracle device, it is unlikely.]

‘Can you have access to his Oracle data?’

[I can, but with your Authority level, you will have to put your bracelets in contact.]

‘Alright, let’s try this while he is busy having his fill.’ He said excitedly.

Jake walked with caution toward the cat for nothing, as he was royally ignored. He easily made contact with his right front-paw black ring, linking their Oracles in a blink.

[Species: Himalayan Persian Cat]

[Age: 2 years]

[Weight: 4.5kg]

The black cat had negligible basic attributes and was underfed. He had a few skills fitting of a cat like clawing, hissing, meowing, self-cleaning, purring and other typical cat’s habits. He was also good at digging and swimming. Not the typical skill set you would expect from an interior pet.

Adouz f jvau, ovu lozfw hfo vft iahcut hiufr val nifou md oprf frt vft rmj f lft immc ovfo jfl lfware vu jmpit rmo vfsu zudplut f iaooiu ukozf. Hmjusuz, ao jfl oaqu dmz vaq om iasu. Jfcu vft ruaovuz ovu oaqu rmz ovu qufrl om cuun vaq.

Even if he had a bachelor after the False World War the salaries were low. His paycheck was 2000 Earth dollars per month, but fresh food like fruit, meat, fish or vegetables were ten times more expensive than the early 21st century. So, like many poor people before him, he lived off cheap vegan protein blend and junk food to keep his chin up.

Jake opened the door, ready to take the cat in his arm to bring it outside. As if having felt his intention, the black cat had a distressed face for an instant, but soon

after he seemed to liven up again. The ball of fur pulled out an unidentifiable object under his welcome mat, then pushed it toward him with a loyal expression.

Curious, Jake reached down to the object. It was a creased piece of paper having been soaked in cat spit. It was wet and cold, looking good for the trash bin. However, when he finished unfolding the paper, his face changed.

‘500 Dollars!’