

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

### Chapter 155 - Unexpected Encounter

Jake may have been curious, but he couldn't wait to find a place where he could settle down out of sight and finally check out his rewards. When he opened his backpack to retrieve a rope to descend the cliff, he caught a glimpse of two Blue Cubes of the size of a Rubik's cube inside that looked just like the ones the drones kept carrying around in a hurry.

To be quite honest, they had come across quite a few Cubes of all kinds of colors since their arrival on B842, but especially since their entry into the Oracle City. Just outside the Oracle Playground, they had seen other Cubes as big as the Red Cube in which they had made their Ordeal.

Notably, two huge Green and Blue Cubes respectively, as well as an even more massive Yellow Cube in the heart of the city. Even within the Oracle Playground, smaller Orange Cubes seemed to act as teleporters inside the building, and a large Yellow Cube about ten meters tall stood atop a skyscraper that they could see from their position.

At first they thought they had reached the central plaza of the city, but after acclimatizing to the place they soon noticed the other similar plazas nearby. The Plaza and the Orange Cube that had brought them there were currently on the perimeter of a circle marking the outer boundary of the city.

On this paved road around the city, other plazas were visible every fifty meters, each with its own Orange Cube. Although they thought the city was completely uninhabited at first, they soon saw other humans materializing not far from them on the adjacent paved plazas.

When Kyle saw other humans, he was tempted to approach them to gather information, but Jake held his arm back as he noticed their style of dress and appearance. In addition to wearing strange, spongy-looking armor, each of them was almost ten feet tall, which was probably close to the size limit allowed in this location.

‘We’ll have plenty of time to make friends with all these aliens, but for now we’re just here to familiarise ourselves with the place.’ Jake called the shots. ‘We can spread out if you want, I’ll be back in front of that Cube in half an hour.’

The group discussed among themselves for a few minutes, but all agreed. In principle, they were safe as long as they did not try anything suspicious. Many Oracle drones were actively monitoring the area and there were no dark or unfamiliar alleys.

As a leisure town, it was a place reserved for wealthy Players and Evolvers, so there was little chance of anyone breaking the rules. When in doubt, it was best to walk around in pairs.

Xi, confirmed to him that they could communicate without any problem via their wristbands, but that remote communications cost Aether and the range was limited to about ten times that of the Scan. For Jake, who was Sergeant, this meant that he could contact his group members up to 500 meters away without any problem, the scan being limited to 50 meters. It wasn’t miraculous, but it was a start.

Sarah agreed to go for a walk with Kyle, while Will and Tim formed another pair. The first duo was in good shape and could square the city much faster than Will and Tim, whose stats were more modest.

Al dmz Jfcu, vu hmpit hmsuz ovu haow ar f duj qarpoul frt ao jfl qphv qmzu uddahauro dmz vaq om gu mr val mjr. Id mru md ovuq dmprt lmquovare arouzuloare, ovuw hmpit ozw om hmrofho ufhv movuz saf ovuaz gzfhuuiol mz jfao proai ovuw emo gfhc om ovu nifxf om iuo ovuq crmj.

Having no idea of Crunch's real physical level, he decided to let him follow Will and Tim with whom he got along well. His behaviour was excellent for the moment. Perhaps not yet as intelligent as a human, but he understood the instructions he was given relatively well if the movements were explicit enough.

The other advantage was that apparently because of his Pet Contract, Jake could always feel the direction his cat was moving in. This was a hidden feature that seemed to have been activated only after their Ordeal was over.

Since Jake hadn't done anything special, it was a good bet that this change was either related to his Oracle Rank or a Reward that Crunch had gotten for himself that benefited both of them.

Wishing each other well, the group split up, Jake, Sara and Kyle leaving Will and Tim behind in an instant. Sara and Kyle turned left at the first intersection, while Jake headed straight towards the heart of the city.

Fortunately the paved roads were wide and there were no living souls, because at the speed he was traveling a collision would have been fatal to a normal human. A car would probably have been slightly lifted off the ground by the impact, its bodywork totally

deformed. In this case, Jake would have suffered slight bruises or bumps, but nothing he couldn't heal in a few hours.

The polished white stones on the roads were definitely special. The ground was neither damaged nor heated by Jake's passage, but sadly this was not the case for his boots.

Since his return from the Red Cube, his maximum speed had far exceeded the physical limits of an Earthman and the direct consequence was that his soles were completely dead. A little more and we would probably see his toes sticking out.

Slowing down to preserve what little was left, Jake sighed with lassitude. Getting clothes that could hold up was another of his concerns to which he had to find a solution or he might well spend his future on B842 naked.

He stopped for a short while in front of a clothing shop run by a drone, but boots his size capable of withstanding subsonic friction cost, unsurprisingly, several thousand Aether points. For even higher quality, the prices rose dramatically.

'Fuck... how am I supposed to pay for all this?' Jake grumbled in a bad mood.

[You could learn to sew... I'm just saying.] Xi laughed.

Jake's face suddenly lit up.

'That I can do! But I need a material strong enough to hold it and something to work it with.'

Jake realized for the first time that his AI was capable of laughing, which had the immediate effect of making him forget his precariousness. To every problem, there was a solution. At worst, he'd go out and shoot up some Digestors to fill up on Aether.

[For now, you can control your yellow Aether Constitution to focus on your boots.] Xi patiently reminded him. [But that means your body will be weakened and unable to withstand your speed in terms of either endurance or stamina.]

Jake grunted in response. He had already thought of this solution, but finding an ideal balance in his distribution of Aether meant becoming considerably slower. It was a compromise he refused to make. If he had to walk barefoot, so be it!

Minutes later, he finally reached the heart of the city, the skyscraper with a tall Yellow Cube towering over it. For the first time outside the border plazas, there were people.

In addition to the skyscraper in the center, there were a dozen other Orange Cubes around at regular intervals much more massive than the human-sized ones by which he had been teleported here.

Numerous restaurants and other large buildings that looked like hotels or real estate agencies surrounded the main square.

Many of these restaurants had open-air terraces or tables extending directly onto the plaza. A few groups of humans of all finery and appearance occupied these tables, devouring with appetite dishes costing dozens of Aether points.

Scanning the terraces and balconies with his eyes, Jake's attention was caught by two individuals eating at one table. A white man and a black woman. Both had very short, nearly shaved hair and a morose expression.

What caught his attention was neither their deep-fried coca burger menu costing dozens of precious Aether points, nor the huge swords leaning against the table beside them, but rather their uniforms.

It had been a long time since Jake had seen a similar one and even if this one was quite different, he would have recognized the coat of arms on their shoulder even after decades. On a rectangular patch with a black background a blue sphere with green spots was painted on it: The Earth.

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