Chapter 16

As we walked to turn in the quest Cael pointed out two guys following us. He said they were the same guys that tried to mug him. They were each at least level 20 according to one of Cael’s skills. We remained on the main sidewalks to get to the quest giver. The goons tailed us but kept their distance. We turned in the quest item and all got the completion notification. Celeste said she could get some rewards from quests but not luck increases or item rewards. She also could not accept any quests on her own, she just shared rewards I got as long as she was present when I turned the quest in. She was tied to me in terms of quests.

*Quest Completed: Kill the Dread Trent Boss in the Dungeon, Return with the elder branch as proof. Reward: 2500 experience, +5 free stat points*

The quest give gave another quest.

*Kill the Terror Lynx Boss in the Dungeon, Return with the terror lynx paw as proof. Reward: 3500 experience, +5 free stat points, +1 skill point*

Cael said this was either a chain quest or this quest giver gave random quests. We looked at the SYSTEM pad. The dungeon was 200 miles south. We accepted the quest and got a room in the hotel we stayed at prior. The goons following us waited outside the hotel for a while before leaving. After a meal I was in bed going through my sheets. I used my 5 stat points from the quest, +3 charisma, +2 stamina. I did it out of vanity to keep up with Celeste. My spellcraft had reached level 23 giving me a new boon.

*Spellcraft Boon Selection:*

* *“Master Caster” – add two primary spells and two secondary spells*
* *“Superior Channeler” – +25 Channeling Stat, +10% Aether channeling*
* *“Master Spell Enhancer” – castor can choose two spell boons at level 7, 23 and 43*
* *“Spell Master” – can promote any cantrips to regular spells even if the correct magic spheres are not known*

Oh my god! Each of these was totally OP! I discounted option 2 and after 10 more minutes option 4. The master caster was so appealing, being able to level up 4 spells quicker but I had saved 14 spell points I could use to raise spells. So master spell enhancer it was.

The SYSTEM pad said the boon would offer a new boon selection list after a selected one. I couldn’t select two boons from the same list. I had some work to do! Before moving to spells my stalwart defender skill had reached level 7 and I had to select a boon.

*Stalwart Defender Boon Selection:*

* *“Invincible” – take half damage for 30 seconds, cooldown 24 hours*
* *“Unstoppable” – +5 strength, +5 constitution, +5 stamina*

This was a difficult choice. Option two would give me 100 health and 75 stamina to my pools while the first option could only be used once a day. Celeste had curled up next to me reviewing her own sheets. I decided on unstoppable getting the bonus stats even though I felt it was the wrong choice.

Moving onto spells I was a little giddy with all the upgrades I had coming. Even when I was younger I loved saving up for one big item rather than spending money whenever I got it. That was how I rationalized my penchant for ignoring upgrades on my sheet.

Heal Other spell was my first upgrade from level 5, tier 4, and I choose to increase the base healing from 62 to 81. I choose this over reducing the casting time by 2 seconds. Now the spell could heal almost 93 health with other bonuses.

The next spell was my summon stone spell. I could reduce casting cost, increase hardness or summon black marble for twice the Aether cost. I wasn’t using this spell as much so I choose the black marble option.

The next spell, stone bullet, I increased damage by 30% over adding a sound effect to the spell.

Flame spear had 3 upgrades available. I increased damage twice and added 102% increased damage. The third upgrade was increasing the duration from 12 seconds to 19 seconds, giving the fire more burn time.

My superior excavate spell had three options, an instant cast, 11% Aether cost reduction or the ability to excavate just earth or just stone. i choose the instant cast. Leo had said that option was rare to get.

For the create water spell I increased the base amount from 5 to 7 liters over being able to summon green colored water.

For Aether respiration I increased the duration by 3 seconds per aether. This let me use 1 aether per 13 seconds to sustain the spell.

My personal dimensional pocket spell was a difficult choice. I could reduce the base cost from 63 to 50 per cubic meter or I could gain a ‘stack’ ability. Allowing me to stack similar items up to 3 to take the space of one. I asked Celeste what she would do and she asked if the stack ability could be upgraded at later levels. I checked with the SYSTEM pad and the answer was yes typically it went 3, 5, 10, 20, 30, 50 but sometimes it might jump an interval if the caster was lucky. I selected the stack ability.

My personal force shield spell had 3 upgrades. I was actually jealous of Celeste’s force screen spell having seen it in combat. Her spell surrounded her whole body, no need to move a shield around. I increased the toughness of the shield by 32% with my first upgrade over reducing the casting time. My second upgrade was casting two shields at once for twice the Aether over enlarging the shield. That was pretty cool. My last upgrade was increasing the shield movement by 22% over increasing the toughness by 28%.

The last spell was ship movement which I was able to double the acceleration from 3ms to 6ms. Celeste pulled me to the shower when I said I was done. She was using it to tempt me in her game. She even had the audacity to blame me, saying her instincts drove her to level all her skills and I gave her tantric sex. We did a lot rubbing, sliding and kissing against each but I held firm. Well I did have one release when she slide my member between her buttocks for a whole minute. In bed she proceeded to give me a massage. I remained face down the entire time and reveled in her touch and body heat. She fell asleep on top of me.

The next day the three of us went to the system terminal. It cost 15,000 for me to enter with Celeste, 5,000 was the fee for companions. Cael had to wait outside as we didn’t have another 10000 Ballen credits for him to enter. It was the same setup with Guy behind the desk. I unloaded all the loot we planned to sell. 62,560 SYSTEM credits. It was a substantial haul for two days work in that one dungeon. Minus the 15000 Ballen credits to use the terminal. I then produced the summon companion scroll.

Guy said it was a tier 4 scroll, good for 500 points to summon a companion. I asked about upgrading Celeste. It was the third scroll used for this companion so I would get 1/3 the points for her, 166. It would have been better to create a new companion with the points, Celeste cost 400 points and was extremely bad ass. But it was Celeste’s scroll. I was torn for a second before I said it would be used on Celeste. Guy said the companion would be in stasis while the upgrades were chosen and added. I asked Celeste what she wanted and she said she trusted my judgement while stepping in the stasis field.

I also found out everything cost twice as much. Guy said yes and if I upgraded my companion a third time it would cost 3 times as much. He forgot to mention that. It was a diminishing return law for companions. I took 16 points and turned it into 40 stat points. Celeste’s style of combat had been hit and run in the dungeon. I added 20 speed and 20 agility. Next I added 3 free skill slots. She liked physical skills so I filled the slots with physical skills she could level, Stealth, Climbing and Wrestling. Celeste had favored the rifle in the dungeon so I added two ranged combat actions, Quick Cover Fire and Precognitive Overwatch. Both were tier 5 skills. I found the masseuse skill and grinning added it as a free skill for 12 points. I decided to give her Starship mechanic and leveled it to 7 for 24 points. That way she could help with the ship repairs. I found Pilot: Combat Armor and added it for 12 points. 78 points remaining, I added two tier 5 spells, advanced illusion and lightning storm. Minus 20 points. Her primary role of navigator…I spent 48 points raising both navigation skills from 23 to 27. Ten points left. I opened up a free skill slot for her leaving it empty. She could find her own skill to fill it. I accepted the changes and Celeste came out of stasis after a few minutes.

She looked over her sheet and nodded a few times. I bought Celeste her own storage ring for 15000 credits. Celeste finished her review and asked a few questions on my thought process and what I thought her role was. I said she was my bodyguard, navigator and mistress. And she asked what a mistress’ job was? I said she was to be positive supportive influence in my sphere of friends and offer comfort in private. I had Guy search for any quests associated with the dungeon we were planning to go to. He found two.

*Capture and Deliver a Live Specimen of a Gnarled Skunk. Reward: 500 experience, +2 free stat points, 1500 credits*

*Collect 25 Gnarled Skunk Scent Glands. Reward: 1000 experience, 2500 credits*

The Live Specimen quest came with a special cage to remove the monster from the dungeon. We left and met Cael. Cael cracked some jokes about Celeste now being super human. The goons followed us so we decided not go see Maranda. We rented the same ATV, loaded our tent and started to head toward the dungeon. Two miles outside the city we found we were being followed, probably the goons. Two large vehicles. I accelerated and opened the distance. We began to strategize. Each vehicle could hold up to 8 guys. 16 vs 3. Terrible odds especially if they averaged levels in the 20s. We couldn’t stop to leave a trap but perhaps I could cast a spell. I drove into a field of meter high grass slowed down for just a few seconds and instant cast excavate behind the buggy creating a pit trap with Celeste casting an illusion over it, then we speed away. Two minutes later Celeste said we got one. But the other was still on our tail. My next attempt was casting a clear quartz rock behind us. But our pursuers were not following our tracks and missed hitting it. Celeste tried her force wall spell but once again they didn’t run into it. I was getting worried. We probably pissed them off and they were going to do more than rob us.

We raced on for an hour. We opened ground to about two miles but it was clear we were not going to lose them. I saw a narrow ravine and steered toward it. Cael took the wheel and a cast a 1 meter high wall in the narrow opening as we past. Our pursuers just blew the wall up. The size of the explosion just caused me more concern. Then Celeste spotted it. It was a stealth drone tracking us. It was hard to see in the sky but once she pointed it out. Using her kill shot combat action she took it out with one hit. That seemed to spook them. They drifted further back until we didn’t see them any longer. Our plan was to get to the dungeon then hide behind an illusion and hoped they went in.

The plan worked. The dungeon entrance was a tree trunk and with Celeste’s illusion and our shadow cloaks we waited in the trees. The light armored vehicle pulled up and seven men got out. Shit two of the guys I recognized. The asshole jocks from my world. We were about 80 meters away and I hoped the psionic didn’t have any detection abilities. They talked a bit then burst our buggies tires. Five of the seven entered the dungeon leaving two outside.

The plan was to focus fire on one target to get a sure kill then move on to the second. They had medium armor by the looks. Cael and Celeste leveled their rifles and I cast my flame spear and I used called shot on the left goon. All three shots hit knocking the goon down but he was just injured as he was moving. A shield had appeared around his body. He was trying to heal himself and Celeste and Cael’s second shot shattered the shield and popped his head. The other goon had gotten behind the transport and launched a magic grenade. The range was too far and the explosion threw dirt up but did us no damage.

Cael moved right and Celeste left to flank him. I cast the flame spear spell carefully avoiding the transport. It was our ride out of here after all. I kept him busy as he switched to a ballistic rifle. He was obviously a melee type as he missed twice before hitting my force shield. After my third cast of the flame spear Cael opened fire forcing him into Celeste’s line of fire. It took four hits to kill him. They had good armor. We ran up found the transport was empty and running, idiots. Celeste searched the two corpses pockets, took their weapons and helped move the tent to the new vehicle.

We drove as fast as the beasty vehicle would go for an hour then stopped. Celeste and myself searched the vehicle for a tracking device. We just cut power to everything that might be a beacon using our mechanics and engineering skills, even the drone dock on the roof. Ok what was our plan?

Cael’s idea was to go to the other dungeon, farm it until it was time to fly home, sneak to the city get the orcs and fly home. Celeste wanted to try and kill the five remaining goons. I knew the two jocks were probably not too strong but one was a psionic and the other three were probably very dangerous. I let them know the two jocks I recognized were part of a local criminal gang according to Mindy and had arrived with me. My option was to go back to the city and report the attack as I was adverse to the unknown risk. I did plan to get a remote viewing spell in the future.

We drove close enough to the city to use my comm to call Mindy. When Mindy picked up I learned the gang was stirred up. Rumors said 3 members had been killed outside of town and they sent 3 heavy vehicles out of town recently to hunt down the killers. Mindy said records had the criminal gang with about 50 members, 10 were from Earth. Her intelligence had only 5 left in their headquarters which meant we probably had 40 out here after us. Could Mindy use her influence to raid their headquarters? She said no but after thinking she could let some rival gangs know of their lightly defended base.

The Dread Trent dungeon was still within range of comms to Mindy so we headed there. We arrived hid the vehicle under an illusion spell and ran the dungeon. I added a shadow cloak to my belongings even though both Cael and Celeste had storage rings and I didn’t have to be the pack mule. It had been 7 hours when we emerged. It was late and a light rain was falling. I called Mindy. It was good news. A rival gang had attacked and pillaged the criminal nest. She said the gang had returned towing a vehicle and retaliated. A minor gang war had broken out. The militia police would let them fight it out away from civilians. She said she would keep us updated.

We rested in the tent for the evening and reentered the dungeon, clearing it again. This time when we emerged Mindy said the gang clash had stabilized. Our enemies had lost seven more members. The total death count was now 16, the 3 we killed, 6 in the sneak attack and 7 in the skirmishes. Mindy said drones and recon had their remaining numbers at 38 but they had regained control of the headquarters and the two jocks were still alive. Mindy thought we should be safe for a few weeks as they were holed up for now licking their wounds. We decided to head back to the other dungeon to finish the quests.

We were very cautious and maintained an illusion on the vehicle the entire trip. We hid the vehicle a kilometer from the entrance and entered the dungeon at night, our buggy was burned to the frame. Guess they were not happy. It was a large dungeon, maybe a square kilometer on the first level. The monsters were large gnarled skunks and wolverines. Not too difficult for us and we captured a gnarled skunk and got all the glands we needed. The giant boss skunk just gave extra coins as loot.

The second level was just as large and had skeletons of multiple animals. It was a little eerie but we coasted to the boss. The boss was an ogre skeleton. It was an actual fight as it had a blink skill. I got wacked twice for 109 health per hit and went flying both times as its club just shattered my shield and kept going. Our high damage output took it out before I was mincemeat. I joked that I must have a great personality to draw the boss’ complete attention. We got *wireframe glasses* that gave enhanced vision. The third floor was a lot smaller, a half dozen rooms with various cats in them. They were fast but we just flew up out of range. The boss lynx breathed an ice storm attack spell. Cael got hit twice before it died. We got a *scroll: wood golem,*a tier 10 spell, and the paw for the quest.

We searched everywhere for a secret chest on our way out but didn’t find anything. Leaving the dungeon we were very cautious and got to the transport. We headed back to the city. I commed Meranda and we hid the transport in her garage. Cael went and paid the penalty for losing the buggy. We gave Meranda the rundown of our adventures. She said the gang was the Blackthorns and they were one of the more malevolent gangs in the city. They dealt in drugs and slavery, selling people off planet. Meranda paid protection to the Glorious Murmurs, a gang of a bunch of kids, so if my enemies found out where we were they would get us. We decided to pack and leave tomorrow. I gave Meranda all the currency we had so she could get as many parts as we could afford. They would be cheaper in the markets than the SYSTEM terminal. We were able to sneak out to turn in one quest but the two SYSTEM terminal quests were out of reach as we lacked funds to enter and didn’t want to risk selling items in the city. Cael killed the live skunk rather than release it.

*Quest Completed: Kill the Terror Lynx Boss in the Dungeon, Return with the terror lynx paw as proof. Reward: 3500 experience, +5 free stat points, +1 skill point*

*Kill the Fear Goblin Chieftain in the Dungeon, Return with the Head as proof. Reward: 5000 experience, +5 free stat points, +2 skill points*

We accepted the next quest in the chain but didn’t have plans to complete it at any time.