

We're not even a treen of steps in when the first attack comes, and it's more disgusting than anything else.

Dungeon Worm, Level 1
Dungeon Worms are the weakest of the creatures that inhabit wild dungeons. They can range from not larger than their out-of-dungeon counterparts to being many times bigger.
Perception Check Failed

They come out of the walls and ground, and are the size of my forearm. They look more like maggots than worms, other than being slimy. There aren't a lot, and cutting them in half ends them.

Explorer Quest Completion, step 3: Creature Fights
You have fought 6 different creatures
Rewards: 6929 experience

You have gained a level. You are now level 6. Experience required to reach your next level: 14,027
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"Why didn't you help?" I ask Brandon as he hand me a thermos. "I'm not thirsty. And I gained a level."

"Congratulation," he replies flatly. "This is for your sword. The slime is mildly acidic, so you don't want to let it eat away at the metal. Or leave injuries unattended, if they somehow hurt you. As for why I didn't help, you need the experience gain more than I do, as demonstrated by your level."

"And he doesn't want to get slime over himself," Helen adds.

"I'm pretty sure it's the fighting quest line more than these level one worms made it happen."

"It still moves you toward the next level faster than if I'd killed most of them. And if Dennis needs rescuing, Hel, I'll be happy to dirty myself. But like I said, he needs the experience more than I do. Do you want to take the time to assign points?"

I shake my head, putting the ability point I gained in At it All Day, since it's the next one of my list. "I want to have a buffer of skill and attribute points. It already saved my life once."

"That's smart for skills, but you sure you don't want to put your points in Strength? We don't get class bonuses in that attribute."

"I doubt it'll make much of a difference. And if it does, I can put them in when I need them."

"Only if you're still conscious. But it's your decision." He turns to Silver, who is

still playing her violin. “Since they’s a lot weaker than I thought they would be. You can join in with Dennis. You’re going to get more experience that way than filling whatever quest you’re working on.”

“I’m not really fighting oriented,” she replies. “And I don’t have anything to use as a weapon.”

Brandon offers her a slender sword. “If you have a skill point, put it in that.”

I don’t know why she looks at me, but I shrug. I figure she’s better off learning how to use a sword, but I am combat oriented.

“Let me put it this way, Silver,” Brandon says. “If we get separated while traveling. Do you really want to depend on your violin to keep creeps and monsters from attacking you?”

“What about the buff I’m providing?”

The icon is green and has the silhouette of a man with his chest puffed out.

System Query: Courage, Buff, level 1
You are feeling more courageous
Strength, Agility, and endurance receive an extra point for the duration of the buff

That isn’t making me feel all that much braver.

“I think Dennis can work without it until he goes up against stronger creatures. Look,” he continues as she still looks uncertain, “It’s okay if you’re scared. I get it. I’m just saying that—”

“I’m not scared. Well, a little. It’s just that I didn’t think I’d have to do any fighting.”

“You don’t have to,” Brandon says. “If you’re comfortable with it, you can just keep on depending on me and Dennis to keep you safe while we’re here.” His eyes flick to something I don’t see, then he glares at Helen, who is glaring right back at him. So they’re can message each other and they’re going to take their sibling problems there?

“Mom made sure you knew how to handle a staff before she let you touch spellcraft,” Brandon states. “That you’ve grown beyond using it has nothing to do with this situation. Unless you think Silver’s learned enough to defend herself with it?”

“I haven’t even gained a level in the spark spell yet,” Silver says.

“My point exactly,” Brandon snaps, then curses under his breath. “Sorry,” he tells the startled Silver. “The tone was directed at my sister. But my point remains. We’re in a dungeon. This is the best place to start learning since you haven’t taken courses. You put a point in sword fighting, and before we leave, you’ll have at least a treen in the skill, if not twice that.”

He’s exaggerating, I’m certain of it, but I do agree with his sentiment.

Silver puts her violin in its case, then it disappear into her inventory. She takes the sword and Brandon spends a few minutes making sure she holds it correctly, then he motions for us to take the lead.

“It’s going to be okay,” I tell her. “Brandon and Helen are right behind us, and if anything goes wrong, they’ll help.”

Her nod lacks confidence, but she looks ahead and we are walking again, with me

cranking the light so it will continue shining.

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Dungeon fly, Level 4
A fly that has been changed by living within a dungeon
Perception Check Failed

Change isn't strong enough of a word for what that 'fly' is.

You have gained a level. You are now level 7. Experience required to reach your next level: 16,393
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I guess something good came of me getting stabbed by that thing. It didn't do a lot of damage, but I can't feel my hand right now. I'm lucky I batted at it with my shield arm. Without a sword, Brandon would have had to jump in to help.

"I'm sorry," Silver tells me. "I just..."

"It's okay," I reassure her. "I was just as surprised."

"But you didn't run away."

The six things barely larger than my hand flew at us from the darkness ahead and I'd reacted before the disgust set in. Then I was cutting one, and another, until I went to bat one away with my shield and it was nimbler than I expected. A cut was enough to ground them and render them harmless, but I made sure to kill them, both because I don't get experience just for maiming a creature and because they are even more disgusting than the worms.

"I've been training since I was nine. I didn't go up against monsters then, but we learn that our job's to stop them so others have a chance to escape, and that means we learn not to let disgust drive us. You don't have that, so your reaction's normal. How's your skill?"

"Still at one," she says.

It's what Brandon was trying to avoid by not letting her know he'd be there to protect her. I also haven't gained any levels in my skills because I haven't felt in danger at any point.

"Do we have anything to take care of my hand?" I ask. The 'numb' debuff is already yellow, so it's going to be gone soon, but I don't want to sit and wait for it to pass, and I don't know how safe it is to continue. I can't crank the light one handed, and I don't know how long it will keep working without that.

"I can have you regain the points you lost," Silver says, "but I don't have a song to remove a debuff like that."

"It falls under the category of cures," Helen says, "rather than healing. And I don't do either."

I put the ability point in Bob and Weave. I now have five attribute points. I can afford to put one or two of them in Endurance, right? More of that will help against these kinds of debuffs. It might also be time to put something in dexterity. I would have reacted faster. Health would also make sense, because monsters are only going to get more dangerous going forward.

And tougher, so Brandon might be right that I should invest in strength.  
It might be best to wait still.

“System to Dennis,” Brandon says. “Are you still in there?”

“Yes. Sorry. I went up another level, and I was trying to decide where I should put a few attribute points.”

“And what did you decide?”

“I...didn’t.”

He nods. “How many points do you have?”

“Five. I know you want me to put them in strength, but what if that’s not where I end up needing them?”

“Don’t put them in strength. I shouldn’t have told you that earlier. Hitting hard is my thing. You go for precision. So if you’re going to put them somewhere, dexterity is where you should start.”

“But what if I need more health or toughness?”

“So that’s the problem.” He takes hold of my shoulders and looks me in the eyes. “First off. Endurance, intelligence, and Health get raised through our class, so you don’t have to worry about them. What’s going on here is that you’re afraid of making the wrong decision.”

I open my mouth to protest, but his smirk stops me. I guess that he isn’t wrong. “How do I make sure that doesn’t happen?”

“You can’t.”

“But—”

He shakes his head. “Whatever you decide, it’s going to be the wrong decision in at least one situation and, realistically, a lot more of them. It’s the nature of stepping into the wild. Out here, the system doesn’t care about what you want, or what you think should be happening. There’ll be days when you think the system looked at your sheet specifically and tailored every encounter to poke at what you’re worse at.”

“So there’s no way to get it right?”

“All the time? No. But that’s the thing. It doesn’t matter where you put the points. There will be times when that will be exactly what saves your ass. Even points in charisma can come in handy.”

“Like you know anything about that,” Helen comments, and Brandon simply smirks.

“So here’s my advice. Once were done here. Think about a few areas where you want to excel at. Since you said you want to be a guard, it’s probably going to be combat related for you too, and then pick the three best attributes to improve that, and those are where you put most of your points. Okay?”

“And remember, you’ll be getting points your entire life,” Helen adds. “So if things change at some point, it’s not a ‘all is lost’ situation.”

“And that’s where keeping some points in reserve comes in handy.” He smiles. “So, we good to go?”

I nod and notice the debuff’s gone.

He pats my shoulder. “Then you and Silver take the lead again.”

“I’ll do better,” Silver says.

“I have no doubt,” Brandon replies.

We walk for a few minutes, then a sound behind us had us turning in time to see the tunnel close up, trapping us inside the dungeon.

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