Chapter 9

Even though I was a little paranoid about someone finding my ship I left for town on foot after a late lunch. As it got dark on the dirt road I summoned a stone platform well off the road and set my tent up and practiced sword forms inside. I practiced my analyze skill on all my items but found it didn’t increase for items I had already analyzed. Then after dinner I studied the ship engineering schematics and fell asleep with the pad in my hands.

I woke figuring I had about made about 15 miles yesterday so I had 35 miles or so to go today. I made some crepes with a side of oatmeal. As I was eating the oatmeal I remembered I didn’t like oatmeal. I added sugar and nuts to it to make it palatable. My cooking skill was leveling really slowly. The crepes did give me +5% Aether channeling for 60 minutes, the oatmeal gave me nothing. I sighed figuring it was a poor choice for a skill slot and remembered my companions had advised me against it. I packed the tent and started down the road. I decided to study the ship schematics by casting my flight spell and floating down the road and a fast walk. I was working on the big aspects so I could do a good inspection of the ship when I got back. It was funny how much wildlife you see when you are just floating by and barely making noise. I had danger sense active as I was absorbed in the pad but movement still drew my gaze. Rodents, birds, an antlered elk I think, a fox like creature, even a lone wolf creature. I found I was able to utilize Aether cultivation and still study the schematics. I was able to replenish 450 aether per hour doing so while spending 600 per hour on flight. After five hours my Aether had gone below 1000 so I decided to have lunch. I made a minimal stone table and chair just off the road. I made a meat stroganoff that gave +50 health pool for 8 hours and +5% health regeneration for 4 hours. It had been my best result yet from cooking. When my Aether topped off I continued my multi-tasking journey.

I passed two offshoots off the dirt road, probably leading to other farming communities. I ignored them and as the sun set I moved off the road, summoned a stone platform and set up my tent. My meal was just a reheated vegetable and meat stew made at the farm. It gave me +50% stamina regen for four hours. I couldn’t wait till I could create meals like this with my skill. I was pretty drained from the day’s use of Aether. I went right to sleep hoping to cover the remaining ground to the small town early tomorrow.

In the morning I checked my sheets and the only thing that popped out was my summon water spell had reached level 7. I would tailor it later. I ate some hard boiled eggs and a liter of fruity juice and headed toward the town after packing the tent. I decided to use fleet footed to get there as quickly as possible. An hour later the forest opened up and I saw a monolith surrounded by one and two story buildings and half a mile away. There was no wall or castle…I was disappointed. I headed toward the town. I found the town did have two story towers surrounding it. Most appeared unoccupied. The one by the road I was on had a single person. He didn’t even question me as I entered the town.

The monolith was probably the dungeon so I headed there. The town had a few motorized vehicles and a few horse-like mounts. All the people were human. No one paid me much mind that I noticed. As I was getting close to the monolith I was recognized. Vlad was walking toward me and noticed me. He gave me a big Ukrainian hug and asked me how I was. We said hello and he brought me to the rest of the group. They were renting a small house on the edge of town. They were entering the dungeon every third day and had done 13 dungeon runs to date.

The house was ok. It was mostly clean but smelled like a men’s locker room. Casey and Red were there at the table playing cards. They greeted me and we sat down talking. Vlad pulled out a comm unit and called Andrew and Will. Ten minutes later the entire group was there. They started talking about their adventurers. They had been hitting the dungeon every third day and had team wiped once. Their bodies had been reincorporated and they had lost a point of soul strength. It was a sobering experience for them. They had to give up 25% of their loot as their fee when they exited from each run. Andrew said they were focused on leveling and saving funds. The dungeon had 5 levels and they could now reach the 3rd level safely and take on the mini-bosses on that floor. They didn’t want to challenge the main boss as that was who had team wiped them. They were making about 6000 credits per run and their three day expenses were about 1000, so after giving up 1500 credits for their entry fee they were getting 7500 credits per week. They had all reached level 9. I pretended to be all impressed with their progress but they each only had 2 or 3 minor magic items of tier 1 and 2 quality.

I told them I had a few gifts for them. I pulled out all the clothing items I was not wearing. They were shocked to see my dimensional space in action. They were very thankful for the gifts. Andrew started probing. Asking what level I was at. When I said 6, Vlad clapped me on the back hard, saying nice work! He let slip that Andrew had said just yesterday that I was probably only level 2 and I would be regretting not staying with the group.

I decided not disclose my abilities too much. I just mentioned I had picked up the dimensional pocket spell and some spells that would help me get into space. Will jumped in about how he wanted to go to space as well. Andrew quieted him with a look. Apparently Andrew had a plan to reach level 23 before heading into space as it was too dangerous. They had all selected a specialization at level 7 and at level 23 they could further adjust their specialization.

I asked about Mindy, Ophelia and the other Will. Vlad jumped up and said they had a comm device linked to their group and he could call them if I wanted. I waved him off. They had taken a transport to Sand Bastion. Ophelia was training to become a shuttle pilot, Mindy had joined the local militia and Will had sort of disappeared. They hadn’t heard from him in over three weeks.

They also mentioned the large other group we had arrived with had mostly headed to Sand Bastion as well. Well they had tried to run this town’s dungeon a few times and a few had died, permanently. The two jocks were still alive as far as Vlad knew, Malcom and Jared were their names and they were asses. About 10 people were still following the two assholes according to Mindy. They were part of some minor criminal gang in the city according to her. I just nodded, not really caring.

My plan was kind of shot. I had hoped to recruit Ophelia as a pilot and bring the rest of the guys along as crew. But I knew Andrew was a bit too controlling and that was not going to happen. Or he would try to take charge and I didn’t want that. I was never much of a leader but that was my ship!

After a while I left to go to a hotel. They pointed me to a good one near the monolith. I paid in copper dungeon coins. Each one was worth 2 SYSTEM credits and it took 40 coins for a room. 80 credits! Damn. I needed to sell some gear to raise funds. I paid another 5 coins for a meal to be sent to my room. The young women that delivered it lingered for a bit. I thought she wanted a tip so I tossed her a coin. She looked confused and eventually left. The meal was a whole roasted bird with some heavy gravy that was way too sweet. The meal also had two one liter bottles of beer with it. It was actually a pretty good pale ale. I went downstairs and asked for 50 cold beers to be delivered to my room. 50 more coins. When they arrived I placed them in my dimensional space so they would stay cold for when I was out in the wild.

Casting danger sense I lay down on the bed. I had to think. I liked Vlad and Red and hoped they would come with me…but I didn’t even have a ship yet. I was currently pretty neutral on Will and Casey. But I didn’t want Andrew. I didn’t like his bossy nature. I made a plan to spend the day in town selling gear and getting equipment. Then I would stay one more night before going back to the farm. At least the bed was really comfortable. Hmm the mattress was really comfortable. Buy a mattress tomorrow and a dozed off.

My morning was great, cheesy eggs, toast and milk. I was glad the food wasn’t too far off what I was accustomed too. The girl who delivered the food last night and this morning told me where I could find a place to sell my stuff and buy supplies. I then left and went to the local supply dealer who purchased gear and salvage. They also had a replicator so could make anything I needed.

The shop was well kept and run by an older couple. It was a small warehouse with a crapload of items well organized. The first thing I needed was credits. I had a few credit chips from the farmers and just under a hundred copper coins. The women was Bammi. She had bright gray eyes and a great smile and was probably in her 60s.

I pulled out the water damaged heavy orc rifles. She raised he eye brow as the trick but quickly began to access the rifle. She asked where I found it. I told her I found some salvage in a pond in the woods. She pulled out a device and scanned the rifle. She had a frown. She offered 2000 Ballen credits. She said the rifle was repairable but would cost at least 1500 credits to do so with the replicator printer. Then she could sell it for 5000 credits earning a profit. She seemed honest so I accepted the deal. Next I pulled the electronic devices and the non-magical jewelry I found in the crew quarters and on the crew. Bammi patiently went through everything. Eleven devices, seven pieces of jewelry. Three of the devices were salvageable and the rest just parts and fuel for the replicator. 12400 credits for the lot. I nodded. Then I pulled out 250 vials of my potions I had picked up from Silia’s alchemy shop.. I had 150 of minor health potions and 100 minor Aether potions. The minor health potions were good for 30 credits each! 4500 credits. Nice! The Aether potions not so much, just 10 credits each. I accepted the 1000 credits. Finally I started pulling out all the alchemy ingredients I had harvested and it was a lot. My botany and mycology skills just highlighted useful items, most of it couldn’t be used in my two potion recipes. The pile of vegetation got me another 3300 credits. Not great figuring it had taken me 200 hours or so to harvest everything. 24500 credits. Ok time to shop. Bammi gave me a pad and said it would scan the item and tell me about it. I found I couldn’t read it. While I had learned the local language from Cael and the farmers I still couldn’t read it. So she patiently walked down the long isles with me explaining everything. I pulled a high end cooking setup, a quality alchemy set, ordered 500 vials for completed potions from their replicator, a human sized cleaning robot, a few various chips that had ‘good’ films according to Bammi, and a large motorized bike. She added everything up and it came to 18,800 credits. I then asked about the mattress. She could replicate one with the printer that would compress down and should be very comfortable. I ordered some pillows and bedding as well. Another 300 credits for the best possible mattress for the small bunk. Then I asked about tarps. I said I wanted something to cover a large field to kill the vegetation so I could replant. I was indicating I was joining the farmers and starting my own field. Bammi said anything could be made with the replicator. I started in 100 meters square, durable and heat reflective. It would be good if it could be dirt colored as was. She said wouldn’t camouflage be better. I hesitated, did she figure me out? I just nodded and said yes that would be good. Unfortunately the tarp was going to be 1 meter rolled by 10 meters long. Damn it, my space was not even close. I asked if they could deliver it to the farm. Yes for a fee. In all it cost 2900 credits delivered. I asked if we could do a trade. I would pave the back loading area of the warehouse which was currently dirt. When I showed what I could do she agreed. 1500 aether of stone later the deal was done. I wasn’t sure how I was going to get the tarp which weighed 400 kilograms to the ship but I would worry later. I asked Bammi to keep my dimensional space secret and she nodded and I put my new purchases except the bike into the space. The humanoid cleaning bot compressed down to hug its legs in order to fit. I bought 200 ‘heat and eat’ meals that Bammi said were not terrible for 200 credits and got my change 5,200 Ballen credits. The credits were dime sizes chips worth 100 credits each.

The bike had a 6 hour battery. But the battery matched the ones I used for the tent. I rode over to the guys house and brought the bike inside everyone except Andrew was excited and tried it out, it was obvious he was jealous. It had good power getting up to 100 km per hour pretty easy. After the fun they asked if I was going to join them for a dungeon run tomorrow. I decided to pass but Vlad convinced me to spar when he found out I had the long blade skill. Not wanting to draw attention we went to an abandoned barn to spar, Red and Casey came to watch. I was pretty cocky going in. I put on my Brooch of Blades and we started going at it. Well to say I got my ass kicked was an understatement. Vlad had seven combat actions that were are leveled and tailored to his style. I never touched him but I did level my skill to level 4 over the three hour session and got to use my heal spell a bunch of times.

I pulled out four beers for everyone and we sat in the barn talking lightly. I asked them all what their goals were. Red was trying to get with a young women on the other side of town that ran the desk at the entry port for the dungeon. Vlad was just taking it day by day. He wasn’t as enthralled as Andrew with pushing to level and become powerful and find the essence and ‘win’ the game. So that was Andrew’s drive he wanted to win. Casey said he was happy just learning magic but wanted a stable city life. Hopefully with a new beautiful women every night. If we had these skills back on earth we would be gods. Here we were just average and in most cases below average. They mentioned some of their encounters with locals and how much they were at a disadvantage. I nodded. Cael still far surpassed me.

I pulled everyone another beer. Then I tossed Vlad the *Black Composite Ring (+10 Strength, +5 Melee Combat)*. You won out duel Vlad that is your reward. He gave it to Red who identified it for him. His eyes popped. It was an item that was as good as a drop from the 4th floor boss in the dungeon. He said he couldn’t accept it. I insisted and hoped it would keep him alive. He asked where I got it and I gave them all the story of finding wreckage of a crash site with skeleton orcs. They asked if I had to defeat the skeletons, no of course not. They started asking if there were a lot of salvageable crash sites. I said I doubt it but I was going to sniff around this site again looking for items. Then I popped the orc suit on in front of them. They all jumped up and started admiring the suit. Red told everyone the stats and they were instantly jealous. They had some plastic composite armor that gave about 60% as much defense and was bulkier.

I had them hooked. But I failed. Vlad was just too loyal. They all found Andrew annoying but he had been right about everything so far and they were doing well. I didn’t want to expose any more of my secrets so I just said I would be back in a week or two to check in again. Then I got up and went to the hotel.

I got the meal in my room again and the waitress waited again. We got into an awkward conversation and she was basically a prostitute. Well sort of. Her name was Gallana. She didn’t do it often just to get extra money from some of the more attractive people renting rooms. We started talking, she grew up in this town. Her dad had died in the dungeon and her mother and brother ran a small broker business that set up deliveries from the surrounding farms for sale to Stone Bastion city and off planet merchants. She wanted out of this town, either go to a large city or to the Ballen Space Station in orbit. As we talked more she was tall, looked fit and young, early 20s. I eventually gave in and tossed her 200 credits for a good session of sex. She was very energetic and my ‘improved’ equipment was put to great use, multiple times.

When I woke Gallana was gone. I used my cleanse spell and cleaned up my clothes as well before leaving as I smelled like sex. I recharged the battery for the bike and bought four more from Bammi. I asked about buying spells and Bammi said only the overseers of the dungeon were permitted sale of spells. Not wanting to draw their attention I decided to leave. The ride back to the farms only took an hour, the shocks on the bike were excellent and it was pretty fun. I did scare one predator cat about halfway through the ride back but otherwise it was uneventful.

At the farm, Cael was not around so I went to see Leo. Leo was out by the goat pasture the first thing he said was the underwear was fantastic! I started talking to him and revealed I had found the orc ship. He was instantly interested. I told him it was a secret and he agreed he wouldn’t tell anyone. He said he wanted to see it. I agreed and we decided Cael would accompany us as well. Cael would be back in two days.

I decided to spend my time clearing Caels dungeon. I traveled out using the bike to the Aether pool and set up my tent. The next two days I cleared the dungeon twice getting 2 aether crystals, 230 copper coins and some interesting clothing. I focused harvesting ingredients for the minor health potion and brewing it. I practiced my swordmanship even though my excitement about sword play had greatly diminished after sparring with Vlad. I kept reviewing the schematics as well. My loot items were:

*Black Lace Bra +5 Charisma, charm to smell like mint*

*Black Pants +2 animal riding skill, +3 agility*

*Burgundy Socks +5 Aether*

*Green Vest +2 lockpicking skill, +3 intellect*

*Yellow Cowboy Hat +9 to Constitution, +1 Strength*

*Dark Blue Tank Top +2 Fire Magic Skill, +3 intellect*

These items were as good as my friends were getting from their dungeon. Each was probably worth 200-400 credits. Between the Aether crystals, copper coins and items I was clearing at least 1500 credits every day. I wondered how much Cael had saved?

I didn’t make level 7 which was disappointing. I was able to promote two skills to secondary status having the 7 day change cooldown finishing. I decided on Supplemental Aether Core and Starship Engineering. I reviewed my skills before heading back to the farm.

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|  | Next Skill Slot at Level 10 |   | Unused Skill Points: 10 |
|  | ***Skill*** | ***Level*** | ***Tier*** | **Percent Next Lvl** | **Stat** |
|   | *Spellcraft (Primary)* | *18* | *8* | 90% | *Chan* |
|   | *Spirit Magic* | *3* | *3* | 44% | *Aeth* |
|   | *Mind Shield* | *3* | *3* | 78% | *Int* |
|   | *Sense Psionics* | *3* | *3* | 2% | *Chan* |
|   | *Earth Magic* | *10* | *5* | 28% | *Aeth* |
|   | *Stone Magic* | *17* | *7* | 9% | *Con* |
|   | *Order Magic* | *4* | *3* | 24% | *Aeth* |
|   | *Starship Engineering (secondary)* | *6* | *4* | 10% | *Int* |
|   | *Long Blades* | *6* | *4* | 68% | *Str* |
| 1 | *Marksman* | *11* | *6* | 40% | *Agil* |
| 2 | *Cooking* | *5* | *4* | 3% | *Agil* |
| 3 | *Aether Cultivation* | *13* | *7* | 79% | *Chan* |
| 4 | *Air Magic* | *9* | *5* | 7% | *Aeth* |
| 5 | *Alchemy* | *8* | *4* | 43% | *Int* |
| 6 | *Botany* | *7* | *5* | 89% | *Int* |
| 7 | *Mycology* | *8* | *5* | 32% | *Int* |
| 8 | *Water Magic* | *4* | *4* | 62% | *Aeth* |
| 9 | *Sculptor* | *6* | *4* | 18% | *Chr* |
| 10 | *Supplemental Aether Core (secondary)* | *11* | *6* | 73% | *Aeth/Chan* |
| 11 | *Teleport Magic* | *8 (+5)* | *5* | 97% | *Int* |
| 12 | *Time Magic* | *8* | *5* | 62% | *Chan* |
| 13 | *Space Magic* | *8* | *5* | 62% | *Aeth* |
| 14 | *Force Magic* | *8* | *5* | 70% | *Str* |
| 15 | *Analyze* | *2* | *2* | 10% | *Int* |

Things were slowing down. I checked my spells. Create Water, Personal Dimensional Pocket and Ship Movement all had tailoring available. I would leave it for now. Next time I planned to recast the pocket space I would choose.

I reviewed my stats next.

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| **Primary Stats** |  | **Secondary Stats** |
| **Strength** | **22** | **(3)** | **Aether Tolerance** | **5** |
| **Constitution** | **23** | **(5)** | **Mental Resilience** | **5** |
| **Stamina** | **18** | **(8)** | **Soul Strength** | **2** |
| **Agility** | **21** | **(4)** | **Cellular Cohesion** | **1** |
| **Speed** | **8** |  | **Personality** | **2** |
| **Intellect** | **70** | **(20)** | **Fame** | **2** |
| **Aether** | **64** | **(10)** |   |   |
| **Channeling** | **57** | **(15)** |   |   |
| **Charisma** | **12** | **(2)** |   |   |
| **Luck** | **3** |  |   |   |

Not bad as well. I returned to the farm and found Cael.