Chapter 18

Basically I needed a shit load of money. I began thinking…

Treasure chests. There were lost dungeons all over this planet that should have treasure chests and each would have a golden scroll. How do you find dungeons…issued quests and luck. I asked Cael if there was an easy way to find a dungeon. Not unless the dungeon wanted to be found like building a monolith or spire. No magic or tech devices? Not that he knew of. Celeste said me and her had a skill, treasure hunter, that would help spot a dungeon entrance. The skill worked that way? Ok the plan was the orcs would stay in the cave and work on the ship. Red and Vlad would farm two close dungeons for funds to buy the two robots to help Meranda. Me and Celeste would go exploring for new dungeons.

The rest of the day me and Celeste helped work on the ship and I added 1600 gallons of water to the tank. That night Celeste used me to level up her wrestling skill. I won the first two and then I was pretty much at her mercy.

Laying with Celeste my sheets showed that I had boons for sculptor and water magic waiting.

Sculptor Boon Selection:

* “Aether Aura” – artistic stone works will contain an aura to increase Aether regeneration, strength and distance of aura depend on the objects quality
* “Imbue Spirit” – adds statues with life essence making them easier to animate, cooldown 24 hours

Two very interesting options. I got the pad and checked on imbue spirit. It gave animated statues +10 to all stats. The animate statue was a tier 10 spell requiring spirit and stone. Aether Aura at this base level could have up to a 20% bonus up to 10 meters distant. I couldn’t decide so left the choice alone for now.

Water Magic Boon Selection:

* “Water Serpent Elemental” –summons a level 5 snake water elemental, cooldown 24 hours
* “Spell Efficiency” – reduce all water spells Aether cost by 11%
* “Water Movement Ability” – move in water as you move in air

It was either going to be option 1 or 3. After finding out how weak the elemental was I selected water movement. I was going to be aquaman! It wasn’t a spell but required 1 aether per second to sustain. While I had the pad out I brought up the quest mapping setting and there was a marker 320 miles away on a peninsula on this continent. I opened the link.

*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 had never checked on this quest as we made our escape. It wouldn’t be easy to get to. Over the mountains, through swamps, some hills… Celeste asked what I was doing and I showed her the screen. She said the quickest way would be to fly or go by boat along the coast. We didn’t have a plane or boat. Also we needed to find other dungeons so the trip over land would be an opportunity.

The next morning I cast my pocket space to make a 2.2 meter cube, just big enough to hold my bike, and a slew of gear. Then we set off through the mountains. Celeste’s fly spell let her move up to 32 km/hour but cost 300 aether for just 5 minutes. She could carry me though with only a small decrease to speed. This turned into our main resolution to difficult terrain. Celeste’s observant skill gave us plenty of alert to monster encounters and we handled them at a distance. The monsters were all large predator birds which nested in the mountains.

We camped at a summit. I surrounded the tent with a rock wall. The night involved reciprocal oil massages and slow sex. We got up early to catch the sunrise.

We descended out of the mountains toward the swamps. The only good news for me was I found some black and gold truffles. I had set my foraging to only highlight this rare ingredient. I collected enough to make about 26 lessor health potions. I didn’t have the other ingredients but this was a great find.

As far as Cael had known there were no human settlements of this side of the mountains as the land wasn’t farmable. There were insects as we entered the swamps. Lots of bugs. I found my cool self cantrip kept them away and Celeste cast personal force screen when she got too annoyed. Some bugs the size of our hands had to be sliced with our swords. We ended up hoping between mounds in the swamp with flight then recharging our Aether to stay topped off. The water was murky with fish and snakes and after wading through the first one and coming out with finger sized leeches that was enough for us. Around mid day Celeste noticed something in a mound of swamp mass. We headed that way and it appeared to be a building overgrown with plant life. It took a short time before we found an entrance to a dungeon, less than two days and we found our first dungeon!

The inside of the dungeon was a vibrant city scape with ratlike people hustling to and fro. They noticed us and started swarming to attack. The fight was on but not overly difficult. They dropped various weapons of good quality, all non-magical. We made our way to the castle at the center of the city. The rat king was supported by two healing rats and seven guards. Celeste’s lightning storm spell killed them all with a single cast. The stairs to the next level were behind the throne. I gathered all the loot. No magic items, just lots of copper coins and equipment. All in all we killed over 500 ratmen and gained over a thousand copper coins, a few hundred steel short swords of varying quality and dozens of silver rings. The armor and other loot wasn’t efficient use of space in storage. We searched a few houses and shops but gave that up as a waste of time. We moved to the second level.

The terrain changed to a sandy valley with stone walls funneling us forward. The monsters were black scorpions and red scorpions. They didn’t have a lot of health but their stinger had poison. The black poison drained 200 points of Aether and 50 health over a minute. The red scorpions burned 150 health over a minute and halved all healing effects. The boss was a very fast white scorpion. It was bigger than an elephant and I got tank duty. I got hit twice before we could zero its health. Its toxin from the stinger drained health, stamina and Aether, 200 points of each over just 10 seconds. That was scary especially since the effect had stacked and the stinger did another 150 physical damage. I drank one of my lessor health potions bringing my count to two. The loot was at least ok. A 300 point Aether crystal, white scorpion poison sac, *staff of scorpion summoning*, and 27 silver coins. The summoned white scorpion was a level 4 white scorpion. Its poison did ¼ of the damage as the boss we had just faced and cost 500 aether to summon for 1 hour with a 4 hour cool down. I put it down as a sell item.

The next level was forest. We had been fighting for over 10 hours and set up the tent by the stairs. Dungeons usually had a safe zone by the stairs. We hadn’t seen any monsters so I thought we would safe. In the tent we cleaned up with our spells and while I was getting a massage and doing a search on the pad I talked with Celeste. She asked what my goal was if life. I wanted a comfortable living and planned to make a light effort searching for the god essence. When she asked what I meant by light I told her I wanted to be safe and I needed a goal for my long life span. I was looking at dungeons on the pad. The reason why we were having such an easy time was we had superior tech for these dungeons. Then I found how dungeons ‘age’ They absorbed ambient mana from the outside environment and adventurers inside. It took a dungeon hundreds of thousands of Aether to grow. The dungeon could also absorb items dropped from adventurers and use them. An intelligent dungeon could also purchase upgrades from the SYSTEM once every 7 years. I was reading while Celeste finished the massage and fell asleep. Basically the dungeons I had entered only had been exposed to medieval technology. Dungeons in space had much more dangerous monsters, traps and technology. I read the warleaders journal and went to an entry I remembered. They had entered a dungeon on an asteroid mine. The dungeon had space worms with psionic attacks and shot needles faster than a bullet. There was another entry where his brother’s light cruiser had been destroyed in another dungeon by mechanical space fighters. Only 27 of a crew of 709 had escaped in shuttles. I fell asleep reading.

We woke and headed into the forest. More ratmen but they were skilled at ambushes. Fortunately our armor limited damage but I was reluctant to proceed after the 3rd successful ambush. Celeste said her observant skill was leveling like mad though so we proceeded. Soon she was able to see about half the ambushes. By the time we reached the other side of the forest Celeste was seeing 3 out of 4 ambushes. The final boss was in a clearing, a ratman chief riding a giant beetle. We focused distance fire on the beetle as they charged. The beetle had a sonic stun attack that hit us preventing us from using Aether for 2 minutes. Celeste took the hit from the charging beetle and the beetle gored her while the ratman launched himself at me. We had hit the beetle for a fair amount of ranged damage and Celeste finished it in melee. I struggled against the ratman chieftain. He was a very fast dual wielder and I had trouble without my force shields to block his attacks. My sword wasn’t doing enough damage. I used my sword ability to heal myself when I dropped under 200 health. The bastard just kept at me, it was worse than fighting Vlad. Fortunately a bloodied Celeste joined the battle before my health got under 50% again and we finished him.

We sat back to back in the clearing with me spamming the heal spell. Eventually I picked up the loot. A 500 Aether crystal, 79 silver coins, *yang short sword (+10 speed, +7 agility, charm: blur), ying short sword (+7 speed, +10 agility, charm: phase).* They were a matched pair and if both were linked gave another +10 speed and +10 agility and the haste ability increasing movement by 100% for 15 seconds with a two minute cooldown. The blur charm was active and just made it a little more difficult to hit the wielder. The phase was more powerful, allowing one physical attack to completely pass through the wielder but had an 8 hour cooldown. The paired blades were only a half meter long hilt to blade, one was black and the other white.

I looked at my items then asked Celeste if she could us the short swords. She said hell yes. She spent the next few minutes changing over her magic items. She then was rather surprised and told me that the paired weapons only used one magic item slot. It was a massive increase for Celeste and I knew she was now going to kick Vlads ass next time they sparred.

There was no teleport pad back to the top floor exit. Most dungeons with over 5 levels had one according to what I had read. Not this one. There was stone you could buy from the system that would do the same thing, it teleported a person in the dungeon to the dungeon entrance with an 8 hour cooldown. I put it on my must purchase list. We made a half ass effort to locate the secret treasure chest but since all 3 levels of the dungeon were so big we didn’t think it was probable. The monsters on the first two levels had respawned as well. We made best possible speed out. We were definitely not going to rerun this dungeon but if the loot sold well we knew where to find it.

We left the dungeon and set up the tent. Inside the tent I summoned a stone tub and water. I heated the water holding the fire spear under the water. Then we relaxed together in the hot water. Best idea ever.

I scanned the pad with Celeste sitting wrapped in my arms in front of me in the tub. I was looking for a vehicle. I found a hover bike with a 600kg capacity for 75,000 system credits. It was a two seater and was 3.5 meters long and 1.7 meters wide, weighed under 2 tons, which could be our combined cargo allowance on the ship. It had a top speed of 240 km/hr. It ran off of Aether crystals, a baseball sized recepticle. The pad had a design function. We could design our own hover bike and then purchase it at a SYSTEM terminal. I selected the full anti-theft security suite, +5,000 credits. Celeste took over. Celeste played with weapons systems finally adding a concealed dual Aether laser 20 degree targeting mount in the front, +12,000 credits, -100 kg weight carrying capacity. Celeste then increased the handling and top speed, +7,500 credits, -50 kg weight carrying capacity, top speed 320 km/hr. Celeste then added a light force screen for the bike, +5,000 credits, -20 kg weight carrying capacity. She then changed the color scheme and handed the pad back to me. I added a built in tool compartment, medical treatment compartment and a high end comm system, +6,800 credits, -25 kg weight carrying capacity. I then found an A.I. program for the bike. Nothing great, but it could autopilot the bike with the Pilot: Hover Bike skill of 11, +8,000 credits. Celeste said she would take the hover bike skill if I bought the bike. 119,300 credits, 405kg capacity, 320 km/hr. The bike at full operation cost 50 aether crystals per hour plus 5 aether crystals per shot of the dual Aether laser. There was an efficiency upgrade that cost 15,000 credits and reduced it to 35 aether crystals per hour. The next efficiency upgrade was 50,000 credits and reduced it to 20 aether crystals per hour. I passed on both and saved the design.

We slept after a quickie. When we woke we had another quickie, I really couldn’t resist having such a beautiful body who was so close and eager.

We continued through the swamp. As the swamp became less and we got more solid land I was able to pull out the bike and we arrived before sunset at our target dungeon. We entered immediately.

The dungeon was a fortress on the inside. It was a massive wooden structure defended by goblins. The entire dungeon was about half mile square and only had one level. The goblins on the walls were between level 2 and 4. They went down with one hit but there were a lot. They came in waves of 5 to 8 from the fort after we attacked. Eventually it slowed down and we entered the fort. The center of the fort had goblins between level 5 and 8. We had no problems and the loot was low quality weapons and copper coins. We killed about 400 goblins before the boss fight. The Fear Goblin Chieftain was a little bigger than me and level 11. Too bad our ranged attacks did so much damage. The loot was a 500 aether crystal, the cheiftain’s head and 21 silver. No magic items. The total time we took was 5 hours. We began the search for the secret treasure chest. Four hours later we gave up for now. We left the dungeon set the tent up and ate a large meal. It was just a one level dungeon so we should be able to find the secret chest if was still there.

When we reentered the fort goblins had respawned. It only took 4 hours this round to clear and the boss dropped another Aether crystal, *magic ring +6 strength, +2 constitution*and 23 silver coins. We spent 4 more hours searching and gave up again. We slept after the very long day.

The next day I went in alone so I could get my solo clear. It took me 9 hours and Celeste joked how slow I was. I had Celeste come in and this time we searched outside the fort and found the chest. Directly opposite the dungeon door on the far side of the fort we found a somewhat circular rock the shimmered for a second. I zapped the large rock with the excavate spell and the chest was underneath. It was decided that Celeste would get to open all secret chests since it was the only title she could level.

The chest had one golden scroll for the weapon skill bludgeoning weapons, 100 silver coins and a lightning long bow. The lightning long bow didn’t require arrows and cast the level 5 spell lightning arrow when draw and released with a cooldown of 2 seconds. We both tried the bow a few times, blowing chunks out of some trees. We didn’t get a summon companion scroll which I thought was odd. I checked the SYSTEM pad for info on treasure chests and companion scrolls.

It said all treasure chests drop a companion scroll, a gold scroll, magic item and coins. Sometimes they dropped additional items as well. It hadn’t disappeared and I searched it again. Finding nothing I began to smash it up. There in an enclosed compartment was the companion scroll and a pair of pea sized Aether crystals that were 1000 points each. My analyze skill told me it was a tier 3 companion scroll. I found a chart in the SYSTEM with info on companion scrolls. They ranged from tier 1 to tier 13. Tier 1 dropped from dungeon bosses and tier 2 to 13 were found in secret chests only. Even though secret chests took 6 months to 2 years to respawn I didn’t understand why a planet like this with so many low level dungeons wasn’t harvested for them by the superpowers. I looked at the chart again.

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| **Companion Scrolls** |
| Tier 1 | 100 |
| Tier 2 | 200 |
| Tier 3 | 300 |
| Tier 4 | 500 |
| Tier 5 | 700 |
| Tier 6 | 1100 |
| Tier 7 | 1300 |
| Tier 8 | 1700 |
| Tier 9 | 1900 |
| Tier 10 | 2300 |
| Tier 11 | 2900 |
| Tier 12 | 3100 |
| Tier 13 | 3700 |

Maybe it wasn’t worth the time? After the entire higher tier scrolls were multiples stronger than the low tier ones. And some dungeons were huge and finding the secret chest was harder than a needle in the hay stack. Whatever the reason these secret chests were my chosen path to wealth on this planet. The respawn was just under 12 hours for this dungeon. I and Celeste could clear it about 3 hours. That gave us time to explore the surrounding hills out to 40 miles on the bike. Each day we would clear the dungeon twice and make one exploratory trip. I was able to gather enough materials to brew the lessor health potions and brewed just 6 and gave them to Celeste for emergencies. I held the rest of the truffles until I could get Aether water to make the stronger version of the potion. After 5 days our only find was a space ship fighter that had been stripped to its frame. We had picked up 6 magic rings, a magic bastard sword and magic leather armor from the boss. We decided to return to the bat cave since I had enlarged my storage space using 60% of my Aether and it was now almost full. Celeste wanted to head across the ocean and sell the haul at the SYSTEM terminal but that was not feasible.

On our last night I looked over my sheet and noted all the upgrades I had made in the last week. I had made it to level 9 and Celeste level 6. My leveling stat points went into stamina. The reason was I found no skill associated with the stat and running out of stamina in melee combat sucked as I had found out a few times.

I compared Celeste and my stats side by side.

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| **Oliver** |  | **Celeste** |
| **Primary Stats - Unassigned 0** |  | **Primary Stats - Unassigned 0** |
| **Strength** | **53** |  | **Strength** | **42** |
| **Constitution** | **34** |  | **Constitution** | **34** |
| **Stamina** | **22** |  | **Stamina** | **45** |
| **Agility** | **47** |  | **Agility** | **126** |
| **Speed** | **22** |  | **Speed** | **70** |
| **Intellect** | **77** |  | **Intellect** | **123** |
| **Aether** | **87** |  | **Aether** | **52** |
| **Channeling** | **66** |  | **Channeling** | **38** |
| **Charisma** | **15** |  | **Charisma** | **39** |
| **Luck** | **6** |  | **Luck** | **NA** |

She easily outclassed me in but overall had about 140 stat points more than me. I would have to accept she would probably always outclass me.

My skills had hit a few levels here and there. The development really slowed after level 13 except in combat. Looking at my spells my flame spear had experienced 3 upgrades in the last week. It was my go to spell for a sure kill and currently stood at level 11. The upgrades I had chosen were +40% speed of the spear, +28% damage and decreased the cost to cast from 100 to 79 aether. The only other spell I had modified was personal force shield at level 17. I reduced it costing cast from 50 to 36. I had been using the spell a lot and I picked it over increasing the shield toughness again.

Celeste taught me Line of Sight Accuracy combat action. It gave my increased chance to hit targets not behind any cover. It stacked with other skills so it would improve my hit percentage as I leveled the action. Using the skill I found it took a small amount of sustained stamina and the action highlighted the probable location of a moving target I would need to aim at in order to hit it. It probably wasn’t the best combat action as there were HUD helmets that would do the same thing. We decided to head back through the swamp threw a different route, away from the temple dungeon. That final ratman boss had left me uneasy and I didn’t want to redo the dungeon.

Celeste thought she found another dungeon in the swamp but it was just the corner of a spaceship that had crashed. It was definitely bigger than my ship. I summoned up a platform of stone for the tent and we set up camp. I emptied my pocket space of a number of items to create space. I would use my water movement and Aether respiration to explore the ship, Celeste would scout the surrounding area within about 40km.

Using a few light stones I was able to barely see in the murky water. A few meters down I found the ship was cracked open and the hull was somewhat crumbled. Entering the crack in the ship I cast excavate clearing the dirt in the water. The water cleared considerably. Some vegetation still made it slightly murky. I moved further down into the ship. Passing the outer hull the ship corridors further in were in much better shape. The water cleared a little and I just saw some small fish fleeing the light. I found my first skeleton of a crew member. It looked human and was just wearing deteriorating clothes. I used analyze on all the items looking for something useful. The only magic item it had was a stamina belt, +10 stamina, +25% stamina pool regeneration. I then placed the skeleton in my pocket space planning to bury it. Moving forward I was lost as I could not read the writing on the wall. I forced open a door and it looked like a medical treatment room. Six skeletons were inside. I found 4 items of value on the bodies and another 10 minor magic items I tagged for sale.

*Glasses of Medical Evaluation, casts the Medically Assess Condition Spell, cooldown 5 minutes*

*Ring of Storing, has a 4 cubic meter space*

*Glass Eye, +12 Intellect, +6 Engineering Skill, +6 Engineering: Power Systems Skill*

*Prismatic Toe Ring, +5 Charisma, +5 Luck, Greater Shapechange Self, 4 four cooldown, heals 1000 health on transforming*

The 10 minor items gave a mix of stat and skill bonuses adding up to around 8. The pad said the medically assess condition spell was a tier 10 spell and would diagnose any effects tier 15 or lower on the target. The glass eye was more of a large contact lens that changed the eye to a golden yellow. It was going to Meranda. The Greater shapechange self ring had a tier 15 spell that physically transformed the wearer. The spell had the side effect that it could heal 1000 health when you changed form. Unlike the actual spell which had a 24 hour duration the ring sustained the spell until the ring was removed or cancelled. The ring had a 4 hour cooldown to recast the spell but it was definitely my new favorite magic item. I guessed one of the crew must have been a spy. I moved my bonded items around to activate the ring. Now I had two heals with my sword and this ring. I added the skeletons to my pocket space. I continued down the corridor and opened another door. It looked like a gym with no bodies. The next looked like a utility closet. I continued through the corridor and prying open doors. I found six more skeletons and had added 15 more minor magic items to my loot. The corridor ended in a crushed mass. I couldn’t find a path to another corridor. I returned to the surface. While waiting for Celeste I buried all the bodies I found in summoned stone coffins. I didn’t get any rewards but that was ok.

Celeste returned and I gave her the upgraded storage ring. I took the one I had bought her and planned to give it to Vlad or Meranda. She had found some other ship debris but no loot. I had a feeling this wreck had more treasures if I could just get to other parts. We ate, had sex and slept.

The next day I tried to break through the walls of the rooms. After finally getting the panel off I was meet with wires, tubes and pipes. I wished I had some type of blow torch. My fire spear wasn’t strong enough to cut the material. I circled back to the corridor end where the hallway was crushed. I wasn’t able to dig very far before encountering structural beams too heavy to move. I was about to give up when I noticed an access panel in the ceiling.

It was an engineering access tube for the ship. I started exploring. The damage from the crash made some ways impassible and others very tight. I was glad I wasn’t claustrophobic. Finally I got to a large room and I knew immediately that it was engineering. I had the pad translate the plaque I found. The ship was the *Gladius*, a light cruiser. I saw so many things I wanted to take in this compartment. At the top of the list there was a drained Aether core and an Aether collector. The core was 400,000 in size and the Aether collector was 250 per hour. There was a second core but it had shattered unfortunately. There were also 3 bodies. Two of the dead crew had a few minor items but the third was most likely the ships mage because of the items I found on him.

*Sapphire Inlaid Platinum Anklet, +3000 Aether Pool, +20 Channeling, +5 Levels Replenish Aether Core Spell*

*White Steel Dagger, +20 Aether, +20 Channeling, Siphon Aether Combat Ability*

*Amethyst Sphere, +5 Teleport Magic, +5 Time Magic, +5 Space Magic*

*Silver Chain Collar, +50 Aether, +25% Aether Recovery*

This guy had some serious items. The anklet was restricted to the space mage specialization class, thank you very much! The siphon Aether combat ability on the dagger stole 100 aether from a target on a hit. It was a tier 10 combat ability, the first one I had seen. The sphere was the size of a baseball and glowed with a blue light. The chain collar wasn’t too attractive as it looked like a dog collar. It would give me 750 aether but I wasn’t planning to sacrifice the cosmetic detraction. I switched out my steel toe ring and activated the anklet. The endorphin rush from almost doubling my Aether pool was immense. I felt drunk for a good thirty minutes while I cancelled my dimension space then recast it with 6000 aether. I recovered everything then I quickly filled my space with equipment I knew was valuable.

I returned to the surface and found Celeste who was ready to go looking for me. I had been under for over eight hours. Celeste had found another wreck, a small shuttle that had been stripped. Nothing great. In the tent Celeste used her ring to collect some of the loot I had removed. I tried to add the rest but in the end we had to drop 200 ratmen swords outside the tent. Ok no more stops. Straight back to the bat cave was the plan.