Chapter 15

Outside Cael was waiting and he was overjoyed to see me. It was well past our meet up time. I handed him the comm unit and his storage ring. He said he would pass me the Aether crystals in private. As we walked I introduced Celeste, Cael eyes kept wondering to her form and I could understand that. Celeste for her part was reviewing her sheets, probably choosing skill boons. The only thing she mentioned was she would like the observant skill if we could find a trainer or purchase the skill scroll. I said no problem. I explained to Cael about the summon companion scroll and didn’t mention I actually had used two. Cael told me he found a place to stay and a had few leads on magitechs. I told Cael the Celeste would cover the navigator role and could be the pilot if Ophelia wasn’t interested in it. We went to the hotel Cael had found. The room only had two beds and I flushed. I went to the lobby and got another room.

Cael handed me the Aether crystals when I returned. The three of us talked late into the night. Cael had a thousand questions for Celeste as she was the first SYSTEM companion he had ever met. She just had the knowledge of her skills and her personality was developing. She would grow into a personality over time based on her interactions. Eventually I retired to the other room with Celeste. She stripped and climbed into bed under the covers. Naked. She had an expectant look on her face. I held strong, just stripped to my underwear and said we would sleep in the same bed but we should wait for her personality to develop before we progressed to an intimate relationship. I checked her sheet, +1 to loyalty.

I woke the next day with Celeste’s naked body hugging my side. I guessed I slept the entire night with wood. I slide out of bed to take a long shower even though I didn’t need to because of my cantrip spell. Celeste stepped into shower a moment later. She was trying to crush my will. We washed each other and I remained strong. I did play with her nipples for a while I scrubbed her body. She was definitely aroused and I was happy my actions and my body turned her on.

We met Cael and started going around interviewing the magitechs. The first guy was a dick. He just kept asking for more crew shares as he said the engineer was the most important member of the crew. The second guy didn’t have a lot of experience in advanced work as he was still an apprentice. The third one definitely had orc blood. She was a really good magitech and had a repair shop on the outside of town. She wasn’t looking to leave the planet because she had two young brothers she was taking care of. We said we would get back to her if we needed just repairs and couldn’t find a magitech crew member. The next magitech was a very old woman and took one look at us and left. We guessed we looked too young and inexperienced to her. And that was the last one. The orc was the most competent of our options by far. We decided to visit her shop on the outside of town.

We brought food with us and her two younger brothers who were there studying on pads when we arrived dug into the food without hesitancy. Her shop had a lot of small vehicles she was working on, no spaceships. Then again there were probably only a dozen spaceships in the entire city. Cael, Celeste and myself got the orc’s story over food and few beers I drew from storage.

Meranda was a quarter blood orc. Her father had crashed on the planet 100 years ago and befriended a human woman. They had two children. Her mother and an aunt. Her aunt was killed in a hate crime when her mother was young. Meranda was the product of her mother being raped by a human. Her brothers were from a relationship her mother had with a drunk. Her mother gave her her grandfather’s legacy which was a pad with the engineering skill introduction. She studied hard and opened a business in her teens. Even though she was still ostracized she did excellent quality work and her business was growing even though she had to charge less. She was trying to get her brothers to learn the same engineering skills as well but they hated studying. Her brothers weren’t allowed to the local schools but both hoped to join the navy as a marine. Meranda frowned when they said this. It was obviously a sore point in this family.

I switched over my title to Cleric of Gerrn. Then I pulled out my SYSTEM pad and showed her the ship and damage. She took the pad and started reviewing it. Thirty minutes later she said she could get it fly, 400,000 credits minimum in used parts, not including the dual fusion core. That would get it to a space station and further repairs would be needed there. That amount was doable. I asked with all her hardships why she didn’t want to leave this planet. There was no good place for half breeds was her response. She at least could build a reputation here and scrape by. I made a spur of the moment and I said her brothers could join the crew for a half share each. The preteen orcs were jumping about excited and Meranda looked to be thinking about it. Meranda eventually said for us to come back tomorrow and she would tell us her decision.

As we walked into town Cael asked what the orcs would do on the ship. I said security, stewards and stevadores. With half a day left we went to find Ophelia. I called her on my new comm and set up dinner at a quality restaurant with Ophelia and Mindy. We walked through the stores waiting for dinner. Everything was either from the dungeon or made from things harvested in the dungeons. The local dungeon was an instance tower dungeon, stairs go up instead of down, and each team had its own dungeon. It had 25 levels and the dungeon harvesters were 90 % from the Ballen Empire teams. It cost 12,000 Ballen credits per person to enter if you were not on a Ballen team. We found a scroll shop and I got the Observant skill for 2000 Ballen credits for Celeste. Cael bought 2 scrolls. I found the enchantment skill for 5000 Ballen Credits and bought it. There was a scroll with golden lettering for the tracking skill in a clear case. The price was 150,000 Ballen credits! The owner said golden scrolls were pricy. If it had been a magic skill it would be worth 5 times as much. I asked about dual stat golden scrolls. He said easily over a million credits depending on the skill. I coughed, I used up a million credits. Well at least I got the dual stat skill and passed it to Celeste.

We looked in other stores. Cael bought a bunch of items, mostly gifts, I just bought a sword and sheath for Celeste and a light Aether rifle. She looked really bad ass walking like with a light hip sway and the weapons hung over her body. I put all our weapons in my storage before we entered the restaurant.

Ophelia and Mindy both wore uniforms and looked sharp and hot. Who said just guys looked hot in uniforms. We all sat and Ophelia and Mindy were introduced to Cael and Celeste. Both started talking about their time here. Mindy had a half dozen stories of local crimes. Ophelia went over her pilot training. She was almost certified as a primary shuttle pilot and was starting on her cruiser certification in the simulator. I wasn’t sure if I should reveal my ship. I decided not to reveal the ship to them at this time as they both seemed happy and I really only wanted Ophelia to join the crew. I just told them about my friendship with Cael and the boring life on the farm. I introduced Celeste as a new adventuring companion without specifically saying she was a SYSTEM companion. We ate, talked and drank till the early hours in the morning. We hobbled back to our hotel and I crashed in the sheets fully clothed. Celeste did the same and snuggled next to me.

The next morning Celeste was up and ready to go out. I commed Cael about getting tickets to return. I told him to get 6 tickets just in case. I left with Celeste to see Meranda. We got some breakfast on the way.

Meranda had tons of questions. She wanted to know what I planned to do with the ship. I told her passenger and light cargo for now. What were her brothers going to do. They would serve as stewards and security. What about the rest of the crew. I told her about Vlad, Red, Celeste, Cael and Ophelia. What about all her tools. I told her I had a pocket space spell and would transport it to the ship. When would we leave for the ship. I commed Cael and found out the next transport was 11 days away and he had purchased 6 tickets. Meranda nodded. She was in. In 10 days I would come and collect everything she wanted to take with her. I told her no more than 50 cubic meters of luggage as that was 80% of my estimate of my max spell casting. She said that would be sufficient. We talked for an hour working on the details. Cael arrived as we finished up. Apparently someone had tried to mug Cael this morning. He just ran away.

We spent the rest of morning deciding what to do. Cael said we could get some SYSTEM quests. Where? He had a local ‘guidebook’ where SYSTEM puppets offered quests. Puppets were essentially like NPC quest givers in a video game from what Cael described. Was this book like a map to the stars in Hollywood. Ok we would try it out. The first two NPCs were not there. Then third offered a gathering quest worth only 250 experience which we passed on. The fourth was a quest in the spire, we didn’t have enough money to enter the dungeon, 36000 Ballen credits. The fifth was a cooking quest, too boring for Cael. The sixth was to kill a dungeon boss in another dungeon. Cael said for me to open my SYSTEM pad. The map on my pad showed the location of the dungeon, it was 120 miles east. We accepted the quest.

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

We looked to rent a four person ATV, more of a buggy actually. We spent another night in the hotel. Celeste slept naked again and wrapped herself around me. I rubbed her smooth back and she tightened her body grip on me. I must have had godly willpower. The next morning we did the shower thing again and she almost got me. I could see this was a game to her, and she was slowly winning.

We left for breakfast with Cael then we all took the buggy. Our buggy wasn’t as fun to drive as my bike. I was driving as my car driving in the old earth gave me the best skill. Cael sat shotgun and used the pad to navigate. Celeste sat in the back scanning the landscape with her rifle. The roads disappeared after 10 miles from the city center. The terrain wasn’t too bad. Celeste shot a fast moving very large turtle that tried to intercept us. Two shots to the head killed it. I got 24 experience from her kill as she was my companion.

The next encounter was halfway through the trip. Two very large eagles attacked us on the open plain. Celeste took one down and the other one fled. The dungeon was just a hole in a rock. No town surrounded it. It was either a small dungeon or a dead dungeon. Dead dungeons had their central cores removed. We entered into a large field with trees and some dog sized squirrels attacked us a few meters in. It was a good sign. We moved slowly through the field. Giant squirrels were the only monsters until we found a large stone with stairs going down. We had tens of dozens of copper coins and squirrel pelts as loot. The next level the trees got more dense and the opponent was wolves. We didn’t have much trouble. Celeste was a bad ass with her rifle. She was just as good as Cael if not better. There was a mini-boss, a giant black wolf. It was killed easily. The loot was just more copper coins and wolf pelts.

The third level was denser woods, almost a forest, and some spiky birds. They had a ranged attack with a quill. Cael said the quills would make good arrow shafts so that was our loot. The boss was a very large specimen whose quills were more like javelins. I got hit just once with the quill going through my side. The loot was a figurine of a white cat. It was magical and could summon a white cat pet. The cat was just normal. Cael took it as a gift for his sister.

The forth level was a dense forest and was dark. The monsters were shadows. When they hit you they slowed you a bit and did frost damage. It was a tough fight until we started using light stones so they couldn’t sneak up on us. They dropped a single silver coin each. The boss was a pack of shadow monsters that swarmed us. Celeste’s shield wall diverted the wave and we picked them off. The reward was a black cloak. Shadow Cloak, +5 Stealth Skill, +10 Speed, Charm: Blend with Shadows. Both me and Cael had duster cloaks so Celeste got it. The fifth level was a forest at night with rain and lightning. It was hard to see and then the damn trees started attacking. Not all of them, maybe one of four. My flame spear was super effective against them. The loot was two silvers and an ironwood plank. The forest seemed to go on forever. We probably killed 100 trees, twice as many monsters as the previous floors. We did take an injury or two every encounter. Nothing serious though. The monster was a massive ominous looking tree. We tried to attack from distance but roots erupted from the ground attacking us. Celeste and me cast flight avoiding the attacks. Cael was too busy dodging to attack the tree. Celeste started casting plasma bolt and I cast flame spear. It took ten minutes to finish the fight. The loot was 30 silver, the elder branch and 2 pieces of Aether wood. We returned to the buggy, it had taken us 10 hours to clear the 5 level dungeon. We had a few monsters on the way out that we missed, the second floor had completely respawned. Meaning this dungeon had about an 8 hour respawn. There would be no way I could solo this dungeon. We ate in the buggy talking about dungeon strategy. We were going to clear it again before heading back to the city. I told Cael about secret chests and we decided to look for it on the next run.

The figurine was a blue cat this time. We got another Shadow Cloak as well which I claimed. It was a little cooler than my duster cloak so I switched. The Dread Trent was a bit easier this time. We got 30 more silver and a magic wand. Elder Stasis Wand, casts stasis on 1 cubic meter of non-sentient target. We looked everywhere on the way out for the secret chest. In the shadow forest with my treasure hunter skill active I got that flash in my vision again. It was near a tree. We didn’t find anything in the tree. I cast excavate on the ground and on the second cast we found the chest. This was too easy. So who would open it? They could get the title Treasure Hunter. We all played rock, paper, scissors after I explained the game and Celeste won the right to open it. This dungeon had no traps and neither did the chest. The loot was the same a companion scroll, a gold scroll for the cooking skill and cutlass sword. Satinsteel Cutlass, +5 long blades skill, +20 strength, +10 agility, heal self once a day. I got the cutlass and gave my Gold Chain Necklace, +10 Intellect, +5 Stellar Navigation Skill to Celeste. Cael won the gold scroll. Knowing it was worth 150,000 credits he was happy. I liked the sword but getting +5 to my cooking skill would have been good as well. Celeste got the companion scroll. Could a companion summon a companion? Celeste said no. But she said I could use it to improve a current companion in a system terminal with a wink. She already was superior to me, how much would she pass me after an upgrade?

Cael wanted a shadow cloak so we decided to run the dungeon twice tomorrow before heading back. We tented outside. Celeste slept on the bunk over me and Cael on the other side of the room. It looked like she was behaving at least for one night.

On the two runs we got two more figurines, a gray cat and a brown cat. Cael got his shadow cloak and I got the 4th one as a spare I guess. The loot from the dread trent was a magic wooden shield and a magic wooden staff. Both items were to be sold. My dimensional space was packed with loot, so much so that we had to put the tent in the back of the buggy.

On the trip back I learned Celeste hit level 4. A big accomplishment since she only got 33% of my experience. I had hit level 8 and would work on my upgrades in the city hotel room. The drive back had Celeste sitting shotgun and Cael on lookout in the back. I was able to go around any potential monster encounters and the trip was uneventful. We returned the ATV buggy and said we would pick the tent up in a few hours.