Chapter 8

The next day I updated my house furniture and got the bots working on the pool and pool house after harvesting the garden. I ordered more Aether soil as well and kept the growth going. I had to refocus and got my drones repaired and purchased six more. They all got a basic stealth suite upgrade, thermal and visual obfuscation. I left 2 million in cash in the house for the girls in case me and Violet didn’t return.

I bought a digger bot and a professional construction bot to add to my collection. I also bought two small bots and disguised them as raccoons to keep surveillance on the place and scare off bears and cougars. I bought everything I needed to finish the pool and pool house. Violet said I should build a stable as well. I asked ‘why’? And she said to ride. Ugh. I said I would build a stable when we got back. Planning ahead I had Flux bring up the land for sale in the area. The 689-acre plot toward the paved road was $390k and still available, the next plot that was adjacent to the paved road was a 680-acre plot and was $680k. I told Flux to start the process of buying both plots but only use $50k from my bank accounts to hold the properties. I would pay cash for the remainder when I returned.

Back in the terminal, I bought Violet an Aether battle skinsuit. It was black and powered by Aether instead of electricity. When she tried it on my jaw dropped. I then went and started making stat upgrades to Violet. I found I was limited to 10 stat points every 30 days for terminal ‘companions’. So I ended up adding 1 point to each physical stat and 5 points to Aether. I probably should start upgrading Celeste and Olivia too in case I never returned. I knocked them out and brought them both into the terminal with their permission. I had the system scan their stats.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Olivia** | **Celeste** |
| **Strength** | **36** | **37** |
| **Constitution** | **52** | **53** |
| **Stamina** | **58** | **59** |
| **Agility** | **48** | **48** |
| **Speed** | **46** | **48** |
| **Intellect** | **52** | **52** |
| **Aether** | **0** | **0** |
| **Channeling** | **0** | **0** |
| **Charisma** | **57** | **56** |

The girls were pretty average. They were planning to run cross country this fall as I said they had to play a sport from my requirements for staying here and that coach said they would just have to run Tue, Thurs, Fri, and Sat with the team. They had run their freshman year and gave it up their sophomore year due to their stepdad. I gave each of them +4 to speed and constitution. And then I +1 to Aether and channeling to open their magic. The last bit was painful but they wouldn’t mind…everyone wanted magic. If they did well in school I would give them a magic ability for Christmas. I brought them out of the terminal and woke them. I told them about the cash in the apartment in case we didn’t return and then returned to the terminal with Violet.

For myself, I found I could only withstand increasing my stats by 25 points. Each additional upgrade was very painful and Flux said I needed to complete missions as the terminal felt I didn’t deserve the increases. I did the same with my skills and abilities, getting 10 skill points and 5 ability points before the system stopped me. I decided to use my 7 skill points as well as this mission felt ominous. When I was done I felt like superman and my stats and abilities looked good.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strength** | **84** |
| **Constitution** | **76** |
| **Stamina** | **67** |
| **Agility** | **100** |
| **Speed** | **81** |
| **Intellect** | **84** |
| **Aether** | **40** |
| **Channeling** | **20** |
| **Charisma** | **53** |

8/12 slots used, 0 skill points available

Ballistic Hand Guns Beginner-5

Ballistic Rifles Beginner-6

Short Blades Beginner-1

Martial Combat Beginner-1

Dodge Beginner-2

Mercantile Beginner-2

Long Blades Novice-3

Parry Beginner-5

Language: Tantarian Basic

2/5, 0 ability points

Healing Hands Beginner-8

Dual Neurality Beginner-3

I looked at Violet and nodded. We had 27 hours left for the mission so we would have to hurry to get to Taton. I decided not to use the hoverbike. When we got through it was easy to find news and rumors from the people. The Grendles had overrun the frontier towns and were marching on Taton. Rather than get horses we went with a legion heading to reinforce the city. I didn’t want to sign a mercenary contract. I just planned to fight and bail if it got too bad.

The 40 miles to the city went by quickly as we didn’t rest and went on a fast walk getting there in 15 hours. The small city was bustling. The stone walls were just over 20 feet. The news was the incoming enemy had a huge army. Civilians were fleeing. We went to the wall and climbed up to talk to a sergeant. I had my A-10 rifle, Glock, and 12 drones. I had only brought 100 rounds of ammo for the A-10 which I regretted. I had 6 clips for the Glock. Violet did the talking while I watched the horizon, civilians were fleeing toward us, with smoke at their backs in the distance. The tired people were seeking shelter in the city while the smarter and less fatigued were hurrying past the city. I went down to the gates and healed some people until I ran out of Aether. I returned to the wall with Violet. She gave me bad news. They estimated over 100,000 enemies, and some cities from the Under Earth must have allied with the Grendles. She suggested we should leave…the worst case is I would take some hits to my stats. I said we would at least see the army before fleeing.

Holy shit…it was like the nightmare out of Lord of the Rings. They started making camp then the camp spread, surrounding the city. Violet said they would surround then attack, kill everyone, then they would loot the city. Ok, it was time to use my first ace card, the drones. Flux flew the drones east and positioned them. I watched on Flux’sscreen and finally, I said ‘go’ to Flux.

The commotion could be seen in the distance as the drones began their killing spree. I watched the death count on my phone, it hit 356 then the drone count dropped to 11. At 417 it dropped to 10. I watched as the one count went up and the other down. The power level on the drones was going down quickly as well, no point in recalling them. I should have brought 100 drones with me. The final count was 1,260 dead when the last drone was destroyed. The army had also rushed to combat the drones, slowing the encirclement and giving people more time to escape. Flux said he had killed 19 giants, 27 mages, 52 trolls, and a mixture of human and orc warriors. It was the mages who had knocked out 10 of the drones with area attack magic, a troll got a lucky hit on another drone and the last one had run out of power.

My next ace was the A-10 rifle. Unfortunately, I had hoped to only have one direction to defend but it looked like this army would roll over the walls from all directions. Violet heard the news that an army was coming to reinforce us, maybe 50,000 strong and made of mostly dwarves and humans with a contingent of war wizards from a neighboring ally. However, we needed to hold out for 20 hours.

The first attack came 10 hours later. Next to Violet, I emptied my A-10 over and over with spells and arrows joining me. When the army hit the base of the wall I switched to my Glock. Violet joined with hers but she had only brought 2 spare clips. Soon we were out of ammo. The west wall was briefly overrun. We switched to swords as the beasts climbed the walls and I witnessed the true Violet. She moved like a ghost beheading man and beast trying to get to the rampart. I did my best to keep up but I was tired after 10 minutes of swinging my two swords constantly. I didn’t know when but I was hit by a large rock and fell 15 feet to a rooftop in the city below. I was in immense pain and managed to heal myself a little before I passed out.

I came to and Violet was standing over me. There were a half dozen dead enemies around us. I healed myself a bit more and stood. Violet said the attack had faltered and we had a few hours before they regrouped and attacked again. Violet said her Aether armor worked fantastically but she was struggling to maintain it as her aether pool wasn’t that large. She sat next to me and we shared a meal she produced. I was very thirsty and drank a lot of fruit juice.

There were only about 5,000 defenders left and some 70,000 attackers from what she had overheard. And more attackers were trickling in. Violet said a group was going to try and break the siege and flee, the civilians were bunkering down in the sewers. She asked what did I want to do. How long before the reinforcements get here? Violet guessed maybe 6 hours had passed, so 14 hours. I had two clips left for my Glock. My A-10 was missing, not that I had any ammo for it. I said we would defend the civilians in the sewers who were too weak to break the encirclement and flee.

We went to the walls to look at the enemy. Violet said the night was coming soon too and that meant some of the more dangerous Under Earth creatures would be coming. We got with the defenders and set up a retreat route from the wall to the sewers. We would fight on the wall briefly then fall back with a dozen soldiers and defend an entrance to the sewer.

The oncoming attack was impressive and scary. I emptied my Glock and holstered it when I was out of ammo. We fought with swords briefly before retreating. Only seven of the twelve soldiers made it with us. Violet held the tunnel by herself for nearly half an hour. The soldiers were called away to help another entrance. I told Violet to step back and recover her Aether. I took the center of the tunnel and started holding the tunnel. I lasted 12 minutes before tiring and Violet took over again. My superior armor kept me alive. Violet skill kept her free of major injuries but she was tiring.

A troll did manage to break her defenses but I healed her after she defeated it. Things started to get sticky as stronger opponents started coming. We slowly retreated and got to one of the forks. Injured soldiers were there and more were fighting a dozen yards down the fork. They retreated to the fork and we all pulled back together. With my healing skill I got the injured soldiers back on their feet and we were able to hold out much better. Soon soldiers in our company were leaving to reinforce other tunnels. Violet was our bulwark. I was getting worried but soon the attacks started to lighten. Eight hours later a soldier instead of an enemy came down the tunnel. We were saved.

We walked out to the tragedy…469 soldiers survived with 134 mercenaries. We also saved 7,200 civilians in the sewer defense. Word of Violet's defense (and mine too) got us some rewards. Violet got a cart and selected a whole slew of various weapons of excellent quality, 6 horses, and we got 1200 gold coins reward as well. I was happy as we returned to Stormheart and brought our loot back to Earth. The horses were purged of disease in the terminal and then brought to Earth.

I was happy to see the pool was finished. I set up the puffcrete machine to make a 5’ high wall down the mountain. A 2-acre enclosure for the horses. I was happy to finally shower, even if it was alone. Violet was watching the horses. After taking a very long shower I returned to the terminal for my mission completion.

***COMPLETED: Help defend the city of Taton. Reward: +2 to all stats, +4 skill points, +3 to long swords skill, +3 parry skill, +3 dodge skill, 10,000 credits.***

Holy crap…the euphoria I was feeling and the upgrades happened. I checked my stats.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strength** | **86** |
| **Constitution** | **78** |
| **Stamina** | **69** |
| **Agility** | **100.2** |
| **Speed** | **83** |
| **Intellect** | **86** |
| **Aether** | **42** |
| **Channeling** | **22** |
| **Charisma** | **55** |

Huh. After some time I learned from the voice that after I passed my racial maximum it took 10 stat points to level a stat one point as the system had to rewrite my physiology. Also, I could only get these stat points from rewards…no buying them with credits. I checked and found I could raise my stats again but had just 4 points purchasable. Guess that was all the recognition I had earned from the system. I bought 4 stamina points after falling short in that category during the battle in the city.

I went to the house and fell asleep. I woke with Violet nestled next to me. We ate breakfast together and wondered where the twins were? I checked my phone and the message made me instantly angry.

Their stepdad had demanded they return to the house and had confiscated the jeep for his use. I told Violet and started by having Flux report the vehicle stolen since it was registered to me. A few directions from Flux to the police and they had arrested the asshole in a Wal-Mart parking lot. I went to the police station with Violet and talked to the police officers. The stepdad tried to say the jeep was his but I made it clear the girls were renting a trailer house from me and they had the use of my jeep for errands and to get to and from school. The girls were just 16 and wouldn’t be 17 for another month. Even then they needed to be 18 to move out of their parent's supervision. I told the officers that the stepdad was accused of sexual abuse and they found the complaint in their files and it was squashed by an officer who happened to be the stepdad’s uncle. The police chief seemed to be upset when everything came to light. His sister-in-law worked for the state social services and she would have someone come out to check on the girls living situation. If everything was good then she could fast-line us as a foster home. Unfortunately, the stepdad would only face minor charges and would be released soon. His uncle on the police force would face a suspension and probable dismissal.

I got the police officers to drive the jeep to the girl's mom's house so they could drive it back to the house. Celeste and Olivia were happy but I told them things were not quite done. We had to get the farm ready for a visit from child protective services. A call from the police officer said he was driving out now and his sister would be up in two days. We met the police officer there and the girls showed him the trailer they were living in. I let him walk through the house and the empty pool house. The poolhouse was empty and I said the place was for my sister who might visit but the twins might move into it in the interim. We talked a bit saying it might be best if the twins moved into the poolhouse as it was a nicer place to live he said he may stop by again unannounced to check on the girls. Fortunately, the trees had grown downslope and obscured the horse pasture. Flux was still working on registering them with the county.

I sighed and after a long shower Violet gave me a very long massage in bed…with a happy ending.