Chapter 5

The next day the farmers gave me the day off as I had been working hard for them. Cael said he had a ‘secret’ he wanted to show me about 12 miles north near the mountains. We set out on foot with backpacks full of food.

I practiced spells while searching for ingredients and moving with Cael. Cael scouted and shot a forest cat halfway through the hike. Eventually we arrived at a spring that had formed a big pool in a rock depression. This was the secret? I was starting to a gay vibe from Cael. He said I should go swimming. Did he want to see me naked? I was getting uncomfortable. Seeing my hesitance he caved and told me the secret. It was an Aether pool! Which he explained if someone immerses in the pool they could greatly increase their Aether recovery.

I waded in and found he was right my recovery increased a little more than three fold! Cael said the water could be bottled but the Aether dissipates in about 12 hours. Cael said the real big secret was at the bottom of the pool. A dungeon entrance!

Cael said it was just an infant dungeon and only had one large circular room about three hundred yards across. It’s terrain was a swamp with poison frogs and dragon flys as monsters. The boss was just a large frog and gave a small Aether crystal the size of a grain of rice. Cael brought out a small bag and poured out a small handful of rice sized rainbow Aether crystals. He had cleared the dungeon 49 times so far. Each grain was worth about 200 SYSTEM credits or could be used to recharge his rifle, adding 40 shots. The monsters respawn after about 20 hours including the boss. After I topped off my Aether pool I swam with Cael through the dungeon opening under the water.

After passing the opening I found myself on muddy ground. Crickets and frogs sounded throughout the stone cavern that was lite by points of blue light on the ceiling. Stone paths were latticed throughout surrounding pools. The frogs were the size of small pigs but Cael said their tongue attack range was only about 5 feet. The dragonflys had 12 inch wings and made lots of noise so were easy to locate. Their bites hurt but were not serious. The biggest danger was getting too distracted by one creature and have the other monsters move in.

My first frog took 11 attacks, 2 missed, to kill with my stone bullet spell. While I was in combat, Cael one-shot two other frogs with a slug rifle and used an electric whip to kill one dragonfly that were attracted to the noise. I gained a whopping 12 experience. Harvesting the frog was much different than outside. It was like video games. When I touched the corpse it had a blue light surround it then the corpse faded into a frog leg and a heavy copper coin remained. Cael let me know the copper coin could be converted to 2 SYSTEM credits at a SYSTEM terminal. The frog legs could be made into dinner at the farm he joked.

I tried a dragonfly next, it took 9 attacks, five of which hit to take down the bug. 8 experience. I asked Cael how much experience it takes to get to level, the response was 1000. Ok. I began my grinding with Cael chaperoning. We zigged back and forth on the paths avoiding the far end where the dungeon boss resided. My approach was to cast fleet footed then spam stone bullet, using my speed to remain outside the frogs attack range. When my Aether pool got too low I left to the Aether pool to meditate and quickly recover.

The day passed quickly and the pain in my abdomen started telling me I was approaching my limit. When I told Cael he went quickly to kill the boss with two shots from his Aether rifle. He got an Aether crystal and a deep dark green duster cloak, he handed me the duster. It was a nice looking piece of clothing. Cael said it had +3 to Str, +3 Stam and gave 10% energy resistance.

I had also leveled up my stone bullet spell, at level 3 I added 10 yards to range, at level 5 I increased damage by 30%, and at level 7 I selected the boon double base damage.

We then left the cave. We ate a large meal and spent the remaining daylight swimming. We talked for awhile on experience and skill growth. Cael explained how in combat skills grew anywhere from two to twenty times faster. It really depended on the level difference and how ‘in danger’ you were. Once I topped of my Aether pool in the Aether pool I was prompted to learn a new skill, the Supplemental Aether Core Skill. Cael wasn’t familiar with the skill. It sounded very useful so I decided to accept. I really had to reign in my impulses on learning new skills.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Supplemental Aether Core** | 1 |
| Associated Stat: | Aeth, Chan |
| Leveling Effect: | Adds 50 Aether per level to Aether Pool |
| Level 7 Boon: | Not reached |
| This skill creates a secondary aether pool in the mage | |

I relayed the skill info to Cael and he was shocked. Dual stat skills were extremely rare. Typically they were only bestowed after completing extremely difficult SYSTEM quests. I had thought being immersed in the pool unlocked the skill. Cael said he had swam in that pool dozens of times and never was prompted to learn the skill. Maybe it was due to me being the mage class. Cael also let me know that dual stat skills could not be imparted to others. Cael had mentioned ‘SYSTEM quests’ and I asked him to elaborate. The SYSTEM quests could be obtained through SYSTEM proxies or at a SYSTEM terminal. A SYSTEM terminal could be found at SYSTEM space stations or typically at large cities on planets since populations built up around them. The only known SYSTEM terminal on this planet was 700 miles away in the city of Sand Bastion. It was controlled by the Ballen Empire. From Cael’s description a SYSTEM proxy sounded like an NPC quest giver in games. They appeared like normal sentient beings but had fixed level and abilities and the ability to give quests.

Cael said it was time to return to the farm. My loot from the day was 34 frog legs, 8 dragonfly wings, 42 credits in copper coins, and 714 experience.

I checked my skills while heading back.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Skill*** | ***Level*** | ***Tier*** | **Percent Next Lvl** | **Stat** |
|  | *Spellcraft (Primary)* | *8* | *5* | 38% | *Chan* |
|  | *Spirit Magic (Secondary)* | *2* | *2* | 7% | *Aeth* |
|  | *Mind Shield* | *2* | *2* | 5% | *Int* |
|  | *Sense Psionics* | *2* | *2* | 71% | *Chan* |
|  | *Earth Magic* | *3* | *3* | 14% | *Aeth* |
|  | *Stone Magic (Secondary)* | *8* | *5* | 51% | *Con* |
|  | *Order Magic* | *1* | *1* | 13% | *Aeth* |
| 1 | *Marksman* | *8* | *5* | 75% | *Agil* |
| 2 | *Cooking* | *2* | *2* | 1% | *Agil* |
| 3 | *Aether Cultivation* | *4* | *3* | 44% | *Chan* |
| 4 | *Air Magic* | *4* | *3* | 19% | *Aeth* |
| 5 | *Alchemy* | *3* | *3* | 66% | *Int* |
| 6 | *Botany* | *3* | *3* | 27% | *Int* |
| 7 | *Mycology* | *2* | *2* | 12% | *Int* |
| 8 | *Water Magic* | *2* | *2* | 89% | *Aeth* |
| 9 | *Sculptor* | *2* | *2* | 5% | *Chr* |
| 10 | *Supplemental Aether Core* | *1* | *1* | 6% | *Aeth/Chan* |
| 11 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |
| 12 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |
| 13 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |
| 14 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |

I mentally clicked on Stone Magic to select the boon for level 7.

Stone Magic Boon Selection:

* “Bonus Spells” – +2 spell slots, must be spells from stone magic sphere
* “Spell Efficiency” – reduce all stone spells Aether cost by 11%
* “Primary Spell” – promote one stone magic spell to primary spell

I selected spell efficiency. With my summon stone spell I was now at 25 mana per 1.1 cubic feet of stone summoned. Excellent.

We returned back to the farm. I went to sleep immediately exhausted.

When I woke it was after breakfast. I found my Aether Core had leveled twice while I slept. Apparently it leveled naturally as long as my Aether pool was full.

I spent the next four days focusing on raising my skills and spells while doing my stone projects for the community. My spell boon for summon stone spell at level 7 was doubling the base stone volume to 2 cubic feet. With this increased efficiency I was quickly completing projects. After four days I was given another day off. I quickly reviewed my status before Cael and myself went to the simple dungeon again.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Primary Stats** | | |  | **Secondary Stats** | |
| **Strength** | | **14** |  | **Aether Tolerance** | **3** |
| **Constitution** | | **13** |  | **Mental Resilience** | **4** |
| **Stamina** | | **12** |  | **Soul Strength** | **2** |
| **Agility** | | **13** |  | **Cellular Cohesion** | **1** |
| **Speed** | | **7** |  | **Personality** | **2** |
| **Intellect** | | **24** |  | **Fame** | **1** |
| **Aether** | | **31** |  |  |  |
| **Channeling** | | **24** |  |  |  |
| **Charisma** | | **10** |  |  |  |
| **Luck** | | **2** |  |  |  |
| **POOLS** | **Total** | | **Regen/Min** |  | |
| **Health** | 375 | | 0.60 |  | |
| **Stamina** | 290 | | 0.75 |  | |
| **Aether** | 895 | | 1.67 |  | |
| **Psion** | 60 | | 0.13 |  | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Skill*** | ***Level*** | ***Tier*** | **Percent Next Lvl** | **Stat** |
|  | *Spellcraft (Primary)* | *10* | *5* | 36% | *Chan* |
|  | *Spirit Magic (Secondary)* | *2* | *2* | 11% | *Aeth* |
|  | *Mind Shield* | *2* | *2* | 5% | *Int* |
|  | *Sense Psionics* | *2* | *2* | 79% | *Chan* |
|  | *Earth Magic* | *5* | *4* | 18% | *Aeth* |
|  | *Stone Magic (Secondary)* | *10* | *5* | 1% | *Con* |
|  | *Order Magic* | *1* | *1* | 19% | *Aeth* |
| 1 | *Marksman* | *8* | *5* | 77% | *Agil* |
| 2 | *Cooking* | *2* | *2* | 8% | *Agil* |
| 3 | *Aether Cultivation* | *6* | *4* | 16% | *Chan* |
| 4 | *Air Magic* | *6* | *4* | 70% | *Aeth* |
| 5 | *Alchemy* | *5* | *4* | 71% | *Int* |
| 6 | *Botany* | *6* | *4* | 3% | *Int* |
| 7 | *Mycology* | *4* | *3* | 44% | *Int* |
| 8 | *Water Magic* | *3* | *3* | 23% | *Aeth* |
| 9 | *Sculptor* | *4* | *3* | 22% | *Chr* |
| 10 | *Supplemental Aether Core* | *6* | *4* | 6% | *Aeth/Chan* |
| 11 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |
| 12 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |
| 13 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |
| 14 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Spell*** | ***Level*** | ***Rank*** | **Percent Next Level** | **Tier** |
|  | *Heal Other* | *3* | *3* | 11% | *1* |
|  | *Summon Stone (Primary)* | *7* | *5* | 21% | *1* |
|  | *Stone Bullet (Secondary)* | *8* | *5* | 42% | *1* |
| 1 | *Create Water* | *6* | *4* | 88% | *1* |
| 2 | *Aether Respiration* | *5* | *4* | 2% | *3* |
| 3 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |  |  |

I was getting close to the prerequisites for the teleport magic. Probably another week or so. Cael let me take the lead in the dungeon. There was a new variant frog that had a massive 10 yard leap attack. Cael said dungeons evolve and this was an attempt to counter ranged attacks. It really didn’t effect us as I was still able to retreat and kill a frog before it could get in range. If there were multiple frogs Cael handled the extras.

My stone bullet spell was doing almost 3 times its original damage and it only took two or three solid hits to kill one. I was a killing machine and Cael even let me attempt a mini-boss, an extra large onyx dragonfly by myself. I took some damage for the first time losing some chunks of flesh to bites from the beast. When I got down to half health Cael jumped in and took it out. I had managed to get about 30% of health off the mini-boss. My heal spells quickly regrew my missing flesh and I definitely wanted armor. The drop was a few copper coins and a black belt that was veined like a dragonfly wing. Cael identified it for me, Onyx Belt +20 stamina pool, +1 Luck. Cael said it was probably worth 200-300 credits since luck enhancement gear was pretty rare. I put it on over my shorts. It was comfortable and clasped itself without a buckle. It felt warm and silky when it touched my skin but wasn’t restrictive at all. I liked it. Cael asked if I wanted to try my luck with the other mini boss. I said yes because I wanted the loot not so much the pain. We made our way across the cavern and I continued to kill frogs and I finally leveled! I got a free Aether point and immediately added my two free points to intellect. I decided to hold onto my skill and spell points for now. I got over confident and pulled three frogs and two dragonflys. One frog got me and I lost 40 health to poison. That hurt. We proceeded more cautiously after Cael bailed me out. I decided to hunt frogs for a while before heading to the mini boss. I got a title as well.

Frog’s Bane Tier 1 – you have killed 100 dungeon frogs, +10% damage dealt to dungeon frogs, -5% damage received from dungeon frogs, next level at 1,000 frogs

The mini boss was an Azure colored frog the size of a dog that spit a blue glowing liquid that was a mild paralytic. I hit it twice before I got hit. The poison slowed me and I was quickly hit two more times before Cael stepped in and finished it. I was now pretty certain I was no match for the boss. Cael gave me the loot from the mini boss. A bunch of coppers, a vial of the blue paralytic and a pair of blue socks. Cael said almost all equipment in this dungeon were clothes. The socks were very thin, similar to sock liners. Cael let me know the properties. Azure Socks (both must worn for effect) +2 Agility, +5% to stamina pool. Cael said they were not bad and being magic laced would probably not wear out. They could probably get 500-600 credits in a large city for novelty. I put them on.

I killed some more frogs until none were left in the cavern besides the boss. I let Cael eliminate the boss and he gave me part of the loot, *Brooch of Blades +2 charisma, +4 to long blades skill*. The brooch was a silver frog head with a sword in its mouth. It wasn’t ugly or ostentatious and only two inches in size. Then Cael gave me some not so great news. I could only have 5 active magic items. I was currently at four. This number would increase by 1 every 10 levels. I also needed to get long blades before I could get +2 to the skill. The brooch wasn’t worth much since people mostly used ranged attacks, Cael guessed 600-700 credits.

We returned to the farm.

I slept well again. When I woke I was pleasantly surprised to see my Supplemental Aether Core skill had reached level 7. I had the opportunity to select a boon.

Supplemental Aether Core Boon Selection:

* “Improved Core” – +10 Aether per level
* “Aether Shard” – if Aether pool is full empty to create an Aether shard ¼ total Aether supplied
* “Improve Aether Tolerance” - +1 Aether Tolerance

Well damn. All options were beyond awesome. Aether shard was like a personal money printer. Doing the math the crystal would worth 250 credits but that would grow as my Aether pool grew. I would never be poor. I selected it without thinking and made my first Aether shard. The Aether poured from me into my palm and I immediately felt sick. I couldn’t move because the growing pain was so intense. It took at least 15 minutes before I was able to move again. The shard looked the same size as the shards Cael harvested from the dungeon boss, maybe a little bigger. Well I could make 2 a day if a didn’t mind the pain. But the pain was VERY bad.

Even after filling my Aether pool it was painful to cast spells. It was like creating the shard had burned all my Aether channels in my body and pushing Aether through them hurt. It took three days to fill mostly normal. I focused on small Aether cost spells, cooking and alchemy during this time. When I felt better I resumed the larger projects the farmers had. Three days later I returned to the dungeon with Cael. After my first run around I was sitting in the Aether pool using Aether Cultivation and it hit level 7! I quickly opened the interface to select my boon.

Aether Cultivation Boon Selection:

* “Improved Flow” – +10% Aether recovery per tier
* “Aether Tolerance” – +2 to Aether Tolerance
* “Passive Cultivation” – while awake you can utilize this skill at 50% efficiency and perform other actions

It really was no contest for me. I was frustrated with my limited daily Aether use. With +2 to my Aether tolerance I could increase it by 66%. Excitedly I went back to grinding and soon got another bonus, Level 3! I had passed the 2000 experience threshold. I put both stat points into intellect bringing it to 28 and saved my skill and spell points. Cael said my next level required 4000, twice my current. I wasn’t deterred at all and attacked with fervor.

I took down both mini bosses myself but took a little damage as well. Well I did need to use my heal spells to level up as well. The two items I received were *Black Slippers, +2 strength, +2 unarmed combat* and *Navy Blue underwear, +2 charisma, vanilla scent*. The slippers were impractical but Cael wasn’t interested. I put on the underwear and I immediately smelled like a vanilla candle. I had also reached my item limit of 5 for my level. I waited while Cael killed the boss then we headed back to the farms.

On the trip I decided to review my sheet in its entirety.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Oliver** |
| **Origin** | **Earth** |
| **Race** | **Human** |
| **Class** | **Mage** |
| **Specialization** | **None** |
| **Title** | **None** |
| **Experience** | **2680** |
| **Level** | **3** |

I asked Cael about specialization and title. I could take a specialization when I reached level 7. He wasn’t sure but thought a specialization would allow me to focus on one sphere of magic. A had Titles were given for accomplishments. They usually give a reward to stat points when first earned and then a benefit when active. You could have as many titles as you could earn but only one active at a time. Cael had the “Dungeon Soloist” title. He received +1 to every primary stat when he earned it and when equipped he did +10% damage in dungeons when not in a party.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Primary Stats** | |  | **Secondary Stats** | |
| **Strength** | **14** | **(3)** | **Aether Tolerance** | **5** |
| **Constitution** | **15** |  | **Mental Resilience** | **4** |
| **Stamina** | **12** | **(3)** | **Soul Strength** | **2** |
| **Agility** | **17** | **(2)** | **Cellular Cohesion** | **1** |
| **Speed** | **7** |  | **Personality** | **2** |
| **Intellect** | **28** |  | **Fame** | **1** |
| **Aether** | **33** |  |  |  |
| **Channeling** | **29** |  |  |  |
| **Charisma** | **10** | **(4)** |  |  |
| **Luck** | **3** | **(1)** |  |  |

My stats were looking good. I just needed two points in intellect to learn teleport magic! The number in brackets were the magic equipment buffs.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **POOLS** | **Total** | **Regen/Min** |
| **Health** | 425 | 0.70 |
| **Stamina** | 384 | 0.99 |
| **Aether** | 1015 | 1.96 |
| **Psion** | 68 | 0.14 |

This was disappointing. My health and stamina were low, Cael suggested my health be at least 800 if I wanted to have a degree of survivability. His rifle did around 600 damage to an unarmored target…shit I was basically a one hit kill to him. Thinking back to game terminology I was the prototypical squishy mage.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Next Skill Slot at Level 5 |  | Unused Skill Points: 4 | | |
|  | ***Skill*** | ***Level*** | ***Tier*** | **Percent Next Lvl** | **Stat** |
|  | *Spellcraft (Primary)* | *13* | *7* | 31% | *Chan* |
|  | *Spirit Magic (Secondary)* | *2* | *2* | 60% | *Aeth* |
|  | *Mind Shield* | *2* | *2* | 41% | *Int* |
|  | *Sense Psionics* | *2* | *2* | 86% | *Chan* |
|  | *Earth Magic* | *6* | *4* | 4% | *Aeth* |
|  | *Stone Magic (Secondary)* | *11* | *6* | 9% | *Con* |
|  | *Order Magic* | *1* | *1* | 69% | *Aeth* |
| 1 | *Marksman* | *10* | *5* | 12% | *Agil* |
| 2 | *Cooking* | *4* | *4* | 3% | *Agil* |
| 3 | *Aether Cultivation* | *7* | *5* | 49% | *Chan* |
| 4 | *Air Magic* | *6* | *4* | 70% | *Aeth* |
| 5 | *Alchemy* | *6* | *4* | 44% | *Int* |
| 6 | *Botany* | *6* | *4* | 78% | *Int* |
| 7 | *Mycology* | *4* | *3* | 66% | *Int* |
| 8 | *Water Magic* | *3* | *3* | 23% | *Aeth* |
| 9 | *Sculptor* | *4* | *3* | 45% | *Chr* |
| 10 | *Supplemental Aether Core* | *7* | *5* | 11% | *Aeth/Chan* |
| 11 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |
| 12 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |
| 13 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |
| 14 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% |  |

This was all good news. My alchemy, botany and mycology were all close to breaking through to 7 and getting a boon and more importantly the extra intellect points! All four of my remaining slots were needed for teleport, space, force and time magic though. I would have to resist adding anything…unless it sounded really cool.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Next Spell Slot at Intellect 30 | | | Unused Spell Points: 4 | |
|  | ***Spell*** | ***Level*** | ***Rank*** | **Percent Next Level** | **Tier** |
|  | *Heal Other* | *3* | *3* | 25% | *1* |
|  | *Summon Stone (Primary)* | *9* | *5* | 21% | *1* |
|  | *Stone Bullet (Secondary)* | *11* | *6* | 36% | *1* |
| 1 | *Create Water* | *6* | *4* | 88% | *1* |
| 2 | *Aether Respiration* | *6* | *4* | 11% | *3* |
| 3 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Psionic | *Fortress Mind* | *2* | *2* | 55% | *2* |

Damn I was a one trick pony as a mage. I was holding the spell slots for when I learn the new magic spheres. I also realized I needed to spam my psionic ability to level it, maybe someone in the community had an attack psioinic skill to help me level faster like Red did the first few days I was here. Cael didn’t know anyone who did. My stone bullet spell had a new boon and I choose +30% damage. I decided my spell was now about as effective as a bullet from a .22 handgun now.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Cantrips | next slot at level 5 | |  |  |
|  | ***Spell*** | ***Level*** | ***Rank*** | **Percent Next Level** | **Tier** |
|  | *Light* | *0* | *0* | 0% | *0* |
|  | *Sense Danger* | *0* | *0* | 0% | *0* |
|  | *Sense Direction* | *0* | *0* | 0% | *0* |
|  | *Cool Self* | *0* | *0* | 0% | *0* |
|  | *Warm Self* | *0* | *0* | 0% | *0* |
|  | *Cleanse Body* | *0* | *0* | 0% | *0* |
|  | *Clean Clothes* | *0* | *0* | 0% | *0* |
| 1 | *Fleet Footed* | *0* | *0* | 0% | *0* |
| 2 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% | *0* |
| 3 |  | *0* | *0* | 0% | *0* |

We eventually made it back to the farm and I went to sleep after spam casting spells to drain my Aether.