

Over the next treen, I learn I need to get at least one other item.

A razor, as my beard starts coming in and...it isn't pretty.

Once Brandon stops laughing after he notices the patchiness, he tells me it's not that uncommon at my age. Using soap and a sharp knife, he shaves it off, and it takes nearly a week before it's noticeable again, just as patchy.

The traveling goes surprisingly well. Up with the sun, Silver buffs us after breakfast. Then we walk until noon, eat, get buffed again, and we walk again. Even when it rained, it never hit the 'I'm miserable' stage of being soaked.

Throughout the days, Brandon points to the sky and asks me to predict the weather. I screw it up, of course, and he explains how to go about taking in the shape and grayness of the clouds, the sound of the insects, the feel of the air, and a lot of other things that don't always make sense, and use that to work out what the weather will be like later in the day.

He sucks as a teacher, but at least there's no way under the system he can't make me 'not learn'. Worse that happens is I don't benefit from a teacher's bonus to my learning.

He did the same when we encountered animals. And at least once a day, he had me pick up a trail to track.

The days are leisurely, and even Helen stops grumbling about it after a while and just enjoys the quiet of the wilderness.

They aren't all without events.

One lesson in following a trail led to a boar. We were close enough by the time we saw it that it had noticed us and charged. We couldn't get it to give up the chase, so Brandon stunned it with a blow to the skull it and we moved on.

When I pointed out that he'd said animals would leave us alone if we didn't disturb them, his reply was that not every animal was the same. Then grinned and added. 'It's what makes this fun.'

We made camp well before the sun reached the horizon, and once we were setup spent time training. My archery, swordplay, blocking and dodging all got good workout, and Brandon insisted I train hand to hand with him.

I'm surprised at how few bruises I go out of those sparing matches.

Then we ate, trained some more, and as the sun vanished, me and him read while Helen and Silver trained some more.

Magic training involves a lot of talking about it, from what I gathered.

The only 'incident' relating to me being hunted, and it might not even be related—Brandon said they could have been a patrol taking us for brigands—was around London. It's about half the size of Toronto, Helen explained, and the only actual settlement between it and Detroit after the Nation of the People. We had to cross the road again, and we missed a group on horseback. They yelled after us as we rushed to the other side.

I heard them trashing through the trees for a bit, but they never caught up to us.

We explored a few more abandoned buildings, but unlike Brandon's eternal enthusiasm with them, after a while, they all felt the same to me, and none had anything of interest.

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"I don't think it's going to rain anymore," I tell Brandon, looking at a sky filled with wisps of clouds ahead of us and the dark ones behind us. I'm pretty much just playing the

odds here. I still can't get anything out of what's up there or around us that clues me in. But he nods.

"Let's look for something elevated and make camp. Hel, will that desiccate spell work on the ground like it did to dry us off? Otherwise we're going to want to make beds so we aren't sleeping on soggy grass, and those are less comfortable than the ground."

"It'll work," she replies.

"Isn't it early to stop?" Silver asks. "If Helen can just dry the ground for us?"

"I want Dennis to hunt us dinner," he replies as we continue.

"Shouldn't you do it?" I ask. "You're more skilled at tracking."

"Which is why you need the practice. And if you don't catch anything, we have that jerky you've offered."

"If you're sure."

He grins. "Don't worry about it. You know what you're doing, and you don't have to worry about us going hungry. This is the best time to do it."

If you say so?

Under an hour of walking through a hilly forest, Brandon is satisfied with the location. With words that just don't want to registers as such, along with motions and a sprinkling of salt, the water on the ground vanishes, leaving dry earth, and a few wilted leaves and slightly yellowed grass. The spell doesn't adjust to what has more or less water in them.

With my bedroll in place, the fire going, and Brandon waving at me, I set off on my first ever hunting expedition. Alone. Barely knowing what I'm doing.

I guess there's no better way to learn.

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I pull the arrow out of yet another tree. At least I saw where this one hit. I must have lost a good tree of them to the underbrush at this point, or a in a bolting deer, or to them breaking.

That's the thing Brandon might have forgotten to tell me. Hitting an animal isn't enough. If I don't down it in one hit, I have to be able to track its trail as it run off.

That's a lot easier said than done. It takes a lot less than I expected to lose a blood trail.

At least this is good training for my archery and my tracking. If not my nerves. Even after these days of peaceful traveling, now that I'm alone, I can't help remember my first time in a forest. That Warg, and how lucky I was to survive it. If I come across a bear like in that house, it's quest over for me.

I settle my nerves, a little, by breathing and focus on moving without sounds. When I make out a bundle of fur no larger than my head, I pull on the string, aiming, and—the damned thing takes off at the creaking of my bow.

I resist the urge to chase—that's a waste of time—and look at the shadows. I'm guessing another hour of full daylight. Half of that in an attempt at killing something, then I head back.

I spot the trail not long after and follow it until I see the deer. It's on the smaller side, so better odds of me killing it with one shot. I take position, gently pull the string as I aim. I take my time; I have all the time in the world. Well, not really, but—

What's that?

The distraction as the...whatever that dark thing is, pulls my attention causes my fingers to loosen and the arrow's off, missing the deer completely. Unless I'm mistaken, it hit that thing I noticed through the trees.

It doesn't roar or scream or even move, so I figure I don't need to run in the opposite direction. I'm cautious in my advance until I realize it isn't something, but a hole in the side of a hill.

I approach it, and see my arrow a few paces inside, well within the light streaming in. I listen for the sounds of an animal since I've seen enough movies where they use caves like this as dens, and when I don't hear anything, I step forward.

Congratulation, you have found a Dungeon.
You have found Dungeon of Munsee.
This Dungeon has not been explored. Experience, and reward bonuses will be assigned upon exit based on percentage of completion.
Do you wish to enter Dungeon of Munsee? Yes/No

My first dungeon!

Ye—

I back up, pulling my hand away.

Don't be an idiot, Dennis. This is a dungeon, not a game room. Since it hasn't been explored, I can't even query the system for rating info on it. That is not a place to wander in alone.

I pull up the team window.

Thing is, I don't have to be alone. And I'm pretty sure there's at least person who won't say no.

I bring up the team's chat.

Dennis—Hey team, I just found a dungeon that's never been explored before. Who wants to go on an adventure?

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