

StoryLine-7

I startle awake to the appearing message.

You have reached the age of 16.
It is now time for you to select your class. You have 13 hours to do so.

I rub the crud out of my eyes as its meaning sinks in.

That's it. My life is over.

It's not over, dumbass. I have half the day to make it back, and Court is only two or so hours from here.

In what direction?

Not in the direction of sitting here.

I swipe the message away. I might as well look at the abyss right now.

"List my available classes."

There are no classes available for your selection currently.
Make your way within range of a settlement node to gain access to its list of available classes

It's been that way since the system appeared. You have to be around other people to have a list of class you can select from. The more people, the more options to pick from. Nodes have access to every class in the world, as far as I know. If someone doesn't have my dad to limit their choices, they can become anything they want from a node.

It's why the farmers make pilgrimages to Base when their kid's about to turn sixteen and isn't interested in taking up their parent's class.

And it's why I have to get back, so get up and get moving.

What's the point?

"The point is that I'm not just going to give up," I grumble, pushing myself to my feet. I have no idea what Rich is playing at. Why he pushed me in here and abandoned me, but I am not going to sit around, feeling sorry for myself until the timer runs out and I end up with the class of the next person I encounter.

Of course, getting out of here without a light is going to be... interesting. I have the chemical light in my hand, so... I send it to my inventory. My stamina maxes out almost at three quarters. That means I didn't get a full night of sleep, but it had been night for a while by the time I slept. It's got to be light outside by now.

I place a hand against the wall on my right and, shuffling my feet so I won't trip or fall in a hole and break my neck, I walk.

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Time remaining to make selection: 11h34m21s

The system's adamant about us knowing how much time I have left, so I can't dismiss this icon, and unlike buffs and debuffs, just glancing at it brings up the clock. Like having it

go from green to red isn't enough to stress me out.

It's still basically green. But I can tell the shift toward yellow now.

I nearly fell in a hole twice already, put my hand in something icky I am happy I can't see, and tripped twice, the second time banging my head on the hard floor and getting nose bleed and losing a few hit points.

And still no light.

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I see stars because I've been an idiot and ran the instant I noticed the brightness in the distance.

Time remaining to make selection: 09h14m58s

"I don't want to know!"

It could have been worse.

There are so many ways this could have been worse. So I get up, feel around with my foot until I find what tripped me and kick it.

Fuck! That hurts.

No more kicking stuff I can't see.

I face the distant light and shuffle forward, reminding myself there could be a hole in front of me, or that the next time I trip, I might end up with a spike in my eye and dead. Or just hit wrong and end up with critical damage.

Being paralyzed down here would suck. Even more with having those healing bars in my inventory and not being about to move my hand to my mouth to eat one. Couldn't Rich have given me one of those potions that can just be 'taken' instead of having to be eaten?

Other than him being an asshole, because it's not like I need one of those. I'm going to be careful and ignore how long it takes to get to the light. Worse comes to worse, I end up with some random class on the way home. Could be an awesome one.

Or I could end up with some street sweeper class. That's a thing, isn't it?

But I still have time. Light means the sky, which means a hole and a way to get out.

I avoid the hole. Scrape my shoulder on something ragged in the process and the thirty-second of the weak bleed debuff costs me some health, but I didn't fall and break my neck, so that is a clear win.

The next obstacles are easier to avoid as I make them out in the slowly increasing light. Then I stand soaking in the warm sunlight and thanking the system for letting me make it this far. Not a lot of angle to the light in the hole, so near noon.

Time remaining to make selection: 08h48m35s

At this time of the year, that gives me daylight all the way home even if I cut it down to the last second.

Or at least I'll reach the farms. I don't have to worry about monsters in the night once I'm there.

So, getting out.

One wall goes up to the hole, while the others are away. So that's the one. There are

handholds, so even if it's vertical, I can do this.

Even in climbing makes this easy, doesn't it?

Why didn't I max that skill out too?

The first three hand holds are close together. The fourth one I have to reach, but grab on. The fifth nearly slices my hand open, but I felt the edges before putting my weight on it.

Gloves. From now on, I use one of my inventory slot for thick leather gloves. Or invest in one of those belt clips that gives me an extra slot. They aren't cheap, but if I ever find myself in this situation, I want a pair of gloves.

The alternative is just out of reach. My jumping skill's higher than climbing, so...

I curse as my fingers slip and I fall.

The stun debuff's already green, so it's not going to last. Is Tumbling a skill?

System Query: Skill, Tumbling

Tumbling is the skill by which one masters the art of falling while minimizing the damage taken.
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Okay, so it is.

"You know, system. If I can find out about skills I don't have from way out here. How come you aren't letting me pick my class? You're everywhere. What's with forcing me to go back to Court for it?"

Of course, it doesn't answer. It's not like it's possible to have a conversation with it. If the answer is somewhere in what it knows. I'd have to find the right trigger words to get it to tell me, or combination of them.

I try a different path and make it to the seventh hand hold before I realize this isn't going to work. I'm about halfway up, but the next one's too far. Halfway between me and the hole. I can see a bunch of possibilities after it, but if I try to jump and miss.

I look down.

That's going to be seven meters, at least. Even if I don't break something, that's going to hurt. I'd rather keep the bars for the trip back, in case I encounter—

Let's not think about monsters just yet.

I have a rope, and there's something I could hang it on, if I can swing a loop of it there. Worth trying, but not while hanging up here.

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This has to be my best knot ever. It's pretty bad, but this one isn't going to slip undone at the slightest pull.

I hope.

Come on, why didn't you give me a fourth level in knot tying for this accomplishment?

I make my way back up with the rope in my mouth—it tastes disgusting—and then it's the fun part of attempting to loop it on the protuberance that is going to be my way out of this place with enough time to—

Time remaining to make selection: 05h56m12s

Fuck, I've been at this way too long.

And of course, in my panic to make up time, I nearly slip as I swing it hard, and drop the rope to grab hold of the wall.

At least I didn't fall.

Down I go, rope in mouth—urg—again and up I climb.

Slow and steady wins the race, my dad likes to say. Makes no sense, since it's the fastest runner that wins. But I can't rush this. It's okay to miss my throw, but if I lose my grip...

With the fifth throw not even getting close to snagging, I grind my teeth and curse Rich yet again. Come on. My dexterity training's not that bad; it's got to count for something.

The sixth's is a little closer, seventh is...was I aiming for the other wall or something. Eighth also misses the mark by the length of the town. And Nine isn't an—

I stare at the loop hanging onto the thing poking out of the wall.

I did it?

“Yes!”

Fuck! I tighten my grip on both the wall and the rope. I'm not dropping it this time, because it's not going to end up on the floor for me to pick up.

I wait for my heart rate to slow until I can hear the birds through it.

I tug lightly, then harder. When it doesn't come undone, I loop the end of the rope around my wrist and put more and more of my weight on it. When the only way to put more is for me to let go, I stop.

Okay. This is it. Let go, wait until I'm not swinging anymore and climb up and get out.

Oh, and hold on to the rope.

I just have to let go, and it's basically over. I'm free and on my way home.

Are my fingers stuck or something?

Come on, just let go.

And hold on.

To the rope, not the wall.

Fuck, this is scary, and fuck, when did I start swearing so much? That's Rich's fault too, I'm sure of it.

Okay, deep breaths. Now, on the exhale, let go of the wall—

Grab the rope! Hold on! Ouch! Didn't think the swing would have me bounce off the wall, but I held on so I'm—

The pain lances through my arm in time with the debuff appearing. Something sliced my biceps and I'm bleeding. But I'm still holding on, it's only yellow, so that's a point every treen second or so. It's going to be gone before in less than a dozen cycles. I just have to hang on and wait.

Pain explodes as the debuff flashes red with the impact. I cry out, first from the pain, then because I've let go of the rope. I try to grab it as I fall, but it's out of reach and I'm—

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The groan drags me back to consciousness. My head hurts, my back, my arm. I move, looking for a more comfortable position and pain explodes as I put weight on my arm. No

debuffs at least, so it's going to pass quickly. Unlike the deep orange—

Time remaining to make selection: 03h08m41s

Oh.

No. It isn't over. I look up at the blue sky. There's still time for me to get out and make it to the farms before full dark. I just have to get up, climb and—

The rope dangles on the wall.

Maybe I can grab the end from the ground by jumping, or—I look for hand holds near it, and I'm disappointed. The way until I had to use it moves me away from it, and then close enough I might manage a jump.

And if I miss?

I was out for almost three hours. Another one and it is all over.

It already is.

Wetness around my eyes. Why did I come here? Why did I listen to Rich? Why didn't I do what my dad wanted and stay home where it's safe?

The sky darkens slightly, but it's no longer the hole I can escape through. It's the pit my life is falling into, ever darker until there's nothing left worth trying for.

I start to curl up, and the pain in my arm makes me curse. Fuck, that hurts.

“Fuck!” I uncurl and roll to my stomach, ignoring the pain or the bleed debuff that reappeared. “Fuck you!” Can you hear me, Rich? Are you laughing at this kid who was stupid enough to think you were promising him a fun time before he had to settle down into a boring life? That you pushed down a hole? Are you watching him, hoping he's going to wallow in misery?

“Fuck you, Rich!”

I take a healing bar from my inventory and eat it. My health goes up, the bleed debuff disappears, the pain does too.

I am not lying down for you.

Fine, I'm screwed. I'll end up with some loser class because of you, but I am not giving up. “I'm not giving up, Rich! I am going to get out of here!”

And I'm going to make you pay.

Okay. I can't get out through this hole. Without the rope, my only hope is that this moves up, eventually. So I have to keep exploring.

I walk, careful of where I step. I'm not going to be able to make him pay if I kill myself because I didn't pay attention. And I am going to make him pay.

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Staying angry is hard.

Especially when I have to focus on my footing, then where the wall is by touch, or is that sound a monster approaching?

It's easy to reignite it, though.

Time remaining to make selection: 01h49m03s

I grind my teeth and make all sorts of promises as to how little there's going to be

left of that asshole by the time I'm done with him.

Then I stumble, and I can't focus on staying angry. And I think of everything I'm going to lose. Josie's not going to want to have anything to do with a loser like me. Dad's going to lock me in my room and never let me out. Base isn't going to talk to me.

And I'm going to deserve it, because I am an idiot. None of the adults ever sounded like Rich was someone that should be around. Even Base didn't sound like he liked him. Only an idiot like me would think that his whispers, his touches, were meant as anything more than a distraction, so I'd follow him to the edge of a hole so he could push me in it and laugh.

I am an idiot and I deserve to be in the dark, with no hope of ever getting even a useful class now. I'm going to end up—

A class is available for your selection