Chapter 3

The farm was actually four large buildings surrounding a square with a well.

A bell rang as our group entered the square. We had been noticed, not that we were being stealthy. A group of men from the fields across the square appeared after a few minutes. Two were sporting light rifles and the third was hefting a bow. There was a stand-off as there was no language compatibility. After a while one of the men with a rifle went to a house and came back with a middle aged women. She had a telepathy ability that could translate. Andrew used her as an intermediary to converse.

Our group learned that 6 families lived here. They raised grain to supplement their cattle. They sold their cattle once a year to city for profit. They also had an orchard by the river that grew lemons and limes. After Andrew explained where their group had come from the farmers seemed slightly more at ease. Soon another farmer arrived and he cast some magic that allowed everyone to speak and understand each other. The group moved inside and Andrew and his companions were fed. It was a kind of shepards pie and a notification appeared before on all our screens.

Buff Received, +50% stamina regeneration for 2 hours; +20 to stamina pool for eight hours

With everyone able to communicate a lot of information was learned during the meal. The ‘SYSTEM’ governed everyone’s life. It allowed the screens and your ability to level up. It was set up by the First One, basically the god that had created this universe and brought us here. There were SYSTEM terminals where you could purchase items from the SYSTEM but generally the cost was much higher than producing it. Also the terminals only accepted Aether crystals as payment and they were in high demand to power magic devices.

We were on a backwater planet. This planet was of little strategic importance with poor resources and sat between the Imperial Light Consortium and the Ballen Kingdom, both human empires. There were dozens of other human space empires, each having a single planet up to a few hundred star systems under their control. Outside of humans there were dozens of other races that had space forces and their own regions of control. The quest for this god ‘essence’ was restricted the wealthy and powerful.

The planet we were on was about 40% land, with two large continents. There were two independent space ports on this continent and free traders landed infrequently. The Ballen Empire had a small city on the other continent about 700 miles from here called Sand Bastion. It monopolizied two mid tier dungeons close by, the best two dungeons known on this planet. It also had the only known ‘SYSTEM’ terminal in the solar system. The Imperial Light Consortium had some old mining operations in one of the star systems asteroids belt but they may be defunct now. This info only made sense once the dynamics of this universe were explained through many questions.

Technology and magic both existed. Magic was fairly common, about 1 in 4 humans had access to higher Aether magic. Psionics were rarer with about 1 in 100 demonstrating strong ability. Warriors and scholars all could access Aether or psionics but to a much lessor degree and it was difficult for them to develop. Warriors for instance could not learn the skill spellcraft and could only learn one spell for every 30 points of intelligence. Adventurers were hybrid classes, mixing two other classes. Technology was fairly advanced but expensive on this backwater planet. Magic could replicate a lot of tech benefits with less effort so empires usually favored magic over developing industrial capacity. Magic also made space flight much easier and many ships required a lot of magic to fly.

The conversation turned to currency. Rare metals would be accepted but mostly each star kingdom had its own base credits which could exchanged at moneychangers. The highest form of hard currency was Aether crystal which could be made into Aether batteries which powered much of the magitech. Aether crystal could only be found in dungeon instances. And yes instances were exactly that, passing through a dungeon portal put you in a different reality pocket space. They varied in difficulty and rewards. Generally Aether crystal was only obtained after beating bosses in the dungeons. Dungeons could be found anywhere, including space. Some space dungeons where large enough for a battleship to enter and had a whole star system on the other side. That also reinforced the biggest reason this planet was so backwater, the dungeons were weak and had low amounts of Aether crystal rewards. The two best dungeons being farmed by the Ballen Empire near the city of Saand Bastion and could probably sustain a single small cruiser’s operations. This was a terrible return since a strong empire had hundreds of vessels of cruiser size and larger. Most likely this planets local dungeons were serving more as a training ground for young ‘harvesters’. Harvesters were the term used for people who specialized in farming dungeons for Aether crystal and other loot.

The good news to our group was the road we had travelled on had a small town about 50 miles at the end that had a low level dungeon. The dungeon supported the town of about 500 humans. The farmers at the table had little info but there were others in their consortium that had explored it that would be back in a few hours from the fields if we were interested in learning more. We also learned a group would have to pay a fee to gain access and there was also a waiting list. Usually two or three days. This allowed the small dungeon to reset its monsters and loot.

Andrew asked about adventuring outside of dungeons. Apparently this continent was fairly tame. The planet was colonized over 600 years prior and most of the easily mined minerals were already taken. With no real upper tier dungeons the planet was pretty much forgotten. There was a large space battle in orbit about 100 years ago between four factions, but the dozens of ships that had crashed through the atmosphere in the battle had long since been salvaged but sometimes pieces of ships could be found in remote regions.

The conversation turned to the character sheet. Everyone that the farmers had ever known had access to their sheets starting at puberty. Skills and abilities on the sheet were ‘supported’ by the system. That meant knowledge and muscle memory was imported as skills advanced on your sheet. Skills could be developed outside of the sheet but were usually incomplete. For instance someone who had level 7 botany could use their skill anywhere in the universe encompassing billions of plants and it would be effective, but those that learned it would be limited to their knowledge probably just on the planet they grew up on. We learned it generally took 4 hours to learn a new skill from someone who had at least 7 in that skill. It took 6 hours of practice to level a skill from 1 to 2. Then 9 hours to level from 2 to 3. The time basically increased 1.5 times for every level. So it takes about 130 hours of effort on a single skill to get it to level 7. Level 7 was generally known as being ‘skilled’ in the skill. Level 23 was known as being an ‘expert’ in the skill. Finally level 43 was considered a ‘master’ of the skill. The discussion turned to specific skills for a while as my group tried to get as much info as possible to help develop. While this was going on I got up to help Ophelia with washing the dishes. At the sink Ophelia said she planned to head towards one of the largest cities in order to find a piloting job. She had a plan to make a living flying. Andrew’s group planned to raid the dungeon in the small town to level up. I wasn’t sure what my plan would be yet.

We ended up sleeping in a guest rooms. The farmers were nice and had us to help on the various farms in exchange for some local credits, clothes and food to get us to the next town for three days.

That is how I met the old man. His name was Old Man Leo. He had a silver tongue and talked non-stop. I learned his life story, he grew up on a city planet in the Blue Light Kingdom. Back in his day the kingdom was a monarchy and controlled 30 planets in twelve star systems in Leo’s youth. When he reached his teens he went to the naval academy. His skill in magic pushed him toward being a space mage focused on FTL travel. He spent 70 years in space as a ships mage. He survived dozens of battles, most of which the Blue Light Kingdom lost. Twelve years ago he was in his last battle as the remains of the Blue Light Fleet was eliminated by the First Dawn of Humanity. This space power was a religious zealot. Leo fled light years away with his wife to this planet and wanted to live out his remaining years peacefully.

From Leo I found my summon stone spell was rare and quite in demand. Leo said the cooperative farming families had many projects that could make use of my skill. Leo said they would pay well and could make use my spell summoning for the two months or so. He also said he would teach me some basics of magic knowledge if I stayed for awhile. I was enamored with his stories and wanted to be a space mage as well. There were three branches of space mages. FTL mages, space mages, who helped with ships travelling between stars. Magitechs who were responsible for the runes and Aether batteries on ships that replaced or supplemented non-magical technology. Finally there were Magitroopers who were specialized in boarding and defending ships.

I spent the next day creating slate stones for paving paths around the houses. At the end of a hard days labor Andrew and I got into an argument. I wanted to stay and take Leo up on the offer, Andrew had assumed I was now part of their group. Ophelia and her two companions stayed out of the argument. Eventually Andrew gave up. The next morning they all left me behind heading for the town.