

[note: A reader has pointed out I forgot about Dennis' class quest about cataloging monsters by fighting them. Going over that readjusts Dennis' level to 5. Which means he has 4 ability points to assign, 3 attribute points, and 9 skill points to assign. I am proceeding as if Dennis made a conscious decision to wait until he was in Toronto before assigning any of them. This will certainly change when I write the second draft)]

The city node building is impressive, white stone with a dome on top, columns on each side of the entrance, which are doors tall enough to accommodate the giant exiting. I catch myself staring as he steps around people then force myself to stop.

He isn't like in the stories my dad told me when I was a kid, where giants could touch the cloud and were vicious monsters. He's maybe 4 meters tall, dressed in well-made craftspeople's clothing. As I head for the entrance, an orc gets into an argument with a woman and I've taken three steps in their direction when she flips him the finger and he barks laughter. Then they head away together.

I need to remember that not everyone who looks inhuman is automatically dangerous, or up to causing problem. This isn't court. I'm bound to come across more of them, even if in the grand scheme of things they are in the minority. Base said that according to information he gathered on the way to reaching Court, humans, or human-looking races make out nearly seventy percent of the population. He's the first to say the number is thirty years out of date, but that for it to change significantly, it would take a system like change again.

Inside, it is loud with conversation, and busy with people coming and going. The room is vast, and the whistle that escapes me has some people chuckling. There is nothing like this in Court. The largest structure is Base, and that's only true if you consider his area of influence as being the building. Other wise, his wall doesn't qualify, and then it's just regular sized buildings spread around within the wall.

Even the command center isn't all that big, and I don't think he's ever made the inside anything close to this large. He made it large enough, a few years ago, to have a town meeting, but it wasn't like this.

How am I supposed to find where to go?

"You look like you can use some help," a woman said, and I turn in her direction, only to step back with a start. A ragged ear at the top of her furred head tilts and she cants her head. "New to the city, I take it?"

I nod dumbfoundedly.

She's dressed in a leather armor uniform close to those of the guards in court. It's died a deep blue for the chest and lighter for the arms, giving the impression she's wearing the chest over a shirt. On her shoulder, there's a crest, crossed swords over a rendition of the Tower. Toronto's crest. The name Liona is engraved on the left side breast of her armor. Instead of a sword, she has a baton at her belt and a hand resting on its pommel.

"I'm sorry," I mumble, then straighten and force myself to look at her face, the wide muzzle that I have no problem imagining hides vicious looking teeth. The fur's light brown, with streaks of black going around her ears. "We don't have anyone looking like you in Court, and I was attack by a Warg. It wasn't a fun experience."

She nods like that wasn't the most idiotic thing I could have said, comparing her to a

Warg. She doesn't even look like one, being on two legs and in a uniform.

"I can imagine it would be a harrowing experience. What are you looking to do here?"

"Get skills."

"Points or money?"

"Both, maybe. I don't know yet. It's going to depend on if I can get everything I need with my points." I shut up at the quirking up of her lips. I'd rather not see her teeth.

"Then you want the third floor, room three-o-four to three-o-eight. The node accesses there are set to deal with both. It shouldn't be too busy, since most people buy their skill with cash."

"Do they have access to class abilities?"

"They do, but you can't buy those with money, and you can do that from your personal connection to the system."

"Yes, but I want to look at them side by side, do comparison to make sure the build I planned is going to work. I can't do that with the system's answers."

The smile stretches before I finish, but doesn't expose teeth. "The node are general access, so you'll be able to do that."

"Thank you." I head to the large stairs and up to the third floor. The numbers are on brass plaques on each side of the entries. Three-o-four and five have all their nodes occupied, but six has half of them free.

Unlike with Base, where I interface through a screen in the command center or in my room, or by having Base just show me what I'm asking for, here the access node is a sphere floating over a table with a chair before it. I sit and touch it and a welcome screen appears.

I open the journal on the table, taking out one of the pages I added before leaving court and the stylus.

"Show me the list of skill relating to the wilderness." I don't have to speak. The man two nodes from me glances in my direction in annoyance before going back to typing and looking at the screen only he can see. Another difference from Base. The nodes use my personal interface to display the information, instead of having a screen anyone can read.

I know how to write, but I've always talked with Base, so that's what's comfortable for me. The node doesn't say anything. Neither Base nor Grandpa Louis know if their relationship is unique. In their travels, they haven't come across another military node, so they can't find out if they are all like them. What they did say is that they've never come across settlement node that seemed to be able to be able to think. On the whole they seem to be extensions of the system, filtered down to accomplish specific tasks.

Like manage a city or let people pick skills, classes when it's time, get information. Base can do all that, but he doesn't need anyone setting the node up for what it will deal with. He doesn't even need Grandpa Louis, although as the Commander, Base needs to obey him when he gives an order.

Or when he sets someone else to be able to give Base orders.

System Query: Skills, Outdoors
Camouflage

Botany
Cartography
Climbing
Fishing
Hiking
Meteorology
Navigation
Prospecting
Swimming
Ttracking
Trapping
Zoology
Cryptozoology

[all I could find that fits]

I write down meteorology and tracking next to the butchering skill, cryptozoology, leather working and fletching I already planned for. I add zoology. I doubt monsters are all I'll be killing while I travel. At least I don't plane on hunting them for food if I have other options. If cryptozoology can get me more from their corpse, then zoology should do the same with normal animals.

I consider trapping, then dismiss it. That requires staying in place longer than I plan to. Camouflage is... I don't know how important that is to hunting. It feels more like something I want to use if I'm trying to evade someone.

Hiking is tougher. At it All Day lets me travel for longer without getting tired. Does it work with hiking or not? It should, I think, but neither explicitly say so.

System, Does the hiking skill add to the At it All Day ability? No response.

Add to that how Aether Striding opens up teleportation, and Aether striding lets me access an entirely other plane of travel, and hiking doesn't seem all that impressive anymore. Sure, in that other plane I still have to walk for a cube of treens, so I'd only want it for really long distance travel. So maybe hiking would be of use, but...

I add sewing. If it's a good idea to be able to repair my leather armor myself, it's a better one to be able to repair my clothing.

That's eight skills. I'll probably learn hiking just with all the walking I'll do. That leaves one point. Two if I decide to buy one with money.

It's tempting to keep two points in reserve, but money is also good.

This is harder than I expected.

I buy them with points. Ultimately, money is more versatile, so something I should keep as much of that around as possible.

So that's eight new skills, all at level one. I am looking at a lot of practicing for them to be of any use.

No point wasting time worrying about that. Now it's on to going over my abilities

properly.

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