

Armor and Education
Saturday – 09.17.62

I HAD BEEN GETTING WORRIED; MY ARMOR WAS ALREADY A few days late, but it finally arrived the day before we were supposed to enter the dungeon. Still, it was here, and I had about thirty minutes before I had to leave for the first day of orientation. Might as well see what I got.

Popping open the box, I began pulling out each piece. The armor was meant to be worn over the top of other clothing to act as padding. Properly padded under-armor existed, but I wasn't going to be on the front line, so thick cloth to keep the armor from chafing was all I was willing to spend money on for now.

Damn, this shit was heavier than it looked. It looked like it was made out of extremely thick cloth, though after I touched it I knew that wasn't the case. It was coarse, hard to bend, and felt vaguely like something that was either some kind of plastic or metal. If memory served, this was some kind of synthetic derivative of Kevlar.

The armor might look and feel similar to a thick cloth like burlap, but it was clearly far more refined. The cloth was stiff in most places except around the joints and thicker in locations where you could expect to be hit, like the ankles. At the bottom of the pants were straps for attaching them to your boots, an effort to keep ankle bitters from hitching up your leg.

The jacket was surprisingly heavy, even compared to the pants, and the majority of the weight seemed to come from the front and back. Unlike normal jackets, this one was fastened along the left side, up to the armpit. This was because the chest and back pieces were so thick they were impossible to bend at all. The chest "plate" was molded out and away from the chest. According to my research, this was to prevent "dents" in the armor from crushing ribs, a good thing. But it was also a lot more roomy than I expected.

Altogether, the armor felt like there were several planks of wood rather than cloth. Which was just a bit disconcerting. Of course, the cloth it was made out of was advanced derivatives of Kevlar and other technologies so the term "cloth" wasn't accurate, but whatever.

And of course the jacket had ties to connect to the pants and to connect its long sleeves to gloves, all in the interest of protecting the wearer as much as possible. Most people were surprised that all of this was included when helmets weren't, so much so that detailed explanations were quite common on the web sites, but the reasoning behind such a choice was quite well established. Statistically dungeons with ambush monsters, especially the flying kind, tended to see more casualties from those with helmets. The explanation usually was that Divers needed to hear things like the slight brushing of a foot against stone, or the rustle of wind over wings in order to detect such attacks. And Balltown, the most popular local dungeon, had all kinds of ambush monsters.

Of course, it was also possible that the game-like nature of the system had hidden variables, and loss of awareness was one when wearing a helmet. It was difficult to compare the state of affairs before and after the system's appearance.

The whole set of armor was about thirty pounds. Which would be my full backpacking load. Though wearing the thing did make it easier to carry than a backpack would be. For a day trip into the dungeon I would only need to carry in a meal or two and as close to a full pack of loot out as I could get, so weight was always going to be a lot. The armor was a little difficult to move in, but after casting a few experimental spells, mostly the mage hand and forming and breaking other spells without casting them, I found the promised magic permeability of the gloves lived up to expectations.

Magic, like anything else, couldn't pass through every substance. Most importantly, even if it could pass through something, it took time. The gloves I'd gotten, which were definitely made of something different from the armor itself, posed almost no problem for my magic. Pushing magic out of my palms had only the slightest delay, so minor I was sure I'd get used to them with a few hours of practice.

I didn't actually know what we were supposed to be doing today as a part of the "orientation," so I decided to wear the gloves and boots. I needed to break in the boots, and if I needed to cast I could start getting used to the gloves. I doubted it would be a good idea to cast any spells

without permission at something like this. Maybe I could head to the spell range after the classes.

A glance at the time left me scrambling to get out of the armor before leaving. I could wear it before heading into the dungeon, but honestly I didn't want to seem overly eager. I didn't know anyone in the guild, and making a good first impression would be worthwhile. I also grabbed the documentation that came with, if for no other reason than to have something on hand during any down times.

Making it to the bus stop, I realized I should probably take off my gloves. They were armored, and unlike the rest of my armor they had small metal scales on the back of the hands and my knuckles. I didn't want to freak out civilians, make them think the armored gloves were because I was planning on punching people or something silly.

In order to have flexible gloves you couldn't use the same materials as on the main armor. The addition of metal made the gloves weigh a few pounds on their own. A noticeable weight when I walked, but one that made me feel confident that they would actually provide protection.

I was cutting it close with the bus, only having five minutes to spare. Looking around, I noticed half the parking lot was covered in tents set up in an L shape with some folding tables in the middle. As I headed toward the tables I started to notice a number of people wearing their boots and gloves, so I slipped my gloves on as well.

I had to wonder if the other mages wanted to get used to casting with gloves on or if it was some kind of statement. Like, "yes, I use magic" or something.

Most of the people seemed to be gathering in the middle around the tables, so I knew I wasn't too far off. I also noticed a couple of guild officers, including the guy who'd tried to reprimand me for preparing for tomorrow's dungeon crawl.

Sitting down, I pulled a notebook out of my pack, along with my armor's manual. I had no idea if I would need to take notes, but I figured I'd better be safe.

Rather than be super awkward and watch people, I read the armor's manual. It was mostly maintenance information, a breakdown of the most and least armored regions, and why it was built that way. And, of course, how to wash it after you exited the dungeon. I was kind of hoping I'd never need the tips on washing out blood because I wouldn't be on the front line, but somehow I doubted it.

Like most things, it was a few minutes after the official start time before the guild officers started looking like they were going to begin, and I put away my manual and waited. It looked like we had somewhere between thirty and forty new members, but I didn't exactly count.

It was impossible to tell what most of them were, though I spotted at least six I figured had magic jobs. Only because they were wearing gloves that looked similar to mine.

Thirty to forty new members couldn't be the norm, not by any stretch. Based on the research I'd done, twelve or fifteen was normal. Maybe they'd just gotten lucky this month or something. Even if these were normal recruitment levels, they couldn't have a high retention

rate, otherwise they would have hundreds of more members in this city alone.

The guild leader, Mathew something I think, stepped up to the podium and I recognized the pull of a charisma-based job. I wasn't that surprised, it was the type of job you'd expect a guild leader to pick up. Charisma jobs were quite common, conmen and teachers both used charisma. The danger of those types of jobs was their ability to convince people to believe you without critical reasoning.

Of course, both my parents had charisma jobs, Mom being a teacher and Dad a salesman in a business-to-business company. Both were actively trying to convince local schools to teach children to resist charisma jobs, or at least notice the affects and be suspicious. Of course the teachers weren't happy with the idea, as it would likely remove their ability to control the classes as easily as they could currently.

Personally, I found the effect just a little creepy. Nothing wrong with having a charisma-based job, but it still freaked me out a little bit. Though all my professors had a teaching job, so it's not like I wasn't used to it.

Mathew started speaking and I almost tuned him out. It sounded like a basic speech, and now that I was aware of it, I didn't have the pull of his charisma to keep me awake.

"Welcome, new recruits to the Sanctified Devils. Some of you have been waiting on orientation for weeks, and I just have to say, thank you for your patience. I know we all want to get out into the dungeon, but doing a large group like this is the best choice. It allows those who will be

teaching you to spend most of their time in the dungeon honing their craft while also ensuring that these stronger guides can volunteer their time to help all of you through your first difficult trip into the dungeon.

“One of the major reasons people drop out of the dungeon diving business is stress. And this, as well as many of our other policies, is pointed toward reducing said stress.”

From there we went into hype mode. He focused on convincing the entire group we were unbelievably awesome. Normally I would call this unnecessary, but when we broke up to go to our classes for the day I heard a lot of comments about people no longer being as nervous, and it was clear the tension that had been building was washed away. So maybe it wasn't all bad. Still, it probably didn't help the people with already large egos.

We were split into four groups of seven. I was the only spellcaster in my group, which was annoying. You'd think we would be grouped together to foster friendships through mutual interests.

Instead I was paired with a bunch of jocks I shared no common interests with. The only positive was that Alice keeps me up to date on sports stuff.

I wasn't the only one in the group feeling left out apparently, because two of them sat apart from us in the classes. It took a moment, but they were both wearing little cross necklaces. I guessed they were some kind of Christian. No idea why they'd sat apart from the rest of us, however.

The classes weren't anything special. Before lunch we had income management, handling clients, first aid, and laws regarding dungeons. First aid was redundant, nothing we covered was new to me, and I thought it was too short for people who didn't have previous training.

The only class I felt was useful for me was handling clients, and even then it was only tips specific for Balltown. Mainly it was on how to treat clients and handle the "I want to do something stupid" requests. Which was actually helpful.

Technically the laws class was useful, but I already had a list of the laws regarding dungeons in South Carolina, and the class only covered the "most important ones." Which both made sense, and meant I'd already looked into most of them.

Unfortunately, by lunchtime I was wearing thin. My group was more interested in boasting and carrying on. Which was fine, really. But it wears on the soul. At least it did for me. So I found an unused corner of the tables after grabbing food as fast as I could and pulled out the notebook I had on Golem Creation and bone magic. No need to waste time or anything.

To my surprise, two people sat down next to me almost right away.

"Adam, Pyro- and Cryo- mancer. What are you working on?" Adam shrugged.

"Sandra, Druid." Sandra grinned like a maniac, and I couldn't help but flash a small smile.

"Kathrine. And a Necromancer. I guess. I'm working on my Golem Creation for my minions," I said a little hesitantly.

Sandra instantly perked up. "I heard about you! Surprised you're sitting here by yourself!"

"I needed a break from..." I trailed off, not really certain how to say it.

"I know, how can they be so ignorant of magic?" Adam asked, his volume a little loud.

"You could stand to be quiet," Sandra said, pointedly looking around. "And you can blame TV and movies, which don't like to deal with the 'pointless stuff.'"

"Boring stuff mostly. But yeah." I didn't know how to deal with this. I'd never been in a complaints conversation before.

Adam simply shrugged but switched topics. "What are you two planning on doing after this?"

Sandra just gave him the finger, and I noticed she was wearing hot-pink armored gloves.

"Uhm. I was planning on going to the magic range. Practice my poison spells, since they'll be the only ones that will be much use this weekend." I didn't know what else to say.

"Uh, yeah. That's probably a smart idea." Adam deflated a bit.

"I'm in. Don't know how helpful I'll be to you though." Sandra started humming a tune as she dug into her food.

Adam just raised an eyebrow at her as I agreed. Hopefully I could weasel a few tips and suggestions out of

them at the range. Both of them used elemental magic, so it might be quite the boon.

Adam and Sandra started up some conversation, and as I wasn't feeling very social I just studied and eat. However, Sandra seemed to know how to not leave me feeling alone. Despite my best desires, I ended up adding a comment or two. Especially when it turned to dungeon topics.

Surprisingly, no one said anything when we stayed as a group. Maybe they expected groups to reform later? I didn't really know. Unfortunately, we ended up with a chatty Monk who didn't seem bothered about the early start for the dungeon the next day and wanted to go out and party tonight.

The after-lunch classes were more interesting. Basic tactics and formations for dungeon crawling, monster anatomy, identifying valuable monster parts, and, of course, navigating. All of these gave only passing reference to the Asylum or the Rat Way, being focused on Balltown. But it was still kind of interesting. The formations class was the main one for me, after navigation, because I needed to figure out how to best use my skeletons. Eventually.

When the day was done, the three of us headed inside to the magic ranges and a few people followed us. I was starting to get nervous, not knowing either of these two very well and thinking about the impending dungeon dive.

All the same, I enjoyed the practice. And I managed to talk about elemental knots with both of them. Don't know

how useful it was, but I did learn a thing or two.

I was definitely nervous for tomorrow though. It would be my first time in a dungeon, and I didn't really know what else to do about this whole thing.

Kathrine's Status, Spells, and Skills:

< Kathrine Baulcom | Human(Female) | Age: 20

Necromancer Lvl 1.00 | Bone Walker

STR: 10 | END: 13 | DEX: 15 | SPD: 12 | WIS: 15 | INT: 18 | CHA: 11 | MNT: 17

Minion Control: 10

Stamina: 125/125 | Mana: 723/775 | +2.1 stm/min | +25.8 mana/min

Mana Conversion: 75% >

< *Necromancer Spells* >

< *Poison Bomb*

Description: *Launches a bladder of poison gas with bursts and spreads the gas over a wide area. The poison gas is heavier than air and must be breathed in, which limits the range most would be threatened by it.*

Effect: *A weak poison that makes it hard to breath and causes nausea. Non-lethal.*

Necromancer | Runic | Poison

Miasma Bomb

Description: Launches a fleshy sack pressurized with a dangerous miasma that causes difficulty breathing, loss of balance, and lung damage after extended exposure.

Possibly lethal, but very debilitating.

Effect: Wide-area effect debilitating poison cloud.

Necromancer / Runic / Poison

Toxic Breath

Description: Allows the user to exhale a cloud of toxins without risk of breathing it back in. The cloud causes numbness, loss of motor control, and possibly death. It also magnifies the effects of any trace elements of poison that might be in the target's system.

Effect: Exhale a small cloud of poison that causes extreme issues and magnifies the effects of other toxins. Immunity to this spell lasts 3 seconds after exhale. >

Necromancer / Runic / Poison / Contact

< Necromancer Skills >

< Runic Magic (Poison) IV / Runic Magic (Flesh) III /
Runic Magic (Bone) V / Runic Magic (Contact) I / Golem
Creation V / Magic Accuracy III / Mana Channel XVII /
Mana Control XVIII / 13 minor skills >