

Access
Monday – 09.18.62

MONDAY MORNING SAW MORE ACTIVITY IN THE GUILD THAN I had seen yet. I recognized a number of people from the orientation weekend in the computer lab, and the numbers grew as the day wore on. Based on what I spied on people's monitors, most of them were watching tutorials for learning new mundane feats.

I dropped into a chair next to Sandra, the Druid from the weekend.

"So what are you looking into?"

"Butchering and harvesting," she answered, a little green. I remember her talking about how much that grossed her out.

"Yeah, just be glad monsters don't have intestines or bowels. You don't want to cut into those things by accident." I scrunched up my nose. "It smells a lot worse than it sounds."

"I can imagine. I think. How do you know?"

"My parents made sure I knew all the nitty-gritty shit about dungeons. Made sure I went on a couple 'normal' hunting trips after I converted mana." I shrugged. "It worked for a little bit, but not as long as they'd hoped."

The Druid nodded her head. "How about you?"

"Undead. I need a minion badly, my poison just isn't that effective otherwise. I don't feel like I have enough information to create the spell just yet."

“Yeah, they really were pushing for a fast pace, weren’t they? Although I can understand why.”

I had logged into my account on the Sanctified Devil’s server and found an email from Mai. She had apparently twisted some arms and got my access to the expanded database info I was supposed to have some time yesterday afternoon.

She said she understood that without the database I wouldn’t be able to “make as big an impact as a Necromancer should.” It was a nice sentiment, and I think that blessing from Zilena did the trick. After all, it was that blessing that made sure none of my actions were seen as very “impactful.” I originally thought it was protection from negative views derived from my lack of minions, but perhaps it also helped put pressure on people to fulfill their side of the bargain.

Taking the info in the email, it took me ten minutes to get access, and then another twenty to download the database for some reason. Once I finally got tired of finding rare runes that might help in some minor way from languages I would probably never use and had the database ready to go, I loaded it up.

Part of what took so long to download was that all the runes were represented as 3D models, as well as the more traditional sketches. However, the database was limited. It only had runes from the Flesh and Bone languages.

Those were two of the main languages I wanted new information on, so it should have been great. However, without more information on Golem Creation I still had a significant number of runes I’d need to find the hard way. Flipping through the information, I also realized I

wouldn't be able to fully understand how each rune worked without testing them, since runes are used in a very different manner in enchantment than in spell crafting.

The first thing I did was find some runes I knew and compared them with what I had already figured out. Unsurprisingly, the properties attributed to the runes by enchanters were subtly different from the information I already knew. What was frustrating was that none of the database explained where the runes came from. If they came from some kind of spellcaster, it should be possible to make some inferences with knowledge of where that rune was used in the spell itself. It seemed unlikely said knowledge didn't exist or wouldn't be useful even to enchanters, yet it wasn't in the database. I went ahead and fulfilled my side of the bargain as I went through, each rune I checked, I added whatever information I had on its spell data.

After a few minutes we were joined by another guy, one I'd never met before. "Hello, guys. How was your first time in the dungeon? I'm Henry by the way."

I grunted, not really interested.

Sandra shrugged, a little of her usual energy coming back. "Good, except for the butchering part. Don't mind Kathrine, she don't like people interrupting her studying, and it's not going as well for her as she'd like. I'm Sandra."

"I can understand. So, Kathrine, what can I help you with?" Henry asked, apparently not bothered by anything.

"I don't think you can, not unless you know a thing or two about Golem Creation?" I was pretty sure I was gonna have to take Ashley up on her offer.

“Sorry, mate, I’m a Sorcerer. Don’t really need golems,” Henry said easily.

I sighed and leaned back. There wasn’t much this database could do for me, except pay off Ashley’s friend. Or get me in trouble for selling proprietary information.

“Druids can use it. But I don’t know how and I haven’t talked to anyone who does,” Sandra provided, returning to full chipper mode.

I groaned. “I’m missing something. I know it, I can even kind of guess the runes I need to get the job done. But I can’t find the information anywhere. And this database doesn’t have anything on Golem Creation, just Bone and Flesh. Not that they aren’t important.”

“Don’t know about all that,” Henry shrugged.

“So, Sorcerer. How does that work?” I wanted a distraction, and I really didn’t care much about the topic.

“The best way I know how to describe it is a combat-focused Wizard. Pure mana-based spells, but all geared to combat.”

I nodded. “I know some Wizards have golems, but it’s pretty rare. I’m guessing it’s the same with you. So pure mana shields, ‘magic missiles,’ that kind of thing?”

“Yeah, pretty much. I actually made a magic missile spell. It’s not very useful, except against specific monsters that are hard to hit. Mana lasers, bombs, and impact spells seem to do better.”

“I favor the ‘storm of nature’ version of druidic magic.” Seeing the odd looks she was getting, Sandra continued, “Miniature tornadoes, lightning without the storm, I’m working on a localized earthquake, but that might take a while to get right. Those kinds of things. Druids that use

Golem Creation often cause plants to sprout and attack others. Maybe 'summon' an animal or something."

The last part was pointed toward me, and I was happy for the information. I threw in what I was doing, poison and skeletons, and the conversation moved away from dungeons toward the ignorance of people who didn't know magic. Then it bounced around.

Based on what Sandra said, it was likely that Ashley's idea would only point me in the right direction, not give me all the answers. This was honestly a relief, I didn't know what I would do if some "rando" I met in a restaurant turned out to be the answer to all my problems.

With this idea, I redoubled my efforts to create the needed runes, as well as dig deeper into both the available Flesh and Bone runes. I might not need to use the Flesh runes right now. But who knew, maybe I could create mummies. I remembered an old movie that had something like that. Or maybe more than one.

About two hours in, I got a text from Ashley.

Ashley: Got a hold of my friend. He's willing to give you some information on Golem Creation in exchange for Poison and Flesh runes. You game?

That the friend had asked for those runes made sense to me. Based on what Sandra said, those were the most likely runes to help in the creation of summoning Druid spells. The lack of Bone runes was interesting. Either he already

had them, or didn't think they would be useful. I could see either one being true, but it was an interesting request.

Kathrine: Does he want Bone runes?

Ashley: I told him you used skeletons, but he didn't seem interested in Bone runes. I don't know what he's going to do with them.

Right. After a few more questions I knew what I needed. I didn't think I would need to hand over any database runes. But it did skirt kind of close. Runic Magic (Flesh) had risen to level 5 just from studying. As an odd side effect, it was kind of difficult to disentangle what I learned from the skill, my own study, and the database as the updated knowledge filled in holes I might not have noticed just yet.

This was a well-documented phenomenon, one that had caused a number of problems surrounding NDAs. The general advice was just to stay away from using any information that "might" violate the NDA. But, for me, getting more information on Golem Creation, the last and most difficult piece of information for my minions, made me think it was worth it. I was desperate not to end up without shelter because I'd run out of money.

Ashley wasn't bothered too much about my lack of complete information, suggesting that her friend would rather do the work himself if at all possible. I needed another opinion. Someone who I could trust to not be as

invested as I was. Otherwise I might be making a huge mistake because I was too desperate to actually think things through.

Eric: Got your text. What's up?

Kathrine: This has to stay between us. Please?

Eric: Always.

Kathrine: Sorry, just... it's a lot. My hunt through the dungeon only had a single positive effect. It convinced people that I really did need that expanded database. Got it right here.

Eric: The problem?

Kathrine: The database doesn't have all the information I need. And the parts I'm missing are the hardest for me, the elemental knots, and how they connect to the rest of the runes for minion creation.

Eric: How bad do you think it is?

Kathrine: If I can convince anyone to go into the dungeon and spend hours just watching me experiment? One more trip. Otherwise I could take much longer to deal with the problem. Like weeks to a month, easy.

Kathrine: On the other hand, that new friend Ashley? She has a friend who's a Druid who is willing to share info on the skill I need the most help with, Golem Creation, which includes the elemental knots. I'll probably only get useful information, not completed knots. But that's likely the best choice possible. As far as I know.

Kathrine: However, the Druid wants me to give them Flesh runes. Now I don't think I'll be breaking my NDA

over this. But I have a knowledge skill advancement problem. It's hard to tell what I learned from the database and what I didn't.

Kathrine: If I go looking for the Flesh runes I need to hand over, I'll most definitely find all if not most in the database. They're the foundational type of runes that will come up everywhere, the type of runes you have to learn to advance the skill.

Eric: Heavy. Have you looked into a part-time job again? I know you decided you couldn't support yourself with such a job when they were considering the change in policy. But have things changed?

Kathrine: It's worse. I still can't do a part-time job, and I now have quantitative proof that I'll need to experiment and improve on my minions to grow levels. That means a lot of time in dungeons practicing. Time that will be difficult or impossible to gain with a job of any type.

Eric: Do you think you can maintain the job long enough to achieve what you need without this extra information?

Kathrine: No.

Eric: I would suggest double-checking. But it sounds like you have your answer. If your guild can't help you, being stranded on the street isn't worth it. Ask John. When I met him that was what he was doing.

Kathrine: Ok. Thanks.

I wasn't happy with Eric's answers. They were exactly what I had expected to hear. What he didn't know, and was too

much of a gentlemen to suggest, was that I had one option, even if only technically, for a part-time job I thought could support me and allow me to grow my job level.

I did check into the income potential of being a stripper. Strip joints were much better regulated these days than they seemed to be in the past, even better than just a few years ago, but I didn't really feel comfortable attempting that.

Though even without talking to John, and I did send him a text asking the question, I would probably attempt to become a stripper before I was homeless. Ugh. No good choices. I'd take the one with the most dignity if I could.

The only thing I could be certain of was that if I couldn't get a high enough level inside the next three months to support myself, all my choices were bad. Even if strippers had better protection under the law these days, they still had to deal with creeps who knew enough to avoid crossing legal boundaries to avoid getting arrested. I've found websites actually explaining how to avoid the laws designed to protect anyone in or adjacent to the "sex industry." At least strippers are adjacent, usually.

Right, I needed to dig up as much information as I could out of the database. I couldn't ask my parents for help, they were barely above water with the new business as it was. Plus, this was honestly a problem of my own making. I should have thought about jobs that used Golem Creation, I could have asked for a mentorship with a summoning type Druid and that would have driven me toward a different guild. I knew the Devils didn't have one job based solely on what was in their normal spellcaster database.