

I FOLLOWED HIS ADVICE AND PULLED UP THE NOTIFICATION. It was largely what I had expected. I have been waiting for this level for hours, so every other notification has been cleared out.

*< Necromancer Lvl 9 became Necromancer Lvl 10!
A milestone has been reached: +2 Intelligence.
Path of the Bone Walker I has expired.
A new path is available! >*

All right, and hell yeah! It seemed I'd managed to make it to level 10. And before I ran out of money. I really should be safe from most forms of bullshit now. That bonus in Intelligence was a major boon, like a hundred mana. I should be able to afford more expensive spells now. Plus, I could see some connections between the runes and knots I hadn't noticed before. So it was likely I'd be able to make even better spells now from that alone. The elemental knots made more sense to me now than they did before, a major advantage for me right now.

And I could grab a new path! I couldn't help but laugh, which earned me an odd look from George. I ended up explaining my financial situation, which helped bring my high down a little bit. Not much mind you, but some. After all, I still had a lot of work to do. And now that the mages' guild might actually be a thing, I might not be able to focus solely on my personal business. But hey, I'd accidentally helped make that, so I should probably finish

making it. Or something like that. I doubted there would be a problem for me unless something stupid happened.

Most part-time Divers took years to make it to level 10, unless their occupation somehow helped them build job levels. This was largely because they had to spend a lot of extra effort to avoid taking injuries, and that meant minimal risk and minimal reward methods. Thus, having hit level 10, I should be able to get more lucrative contracts. Being a Necromancer would help there as well.

I sent up a quick prayer to Zilena that stupid didn't happen. For some reason I got this feeling of amusement echoed back to me. Yeah, it wasn't the most coherent prayer, but I held to the truth of it. The amusement was appropriate, however, stupid seemed to be a state of being for mankind in general, though not individuals, so asking for it not to happen was foolish. Fortunately, I was more focused on the idea of getting myself financially stable.

Whatever. We made it back to a place where we could easily set up camp. We spent some time talking about what had happened and how we were going to move on. George seemed quite happy with his time in the dungeon. The good mood bode well for repeat business as far as I was concerned.

It was George who brought up the question of the mages' guild. The way Kelly paid more attention caught my eye.

"So, what's the plan with this guild you guys are putting together?" George asked.

"The mages' guild," Zak said carefully. "The idea is to make a guild focused on mages who can provide magical support to other guild groups as needed."

"How's that going?" Kelly asked.

“Pretty well. We’re fairly certain we’ll have enough interest to maintain the model, and I’ve even managed to find a few businesses who might be interested in investing in our start-up. But it all comes down to whether or not we can pull in enough members,” Zak said.

George frowned. “What’s holding that up?”

“Guilds have a non-compete clause in their employment contract. It runs out after a year or two, depending, but unless you get fired, or can prove you had cause to back out, you can’t join another guild after leaving,” I explained. “Since most of our initial membership is coming from the Sanctified Devils guild, we just need to show that they were discriminating against magic users. Our lawyers think we have a good chance, but it would be much easier if we could figure out what company handles the guild’s backups. Apparently all backed-up information that isn’t needed regularly is deleted after a backup. Which happened literally days before the request for documents was submitted. And we have to submit the demand for the backups separately.”

George nodded. I wasn’t surprised he was well aware of the security measures around backups and the like.

“So what’s the problem?” Kelly asked.

“The system allowed many people to achieve a massive jump in ability when it came to their jobs. Both hackers and those who wrote computer security companies benefited from this, but hackers had a faster turnaround because companies had to purchase and install new software,” George explained. “One of the results of this is that security systems are always a few years behind the cutting edge when it comes to hacking. They’re catching up, but one of the most important security measures is simply not being known to secure information. So legally,

data security companies are allowed to keep both their clients and even purpose fairly hidden.”

“Yup. We can request the data, and the data will have to be turned over, but that’s only on the assumption that we’re right about the company serving the guild. And we don’t know, right now, who allows the backups of the Devils.”

Kelly frowned. “What would you need?”

“Company name, or the name of the backup software on the computers in the guild. No one who has access remembers that,” I said, a little excitement tingling in the back of my mind.

Kelly didn’t say anything, simply looked off to one side. Like she was thinking hard about what I’d said.

I had no idea if she’d help us out, but it would be great to see that happen. As the conversation petered out, I decided to take a look at my choices moving forward.

Pulling up my path information, I had more to consider than last time. Not too surprising. Straight up, I had access to Bone Walker II. The description read like I would expect, even more bone-based upgrades. But I’d been trying to mix some flesh into my skeletons because I thought, based on the command spell, that this path would provide the most increase in capabilities. I could be wrong, of course, so this one was set as the fallback position.

Flesh Shaper was still a path I could take, which might suggest combining the two. But I had my doubts based on the information I’d received from Bone Walker. Most likely all efforts to combine the two would require information not within either path. However, there were two others that deserved a closer look.

< Reaper

Requirements: Weapon skill (forged from a golem) at level 5 / Necromancer Lvl 10

Description: Not all Necromancers stand apart from death. These Necromancers wade into the fight with weapons and armor forged from their own magic. Though reckless from the point of view of most mages, the power of the weapons and armor forged is impossible to ignore.

Effects: Reaper perk / Gain Runic Magic(Dimensional) II

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< Undead Commander

Requirements: Organizer perk / Necromancer Lvl 10

Description: Undead Commanders are powerful individuals who have pursued the ability to maximize the number of undead under their command. This makes them very dangerous but tends to result in less powerful undead outside of rare specialized minions.

Effects: Gain access to specialized Golem Creation information / Commander I perk >

These two choices were the best in my mind. Reaper was an oddball. It was the generally held belief that martial and magical jobs didn't mix. But a magical job that encouraged close combat wasn't unheard of, just stupidly rare. The Shinobi job fell under this headline technically, much to the "annoyance" of a lot of hard-line ninja fanboys and girls. Yet, I felt like I'd picked up a hint or two

on how to maximize my movement down that path from talking to Kelly.

But I'd never heard of a Necromancer who used weapons. It could be because the creation of weapons was encouraged by the less common Bone Walker path. So it was unlikely that a zombie-based Necromancer was likely to have made the requirements for this one. I felt like skeletons worked out for me, so I was kind of tempted to take this one on faith.

However, the most interesting part of this path was the access to Runic Magic (Dimensional) runes. This meant, to me, that I should be able to develop such runes on my own. And if I could create a pocket dimension to store spare dust in. That would be such a huge boon that I was tempted to work out those runes on my own.

And I already had an idea. The "gate" rune used in Golem Creation was the rune that targeted the Valley of Dust. If I had to guess, I would say this was a kind of Dimensional rune. One I could use as a pattern when trying to develop my own runes. It would be better if I could get access to other gate runes to compare structures and see if I could predict which structures related to fucking with dimensional space.

So while choosing it would be interesting, and the information gained would probably be useful, I'd learned a lot about it just from the mere existence of such a path. So maybe it wasn't a good idea to choose it?

The question was, could I assume I knew enough to figure out the Dimensional runes on my own? I already knew it took a lot of work to discover a unique type of runic magic. And my only lead was the gate rune, which might have nothing to do with Dimensional magic as far as I knew.

Undead Commander, on the other hand, seemed like a straight-forward upgrade. Instead of specializing in even more powerful minions, you built a lot of them. I'd seen Necromancers go both ways, and it wasn't that bad. The issue came with maintaining one's mana regeneration and getting enough bodies to fill all possible slots for minions. Something I'd have to look into if I chose this path. I knew that efficiency of creation was often a part of this.

The most common complaint from and about Necromancers had to do with mana usage. Using so much mana to create minions forced the group to wait for mana to regenerate, and that took time. Even more as the minion numbers increased.

This would be a problem no matter how I specialized. If I kept going down the Bone Walker path, I'd have to spend mana on more and more powerful minions, and the Commander path was dependent on large numbers of minions. Both would take a ton of mana.

This was a good argument to take the Reaper path. I already knew that powerful weapons were more expensive to use, but they were limited in number. A single powerful weapon. On the other hand, it could also provide information I could use to improve my minions' weapons. If I did too much of that it could lead to the mana problem again, but such a thing was easier to manage. Probably.

On the face of it, Undead Commander is and was the best choice. More bodies to block with meant more survivability. However, I wasn't sure about that. As much as I would have liked to attempt to develop my own Dimensional magic independently, I didn't know if that was a good idea. I had barely any idea of how to go down that road. And the possibility of developing a way to store undead in some pocket dimension would be amazing.

One would think that would be the preview of the Commander path, but the lack of bonus Dimensional knowledge made me wonder about that. It' was also possible that the Commander path could find a way to develop in another way, like the Necromancer I saw who could make multiple zombies from monsters I was certain should only support one.

< Reaper path taken

Reaper added

Reaper bonus added!

Runic Magic (Dimensional) II has been created!

*Runic Magic (Dimensional) II has been added to
Necromancer spells! >*

I grinned at the Reaper bonus knowledge. It was clearly laying the foundation for the creation of more powerful weapons. I now had some fun ideas on how to upgrade my scythe. And the Dimensional runes I'd just picked up were clearly meant to give me the ability to store my scythe in an out-of-the-way place. Possibly other items as well.

Of course, all of this would be much more complicated than I could handle right now. But as the rain started pounding on the outside of my tent, I pulled out my notebook and started writing down what I had learned. This helped me see connections that weren't pointed out by the info dump. And I started considering more aspects of the weapon creation spell.