Chapter 9

The next day I took the twins to the pool house. They hadn’t seen it yet as the day after I left they were ambushed by their stepdad. They were excited about the space. It was a single-story building. It was 30’ by 40’. It had two bedrooms that were 15’ x 10’. It had one full bathroom. The kitchen and dining room were small but there was a great room that was 30’ x 15’. It was modern with beautiful walls, floors, and appliances purchased through the terminal. I told the girls they needed to furnish it and they could use the cash in the house.

We all went to Boise, rented a moving truck, and filled it from the local furniture store. It might have been easier to get the furniture from the terminal but a paper trail made more sense. It was then two hours of moving furniture for the girls. They took a lot of pleasure in ordering the two humanoid bots around. I just needed to order some mattresses from the terminal store and we were finally finished. The girls could use cash to buy sheets and towels and blinds when they made their next trip to Boise. They could get blinds for my house as well! Well, they left after dinner for Boise. I guessed if a woman had money to spend she was going to spend it. I had been hoping to spend the evening in the tender embrace of Violet. Well maybe not tender, just an overpowering embrace that would result in some sexcapades.

With the women gone, I went down to see the horses. They were excellent mounts according to Violet when she selected them for our spoils. I used Flux to create plans for a barn with stables and a tack room on the first floor. The second floor would be for hay and grain. Flux suggested a mechanical cat in order to keep the building free of vermin so I got a cute-looking black robot cat. It looked real but would be on 24-7 patrol duty.

Then I brought up my property map…I should go drop off the cash for those two plots I wanted. Flux said I had to go to Seattle as the firm that was selling the land was located there. I looked at the properties available again…maybe I should get the three properties on the other side of the forestry road too? $1.6 million? I would inquire about it. Flux got me in touch with a lawyer in Seattle and I took the hoverbike. I would park it in my terminal and then go to meet him.

I walked into his office and dropped off $4 million in cash for him to handle the purchases. It took two hours of paperwork to get receipts and start the process. The lawyer was a little flustered and worried about handling so much cash so he rushed off to the bank after we were done. Flux would handle any government inquiries into the large amounts of cash being thrown around.

Flux said there was a billionaire in Seattle with terminal cancer that offered $50 million to the masked angel to cure him. I waited in Seattle till night fell to meet the billionaire. I went to his estate in my black armor that night, cured him, and told him to donate half of his wealth to children’s hospitals rather than take the 50 million in cash since I didn’t need it. I then flew home.

The lawyer called and said the corp wanted another $100k for rights to the forestry road which was not included in the plots of land. Greedy bastards. I said fine and the deeds should be done by the end of the week. I would be able to put up a gate at the paved road and then I could pave the entire forestry road. I also sketched some riding trails throughout my massive new property. I would add lots of trees with aetheric fast grow soil to liven up the property. I planned to mark the edges of my property with a low stone wall as well. I would use the puffcrete to create large rock-shaped objects to make the wall. And I needed tons of Aether soil to help the trees grow faster. Flux was ordering seedings of the best species for the terrain. I would get the labor bots planting at night.

The woman came back after having spent $17,408 at Bed Bath and Beyond. I couldn’t imagine spending so much money but they had managed it in just a few hours. Violet had got a number of things for our house as well. Adding her own feminine touch.

Two days later the visit from the social worker went well and I signed the paperwork to serve as a foster parent. The girls were delighted. Violet said we needed a training room built. So I had the bots use the puffcrete machine to build a workout studio that was underground, 50’ x 80’ with a 20’ ceiling. It took three days to build and Violet moved in all her new weapons and got a full set of training devices from the terminal. The girls were going to get training from Violet when she had time. Poor girls…and me too as Violet eyed me too during dinner.

The next week everything settled down. I made trips and knocked off the serial killers that Flux had identified. I felt I was doing my civil service taking them out of circulation. I rearranged the property a bit as well. I moved the house trailer down to the barn. Violet wanted a caretaker for the horses as we were not going to be around too often with missions. Celeste and Olivia knew a senior girl at the school who would be a good fit. She was going to run cross country with them and had a similar story to them only it was her brother, not her stepdad. She didn’t have a dad at all and her mom blinded herself to the abuse. I met the girl the next day, she seemed normal and was half native American. She took one look at the stables and horses and agreed after I explained the job and pay was housing and $300 a week. Her name was Amelia. She didn’t have a driver’s license but could ride. I told the twins they could drive her to school but they had to help her get her license.

I set the bots up and stored as many puffcrete bags for my future building plans as I could and returned to the terminal finally to get going on a new mission.

With Violet next to me I went through my choices and we selected one.

***Travel to the Elven city of Ahrenhal. Reward: +1 stat point, +1 skill point, +1 anchor point, 500 credits***

It was a simple mission and would give me a new anchor point. The only issue is it was a 1000-mile journey and I would need to come back to collect the reward, so 2000 miles of total travel distance. After a brief discussion with Violet, we decided I would upgrade my hover bike and then quickly complete the mission. I spent 200,000 credits tricking out the bike; armor, an improved engine, an improved altitude to 250 meters, cloaking, phasic shields, sensor upgrades, a light laser turret, a new paint job, an upgraded communications suite, an AI autopilot, and a coffee maker. Well, the last one was an adapted Keurig machine. I was itching to go and the bike was just a smidge under 4 feet wide and 5 feet high and 11 feet long. I left from my first forest portal, cloaked, and went right up to 250 meters. The AI synched the maps I had with the visible terrain and we were off.

The trip was two hours and the AI calculated with the Aether tech drain I had 160 hours of operation with everything running. So no foreseeable problems. When we got close to the elven city I zoomed in on my bike sensors and it was an impressive city out of a storybook. White stone buildings and gardens everywhere. I decided to do a flyover and land a mile away and make my way on foot. As we neared the city I crashed into an invisible wall. The deceleration threw me forward and I blacked out as warning messages flashed everywhere in the cockpit.

I woke in a bright room and was unable to move. I must have been paralyzed. No, I could wiggle my toes, I was just restrained. I tall male elf stepped into my vision. I tried to make a joke about the poor hospitality but he looked very serious. He stated plainly that I was an Operator and he wanted to know why I was in his city and if it was tied to a mission I was doing. I told him about my mission and he looked over to someone who I could barely see nod…a lie detector maybe? Best to be truthful.

He then asked me numerous questions about my terminal and experiences. He was surprised I had only been an Operator for a few months. After I answered his questions he released my restraints. I sat up and there were ten guards around the room, my questioner and two others in finery. He said he had built this city over the last 700 years. It was over an Aether nexus and had access to the Under Earth cities and a path to the outer shell.

I had crashed into the city's Aether force field. My hoverbike was mostly destroyed and his healers were barely able to save me. It had been 9 days since I had crashed. I asked him if he was an Operator as well and he said yes. How long had he been an Operator…910 years. Wow. I asked him what now? He said I was free to leave his city. He also advised me to be careful. The missions the terminals set out are usually done for a purpose of the entity that controlled them. I had probably been sent here to start a chain of missions that would take me out into the galaxy in this universe.

I asked him what was the goal of the entities that controlled the terminals. Each entity controlled a few million terminals and their goal in his opinion was to alleviate boredom. He advised that I either go all in and do as many missions as possible or just do the required missions…the missions that the terminal selected automatically and required the Operator to do. After an Operator completed a required mission they usually had a few months before another one was required. I wanted to talk more with the king/emperor but he was busy and just warned me not to cause trouble in his city… ever.

I was escorted out of the palace in some white linen clothes and sandals. I had nothing. I had to get back 1000 miles on my own. I started by going and finding a clinic. I was able to ply my healing hand's ability over the next 5 days to earn some coin. I left the city with traveling clothes, a backpack, a nice pair of elven swords, and 209 silver coins.

Of course, I got rained on the first day of walking. It was a slog but I could make 40 miles a day on the road at a brisk walk. I used up 19 silver on my first night at an elven village because I ordered a rare dish at the inn by mistake. On the second day, I made it to a nice village and just had to heal a few elves for food and lodging. The third day took me to the edge of elven lands. I had to pass through unclaimed mountains on a rough road. There were wild elven clans in the mountains… kind of like barbarians. A war party challenged me to duel. I defeated the leader and was given an armband that allowed me to pass the territory.

I summited the mountains and on the way down the other side, a giant eagle grabbed me. I had to remove my backpack and it flew away with it. The 50-foot fall broke a few bones and I got speared by my sword sheath too. I spent the day hiding in the rocks and healing. Hunger finally got me moving again. The base of the mountain was a dry jungle. Everything was dying and I moved slowly and fought off some giant mosquitos. I slept restlessly and was hungry and thirsty. I pushed the next day to some grassy hills. The high grass made it difficult to see and I wasn’t sure if I was going in the right direction. The only animals were gophers.

Fortunately, I didn’t stumble on any predators and I also finally found a water source that seemed clear. It even had fish and I stabbed a pair with my swords. I wasn’t able to make a fire. I learned I didn’t like sushi but I was hungry. The next day I finally got out of the grass and could use the mountains behind me to head in the right direction. I came across a small town of beastmen; cat and fox subspecies. They were fortunately friendly and a catwoman spoke Tantarian. I got food and a place to sleep. The village of 300 didn’t have a healer so I spent two days healing and curing villagers. They even gave me an escort for 150 miles to a human town in the right direction.

I spent a day getting rest and maps in the human settlement. I still had 750 miles to go. The good news was I had roads to follow the rest of the way so could make good miles every day. I had to travel through two human kingdoms, both were tolerant of outsiders. There was even an airship that could do a 400-mile stretch of it. It took 4 days to get to the city by airship. I spent two days in the massive city getting the money for a ticket by healing people. The airship was pretty awesome and I met some powerful adventurers. The adventurers told me about their adventuring in the Under Earth and they had even been to a city on the Dark World, the outside of the sphere. They preferred to not deal with technology so didn’t plan to go back again.

The adventurers returned to the Under Earth via an underground highway in the city and I started my last 200-mile stretch. It took a week to get to Stormheart but I was happy to port to the terminal. The first thing I did was get my Flux phone back in my hand with some upgrades, I got a bone graft with holographic display and ear implant. The phone was now a part of me and could talk to me. I could also reinstall Flux’s memory when I went to Earth and could connect to the server there that Flux was using. Next, I ordered a skinsuit similar to Violet’s. I then got my hoverbike back, not hesitating to spend the credits. I was a little afraid to face the women after being gone for so long so I spent time shopping in the terminal. I got 24 more of the baseball-sized attack drones. I purchased a heavy pulse pistol. It was good for 30 shots and had excellent accuracy out to 75 yards. After 75 yards the power of the shot dropped slowly. I got 3 spare power cells. Next, I installed a full bathroom, kitchen, and bedroom expansion in the terminal. I took a shower, ate a few MREs, and went to sleep.

When I woke I dressed and took a deep breath and returned to my house. Violet found me shortly…she was happy, angry, and then concerned as I told her what had happened. She then said I wouldn't be doing any missions alone again. Eventually, Celeste and Olivia got back from school and rushed and gave me a hug. They went into what happened the last five weeks on Earth. I listened to their high school stories, stories of their cross country team, and the changes around the place. The road had been adjusted and paved, saving a few minutes of drive time. They had been getting conditioning, sword training, and horse riding lessons from Violet. They were very excited about everything going on in their life.

Then I told them about my last few weeks and they asked dozens of questions. It took 3 hours to tell my story in its entirety. Violet said the twin's mom showed up and tried to get them to return home. They turned her down and had the cops show up to get her to leave. It was late and Violet and I had short passionate sex. Falling asleep in my own bed was like a weight being lifted off my shoulders.