Chapter 2 A Very Small Fish In Multi-Universe Sized Pond

When I woke I felt good but I was really hungry. I left the terminal and went to the trailer. I cooked and ate two frozen pizzas, drank a six-pack of beer, and ate six P&J sandwiches before I finally felt satiated. I then went to sleep. I woke 14 hours later and rushed to the bathroom for the smelliest and largest bowel movement I had ever had. I took the mess from the composting toilet outside to my pit immediately. I then showered and admired myself in the mirror after.

My gray hair was almost gone, the scale said I weighed just 180 lbs and all my scars were gone. I was anxious to get back to the terminal. I went outside and decided to try opening the terminal without a door and it worked. The door was in the open and was roughly 4 feet wide by 8 feet high. I went and sat at the computer. It was still on my Operator screen. There was a skill and abilities tab that I opened next. I asked the computer for a description.

“Skills can be purchased or learned on your own. There are 11 ranks of skills. The first rank, neophyte, has five levels, each level is equivalent to 20 hours of knowledge. The next five ranks are beginner, novice, apprentice, skilled, and expert; each has ten levels. Each level in the beginner rank is equivalent to 100 hours of knowledge. Each level in the novice rank is equivalent to 200 hours of knowledge. An apprentice level is equivalent to 300 hours of knowledge. A skilled level is equivalent to 400 hours of knowledge. An expert level is equal to 500 hours of knowledge.”

“The upper 5 ranks, renowned expert, master, grand master, legend, mythical; have 100 levels each. As a new operator, you can select five skills at beginner-1 rank and one ability at beginner-1 rank.” A massive directory appeared. I did some mental math, Expert-10 in this system was equal to 15100 hours of knowledge. If a person worked diligently 8 hours a day on just one skill it would take over 5 years to develop just one skill to Expert-10. The system didn’t even mention the upper-rank equivalents in knowledge.

Figuring spending 2 hours a day might be normal, a year working on a skill would mean competency at beginner-3, in my opinion, would be a good level to indicate proficiency. After some more inquiries, I learned that the skills were extremely varied. I needed to unlock a skill in order for the skill to be raised by the system. After a few minutes, I sorted out some skills and selected them. I found I could also unlock a new skill for 1,000 credits so choosing all combat skills with my free five choices seemed like a good idea.

Ballistic Hand Guns Beginner-1

Ballistic Rifles Beginner-1

Short Blades Beginner-1

Martial Combat Beginner-1

Dodge Beginner-1

The knowledge download was intense. My head hurt and I couldn’t think straight as the knowledge was added, equivalent to 1000 hours in one shot. After I felt like a one-man army. I also had to select a free ability. Each ability cost 10,000 credits to unlock so this was a big choice. Eventually, I decided on healing hands.

Healing Hands Beginner-1

This was a magical ability that used my Aether reserves to heal wounds and sickness. I could even cure cancer! Well almost. I would need 30-80 Aether depending on how advanced the cancer was. And I currently only had a pool of 10. Increasing the ability would also increase the skill's efficiency, reducing the Aether cost. The voice gave me some bad news though. My planet, Earth, was at the rim of this universe and Aether density was low so I regenerated just 1 Aether per day with my 10 in channeling. There was good news though, the terminal room was Aether dense and I recovered 100 Aether per day here. So 10% vs 1000% percent.

The terminal voice then said something that made me a little upset. It said I could unlock a maximum total of 10 skills and 5 abilities with credits. Fortunately, these limits could be increased with certain mission rewards. I guess I should check out the missions tab next. I went to the folder and opened it. There was only one mission.

***Connect your portal to a new realm, Reward: +2 stat points, +2 skill points, +2 ability points***

I asked the voice how did I do that? The response was that the portals had all been reset. I only had one connector available. So I had to choose which of the 6 other realms to choose, the doors on the other side of the room. These doors led to entire universes so where did they connect to?

The initial anchoring could be selected. I asked the voice to advise me on this choice. The voice paused then said the *World Sphere*. The World Sphere was a Dyson sphere with the interior an expanse of limitless exploration opportunities. The shell of the sphere was 5000 miles thick and had hundreds of inhabited layers. The outer surface was called the dark world and had its own explorable area.

In addition, there were sixteen planets that orbited inside the sphere which gave some areas a day/night cycle. Each of these planets was explorable as well. Basically, I could spend hundreds of lifetimes on this one structure. The Aether coefficient was 8, meaning I would recover 800% of my Aether a day. The interior was magically dominant and technology was limited but on the exterior technology was prevalent with some spaceship ports and domed cities.

I found the interior landscapes were populated like a fantasy game, elves, dwarves, dragons, goblins, orcs, magicians, knights… Would my guns work? Yes, they would but gunpowder would lose effectiveness over time as it became Aether saturated…the voice estimated about 200 days. So Aether kept technology in check on the interior? Yes. Electrical devices were 16% effective. Well, I could always restock my ammo in my world.

Ok, it sounded like a good option but where would the portal connect to? The voice said it would anchor on the interior surface randomly. By completing missions I could earn more anchor points but I would have to travel to a location to use them. I thought for a bit then asked about gravity. The interior was just a little heavier than Earth. Breathable? Yes. Languages? Forty-five thousand or so from the sentient races. So I probably wouldn’t be able to communicate with locals.

Would death be permanent? Yes. Ok no respawn like a video game. How many Operators were on the sphere? The voice paused for a long minute then said 203,478 currently. Wow! How many Operators were there? There were 99,990,001 Terminals with 79,968,860 currently active. Were the Operators all human? No, only 4,129,760 would be classified as human. I was learning a lot. How many operators were based on Earth? Seven. Including me? Yes. Well just imaging the *World Sphere* I could see how insignificant Earth actually was. How many humans lived on, in, and outside the *World Sphere*? Between 22 and 23 billion. Why were the terminals created? The terminals were created as a way for the Entities to influence the 7 realms. The Entities? Yes. What are the Entities? Powerful beings who created the Terminals. I gave up on the circular responses. Ok, let's connect to the World Sphere.

The first door across the room rippled then the frame turned black and a quarter-sized light appeared, like an elevator button. The terminal voice said the portal was connected, and as I added more anchors in this realm more buttons would be added linking their access to my portal. Can others use my portals? The operator would have to be present and consciously let the person or object through. I was feeling hungry so I went and made some rice noodles with chicken and sweet Thai chili sauce. I thought about what I should do.

If I went in and died no one would ever know what happened to me. I decided to write my sister a letter. My handwriting was perfect with my high agility. I told her that I was traveling the world and I would be unreachable. If she didn’t hear from me for three years I told her she could have my land and property in Idaho. I put a bunch of sappy stuff as well. I addressed the letter and got in the truck and headed to Boise.

In Boise, I mailed the letter. Next, I bought 4000 rounds of 9mm ammo, 1000 30-06 ammo, 576 MREs, 3 sets of military fatigues, 12 ferro rods, 20 para cord rolls, 4 pairs hiking boots, 6 wool blankets, 4 sleeping bags, 20 pairs wool socks and two backpacks. The guy looked at me for a bit but said nothing as I loaded my truck. I stopped at a burger joint and got two ½ lb burgers and fries. My metabolism had definitely increased. I went and got regular groceries as well. On the way back to my home I was excited and planning in my head. I arrived and opened the Terminal door near the trailers. I then began to drag things into the terminal, setting up a bedroom and kitchen area. After finishing I slept in the terminal.

On waking I went to the computer and checked missions.

***COMPLETED: Connect your portal to a new realm, Reward: +2 stat points, +2 skill points, +2 ability points***

This was great. I went to my screen and added the stat points to speed, the skill points to handguns, and the ability points to healing hands. The increases were euphoric. I went back to missions. A new mission was selected.

***Explore the other side of the linked portal, Reward: +1 skill point, 1,000 credits (min time 8 hours)***

Ok, this was good. I just had to spend 8 hours on the other side. I needed to prepare. I mumbled that I wished I could increase my skills before going and the voice said for beginner level the cost to increase was 100 times the new rank. What? I had just used my rewards on low-level skills. I should have banked them. Damn. What about stat points? It cost 10 times the new stat value up to 100, after 100 it cost 100 times the new stat value. How many credits did I have? 7180. Ok, I started by increasing my Aether to 20 for 1550. Then channeling to 20 for 1550. Curious I clicked on the store and auction.

So many things… spaceships! Energy weapons! The store seemed expensive so I went to the auction and focused there. Items could be bought outright or there was an auction. I found a new entry Labor Bot. I clicked on it and an image of a humanoid robot appeared for 1000 credits. I checked and found the store sold the same robot for 5000 credits. I bought two of the ones that were available on the auction site. The white alcove flashed and the two 7-foot-tall bots stood there.

Awesome! I tried to give them commands but they just stood there with a light glow in their eyes. Damn was I duped? The voice said I would need an interface and translator. Great how much would that cost? The computer showed a device in the store for 250 credits. After some back-and-forth questions, I got a device that was shaped like a cell phone but looked like a piece of black glass. It cost me 790 credits but could integrate into any low-tech communication network.

Basically, I now had a free cell phone that was powerful enough to use at my home to make calls and connect to the internet. It also was able to update the two bots to understand English which I did. I commanded the bots to leave the Terminal and return to Earth. They were strong but did not move overly fast. I bought a rock crusher the size of a car in the auction for 600 credits but was quickly disappointed when it didn’t fit out the portal. In order to expand the portal to 8 feet in width required 1000 credits and I only had 590 credits remaining. I went and set the bots to repair the road. If their battery got under 10% they were to return to the trailer and wait for me. I had planned to use crushed stone on the road but that idea was on hold. My device displayed the robot's battery with an estimated 11 hours of activity remaining.

Back in the Terminal, I started to pack. One rifle, 6 loaded clips, one pistol with holster, 5 clips, box 100 9mm rounds, backpack, tent, sleeping bag, 12 MREs, 2 bottles of water, water filter, 300 feet para cord, survival knife, ferro rod, one set of clothes, and a box of snickers bars. I dressed in camo clothes and stood ready. I was only bringing 30 rounds of ammo for the rifle…should I get more? No. I just planned on a two-day trip. I walked through.