

StoryLine-12

My nerves lighten with the rain.

I don't know how far I made it during the downpour, since while I know in what direction Court is, my ability doesn't tell me how close it is. I doubt I've made a lot of progress as slow as I've been walking.

The rain made it impossible to hear anything over it hitting the canopy, or see more than a meter around me. In a forest with I have no idea how many animals and monsters, I didn't feel like running, or even walking fast.

Now, I can see far enough it's the trees blocking my sight, and I'm sure that once my ears stop ringing, I'll be able to hear something approaching. I still move carefully. I think we walked into the forest for a couple of hours before reaching the power station, but time wasn't what I paid attention to. When Rich wasn't distracting me, the forest was.

The ground squishes with each step and I try not to let that stress me. Noises attracts monsters is one of the first thing Grandmother taught us. If we find ourselves in the wild for some reason, be as quiet as we can. That, and listen carefully.

Perception check Failed

With how many of those I've failed since starting to walk, I've got to be getting close to gaining a level. I've set those messages down to the bottom left so they'll stop obscuring my sight every few minutes.

I find out the clouds are mostly gone as I approach a clearing and the sun shines through the canopy.

I stop, surrounded by light breaking into rainbowed sparkles on the raindrop covered trees. I look up and, in the haze of misted water, every beam that makes it through openings in the leaves is visible. Lines of light, some tinted green, fall everywhere.

I'm tempted to thank Rich for taking me out here, letting me see this. But I'm standing here in spite of him, not because, so he can still go fuck himself.

But I am glad I get to see this.

The forest can be beautiful in a way Court can't be. At least, I got to see this once in my—

My head snaps to the left as something flashes there

Perception check Successful

I scan through the trees. Making a perception check doesn't mean I get information as to what I noticed. The flash gives me the area, but it could have been a leaf falling, a rat skittering about, or some monster poking its head around a tree to prepare an attack. If this was somewhere I planned on spending time, I'd invest points and training in skills that would be relevant: tracking, sound identification, if that's a skill. Base can give me a list if I want to find out what I'd want.

Whatever it was, I can't make it out, so I turn to back toward Cour—

Wow.

In the center of the clearing is an animal I've never seen

Antelope, level 8

Cryptozoology check failed

That's definitely a skill I'd get if I was going to spend time here.

It's... big, but stands on surprisingly thin legs. It grazes the grass, its wide antlers almost scraping the ground. They, too, are thin and delicate looking. Water glistens on its chestnut colored pelt.

It raises its head, looking in the direction I had. I check again and make out nothing. When I look at the Antelope again, it's looking in my direction.

I...

Well, if it wanted to attack, I'd be dead.

It goes back to grazing the grass, its head snapping in my direction when my foot squish as I back away. I'm not pressing my luck against a level eight animal. I make it four steps before it's grazing again, and I turn toward Court.

Over my loud steps, I make out birds singing, the occasional chittering.

I make perception checks and occasionally catch sight of something in the branches, but they're gone too fast for me to focus and get a name. One of them jumped and its body stretch to let it glide to another tree.

Perception skill is now Level 16

"Yes!"

Shit! I hunker down and look around.

Perception check Failed

A definite reminder that one level doesn't make that much of a difference.

I grin.

Still, my first skill past fifteen.

The sounds of the forest return, and I stand. I take a step and the growl makes me turn as I equip the sword.

At least I armed myself this time.

Warg, Level 2

I only have time to make out gray fur, something half my height, and that it's running in my direction, before I see an open jaw and large teeth. I throw myself aside, and its paw slams into me, throwing me to the ground. I get up to the flashing of my health bar, but no bleed debuff.

One for me wearing armor.

I roll to my feet and slash, but it's already out of reach.

My free arm aches for the weight of a shield.

I put my sword between me and the incoming claws, only for them to connect with my arm and send me spinning to another flash of my health bar. Now I can make out the missing health.

I'm on my feet and sent back to the ground as it slams into me. I feel the claws on my chest as I swing and it backs up, a red line becoming visible through the fur. It's got to be thick for it to be that thin. It felt like I'd gone deeper.

I'm on my feet, and take the offensive, and it backs as I swing. I finally manage to cut its face, but it responds my jumping on me. I hit the ground hard and something harder that pokes out of it, added to the Warg's weight on me, cost me health again. I shove hard and roll away. The stone has a rounded tip, which accounts for the lack of debuff, and I throw myself aside again as it leaps at me. I dodge, but my swing misses, too.

I catch my breath as it circles me. My stamina's down to three-quarter, my health to seven-eighth. Either drops to zero and I'm dead.

I attack, feinting left and land a kick in its side that sends it down. I follow with a stab that grazes it as it gets up, but the bleeding's stronger on this cut.

Is there a point where it'll flee?

I slam my blade into its head as it almost lands on me, but I get a staggered debuff and my follow up swing goes wild, At least that kept it from attacking again.

The debuff vanished as it attacks, and I curse as it drops at the last moment. I'm on my back, my boot in its jaw, and lose health as it swings me into a tree a few times before my free foot connects with its face and it lets go.

It glares at me, panting, as I push myself to my feet. Health well below three-quarter now. No idea how much damage I've done to it. Or rather how much it takes to take it down.

It snarls and takes a step forward. I send it back with a swing that nearly connects with its muzzle. It comes at me immediately and I get my left arm under its neck as its jaws snap centimeter from my face.

I stab and my sword slide off its pelt, but that still gets it off me, and there's another bleeding line. At this point, if I can last long enough, the bleed debuffs will get it if I don't. But I'm not going to win hoping for that.

My swing connects and leaves yet another deep line in its side, but it's not backing off this time and I my arm's too high when I try to keep its head from me so that instead of catching it at the neck, its jaw closes on my arm.

It shakes its head and I'm on the ground, but it doesn't let go. I ignore the debuff as my health drops below half and try to stab it with my sword, but it's too close and with it shaking me, I can't get the leverage for anything more than getting the point to slide off its hide. If that's hurting it, it's not showing it, or letting go.

With another slam and my health getting too close to a quarter, I unequip the sword and equip the knife, which I slam into it over and over. It slams me down again, then lets go of me halfway through the next one and I slide on the wet grass.

It looks at me, panting and bleeding a lot.

I glance at the debuff.

Debuff, fracture, Left Ulna
You have broken a bone
All actions requiring this arm are taken at a 75% penalty

At least I'm not bleeding. The armor's indented where the teeth bit in, but it held. It takes an unsteady step in my direction and I use a tree to push to my feet. On the next step, it falters and is on the ground. Its panting slows, then stops.

Explorer Quest Completion, step 1: Fighting Monsters
You have fought your first monster
Rewards: 1098 experience

I slid down the tree as more messages appear.

Sword Fighting Skill is now Level 16

Parrying Skill is now Level 16

Kicking Skill is now Level 16

Dodging Skill is now Level 16

Blocking Skill is now Level 16

I chuckle, then groan. Grandmother always said that nothing beat actual combat for gaining levels. Considering how long it took for my perception to hit sixteen, compared to all these skills, I can't deny it anymore.

I unequip the knife and pull my last healing bar and unwrap it. One bite and I feel better, Half of it eaten and the debuff fades away. I finish it and my health is slightly above three-quarter.

As I start to crumble the wrapper, I notice writing on the inside.

Carlyle's Healing Emporium, 1279 Bloor, Toronto.

I send that to my free inventory spot to dispose of once I'm home and get to my feet. I consider the dead Warg, then touch it. *Access.*

Raw hide, meat and bones are the only loot from it. Not worth more than what I'm already carrying, so it's not worth freeing an inventory spot.

I think of home and orient myself, then I walk, paying more attention to my surroundings.