

Leveling up the World

Chapter 4: Within the Ring

The hall that Dallion found himself in was very different from the one he had been moments ago. All furniture and people had vanished, leaving nothing but silvery glittering walls behind. The only source of light was a floating blue rectangle, identical to the one he had seen in the closed room earlier today.

The RING is Level 3

So, this is to be awakened? Dallion thought.

Curiosity made him look down at his clothes. They were the same as before with one slight difference: there was a metal buckler attached to his left forearm.

The blue rectangle flipped.

You are in a medium metal hall.

Defeat the guardian to change the RINGs destiny!

The challenge was clear, though that didnt make Dallion feel better. As a child he had gone to a dozen different martial arts classes, quitting on each after a few weeks of training. At present he could say he knew the basics, he could even claim to be somewhat fit for a city kid. However, he had never been in a serious fight since elementary school.

I accept, he said reluctantly, tapping on the buckler with his right hand.

The rectangle remained in front of him, silent and unmoving.

Do I get a weapon? *I should have taken the sword.*

No response.

Anything?

The rectangle kept on floating, oblivious to his questions. After a while, Dallion got tired and hit it with the back of his buckler. The rectangle shattered into pixels and disappeared into the air.

Just like pop-ups. Dallion mused.

A large arch formed in the end of the hall, leading to an adjacent room. Normally, when presented with an unknown opening, a person's initial reaction was to peek through. Dallion was no different. He suspected that the guardian might be waiting for him there, but he still couldn't stop himself from moving closer.

Just a few steps, he told himself. There could hardly be any harm in that.

The few steps became many, then lots. Before he knew it, Dallion was at the threshold, trying to peek beyond the sides of the archway, like a cat pressing its face against a windowpane. There was no enemy to be seen, nor anything else for that matter. The room appeared to be an identical copy to the one Dallion was in.

Most people would have found the fact suspicious, exerting some caution before continuing further. Dallion didn't, stepping through the archway without a moment's consideration.

COMBAT INITIATED!

A red rectangle emerged, though that wasn't Dallion's main concern. In the middle of the room, a seven-foot-bronze statue had emerged.

The statue had a distinctly Greco-Roman look, depicting a woman who seemed to have spent her entire life in a bodybuilder's gym. Muscles bulged, stretching the robe she was wearing in a fascinatingly terrifying fashion. There were no weapons or armor visible, but given that she was entirely made of metal, even a slap would likely feel like a sledgehammer.

What the heck is that?! Dallion smashed the red rectangle away.

RING GUARDIAN

Species: COLOSSUS

Class: BRONZE

Statistics: UNKNOWN

Skills: UNKNOWN

Weak Spots: UNKNOWN

A white rectangle appeared above the statue's head. In theory it was supposed to provide information, but the lack of specifics only made the guardian more menacing.

Dallion's instincts forced him to take a step back. The wall that had replaced the archway, however, prevented him from moving any further.

So, this is it The boy raised his shield. This was the trial that had caused his mother to lose her awakened powers, and by the looks of it, was about to do the same to Dallion.

Determining her target, the guardian bowed.

You're courteous, at least, Dallion thought.

The futility of the situation, combined with decades of watching martial art competitions on YouTube, made him do the same. After all, just because he was about to be pummeled to a pulp was no reason for him to be rude. To his surprise, the guardian smiled in response. Unlike the village chiefs family, there was no maliciousness in her, just a desire to fulfill her task.

Moments later, the guardian rushed forward. Her right fist pulled back, preparing for a strike.

Dallion braced himself. There was little more that he could do. Even with a sword he would be hard-pressed doing any actual harm. The thought of bashing her on the head cartoon style crossed his mind, only to be cast away.

Just then, a green line appeared, connecting the guardians fist to his chest. It was a curved glowing line, more like a piece of string or a wire-frame projection. Not wasting a moment, Dallion leapt to his right. The line didn't budge, now linking the guardians fist to the wall. Moments later, the two made contact. A loud resounding clang resounded in the room, as if someone had hit the inside of a bell.

Two new lines appeared, starting from each of the guardians fists and continuing to Dallions chest and jaw. In addition, there also were a series of green glowing footsteps on the floor, as well as semi-transparent disk representations floating in the air.

GUARD skills activated.

Follow the suggested markers for best efficiency.

Is this a tutorial? Dallion shouted.

The notion was simultaneously strange and insulting. Tutorials were the one thing that everyone agreed was useless and best ignored. Right now, though, the boy was glad to have been proven wrong.

Attempting to follow the instructions made him feel like a marionette operated by a very drunk sailor: there were a lot of mistakes and swearing, and even when Dallion succeeded, he did it in a way that seemed as if he had something else planned.

The key was to avoid the guardians fists which he did with perfect accuracy. Keeping up with his footwork, though, was like playing Dance Dance revolution. For every five

successful steps, hed miss two. The position of the buckler was even more difficult to match. It took over twenty tries for Dallion to get a full sequence right. When he did, time came to a sudden crawl.

Nice! Dallion smiled at the unexpected combat advantage. There were multiple ways for him to make use of the situation. The way he chose was to slam his buckler in the guardians head. One for me!