

Leveling up the World

Chapter 9: Mother's Training

Time slow, as the name suggested, allowed a person to experience the passage of time much faster than everyone else. Games and movies illustrated that by allowing characters to perform actions within the fraction of a second while their opponents stood helplessly like statues. In practice, the experience was very different.

The time slow effects allowed Dallion to analyze the situation and make a better decision while not being under pressure. However, they did not make him faster, he had Reflexes to thank for that. At this point it would have been easy for the boy to whap the bone spider on with his buckler and end the fight. Doing so, though, would gain him little.

So thats what you were aiming for, Mom? Dallion smiled.

The bone blade spider was perfect for him to perfect his guard skillsthe creature was fast, agile, and dealt virtually no damage. Defeating it was simple, learning to consistently evade it, though, that was the real trick.

Here you go, little buddy. Dallion gently shoved the creature to the side with his shield, as if he were shooing away a small kitten from the kitchen table.

Time resumed. The spider paused, visibly confused as to what had happened. Its eyes moved in all directions before focusing on Dallion again.

Come on. The boy invited. Lets have another go.

The spider tapped its legs, then charged forward.

The fighting continued for hours. Letting go of his fear, Dallion lost track of time. Everything had become an enjoyable experience, almost a dance in which each side tried to outperform the other. Following the step and shield indicators had become remarkably easy. Out of four sequences, Dallion would mess up one at most. It was while performing them, that some additional advantages became apparent.

Completing one sequence flawlessly caused time to slow. Completing two in a row, without attacking in-between, made it stop completely, also allowing him to move a short distance away without stopping the time flow. The only rule was that Dallion could only move to the flashing footprints that appeared. Every subsequent sequence increased the distance.

Despite Dallions attempts, however, he still couldnt complete five guard sequences in a row. At that point it was no longer an issue of skill, it was that his body couldnt keep up. Being limited to a body value of three, four seemed to be his limit.

How about we call it a day? Dallion asked, brushing the sweat off his forehead.

The spider stopped its attack, paused for a few moments, legs tapping against the bone floor, then took a few steps back.

I dont suppose you can forfeit the fight? Dallion smiled.

The spider lifted two legs in the equivalent of a shrug.

Didnt think so, the boy sighed. Well, lets do this.

On cue, the spider dashed forward. The creature, so fast and scary before, now looked like a snail slowly crawling towards him. One smack later, it was all over.

HAIRPIN Level increased

The HAIRPIN has been improved to IVORY.

Your GUARD skills have increased to 3.

Dallion found himself back in his bed, holding onto the hairpin his mother had given him. His pajamas were drenched with sweat.

Careful not to overdo it. The boys mother pulled the pin back, inspecting it. The object was far more refined, polished and sharp, with an almost pearl-like shine. Awakening numbs fatigue, but the body still needs rest. I suggest you stay in bed for a while. Before that, get changed. Ill bring some fresh sheets.

The guardians, Damion started. As he did, he noticed he was gasping for air. The guardians, are they sentient?

The woman smiled.

Only for the awakened. Thats one of the curses we have to live with. Once youre awakened, you can never look at objects in the same way. She placed the hairpin back in her hair. Those that are too softhearted, youll hear their screams no matter where you look. Those that are too cruel will find joy in breaking things only to imagine their guardians in pain.

It was no mystery in which category the village chiefs family fell.

Rest a bit. Ill bring you some food as well.

Taking a few more moments to catch his breath, Dallion got up and went to the well for a wash. The state of the well tempted him to use his awakened skills on it, but reason prevailed. Only once per day. Besides, there was no telling whether he could even handle something as large as a well. So far, he had only improved objects that could fit within the palm of a hand. Given there was so little he knew about the rules of awakening, it was safer to follow his mothers and grandfathers instructions.

The next few days followed a cycle of rest, practice, rest, washing, as well as lots of eating. Dallions Aunt Vanessa came frequently to visit, of course, each time bringing a small trinket she wanted adjusted. The first was a simple handkerchief Vanessa wanted it made into silk, but reluctantly accepted fine cotton as a result. The second was a vase which Dallion had no problem improving. As for the final one, the woman had brought a copper coin. Upon seeing it, Dallions grandfather had made it clear in no uncertain terms that the boy was not to meddle with any metals, let alone copper. The message was received loud and clear since Vanessa had stopped visiting.

On the fifth day since Dallions awakening, his parents reluctantly let him choose what to improve on his own. It didnt take long for him to decide on what exactly.

Are you sure, brother? Linner asked. You can repair another

Ive repaired everything in the house, Dallion interrupted. For the most part it was true he had repaired most of the smaller items, as well as a pot, a pan, and a few of his fathers tools. Sadly, repairing things didnt improve his skills. At your last birthday I promised Ill improve the best pebble for you and Ill keep that promise.

It had been a childish promise, made years before Dallion even appeared in the world. Given his little brothers constant support and admiration, it only felt proper that the boy got his birthday wish an improved river pebble.

You remember our deal. Dallion entered the river. You choose the pebble, I improve it.

Of course! The child grinned and splashed further in, searching for the perfect pebble.

Standing at the riverbank, Dallion couldnt help but wonder what sort of guardian hed face. So far he had fought metal, bone, cloth, clay and wood. Stone was definitely going to be a first.

Hello, Dallion, a female voice from nearby. Turning around, the boy saw the elder chiefs granddaughter, the one for whom he had improved the metal ring. Lets have a word.