

Weapons of Mass Destruction #Chapter 1 - Read

Weapons of Mass Destruction Chapter 1

Chapter 1

I let out a small yawn, my cheek pressed against the cool bus window. For a brief moment, a street light blinds me, forcing me to close my eyes. When the light fades, another yawn escapes me.

Shifting my gym bag, I wriggle into a more comfortable position and sneak a peek toward the front of the half-full bus.

A standing boy mutters something, and his friends erupt in laughter. One of them, in particular, lets out a laugh that's... well, it's unique.

He continues to cackle without a care in the world.

Honestly, it's beginning to freak me out a bit.

Seriously, what's the deal with that laugh?

As I tear my gaze away from them, I catch the eye of a girl around my age sitting a few seats behind the noisy bunch. Annoyance is etched on her face.

Our eyes lock for a moment, and then we both nod.

Just like that, an eternal bond is forged between us, united in our annoyance by the gaggle of kids but too lazy to do anything about it.

I return my attention to the window and notice a small, nearly imperceptible grin on my reflection.

Definitely not because someone else is suffering with me.

Nope.

Through my closed eyelids, I see the rhythmic flashes of streetlights as we pass by them. The hum of the bus and the muted conversations blend into a soothing white noise, lulling me toward sleep.

And then, suddenly, chaos erupts.

Blinding light.

A sensation of falling.

Terrified screams.

The flash of light is far more intense than any streetlight.

The sensation is akin to the bus being hoisted into the air and dropped down.

Screams fill the air again, some quivering with fear, others laced with shock.

The cacophony of shattering glass and groaning metal assaults my ears. I open my eyes, only to squint as the overpowering light blinds me.

My pupils dilate in surprise as they adjust to the brightness.

Daylight?

What the heck?

I gape out the window at the blue sky and the sun peeking out from behind the clouds.

If anyone asked, I'd swear it was morning, or maybe early afternoon at the latest. But how could that be? It was late afternoon just moments ago.

"Let's calm down," the bus driver attempts to reassure the frantic passengers. His efforts are in vain, as the shouting continues.

Unlike the others who have sprung to their feet, I remain in my seat, staring out the window. My gaze travels across the sky. A cold sweat trickles down my back as it dawns on me.

Uh, what?

The hell?

Is this some kind of hallucination? A dream?

Can this really be happening?

Something like this shouldn't be possible, right?

I blink my eyes shut, then reopen them.

Nothing changes.

Well, this just got a whole lot more interesting.

Since when are there two suns in the sky?

Did I bonk my head?

Is it a prank? How would you even pull off something like that? The first sun is hiding behind the clouds, and the second... the second maybe-sun, smaller and more orange in color, beams in the sky to the left of the first one.

And where are all the buildings? Where is the road?

Okay, let's calm down.

Slow and deep breaths.

Just like this.

In and out.

Good...

I hurriedly fish my phone out of my pocket, and of course, there's no signal.

Not even a smidgen.

Now what?

I glance at the other travelers and see that the first ones are already stepping outside. A few of them check their phones but judging from their faces, they're also out of luck.

After grabbing my bag, I too exit the bus and step onto the grass... yup, grass.

"What the fuck?" I hear, and when I glance to my left, I see the annoyed girl from before gawking at the second maybe-sun with her mouth agape.

Welcome to the club.

No refunds.

Please send help.

"Sophie." A cute little girl holds the annoyed girl's hand.

"...I'm sorry."

My gaze lands on the bus driver as I survey the area. He's still trying to calm down others. Must be some weird sense of responsibility or something. About ten people huddle around him.

Then some kids, likely from the same school, stand near the bus.

A few men, already forming a group, stand off to the side.

A girl and her mini version to my left and two women nearby.

I even hear barking and spot a small corgi's head peeking out from a woman's arms.

"I have no idea what happened!" I hear the bus driver exclaim. "I don't know where we are," he continues.

Poor guy.

"Hey... hey!" I hear behind me as I move away from the bus, checking the signal on my phone.

It's the annoyed girl, and she stops when I turn toward her. I don't say anything, just wait for her to continue. She looks lost for words and simply asks, "Where are you going?" while nervously glancing at the bus as if it's her lifeboat in the middle of the ocean.

"Just checking the signal," I show her the display on my phone before continuing. I also dim the brightness to its lowest setting.

She doesn't look like she has more to say, so I move on.

After wandering for a while, but always keeping the bus in sight, I give up and turn off my phone. Better to conserve my battery.

Thankfully, my battery is around 80%, but it's smarter to let others use their phones and save mine.

I glance at the second maybe-sun... yeah.

Houston, we have a problem.

A little, orange problem.

Well, if it's a sun, it isn't exactly small. It's probably larger than the planet, moon, or whatever we're on, but... I sigh and force myself to calm down.

If I pretend it's not there, it might vanish on its own.

I can hope, right?

Chapter 2

Deciding not to stray too far from the bus, I take a good look at the people surrounding me. There are 24 of us. 23 if I'm not counting myself. There are 15 males and 9 females of all ages. The youngest one is a little girl next to the girl who looks like she's perpetually annoyed.

"Does it look like Earth to you!?" I overhear from the crowd as a 50-year-old man points towards the second, rather questionable sun. I can see spit flying out of his mouth and veins popping up on his forehead. "We can't just bloody sit here and wait for the police." When he starts shouting, no one tries to calm him down, and it even appears that some of them agree with him. "We should look around first, maybe climb on some trees or something."

I can't help but roll my eyes as I stop listening to him.

We're surrounded by trees in all directions. They look ordinary. Like the trees you'd find on Earth...

I stop my thoughts.

Earth.

I think about it.

Did I already determine that we aren't on Earth anymore?

It appears so.

After pondering for a bit longer, I come up with a few options, each more ludicrous than the last:

First, someone kidnapped us. Put us to sleep, perhaps with the help of some gas sedative filling up the bus. Afterward, they waited until morning and then let us wake up in the middle of the forest while somehow faking the second sun.

I find this option highly improbable as I don't remember falling asleep. Sure, I was sleepy but I didn't fall asleep. The only thing I recall is a flash, us falling down together with the bus, and then just being here. There are no empty spots in my memory, and I don't feel as if anything is missing.

Second, I am dead. The flash I saw is either us crashing into something, maybe an explosion. Perhaps I got shot through the window. It would mean that this is some weird kind of afterlife.

I also find this option improbable, not to mention utterly depressing.

Third, I fell asleep, and this is a dream.

I pinch my forearm with my nails as hard as I can until blood starts flowing out of the wound I created. The pain feels way too real, and I'm now mildly annoyed at myself.

Fourth, some kind of convoluted prank.

I think about it for a minute and, after I can't come up with a way they would pull it off or why they would even bother, I nearly dismiss it. It still lingers, though, because honestly, who knows what people are capable of these days? I once again look towards the passengers. They're still "discussing." I slowly glance over every one of them, but no one looks high profile, important enough, or rich enough for such a waste of resources.

I don't completely scratch out this option, but it's also highly improbable.

Fifth, we really are on another planet.

The main reason is this bloody orange thing in the sky.

The probably-sun.

I just can't find anything fake about it. Not a single thing.

Of course, you would expect higher temperatures, but with the first sun looking slightly smaller and the second one looking weaker, it might balance out. I don't know to be honest. My knowledge about this kind of stuff is pretty much just the basics.

I sigh.

Then I hear one of the schoolgirls screaming and pointing towards the forest.

I follow the direction she is pointing towards and notice a wolf standing on the edge of the forest.

Well...

The beast's brown fur is matted with dried blood. Missing an ear and bearing a gruesome scar on its snout.

It fixes its unnerving gaze on the terrified girl, eyes glowing with an eerie light.

This massive creature is tall enough for its eyes to be at the same height as mine.

It growls and takes a menacing step towards us. A huge, car-sized wolf, with a strange text hovering above its head.

[Wolf - lvl 2]

Yeah, nope. I am out.

Thank you and fuck you, whoever is responsible for this monstrosity.

I am already on my way back inside the bus even before the wolf takes the first step.

Wolf moves towards us and lets out a deep, long growl. I can feel it in my chest. The deep, disturbing vibration and all my instinct screaming at me to run.

Yup, it's definitely time to run.

People are leaning back inside the bus, obviously with a lot of screaming. Some of them even fall down and desperately crawl and run back inside. I see a few men pushing kids out of their way just to get in first.

The level two wolf slowly and carefully walks towards us. He almost seems like he is expecting some kind of trap, and an inhuman intelligence shines in his eyes.

While not turning my back to him, I get to the bus and enter it as well. Everyone is already inside.

I hear a few people sobbing and their scared voices.

"What the hell is that..."

"...at least two meters tall."

"...level..."

While they are staring at the wolf, I look around, searching for something I could use as a weapon against...I glance outside at...that thing.

Unfortunately, there is no weapon laying around. Hell, I would like an RPG at this point.

Fortunately, I notice a slightly bent iron pole used for people to hold onto the hanging and after a little bit of pulling with all my force, I manage to free it. It's unfortunately only around 1 meter long and blunt. After another second, I grab a bigger piece of glass from the ground and hold it in my left hand while holding the pole in my right one.

Probably because of my nervousness or shaking hand, I can already see blood from my cut hand on the piece of glass, but I quickly ignore it.

The wolf is around 10 meters away from the bus, looking even more dangerous than before. It is sniffing and growling while showing its massive teeth. It has lowered its body closer to the ground as if getting ready to attack or run. Its steps are slower and slower as it starts making circles around the bus while letting out horrifying growls.

"Hey Google, what's the opposite of 'pspspsp' but for wolves instead of cats?"

The boy with an annoying laugh says, his voice shaking and his face pale as snow.

He gets a few shocked looks but no laughs.

Everyone is looking absolutely terrified and I am sure some people can't even see the wolf because of their tears.

"Mommy..."

"Oh my god, please let me..."

"G-get away from the windows..."

The wolf's circles are getting smaller and smaller and it seems to be getting more and more comfortable. It's as if they are slowly stopping seeing us as a threat.

My eyes are glued to the text over the wolf's head.

[Wolf - lvl 2]

I look around but I don't see anyone with such text over their head.

I focus and try to filter out all the screams, cries, and wolves' growling.

A crazy thought flashes through my mind.

It can't be, right?

"Profile," I whisper. Nothing happens.

"Character window," I say.

Nothing.

"Window," I say.

Nothing.

"Level," I say.

Nothing.

"Inspect," I say.

Nothing.

"Appraise," I say.

Nothing.

"Shut the fuck up with your mumbling!" one of the men yells at me.

"Shut the..." I start, but then I realize that a few people are watching me like I've gone crazy.

For a second I look around. Some of the passengers already have some kind of "weapon" in their hands, like a glass bottle, a piece of glass from the window, a purse, a messenger bag, or another piece of iron pipe from the bus.

The wolf is already two meters away from us. We can hear it sniffing and I can see drool dropping from its massive maw.

I go back to my thing, ignoring the other passengers.

"Skill window," I say.

Nothing.

"Skill," I say.

Nothing.

"Skills," I say.

Nothing.

"Status window," I say.

Nothing.

I hear screams and see a wolf's massive head behind one of the unbroken windows. Everyone is trying to get as far away as they can, shaking, screaming, and crying while waving their makeshift weapons and trying to look as dangerous as they can.

"Status," I say.

Before I have a chance to say another word, a golden see-through window pops up in front of my face.

[Name: Nathaniel Gwyn]

Difficulty:Hell

Floor: 1

Time left until forced return: 4y 364d 23h 36m 12s

Lvl 0

Strength: 6

Dexterity: 7

Constitution: 3

Mana: 1

[Primary Class: Unavailable]

[Sub-class: Unavailable]

Skills:

Focus - lvl 1

Mana manipulation - lvl 1

[Skill Points: 0]

[Stat Points: 0]

It's interesting, but useless at the moment.

The window disappears when it decides to do so and then the window breaks and the wolf sticks its head inside, ignoring the broken glass and trying to bite an older woman nearby. Fortunately, it only bites off part of her sweater and the fabric tears as the wolf tries to pull her outside. The woman falls down while screaming.

Chapter 3

The window breaks and the wolf sticks its head inside, ignoring the broken glass, and tries to bite the older woman nearby. Fortunately, he only bites the hem of her sweater, and the fabric tears as he tries to pull her outside. The woman falls down while screaming.

I move slightly to the side, holding an iron pipe and a piece of glass in my hand. Then, I notice a man on the opposite side of the wolf, reaching under his jacket and towards his armpit.

Don't tell me...

I step a bit closer to the wolf, and its eyes turn towards me. It shifts its head slightly, totally ignoring the broken glass. Its eyes are almost as if glowing.

As I get its attention, the man pulls out a pistol, and for a second, our gazes meet. I give him a little nod and step a bit closer to the wolf.

I am standing just a meter or two away from the wolf, and I feel my heartbeat speeding up. My muscles feel warmed up, and my heart aggressively circulates blood in my veins, and my mind clears.

There is only me, the wolf, and the man with the gun.

I don't hear screams anymore, nor do I feel pain from my scratched forearm or cut palm of my left hand. I squeeze the piece of glass.

How long has it been since I felt so alive?

Did I ever feel so alive?

[Focus - lvl 1 > Focus - lvl 2]

I feel the corner of my lips lifting up slightly as I lower, calculating how far the wolf can reach and how fast it was before. Just to be sure, I add some amount to its reach and double its speed.

I can feel my muscles squeezing and exploding as I dash towards the wolf.

It looks almost as if it is smiling as it opens its big mouth with teeth as big as the palm of my hand.

I stop just in time, and its mouth claps just a few centimeters away from me.

Realizing my terrible miscalculation, I add more to its speed and reach in my mind. I move my right hand and try to stab the blunt piece of iron pipe into its ear while predicting the wolf's dodge.

The pipe hits its eyebrow, and the wolf lets out a deep growl and instantly attacks again.

But I am not there anymore.

Its maw claps this time a bit further from me, and I slash with my left hand, scratching its upper lip slightly.

I jump back, and the wolf keeps trying to push its head towards me. The iron plates of the bus creaking and groaning.

Finally, I hear five quick and loud explosions. Inside the bus, they are deafening, and for the first time, the wolf lets out a loud cry and quickly pulls its head outside. I hear two more shots, and the wolf jumps backward. I notice a slight limping as it does so, and it cries once again, following it with a loud growl and deepening its stance.

It looks wounded but not fatally.

It starts slowly walking backwards with its attention turned towards the guy with the handgun. I can see blood dripping down the wolf's face. It looks like a few bullets hit the right side of its face and some of its leg as it is limping.

My gaze once again moves towards the text above its head.

[Wolf - lvl 2]

The monstrous wolf is slowly moving towards the forest when...

"Fuck."

I put the glass and pole on the seat next to me and quickly pull down my shirt.

"Fuck me.

I tie the shirt around my left hand and grab the piece of glass once again. This time, my grip is stronger and without the glass cutting into my palm.

I lodge the tip of the pipe under the seat and try pulling and pushing it. When I get it out, I step on it a few times with my full force, trying to sharpen the tip of it at least a little bit.

My breathing is heavy, and I can hear my blood pumping in my ears.

Somehow, I feel stronger and more alive than ever before in my life.

The wolf is already near the forest, slowly turning around when I jump out of the window and dash towards it.

Bare-chested, dirty, and holding my makeshift weapons in my hands.

Shaking.

Scared.

Intoxicated.

The wolf turns towards me, and my mind is clearer than ever before.

I slow down into walking while lowering my body, and the monster lets out a deep growl.

I decide not to lower its speed in my mind. Underestimating him could be a big mistake.

It looks weaker, acts weaker, and it's bleeding and running away, but I decide not to underestimate the monster.

Sure. I wouldn't go after it if it didn't get shot and probably heavily injured, but this isn't an animal from the Earth.

If it's like I think, we can level up if we kill such monsters. Get skills, get stats. Become stronger and survive until the forced return activates.

Just like a game.

A fucking game.

I know I am risking my life here, but I don't think I will get a much better chance than now.

If the wolf dies, it will probably count as if the guy with the handgun killed it, so I have to damage it at least a little bit and hope it will do something.

It might survive, and not even the guy with the gun will get anything, and in the worst case, it will come back with more of them.

On Earth, wolves are social creatures.

Wolf slowly moves towards me, and I start moving to the left, the side where it got shot. Slowly, carefully. The wolf is bleeding, so I have an advantage over it.

My senses feel sharp, and I can hear my heartbeat. I am not even blinking as I watch the wolf's legs and shoulders, waiting for it to telegraph its next move.

Here.

I quickly sidestep to the left and then once more, thrusting with my left hand to try to stab its eye with a piece of glass. It doesn't connect, but I leave a deep wound over its eye.

The wolf instantly turns around, trying to bite after me, but I am already moving backward and swinging with my right hand, hitting its nose.

The wolf quickly attacks again, and this time I move to the right and slash once again, trying to hit its left eye. It connects, and with a loud cry, the wolf jumps backward with a piece of glass lodged into its left eye.

I bend my knees and dash slightly to the left, and while grabbing the pipe with both of my hands, I hit its left eye, destroying the shard of glass and injuring it even further. I dodge its next attack to the left, its blind side, and hit its blinded eye once again as strong as I can.

The wolf lets out a painful cry and some of its blood splashes on me.

It jumps backward, but I dash once more.

My body feels strong and light.

My hands aren't shaking anymore, and I feel like I can't see anything else but the wolf. Its movements, twitching muscles, telegraphing its movements. Its paws burrow into the ground as it prepares its attack.

I stab the wolf's blinded eye with the tip of the pipe and jump back.

My body feels like it's burning, and my heart is beating like crazy.

I try to gulp, but my throat is parched.

I slowly take a deep breath.

I don't think I am going to lose.

The wolf is stronger, faster, and much more resilient.

But I don't think I will lose.

I dash, but this time towards its right side. The wolf attacks to the opposite side, probably expecting me to attack its blinded eye once again, but instead of that, I lift the pipe over my head, and with all the strength I can muster, I hit its left eye.

It's not blinded, but there is blood flowing from a deep wound over the eye, partially blocking its vision.

The hit connects, and as a few times before, the wolf cries and jumps back.

Expecting that, I am already dashing towards its right side and hitting it once again, finally blinding even its other eye.

I stop.

While the wolf thrashes around, biting towards all sides, I take a deep breath.

Calm down.

I breathe in.

Focus.

I breathe out.

Focus.

[Focus - lvl 2 > Focus - lvl 3]

I take a deep, slow breath, calming down my rapidly beating heart. My body feels like it's burning, and my muscles hurt. I feel lightheaded, and there is a deep scratch on the left side of my chest.

I didn't even notice it.

I look at the wound, slightly surprised.

The wolf stops attacking and starts letting out quiet cries while shifting and baring its teeth.

While untying the shirt from my left hand, I move towards its right side. I make a ball from my bloodied shirt and throw it to the right. After waiting one second, I dash towards the left side while grabbing the pipe with both hands and pointing the slightly sharpened side towards the ground.

The monster jumps towards the shirt, its mouth letting out a horrifying noise as it bites with its massive mouth.

While trying to stay as quiet as I can, I lift my hands high in the air and thrust downward with a pipe in my hands, aiming for the wolf's left eye.

The monster wolf let out a horrifying noise as I push the pipe as deep as I could before letting it go and jumping away from it. I watch the wolf thrashing around while growling, biting, and dashing towards random directions.

I grab my shirt from the ground and start walking back to the bus while not letting my eyes off the wolf monster.

It sniffs and then starts running towards the forest while growling and limping. The monster hits one tree but ignores it and enters deeper into the forest with the steel pipe still lodged in its eye.

The world slowly comes back into focus as the wolf disappears, and I can hear the people from inside of the bus.

Pain hits me in waves.

My wounds.

My burning muscles.

My head feels like it's about to explode.

Out of nowhere, I don't have any more strength in my legs, and I almost fall to my knees, only my will keeping me standing.

My heartbeat slows down, and the world...

The world feels ordinary again, once more

Chapter 4

When I turn around, I see a few people getting out of the bus. The man with a handgun is one of them.

"I've never seen such a dumbass in my life," he shook his head unbelievably.

I just nod, totally agreeing with him.

I try to force a smile on my face, but it doesn't work. I just keep nodding instead of talking. Not like there are a lot of people who want to talk to the bloodied guy who chased a wolf as big as a small car.

I can't see why.

"No, I am not suicidal," I answer one guy. Isn't it kind of rude to ask something like that?

"Yes, it was dumb," I answer an older lady. What are you, my mom?

"Yes, it hurts a lot." No shit.

"I just thought I had to." Let's act like a good little boy.

Blah, blah.

I just try to force out answers people want to hear and look as normal and harmless as possible. I am guessing we won't be coming back to Earth anytime soon, so it isn't bad to try to make some "friends". I just can't sleep with my eyes open, and there might be things other people are better at than me.

After a few minutes of questioning, I start feeling uncomfortable because of people surrounding me and asking questions. My energy drops even more than after a fight with a wolf.

I know I am not particularly social, but I try to not let it be too obvious, so I answer a few more questions, give a few pieces of advice, and then tell them about "status." That finally makes them shut up, and they just stare into the air a few centimeters in front of their face. As I thought, their windows are invisible to me.

I sneak away to the opposite side of the bus and sit down on the grass, resting my back against the tire.

Sigh.

Who knew that even in another world, surrounded by monsters, the most dangerous beings are extroverts.

A few minutes later, I feel much better without people surrounding me.

I slowly lift my shirt from my side, dried blood slightly gluing it to the wound. Fortunately, I am not bleeding anymore, and the wound doesn't seem as bad as I thought.

A sigh leaves my mouth as I put the shirt back on my wound. It could be worse. Much worse.

I should be able to find a first aid kit on the bus, but there is something more important now.

What was that?

What the hell was that?

I am not even talking about the giant wolf, nor about two suns in the sky, or these goddamn holographic windows and text over the wolf's head.

I am sure I can adapt and survive it. As always.

But.

Once my decision-making goes the wrong way, I am dead. One small mistake can mean death.

So.

Why did I do that?

I close my eyes and reflect on my actions.

Sure, I did feel some boredom back on Earth. Lack of excitement or change. Something to strive for.

But that doesn't sound like a good enough reason to charge a gigantic wolf.

It's not me. I don't act like that. I know myself well enough to say it with certainty.

So let's think about it.

...

Could it be some kind of mind manipulation? Is someone controlling my feelings or at least giving me impulses to charge at the wolf? I already noticed two new skills in my "status", and I am more than sure that there are many more.

I look at the people around the bus. One of them?

I did get two skills at the start, so what if...

I try to replay the whole fight in my head, from the start to the end.

At first, I just wanted to get the wolf's attention so the guy could shoot it. That feels like something I would do as it's helpful for my survival and not too risky. Not for me. During that part of the fight, I started feeling strength filling my body as I increased my focus. I felt as if I could control my body to an unusual degree and even gain more strength from it than usual. I bet that's the skill called Focus. More testing is needed, but I am pretty sure of that.

It's possible that someone manipulated me during the fight. I have no way of knowing if it was just something like sending me some impulse to fight longer in hopes of killing the wolf or someone unable to control their skill. Some scared passenger sent me to my death.

Another option is for them to realize the skills they have and use them on me while not caring if I die or live. That sounds also plausible.

Then there is also a chance that's something the Wolf did, but looking at how he ended up...

I sigh and open my eyes to look at the sky. I need more information, more testing, more time.

For now, it will be best to watch my feelings and impulses.

One mistake can lead to my death, so I would rather think twice and analyze everything I do.

I will find the responsible person, and if I can't use them, I will have to kill them.

Yes, let's do that.

My mind is mine and mine only.

I feel anger rising up deep from inside me, the anger I pushed to the back of my mind.

This time, I didn't even bother to think if this impulse is me or someone manipulating my feelings.

Chapter 5

[You have defeated a Wolf - lvl 2]

[Lvl 0 >Lvl 1]

After resting against the tire of the bus for a few minutes, I receive a message indicating that the wolf had finally died. Either it succumbed to its wounds or another animal finished it off. Well, at least I got enough experience to level up.

[Name: Nathaniel Gwyn]

Difficulty: Hell

Floor: 1

Time left until forced return: 4y 364d 23h 12m 3s

Lvl 1

Strength: 6

Dexterity: 8

Constitution: 3

Mana: 2

[Primary Class: Unavailable]

[Sub-class: Unavailable]

Skills:

Focus - lvl 3

Mana manipulation - lvl 1

[Skill Points: 0]

[Stat Points:

3]

I got three stat points, and my level changed. Also, somehow my Mana and Dexterity went up by 1 point each.

One hour. I can't believe we have been here for that short time. Somehow it feels much longer.

I try touching the holographic window with my finger, but nothing happens. My finger just passes through.

"Stat explanation."

Nothing.

Haaaa. Not again.

I am too tired for this. I'm sure there will be some gamers on the bus so I can make them do all the work, but for now, there is one stat I can't go wrong with.

"Put 1 stat point into Constitution," I try, and one stat point disappears. Huh? It actually worked.

Now I try to focus and think about wanting to put 1 stat point into Constitution. It takes a moment, but then I get a feeling as if someone is asking me for confirmation, but in my mind. It's unsettling but I send back something like a thought version of "yes," and another point disappears. This could be useful.

I quickly add the last remaining point into Constitution and close the status window.

Now back to stats.

Strength and dexterity should be self-explanatory, and Constitution should be something like endurance, vitality, health, or an all-in-one stat. Hopefully, it will help me heal faster or require less rest.

There is no need to be greedy for power or speed. As I already noticed, I can level up my stats even without stat points, and survival is most important at the moment.

I don't know if it's the placebo effect, but I already feel better. Well, let's wait and find out.

Now, mana.

I already used mana to strengthen my body. I think.

The movement I showed while fighting the wolf should have been impossible for a 1-hour younger me. It could be Focus, it could be Mana manipulation, or both. If I learn how to control it, it will increase my chances of survival.

Okay, I will figure it out later.

My name. Somehow, the system knows my real name. The best thing I can do at the moment is to be prepared to not be surprised if some of my private information pops up out of nowhere.

Freezing from the surprise in the middle of a dangerous situation can be deadly, so for now, let's think that the entity controlling the system knows everything about me. While we are here, I need to let go of my life on Earth and focus on surviving here.

It might be pretty drastic, but I am at the mercy of the entity, system, and the only sensible thing is to focus on surviving.

It's better to think that I will be stranded here for five more years, and that's long enough for people to declare us dead.

Let's forget about everyone on earth - my family, my friends, everyone. There will be time to grieve or celebrate after I get forcibly returned, so it's better to be pleasantly surprised than any other option.

Well, it's not like there are that many people I care about. To be honest, the list may be really short.

The most important thing at the moment is my survival, and I can't let anything distract me.

Let's use other passengers as well. I should act fairly friendly but distant enough, at the same time, I can't let them use me. I need to act a bit more distant. I can also put on a strong front. If I set it upright, it will be a nice combination of give and take, with me taking more than giving.

For a second, a thought flashes through my mind - would it be possible to level up by killing them? This time I think about it a bit longer but decide against it in the end. I started with lvl 0, and others are most likely the same. Even if it's possible to level up by killing people, I am lvl 1 at the moment, and I would most likely need to kill most of them. If it's even possible to gain experience from lvl 0 or a human.

It might be even on purpose that everyone is level zero.

Also, I already decided on using them - well, at least from the start and until I collect more data or become stronger, so let's not go this way.

Sounds good.

Good.

I take the shirt off my chest, and I don't know if it's just me, but the wound already looks better.

Another thing from the status is the word "forced" return. If I had to say, it means that there is a way to return to earth without waiting for 5 years. Not a forced way of returning.

But...

Do I even want to?

Well, probably yes, as it's much safer that way, however...

...

Later... I will reflect on that later.

The Floor 1 part in the status is interesting as well. It means there are more floors, and if I think about it as a game, we will have to fill out some requirements to move to a lower or upper floor, or we will be moved there after some time. Maybe after 5 years? That doesn't sound right - we never went to another floor, so we don't have any place to return to. The only fitting place to return to is Earth.

Let's collect more info first and then think about it again.

The level number in my status is probably only showing how many times I got 3 stat points. But it can be useful in another way as well. Maybe I will need to be at a certain level to be able to do something, or it's just some kind of strength measurement.

The difficulty is pretty disturbing - Hell.

In games, the difficulties are usually categorized as easy, normal, and hard, with "hell" representing the most challenging level. Therefore, I must be extremely cautious. When facing an enemy, I need to make sure to not underestimate them, even if they appear weaker.

I am also curious why I got this difficulty, which may be the hardest one, but at the moment, I have no way of finding out. There is also the possibility that there is an even harder difficulty, but no way of confirming it at the moment, or at least I don't know about any.

Classes sound interesting, but I don't have the option to pick one. There may be special requirements or I need to level up more.

It is already clear that the system knows a lot about me, and it's highly possible that I am being watched by it even at the moment. It doesn't even have to be someone personally watching over me, just some kind of program writing down my actions and thoughts.

Now when I think about it, even the process of leveling up is kind of weird. I have an idea of how it works in games, but being stuck in this situation makes me want to think about it a bit more logically.

There is a possibility that leveling up is just a reward from the entity/system for killing the monster. Meaning that I got granted stat points by it after fulfilling the requirements of leveling up.

Another option is that I got stat points by killing the wolf - the wolf died, and its life force or something similar to it got transferred to me and probably to the guy with the gun. Possibilities are that its life force got split between the two of us. Another one is that we humans need more life force than the wolf to get to lvl 2. The third possibility I can think of is waste during the transfer of its life or the system taking a "cut."

I like the possibilities with life force more. They sound a bit more logical, and I always liked to think of magic as science we don't understand.

Taking a deep breath, I slowly stand up, but fortunately, my head doesn't spin, and I feel pretty good all things taken.

It's time to socialize and find someone useful.

Chapter 6

What welcomes me inside the bus is a bunch of people absentmindedly staring into the air. Well, some of them are discussing.

"Fuck you, I will not go into that goddamn forest! You go there if you want to die that much!"

Calmly discussing the situation we are in.

It looks like the wolf scared them as all of them are inside, using the bus as shelter.

It's easy to understand why, but I already know that we can't stay here for too long.

The main problem is water and food. It's only been around an hour since we arrived, but I already feel thirsty and hungry, most likely because of the energy I used.

Even if they are not hungry at the moment and have a bottle of water with them or a little bit of food, soon they will need to look for more.

"So you're back," the man with the gun comes towards me and falls silent for a moment, watching the bus driver conversing with two adult men. He then looks at me, "You good?"

I nod. I have already put my white shirt on. Ehm, my formerly white shirt. I guess it's red now.

"We will need some water and maybe food and it would be best if we look for it before sunset," he says directly.

He seems to be on the calm side, and from the way he watches other people, I can say that he is in a better state than most others.

Anyway, he should have a good impression of me as well. Hopefully. Well, maybe not that good. In his eyes, I might be a suicidal lunatic.

He looks at me for a whole minute, with a deep discerning stare as if he's trying to see inside my head.

His stare makes me slightly nervous, especially knowing that he should have leveled up as well. Who knows what skills did he get or how did he use his stat points.

"Soo, how many bullets do you have left?" I break the silence.

"..." He once again falls silent and looks at me, a slight smile slowly appears on his face.

"Not too many." There is a hint of amusement and warmth in his voice.

"I see."

So careful and not too trusting type.

He is slightly shorter than me. His figure is pretty robust and muscular, with a sense of authority around him. It might be caused by his gun, but I don't believe that's just it.

A cop? Maybe.

"Nathaniel." I reach out my hand towards him, and he accepts. His grip is strong, and he looks into my eyes while shaking my hand.

Like I do to him, he is also judging me.

"Hadwin." he says.

I notice a few people staring at us, but I ignore them for now.

"Did you also level up?"

"Yes," the bus quiets down, and I can see them listening to us. "I already used my stat points. One of the kids told me to do so," he nods towards the school kids. "It's crazy when you think about it. Us appearing in the middle of nowhere, two suns, gigantic wolf..." He smiles awkwardly while looking around.

When he looks back at me his smile is gone.

"You know," he starts, and I can see that he is trying to find the right words. "I thought about it, and I think we should look around. We will need water soon and we might find out something about this place."

I can tell what's going to be next.

"Do you want to join me?" His eyes seem honest and firm as he asks me to risk my life.

So shameless.

"Sure, let's go."

Short pause.

He slowly brushes his hair off his forehead and his muscles tense a little bit. After a few seconds, he relaxes his body and a quiet sigh escapes his mouth.

"To be honest, I pretty much expected you to decline," he says.

"I gave it some thought." I shrug my shoulders. "We should look around while we are not starved or dehydrated. Logically, it will be harder the later we go."

"It's not about logic... People don't tend to think logically in situations like this..." Another sigh escapes his mouth. "I see... Well, I guess you are one of these guys..."

I feel like I should be insulted, but I let it go.

I kind of like the way this goes.

Let's put it all on Hadwin.

Yup.

I like it.

"Others should keep watch while we look around." He quickly gives a few orders, and I can see that he has already talked to a few people, and they seem to respect him enough to follow his orders.

It's the gun.

I bet it is because of the gun.

Obviously, some of them seem dissatisfied with the guy with a gun leaving them to go into the forest, but no one says anything. Most likely, they are scared that he will ask them to go with him.

I am not too surprised at their lack of initiative. It's weirder that Hadwin and I plan to go there without being pressured to do so.

Hadwin grabs his backpack and two iron pipes, clearly inspired by me. He gives me one, and I take it.

Some of the passengers see it and start talking amongst themselves, and I see some of them trying to pry out their own pipes.

What's with that reaction time? As we are about to leave the bus someone stops us.

"Do you have a spot?"

On the bus, there are a few 30-40-year-old men, and the one asking is one of them. He is close to 2m in height and slim, but his shoulders are surprisingly wide. His face is on the handsome side, and he is smoothly shaven.

"Maybe..." Hadwin stops next to me

"Damon," he reaches his hand towards Hadwin and then towards me.

His grip is even stronger than Hadwin's. Hadwin's shake was just a greeting, but Damon's is clearly some sort of test as he squeezes my hand as strongly as he can.

As he lets go of my hand, his gaze stays on me a bit longer than on Hadwin.

"I would like to join you. I grew up in the countryside, so I shouldn't be baggage inside the forest."

A laugh almost escapes my mouth, but I keep my face neutral.

Well, in the worst case, we can use him as bait. Something tells me that Hadwin wouldn't like it, but I can work around it.

"Sounds good," says Hadwin, and I just nod. Damon once again looks into my eyes.

Look at him.

I feel amused as his look isn't too friendly, more like the opposite.

As we exit the bus, no one else joins us. No one is brave or desperate enough to come with us. Not yet.

Well, almost no one. I saw one of the school kids wanting to join us, but others stopped him. Well, I call them kids but all of them are around 18 years old, not that much younger than me.

Bless you, kid.

Maybe next time?

After something eats Damon.

Chapter 7

Outside, we find the annoyed girl leaning against the bus. She is clearly keeping watch, looking towards the place where the wolf came from.

It's a good idea.

She is around my height, slim, and has an athletic figure. The most striking thing about her is her deep green eyes, which are even more noticeable against her tanned skin and brown hair.

"I want to join you," she says without holding back. Her voice shakes almost unnoticeably as she says so, yet she seems determined.

"I also want to level up. I need to level up."

Oh?

Did they have a group talk inside the bus while I was thinking outside?

They seem fairly used to the idea of leveling up.

"I need to become stronger as soon as possible. Wolves usually don't move alone, and... we don't know what else is here. I swear I won't slow you down."

Everyone should be level 0, with only me and Hadwin being higher level so she also might be worried to lag behind us. Or does she just want to protect the little girl next to her?

Did Hadwin share the results with others? Did he put all three points into strength and test it out while they were watching?

How much of a difference would three points make?

"I don't think we have to worry about that," says Hadwin, to my surprise. He continues, "The wolf from before did look starved and wounded, and he didn't even try to call for other wolves before attacking us." He looks at us. "So it's either the last surviving wolf from the pack or they chased him away from it."

I like the sound of that.

I really do but...

"I think we should expect the worst option," I say as their eyes turn toward me. I shrug my shoulders and don't say more.

"I partly agree with you," Hadwin says carefully, caressing his short beard as he speaks. "But we shouldn't let it scare us too much. Doing nothing because we are too worried could cost us."

I'm slightly disappointed. He seems too confident.

Whatever. If it seems like he's too careless, I can leave them.

"Hadwin," as he reaches his hand, the brown-haired girl grabs it. "I have to warn you. It will be really dangerous out there."

She just nods and shakes his hand.

"Sophie."

"Damon."

"Nathaniel," I add, and for a second, our eyes meet.

"I know," she says very quietly.

Hadwin and Damon probably didn't hear it, but I could because she is standing a little bit closer to me.

I try to think about it, but I can't remember her at all.

Maybe I met her at the gym? She seems fairly athletic and there aren't that many places where she could meet me.

I look at the girl next to her who stayed quiet up until now. She looks similar to Sophie. She isn't as tanned but her hair is the same and her eyes have a slightly lighter shade of green. She is around 10 years old, but it's hard for me to tell.

She is also shyly half-hiding behind Sophie, but she is peeking with big and wide-open eyes.

That can be a problem.

"I hope you don't plan to take a kid with you." As expected, Damon sounds as annoying as he looks.

It's not like I don't agree with him.

Quite the opposite.

There is no way we are going to take a little kid with us.

Damon just sounds... super punchable.

"I am not..." It's clear that Sophie wants to go with us, but at the same time, where should she leave the little kid? With whom?

The girl slightly pulls the shirt of a distressed Sophie, and she turns to her with a smile on her face. To me, it looks fake but I guess it's good enough to trick a little girl.

"Don't worry, Izzie." She gently caresses her head, and there is a lot of gentleness and love in her action.

However hard this might be, I am glad I ended up here alone.

"How about you leave her with Jacob? He seems like a good guy," Hadwin finally says. "She will be safer with others." He pauses. "You can stay too... with your..."

"Sister..." Sophie says slowly.

"Sister." Hadwin kneels in front of the girl, and a big soft smile appears on his face. "God knows I would do the same."

The little girl proceeds to avoid his gaze and looks back up at Sophie.

I think it's already taking too long.

She is most likely scared of being left behind, and probably not trusting us that much too.

Who knows what would happen if we come back much stronger?

For now, it looks like nothing much has changed, but the moment some of us obtain strength way beyond others, things will become... difficult.

"You should come," I say as she turns towards me with a surprised look on her face. Her sister starts peeking again. "We most likely won't go too far at first. Not far enough to not hear if something happens."

It's obvious that she already decided to go with us, so why is she struggling that much? Just trust your own decisions and then take responsibility if something happens.

"One or two hours should be enough to scan our closest surroundings. After that, we will come back with some wood which we can use for weapons and fire," I suggest. "If something happens they can use the bus horn and we can rush back as quickly as possible."

After a little while, she finally accepts the plan and disappears inside the bus with her sister. I can see her talking to the bus guy, Jacob, apparently. Her sister starts crying.

"For fuck's sake," Damon complains.

When Sophie comes back, we finally start walking toward the forest. Not coincidentally, we walk on the opposite side of where the wolf came from. Everyone stops talking as we come closer to the trees, and the atmosphere instantly changes. It's as if the closer we get to the trees, the more nervous everyone becomes.

Interestingly enough, the trees seem normal. I don't know what I expected. Shining leaves? Faces on trunks? Whispers in the wind?

Tree branches wave slightly in the wind, as the suns shine through the crowns of the trees.

It looks like a normal forest...

Chapter 8

I keep my guard up as we enter the forest. I squeeze the iron pipe in my hand. For a start, let's not touch anything. Who knows if it's poisonous?

Hadwin enters first, closely followed by us. His iron pipe is behind his belt, and there is the gun in his hands. I am not an expert, but the way he holds it seems like someone used to weapons.

Maybe he really is a policeman. Judging from the way he talks and acts, I wouldn't be surprised.

"Focus and listen to our surroundings," he says as he slowly walks between the trees. "Nathaniel, you will take my left, Damon you focus on your right, and Sophie you will have our back."

I slightly change my position. Obviously, I don't focus only on the left, but I give it a bit more focus than other directions. Don't forget to check the tops of the trees as well.

"Talk only in a whisper, and if you hear flowing water, see wet places, puddles, or anything suspicious, let us know."

We slowly continue. It's almost funny. A bunch of adults led by a crazy man armed with a handgun sneaking through a normal-looking forest.

Fortunately, the forest isn't too dense, so we move without a problem.

Thirty minutes later, I can hear Damon silently cursing under his breath. Something about the mother and the forest?

"Motherfucking alien forest," I hear. Oh. That makes much more sense.

I don't blame him. Every one of us twitches every time we hear the slightest noise. After a while, it's really tiring. We continue as Hadwin leads us in a circle around the clearing with a bus. The clearing is on our right side, and we didn't walk too deep inside the forest.

I also noted that Damon touched the trees a few times, and he looks fine, so they most likely aren't poisonous.

"We are getting to the place where the wolf came from," Hadwin says.

Just this sentence is enough to bring us to the tips of our toes. Damon instantly shuts up, and I can almost hear him squeezing his weapon.

Somehow I feel calmer than before.

"Movement to our left," I whisper, and I hear Hadwin's gun click as he turns it towards his left. "A bit more to your right," I quickly add, and he points it there.

I squeeze the pipe in my hand as two human-like beings rush at us at once while holding primitive weapons in their hands.

I step to the left and avoid a stab with a spear. They don't seem to be too tall, almost like kids or young adults, so I hesitate for a second.

Then I hear a gunshot, just one, followed by a weird scream.

I dodge another stab and swing with the pipe, it connects and I hit the creature on its head

Its head is harder than expected, so I hit once more while using as much strength as I can while dodging its aggressive but clumsy stab. The creature falls down

When I look around, Hadwin is already running after another one.

[Goblin - lvl 3]

The goblin is shot, and Hadwin is holding the pipe in his hands, closely behind the monster.

Sophie and Damon are fighting the third enemy, which surprisingly attacked from somewhere behind us.

[Goblin - lvl 2]

Another level 2. They seem to be overpowering it, especially Sophie with some clearly well-trained moves.

Not bothering to help them, I quickly follow Hadwin. I am sure he wants to stop the goblin from running away and maybe bringing back more of them, but at the same time, he is saving his bullets.

I quickly find him fighting the monster. The green creature seems to be mortally wounded by his gun so that makes it easier.

While slowing down to walk, I keep my eyes on Hadwin. His movements are careful and calculating as he slowly makes a half-circle around the creature, which is swinging something that looks like a knife.

There are wounds other than gunshots covering the creature's body. Seems like the older man did get in some attacks.

Out of nowhere the cornered creature quickly dashes at him, but its movements are just that – quick. There is no technique and no other intent than just violence.

Hadwin almost dodges it, but the creature hits him with the edge of its shoulder, making him lose his balance and fall down.

For its size, the green monster is surprisingly strong.

I am already on my way as it starts a downward stab, and Hadwin lifts up the pipe against it.

Before it connects, I hit the creature's hand with my full strength, getting a scream out of it and making its knife fall.

The goblin turns towards me, a murderous look in its red eyes. I can see its pointy teeth as it fully opens its mouth and rushes at me with a loud scream.

In one move, I dodge to the right and hit the back of its head as inertia makes the goblin move ahead.

Of course, it's not enough, and the goblin charges me again. This time I dodge to the left and follow up with a kick, focusing more on pushing it further away than on damaging it.

The goblin screams with rage and turns back to me as I am lifting its knife from the ground.

For a second, it makes a beautifully dumbfounded look.

One long and quick step.

Stab.

It puts its hands in front of its neck, but in the middle of the move, I change the direction of the stab, and the knife easily enters its eye.

I step back, just far enough, to dodge its blindly waving hand.

The creature screams and scratches its face, surprisingly still alive.

Then Hadwin hits its temple from the side. Goblin falls to the ground. The second hit from Hadwin lands as the goblin starts twitching on the ground.

Last hit. I can hear the wet and nauseating noise of the iron pipe breaking its skull.

The goblin finally stops screaming.

[You have defeated a Goblin - lvl 3]

Then I notice my wildly shaking hand, tense muscles, and rough breathing.

The world comes back into focus, and I feel like someone turned off the noise canceling.

Hadwin is breathing heavily and cursing under his nose.

I hear Sophie and Damon not far away from us.

"One goblin is only unconscious. Can you keep a watch?"

Hadwin nods with a tired imitation of a smile, and I can see the sweat running down his forehead.

Before running back, I grab the knife and pull it out of the goblin's eye. It makes a disgusting noise I am sure I will remember for a while.

When I get back to Sophie and Damon, I can see them repeatedly hitting the goblin they were fighting against. It seems to be dead, but they don't stop.

They have furious looks on their faces, and I can see some wounds on their bodies. The wounds don't seem to be serious.

The goblin I stunned is still lying on the ground. I kick its leg while standing as far as possible, and when it doesn't react, I calm down slightly.

I still can feel the adrenaline flowing through me and probably mana as well, and just now, I am slowly realizing what happened as if I am coming back to reality.

My heart is beating wildly and multiple feelings wash over my body.

Fear, relief... desperation

Calm down.

Think logically.

Calm down.

Calm down.

CALM DOWN.

My breathing slows, and I finally catch my breath, and my focus comes back to normal.

I am such a mess.

I hear quiet sobs from Sophie behind me, but she quickly stops, almost choking on them.

While clenching my teeth I slowly lower my body, carefully, while watching the unconscious goblin. And then, without hesitation, I stab a dagger deep into its eye.

[You have defeated a Goblin - lvl 2]

[Lvl 1 > Lvl 2]

Chapter 9

I decide to ignore stat points for now as I want to test their effects a bit more so I pull the dagger out of the goblin's eyes.

Damon and Sophie seem to be shaken, but their wounds aren't that serious.

Damon is naturally athletic and strong, with long limbs, meaning his reach is pretty big. Sophie seems to be well-versed in martial arts, but even so, this creature, around a meter and a half tall, managed to hurt them in a 2v1 fight. (*meter and half - 150cm - 4' 11*)

"Motherfucker..." Damon kicks the corpse of the goblin.

For me, it just seems like a way of hiding his fear. I can even see his shaking hands and hear a slight tremble in his voice.

"Can you carry its corpse?" When I ask, he looks at me like I'm crazy.

"There might be more of them, and we don't want them to find their friend's corpses," I add before he says anything.

He just nods solemnly after a short pause.

"Sophie." When I call her name, she looks up.

Oh.

I like the look in her eyes.

"I will carry the other one, and you can help Hadwin," she says.

She catches on pretty fast.

"Carry only the corpses; I or Hadwin will take care of the rest." I pause. "Don't bring them too close to other passengers for now," I add.

She nods.

I go deeper into the forest. The dagger is once again in my hand. It's made out of some kind of obsidian-like stone, but it's surprisingly sharp and hard.

Hadwin is looking at the corpse of the goblin, and I step next to him.

"Damon and Sophie will bring the other two away. I will take this one. Can you take care of their weapons?"

"I will. I can also try to cover up some of our and their tracks."

"Sounds good."

To be honest, I partially expected something like that from Hadwin, but I wasn't so sure. I scan the man in front of me once again.

Let's be a bit more careful with him.

The way he starts looking around and taking care of tracks that he can cover looks experienced to me, but I don't know anything about it, so he could be making it worse.

I keep a watch while he does so, and when he is done with our closest surroundings, I kneel to lift up the goblin and put him over my shoulders.

Unintentionally, I let out a surprised noise as the goblin is much heavier than I expected him to be. Probably around 90 kg. (190 lb)

God damn green asshole.

For someone at this height, it's a lot and he isn't even that bulky. But I guess we can't use human standards here.

Hadwin picks up the goblin's weapon and our stuff. My loyal pipe is there as well.

When we reach the spot where the fight started, Hadwin starts covering tracks or digging out ants or whatever he does. He is an expert here, not me.

Both goblins are gone, and in the end, Hadwin also grabs their weapons from the ground and watches our backs as I lead the way. The pistol is in his hand. The weapons and our stuff are under his other hand or inside his backpack.

We move quickly and quietly without a word, and once in a while, Hadwin does something that I guess is covering the tracks of our two companions and ours.

After around 15 minutes of walking, we reach the clearing.

I notice that I am not as tired as I should be after carrying such weight.

Sure, I lifted heavier weights before, but carrying it through the forest?

It's either adrenaline or, and I guess the more probable option, the effect of putting three stat points into the constitution.

We find Damon and Sophie lying on the ground, breathing heavily and covered in sweat, while their baggage is a few meters away from them with other passengers surrounding the dead goblins.

Once again, I realize how much better state I'm in as I throw the green creature on the ground.

Damon has an angry look on his face as he turns to me. I don't say anything, just look back at him.

"Fuck off," he breathes out and turns towards Hadwin.

"What the hell was that? What are these green little fuckers?"

"Goblins."

"No shit. I asked..."

Before he can continue, the older man interrupts him. "I don't know, Damon. As you know, I've been here as long as you have." There is a slight frown on his face. "What I know is that we should be thankful that we are still alive. These... creatures are far stronger than they should be."

"And much heavier," Sophie says quietly, and there is a questioning look on Hadwin's face. "The one I carried must have weighed around 50 kilos, and it's the smallest and slimmest one." *(50kg - 110 lb)*

"Fucking hell, mine is for sure over 100 kilos," Damon adds. *(100kg - 220 lb)*

From the corner of my vision, I see Sophie rolling her eyes.

Hadwin slowly walks towards my goblin and tries to lift him. Surprise appears on his face, but with a groan, he lifts him up.

"For sure close to 100," he puts him back on the ground.

Everyone falls silent.

"We should dissect them," I say after a while.

Their gaze instantly turns back to me.

...

Uhm? Why are you looking at me like that?

Chapter 10

I had hoped that Hadwin would suggest it first, but I can see that he is holding back a little bit, still not fully realizing the situation we are in. Still not prepared to do everything it takes for his survival.

When they look at me with shocked looks in their eyes, I just shrug my shoulders. I notice that only Hadwin looks somewhat relieved.

"You don't have to be there."

"I will help you," he says. "But we should do it far away from the clearing."

I stop to think about it for a second.

Doing it here doesn't sound like a good idea. We don't know if blood won't lure more monsters to us, and I don't know how the other passengers will react to it.

Well, I am sure that they will get used to it fairly soon.

"We have to get rid of them anyway. So let's just throw them out, and while doing so I will quickly check a few things."

"There is no fucking way I am going to carry that green little shit again," I hear Damon say, but everyone ignores him.

"Are you sure it's worth it?" Hadwin is still worried. "We will be taking a big risk."

While in deep thought I look at the dead goblin. The words over his head are gone. Knowing that the text disappears when a monster dies helps.

The goblin is around 150 cm (4'11) tall with a short torso but long legs and hands. Even though his limbs are slim, I remember their weight. It was also illogically strong, unfitting its figure.

I lean over him and poke him with the tip of my finger.

His skin feels thick, somewhat firmer than mine.

I pinch him, and I once again notice the firmness of his skin.

Could it be his thicker skin adding to its weight?

The green creature is wearing some sort of primitive leather clothes covering parts where reproductive organs on humans would be. There are also light blue markings all over its body. When I glance at the other two goblins, I notice that they have similar markings. I try to rub them, but nothing stays on my finger. When I spit a little bit on it and try again, the result is the same.

Tattoo? Some kind of group, clan, or village marking?

I pause for a second, done thinking over things

Okay, no dissecting, let's just test a few things.

I pull out the knife I took from him and point the tip at its chest. I am careful to do it close to its clothes so blood can soak into it. I push onto it, and it's harder than it should be, but I am not too surprised. I don't push too deep, but I try the same thing on other parts of its body, but it's the same.

The monster's skin is surprisingly strong and thick.

I put my knife away and grab its hand. Before I continue, I look behind me. Hadwin, Sophie, and Damon have looks on their faces that are hard to describe.

I also notice the bus driver pushing people towards the bus, away from the three dead goblins and us four. I guess he saw me poking the goblin with a knife as I also see disgust on his face.

To be honest, I am surprised by myself as well. Never in my life did I think I would do something like this, but I am surprisingly calm and clear-minded.

I will have to give it some thought a bit later.

"You don't have to be here," I say.

Damon curses, but all of them stay.

I try punching it a few times, and the response I'm getting is much more resistant than hitting a human body. I am also unable to break his ribs after repeatedly hitting his chest with my fist and full strength.

I continue examining the goblin.

Its nose is smaller than humans, even if we leave out proportions.

Maybe it doesn't have a good sense of smell?

That would be good as I am worried that they will sniff out their companions.

Its ears are also small, but what worries me are its big eyes.

They are almost twice as big as mine. I just hope they don't see twice as good. During the night, it would be bad news.

The creature also has pretty long nails; they are sharp, and if everything else fails they can be used as weapons.

The creature's teeth are extremely sharp. I'd be concerned about the risk of infection from a potential bite.

I don't find any pockets in its clothes, so other than weapons, this goblin didn't carry anything.

I can't be sure if that's the norm for them or if they move around like this.

I tell the results of my examination to others and stand up.

Sure, I wanted to do more testing, but I decided against it.

Where are its heart and other vital organs located? What makes it so strong? Can it use mana, and if so, how does it affect its physiology? Is it particularly vulnerable to fire? What are its weak points? And where is its skin thinnest?

Most of them would create quite a mess.

Maybe next time.

After stretching a little bit, I focus and put two stat points into the constitution and one into mana.

At the moment, I'm not sure if changes in investing stat points show up instantly or gradually. I'm more inclined to the second option, so investing them sooner sounds like a good idea.

As for why the constitution and mana.

My survivability is most important at the moment. I believe that constitution increases my endurance, vitality, and affects my regeneration.

At the moment, I don't have access to food, so a stronger body sounds like a good idea.

I just hope it doesn't mean increased consumption of calories to keep me going.

It probably does.

I am sure it does.

We can't have things too easy, can we?

I don't need much strength as I can use weapons and attack weak points.

Unfortunately, I'm not in a situation where I can test my stat points as I need to find water, food, shelter, and fight against these monsters.

One point in mana is a risk and I justify it as something that potentially can make me stronger.

But I can't lie to myself. It's simple curiosity, and I am willing to risk a little bit to satisfy it.

Ever since I felt it for the first time, I keep trying to manually use it with no success so far.

I was only able to use Focus and mana during fights. It happened subconsciously. When we found the goblins, I was able to control it a little bit.

I can't wait to test it out a bit more, but unfortunately, I have other priorities at the moment.

"I have a place in mind where we can get rid of them," Hadwin says. "I noticed it when we were scouting. It's a deep hole near a few big rocks, probably caused by a landslide. We can just throw them down there. It should be around 15 minutes there and back," he then looks at the goblin, "Maybe 20."