

Weapons of Mass Destruction #Chapter 61: Skill upgrade

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Okay, that might make me change my plans a little bit. At first, I wanted to go and upgrade my **[Mana Manipulation]**, but now I'm not that sure.

Yes, there are some amazing upgrades for it, especially **[Advanced Mana Manipulation]** and **[Mana Amplification]**.

BUT!

What the hell is this?

[Dual Focus]?

Is it what I think it is?

Instead of one **[Focus]**, would I have two? Does that mean it's almost like having two brains? Does that mean I could keep up my **[Oscillation]** with one and use the other one for **[Armament]**?

Would it split my current skill into two parts or would it duplicate it? From description it sounds like it would duplicate the skill.

Up until now, I always felt as if my brain was about to melt when I used too many skills at once, and I could never give them the attention they deserved. But this?

Sure, I would miss out on better mana handling, but isn't this even better?

And maybe.

Just maybe.

I might be able to upgrade it in the future again?

I will be able to do multiple things at once.

Like...

Like a woman!

Huh?

Nevermind.

Okay, let's go over the others.

[Deep Focus] might be an improved version of the current **[Focus]**.

[Focus Extension] doesn't sound that good in comparison to the others.

[Focus Synergy] also sounds good, but **[Dual Focus]** beats it for sure.

Almost all upgrades for **[Mana Manipulation]** are great but my eyes keep ticking back to this one upgrade.

I just chose the upgrade before I change my mind.

Congratulations! You have upgraded your skill. [Focus] > [Dual Focus]

Unable to help myself, I quickly try it out and enter the **[Focus]**. The weirdest feeling hits me. It's hard to describe and dizzying. It's just... weird.

I cancel the skill and breathe out.

This will need some serious training to get used to it. I also notice that my **[Focus]** didn't strengthen that much. I'm sure that would happen if I picked the other option, but I still like this one a lot.

Hopefully, it works the way I think it does.

Now I should check if we got new quests, right?

Floor quest:

Witness the end of the world.

Rewards:

Skill upgrade token

20 stat points

Increased daily limit of community usage

Tutorial Difficulty change token

Side quest:

Reach level 50

Rewards:

Trait strengthening token

I enter the **[Focus]**, not activating the upgraded version, just the old one.

Okay, first.

I'm not witnessing a thing! What am I? A freaking dinosaur? I won't be witnessing the end of the freaking world.

What's with this jump? From fighting spiders you could probably find back on Earth in Australia to watching the end of the world?

Also, what the hell is Tutorial Difficulty change token? Does it mean I can change my difficulty to easy? Or does it mean more people can come to Hell difficulty? Most likely, it means just that. Hmm, that's interesting, to say the least.

Other rewards for the floor quest seem nice but not as interesting as these two.

Rewards for the side quest are quite good but level 50 is still far off.

I sigh.

Biscuit, come here; I need to relax.

As if hearing me, the best doggo of the first... of the second floor comes to me and puts his head on my leg as I am still sitting down.

(Food?)

I boop his snoot, and he lets me, only looking at me with big eyes.

Soon, okay?

I pet the corgi and feel myself calming down a bit, feeling his warm body so close to mine.

"Lily?" I get out of myself slowly, and the girl looks up at me; her eyes still look empty.

"If you want to talk, I can listen. If you want to cry, I can be here with you."

I'm not good at these things.

Kevin died, yet my reaction is minimal. There is a hint of sadness at what could be, but that's it.

I can laugh now, and I know I won't cry.

And it's not only because of **[Focus]**.

Lily's eyes become wet, and she finally starts crying. She hugs me, and I feel her tears wetting my chest. I awkwardly put my hand on her back and hug her back. Even my sympathy might be fake.

But does it really matter if it makes her feel better?

[Name: Nathaniel Gwyn]

Difficulty: Hell

Floor: 2 - Mana-Infused Kingdom

Time left until forced return: 4y 334d 21h 36m 02s

Traits (1/3): Mana Circuit (Passive)

Lvl 24

Strength: 13

Dexterity: 12

Constitution: 38

Mana: 62

[Primary Class: Mana Channeler]

[Sub-class: Unavailable]

Active skills:

Focus (Dual Focus) - Lvl 10

Mana Manipulation - Lvl 10

Mana Perception - Lvl 9

Oscillation - Lvl 6

Kinetic Redistribution - Lvl 8

Armament - Lvl 3

Mana Surge - Lvl 1

Passive skills:

Mana Flow (rare)

[Skill Points: 1]

[Stat Points: 0]

More time passes, and there are no signs of living beings, and we still stay on grassy hills. Hungry, and thirsty, yet all of us are resting.

The breeze is amazing, the temperature is perfect, not hot nor cold. The grass feels nice to sit on and is calming to look at as it moves in the wind.

Almost as nice as my stats!

Hell yeah.

" ... "

Sorry.

So, should I invest my skill point? I could get my **[Mana Perception]**

to level 10 or **[Focus]** to level 11. But I think I'd rather keep it for another bottleneck for a skill I will need more. It might be a waste to use it right now, so yeah, let's maybe keep it.

Also, my poor mana. Why is it so low? Or why is my constitution so high? Sure, my body would complain every time I handled my mana, but it was okay. It was totally fine!

Anyway, I was also able to talk with Tess, and her class is something like this:

Storm Sentinel:

A novice class that manipulates the power of lightning through their psychokinesis, electrifying their projectiles while using farsight to maintain a constant vigil over the battlefield.

Sure, it sounds good. Maybe even really good, but did you see mine?

Hehe.

Not jealous at all!

Together, we also went over Lily's classes and picked one for her.

Harmonic Dissonance:

A novice class that draws on the power of opposing forces, utilizing rejuvenation to heal and protect, and disintegration to obliterate obstacles and enemies, demonstrating the duality of life and destruction.

Yup.

Still not jealous.

Her healing improved after getting a class, so I am already feeling much better. Hopefully, she won't use her other skill by mistake.

That would be... interesting.

Kim seems to be avoiding us. He is neither joining Hadwin and the twins nor Sophie; he just stands alone to the side, and small stones continue to fly around him as he practices.

So that's it. He is still young, a teenager; maybe he will calm down after some time. It's not like Lily did it on purpose.

But first, let's try to find some food and water.

We slowly start walking down the gently sloped hill covered in vibrant green grass, and Tess walks first, using her **[Farsight]** to scout for us.

While we do so, I think about the name of the second floor.

Mana-Infused Kingdom.

What does it mean? Will there be people? An entire kingdom? Medieval age style with some magic? Sci-fi style with all kinds of things running on magic? Is this kingdom destroyed, and are there only ruins? Is this kingdom made not of humans but of monsters?

I don't know, and it makes me nervous in the same way the start of the first floor did.

We did have some break after getting here, but not even for a second did I dare to forget that this is Hell difficulty. There is no way this will be easier than the first floor.

Yet, it feels different with massive clearings, pretty hills of grass, and fewer trees, making us able to see much further in comparison to the forest of the floor we just cleared.

"There is a lake nearby and a stream flowing into it," Tess says shortly, and we all start paying more attention.

My perception still hasn't picked up a single living being as we move closer and closer to the lake; soon, we see it.

It's not that big, but under the sun, the water shines beautifully, looking almost unnaturally clear. Small waves are over the surface of the lake as the wind blows gently into it.

We move towards the running water and stop in front of it.

"We don't have anything to boil it in," Hadwin says shortly.

"You should test it out; you have the high constitution."

"Fuck off, Nat," the older man says.

Hey, I tried to help.

"It looks so clear," Lily says carefully while putting her hands into the water, using it to clean her face and neck.

I kneel down and do the same; the water is nice and slightly cold. When the wind blows into us, and I feel it on the wet skin of my face and neck, I let out a quiet sigh.

Damn, this feels nice. I jump into the water, diving my entire body into it by lying down in the not-so-deep stream. When I get my head out of the water, the others are looking at me.

"I would recommend moving higher; downstream water isn't safe anymore."

"You have got to be kidding me," I hear Hadwin say, but I already dive again under the water while scrubbing my body as much as I can.

It looks like Hadwin is slowly not hiding his grumpy mood, as there aren't that many people he has to trick and pretend to be a reliable leader. Currently, only the twins tag along with him. Their opinion of me doesn't seem that good, and they seem to be avoiding Sophie's group even more.

They do have some telepathic and physical connection between themselves. So maybe they can feel her **[Manipulation]**, or Hadwin told them?

When I get up, I continue to look down at the water and then cup my hand, taking a bit close to my mouth, and take a sip. It tastes good, but I stop. Let's see if I'm going to be okay in a few hours.

"Enemy," Tess says shortly, and I jump back onshore.

She points towards somewhere, and I send my mana in that direction. A really weak hidden mana signature comes back to me.

Around level 10 non-named monster?

We wait a bit, and soon enough, the enemy appears from behind the bushes.

[Horned Rabbit - lvl 9]

A cute white rabbit with red eyes and a horn on its head.

Chapter 62: Drifters in a Foreign Land

Everyone jumps at the defenseless-looking monster, hungry for some food.

A small stone flies at its head, and Maya dashes, I feel a pulse of Sophie's mana, but the monster blinks its eyes and dashes so quickly I can barely track it with my eyes, disappearing where it came from.

I feel its mana with my perception, but then it disappears as the monster hides its mana. Is that why I didn't feel it coming closer?

"It's gone," Tess says shortly.

Already? Tess's skill has a massive range; how fast is that rabbit?

"That was so funny," I hear.

A new voice. No one from us.

When I turn around, my mana is already flowing through my body, faster than ever before, thanks to my new class and passive skill.

Then I freeze, unable to feel any mana from the man in front of us.

[Mana-veiled Scout- lvl ?]

I guess that answers the question if there are any other humans.

"I've never seen such a pathetic attempt to hunt a horned rabbit," he lets out a quiet laugh.

Confident yet still careful, judging from his stance.

Is he from a different group of Hell difficulty people? Is he from a different round?

"Do not move closer," Hadwin says, his voice firm but not aggressive. I already feel mana around the man.

"Calm yourself, mister, it's you guys who are here hunting on Lord Blackburn's land," he smirks.

Yup, I guess he is not from Earth.

We have to witness the end of the world. What is it even?

Does it mean the system plans to destroy the world and for us to witness it? That would be weird, there are more groups; even the system can't create multiple worlds, right? Right?

Moreover, the environments appear identical; could this be some sort of virtual reality? Are we merely imagining all this?

While thinking, focusing on one part of my mind to think about it, I focus with another part to keep mana flowing through my body, ready to fight anytime.

"We didn't know it belongs to someone; we wouldn't dare to do it otherwise," Sophie smartly talks to the man. "We are lost... and hungry."

Good start. The man seems to be much higher level than us so let's be careful.

"Ha! That's some bullshit! You are in the middle of the lord's land, and yet you got lost."

Mana finally flares up from him. Only as a warning.

The difference is massive. He is on a different level. Much stronger than Cinderbear. Multiple times stronger.

Isn't he a scout? Why does he have such mana, and does the question mark mean that his level is so much higher? We were able to see level 20 when we were around level 5. So he is at least level 40 or higher?

"We just appeared here out of nowhere, through the portal! We didn't want to," Kim adds this time. "Are you also from Hell difficulty?"

"Oh," he pauses, and his mana calms down. "So you are drifters, you should have told me," he laughs a bit, ignoring the last part.

Did he not hear it?

"It's my first time finding some of your kind." His eyes move up and down, checking us out, and I feel an almost unnoticeable touch of his mana measuring us.

"Well, you guys seem pretty messed up, so it could be true. I will bring you to the boss, and if you try to run or fight, I will have to kill you," he says and this time his face seems a bit more serious.

I don't like that at all.

Can we fight?

It might be too risky right now so I gesture to Tess to calm down and do the same.

Let's wait and see if we get a better chance.

It's not like we have a choice, right? The entire time, I continued to watch him he seemed careless at times, but that can't be it.

He might be trying to lure us into attacking.

How strong is his body being the level he is? Can we even pierce his skin with our attacks? How does it work?

He is still a human, so is his body stronger than a level 26 Cinderbear?

Questions, questions, questions and no answers.

Fine, let's tread carefully for the time being.

He whistles, and a crow comes flying down, landing on a nearby tree.

[Twilight Raven - lvl 19]

The crow is pitch-dark, and its eyes are yellow-colored as it looks at us with intelligent eyes. It looks especially long at the corgi.

"Talon likes your... what is it even? Some mutated version of a battle dog? Puppy?" he pauses for a second while looking at Biscuit, "Whatever, follow me."

Without waiting, he starts walking, and I again think of running away. Who knows where the man wants to lead us and what awaits us there, it might be safer to just fight him now.

The crow caws and looks at me with its intelligent eyes. I feel its mana touch me.

What just happened?

"Talon put a mark on you all, so don't even think about running."

Huh? I scan my body, but I don't find anything even after I repeat it multiple times. He might be bluffing.

Yet, the crow's intelligent eyes make me nervous, and slowly I follow the man, together with the others.

The man is called Roland. He isn't that tall, and his build is slim. He has brown eyes and black hair.

He moves, talks, and looks like a human.

We can understand him as if he is talking in English, and he can understand us.

He moves fairly quickly, so we have to move at a similar speed to not stay behind. All under the watchful eyes of his crow.

The land we are on belongs to Lord Blackburn, and every plant, tree, and animal or monster on it also belongs to him. Lord Blackburn is also the strongest man in the area.

Hunting animals without permission is a crime, and for violating this, they can cut off a person's hand.

Roland isn't that talkative when it comes to sharing details, but we find out that there are levels as well. And classes.

The man says they are all from the gods.

We also discover that they refer to skills as "gifts."

Apparently, it's super hard to get one.

Kim asked him what his level is, and Roland slapped him. I wasn't even able to see his movement and even after 5 minutes Kim can barely walk in a straight line.

It looks like it's a super rude thing to ask.

Additionally, it seems like a wise decision not to confront him unless I am absolutely certain of defeating or surprising him. This may be even more challenging due to the crow flying alongside us, which likely has some connection to Roland.

"Sir," I move closer, trying to sound as respectful as possible. "Would you mind if I ask you a few more things?"

"Haaaa, and I thought you would leave me alone. Go ahead and ask, three questions. Let the gods not think that I don't show some mercy towards the cripples."

I pause. You...

Phew, okay, let's calm down.

"Who is the strongest person in the kingdom?"

His eyes turn to me with surprise, and then he laughs.

"That would be Champion Keiron. Sure, some people say that Champion Tristan is stronger, but everyone knows who the king calls when things go to shit!"

Champion? Is that some sort of title?

I wait a bit more, but the man doesn't continue, and I don't dare to ask about the levels.

"What should I do when talking to Lord Blackburn?"

"Yes, you guys are totally drifters," he laughs even louder than before. "You will be talking to one of the lord's men. The lord is too busy to deal with people like you," he continues to giggle.

"What are drifters?" I ask my last question.

"People send here by the gods, what else?" he pauses and looks at me with a more serious look, "Now, shut up. I don't appreciate your tone, nor the look in your eyes. It makes my skin crawl. If you don't want to get beaten, do something about it. Others won't be as nice as me."

Then he stops talking, and I don't ask him anymore.

Are drifters some setup from the system meant to help us integrate here?

Moreover, how much time do we have until the world ends? Days, months, years? Are we meant to become stronger and survive it? Run and hide somewhere?

In addition, what's the issue with the look in my eyes?

I notice that Tess is gesturing at me, so I move closer to her.

"There's something like a camp, a few dozen men, all armored, and most of them with one question mark over their head."

I guess that's it.

Now we have to hope that the system didn't send us here to die. Something tells me it didn't. In the same way, it put us in the least dangerous part of the first floor and then gradually heightened the difficulty.

I'm following the rest of the group, our steps cautious as we approach the camp. We pass a few tents set up haphazardly across the area, their outlines sharp against the night sky. Armed men cross our path at intervals, their watchful eyes, the weapons and question marks over their heads serving as silent reminders of the potential danger that surrounds us.

[Ironclad Warden - lvl ?]

[Longbow Marksman - lvl ?]

[Runebound Knight - lvl ?]

They all seem dangerous, too dangerous for me to deal with even one. Some of them look at us with interest as we walk towards the tent in the middle where the leader awaits us.

[Mystic Duelist - lvl ?]

Chapter 63: Testing Boundaries

"Roland, who did you bring here this time? And what happened to your scouting?"

The man's voice is authoritative. He is tall, muscular, and has curly black hair. His face is clearly shaven. He is dressed in comfortable-looking clothes, and at his side, there is a sword with a thin blade.

Roland only bows slightly and smiles at the man.

"Drifters, sir! I spotted them while on watch. Talon is still out there, keeping an eye on things."

"Drifters, you say," I feel a wave of mana from the man. It pushes against me, scans my body, and probes me.

I feel disgusted. Is that how others feel when I am scanning them?

I want to do the same, to look at the leader's mana, but I do not dare. I don't know if he would feel it or if it's considered rude in the same way asking for levels is.

"They are fairly weak." He puts his hand on his beard and scratches it while glancing at us for a second. "The crippled one's mana is strongest, and the creature they have with them is... weird. But they won't be of use here." He turns away, "Have Finnegan bring them to Stonehaven. It will be their problem to deal with."

Then he goes back behind his table, ignoring us.

The entire time, he barely looked at us; only his mana scanned our bodies. As if we aren't even worth his time.

"You heard Sir Sterling, kids. Now move your asses before someone moves them for you!"

We quickly follow Roland out of the tents and wobble behind him like baby ducks following their mother.

I keep my mana to myself and do not try to use **[Mana Perception]**. Others seem to be doing the same.

Unfortunately, Biscuit is already acting cute in front of a man who is eating some meat.

Biscuit, if you end up getting killed, it's on you!

Fortunately, the man laughs and throws a big piece to the corgi. Victorious doggo comes back to us.

His face seems even cheekier than before. He doesn't say anything in my mind but pokes me, as if gesturing for me to take some food.

"..."

Knowing how much food means to him, I can't help but feel a little bit of emotion. Just a tiny little bit.

"Just eat it."

Stupid dog, your tricks won't work on me.

He doesn't wait anymore and gobbles up the meat quickly.

[Shadowstalker - lvl ?]

Like everyone in the camp, we can't even see Finnegan's level. The man is quiet and just listens to Roland, and then nods.

It takes him a few minutes to pack his stuff, and then he gestures for us to follow him to another man who gives us some provisions after Finnegan signs some papers.

So, we've got ourselves another paperwork-ridden country, huh?

After we manage to leave the camp and walk for a few hours in total silence, the surrounding landscape keeps on showing off its amazing colors and gorgeous scenery.

We stop, and Finnegan gives us some food. Hard bread and dried meat, plus some water he made us carry.

While finally getting some food in my stomach, I carefully watch the man who is also slowly eating while staring into the distance.

The countryside around us remains stunning. Lush green grass and trees, expansive plains, and a beautiful blue sky with hardly any clouds. The weather is just perfect too. It all feels almost unnaturally picturesque.

I notice that the man holding us captive seems to be weaker than Roland. His moves aren't that agile, and even his presence is weaker. Knowing that I have to try it sometime, I slowly wake up my mana and send it towards the man after gesturing to Tess to get ready.

I didn't dare to do it with Roland because he had Mana in his class name and was a scout, probably a class that is made to be better able to feel such things.

As thin strings of mana as I can make reach out and touch the man. I try to probe him, try to guess his strength.

If he's weak, we can fight him and then run away. Some level difference won't stop me, and it's too dangerous to just do whatever they want us to do. Sure, it could all be going as the system intended, but it also doesn't have to be.

At first, he doesn't react, so I send a bit more, feeling the edges of his mana pool.

Carefully.

Slowly.

Then I realize that he is looking at me.

Deep, deep eyes as if piercing straight through my head.

"That's really rude," he just says in a quiet voice, and then everything blacks out.

POV Kim Min-Jae

As we leave the camp, the quiet man in front of me hands me a bottle of water. I take it gratefully, but when I glance up at him, his eyes send a chill down my spine. He calmly tells us what to do, but the fear in his eyes makes me wonder what we're walking into.

Running away is not allowed. We're not allowed to drink water or eat our provisions unless he gives us permission. Talking is not allowed.

We follow him quietly across the grassy plain with trees here and there. Everyone is just going with it.

Even Nathaniel, who is walking slightly to the side. His eyes are most of the time on the man leading us.

They are full of curiosity.

He is not scared; he is just watching his surroundings and waiting. I notice that he also tries to copy Finnegan's movement a few times. Light, quick steps that seem as if he is floating.

I turn away, unable to watch any longer.

I can't compare myself to him. He is not normal. No normal person would turn back to face a Cinderbear instead of just passing through the entrance. Yes, no normal person would do that.

But he won.

And then he forgot about Kevin. No word about that. No sadness in his eyes. And he doesn't even seem to be mad at Lily because of that. On the contrary, it looks like he is even closer to her now.

But it's okay; I will deal with it. As up until now, I will continue to grow stronger. I will put in the effort and improve the same way I did on the first floor.

I am stronger now.

While we sit and slowly eat the food, I hear Finnegan say something for the first time in a few hours since we left.

"That's really rude," his voice is calm and quiet.

Then something hits Nathaniel, and he falls down, defeated just like that.

"No!" I hear Lily and even Tess say something as they hurry towards the young man. Even the dog starts barking, and these weird purple tentacles appear around him.

And I am just looking at the unconscious body of a young man.

Just like that, he was defeated. Without having a chance to fight back.

Pfff.

I can't help but smile, and for the first time since leaving the first floor, I feel relief.

It's all starting over, isn't it?

We are weak once more, and even he is again at the starting point.

Okay.

Okay!

I get it; it is rude to try to probe someone's mana in the same way it's rude to ask about levels, but at least say something instead of quietly looking at me.

Dang it, my head hurts so much. What did he do? Thankfully I'm still alive and smarter than a few hours ago but I could live without the pain. Don't mess with people with a question mark over their heads.

Yup.

I don't know if it's because of that or something else, but Finnegan takes us towards the trees, and we enter a small forest soon to find an animal.

[Boar - lvl 19]

"Kill it," the man says shortly and pushes me towards the animal that isn't running at all.

The boar is massive and black in color, each of its tusks longer than my arm.

Not knowing the man's intentions, I rouse up my mana and step towards the monster.

I enter **[Focus]** and feel my mind split into two parts.

One of them focuses on creating a spear with my **[Armament]**, and the other part does what I would always do.

The mana flows through my body, strengthening it, making it faster, and I take it all in, missing the feeling even after only a few hours of barely using mana.

The translucent spear in my hand becomes denser and stronger while I continue to strengthen myself.

The boar rushes at me, and I dodge to the side while stabbing the animal deep inside its neck. The animal is fast while charging but has some trouble reacting quickly. Its hide is very thick, but not too thick for my improved skill.

With another charge, I dodge to the side and attempt to stab again, but its skin becomes even tougher and turns a deeper shade of black. The spear's blade breaks, so I let it dissipate and recreate it.

When it charges me again, I stab against its head and bury the tip of the spear inside the animal's eye while calmly watching it under the influence of **[Focus]**.

I leap to the side, release the spear, and then dash towards the creature. I form an axe with **[Armament]** and, using all the strength I can muster, bury it in its neck. Blood spurts everywhere, and I somewhat awkwardly repeat the process while holding the axe in one hand.

[You have defeated a Boar - lvl 19]

I look at the man with the Shadowstalker class, and he just nods shortly, his eyes piercing and watching the entire fight.

Keep watching, keep guessing. You'll see only the facade, the skills I choose to reveal.