

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Side story - A Nibble to Remember

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It was all just a coincidence. Just a small event that changed everything. Even that should never have happened.

"God damn it, Biscuit, be careful when you're taking food from me," the older man complains, nursing his slightly bleeding finger.

With a single drop of blood remaining on the corgi's lip, something terrifying happens. The small animal licks its lips, and at that moment, it understands.

It understands the words it had heard before.

The words that said this place isn't real, that this is a facade created by the system.

And with that understanding comes a question.

If everything is fake, does that mean the food is fake too? Just an illusion crafted by that strange entity?

(Food Fake)

Later that night, a young man named Kevin walked through the camp, keeping watch.

"Fucking Cinderbear, I hope it won't appear again."

At that moment, a strange noise surprises him. Momentarily forgetting caution, the young man decides to follow the noise.

"Hello?" he asks quietly, making his way through the trees of the first floor of the tutorial.

The silence that responds is filled only by a strange, wet noise, like a messy eater slurping soup.

Emerging from behind the trees, shock overtakes him, leaving him speechless.

He sees the older man he had just spoken with an hour ago. A small creature is sitting on the man's chest, taking slow, deliberate bites out of his neck, seemingly enjoying every bite.

(Food!) echoes in his mind before a tentacle made of dark pulsating mana decapitates him, and his body falls to the ground.

The creature swiftly continues to tear at the dead man's neck, enjoying its meal.

This food is real.

This food isn't fake.

For the first time, the creature understands the difference, and a bizarre message rings in its head.

Congratulations, you have acquired a new skill!

[Devour]

[Devour - lvl 0 > Devour - lvl 1(Max)]

You have perfectly devoured your enemy.

[Lvl 3 > Lvl 16]

You have acquired 39 stat points! Invest carefully!

The creature doesn't understand, what are stat points?

At that moment, everything could still have been fixed. Things could have returned to normal and it was still possible to stop the creature.

But.

(Mana?)

The creature remembers the words it heard from its favorite human so often.

(More mana!) resonates in the surroundings.

And then everything is lost, all stat points invested in ways they never should have been, feeding the mana-hungry skill, and allowing it to grow.

"What the heck, Biscuit!" a young man with different colored eyes screams, some hint of emotion discernible in his voice. The creature's favorite human.

The answer is a confused tilt of the creature's head.

"Fuck, what the hell!" he continues.

The creature doesn't understand, looking down at the body, at the food near its legs.

(*Food*) it tries to project, but the man doesn't understand.

"You can't..." he starts, then gives up. Mana flares up around his body, threatening to combat the creature.

Threatening to stand between it and the real food.

Real food? Did they call themselves humans?

"Lily..." another food mutters, and then they both attack the creature, forcing it to retreat from the body of the young black-haired girl.

The creature realizes that it can't fight its favorite human, still feeling some form of attachment.

So it **[Devours]** the space in front of itself, reappearing far, far away, leaving everything behind.

In front of it, a giant bear materializes, its eyes glowing with orange light and sparks of the same color floating nearby.

It feels different, maybe it's food?

The creature turns towards it, and dozens of dark purple tentacles appear from its back. Cute barks sound into the surroundings as it attacks the monster.

You have perfectly devoured your enemy.

[Lvl 32 > Lvl 89]

You have devoured a new skill - [Challenge]

The creature curiously tilts its head, a small pink tongue still protruding from its bloodied maw.

(More mana!) echoes again, new stats making it even more formidable.

Yet, the enemy this time wasn't real food. Now smarter, the creature better understands that it's fake and that only people from its home can be considered real.

So it moves again, and it **[Devours]**.

There's only one human remaining, the creature's favorite human. It holds him with two of its tentacles, continuously biting into the man's left arm, the man still alive and trying to fight.

Yet it **[Devours]** everything, all the attacks, all the mana. Unable to stop, the food it has now is the best it's ever had.

(Food) it states happily.

" ... "

(Food?)

Silence is the answer and it realizes that its favorite is gone. Gone in the same way the creature's old owner is gone.

You have perfectly devoured your enemy.

[Lvl 130 > Lvl 166]

You have devoured a new skill - [Focus]

More time passes and a new notification sounds. A month since the start of the first floor.

The entrance to the second floor appears and the creature, curious and in search of more food wobbles inside while swinging its short tail from side to side.

Congratulations! You have cleared the 1st floor of the Hell difficulty tutorial. Welcome to the second floor: Mana-Infused Kingdom.

Congratulations! You can now choose your primary class. Your offered choices are based on your performance up until now in the tutorial.

You have acquired one skill upgrade token.

You have acquired one skill point.

You can now use Community, with a time limit of 10 minutes per 24 hours.

You have acquired 5 stat points.

(More mana!) it repeats.

It also upgrades its skill.

[Devour - lvl 1(Max) > Perfect Devour - lvl 1(Max)]

More time passes and the floors change a few times. Every time, the creature **[Devours]** everything.

But then, one day.

Welcome to the community tournament.

More real food appears.

Much more time passes and the creature, ravenous, starts to devour the place it's trapped in.

The place that stands between it and Earth, a place teeming with real food.

**Error detected within the tutorial's 5th round, group 4. Unable to
?*#äúé3-**

The creature continues to **[Devour]**. The creature maintains its **[Focus]**, and then **[Challenges]** the system.

It won't stop. It will return to its home, and it will enjoy real food once more. It will continue to consume.

It won't stop until everything is Biscuit.

**Weapons of Mass Destruction #Chapter 76: Rain, Wind,
and Monsters - Read Weapons of Mass Destruction
Chapter 76: Rain, Wind, and Monsters**

Chapter 76: Rain, Wind, and Monsters

Two mana projectiles created thanks to **[Armament]** and **[Mana Manipulation]**, hover over my shoulders as I dodge the charge of a weredeer. The monster doesn't seem too pleased and charges at me again.

[Mana Surge] blazes up, and I shoot one of the projectiles at the monster's head.

The weredeer ignores the wound and continues to charge, so another projectile hits it, finally making it stagger a bit.

A wildly oscillating blade made of mana forms in my hand, and I slash it through the monster's head, dodging just in time to avoid its dead body and the splash of blood.

[You have defeated a Weredeer - lvl 34]

[Oscillation - lvl 8 > Oscillation - lvl 9]

[Lvl 34 > Lvl 35]

Now, without any hesitation, I put all the stat points into mana. If I had any before, now there is none. I wipe the rain from my head and look at the cloudy sky. It just can't stop raining.

"Hey! We're done here!"

I just nod and let the mana flow through my body. In the palm of my hand, a weird circular shape made of mana forms with the use of my **[Armament]**. I try to imitate Ruby's master and continue to move it, reform it, spin it, make it denser or less dense, and almost transparent. I find it to be good practice for my shaping skills, but it must look somewhat silly.

I slowly enter the clearing, which is occupied by a group of ten hunters, all of them on a mission or quest, if you will.

This time, I was extremely careful and picked a group that looked somewhat reliable. Sure, I'm not expecting them to sacrifice their lives to save me, nor do they expect the same. But at least I know they won't stab me in the back out of nowhere.

Probably. Look, it's difficult, okay? A man's got to eat. Eat and pay a ton of money, and this expedition is paying super well.

The main objective is to kill as many weredeer as possible and take care of their boss, who is leading them while hiding somewhere in this area.

Are they out of quests where I would have to guide someone super slow walking to some distant place? They don't need anyone to collect a certain amount of some material?

Anyway, the group thinks I am at a higher level than I really am, thanks to my unusually high mana.

Obviously, I joined even though it's dangerous and might be too risky for my current level.

The reason? Ruby's master.

I just can't get the image of her mana out of my mind, and to reach her level is impossible without putting my life at stake to grow stronger. Playing it safe won't get me there. It's as simple as that.

"Nathaniel, how many did you get this time?" our vice leader asks me.

"Three of them this time."

"That's pretty good. You're doing well," he gives me a small smile. "You might really save up enough money in a few years to restore your arm."

Yup, that's the story I'm going with. I lied to make it easier to get into the group.

"Thanks, Bram. That's the goal," I try to act nice. The man is fairly competent, and he has two skills that I really like, so it's better to stay closer to him so I can observe them. Obviously, it would be too rude if I did it with my perception and he felt it, but I may be able to ask for some pointers while thinking about the rest on my own.

Soon, more and more people from our group join us, having finished their part, and I start getting uncomfortable as so many people talk at once, some of them even talking to me.

At first, it's bearable, but I quickly feel my social batteries drain.

Darn, I miss Tess and maybe even Hadwin. They are both much better than me at dealing with people. On the other hand, I don't mind sitting to the side and only listening without having to open my mouth.

I don't think that will ever change. I've tried multiple times, but no matter how much I try, I start feeling uncomfortable when talking to more than one person after some time.

Fortunately, we start moving again as the rain becomes stronger and the wind picks up. A few times, I try to use my **[Kinetic Redistribution]** to absorb some kinetic energy from the wind, but I fail miserably. It's still way too difficult for me. The raindrops, on the other hand, are much easier, and I can even absorb some energy from swaying trees.

Well, it's only a matter of time until I come up with a solution. Later, I might even become able to absorb different kinds of energy. As of now, I can think of something like **[Mana Redistribution]** - that sounds like an overpowered skill. And how about absorbing sunlight, gravity, or thermal energy? The options are immense!

Also, soon I might be able to upgrade one of my skills after finishing one of the side quests:

Focus (Dual Focus) - Lvl 13

Mana Manipulation - Lvl 14

Mana Perception - Lvl 12

Oscillation - Lvl 9

Kinetic Redistribution - Lvl 9

Armament - Lvl 8

Mana Surge - Lvl 4

Disruption - Lvl 4

Three skills are close to level 10. Sure, there will most likely be some bottleneck, but I can do it. But which one should I upgrade after that?

The skill I'm considering upgrading the most is **[Mana Manipulation]**, but if I get some enticing options for **[Mana Perception]**, I might change it up. Lately, I rely on it a lot to learn new skills by watching other people's usage of mana, so even if it hurts me in my current situation, it might be a good option.

Heck, even **[Kinetic Redistribution]** could get amazing options for an upgrade.

Darn, it already makes my head hurt. I'll get what, 20 options to pick from? Nice.

"Nathaniel?" I hear.

Oh, darn it, not again. Lately, it's easy for me to get lost in my thoughts even as I keep running Perception to check for danger.

"Sorry, I'm coming."

I quickly rejoin the group. This time, I am careful to stay with the group and train my **[Kinetic Redistribution]**

for fun.

I've found a new way to practice it. I try to absorb energy from a single raindrop out of the hundreds of them that are around me.

I don't even have to explain how crazily difficult that is.

A few minutes later, one of our group members dies.

His head explodes as a mana arrow hits it, also evaporating half of his chest due to the speed of the projectile. The remaining half of the body falls, and panic sets in.

No one felt anything, not even our scouts, who are most likely well over 50, and their area of Perception is much bigger than mine.

The arrow just came flying so fast and from so far away that they were unable to sense it forming.

We continue to look around, with a few stronger and faster members rushing towards the direction the arrow came from, but even they come back empty-handed.

"I say we get out of here and go back!" one of the men screams, a tall bald man.

"There's no need to be so rash. We made a mistake, and we know how to counter it now. Eamon can create a web of mana far around us with his gift. It can slightly change the direction of a projectile if it enters his area," says the leader of our group, looking around. He's a skilled hunter seemingly around Hadwin's age.

"Simon and Ivar will continue to run their **[Detection]** at full power, and we will have our vanguards nearby so they can block any attacks."

His voice is calming, and even I almost start believing him.

"We know what we're up against now, and we will be ready."

It sounds so easy.

Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to join this expedition.

A few hours later, and after a few fights with a normal weredeer, the leader dies.

This time it's not a ranged attack; it's something much more amazing.

An idle mana projectile was hovering in the air in the crown of a tree.

No one was able to sense it; that's how firm it was and how little mana leakage the projectile had.

We were only able to detect it as we passed under it.

Someone crossed a hair-thin thread of mana, which triggered the mana arrow, sending some impulse, and then, as if it were a homing missile, it flew right at the leader.

The vanguard didn't even have enough time to try to stop it.

The mana around the leader flared up, and in front of him, a barrier made of mana appeared at incredible speed, followed by another and another. The man was amazing, able to create a five-layered barrier in a split second.

Yet the projectile tore through them all of them.

Half of the man's chest disappeared in an explosion of innards, blood, and bones.

He died instantly.

That's when I decided it was time to leave, and I wasn't alone.

We immediately started moving back the way we came, but what awaited us made it all seem hopeless.

Dozens, probably well over fifty weredeer, were blocking our way back, with more of them around us. Even I could feel their mana.

So we just stood there in the rain, which continued to strengthen, and in the strong wind that kept hitting our bodies.

Threatened by mana projectiles and surrounded by monsters that we could hear roaring even through the wind, rain, and thunderstorm.

Chapter 77: Prey

We do the only thing we can do: run.

We charge toward where the horde of monsters seems thinnest.

Flames surge into the monsters; I hear the crackle of electricity. An arrow from one of our scouts flies ahead of us with enough power to destroy a tank back on Earth.

Pushing through isn't the problem; the problem is a sniper.

Another arrow comes flying, obliterating one of the men along with the monster he was fighting.

Meanwhile, my **[Focus]** keeps running at full power while I loosen its hold on my mana, now burning within my body. The **[Kinetic Redistribution]** boosted by **[Mana Surge]** covers a larger area than ever before and absorbs the energy of the rain, which I use to propel myself and attack the monsters, either pushing them away or piercing their bodies.

The world is colorless and quiet under the influence of my skill as I run, striving to stay with the group while keeping someone between me and the

presumed location of the sniper. But no arrow comes flying, even as we plow through the monsters, killing a big number of them in the process.

I am thankful for the rain as it enables me to keep up with the group of higher-level men, propelling myself with the absorbed energy.

After what feels like thirty minutes, we slow down against the side of a hill, a small place sheltered from the rain. Discussions are already underway among the group, but I only half-listen, continuing to monitor our surroundings.

Something tells me this is far from over, and I extend my perception as far as possible, in waves, almost like a sonar. My body is tense, bracing for a mana arrow that could come at any moment.

My best bet is to counter it with **[Disruption]** and hopefully dissolve it, or to cut it with **[Oscillation]**. After seeing it pierce a five-layer barrier, I can't rely on **[Armament]**.

So that's the plan. I will detect it, slow it with the redistribution, and then finish it off with **[Mana Surge]**

combined with either **[Disruption]** or **[Oscillation]**, either trying to dissipate it or destroy it.

Once again, I curse my impatience. Why did I become so greedy after witnessing the power of that woman? I thought I had calmly considered it safe, yet now I feel I didn't because of my greed.

Thankfully, the rain is still strong, allowing me to use redistribution constantly. After a brief rest and some heated arguments, we continue moving back, still a few hours away from the city.

As we proceed, I stop using perception to sense the ranged projectile; instead, I look for similar ones that killed our leader - the ones triggered by thin threads of mana.

I continue to boost **[Mana Perception]** with surge, and even though my head hurts and sweat runs down my face, I keep sending it into our surroundings.

[Focus] helps a lot.

I don't notice the first one in time, and the man who wanted to leave first dies, his lower half separated from his chest. He dies looking surprised at his legs lying apart from his body.

Then we have to fight weredeers. I dodge the monster's rush, and as it passes by me, a sword made of **[Armament]** appears in my hand, and I slash at its neck, leaving it to bleed.

Not having enough time to dodge another one, I fire up redistribution again, absorb as much energy as I can, and then disrupt the protective barrier around the were-deer, finishing it by turning the sword into a spear and stabbing it through its neck.

With the absorbed energy, I propel myself to rejoin the running group, dodging to avoid the flames that one of the men is shooting at the monster behind me. Even in this situation, I use a bit of perception to observe his skill.

Thankfully, the men are dealing with higher-level monsters, and I'm picking off the slightly weaker ones that I can finish quickly thanks to my skills.

[Mana Perception - lvl 12 > Mana Perception - lvl 13]

[You have defeated a Weredeer - lvl 28]

[You have defeated a Weredeer - lvl 34]

I ignore the remaining notifications and follow behind the men. Two mana projectiles hover over my shoulders, and I keep feeding them mana, inspired by the arrow that killed a few of the men from the group.

I make my projectiles denser, sharper, and more durable, trying to imitate the sniper's skill.

As another monster charges at me with glowing tattoos on its body, I shoot both of them with the help of a surge, even pushing them a bit with redistribution and the energy I got from the rain.

The monster's chest explodes into a bloody crater, the tattoos flicker and soon stop glowing, and the monster dies.

[You have defeated the Battle Weredeer - lvl 31]

Again. I form another two projectiles.

My mana is enough, so I add one more. This time it makes my head hurt, and the third projectile dissipates as I have to focus on controlling my mana, strengthening my body, and the use of my skills.

Then I trigger a thin thread of mana at my feet. I only notice it when I feel the thread tearing.

The world feels as if it has slowed down, and I stop holding back my mana which instantly rushes through my body at a terrifying speed, pummeling my muscles and sending burning pain through my circuit.

But I don't care; I even boost it all with **[Mana Surge]**, and my heart throbs wildly, sending even more mana into it.

My perception encompasses a small area and I **[Focus]** with both parts of my mind on it. One part is tracking the thread, the other is looking for a projectile.

In the black and white world of **[Focus]**, I finally notice **a** thin thread shining slightly in pale blue color.

When I get a general idea, I shoot my mana projectiles towards the place where I think the projectile is, at the same time I start strengthening my body as much as I can, knowing that redistribution would be too slow.

It all happened in what feels like a split second.

Then I see the projectile flying right at me, hitting my own projectiles and only slightly changing its direction.

Dozens of small mana orbs appear around me, and I throw them at it, hoping for something.

[Disruption] fires up, boosted even more by the surge, and I try to change the area where it's focusing, making the effect smaller but more potent.

Another part of my mind focuses **[Kinetic Redistribution]** in the same direction, instantly releasing all the energy I absorbed, repeating this multiple times.

The notifications ring in my head as the projectile grazes my side, leaving a deep wound there before hitting the ground behind me.

With a groan, I fall to my knees, releasing all the energy I was able to absorb, and a strong shockwave hits the trees around me, sends smaller stones flying, and makes thinner trees bend under pressure.

It takes me a few seconds of effort with both parts of my mind to calm down my mana and get over the pressure of using so many skills so rapidly.

Unfortunately, it's not the end.

The weredeer hits my body, and only at the last moment am I able to create a translucent armor to soften the impact. I fly through the air and then roll on the ground, unable to even focus on absorbing that energy.

The armor around me disappears, and I crawl on the ground, trying to get as far away as I can from the monster.

I feel it charging at me again and I pull out the dagger from behind my belt. Slowly, I get up on my feet and turn towards the monster.

The rain continues to beat my body, the ground is slippery, and it's getting darker, more like night than afternoon.

The lightning sounds nearby, and I send one pulse of mana through my body at the last possible moment, just enough to jump to the side and then bury the dagger into the monster's eye as it passes by me.

Roar.

It swings its antlers, and I dodge by falling to the ground.

Another pulse of mana, just enough to make myself faster and slash against the monster's neck. The dagger is only weakly coated in **[Oscillation]**, but it's enough. A deep wound opens on the monster's neck, and blood falls on my face.

Another pulse of mana and I stab into the monster's neck.

Then again and again.

The blood covers my body and mixes with the water from the rain running down to it. I make **[Oscillation]** move faster while using as little mana as possible.

Multiple notifications.

I dodge to the side, and the monster falls to the ground, dead.

Forcefully calming down my breathing, I stand up and move to the side, ending up leaning against a tree. My head hurts and the world spins around me.

The roars of monsters bring me back to reality, and I send perception into the area, not feeling any humans close to myself, only weredeers at the edge of my detection.

I am alone.

Chapter 78: Following the thread

[Lvl 36 > Lvl 37]

I pause briefly to invest my stats. After a moment's hesitation, I put them into mana; I don't believe any other stat will help me at this moment. I quickly skim through the notifications, paying no mind to the ones about kills.

[Focus - Lvl 14 > Focus - Lvl 15]

[Mana Manipulation - Lvl 14 > Mana Manipulation - Lvl 15]

[Oscillation - Lvl 9 > Oscillation - Lvl 10]

[Armament - Lvl 8 > Armament - Lvl 9]

[Disruption - Lvl 4 > Disruption - Lvl 5]

For a moment, I summon my status window while starting to run towards the area with the least amount of monsters.

[Name: Nathaniel Gwyn]

Difficulty: Hell

Floor: 2 -Mana Infused Kingdom

Time left until forced return: 4y 318d 021h 51m 03s

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

Lvl 37

Strength: 14

Dexterity: 15

Constitution: 40

Mana: 100

[Primary Class: Mana Channeler]

[Sub-class: Unavailable]

Active skills:

Focus (Dual Focus) - Lvl 15

Mana Manipulation - Lvl 15

Mana Perception - Lvl 14

Oscillation - Lvl 10

Kinetic Redistribution - Lvl 9

Armament - Lvl 9

Mana Surge - Lvl 5

Disruption - Lvl 5

Passive skills:

Mana Flow (rare)

[Skill Points: 1]

[Stat Points: 0]

I still have one skill point left, which means I only need to get either Redistribution or **[Armament]** to level 10 and then use the skill point to level up the last one. I'd prefer not to do it this way as I have a feeling that breaking through the bottleneck from level 9 to 10 would be better to do on my own, but it's not like I can be picky right now.

I gradually increase my speed, each step becoming firmer. The aftershocks slowly wear off, but I continue to search for traps more fervently than before. Every step I take is cautious, and could easily be my last.

My area of perception is smaller, but it allows me to pay closer attention. Now that my mana is over 100, I feel even more how the missing part of my circuit in my left arm interrupts my flow, forcing me to use even a small part of my secondary focus to move it properly.

Arrows fly at me, thankfully from regular weredeer, not the lethal ones. I dodge them, not even bothering to return fire, still not feeling too well. I stagger slightly, slipping on the mud-covered ground, but quickly regain my balance before the charging monster reaches me.

Mana flows only into my legs, just enough to dodge to the side. Immediately, I cut it off and use a bit of mana to absorb the monster's kinetic energy, propelling myself forward. I stagger once again before regaining my balance. With clenched teeth, I continue to run.

Three weredeer appear some distance ahead of me. I form simple mana orbs around me, spinning them and densifying them, trying to save as much mana as possible. I then start spinning them around my body, making them orbit me like tiny moons, gradually increasing their speed.

They spin faster and faster, accumulating a lot of kinetic energy. When I'm close enough to the monsters, I release them, shooting them like projectiles from a sling. Ten of them fly at the monsters at a terrifying speed, smaller than usual but denser. They pierce the weredeer's skin and exit their bodies on the other side.

[You have defeated a Weredeer - lvl 33]

[You have defeated a Weredeer - lvl 32]

Not having enough time to do it again, I boost my body and jump over the charging remaining monster. While I'm up in the air, I absorb a bit of kinetic

energy from the rain and boost the spear I made out of **[Armament]** into the monster's back.

Now the wounded weredeer turns to me, a red glow covering its body. For half a second, **[Disruption]** fires up and the monster staggers as if stung after its skill cancels. I dash forward, and the dagger covered in **[Oscillation]** nearly decapitates it, leaving it hanging by a bit of skin.

But then I run again, ignoring the notification about the kill and dodging arrows or normal weredeer.

The wind continues to threaten to blow me to the ground and the lightning becomes more frequent.

The forest is dark and the branches of the trees are swaying wildly, cracking in the wind.

And I run.

Is it because we made fun of the deer we killed back on the first floor?
Because we called him Bambi and did such a bad job skinning him?

After I get out of this, I swear I will kill any monster that has antlers or even reminds me of a deer.

My first meal will be deer steak and I will eat it whole while laughing, then order another one and throw it on the ground.

Damned weredeers.

I wobble from side to side as I walk between trees, a few more small wounds are on my body and even now I feel as if I'm about to pass out as my head keeps ringing and I have to continuously use my skills. While catching my breath, I stop to lean against a tree.

It's already night and I'm mostly navigating with the help of perception that only feels mana and the little light that the moon offers. Unlike Earth, it's bluish, giving the night an unusual hue.

At the edge of my reduced perception, I feel another signature that I identify as a weredeer and stop leaning against the tree, stepping a bit away from it.

One of the mana orbs that hover around me starts orbiting me and slowly increasing its speed. I found it's much better to increase its speed this way instead of using a surge that puts too much pressure on me in this state.

Sure, it's annoying and it takes a bit longer, but the result might be even better than just boosting it. I just anchor the bead to my body and push it to make it spin around me.

I let the weredeer get closer and then sling the mana bead at him. It hits the monster's face, tearing off a chunk of its head as big as my fist. My accuracy is only getting better and it's enough; the monster falls down dead.

[You have defeated a Weredeer - lvl 36]

I already invested my skill point into **[Armament]**, knowing that it would probably have a more difficult bottleneck as I have a feeling that I am closer to leveling up **[Kinetic Redistribution]**. Also, the second skill is something that I think is better, and I know I would regret, using the easier way to master it instead of doing it my own way.

So even as I barely walk and mana continues to threaten to ravage my body, I keep continuing to absorb the energy of a single raindrop out of the thousands that continue to fall around me.

At some point, I find the corpse of one of the men that was in our group. His body is mangled, limbs torn off, and there isn't enough of his face left for me to identify, but I remember the dagger that lies nearby. I grab it and continue without looking back. The blade still seems to be in good shape.

A few minutes later, I find another corpse. Half of its body is missing, the wound looking similar to the one the sniper's projectiles caused.

It's been a few hours since I concluded this is the work of a human, not a monster. Probably someone paid to deal with the competition. Someone hired to kill the man that led us and to leave no witnesses.

The sniper must also have some ability to at least affect the monsters a little bit and they are not too high level, otherwise we would be dead already. They must have planted the triggering mana projectiles around us as we were pushing forward and then started using the super ranged sniping skill, probably with a long preparation time or some setback that doesn't allow to use it quickly. Or it's just to mess with us.

I've learned to detect the threads of mana and this way avoided three traps. At the last one, I even climbed on a tree and observed the mana projectile, not too much out of fear to not trigger it, just enough to learn that there are two parts to it.

One of them is a huge amount of mana that is compressed into an elongated sharp shape, somehow made to not leak mana. The other part is the trigger, a mana thread that will activate something that will send the arrow flying at the place where the thread of mana touched the person. I already have multiple ideas of how I can use this to improve my skills or to help me in creating a construct.

Thanks to tracking mana threads, I find the one that is slightly different, even thinner, and leading somewhere else. There are no projectiles around. So I reduce the mana my body radiates. I slow my Mana Heart the same way I did when I killed Emeric, and I reduce the area of my perception by a lot.

And I continue to follow the thread of mana, slowly, carefully, concealed in the rain and the darkness that blankets the area. The wind continues to howl around me, sending leaves swirling and making the branches creak. Soon, I reach a small clearing, tucked away behind a line of trees.

There, I find two people, a man, and a woman, standing in between the wilderness where we went and the village. Even through the rain and darkness, I recognize the figure of one of the men from the group. The vice leader, Bram.

[Blade Sentinel - lvl 51]

[Phantom Sniper - lvl ?]

I take a small step to the side and only too late do I realize that I have torn a mana thread even thinner than the ones from before.

My surge fires up and both parts of my mind focus on redistribution. This time, I don't hesitate and reach out towards the forceful wind that keeps roaring through the area, causing the trees around us to groan under its strength.

I absorb the kinetic energy from the wind, almost instantly filling up the amount I can control.

I hear them scream something and turn towards me. Mana projectiles form around the sniper and the traitorous vice leader charges at me.

When he gets close, he hesitates for a moment, recognizing my face.

I do not.

His head blows off, hit by the kinetic energy I absorbed and I refocus my attention on the sniper.

Chapter 79: The Second Skill Upgrade

Using the remaining kinetic energy, I propel myself forward, my hand holding a knife covered in oscillating mana. I read the direction of the projectiles that the sniper fires at me, a much weaker version of the skills she used to kill so many of the group.

I dodge two and block the last one, barely avoiding breaking my hand. Meanwhile, I once again absorb the energy of the rain and mold it into as thin a cone as I can, shooting it at her. She dodges it but a few orbs of mana start spinning around me faster and faster.

I dodge another projectile and, unable to dodge the second, let it pierce through my thigh and sling a mana orb at her, forcing her to dodge again.

This time, tens of projectiles appear around her and all fly at me. My surge bursts forth and I put everything into **[Disruption]**, causing all the quickly formed projectiles to disappear like candles in the wind.

I sling a few more orbs at her and boost them with surge and even the kinetic energy I absorbed. The trees and the ground around the woman become trashed and multiple projectiles hit her. The woman finally staggers, putting a hand on her chest and then looking at her bloodied palm.

She screams and again tens of projectiles form around her. At that moment, another orb made of mana hits her and she staggers again, half of the projectiles disappearing. Still, she clenches her teeth and the remaining ones fly at me.

Once again, **[Disruption]** flares up and the projectiles disappear. All other than one that she made denser after seeing me cancel her attack before. The

projectile hits my arm, which I barely cover in **[Armament]**, and I hear the bone crack.

The force of the attack sends me to the ground, but I quickly absorb more energy, using it to propel myself back onto my feet and towards the woman who is already preparing for another attack.

Coming at her faster than she expected, I tackle her, both of us rolling on the ground.

A quick jab hits my armored chest and another one is aimed at my crotch. I block this one with my broken hand. Then, I swing my head and hit her nose with it, breaking it in the process, causing blood to splurt out. I repeat it. And again, until another hit nearly breaks my **[Armament]**.

Around my hand, I barely create oscillating mana and stab it into the woman's chest, making it oscillate as wildly as I can, tearing her flesh while her hateful eyes stare at me up until the last moment.

Then she dies.

[You have defeated the Phantom Sniper - lvl 72]

Two level-ups and I put all stat points into constitution, rolling on the ground to lay next to her, my heart beating wildly and mouth gasping for breath.

I rest for a minute while the rain continues to fall on my body and face, washing some of the blood off, then I send a pulse of mana into the surroundings, not feeling any monsters close. Still, I let one part of my mind monitor my surroundings, already knowing about the monsters that can mask their signature.

With the other, I open the notifications.

Congratulations! You have completed the Side quest and received a skill upgrade token. Currently, there are five skills available for upgrade. Choose wisely!

I pause for a second, really wanting to see all the options, but I know I can't right now. I'll check them later to see the possibilities.

Right now I need to get my mana under control. I can't continue to rely on **[Focus]** to handle it all the time. Even now, one entire **[Focus]** keeps it at bay and a bit of another as well, not allowing me to use the skills as much as I would like to.

So I glance over the options for **[Mana Manipulation]**.

They are the same as before when I was using my first upgrade token.

Mana Amplification: *Increase the potency of your mana manipulation, enabling you to generate more powerful magical effects.*

Advanced Mana Manipulation: *Enhance your control over mana, allowing for more precise and intricate manipulation of magical energies.*

Mana Intensification: *Strengthen the potency of your mana manipulation, enabling you to generate more powerful magical effects with less effort.*

Mana Sensitivity: *Heighten your sensitivity to mana in your surroundings, allowing you to detect and track mana sources more easily.*

Yes, *Advanced Mana Manipulation* it is.

Half a second after I chose it, the pain hits my body and I groan, feeling it even more because of my pitiful state. My muscles spasm and my brain feels as if someone set it on fire and my heart feels as if it's about to explode out of my chest.

Slowly, after a minute or two, the pain dissipates, leaving me lying there staring at the sky.

These aren't tears. It's the rain. The raindrops.

Yes.

God damn it.

I groan and try to push myself up with my hand, too late remembering that it's broken and a groan of pain escapes my mouth. Great. Just great.

I carefully get up and send a pulse of mana as far as I can. Still no signs of life. I try to move mana in my body, keeping it strengthened. It feels much

better than before but it's hard to tell properly. Yet another thing I will have to test later.

Slowly, I move towards the corpse of the woman and start looking through her pockets, being careful not to put too much pressure on my hand. At some point, I even form something like Biscuits' tentacles to open up the pockets.

Damn, I miss that little jerk.

In the end, I become a few gold pieces richer and even find some weird shining stones. I'm not sure what they're for but they crack and turn into the sand after I touch them. Other than that, she doesn't have any documents or identification. Not even any other weapon.

For the last time, I look at her and move towards the corpse of the vice leader of the group whose head I blew off.

I take his short sword that looks of high quality, some silver from his pockets, and his dagger. Before leaving, I look at him one last time and turn around, leaving both corpses behind me.

On my way back, I find no monster, only one more man. He immediately attacks, clearly with the intention to kill, but one of my mana orbs, which now spins much faster than before, pierces through his arm. Then I absorb their kinetic energy and a cone of kinetic energy explodes his leg and the man loses his will to fight, only begging for his life.

He is 10 levels higher, but I'm a terrible matchup for him. His main strategy seems to be using telekinesis and hurling small iron balls, reminiscent of bearings, at me. Boosted by his skill, I can envision them inflicting serious damage. Furthermore, he appears to have literally hundreds of them at his disposal.

As he moved them, he also made them glow in a blue hue, probably combining his telekinesis with something else, but **[Disruption]** took care of that.

The man is still alive as I get to him, carefully monitoring him with my **[Mana Perception]**.

There are multiple questions I could ask him. For example, I could ask him why he tried to kill me. But the answer is obvious, he was with the two I killed before.

Another question I could ask him is why they attacked the group. Why did they all have to die?

However, there is one thing I'm particularly curious about. Who did it? I want to know information about this person, their power, and the number of their men, in case they decide to cause more problems for me. Other than that, I do not care. I am not interested in the reason why everyone in that group had to die. It's surely something similar to what happened to me when I used to hunt with Aelric.

Before killing him, I get another use out of the man. He already tried to take my life, so I show no mercy. With my improved **[Mana Manipulation]** and **[Disruption]**, I send my mana inside his body. Unlike Sophie, I do not have **[Mana Infusion]**, but the result is similar.

I use him to practice creating constructs and to test a few theories I have. After the third test, he dies. A temporary construct messes with his mana pathways in a harmful way, causing an uncontrollable flare of mana to damage his insides.

But I learn a lot.

When Ruby appears near me, I attack her, not recognizing her at first, but she just hits my chest, almost gently, sending me staggering backward. Immediately, she gets drenched in the rain but she doesn't seem to mind.

She looks down at the man near my feet and then back at me, seemingly unbothered.

"You look like shit," she says.

Yea, I bet.

"Well, it's raining," she says as if she only noticed it right now. "Are you done here?"

I just nod, too tired to talk.

The redhead then steps near me. My **[Mana Perception]** fires up and I watch, knowing that something amazing is going to happen.

With me by her side, she takes another step and immense mana erupts into the surroundings. The view in front of us disappears and the world by our sides seems as if shrinking.

The mana, the world, everything moves so crazily and so complexly that I can't even dream to follow right now. My head spins and I have a feeling as if someone pulled a carpet under me and stagger forward. Instead of into the mud, my feet step onto the wooden floor of a nice-looking room that we are inside.

The silence after hearing the thunderstorm and the rain for so long feels deafening.

With a tired sigh, I slide onto a chair nearby, too tired to even care if I am dirtying it because of the mess on me or not.

Then something sounds in my head.

(Asshole!)

The heck!?

Chapter 80: Your world sucks

The small body of the best doggo hits my chest, making me let out a quiet groan of pain. Yet, I still hug the corgi and keep him close to my chest while carefully petting him with my now slightly healed arm.

(Asshole! Asshole! Asshole! Asshole!)

Yes, yes, I missed you too.

Also, we will have to put some parental control on your access to the community; you are learning bad words from those guys there.

“Master wanted me to buy this creature from Henry as well.”

Oh no. Do I want to know?

“He did cost 10 gold,” she says anyways.

“How much did you pay for real?”

“Two gold? Henry wanted 4 but I blackmailed him, knowing that he sold you to Emeric to die.”

Damn.

“You must be super rich, why don’t you invite me for dinner?”

“Maybe if you grow your hair a bit and dress up nicely,” she giggles and comes closer to also pet Biscuit and he lets her, just like that.

Huh?

Seeing something on my face, Ruby says, “I fed him a bit from my dinner and he immediately became super friendly.”

Biscuit! Stranger danger!

“So how did you find me?”

“Master left a Resonance Imprint on you and gave me your mana signature and I just tracked it.”

The heck? That sounds so cool!

“Can you teach it to me?”

“That's what interests you? You are not complaining that we are tracking you or asking why I went to take you back?”

“I expected something like tracking and you either went after me because you wanted something annoying or master told you to do so. It also could be because you felt my state and didn’t go to check on me.”

But it doesn’t matter.

“Please teach me.”

“Maybe in the future, I will use it as my bargaining chip,” she smirks and lets go of Biscuit who sends a message to her.

(Asshole!)

Good boy! Go and get her!

“Your dog... creature is kinda rude, you know that?”

Hey! He can hear you! Do not listen to her, Biscuit; you are perfect the way you are.

“He keeps saying that, I almost threw him out of the window when he said “Food, Asshole!” but never mind that. We will be leaving Stonehaven.”

“Can you tell me why?”

“Yes, it's because of the war. Frontlines will move here soon enough and Master doesn't want to get caught in all of that. Simple as that.”

I continue to pet the corgi, who is slowly closing his eyes and his breathing is calming as I continue to hold him.

“I heard a few things here and there, but can you tell me who is fighting against who? I would rather have accurate information.”

She thinks for a second and then just nods.

“We are currently what is known as the Mana-Infused kingdom and we are at war with the Solaris Empire and to be honest this kingdom is kinda screwed.”

Yeah, I heard that much. I wait for her to continue.

“The only reason why they didn't attack us properly is because of our Champions.”

“Keiron and Tristan?”

“Yes, the two of them and we also have a few more in their capital.”

I sit up carefully to not wake up Biscuit and ask “They are there in secret or do they know about them?”

“They know about them, but they are hidden. In case the war starts they will mess up their Empire as much as they can. Two Champions should be able to destroy the entire capital in a few minutes if they stop caring about their lives. Millions of people would die instantly.”

She looks at me.

“The problem is that they have something similar. Unlike us, they call them Paragons, but they are the same thing: living weapons capable of destroying entire nations in a moment.”

The floor quest is slowly starting to make more sense.

Floor quest: Witness the end of the world.

“The moment the war starts properly, everyone will lose.” she doesn't smile this time.

“Is it true that the emperor is a mind mage?”

“Yup, the most powerful one that ever lived, most likely. The man is under 40 and controlling their Paragons with his mind. Paragons! And the problem is that he can singlehandedly send them to die, making them not care about that, so that's it.” She moves closer to the fireplace in the corner of the room and sits nearby, still looking at me.

“Your world sucks.”

Surprise appears on her face and then a tiny, almost invisible smile follows it.

“Yes, it does, doesn't it.”

“People are terrible, drifters are too expensive, and the food costs a farmer's monthly wage.”

Her tiny smile becomes a bit bigger, “Higher-ups are assholes, masters are a pain in the ass, and it's full of people ready to scam you out of a few golds!” she adds.

A few golds? More like 92 golds. But I nod.

“Overall, I would give it a terrible rating and recommend future visitors to avoid it as much as they can.”

In the end, a soft smile gently appears on her lips.

A bit later, Ruby uses her skill again and we appear somewhere high in the mountains. The air here feels a bit thinner, but the moment I exit the room and step onto the small terrace, I fall in love with the view.

I've seen some videos of people having breakfast in the Swiss Alps with an amazing view of mountain tops.

Yeah, they can suck it.

The view is much more beautiful, even the mountains seem to be so much bigger. Vibrant green grass, trees, and the tips of the mountains as if dyed in white snow.

For a few minutes, I just stand there and stare, feeling a sense of calm wash over me.

"Pretty, isn't it?" Ruby joins me.

"Yes," for the first time in a long while, I feel the corners of my lips lift slightly.

I tried to warn others, but the forum censored most of my messages. I spent the entire daily limit trying to circumvent it, but in the end, I was only able to warn them about the danger and recommend moving away from the borders and the capital city.

After a long time, I also checked the numbers.

Easy difficulty 1638/2000

Normal difficulty 702/1000

Hard Difficulty 293/500

Hell difficulty 53/250

Noticeably, every difficulty seems to have lost some people. Around 100 in easy. Thirty in normal, 30 or so in hard, and 3 people in Hell.

Once again, it makes me curious how many floors the tutorial has. It's hard to guess now, but after the end of the second floor, we should have a better idea.

Now I only have to find out how to survive this war.

From how it looks now, it seems that the Champions and Paragons will go wild and mess up as much as they can while the mad emperor, Sophie lookalike, will mess with the remaining few.

But, can you call that the end of the world?

Just humans will disappear and after a few years, life will continue as the planet will still be here.

I bet the system did cook up something really spicy.

It fills me with curiosity and worries at the same time. The end of this floor will probably be the most dangerous, just like the end of the first floor.

Well, at least I have some time and the option to get stronger.

Lvl 39

Strength: 14

Dexterity: 15

Constitution: 46

Mana: 100

My stats are nice to look at, but I need to level up a bit more to get those spicy side quest rewards.

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

Reward: Trait strengthening token

I still haven't received another side quest instead of the one I got my skill upgrade from, but as always, I can only wait and train.

Even now, I continue to practice moving my mana. With upgraded **[Mana Manipulation]** it has become much better and I can somewhat ignore the missing mana circuit part in my missing arm.

It's still a mess but it's much better now and my flow has improved.

Somehow, I also think that dealing with all these troubles with the missing part of the mana circuit is helping me level up **[Mana Manipulation]** a bit more. Still, I want my arm back.

So, Lily, you'd better put some effort into it so I can freeload on your amazing skill.

I also found out a bit more about healers and it looks like they are totally like nobles among gifted people. Most of the time, powerful nobles snatch them up, the king also keeps one or two, and the rest are taken away by the temple that uses them to prolong the lives of people that are rich enough to pay.

Yup, it seems like healers can get to such a level that they are able to prolong lives. If Lily gets back to Earth, she will either become insanely rich or they will try to kidnap her or use her.

But for that, they will have to go through me.

Now, seeing how useful healers can be, I am even more decided to keep her close to myself and risk a bit more to keep her alive. At least I will try. I am not that good at dealing with people.

But hey, she can use me to stay alive and I will use her for healing. It's a win-win situation.

I just need to hope that she will see it that way as well, and for that, I need to become more powerful. Strong enough that she will feel safe next to me so I can keep her by my side without letting anyone lay hands on her or take her away.

So, that's that. I know what I want, and I'm sticking to the plan. One step at a time, let's see where this crazy tutorial takes us.