

Hell Difficulty Tutorial

Chapter 17

She is quiet the entire time. No questions, no bothering me. She just slowly cleans my wound as best as she can without water and with just a small piece of cloth.

She always knew me too well. I guess that's why I always felt comfortable around her.

The wound looks terrible even after some healing thanks to my constitution.

While she does her stuff, I drink the last few drops of water remaining in my bottle. I store the empty bottle inside my bag.

"I don't know what else I should do. Pour alcohol over it? I don't have any. Burn it? I've only seen that in movies, so it might not work. And someone already took the first aid kit from the bus."

Her face remains calm throughout, and I noticed she put her long hair into a pigtail resting on her back. She is also not wearing her skirt anymore and is wearing leggings instead.

I look up from the ground.

She is looking at me with an indescribable expression on her face.

I pause.

Why is it so easy to understand her?

"You can come with me next time I go into the forest."

I don't have to say more.

Slow nod.

[Name: Nathaniel Gwyn]

Difficulty: Hell

Floor: 1

Time left until forced return: 4y 364d 20h 9m 59s

Lvl 3

Strength: 6

Dexterity: 8

Constitution: 10

Mana: 4

[Primary Class: Unavailable]

[Sub-class: Unavailable]

Skills:

- Focus Lvl 3

- Mana manipulation Lvl 2

- Mana Perception Lvl 1

[Skill Points: 0]

[Stat Points: 0]

What. The. Hell?

Not even four hours? Is it bugged? It has to be, right? There is no way that we have only been here for four hours. It feels much longer.

Sigh.

“Tess.”

“Yes?”

“I am hungry.”

“...”

Well, I tried.

“How is your wound?”

I move my hand slightly. It hurts, so I stop quickly. I will have to rely on my constitution to heal it, but for now, my hand isn't usable. The wound on my side also hurts every time I try to turn around.

Drops of sweat are forming on my forehead and I feel hot.

"Arm's unusable."

"I thought as much."

She pokes my left hand slightly, and a smile flickers in her eyes when I furrow my brow.

Her face stays the same, without expression.

"What are your stats?"

There is a short pause, but she doesn't think about it for too long and quickly tells me.

It's something like this.

Lv.0

Strength: 4

Dexterity: 7

Constitution: 2

Mana: 1

Her stats are a bit lower than my starting ones, but they aren't bad at all. I also know she can fight a little bit, which is more than I can say about others.

"When you level up, put two points into constitution and one into mana. You can do it even without talking. Just think hard about putting your points into the stats you want."

Then I continue to tell her about the goblins we met, the goblin shaman, and the animated wolf.

I try to tell her anything she can find useful. The way they usually attack, the weapons I saw them use, and everything I know so far about mana.

Tess also got two skills.

[Psychokinesis Lvl 1]

[Farsight Lvl 1]

She also told me that there are passengers with skills such as **[Reflection]**, **[Absorption]**, **[Telekinesis]**, **[Detection]**

, [

Strengthening] and many other. There is even one person with my **[Focus]** and another one with her **[Psychokinesis]**.

To be honest I did expect each skill to be unique to a person so this surprised me a little bit.

Some people even started with 3 points in Mana. Weird.

Mana is usually a resource used to cast magic, enchant items, create spells, and is used as some sort of fuel for magic items.

And it fascinates me.

A lot.

If I could, I would most likely spend hours just experimenting with it.

It just feels like I'm a kid once again, and I got something amazing to play with.

Something very few have. Mysterious and so full of opportunities.

Unfortunately, I have no such luxury.

Tess is almost done smoking a cigarette when Hadwin appears. He is followed by two men who both seem to be around 30-40 years old. I noticed them before, and they seem to be fairly close to each other, probably two friends or coworkers.

Still limping Hadwin opens his mouth and closes it after taking a look at my wound. I can see that he is fighting inside, and in the end, he decides to be shameless.

"Nat, I will need you," he shrugs his shoulders and moves awkwardly.

At least he knows how shameless he is. But it's not like I can blame him. I'm sure I'm more useful than most people, even in the state I'm in. And it's not like I didn't expect him to come.

"When I was walking back with Damon..." he pauses for a second and continues after taking a deep breath "I saw the river down the valley. Probably 5 minutes of walking away from the place where we met them..."

At the moment, I am not sure if it's all just an act, or if he really feels bad for asking me.

How many bullets does he have left? It can't be many. One magazine? Two? Or is he already at the last one?

"Cassian and Dominic are going to join us."

Cassian is a shorter man with black hair, while Dominic has dark skin and curly hair. Both of them are in good shape, having figures that come from doing hard manual work.

I find it weird that they would want to join, even after seeing Damon's dead body.

I think it's better to go, but people rarely use logic in such situations.

Maybe...

I look at Sophie, who is standing nearby with her sister.

Whatever.

I slowly stand up. I try to calculate Cassian and Dominic's reach by looking at their arm lengths, and I assess their mobility by observing the way they move.

Let's see how you'll do.

"I'll be taking Tess with us, but I'll need a bit longer to rest. One hour should be okay. Oh, and give her one of the spears."

As I enter the bus, I hear Cassian and Dominic complaining.

I can't trust anyone.

Not Sophie, not Hadwin.

So I have to push, forget about my wounds, and get the last bit of energy from my body.

Because I am sure I will die the moment they become stronger than I am.

Chapter 18

Right after I reach the back seat, I take out my phone. Even before it turns on, I put the earbuds into my ears and turn on noise-canceling. The world instantly quiets down.

I connect the earbuds to the phone and scroll down through my playlist. Randomly, I pick one song and set it to play on repeat.

When I close my eyes, everything disappears. The voices of people around me, the lady sitting a few seats in front of me with her dog, a bunch of students, and twins.

The song starts playing.

I let it play two times before I start feeling better and let myself think a little bit.

...

I'm a wreck.

My hand hurts more than I'm letting them know. I feel weak, lightheaded, and my muscles hurt, most likely from using mana.

I am thirsty and hungry.

My clothes are dirty. My shirt is more red and black than white at this point.

I glance at my phone. It's at 78%. Earbuds are at 70%, and the case should have one more charge left.

I keep digging the nails of my fingers into my palm, and the wound keeps healing a little bit every time I do so.

My arm heals much slower, but there is some progress.

I increase the volume and close my eyes again.

[Focus]

The song keeps playing in the background as I try to manipulate my mana and send it toward my wound. I keep imagining the wound closing. I am trying to "feel" it.

While I do so, I keep wounding my palm.

Obviously, it doesn't work, but it calms me down as I focus on the mana flowing through my body.

It feels weird as if I got a new sense that's just for feeling the mana.

There are some losses as I circulate mana through my veins, in and out of my heart, but at this point, I can't even feel where little bits of mana disappear. I don't even feel how mana comes into existence. I just know it starts at the heart.

But why does it travels through my veins, through the blood?

Is it just using my veins as a road through my body, or does it need to be mixed with blood?

Is my heart some kind of generator creating mana, or is it getting it from somewhere else and sending it through my body?

At this point, I don't even hear the music and don't realize that I am draining my phone's and earbuds' batteries.

Fascinated by mana, I keep feeling it as it travels through my body and sometimes I slightly poke it.

How is it possible that I can manipulate it?

Is it because it's inside my body? Because it's my mana? Can I manipulate it even outside of my body?

Can I manipulate the mana of other people?

Time loses its meaning, and I hear notifications, but I ignore them.

Amazed, I just keep moving mana inside my body. It's somehow calming.

What I will be able to do with it in the future? Where are the limits?

I move the mana to the tip of my finger. It reaches the furthest capillary, and then I push it out of it. It travels through the meat of my finger and skin. It feels like I am spending it faster and using more of it than when it goes through my veins. I push a little bit more of it, and it exits through my finger. It doesn't hurt me and the consistency is like smoke so I add more and more.

My head hurts.

Knock knock.

Slow breath in.

Breathe out.

Focus.

I push more, and I feel as if the mana is reaching a centimeter away from my finger.

I focus on it. Make it thinner, and sharper.

I feel like I don't have enough air, my brain hurting as i hear ringing in my ears.

More.

Notification.

KNOCK KNOCK.

More.

I focus.

More mana, sharper, stronger.

Use it, shape it, and add density.

Much more density.

With a swipe, I move my finger across the side panel of the bus

More pain and the mana disappears from the tip of my finger.

My hand starts shaking, and my finger hurts as if it got stuck in the closing door.

But it's there.

A deep graze in the side panel of the bus.

When I finally turn to the side and look at Cassian knocking on the window, I feel much better, even though my head is hurting.

POV - Tess Hansen

He disappears inside the bus as Cassian and Dominic start complaining, but Hadwin quickly calms them down. Then, without any hesitation, he gives me one of the spears they were able to acquire. I also notice that he is much less nice and patient while dealing with the duo than when he talked with Nathaniel. His voice is also much more commanding and firm.

Two men leave at the end, not forgetting to give me a few nasty looks as they go. Hadwin gives me a short look and then also leaves. He doesn't even bother talking to me. His eyes just scan me up and down while checking how I hold the spear, and then he leaves while limping a little bit.

I watch him as he slowly strips dead Damon of his clothes and shoes and then pulls his body close to the edge of the forest. The pale body of a tall muscular man just lays there in his underwear. There is a lot of loose skin over his body, as someone who lost a lot of weight.

So that's it for you, Damon Beck. I feel a bit of sadness while looking at his body. I didn't know him that much, and I am sure Nathaniel didn't even recognize him as he looked so different after losing so much weight.

But I know for sure that Damon did recognize Nathaniel. How could he not? You can't forget such a beating.

He once visited the gym Nathaniel liked to use and got beaten to a pulp after attacking him. I didn't see it, but from what I heard, he got both of his hands broken, and since then, he hated the younger boy.

Surprisingly, one more memory flashed to my mind. That of a few years younger Damon smiling brightly while lifting up his little sister. Both of them laughed at some stupid joke.

The memory disappears, and there is only a dead body.

I sigh, then I hold my spear tighter and start practicing stabbing movements. I do it for half an hour to get used to the spear and the movement. Then I try to use my skills by following Nathaniel's guidance. Even though he said it feels awkward, I try to let my body handle it instead of trying to imagine it in my head.

At one point, a stone in the palm of my hand jumps slightly, but that's it.

One hour passes, and Cassian comes closer and knocks on the window. He knocks louder and louder until the young man inside finally starts moving toward the exit.

"...prick." I hear Cassian say. He says it quietly, almost whispering.

Nathaniel finally exits the bus. He is twenty one years old, with black hair and a face that could be called handsome if it weren't for his permanently expressionless look. Because of that, he just looks unapproachable and unfriendly, and people rarely bother to talk to him.

The most striking part of him is his eyes. One eye is a deep rich brown, while the other is soft gray, heterochromia.

He stops in front of Cassian. Nathaniel is slightly taller, but his figure is slimmer, and the man looks much more muscular. Yet, he doesn't say anything, and after a bit, he just avoids his gaze, and Nathaniel passes by him. I notice that Cassian is clenching his hands as he does so.

"Any results?" Nathaniel asks as he stops in front of me. His eyes briefly scan my face then he looks into my eyes for a split second and averts his gaze. He keeps looking at different things such as the weapon in my arm, my shoulders, the side of the bus, and our feet. He never liked making eye contact.

I share the results of my training without trying to exaggerate or lie and he simply nods in response. Surprisingly, he looks back into my eyes again, for a second time in a few minutes. That's unusual for him. It seems like something made him happy, but I don't even bother asking him about it. I know he wouldn't like it.

At the moment, he's the only one I can rely on, so I have to stay on his good side and follow his orders. He's fair, so in exchange, he'll help me too.

I don't have many options. It's either this or...

My eyes stop at the body at the edge of the clearing.