

## Hell Difficulty Tutorial

### Chapter 26

"Izzie!" Sophie screams and runs first towards the bus. We follow behind her, just not as enthusiastically.

The bus horn keeps sounding, and the screams of goblins become louder and louder.

We exit the trees and see other passengers inside the bus. Most of them...

There are two bodies outside, and a few goblins keep stabbing their bodies while screaming. Some of them are even taking a bite out of them.

Then there is another group surrounding the bus. They laugh and growl, still outside as people inside keep poking out with sharpened sticks and weapons they got from the quest.

Sophie staggers onto the clearing.

"N-No..." she stops, seeing around thirty goblins in the clearing. Most of them are level two or three, but some are level five goblin warriors. "Izzy..." she calls quietly, but some of the goblins already turn to her.

A pulse of mana extends to the surrounding from her body, and the goblins that turned to her look confused and turn back to the bus.

Another pulse of mana washes over the entire clearing. Even I feel something telling me to run away. Some goblins even start to leave, but others poke them, growl at them, and they start looking around while sniffing.

In between screaming voices, I hear that of a little girl and Sophie's face is deathly pale.

"Please..." she turns towards us. Another pulse of mana from Sophie, and I stop Tess and Kevin, who are taking a step towards the clearing.

They shake their heads, confused.

Hadwin seems to resist, but Maya and Leon slowly move a step closer and then stop. Even Sophie's skill is not yet strong enough to make them risk their lives.

The girl's eyes then turn to me.

Not to Hadwin.

To me.

"Please, Nathaniel, please..." her voice breaks at the end. Now, I don't feel any mana from her.

Is it doable?

I look at the clearing.

Hmm.

I think it is.

I can do it.

"Use your skill to make a few goblins come here. Around five."

I squeeze my mace and step closer to her.

I see her biting her lips, but she nods. She most likely wants us to rush straight to the bus, but that's too risky.

It's harder to run that way in case something happens.

"Tess, save your mana as much as possible. Only throw your main spear at level 5 goblins and if needed."

Not wasting my mana anymore on **[Mana Perception]** or any other skill, I step a bit back, just far enough into the forest so not all goblins will spot us. Sophie most likely uses her skill as six goblins turn towards us and rush while screeching.

I breathe out.

Four level two and two level three.

I breathe in.

Sophie holds her spear and stabs the first goblin that rushes at us. The monster dodges it slightly and rushes closer to her, where it's hit with Hadwin's axe.

Tess attacks another one with much greater success as her spear stabs its neck.

I step towards the goblin that rushes me to surprise him, and my mace aims for his face, but he is able to lift up his hand to block it. It breaks, and the goblin falls down with a scream.

Another one rushes me while stabbing, and I step back, grab its spear, and pull it to make him lose balance. While he is staggering, my mace smashes his head.

I notice Leon and Maya finishing off the first goblin I attacked.

Another one attacks me from the side while wildly swinging his dagger, and another one tries to hit Tess while she is fighting the first one.

I strengthen my body with mana a little bit and throw my mace, which hits the goblin attacking Tess and distracts him enough so she can turn and defend herself.

I dodge the goblin's knife and pull out mine, stabbing it downwards right into the monster's back.

He screams, and I pull out and stab again, this time into his traps, and then again into its neck. I kick him away, and he dies on the ground.

### **[You have defeated the Goblin, lvl 3]**

Silence.

Every goblin is dead, and I catch my mace that Tess is throwing at me. She nods gratefully.

The green monsters, meanwhile, don't seem too eager to get inside and are more interested in scaring people hiding inside the bus.

Sophie is already bleeding from her nose, and her skin is pale. She is probably using her skill to manipulate goblins.

Maybe she is making them want to tease and scare people before they kill them, so they won't rush them instantly?

Is she making them ignore the screaming of their dying companions?

"I just need a few more minutes... I put more stats into my mana... I can do it..." she breathes heavily while clenching her teeth.

"Your sister doesn't have that long."

Pure desperation is visible on her face as she looks at me.

"Another group." I point at a group of 4 goblins nearby, one of them a level 5 goblin warrior with a dangerous-looking stone axe in its hand.

"I..." she seems so tired, so weak.

"Just do it." There is no pity in my eyes as I look down at her.

She breathes weakly.

"That's all? You're just going to sit there because you feel tired?"

I step closer to her.

"You will stop only because your head hurts a bit?" I give her a cold smile and whisper, so only she can hear, "But it's okay, just lay down and we can watch."

Her eyes become colder and colder with every word I say. More blood starts flowing from her bitten lips, and then she turns towards the clearing.

"You are such a bastard..."

With a groan, she falls to her knees and becomes paler and paler. More blood starts flowing from her nose, down her lips, and drips from her chin onto the front of her shirt.

Then the goblin warrior turns its gaze towards us. He bares his teeth and moves closer, followed by a few more goblins.

"Tess, you take the one on the left. Hadwin, shoot the goblin warrior just a little bit before we start, and then take one. Leon and Maya, the last one is yours. Feel free to run if you want to, but if you do, don't bother coming back."

I step towards the goblin warrior and lower my stance. He does the same.

He is slightly taller than the other goblins while still being slim. The tattoos that cover his skin are in a much darker shade of blue.

He rushes at me, and in the middle of that, an arrow scratches his arm. Another arrow completely misses him, and then the others start fighting their goblins.

Unsurprisingly, even a level 5 goblin is an amateur at best. His swings are faster and carry more force behind them, but they are easy to read now that I've seen their fighting style and taken their unnatural speed and force into consideration.

I dodge the first swing, I dodge the second swing.

He growls, annoyed, and swings again, this time putting more force behind it and losing a bit of balance when he misses. So, I kick his leg, making him stagger even more.

I send just a little bit of mana through my body and swing downwards with my mace.

He moves faster than before and is able to block it with his hand. It doesn't break. There is a wound on it, it's bleeding, but it doesn't break.

He bares his teeth as if smiling, so I take a quick step back, and in doing so, I kick right at his face with the bottom of my feet. I feel a crunch, and his nose breaks.

Another loud roar, and he rushes me again, this time moving faster and using even his hands to move while still holding the axe.

His face is a bloodied mask of rage.

### **[Focus]**

The world becomes quieter, and under the light of polar lights, I focus on the goblin only.

He puts more strength into his left, and I already move to the side by the time he jumps quickly, rushing through the air while letting go of his axe. I feel mana from his hands as he reaches them at me.

But I am not there.

More mana flows through my veins, and the mace's handle creaks in my hands. As he passes in the air next to me, I wait until he misses me with his hands, and then my mace lands with its full power right on the goblin's back.

Crack.

The green monster lands and tries to turn to me but instantly falls, losing all power in its legs. He roars and growls, but his legs do not move at all.

With a hateful look in his eyes, he starts crawling towards me with surprising speed, but I leap a few steps back to the place where he jumped from.

Before he gets to me, I hold his axe in my hand and throw it at him, using some mana. He covers his face, and the axe just wounds him a little bit.

What a terrible throw.

But when he stops covering his face, I am already in front of him, and my mace hits his head with full power. His hands desperately trying to cover it don't help at all.

**Crack.**

**Crack.**

**Splat.**

He finally stops moving.

**[You have defeated the Goblin Warrior, Lvl 5]**

**[Lvl 4 > Lvl 5]**

I instantly put all three stat points into Mana, making it my highest stat.

**[Name: Nathaniel Gwyn]**

**Difficulty: Hell Floor: 1 Time left until forced return: 4y 363d 18h 9m 59s**

**Lvl 5**

**Strength: 7**

**Dexterity: 9**

**Constitution: 10**

**Mana: 11**

**[Primary Class: Unavailable]**

**[Sub-class: Unavailable]**

**Skills:**

**- Focus Lvl 3**

**- Mana manipulation Lvl 3**

**- Mana Perception Lvl 2**

**- Oscillation Lvl 1**

**[Skill Points: 0]**

**[Stat Points: 0]**

Chapter 27

I get back to the others just in time to see Sophie collapsing to the ground.

“I... I can't anymore...” her voice cuts off, and the goblins that had been ignoring us up until now start looking around confusedly, most likely wondering where their friends went.

I stare at Sophie for a moment, but it looks like that's all I can get from her.

“Hey...” my voice spreads through the clearing, louder than it should be and distorted, but recognizable as mine. All thanks to the mana I send to my throat and vocal cords.

“You have 10 seconds; if you stay inside and don't attack the goblins after the time passes, we will leave.” My voice is cold, and I mean every word I say.

“You can't...” Sophie barely gets out while supporting her body with her arm to look up at me.

But she doesn't use her skill on me.

She knows that would be it, and I would just leave her sister and others if I sensed even a hint of her mana trying to manipulate me.

This time, I will decide on my own, and if I put myself in danger, it's only because I am sure I can survive it and gain something out of it.

The goblins slowly screech and sniff and slowly turn towards the source of my voice.

Even if they rush us now, I am sure I can run away pretty easily.

If they don't attack them, I will leave. I won't risk my life just for them to sit on their asses.

“Five...” my voice spreads through the clearing, and goblins start slowly moving towards us, ignoring the bus and its passengers.

“Four.”

Two goblin warriors poke and push a few goblins, making them more aggressive.

“Three.”

One of the goblin warriors is level 6, and he holds a dagger in each of his hands; the other one is level 5 and holds a spear.

“Two.”

Their backs are turned to the bus, and they are halfway to us, leaving two half-eaten bodies behind them.

“One.”

My voice is louder and sounds more like me as I keep improving my usage of mana.

### **[Mana Manipulation Lvl 3 > Mana Manipulation Lvl 4]**

The doors of the bus open, and an older man, the bus driver, I think Jacob, is his name-rushes out, waving an axe in his hand. His voice is weak and shaky, but he is attacking. Right behind him, a few more people attack, and some of the goblins turn around to deal with them.

For a second, the thought of running away goes through my mind. As they distract the goblins, we would get at least a few more minutes to run without pursuers.

But shouldn't you run only if you are sure you can't win?

I step towards the attacking goblins and enter **[Focus]**. All useless noises become filtered out, and some colors lose their vibrancy, yet some become that much more vibrant—the color of blood, polar lights on an inky dark sky.

“Sophie, make the goblin warriors focus on me.”

I saw them fighting; none of them can deal with them, especially if they attack together with other goblins.

“Tess, you will stay here and support others with ranged attacks. Use spears from dead goblins.”

They are already so close.

“Kevin, you will be on the front line with Leon and Hadwin, and Maya will support you.”

I am surprisingly calm.

Around twelve goblins are rushing at us, and I see around five of them fighting with other passengers. Goblin warriors stay slightly in the back, and I dash towards them while strengthening my body, right through a group of level 2 and 3 goblins.

I swing.

A head explodes like a watermelon.

### **[You have defeated the Goblin, lvl 3]**

Another swing.

**[You have defeated the Goblin lvl 2]**

Multiple goblins attack me, but I put more force into my legs and jump right over them while still running.

There are two goblins slightly behind and surprised to see me.

**[You have defeated the Goblin lvl 2]**

**[You have defeated the Goblin lvl 2]**

Then I stand up in front of two goblin warriors. I feel a pulse of Sophie's mana from behind me, and other goblins rush at them instead of turning back.

There are only six of them, so good luck.

Mana rages through my body, and I enter deeper and deeper **[Focus]**.

**[Focus Lvl 3 > Focus Lvl 4]**

Breathe out.

The world becomes quieter, and I see only two opponents in front of me.

Breathe in.

I bounce on the balls of my feet and roll my shoulders back, a series of satisfying pops echoing.

Mana flares out, and I stomp my feet, feeling the earth respond beneath me.

The level six goblin dashes, and in a split second, reaches me with both of his daggers stabbing towards me. There is blood visible on his teeth.

Before he reaches me, I also dash towards him and swing my mace as if it's a bat. At the last moment, he pulls his daggers back and blocks my attack, which sends him staggering backward.

I step back, almost breaking my ankles from the pressure I put on them, and a spear stabs through the place where my head was. I already hold my mace in my right hand only and grab a dagger with my left even before I start dodging the attack.

I send more mana through my body and feel the muscles in my left shoulder and waist tearing from the speed of the movement as I turn my body and stab the dagger right into the goblin's left eye.

He tries to dodge but is unable to stop the inertia from his stab with a spear.

Then I jump to the side to keep the goblin warrior with the spear between me and level six. Just in time, two daggers stab the body of the dying goblin.

Both of them growl, one of them from pain, the other one annoyed.

Before he pulls his daggers out, I swing my mace at his head while holding it only in my right hand. He ducks and pulls his daggers out, so I quickly twist my body and kick his face, probably cracking my shin from the pain I am feeling.

The goblin is able to leave a cut mark on my leg as he flies backward.

Before he gets a chance to fight back, I put more strength into my legs and dash at him, while in my mind I scream from pain.

My mace hits his hand, and one dagger falls down.

He dashes at me, and I kick the bottom of his chin in exchange for a long cut on my left hand that already has torn muscles.

The goblin wobbles a little bit from the kick, and a spear comes flying out of nowhere and stabs right through his right hand.

Nice one, Tess.

The last dagger falls down, and I kick against him as he dashes at me with the spear still stuck in his hand. He falls down, and I swing my mace downwards while using enough mana to make my muscles hurt.

His face deforms under the mace.

One more hit to the same place.

His leg keeps twitching, and foam forms around his mouth.

The last hit.

**[You have defeated the Goblin Warrior, lvl 6]**

I turn around, take a few steps, and hit the conscious goblin on his head.

Once.

Twice.

**[You have defeated the Goblin Warrior, lvl 5]**

**[Lvl 5 > Lvl 6]**

I put all stat points into mana and turn towards the bus.

Just a few more.

Chapter 28

When I reach the bus, only three goblins are alive.

I hit the head of the goblin that is fighting with Jacob first. He is the bravest one of the bunch, so I don't mind helping him first.

The goblin's head dents, and he falls down, twitching and screeching, so I step on his neck, and something cracks.

**[You have defeated the Goblin, lvl 3]**

Another goblin is about to attack an older lady when a corgi attacks him and starts biting his leg.

Good boy, Biscuit!

I see that the goblin is about to kick the brave dog, so I dash and hit the goblin's head. This time, I use mana, and his head explodes.

Hmm, am I not getting too predictable?

Anyway.

**[You have defeated the Goblin, lvl 2]**

After that, I finish off the goblin that is kept at bay by Lily and a few kids who keep poking their spears and sticks at him so he can't get closer.

**[You have defeated the Goblin, lvl 2]**

That went pretty well, all things considered.

Jacob and a few people look severely wounded, but the only corpses are the ones I saw at the start. A few people are still inside the bus, so I make sure to remember their faces.

On the other side of the clearing, everything seems to have gone well.

Tess is not wounded, Kevin's armor is dented, and Hadwin also seems fine. Sophie, on the other hand, appears unconscious, and I would swear that Leon is missing one or two fingers.

I check my status and don't find anything new, so I look up at the sky once again.

The sky is inky dark with no stars at all. The only sources of light are the bright green, blue, and pink lights that swirl slowly in the sky, reminding me of polar lights, just much bigger and brighter.

I find it really beautiful.

Colors, movement, all are mesmerizing and provide enough light for us to see. The light is at the level of a dim morning, but it's much better than the pitch-dark darkness we went through just a few minutes ago.

But.

WHAT THE HECK?

How do you even get rid of two suns?

Anyway, it's almost certain that the suns we saw were fake, yet I can't even begin to imagine what is actually going on.

A fake sky and some kind of projection?

I guess it could be. We just started to learn to use mana, and from looking at all kinds of skills, mana seems fairly versatile.

"Nathaniel..." Tess comes closer.

Darn, I didn't even notice that I started spacing out while thinking about all of that.

"I'm out of cigarettes."

Well, that must suck.

But what a weird thing to say at a moment like this. Just say what you wanted to say.

She slowly breathes in, a hint of emotion visible on her face.

"Jason and Miss Miranda died. Leon lost one finger, and there are many wounded people..."

I see.

So?

I didn't know them at all so there is no way I am going to mourn their death. She should know that.

Tess pauses for a long moment and looks at me as if trying to read my mind. She shifts slightly on her feet.

"Never mind, I'll keep watch..."

Nice!

Now, let's talk with Sophie.

She is already back and inside the bus, her sister next to her. She's already awake but still looking really tired. There's a lot of dried blood on her lips, chin, and under her nose and her sister keeps crying while Sophie caresses her hair.

A few people step away as I walk in and stop in front of her.

"Let's talk."

Sophie hesitates for a moment but then slowly stands up, "Wait here for me Izzy." her voice is soft as she whispers to her little sister.

We walk outside, just far enough away so other people won't be able to hear and then we start talking.

"Name of your skill?"

"Manipulation," she answers instantly.

"Your level and level of skill?"

"I am level 3, and the skill is also level 3."

"Your second skill?"

"Mana Infusion."

Huh, what a weird name.

"Explain."

And she does so. It looks like her manipulation is what I thought it was. She can manipulate the emotions of other people, monsters, and animals. She can make

emotions stronger or weaker, and if she spends enough mana or gets to touch her target, she can instill a feeling that the person didn't initially have.

Her other skill allows her to infuse mana into living beings and objects. She doesn't know what it does for now, other than wasting her mana. It could strengthen some items or share her mana with others, maybe?

What's most interesting is that she started on the 1st floor with her manipulation at level 2 and her mana with 3 stat points.

What the heck?

Even the system is playing favorites?

I did get **[Focus]**, which only allows me to... well, focus.

...

Damn.

I want **[Manipulation]** or **[Psychokinesis]** too. Even **[Reflection]** seems to be cool as heck.

Anyway, the system is clearly playing favorites.

In the end, I also want to ask Sophie what she did to me so I can't even think about killing her, but I decide against it. During our whole conversation, I came to the conclusion that she doesn't even know about that, so it might be better not to let her know that I can't do much against her.

Before I leave, I get a promise from her that she won't try to manipulate me or people around me.

My kids, my underlings, my minions.

My meatsmokers, my biological binoculars.

Obviously, I don't believe her that much, but it should at least make her think twice, especially now when I can feel her using mana.

And that's it.

That's what I get for saving her sister, and we are now back to a cold war.

## Chapter 29

Much later, all of us are either inside the bus sleeping or gathered around the fairly large campfire we set up, as it's not only darker now but also colder. It's not too cold, but it's noticeable.

We've dragged all the dead goblins to the edge of the forest, perhaps in hopes that Cinderbear will eat them and leave us alone in case he comes back. We've also fortified our position somewhat.

To be honest, it's pretty makeshift, but I guess it's better than nothing. There are sharp sticks planted in the ground, pointing towards the forest. Some of them are quite long, while others are really short, possibly intended for goblins to step on.

We've also slightly upgraded the bus with pieces of wood that replace some windows and reinforce the entrance. It's rather unsightly and took a long time to complete.

A few small groups of goblins came while we were working, but they were relatively easy to deal with. They consisted of only two to four goblins, all of them level two or three.

So now, we just sit here. The fire crackles pleasantly, and the warmth feels nice on our skin. Oddly, the flames are redder than they should be – just another strange occurrence. At this point, I wouldn't even be surprised if the flames shone like a rainbow.

I'm sitting on the ground, and nestled between my legs is a small corgi. Well, it's not that small, to be honest, and it's quite heavy.

I swear it's bigger than before.

Surprisingly, this little doggo has taken a liking to me after I fed it a few times and saved it from a goblin.

Time to pay!

I boop its snout, and corgi woofs in its sleep, mostly ignoring me.

Now that I look at it up close, he really does resemble a burrito. Maybe Kevin isn't that far off at this point.

As for the corgi's owner? Well, she isn't happy about it, but she doesn't say anything – at least not to my face, obviously. I'm sure she isn't so quiet behind my back.

But, darn it, Biscuit. You're heartless.

Good boy!

What did she do to you? Did she try to turn you into a vegan or something?

I boop his snout once more; it's cold and the doggo only scrunches its face this time.

Tess is keeping watch again, along with Sophie and her sister. All three sit on the roof of the bus, while a few more people keep watch from inside. We didn't ask them to; they're just that worried.

It's easy to notice how close everyone is to each other, as if seeking safety and warmth from the people around them.

Perhaps a bit too close? A little closer and Kevin will end up sitting on my lap – well, on Biscuit and then on my lap. I'm sure the bravest doggo of the 1st floor of Hell difficulty wouldn't take that lying down.

On my other side is Lily. Like many people, she also leveled up and used her stat points. It seems that the experience requirements to level up from level 0 to level 1 are incredibly low. People were able to level up even after only poking a goblin once with a stick.

Oh, and one more thing. I've noticed that my emotions are somewhat subdued. The reason is most likely **[Focus]**. I finally realized that I'm maintaining a lower version of the skill almost constantly and only enter a deeper state when I want to. Has it almost become a passive skill?

It's hard to explain, and I'll need to experiment a lot more to fully understand it, but some of my emotions, such as fear, anxiety, and desperation, are still present – just much weaker than they should be. **[Focus]** is, well, allowing me to focus on my survival, and either I'm doing it on my own and unconsciously or it's part of the skill.

That would explain a lot.

Sure, I'm a phlegmatic person, but even in situations like this?

Absolutely not.

So yeah, thanks, Mr. Focus!

I should be more concerned about having some of my emotions nearly erased, but if it's for survival, I really don't mind losing a few. As for what will happen to me after I level up **[Focus]**

even more? That's a problem for tomorrow's me!

Okay?

Okay.

Thank you for your service, future Nathaniel.

I continue to use my skills and listen to the conversation of people around the campfire.

"...noticed it even before we got there. There were some disappearances of people all around the world. I heard that an entire class of kids disappeared in Japan a few weeks ago and another day, a plane full of passengers."

Oh?

"I heard it too from my mom. Her friend said some people on the beach disappeared. She saw it with her own eyes. One moment they were there and then they just vanished."

Huh, am I the only one who didn't notice anything? Well, who watches the news nowadays, right? And it's not like I need a friend to hear such stuff from them. Yup, I'm not the odd one here.

"I thought it was just a bunch of nonsense. They didn't even show it on the news. Just a few clickbait titles on websites..."

"So do you think we're not the only ones on the first floor? There might be some people who came here before us?"

"Maybe? You saw the rewards, right? One of them is Community, so maybe we'll be able to talk to others?"

"Maybe we can create guilds!"

Silence, then they continue, completely ignoring the boy.

"There might be other difficulties other than Hell. If so, why did we end up here?" Hadwin looks around, and no one can answer, "Also, what will happen after we get back to Earth?"

Not after, Hadwin, IF. I don't want to be mean, but it doesn't look like most of us will make it.

"Can you imagine the mess it will create if a bunch of superhumans appear out of nowhere?"

Who cares?

That's tomorrow's Nathaniel problem!

Maybe not even his, that's the government's problem!

Finally they will do something useful with my taxes.

"And we just started; look at how strong we are after just a little over one day," Hadwin says.

A few eyes turn to me.

Darn, stop, I'll blush.

But during Hadwin's entire speech, I notice that he isn't too unhappy. It's hard to catch, but I swear I hear a hint of satisfaction and relief in his voice.

"How many floors do you think are here, Mr. Hadwin?" Lily asks quietly, and a few heads turn to the older man.

"I want to know that too. Also, do we have to move to another floor, or can we spend the entire 5 years on the first floor? That's something we'll have to think about. Other floors might be much more difficult, so staying here might be a good idea."

A few people nod. They continue theorizing, but most of the time they don't say anything interesting, so I just filter it out. After some time, they begin talking about what everyone likes to talk about – themselves.

"I'm pretty well-off back on Earth, and I know some powerful people, so if we get back, I can arrange something for us. Imagine how much we can get paid with skills like this."

Oh come on, shut up, Ethan.

"What if we won't be able to use our skills after we get back to Earth? What if all of this disappears?"

Huh?

Good one, Kevin. It doesn't sound too impossible.

The group around the crackling fireplace quiets down, everyone deep in their thoughts.

I look up at the beautiful lights in the sky. What would I do? I don't like the thought of losing mana.

To be honest, I hate it.

I let it flow through my body, pushing it, making it circulate faster and slower as I wish. Wisps of mana appear on the tips of my fingers, like smoke, but then they become denser, sharper, and longer when I want them to.

That's another problem for tomorrow's me.

But I have a suspicion that tomorrow's me would prefer staying over returning to Earth without mana.

## Chapter 30

Fantastic. The phony "suns" have returned to grace us with their presence.

That's a really weird sentence to say.

They just appeared out of nowhere and totally blinded us after a day in darkness, brightened only by beautiful polar lights.

The sky looks exactly like the sky we saw the moment we entered the first floor of this godforsaken Hell difficulty something.

Before that happened, we had to deal with one more attack of 15 or so goblins led by a goblin shaman. The level 5 jerk died like he was throwing. That's what Kevin said, not me.

The goblin shaman got sniped by Tess even before he was able to do anything. He just entered the clearing and an unnaturally fast-flying spear, or should I call it a homing missile at this point, went straight through his chest and pinned him to the ground.

Look, I love my **[Focus]**, I really do, but what the heck!

Whose ass do I have to kiss to get it as well?

I see that Tess is trying not to act smug about it, but it's making it even worse.

As a consolation prize, I was able to level up my **[Oscillation]** to level two. It sure is hard to level up. Most likely because of how OP it is, right?

RIGHT?

So anyway, during the fight, I caught a few goblins alive.

Well, I broke their legs and hands, so they couldn't do anything.

I totally don't understand why that made some people slightly sick and look at me like that. I did it for them! So they could stab defenseless monsters with their spears to get some experience. It's not like I can gain much from level two creatures anymore.

They should praise me, not look at me like that.

Also, give me some chocolate.

Damn, I would kill for some sweets right now.

I was able to obtain a candy drop from Lily - she had saved one for later but was nice enough to give it to me.

In exchange, I gave her two bloodied level three goblins to finish up.

YES, I know, I know.

The candy is much more valuable and harder to come by than these green jerks.

But I'll pay more, no worries.

Lily didn't seem to like it as much as I hoped, but that's something to be expected. She seems too nice for a place like this.

Another thing is Biscuit.

The little doggo isn't that little anymore. He has grown a bit. His proportions are mostly the same, but he is noticeably bigger. Maybe around 10 to 20% bigger? It might be the monster meat he ate, or maybe the little doggo is leveling up.

I swear, if he also gets an OP skill, I will be so angry.

He's also becoming smarter every day. He already knows when I'm going to eat and sniffs around with big sad eyes that become super cheeky the moment I give him some food.

Shameless little bugger.

We were able to get some water once more, and Hadwin hunted a boar on his own and brought it back. The animal must have weighed twice as much as him, but he brought it back alone.

In comparison to the first day or so, this seems too easy.

This thing is called Hell difficulty, you know.

It's not like I'm complaining that we're not getting eaten.

It just feels like the calm before the storm, so I stock up. I put away plenty of food and a few bottles of boiled water, put all of this inside my gym bag, and place it somewhere easy to reach so I can grab it and run if needed.

I notice a few other people are doing the same.

It's still difficult; we have to fight, hunt our food, fight for water, but... this is Hell difficulty.

There are such monsters as the Cinderbear, and seriously, fuck that guy.

Obviously, there is some infighting. Dominic still hates Sophie and Hadwin as well because the older man is defending her.

Oh, and one more person died from wounds she got during the fights against thirty goblins. Lily told me with red eyes that her name was Ava, and it looks like she was fairly nice to the kids, so the girl seems to be sad about that.

As for me, I'm surprised that more people didn't die and that more and more of them are asking us to bring them with us when we go hunting or for water.

Once again, Kevin kept trashing them behind their backs, calling them leeches and saying he won't be power leveling them, something about the bus and grinding.

As most of the time, I ignore him.

Even now, I have a suspicion that he has some life-drain skill.

Every time he starts talking so excitedly, I feel as if he is sucking energy out of me.

It has to be a skill.

Tess always steps in and stops Kevin from talking. It's nice to have someone to deal with people like him.

I'm not ungrateful, so I teach her in my free time, and she was able to obtain **[Mana Manipulation]** as well and is now teaching it to others. It's interesting to watch as her version of the skill is slightly different from mine. How to say it... it seems like she is relying on the skill itself more than myself? In my case, I'm trying to "feel" it on my own a bit more instead of just activating it through the system.

Anyway, it's nice to have another test subject, and to make Kevin a bit more useful, I make him train his **[Reflection]** while I watch him with my **[Mana Perception]**.

His skill seems to be amazing for defense, so I'm trying to copy it. I keep watching the movement of his mana while he uses it. There are no results after hours of trying, but I'm sure I will come up with something if given enough time.

Everyone is practicing as if their lives depend on it. They're swinging, stabbing their weapons, practicing their skills, and complaining.

A lot of complaining.

I wouldn't believe how entitled some people are, looking at me like I kicked their favorite kid every time I take more meat than they get.

But it's not such a problem, as I have an easy solution for that.

Yup, it's Hadwin.

We're not hunting together anymore, obviously, but I still let him deal with social stuff. He seems to hate it too, so that's a bonus.

It's not that easy to see, but I keep noticing his slow, annoyed blinking and veins on his neck every time he clenches his teeth.

I love it.

Screw you, Hadwin.

Now I'm going to hunt monsters or animals together with Tess and Kevin; sometimes, we also take some of the kids. Tess always makes sure that they know they might end up risking their lives, so that's it.

Sometimes they get hurt-a scratch here, a stab wound there-but Tess and Kevin make sure to cover for them. Especially Tess.

God damn.

She now walks around with like five spears somehow tied to her back, and she throws them while using her **[Psychokinesis]**. I'm sure at some point, she leveled up her skill, as they became much faster and more accurate. Combined with her **[Farsight]**, it makes an amazing combination.

As for Kevin, he became a pretty reliable tank. His second skill, **[Combustion]**, also helps. It allows him to cause objects or substances to ignite or even create controlled explosions.

Once again.

I'm not jealous, okay?

Okay.

Also, I will have to find some really annoying work for Kevin.

Spoiled kids. Back in my days...

A few more days pass like this, and one more person dies; this time, it's Dominic.

For some time, he kept getting angrier and angrier, and the stares he gave to Sophie and Hadwin were anything but friendly.

Then, he disappeared.

No one saw anything.

No one knows anything.

But I have my own suspicions about what happened to the man.

Lily cried a little.

Sweet girl crying for a man she barely knew who died. The knowledge that he had passed away in a strange and distant land, so far from everyone he knew, only amplified her sorrow.