

# Leveling up the World

## #Chapter 21: Realm Mending - Read Leveling up the World Chapter 21: Realm Mending

### Chapter 21: Realm Mending

The realm of the Well turned out to be quite real, and very very large. Dallion spent hours walking in the direction of the large mountains before it became obvious that it would take weeks, if not months, to reach them. If there was a way to escape this place, that wasnt it. Apparently, the village chief hadnt lied when he had said that the only way to exit was to defeat the guardian or fail trying.

Kill the monsters, defeat the guardian, Dallion said. His football coach in high school had said that shouting your goals out loud was already half a victory. The only thing that Dallion felt right now was stupid. Even so, there was a sense of wonder in the air. Being in a new world gave off a sense of adventure, just like the first time hed gone to a mall, or a retro-arcade. There was something magical about the newness of everything. It was as if the reality hadnt had a chance to age yet.

Reaching down, Dallion picked up a stone and tried to awaken it. Nothing happened. It seemed that only one awakening was possible at a time.

*Kill the monsters*, the boy thought.

Despite his heightened perception, he wasnt able to see any of the creatures the village elder had mentioned. At the same time, he could sense that they were there, hiding out of view.

Kill the monsters, defeat the guardian, the boy said again. How hard could it be?

Adjusting his buckler, the boy started the long trip to the central mountain. The time he had wasted searching a way out had its effect. By the time he had reached the foot of the mountain, the sun had already set. With night came cold and a sense of fear. So far there hadnt been either sight or sign of any creature. From what little Dallion knew about wildlife, that suggested the creatures to be nocturnal, which meant he needed to set up a fire for the night. The only problem was that other than stone and water, there was nothing else in this world, not even a piece of moss. Undoubtedly there probably was a chapter in some old scouts book describing how to ensure shelter in similar circumstances. Since Dallion didnt know it, he did the only thing he could come up with huddle up against a solid wall of rock, sword in one hand, buckler covering up as much of his body as possible.

Fear gave way to cold, which gave way to calm, and finally drowsiness. After what seemed like an eternity, Dallion dozed off. As he did, the sound of running water slowly

changed into a rhythmic dripping. The sequence was familiar very close to that nightcore song that played non-stop at campus. It was one of the last songs he remembered before waking up in this world. Or had he awakened?

The boy could almost hear the melody ring in the distance, he could almost hear the laughter of his friends, smell the alcohol and vape smoke. All he had to do was open his eyes and A loud roar ripped the mental image in Dallions mind. His reflexes acted on his own, jolting him up to his feet. The dozens of hours spent training had had an effect, making Dallion swerve just as the green and red combat markers appeared. Like a blader doing a seven-twenty spin, he evaded the attack then continued the action, landing a slicing attack in the creatures torso.

**Realm section mended!**

**Overall completion 3%**

The creature let out a blood freezing scream. In the darkness it was little more than a black animal-like silhouette. While the attack had sliced the beast in two, causing it to disappear in a puff of smoke, Dallion still had no idea what it was. One thing was for certain, though if there was one, there would be more.

*So much for a quiet nights rest*, the boy grumbled mentally.

Three percent mended That meant there were at least thirty more creatures he had to defeat. Of course, that assumed that the realm completion level had been zero before. Thinking about it, Dallion quickly came to the conclusion that he had found one more reason to hate calculus.

As they say, when life gives you lemons he shouted to give himself a boost of courage. Squeeze them in lifes eyes. Time to do some mending! he charged out of his shelter and into the open.

The clouds had broken just enough to let the blue moons rays cover most of the mountain. Normally, Dallion would consider the view inspiring, maybe even suitable for a date. A dozen panther shapes further up the mountain made him revise his estimates.

Dallion gritted his teeth. Nearly every strategic advice guide hed seen, from the somewhat serious to the outright memes, was adamant that they who had the high ground would be victorious. Dallion didnt have it, so his only chance was to get it.

The boy took a deep breath and charged forward. The moment he did, red markers appeared, giving him several attack options. The logical choice was to attack the nearest creature, so Dallion took it.

Sensing him, the three nearest panthers rushed down. One leapt directly in the direction of the boy.

The red footsteps turned red and green. The markers shifted. Dallion barely had to glance at them while raising his buckler. His advantage in speed allowed him to greet the creatures claws with ease, the improvement in body helped him stand his ground, and his newly developed skills

### **COMBINATION ATTACK**

**Dealt damage increased by 200%**

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Two more beasts had joined in shortly after the first, all three had been easily dispatched with such ease that Dallion almost felt bad for the creatures. The panthers must have felt the same, for they no longer charged at him one by one, instead gathering into one growling pack. In the moonlight, over a dozen of them were visible like shapes of black ink.

**Realm section mended!**

**Overall completion 9%**

So, each of you is two percent. Dallion smiled. Red markers filled the air.

## **Chapter 22: The Pack**

Fighting a pack was very different from fighting a group of creatures. An individual creature, even a strong and intelligent one, had one course of action. Thanks to the markers his skills provided him, Dallion could see that action and react in the most suitable fashion. Whether it was one, three, or five panthers that attacked, he had the speed to protect himself then counterattack, usually resulting in an instant kill.

The pack had a wholly different behavior. At this stage it was no longer a tactical battle, rather the boy felt as if he were a general in a war; a general that had to follow his own orders and suffered each time he got things wrong.

Four creatures split from the back, attacking Dallion all at once. The entire space around the boy became filled with green markers, constantly shifting position as the beasts approached. At this point, skills were no longer enough to guarantee him victory. While the boy could see all possible defenses, he couldn't determine which of them to

take. Retreating, he raised his buckler arm just as two of the panthers leaped at his face.

Barely did he have enough time to deflect them offusing his force to lift-toss them above his head like pancakeswhen the second pair rushed on taking advantage of his unprotected body.

Back! Dallion shouted, waving his sword wildly like a feather duster. The blade managed to slice through the leg of a panther injuring it, but the second managed to get a bite of it, sinking its teeth in his leg before quickly disengaging and running off.

## **MINOR INJURY!**

### **Health has been decreased by 5%**

The pain was nowhere near as intense as Dallion expected, but that didnt change the fact that they had succeeded in their attacka painful reminder that he wasnt infallible despite everything. Dallion took one last swing at the wounded panther, slicing it in two. The ease with which the creature died only annoyed him further.

*Defeated by a swarm of ants*, the fear popped in his mind. For a split second he imagined himself lying on the ground and defeated by well cracks. Definitely not a very heroic way to lose his awakening, and almost as bad as losing a major battle because of a tooth cavity.

The boys senses quickly caught the sound of claws on stone. The two creatures that hed thrown off with his shield were now charging towards him from behind. Maybe that too had been part of the packs plana triple attack disguised as a double attack. Not a bad move, fortunately for Dallion he still had one advantage they didnt.

Ignoring all skill markers, the boy turned around. His reaction speed allowed him to visualize the creatures before they could bite. One clean arc attack and both were defeated, poofing out like a ball of smoke.

## **Realm section mended!**

### **Overall completion 37%**

A third of the enemies were destroyed. Any other day he would see this as a good sign. At the moment, he was far too busy scurrying away from the pack to care. Waving his sword out of instinct, Dallion continued backwards off the foot of the mountain. The pack sent a few of its members towards him, growling and barking as they did. At one point, however, they suddenly stopped.

*What the heck?* Dallion wondered.

There was no reason for them to stop. Even if he were the better fighter, their tactics were vastly superior. Even as he stood more and more creatures approached, forming one big blob of claws and teeth less than ten steps away. And still, no one dared move an inch further, as if they had reached some invisible line.

For almost a minute, the boy stood there, breathing heavily, buckler raised, sword in hand. Only then did it dawn on him. The creatures were part of the mountain. Like the cracks in the mending labyrinths, he had gone through during his week of training, the beasts were part of the well. They couldn't go beyond it, just as a crack couldn't leave the object it had formed on. The central mountain along with its multitude of streams and rivers represented the well and the panther-like creatures were the cracks. As long as Dallion didn't venture into their domain, they wouldn't attack him, and that meant he could get some rest without fear of being devoured. Just to be on the safe side, though, the boy spent ten minutes walking away from the mountain, all the time keeping his guard up. Fortunately for him, no one followed.

Exhaustion kicked in. The pain in his leg, along with the lack of the adrenalin rush that had kept him going during the fight, hit him like a foam pillow, slowly bringing him to the ground.

*Ill just close my eyes for a moment*, Dallion said, suppressing a yawn. Next thing he knew, it was already morning.

The clouds had cleared out, letting warm rays of light cover the entire ground. Looking at the perfect azure sky above him through the cracks of his eyes, Dallion did what anyone in his place would grumble and cover his face with the buckler. Ten minutes later even that proved incapable of saving his sleep, so he stood up with a deep sigh and stretched.

Faint stinging still emanated from his leg. When he rolled up his trouser leg to check, though, he found that the wound had largely healed, leaving only a purplish-red spot where the creature had bitten him. That meant that bites at least from these creatures weren't overly harmful in small quantities. Not that he would want to attack on the pack head on again. To win against such an enemy, he'd need a plan, and one that did more than rely on skill markers.

As Sun Tzu famously wrote, if you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. Translated in the language of first-person shooter maps, that meant check out the terrain in search for good camping and ambush spots.

## **Chapter 23: Foul Air Hunting**

Adequate light made Dallion appreciate the realm of the Well a whole lot more. Maybe it was due to him killing off or mending as the awakened term went a lot of the areas creatures, or maybe it was the effects of morning, but the unwelcoming feelings of fear and dread that hung in the air the previous day were gone. If it wasn't for the complete

lack of plants or forest animals, this would easily pass for a perfect hiking trip in nature again, minus the actual nature.

The air felt fresh, the water from the streams, once Dallion brought the courage to try some, tasted sweet, and the central mountain was a rock climber's dream. Dallion wasn't a rock climber, but he had watched enough YouTube videos to assume himself an online connoisseur. The increase of his statistics made him believe he could climb up the face of a cliff. Reality quickly smacked him on the head, showing him how little had changed in this aspect. Even after everything that had happened so far, a rock climber Dallion was not.

By midday the fascination had started to wane. Despite spending hours exploring the foot of the mountain, including venturing in several of the many caves that drilled it, Dallion hadn't found anything of interest. Worse, he hadn't found anything remotely edible, which as his stomach kept reminding him was starting to be something of a problem.

There was no sign of the panther creatures, as if the light had made them hide away somewhere. On the one hand, that was a good thing, it meant Dallion could enjoy some calm before sunset. However, the nagging feeling that something was wrong reared its ugly head.

*The guardian, Dallion thought. All I need to do is to defeat the guardian. I don't have to mend everything to a hundred percent.*

No matter what he told himself, though, the gamer in him cried out in pain.

The higher the boy got, the warmer the weather became. More and more caves appeared, making Dallion lose interest in further exploration. The assumption was that the guardian would be on the peak of the mountain where the final fight would take place.

When Dallion reached the halfway point, two things became clear: there was no way he could climb to the top in one day, and once it got dark, the pack of cracks would attack again. Logically, there were two options. He could spend several nights fighting at the foot of the mountain, killing a few of the creatures then retreating to safety. It was a long, but certain method of success. Sadly, the lack of food would make each day progressively more difficult.

Another option was to follow the everything-or-nothing philosophy and face the pack on the mountain itself. As long as he picked a good enough spot, there was a chance that he would thin the pack enough for the creatures to scatter, then kill them off one by one. Finally, there was the seek out approach: find the cracks' lairs, provided such existed, and take them one at a time.

Being the logical sort of person, Dallion decided to pick the last choice. That way he could always face the pack in the event he failed to find any lairs before nightfall.

After another few thousand feet up the mountain, Dallion stopped to take a rest. The sun had started its descent, giving the realm several hours of light left. In a part of the sky, three of the seven moons were visible as pale circles, patiently waiting to shine.

Find a beasts lair, Dallion said out loud. If I were a crack in a well, where would I hide?

The obvious answer was beneath the stones. The boy had often heard of people talking that its the hidden cracks that were the most dangerous of all. Likely that was true, but in a world of awakened that wouldnt hold true, especially when talking about a well. Given the level of technology, Dallion doubted the well underwent yearly inspections. Based on the percentage the last time it had been mended was during its last improvement, if even then. No one would go through the trouble of covering up surface cracks, which meant they had to be visible.

The boy stood up, carefully inspecting his surroundings. Initially there wasnt anything out of the ordinary, but soon he started to see certain small discrepancies.

*Thank you, improved Perception.* The boy smiled.

While the overall state of the realm had vastly improved since the previous day, that wasnt always the case. Here and there large chunks of rock were darker and in a crumblier state. Not only that, but a few of the small springs Dallion could see were far murkier than the neighboring ones. The boy must have seen dozens like them while going up, but thought nothing of it. If his theory was right, a beast lair was affecting both the rocks and water, showing him where the beasts were hiding.

It took Dallion about an hour to find a cave in decrepit condition. The moment he entered, the smell of stale air hit him, making the boy instantly cover his nose. This had to be the place. Dallion drew his sword and cautiously continued on.

The inside of the cave was pitch black. Normally Dallion wouldnt be able to make anything out, but his awakening helped him see vague outlines. Combined with his heightened sense of sound, smell, and touch, that was enough for him not to trip or walk face into a wall.

For minutes nothing changed. Just as Dallion was starting to have second thoughts, a faint growl came from further down the cave. It wasnt an aggressive growl, more like a snore in a cartoon show. There could be no doubt, however, as to its source.

Dallion let out a mental sigh of relief. The rules of logic still applied. Now all that he hoped for was that he hadnt bitten off more than he could chew. Moments later, red footstep markers appeared in the darkness he had just been given the opportunity to attack first.



## **Chapter 24: Hothead**

The attack footstep markers lead on into a chamber where they split into dozens of options. The chamber was more den than lair the creatures had grouped in one giant blob in the center, snoring away. By crude estimates there had to be at least six creatures there, possibly more. If he caught them by surprise, Dallion could kill at least half of them, six if he used his attack skill adequately... and that's what he did, charging forward without a moment's thought.

### **HOTHEAD!**

**Charging head on into dangers could be called brave, but it's not always a smart decision.**

Dallion ignored the rectangle as he lunged, striking the blot with his short sword.

### **SNEAK ATTACK**

**Dealt damage increased by 50%**

**Opponents options to react are limited**

The boy didn't stop following up with his attack sequence. Red rectangles piled one atop the other, each indicating a successful kill. Three creatures had gone before the blob began to budge. Two more perished after it did, thanks to the skill's time-stop effects. Only then did green markers appear.

*Lets see how well you do this time,* Dallion followed the green footsteps to safety. The blob burst apart like a water balloon meeting a needle. Silhouette creatures scattered throughout the chamber, quickly becoming invisible in the darkness. Even so, Dallion's other senses gave a rough estimate of where they were, along with his shield markers.

A heavy mass with claws clashed against the boy's buckler, only to receive a quick jab before the red markers could appear.

*The markers must be contextual,* Dallion thought while hacking away at another enemy. The lack of contact told him that the creature had successfully evaded all attacks and had retreated to elsewhere in the chamber.

The more Dallion thought, the more he became certain that in this world there was no such thing as a tilted build. While his reactions had given him an incredible initial boost when fighting enemies, that quickly vanished as he fought stronger enemies. On their own, his attack and guard skills were nothing without the stats to keep him going. Perception was necessary for the markers to appear, Reaction was needed for him to execute them on time, Body was a must for him to maintain them for long periods of



time and To be honest, Dallion still had no idea what Mind was for, but he was certain that he would have found out the hard way, had his Mind level remained at three.

## **MINOR INJURY!**

### **Health has been decreased by 5%**

A sharp pain ran through his right arm. One of the creatures had managed to successfully claw him moments before dying itself. Fortunately, it was the last one, though still a painful reminder that Dallion still had a lot to learn.

## **Realm section mended!**

### **Overall completion 55%**

The blue rectangle marked the end of the fight, giving Dallion a chance to rest. In theory, from this point on things were only going to get easier. To prove his point a way of sunlight shone through from above, lighting up the chamber. The stench was gone completely along with all remnants of decay on the stone walls.

Tha-thats nothing, Dallion said, gasping for breath. I can take all of you! He waved his sword, though not too energetically for his arm was still stinging from the wound. Having some bandages would have been useful now, possibly some disinfectant. Lacking either, the boy tore off part of his shirt, then went to the nearest stream within the cave to wash his injury.

The water was crystal clean, just as he had predicted. There was no sign of the flow smelling much that had been there moments ago. Just to be sure, Dallion tasted a gulp. There was no trace of bitterness.

Washing off the blood, Dallion then wrapped the self-made bandage over the wound. The scar covered a large mark on his forearm, though didnt seem deep. As long as he wasnt too careless the pain was manageable. As for infection, he had to resort to organic methods to keep it from getting infected. Not a very dignified approach, and one that he wouldnt do had there been other people around.

*I wonder if itll leave a scar once I get out of here?* The boy mused. The only way to find out was to defeat the guardian and leave this realm.

Before leaving the chamber, Dallion sniffed the other cave passages. The air was clean, suggesting that if there were other creatures, they were hiding pretty deep. The only thing left to do now was go back outside and continue the trip to the peak.

Sunset had already begun by the time Dallion emerged from the cave. Warm orange light fell on the mountainside, contrasting with the dark blue cast by the shadows. All in all, it was a nice place, if one wasnt hunted by a pack of cracks.

Lying on the ground, Dallion closed his eyes. He didnt feel sleepy just yet, though a break felt good. His stomach gurgled, issuing its hourly complaint.

Later, the boy told his stomach. At least there was enough water. If things got particularly bad, Dallion was going to resort to drinking in the hopes that would trick his stomach into shutting up.

According to what he remembered from school, a person could survive for weeks without food. Of course, that was if not surrounded by a pack of blood-thirsty creatures. If his calculations were correct, there were twenty-two of them left more than twice as many as he had fought in the chamber. Most likely there were two or three dens inside the mountain. At nightfall they would emerge and try to shoo him off their mountain, or failing that attempt to devour him. Given that Dallion had climbed more than half-way up, he wasnt sure which of the two options was worse.

*Once I get through this, Ill have a word with you, old man.* Dallion clenched his fist, thinking about the village chief. *Then well see whos arrogant and whos not.*

## **Chapter 25: One of Many**

As night fell and Dallion prepared mentally for his inevitable battle against the pack, one thing became alarmingly apparent: while wounds didnt require medical attention while in the awakened state, the pain and discomfort remained. Doing a few mock attacks, even after a bit of rest, remained sluggish, especially the attacks. The annoying creature that had annoyingly managed to wound his sword arm had significantly reduced the boys flexibility.

The boy focused his attention on the mountain peak. Any creature coming from there would be considered a greater threat. With luck, there wouldnt be any. So far, he hadnt seen any dark rocks or mucky streams in that direction. However, he was only able to examine one side of the mountain. A lot of things could be hiding in the back.

It didnt take long for reality to prove him right. A faint rattling sound caught his attention, coming from below. With the realm being composed of rocks and water, it was almost impossible for anything to approach unannounced, especially if those approaching had large claws.

There were a variety of things that Dallion could have done. He could have taunted the creatures to take advantage of the higher ground, he could have attempted to sneak to them and take them out silently, he could also have charged at them as a reckless hothead. Unsurprisingly, he did the latter.

Darude! Dallion yelled, gripping his short sword with all his might. The boy knew that the creatures wouldnt get the reference just as using said reference made little sense considering the realm was completely deprived of sand or sandstorms. Still, that was the closest thing he could think of as a battle cry and didnt want it to go to waste.

The beasts froze. Up to now they had never experienced someone charge at them, let alone shouting. Moments of confusion infected their beings, as they hesitated how to react. Those moments proved to be more than enough for Dallion to slice through them like scissors through silk.

**Realm section mended!**

**Overall completion 63%**

*Nice!*

The boy thought. If all his fights could be like this, mending the well would be a piece of cake. The burning pain in his leg and forearm, though, disagreed. Dallion tried to stop in place, but the inertia of running downhill proved too much. With the grace of a sack of potatoes rolling down a staircase, he went from one defensive stance into another, then seeing that it wouldnt work, turned to the left changing the direction of his run back up, until he finally came to a standstill.

Sweat and shame drenched his clothes. Good thing there wasnt anyone to see. If this had happened on Earth, he could have gone viral as part of YouTubes most embarrassing video clip compilations.

*Im definitely not doing that again, Dallion told himself. Not until I get to learn acrobatics.*

A series of green linesseven, from what he could tellappeared all over the front of the boys body. The trial run was over. From this point on, the pack wouldnt let him have any free kills.

*Damn it!*

Dallion spun around just in time to see four panthers heading his way. They were using the same tactics as before: two were attacking low, two were attacking high, with the rest waiting in reserve. This time, though, he was prepared. The boy took a sidestep to the right, then slashed at the leaping creatures. The action caught the duo by surprise and completely unable to avoid the attack.

Not so confident now, are you? Dallion followed through by matching the red-green footprint markers to spin in place, then slash at the remaining two ground attackers.

**COMBINATION ATTACK**

**Dealt damage increased by 200%**

**COMBINATION ATTACK**

**Dealt damage increased by 200%**

Two more enemies poofed into nothingness. As successful as the attack was, though, it wasn't without cost. Two bolts of pain shot down his forearm, almost making Dallion drop his sword. His leg wasn't feeling all that better either. Combat twists and turns had become among the things he shouldn't do for the rest of this battle.

**Realm section mended!**

**Overall completion 71%**

*So, this is what status effects feel like in real life.*

Dallion looked around. There was no sign of the rest of the pack. It appeared that the cracks were going about in packs of four. Provided that remained to be the case, he had four groups left. Not an impossible task, though no walk in the park either.

Breathing through his nose, Dallion waited for the next attack. Moments turned to seconds, then to minutes, yet nothing came. Was it possible that the rest had given up? If a guardian could do it, why not these creatures?

Hopeful, the boy turned around, searching for a notification rectangle. Alas for him, there was none. Instead, he noticed a rather large black dot further up the mountain. Initially, it looked like a trick of the light, a cloud shadow, or just a figment of his imagination. Slowly the dot grew. In several seconds it had acquired the unmistakable form of a panther a very big panther an incredibly big panther. By the time it had come close enough for an attack, Dallion wished he had run all the way off the mountain. Interestingly enough, no green markers had appeared.

Aren't you a big one? Dallion asked.

If the other creatures were an indication, the lack of a white rectangle suggested that the giant panther would die with one hit. Somehow, though, Dallion doubted that to be true.

Where's the rest of your pack?

The boy looked around. They had to be here, especially if this beast was their leader.

Are you taking me on alone? That's noble of you. I don't suppose we can call it a draw? *It sort of worked in Monty Python.*

The monster growled, but it was more than a growl, as if a dozen growls had merged into one. Eight pairs of eyes emerged in the creature's body, each with their own set of jaws underneath.

Dallion swallowed. The giant panther wasn't the leader of the pack, it was the pack.