

Tutorial 121

Chapter 121: Mage Hunters

It's been already a few hours, and while running and avoiding the revenants' attacks, I was able to level up once by burning a group of Rottenfang vermin. I invested the gained stat points into constitution.

Hey, it's something, isn't it? But at the state I'm in, it feels like pouring a glass of water and hoping to save your house from burning down.

I'll die if this continues much longer. That's something I can say with certainty.

If I don't find Lily or if there won't be a healing aura, I'll die even if I get rid of the Templar Revenant that blocks me from strengthening my body.

My body is just that ruined.

Broken bones, bloodied left arm, a few stab and slash wounds from the Rogue Revenant. Pathways, muscles, and insides ruined by my creation of constructs and by my careless use of Kinetic Mana heart.

The state I'm in won't disappear after I rest for few hours. Strengthening my body to ignore it won't heal it either. So what is the solution?

Obviously, it's more abuse.

More mana flows inside my body, and I loosen my regulators, getting more energy out of my heart, and I seemingly carelessly handle bursts of mana that flow through my body.

If I have to die, I won't go down like a slowly dying candle. I'll burn like a wildfire.

The speed I'm moving at is now even quicker than ever before. I propel myself, I boost my legs to dash fast, while in the air I propel myself once more, my seemingly bottomless mana easily handling all of it.

Once in a while, a disruptive skill hits me, and a few times I crash down to the ground, barely strengthening my body against the impacts or absorbing energy from my fall, only to push myself again up and running.

The two monsters continue to track me with ease and even after I put some distance between us. Every time I stagger and slow down, they are there punishing me with a few more wounds or by making my mana clash inside my body.

But I'm improving.

While I push my body to the point of breaking, my skills break through as well. I [Focus]

[Focus - lvl 30 > Focus - lvl 31]

I grab my mana every time the Templar Revenant disrupts it and I force it under my control, reducing the impact it has on my body. I also continue to try to fight against the monster's skill.

[Mana Manipulation - lvl 31 > Mana Manipulation - lvl 32]

I keep boosting mana inside my body, making it flow faster and stronger to do as much as possible in the time when the Templar Revenant's skill isn't affecting me.

[Mana Surge - lvl 16 > Mana Surge - lvl 18]

And I continue to try to kill the Rogue Revenant every time it reaches me, but never having enough time to do it because of the other monster.

[Redistribution - lvl 19 > Redistribution - lvl 20]

[Armament - lvl 24 > Armament - lvl 25]

[Oscillation - lvl 21 > Oscillation - lvl 22]

And I continue to kill every monster we meet along the way. Gargoyles, Rottenfang rats, chameleon bats, Alghouls, Wererats. I kill any monster I'm able to.

[Lvl 86 > Lvl 88]

That makes my constitution a whopping 80 points high, yet my mana is still at 264 and with my battered body and control over mana constantly disrupted, I nearly can feel life escaping my body, only my will and [Focus] keeping me on my legs, the monster either unable or not smart enough to disrupt this skill.

Yet even during all of this, I feel my mind weirdly relax. There are only two outcomes possible. I'll either die or I'll survive, nothing else matters right now, and I'll put as much effort as I can into it.

To the last breath. To the last beat of my heart.

My mana explodes and using as much as I can, I absorb the inertia of my movement and two heartbeats of my heart that's now getting 40% of my mana. Using all of this energy, I throw myself backwards right towards the Templar Revenant and at a dizzying speed passing by the second monster that is still fast enough to react, and another slash appears on my back.

But I ignore it and a dagger forms in my hand, the color is solid blue and more notifications sound in my mind as I make it as dense as possible and coat it in disruptive mana. I once again absorb my inertia and kinetic energy, this time using it to boost my body, making it faster and increasing my endurance.

The Templar Revenant used its disruptive skill 1 second ago and it seems like his "cooldown" is 4 seconds, judging from attacks before.

So I slash against the monster, that's barely able to react, slower than the Rogue Revenant. Squeezing the weapon in my hand as hard as possible and slashing against the monster with all the resentment I'm able to collect, I continue to track its movement.

I'll hit him. He's too slow, he won't be able to dodge, he didn't show as fast movement up until now.

The Rogue can't reach me, it will take him around a second or two to get there. Then it will be too late.

My dagger will hit and even if Templar Revenant somehow shortens its cooldown and tries to disrupt it, my [Disruption] around the blade will counter it. If not, then the blade itself is dense enough to handle disruption for a while. The blade will separate its head from its body.

I can do it.

Then, the Tempest Revenant disappears, replaced by the Rogue Revenant. The two monsters switching places.

The Rogue blocks the attack of my blade with both of its daggers, mana coating them and saving the daggers from breaking. A kick hits my chest, breaking one of my ribs and throwing me backwards, right towards the Templar.

Another disruptive wave hits the dagger in my hand instead of me and slowly dissipates it. Still having my body strengthened I dodge under the Templar's slash and then throw myself to the side to avoid the Rogue.

And I run again.

How much blood does a human have? And how much of it can I ignore with my now inhumanly strong body when compared to a normal human?

Also, I'm tired, so tired.

While running and jumping from roof to roof, avoiding two jerks hunting me and killing some monsters once in a while, I keep wanting to just sit there and give up.

Everything would be better than this, wouldn't it? I just need to stop for a bit and it will all stop, I did enough.

Yup, such and similar nonsense goes through my head. But who am I? Why would I give up now? I didn't even reach my goal, I didn't even see what there is to see. There is so much more to do.

So yeah, I better get my act together and stop sobbing. Just push through like you always did, filter out useless thoughts and focus.

And keep going.

I leveled up one more time and invested my stats into dexterity for the first time. As expected, it didn't help much, but I tried it.

I also tried to kill the Templar Revenant one more time, this time again the Rogue swapped place with him using some sort of skill to do so. I partially expected it and still wasn't able to finish the guy.

My reward is one more wound.

Then I finished another Side quest: Kill 600 enemies

I ate the little food I got and drank the water and as a reward, I picked a javelin, thinking that a physical weapon might work.

I did throw it with the full power of my body and boosted it with [Redistribution]. The weapon broke against the Templar Revenant's armor.

The system did not disappoint. The common rarity weapon was as bad as expected.

And these two, don't they have anything better to do? Just leave and go hunt Sophie or something. Now I'm also curious how the heck are others alive when there are jerks like these two around.

So yeah, just go and hunt others. But don't worry, after I become a bit stronger I'll come back and destroy you. Oh, I will totally not let this go.

Unsurprisingly, the duo continues to go after me and even after stretching my [Perception] as far as possible, I don't feel others.

The only thing that changes are the houses that become nicer and nicer, some of them now even with walls dyed in colors and there are no roads made from dirt anymore. All are made with cobblestones and I'm not sure, but I think I see a higher tower far in the distance.

It's hard to say if there is some ambient healing aura but that's it, as I pass and notice a few marks that point towards the hideout the natives told us how to identify, I decide to finally risk it.

Mana floods my body and for the last time, I turn and dash towards the annoying duo so used to hunting mages.

Chapter 122: Saved?

This time all my attention is on the Rogue Revenant and oscillating mana appears around my hand as I let the monster reach me.

I'm slow, my body barely boosted, as I only focus on enduring the disruptive skill of the Templar and it does come. With the help of [Focus] and [Mana Manipulation], I'm able to endure it and barely dodge a stab against me. At the same time I too, attack, my hand aiming right at the monster's body.

Four seconds until the Templar disrupts my mana again.

The Rogue dodges by tilting but I send a short burst of mana through my body, taking a small step back and barely avoiding another stab at me. I twist my upper body and dodge a kick aimed at my chest. The monster is faster than me, but I continue to look through its attacks while the Templar, who is much slower, is getting closer.

Three seconds remaining.

The oscillation flares up more and I kick at the monster, to which it dodges slightly to the side, stabbing towards my face. I tilt my body, letting the dagger slightly graze the side of my neck. What is another small wound at this point?

Two seconds remaining.

I send another burst of mana through my body and this time I feign my attack, making the monster dodge to the side. Only then do I use another short burst to change the direction and slash against its neck.

Seeing that it won't be able to dodge, I feel the monster collect the mana, wanting to swap the place with the Templar.

One second.

[Disruption] tears apart the skill and my hand separates the monster's head from its body in exchange for one more wound on my left arm that uselessly hangs along my body.

My heart beats once and with the force of my will, I send a shockwave of kinetic energy towards the Templar, throwing him away from me, only to be immediately hit by a disruptive skill that makes me lose my strengthening for a moment and the pain I'm used to so much again hits me.

But this time I do not run.

Two more heartbeats and another cone of kinetic energy hit the Templar, barely causing some damage, only denting its armor. The monster seemingly slashes through the attack.

I grab one of the Rogue's daggers from the ground and I send my mana through it, making it oscillate along the blade. The Templar reaches me and sends another wave of disruptive energy at me and I throw the dagger towards the monster.

The skill targets the dagger and disrupts the mana on it instead of hitting me, which makes the monster tilt its head in a surprised motion.

Got you.

This time my [Disruption] hits the monster and its armor loses its glow to my extreme pleasure.

How does it feel?

Two more heartbeats later, I release all the kinetic energy and the monster's head explodes. Notification about the kill sounds and a long, shaky breath escapes my mouth as I lean against the chimney. With closed eyes, I regulate the mana going into my Kinetic Mana heart and continue to use it as much as I'm able to increase my endurance.

As I cautiously approach the edge of the roof, I lose my balance. While falling down I absorb the inertia of my body, yet I still collapse onto the ground, landing hard on my knees. But I force myself up and get to the spot where I saw the marks and start tracking them to the hideout.

Noname (Hell, group 4) -Ehm, I might need some help. I'll leave my mana signature near one of the hideouts.

Someone sends a message about noticing some fight far away from them, saying they will look around, but my vision is blurry and I barely see the letters I close the community. It's silly in my current state but even asking for help is hard for me and usually, I would just try to suffer through this all on my own.

It's stupid I know. But I am stupid. I'm the most stupid person on this goddamn floor. Well, maybe with the exception of Lily. She is also extremely stupid. Who the hell sacrifices their arm for some maniac even knowing that they can restore it?

At a speed that could be barely considered crawling, I find the hideout and get inside, carefully closing the door in a way the natives told me.

Outside, further away from the hideout, I leave one of the mana stones I found. I do it after filling it to the brim with my mana, which might help people to find me.

Inside the hideout, I fall down on my ass and lean against the wall that's nicely cold and then I tear and cut apart the usable clothes and tie them around my wounds. I don't know how much it will help but I'll try everything I can.

Then I quickly glance through the notifications that I'm barely able to read.

[You have defeated the Rogue Revenant - lvl 113]

[Lvl 89 > Lvl 90]

[You have defeated the Templar Revenant - lvl 116]

[Lvl 90 > Lvl 91]

[Redistribution - lvl 20 > Redistribution - lvl 21]

[Disruption - lvl 17 > Disruption - lvl 18]

[Oscillation - lvl 22 > Oscillation - lvl 23]

All the stat points are already invested in constitution, but damn, it's not helping much. Meanwhile, I regulated even my first construct, Reinforcement, and I'm sending as much mana to it as I can, hoping that reinforcing my body will help a bit together with the symbiotic transference of [Redistribution] that I actively use to keep my endurance higher.

And now I need to stay awake and keep my skills running. I can't even use as much mana as I would like because of my circuits and my weak body.

But hey, there is one good thing. Thanks to my increased constitution, the tiny scratches I got while crawling here are healed.

“...”

Yay?

Forcing myself to stay awake, I start examining my body and trying to replicate Lily's or Hadwin's weaker healing skill. I take the tiniest amount of mana and start sending it towards one of my multiple wounds, I continue to try to replicate what their skills did. I try to do it by "feel", I try to do it more logically.

I even try to use mana to close my wounds by creating thin threads. It partially works but the thin threads disappear the moment I stop focusing on them.

Then I try using [Armament] to and instead of armor try to create some sort of bandage around one of the wounds on my arm. It works surprisingly well but the moment I stop focusing on it, it slowly disappears.

Interesting, I should be able to create longer-lasting mana creations in the future so this could be interesting to work with.

" ... "

A few seconds later, the pain hits my body and I realize that I dozed off and the symbiotic transference stopped working. I quickly shake my head and burrow my nails inside my closed palm to force myself to stay awake.

This is dangerous, in the future I'll have to try to create a construct that would keep using energy from the kinetic mana heart and turn it into endurance. Or I could stop being a dumbass for once and pick a passive, trait, or something that would increase my endurance or regeneration, that would be nice.

When I try to open the community I'm unable to do so. It's getting harder to focus on anything other than keeping the Symbiotic transference running and I even had to reduce the amount of mana Kinetic mana heart is getting as I start being unable to control even the smaller amounts that I did use up until now.

It's getting colder and through blurred vision, I watch my right arm shaking, my mouth filled with the rusty taste of blood. Of my own blood.

The hideout feels empty, dark, and cold. Just a small, dirty room somewhere in abandoned parts of a massive city on the third floor of the tutorial.

So that's it? Is this the end? If it is, it's a pretty shitty one.

With my eyes closed, I let the image of Lissandra show in my head. The most powerful person I've met up until now. Not only when it comes to raw power. She easily had the strongest will out of anyone I've met up until now in my life.

And for that only, she was beautiful.

Remembering her last moments, I get on my feet and stand up.

I'd rather die outside, than here in this damp room.

Mana starts moving around my body as I open the door, sending a wave of [Perception] as far as I can and feeling three presences.

Nice, they feel strong, dying to some random rat would feel terrible.

I take a step outside of the hideout and then everything becomes black.

When I open my eyes the first thing I see is the ceiling of the hideout I tried to leave and some blurred face in front of me. I just notice the black hair.

Huh? Lily? Goddamn girl, I love you.

But as I start checking my body I realize that the mana that flows through it isn't the warm mana that Lily uses. It's different and it somewhat strengthens my body in a similar way my skills do, it also calms down my mana and stops it from going wild.

The person doing it is very skilled, that much I can tell.

I force myself to blink multiple times my vision gradually focusing and the face in front of me unblurring. And here I slowly recognize Sophie. She is saying something while stopping my mana from going wild and strengthening my body.

Before I realize what I'm doing, I swing my hand and punch her right in the middle of her face, sending her backward with a bleeding and broken nose.

Chapter 123: You owe me

"What the fuck!" Sophie screams at me, already getting on her feet and holding her broken nose, blood flowing down her fingers. "You asshole!"

"Great to hear that from you, mind blender bitch," I hiss and try to stand up, only to be sent back on my ass and having to deal with my mana and strengthening my body instead of what probably Sophie did up until now.

"Mind blender? Are you dumb?" Mana flares up around her and a second later a short burst of electricity hits her, causing her to twitch like she's hit by a taser. Only then do I notice Tess sitting in the corner of the room, carefully watching us.

"Don't do this Sophie," she says to the brunette and then turns to me, "Hello Nathaniel, long time no see."

"Hey," finally some friendly face, but not having the energy to talk more, I put it all into keeping myself alive. Huh, maybe Sophie was doing something useful. Can she continue?

I look at her angry eyes and broken nose and the first thing I want to do is to hit her again and then ask her to help out a bit more. Should I risk it and ask?

"Sophie, can you help Nathaniel again?" Tess says instead of me.

"After he punched me straight in my face? Goddamn Tess, he broke my nose," her voice is slightly muffled as she says so, "And how the hell is he even moving in such a state? He should be long dead and yet he had enough energy to boost his movement with mana and punch me!"

"Nathaniel is in a very... bad state, I believe he wouldn't do that normally, right Nathaniel?"

"I would."

"..." Tess pauses, "You are not helping much. Can you [Focus]?"

"I am the entire time."

Tess only shakes her head and turns to Sophie, "You owe him, Soph, he did keep your sister alive, you know that, so stop complaining and help him too. Lily will heal your nose."

That finally makes Sophie stop and with one hand still holding her nose, she steps closer, carefully, as if expecting me to hit her again. And she is right, it's totally something I would like to do now.

"Goddamn, Tess, do you see him now? He wants to punch me again."

"He won't, but if he tries to I'll zap him," Tess says shortly and turns to me, her eyes serious, "Because it would be all for his own good."

Her words hang in the air and I just sigh and lean back, closing my eyes and feeling Sophie's hand touch me again.

I boost my Reinforcement and [Focus] and start examining my body, looking for some sort of mental fuckery she could do to me, but there is nothing, not a single whiff of her mana near my brain or anywhere close.

Instead, I feel her infuse me with her mana and that mana goes near my wounds and muscles, keeping them strengthened and closed. It's not healing them, but it's helping me to endure and making the wounds smaller by stretching them, making them easier to heal.

She also uses what I guess is her [Manipulation] to calm down my mana. She can do that only after I allow her to do so, which I reluctantly do, yet still carefully watch her.

"Isabella is safe and Biscuit too, together with people from Hard difficulty. They met Lily and Kim and they are together in a hideout," Tess starts, "Isabella told everything to Lily and Lily let us know through the community, so you don't have to worry."

The young blonde continues to observe me and Sophie and I realize that even though it seems like she trusts Sophie, she is still keeping a watch on her.

"My brother, Hadwin, and Maya are fine, but we still don't know where exactly they are," another voice sounds.

Only then do I realize there is a fourth person in the room, Aaron, I recognize him from his brother by the slightly different mana signature.

"I see, but you should be careful. The bigger the group, the stronger monsters track it," I say shortly and close my eyes.

"Nathaniel?" Tess says and I open my eyes looking straight at her, "I'm glad you are fine." A tiny smile appears on her face and I nod.

"It's good to have you near again," I answer back.

"We will get you to Lily after the night ends, so please go and sleep, I'll take care of everything, okay?" she continues.

Goddamn Tess, are you maybe an angel? Are you trying to make me fall in love with you? How are you so cool?

Yet, even while not fully trusting Sophie, I decide to trust Tess and let my mind wander.

POV Tess Hansen

I watch as he quickly dozes off and then finally let the worry appear on my face again.

"How is he, Sophie?" I ask.

"The hell if I know," she holds her still bleeding nose and with her other hand she is touching him and keeping him alive, "From what I see he should be long dead, Tess. Damn it, I don't even understand how he could move his mana to boost himself even in such a state. And so quickly!"

"Maybe he really wanted to punch you," Aaron says, trying to alleviate some dense atmosphere but quickly shuts up after Sophie looks at him.

"Tess, he... he did experiment with his own body, he did modify it even. I can feel it now, he created new pathways and even changed the trajectory of some existing ones and there is this weird thing around his heart," she cuts off, probably examining him a bit more while infusing his body with her mana and manipulating his mana to stop it from hurting him further.

"It's been only a bit over three months and he is already doing stuff that could be comparable to heart surgery, that's just not normal, he will kill himself like this," Sophie adds.

"That sounds like Nathaniel I know," when I say that Sophie looks at me, her face still confused, "Your and my definition of normal and effort are different from his."

Even though I said that I can't help but worry after looking at his sleeping body. He is so thin and lost so much weight. He is pale and the wounds all over his body look terrible and are still nothing in comparison to his internal ones.

Yet even in this state, his eyes were wild and lively as he punched Sophie.

"Soph," I start a bit softer this time, "make sure to keep him alive until we meet with Lily, okay? You owe him," I remind her one more time.

The brunette just turns to me, annoyance on her face, "I will, Tess so stay quiet so I can focus, okay?" She then takes her hand off her face, revealing a broken nose, and wipes her bloodied hand into what remains of Nathaniel's shirt, a tiny smirk flashing before she gets back to work, droplets of sweat appearing on her forehead soon after from the strain it puts on her.

"Any news in the community?" I ask as I turn to Aaron and he just shakes his head.

"Only Lily wanted to rush here even though the storm is outside," he says.

"I always said it, that girl is stupid!" the voice that says that is Nathaniel's, and all of us turn to him with shock.

"Nat, why are you not sleeping?" even I'm surprised by a hint of annoyance in my voice.

"I wanted to check if mind blender missy won't try something right after I fall asleep!" he then turns to Sophie that still keeps her hand on him, "and I did not experiment on myself. It's all precisely calculated magical surgery! I did a lot of testing!"

"Tess, can you zap him?" Sophie asks.

In the end, I didn't get zapped and fell asleep even without Tess's help. One part of me wants to get angry at her but the other one totally understands her and realizes that she would totally do that - for my own good.

And what the heck is this piece of iron that permanently hovers near her? It's of a similar shape to a javelin and knowing a bit about her skills I can easily imagine how much damage it can deal.

She is currently scouting outside with Aaron and I'm left behind inside the hideout. Well, I'm not alone.

"So you didn't find the mana stone I left behind?" I ask one more time.

"How the hell do you expect us to find a mana signature so small? You are lucky you left the hideout for a bit and I sensed your mind," the one to answer is Sophie and I just stare at her for a bit.

I'm prejudiced so that's why every word she says somehow pisses me off?

"Huh, you want to punch me again, don't you? I can see it in your eyes," she quickly adds.

"Yes, I want to." I agree easily.

She smiles at me, her hand still touching my shoulder and helping me to strengthen my body with the help of her [Mana Infusion], "You helped my sister so I'll let it pass, I'll even forget about the punch. As I said before, I owe you a lot. But," her eyes become sharp as she looks at me, "do not push it."

I see so even she changed a little bit within the tutorial.

"Sophie," I decide to be direct, "let's not act dumb, okay? I'm sure at this point you do realize that you did mess up things or two with my memories on the first floor," an emotion appears on her face for the tiniest split of a second, something I identify as regret, "it will be me who will decide how much you owe me." My voice sounds sharp even to myself.

I make sure she is looking into my eyes and wait. I allow her to push a bit of her mana into my body and she uses it in what I guess is a similar way Isabella's skill that feels the intentions of other people works. I let her feel all my emotions.

She then doesn't say anything and the silence once again fills out the room.

But even that is good enough as an answer for me.

Chapter 124: New Skill

[Manipulation]? Get away from me with that crap! I want [Mana Infusion]!

As we awkwardly sit there with Sophie touching my hand and infusing my body with mana, I continue to observe it, and the more I watch, the more I like her [Mana Infusion].

She is directly infusing my muscles and organs with mana and then, with the help of her [Manipulation], makes them stronger. Can something like that even be seen as manipulating something? I don't know.

I just know she can infuse my muscles and organs with mana. When I'm strengthening my body, it's more like I'm coating muscles with mana, some kind of power suit or layer if you will.

BUT!

If I learn her skill, I'll be able to infuse them directly with mana, and as more time passes, I should be able to learn to permanently infuse, and change them instead of just temporarily quasi-strengthening them.

Wait a moment, does that mean I can remake my body to be mostly made from mana sometime far in the future?

Oh boy, let's rather not think about it, that sounds too far even to me. Step after step!

And being as irreparable as I am, I'm already thinking that it might allow me to circumvent the system and strengthen my body without needing to put stats into it.

Sure, I'm doing something similar with Reinforcement construct and Symbiotic transference, but they can be canceled, I need to permanently increase my stats.

Huhuh. I'm stupid, am I not? Well, I'll think about it. Future problems for future Nathaniel, screw that jerk!

Now then, how did she infuse her mana inside my muscles and organs? How is it possible that this skill allows her to partially ignore bodies' natural resistance against external mana? Did she move it like this?

"What are you doing?" annoyance is noticeable in her voice.

"I'm testing something, can you try to infuse my right hand with your mana for a while?" I ask and she does so with a sigh.

And I watch the movement of her mana, movement of my mana. How it passes through my skin, and how it reacts when touching my mana. There is a hint of [Mana Manipulation] in this skill.

I stop strengthening my body and leave it up to Sophie and pull all of my [Focus] into observing her skill, ignoring slowly ramping up pain and the state of my body.

I ask her multiple times to do some changes, to try it on my shoulder, to use more mana, to use less mana, move it faster, move it slower.

I ask her to try doing it while I defend myself, and I ask her to observe my tries.

And it's as I thought. Sophie's [Manipulation] is a higher version of the manipulation series skill. For example, [Mana Manipulation], or if there are such skills as [Fire Manipulation], [Mind Manipulation].

It works in a similar way as I did evolve my [Mana Perception] into [Perception] that allowed me to perceive not only mana, and I still am not sure of the limits of what I can perceive.

The same goes for Sophie. Her [Manipulation] should include all sorts of manipulations, and it's only up to her what she decided to master or is more inclined to master.

But even as she is now, her mastery over mana is really amazing. Probably the best out of our group if I'm not counting myself.

That would usually make me think how unfair it is that others started with so powerful a skill, but as of late, I have been thinking over [Focus]

But no worries, I'll fix it.

Then a notification rings.

Congratulations, you have acquired a new skill!

[Mana Infusion]

Good, it looks like I was right and my good handling of mana helped me to get this one, I just needed a little bit of push and observe the skill a bit as I tried to do something similar to it a lot while on the second floor.

As always the system doesn't give explanations to active skills, but I'll learn it on my own, now then, how is she using it?

I grab and move my mana, infusing at first something simpler with my mana. My wounded left arm. I send mana inside the muscle and it's not as straightforward as it sounds. I infuse the muscle with mana, its entirety, and then cautiously I move that mana, trying to strengthen the muscle but from inside, taking some inspiration from Hadwin's [Strengthening]

[Mana Infusion - lvl 1 > Mana Infusion - lvl 2]

[Mana Infusion - lvl 2 > Mana Infusion - lvl 3]

[Mana Infusion - lvl 3 > Mana Infusion - lvl 4]

Huh? That's easier than I thought it would be?

I finally open my eyes and look at Sophie, who probably felt what I'm doing, and her mouth is slightly agape, and then she closes it and says nothing.

One hour later, my [Mana Infusion] is at level 7, and I walk on my own, infusing and strengthening my body in a similar way Sophie was doing up until now.

To be honest, I was a little bit worried that others might be a little weak. Yes, I know, I know. There is no way Tess would be weak, yet there was still this small hint of worry.

And now as I gracefully jump from roof to roof together with others, I watch her obliterate monsters.

The weaker ones are dealt with by her lightning attacks that she sometimes imbues into pieces of stone from the houses around and throws at the monsters. It looks like she needs something to imbue them into for longer-ranged lightning attacks.

As for stronger monsters? I barely get a chance to see them. Tess has a skill called [Farsight] so she sees them sooner than I can perceive them, and in these cases, the spear that she told me is of Uncommon rarity, flies into her hand to be imbued with white and red lightning and thrown by her and further boosted by her [Psychokinesis].

The spear is flying so far it's hard to track with eyes only and leaves behind itself a trail of white and red light only to usually obliterate the monster it hits. A few Gargoyles flying in the air die like this, and even I'm impressed by her accuracy

The only problem is that she often has to move a bit closer to get the weapon back, so she only uses it on the monsters she can't finish with material that is around.

Aaron is really fast and with a skill that confuses the monsters he sneaks on them to stab them a few times before repeating it. Really annoying fighting style.

As for Sophie? She is controlling all the weaker monsters, mostly Rottenfang vermin, and there are already a few dozen of them. Without hesitation, they fight as she wills them to do so.

What I also noticed is that she is infusing them with her mana with [Mana Infusion]. She first connects and manipulates them with [Manipulation] and then through that link, she sends her mana to them, to boost their physical capabilities by a tiny bit.

I could take them on. Yup, I'm totally sure I would win in a 1v3.

I just can't help myself and have such thoughts. It's fun to theorize, so I'm already planning the fight in my head as we move towards the other group that we told to stay in the hideout.

It's confirmed that the bigger the group, the stronger the monsters appear so we don't want them to move around with so many people. We can do that after we regroup.

Now that I think about it, we only miss Hadwin, Maya, and Dennis and the band is back together? Dang it, so many people, but hey, Hadwin will take care of it, we have a deal right? And as for me, I can go hunting, this time maybe even with Tess. The same as on the first floor - good old times.

It takes us quite some time and it's not because of slow me, yup, totally not because of me. Bad weather or something.

But when we get there the others clear out the surrounding area and Sophie releases her hold on the rats they then quickly kill them and I gracefully let them without trying to kill steal from them.

After making sure we are alone we enter the hideout that is bigger than the ones before and located under one of the houses, a massive underground area, looking more like a cave than a cellar. There are a few mana stones imbued here and there leaking a little bit of yellowish light. The hideout, as ever before, is covered in an intricate web of mana that I'm still unable to fully comprehend.

But before I have more time to observe it I hear a happy scream that I identify as Lily and a petite black-haired girl comes running towards us with a big smile on her face. I notice that she is still missing her arm under her elbow.

Her eyes land on me and her smile becomes a bit less cheery and with every step she takes towards me it becomes less and less of a smile. When she finally stops in front of me, the smile is gone from her face.

Chapter 125: Sharing pain together

She then doesn't say anything and only stares at me. The others are already gone and now there is only this girl, a head and something shorter than me. Her small face is framed by black hair and a tiny nose rests in the middle of it.

Ehm? Please say something.

She does not. Her eyes are piercing me as she grabs my left hand, the one she sacrificed her own left arm to restore. It's still pale, hairless, and both wounded all over.

Without uttering a word, she sends her mana inside it. That warm mana of hers, feeling like a nice breeze in the hot summer. My arm starts itching immediately and I can feel it healing bit by bit along with my body.

Finally, she lowers her gaze and focuses a bit more on what she does, and I breathe out in relief.

It takes 10 more minutes and Lily stops only when she is totally out of mana, even I can feel that. There is barely any mana left in her body. The mana she could use to continue to restore her left arm.

When she looks up at me her bangs are sticking to her forehead that is wet from the effort she put in. And it was worth it, my body is better now. Not nearly close to being fully healed but I don't feel like I'll drop dead the second I stop focusing on my skills.

"You are so stupid," she says.

The heck?! "You are stupid," I say in defense. Who is more stupid? Someone that fights to survive or someone that sacrifices their own arm?

Yeah, I thought so. Stupid girl.

"You are stupid or I will not heal you anymore," she says sharply.

"I'm stupid," I say.

"Louder."

"I am stupid!" I say loud enough so everyone in the room can hear it and the girl finally smiles at me. A small, tired smile. Her petite body moves and she gives me a short hug and then she leaves, running back to the others.

Silly girl.

This is the first time I see Sophie cry as she hugs and holds Isabella, constantly apologizing to her. The little girl cries too and both sisters then spend another hour sitting in the corner whispering something to each other, still in a hug.

After a while, Sophie stands up and comes up to me, her eyes still slightly red and her nose bloodied and still broken as Lily is out of mana.

She opens her mouth to say something and then pauses, going with a shorter version "I owe you," she says simply, to which I only nod shortly.

She then leaves to rejoin Isabella who smiles and waves at me, holding poor Biscuit in her arms. The best doggo on the third floor already gave up on his fate and just lays there, to be used as a toy by a little girl.

"Well, that was unexpected, " says Tess, who is sitting near me, her javelin resting against the wall behind her.

Kind of? But yeah, I still don't trust her.

"Still, be careful around her," I say to her and Tess nods to that.

"Obviously, I'll be," her eyes then check my state again and she asks, "How long do you think it will take you to heal?"

"Around two days if Lily only heals me and every time she gets some mana back? But you shouldn't wait for me. Go out and hunt, natives have some trap that they use to catch sparrows, they also know where to find a bit of water. A jerk named Cipher will tell you more, he did spend some time with them."

I continue to tell all the info I collected up until now and she listens carefully, only here and there asking a few questions.

"I'll try to hunt these sparrows with my skills, maybe my ranged attacks will be able to do it," as she says so, I can hear some hint of pride she has in her own skill.

Yet, remembering the sparrow I tried to hunt, I can't help but smirk inside. She will be so surprised.

"Yeah, you can try that. It might work with you," I say out loud.

Suffer, suffer the same way I did. Be beaten to the pulp by pigeon-sized sparrows and then come back, ashamed and with a broken spirit.

You will share my pain!

Three hours later, after talking with Cipher and others and leaving for the hunt, Tess returns, her hands empty.

She doesn't even look at me and only moves to her spot, putting her javelin against the wall behind her.

I then watch her open and clench her fist while dozens of small stones start to float around her as she practices.

Welcome to the club.

After Lily heals me for the second time and just straight up refuses to fix Sophie's nose before I'm fully healed, I go to Kim, while leaving the girls to deal with it between the two of them under the watchful eyes of Tess.

Cipher and the icy guy and Goldie are spending most of the time with natives who seem to be close to worshipping Cipher, who is able to create water from the air.

Well, it's not like they are fully within his grasp, no no. The divine beast hasn't given up yet!

I don't know what that silly corgi did but it must have been something amazing as they still keep coming to him and share food with him every time they catch something.

Basking in the glory of our group member we - members of the tutorial are getting something as well. The meat from sparrows seems to be highly caloric but it's not nearly enough.

Not for us. The natives always eat only a few bites and it seems to be enough for them. They are all thin and also barely drink some water - even if they have weaker bodies than us from the tutorial they seem to be much better adapted.

I pause the thought as I stop in front of Kim, and the boy who is sitting on the ground lifts up his head and looks at me, Aaron is near him.

Not wanting to make it more annoying I just say, "Thanks for taking care of Lily."

I know how hard it must have been for him, fighting all the monsters while taking care of an unconscious girl. I also know how he feels about her, probably not fully forgetting about what happened to his friend Kevin.

So yeah, I appreciate that as I owe Lily and now I also owe Kim as well. It's annoying but it feels right.

What appears in his eyes is somewhat of a surprise as he stares at me wordlessly for a bit, only after a while realizing what's happening and nodding his head.

"Good job," I add and before I leave I notice that these two words surprised him even more. As if he didn't expect them at all. But even though his eyes are wetter now he doesn't seem to hate it and I leave.

One day and something passes in the darkness of the hideout. The entire time I do not leave it and barely train my body, I only move my mana, getting used to my new skill and observing my constructs. I also plan and examine my body and continue to watch the way Lily heals me.

Natives and even members of our group keep moving in and out of the hideout. Hunting monsters, hunting food, helping Cipher level up his skill that is currently the main source of water for us.

We also find the temporal spring natives did talk about. It appears in the tunnels not that far from our hideout and it only lasts for one minute and they bring back the water. They are happy with the amount but in my eyes its so little and the others agree.

It's already decided that we move further inside the city. To hunt. To find more resources and to finally start doing something about our Floor Quest.

It will be dangerous, but we don't have a choice. As always the system continues to force us to move where it wants us to go.

"Status," I whisper, saying it out loud for the first time after a long time.

[Name:Nathaniel Gwyn]

Difficulty: Hell

Floor:3 - Saint's Eternal Bastion

Time left until forced return:4y 266d 21h 31m 36s

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

Lvl 91

Strength: 25

Dexterity: 27

Constitution: 86

Mana: 265

[Primary Class:Mana Channeler]

[Sub-class:Unavailable]

Active skills:

Focus (Dual Focus) - Lvl 31

Mana Manipulation (Advanced Mana Manipulation) - Lvl 32

Perception - Lvl 25

Oscillation - Lvl 23

Redistribution (Symbiotic Transference) - Lvl 22

Armament - Lvl 27

Mana Surge - Lvl 18

Disruption - Lvl 18

Mana Infusion - Lvl 8

Constructs:

Reinforcement (Construct)

Kinetic Mana Heart (Construct)

Mana Regulator (Construct)

Passive skills:

Mana Flow (rare)

Cerebral Harmony (rare)

[Upgrade token:1]

[Difficulty change token:1]

My first goal is to finally reach level 100 and finish the side quest that will reward me with a body upgrade token. The next step is to get [Armament] to level 30 and complete the second side quest that will reward me with a skill upgrade token.

I also need to level up Lily a bit and my body is already itching to finally test out my new construct.

There is so much to do.

Savant (Hell, Alone) -Hey Nname, guess who is already level 100?

Chapter 126: The Sparrow Hunter 1000

Hadwin (Hell, group 4) - I think we are closer to the middle of the city than you guys, so we will wait here. Don't forget, there is a massive area that is covered in a poisonous cloud but you can pick an air purifier from side quest rewards. We found a few uncommon gear parts inside such a cloud.

Sset (Hell, group 4) -Understood, in a day or two we will start moving. But first, we will need to get our teamwork together and decide what to do with the natives.

Hadwin (Hell, group 4) -Sounds good, take care.

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) -Hey, Hadwin, did you guys find Ligma?

Hadwin (Hell, group 4) -Huh, I don't think so? What's Ligma?

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) -Ligma ba...

I turn off the community before Brainiac finishes his sentence and take in a deep breath. Goddamnit, I despise that annoying hideout.

Also, super thank you, Lily, my body feels like new! Well, it's weakened because of how hungry I'm getting and there's not much water, but hey, I'm still alive so there is at least something positive.

"Same as before?" Tess asks while her javelin hovers behind her back.

There are currently only two of us and the main goal is to level up as much as possible. As during the good old times on the first floor.

"Sounds good," there is no need to say more, and finally, without feeling like my body is about to break apart, I send mana through it and start sending some of it to the Kinetic heart, immediately using the energy I get to strengthen my body even further and to use it to propel myself ahead.

I jump from roof to roof, feeling the air hitting my body and I fly through the air I can't help but feel happy, and just for the fun of it, I release a massive wave of kinetic energy, breaking the roof I'm on and flying high in the air where I pause for a second, taking in the view before falling down and continuing to run.

The first monster Tess finds and points me towards is Gargoyle. A flying kind that is able to strengthen their bodies.

So to test it out I release the kinetic mana heart a bit more and turn all the kinetic energy it produces into strengthening my body. I increase my endurance and speed, the result showing immediately as I dash at the speed of someone with a much higher stat in physical attributes.

Not even hesitating I jump only with the strength of my body and mana and fly through the air reaching the Gargoyle immediately and grabbing its neck only to pull it down towards the ground with me.

This time I do not absorb the energy of my fall and only increase my energy further as my heart beats and sends waves through my body.

We crash through the side of one roof and fall on the street, the monster immediately attacking me. But there is no damage and I even take some energy from its swings to strengthen my body even further. The gargoyle continues to try to hit me, to try to break my arm, to scratch me.

Even without using [Armament], it doesn't hurt me with normal attacks.

I let it go for one more minute, increasing my efficiency a bit and testing if I can strengthen only one body part instead of the entire body. Then I use Symbiotic Transference upgrade of [Redistribution] to boost my strength and tear the monster's head apart from its body.

[You have defeated a Gargoyle - lvl 71]

Quite low level, but good enough for testing.

"Are you done? There are 2 more Gargoyles coming and one Alghoul." Tess says, squatting on the roof over me and looking down with something that I identify as amusement.

I jump up and join her on the roof, "Can you only support me for a bit? I want to test a few things."

"Sure, take your time."

"Thanks," I say and dash towards where the other monsters are coming from.

This time I feed my Kinetic Heart with more mana, around 40% that I regulate with Mana Regulator. Every beat of my heart sends plenty of kinetic energy through my body and before it poses any problem I turn it into a thermal one and a massive yellow flame blazes into existence, reaching far in front of me and roaring audibly.

I [Focus] and narrow the cone until it's as thick as my leg and shoot it towards the gargoyles that fly through the air, avoiding the flame that tracks them until I burn the wing of one of them and it falls to the ground, only to be hit by the full power of my flame and burned to ashes in a bit over two seconds.

[You have defeated a Gargoyle - lvl 75]

The other gargoyle charges me, tattoos glowing on its body. It reaches me quickly and for a moment my flames disappear only so a shockwave of kinetic energy hits the monster and sends it flying away.

Quickly after I transfer the energy into thermal and the flame roars once more, burning the monster that continues to charge through them, its tattoos glowing more and more as I also increase the power of my flames that are getting stronger with every heartbeat of my heart.

I narrow the cone even further and continue to focus it on the monster's chest that slowly loses its arm, then leg, and finally falls to the ground, its body glowing red and burning, the heat palpable in the air.

[You have defeated a Battle Gargoyle - lvl 81]

There is much more kinetic energy that I was getting from absorbing from my mana orbs that I span around my body and it also allows me to focus more on skill usage. Plus I'm not even using the full power of this newest construct so that's something to be excited about.

Good! I would say it was worth it nearly dying because of it, well, and a few more things. But who watches that?

It's all in the past!

Now then, it's time to level up my [Armament]

I turn to the alghoul that is down on the streets and the mana projectile appears hovering over my shoulder I make it as big as an arrow and then add more of them. Screw efficiency, I have plenty of mana, don't I? I shoot them all towards the monster, further boosting them with the kinetic energy that my heart generates.

The street becomes destroyed, obliterated by the rain of mana arrows, yet the monster still lives. Greenish flames flow all over its broken body that starts to mend.

Oh, I'm not done yet.

For the next ten seconds, I continue to boost dozens, hundreds of mana arrows towards the monster, destroying the street even further and then finally overwhelming its healing capabilities.

[You have defeated an Alghoul - lvl 84]

Next to attack is another Battle Gargoyle and this time I try something different.

Mana flows from my body only to start forming into a shape of a javelin that is as long as my body and hovers to my right. I send more and more mana to it, making it denser and its color becomes a darker shade of blue.

This time even my [Mana Surge] activates and I give it as much kinetic energy as I can and shoot it at the monster that is on one of the roofs.

The javelin misses but then it just continues to fly and pierces through what seems like at least five houses then hits the ground and stab itself so deep only a little part is sticking out.

And only then it starts to slowly dissipate, the weapon dense enough to endure this all.

Did you see that, Tess?! My Sparrow Hunter 1000 is ready!

The young blonde woman doesn't seem to be too impressed and her javelin flies too, followed by a train of lightning that accurately pierces through the chest of the gargoyle and a burst of lightning flows from it, frying the monster that falls down dead.

Show off.

We spend the entire day hunting the monsters and slowly they start appearing stronger with even some named ones in between them. I once again finish the side quest and immediately drink the water and eat the little food I get, as the second reward I pick warm clothes again that I immediately put on myself.

To complete the side quest again I need to kill 700 enemies, the system being true to its asshole tendencies.

But I do not despair. The reward for all this hunting is 5 levels and one level in [Armament] and surprisingly even in [Mana Infusion]

Both skills work really nicely together and the skill I learned from Sophie allows me to push my mana creations even further and infuse them with more mana and faster. Something I didn't think of but now when I use it it makes a lot of sense.

So with 4 levels missing to 100 and 2 levels missing to getting [Armament] to level 30, we return back to the hideout as it's already darkening outside. But that's not all. I'll take some rest, I'll drink some water and eat some food they got as the leech I am and then I will go outside and hunt.

I'll go and see what lurks around during the night.

Screw Savant's level 100.

Chapter 127: Into the night

First, I make sure Lily gets some water and food; she seems really thin. Well, all of us have lost some weight. The interesting thing is that if we went through this back on Earth, most of us would be done by now. It shows that even without the usage of skills and just by having mana and increased stats, our bodies started to change.

At what point do we stop being able to call ourselves humans? I do not know, but to be honest, I don't care that much.

I am me, and I'll stay me. If I decide to change, it will be my decision, and I do not care much about what others will call me.

Another thing is Biscuit. I like him, I really do. The doggo might be silly, but he is surprisingly smart and gentle with all of us. Maybe not everything is lost when animal archmages take over. Biscuit might protect us, remembering the bits of food we gave him back on the first floor.

Still, does he really have to use eight massive mana arms to move, using them instead of his legs that hang in the air? He looks like a massive spider with the body of a pottymouthed telepathic corgi.

It creeps me out, so I use [Disruption] to cancel this abomination. I don't put much effort into it and only send a wave of disruptive mana towards him.

The corgi resists.

"..."

What?

The heck?!

He glances at me with a cheeky look in his eyes. He is laughing at me, is he not? He is totally making fun of me!

I send another wave of disruptive mana towards him, and finally, the eight arms made of mana disappear, and the corgi plops down on his short legs and woofs at me.

I succeeded, but I know it's only the beginning of the end. The corgi has already started to learn how to fight against [Disruption].

What have I done?

After booping Biscuit's snout like five times – I gotta enjoy it while I'm stronger – I join Isabella and Sophie. I just nod at Sophie, but the little girl gives me a small, short hug and then sits down, smiling at me.

"You were totally right! Doggo's snout is amazing to boop!" Her face glows as she says so.

"I told you! Also, you should try to gently pull his whiskers; he then woofs softly. But only do it two times; after that, he becomes super annoyed." I tell her.

Isabella giggles. "I'll do that!"

Out of all of us, little Isabella lost the least weight, and I lost the most, even though I probably finished off the most monsters. Hmm, is there any correlation?

"Who are you?" Sophie asks with a weird look on her face.

So rude, but anyway, I wanted something.

I hand her a small mana stone. "Can you infuse it with your mana using your skill?"

She nods and does just that, and I grab the stone from her and leave afterwards without saying anything else.

"What the hell?" I hear behind me, but I ignore it.

I examine the mana stone that is now leaking her mana quickly, and I do it until it's fully empty. Then I go to Tess and ask her to do the same, and she does just that, and I sit next to her, examining the stone again.

After all the mana leaks, I do it as well. I do it two times, and in both cases, I use as similar an amount of mana as I can.

For the first try, I use only [Mana Manipulation], and for the second one, I use [Mana Infusion].

In both cases, I examine the stone until the mana depletes.

The results are as follows:

[Mana Infusion] fills up the stone faster, much faster, and also fills it up more evenly. Also, mana infused by this skill stays in the item for longer. I already tested it and tried to infuse mana into stuff like a piece of cloth, a normal stone, and iron weapons.

When I use the skill to infuse it into a mana stone, it feels much smoother, fills faster, and holds the mana for longer. On the other side, the materials I tried are much worse.

But it's possible to use [Mana Infusion]

On the other side, if I or people try it with [Mana Manipulation] or without the skill, or with a similar skill, it fills slower, and the distribution is much worse. For example, there are some places that fill with a much denser amount of mana, and some not as much, and it sometimes even damages the item.

Even as high as my [Mana Manipulation] is, it still can't compare to the other skill when it comes to infusing mana into something.

But that's just it. The skill only allows me to infuse an item with mana, and what happens afterwards is something other skills have to deal with, and I have a few really good ones!

Even strengthening my body is now better, and it alleviates some pressure in comparison to doing it in a different way. But the biggest difference comes up with the use of [Armament]. The two skills work amazingly together.

[Armament] is much faster and allows me to create even denser weapons or armor around my body. Also, the shields I'm able to create became stronger.

It allows me to have a much stronger ranged attack without worrying about mana projectiles disappearing or being too weak, and not having to spend so much time creating them that would make them unusable.

Good. Good!

But I will not stop! The next goal is to evolve the skill into [Infusion]. I want to infuse stuff with thermal energy and kinetic energy. I want to infuse my mana projectiles with [Disruption], and [Oscillation].

Well, I could probably do it even now in some roundabout junky way, and I even tried it, but it just takes way too long to be usable, and the effect disappears too quickly when I'm not touching it.

I stop my thoughts for a second and listen. The wind outside still doesn't blow too hard, and I already decided to leave only when it's the strongest so I'll have some backup source of kinetic energy.

I also know that I'll have to rely on perceiving mana, and it's almost impossible to see out there.

"Do you still want to go out?" Tess asks. "Lily will be angry."

"It's fine. It's easier to beg for forgiveness than to get permission." And what is she? My mom? I'm not scared of her.

But seriously, I hope she won't refuse to heal me.

"I'll go with you," Tess adds simply, and one look at her tells me enough that she did think it through and knows how dangerous it might be.

Well, who am I to refuse? Tess is her own person, and she should be able to hold her own out there. I already saw it multiple times.

"Sounds good," I answer, and this time, it's her who nods.

Now then, back to experimenting. I still should have around one hour left.

It's dark, and we can barely see anything. The wind continues to pummel against our bodies and to be honest, it's stronger than I expected it to be, to the point that it surprises me that it doesn't destroy some of the buildings.

I already have my [Perception] running as a replacement for my sight, but what about Tess? Is she even able to see with her [Farsight]?

When I turn to her, I notice that she is looking straight at me, and when I wave my hand, she waves it as well, perfectly copying my movement. It's telling enough.

Okay, her skill might be better than I thought, allowing her a bit more than just seeing far. Lightning also keeps crackling around her body every once in a while.

The mana I feel from it is sharp and strong.

Time to go. My heart beats, and with a push against the ground, I propel myself high onto the roof, sending a wave of mana into our surroundings, and then turning to Tess, who also shakes her head.

Nothing so far, so we move in the direction we decided on before, not too far from the hideout so we can get back for some help if needed.

After around five minutes of running, we stop, and I start sending waves of mana into our surroundings as some sort of lighthouse, and we wait.

Once in a while, I absorb some kinetic energy from the wind and throw it against the houses around us. It doesn't take much time for me to destroy a few of them. Doing so, I also realize that this kinetic energy from the wind is a bit harder to use than the energy from my Kinetic Heart.

Interesting. More testing needed!

When Tess finally spots some monster, I stop with that and instead switch to [Armament]. The armor that appears around me is not as translucent as before, and instead, it's a darker shade of blue that is still somewhat see-through, but much stronger.

The armor is a weird combination of medieval-age-like armor and modern armor that special ops or soldiers tend to use. It's also not too bulky and without useless parts.

In the end, a helmet appears around my head, a helmet with a smooth front without any holes for the eyes or nose.

With my new skill, I make them all as strong as possible and even infuse my body with mana before strengthening it with Symbiotic Transference.

Then I sense the monsters I can't see yet, jump onto the roof.

Chapter 128: Tricolored Mana

I grab hold of the wind around us, and for a split second, silence ensues, only for me to release all the energy and blast away the mist, and then a short blaze of flame, lights up the surroundings. Before the wind and mist come back, we spot the monster.

It's twice my height, tall and slim, with a body covered in dark black fur. Even under the fur, I can see dexterous and dangerous muscles. It stands on its two legs with arms long enough to nearly touch the floor.

Its head is elongated into a massive maw filled with long, sharp teeth, and above it are two eyes that glow in the surrounding darkness with a green light.

The monster is partially rotted, with missing pieces of body and fur, revealing sickly grayish skin and terrible wounds all over its body.

[Undead Werewolf - lvl ?]

The monster charges right after the mist fills out the surroundings and its target is Tess. Chunks of the roof are torn apart, and nearly the entire roof flies at the monster, only for it to bulldoze through and reach Tess, who stands in a battle stance, lightning creating something like armor around her body.

I can feel her using mana, and the monster tries to hit her, only to be stopped by an invisible barrier around the blonde and be sent flying backward, the red and white lightning cracking and burning its body.

I dash as well towards the werewolf, which quickly lands on its long thin legs and sprints towards me. I strengthen my body and armor even more, and our bodies meet in an exchange of blows. In the end, I'm sent flying away from the roof, the armor around my chest dented but quickly repairing.

I push against the wall of the house I'm about to hit and propel myself back onto the roof, the house behind me exploding under the pressure.

On the roof, Tess is already exchanging blows with the monster, her nimble body dodging every hit she can, and when she is unable, an invisible wall stops the monster. The entire time, lightning crackles around and through her body, seemingly making her faster.

Then the javelin, floating over her, comes flying down with terrifying speed, barely missing the monster, which dodges with impossible speed. The javelin pierces through the roof and most likely the entire house.

I create dozens of mana arrows and make them as dense as possible, and at my signal, Tess jumps away, and they all fly at the monster, boosted to a terrifying degree. But the werewolf roars, and the mana flares up around it.

The monster's body becomes a wreck under the power of the mana projectiles, with most of its head missing. But its body grows even bigger, and its fur becomes even darker, while it keeps its creepy long-limbed proportions and decaying body.

It howls, a terrifying sound audible even through the raging wind, and I feel my body freeze in place. Immediately, I create two massive shields made out of mana and send them in front of Tess, where they slow down the monster. Next, I send a disruptive wave of mana around my body, freeing myself and propelling ahead to clash with the monster that has already dealt with two shields.

The monster is now bigger, and I'm barely able to push it far enough, but both of us fall from the roof, only to continue the fight on the ground. A sword made of mana appears in my hands, and I grab the monster with [Redistribution] to slow it down, but it's unable to fully stop it.

My sword slashes multiple times a second, yet it is unable to kill the monster that ignores the wounds and dodges anything too dangerous. Only for it to howl again and get healed, and I have to use disruptive mana to free myself.

I grab the kinetic energy I absorbed and turn it into thermal energy, but the flames... the flames don't come out. The moment they should appear, they get canceled by the strong wind and something else, something in the wind. The flames immediately die off.

Without any warning, a massive javelin comes flying down from the sky with a speed that is impossible to track, and it pierces through the monster, a hook at the end of the javelin tying it to the ground. This allows me to cut off one of its legs and then dash away on Tess's signal.

The house to my right explodes into rubble that immediately starts orbiting around Tess, together with cracking lightning. Half of the house spins around her like a massive orb, crashing against the nearby houses, and the sound of rumbling is audible even through the roaring wind.

The rubble spins faster and faster, and I reach out towards the werewolf and put everything into slowing it down and absorbing the kinetic energy of its movement. It howls again, but it's too late, and all the rubble flies at it, pummeling, tearing, and breaking its body into a bloody mess.

When the attack is finished, I send a wave of kinetic energy towards the wolf, pushing away the rubble, and dash at it with a sword in my hand. It dodges my slash, but the stone filled with lightning mana explodes, removing half of its head, and I see it opening its mouth.

My heart beats, and my speed increases, elongating the sword that cuts off the monster's head. Then it slashes through its chest, and to make sure, I use [Disruption], boosted with [Mana Surge], to cover the area and continue to push against the werewolf's mana until finally, the notification sounds.

[You have defeated an Undead Werewolf - lvl 119]

[Lvl 96 > Lvl 97]

[Disruption - lvl 18 > Disruption - lvl 19]

[Mana Infusion - lvl 9 > Mana Infusion - lvl 10]

Damn it, not even a named one.

When I move closer to Tess, she pushes against the wind around us and creates something like a small spherical bubble around us that partially blocks the roaring wind.

"Poor people that used to live in that house you just wrecked," I can't help but say.

"What are you even talking about? It was like that when we got here," she shoots back.

"That's true, some unfortunate natural cause, I guess."

"Yes, it's really weird," she shakes her head, and a smile flashes across her face before it disappears, "You know, you've changed a little bit," she starts again, this time a bit more carefully.

Well, wouldn't it be weird if I didn't? But yes, she is right, and even I noticed it. As for whether it's for the better or worse, only time will tell, but so far... it's not that bad, I guess.

"How is your mana?" I ask instead.

"It's okay for now. We can continue," she answers while stretching a little bit. "You know, I missed hunting with you. Sophie and Aaron aren't exactly a fitting combination with me."

"Tess, are you trying to summon a death flag?"

"We can continue to hunt for a bit more, and then I can get back to my family and finally fulfill my dream of opening a small restaurant," she continues to joke and then pretends to pull out a photo from her pocket. "This is my daughter and wife. Aren't they cute?"

As she jokes, her face is still somehow deadpan and we move inside one of the houses after I shoot out another makeshift signal flare, trying to lure more monsters to us.

The room is dusty, but the furniture, even though old and breaking in some places, seems clearly more luxurious than the ones before, a clear sign that we are getting closer to the middle of the city.

I then start creating a javelin made of mana and making it more dense and durable with the help of [Mana Infusion] and [Mana Manipulation], all while Tess continues to watch me carefully.

"That's a lot of mana," she says.

"It is?" I ask back, seriously curious. Both of us went through different situations, and even our builds are different, so how does she see what I do?

"Yes, even I can tell that without examining it closer. Usually, weapons made of mana are more see-through and feel weaker, if I can say so." She then reaches her hand and touches the javelin, and I release my hold on it, and it falls into her hand.

"It's lighter than it should be, but that's probably because of the mana," she says. After she says so, I can feel her reaching to it with her [Psychokinesis]. "Hmm, it's also really hard to control, even though you are not touching it. Maybe it's still partially considered to be your mana?"

"I think so. You would need a much higher level to be able to control the ambient mana and mana of other people, even if it's something like this. It is still considered to be mana and not an item."

I reach out and make it move to me, easily overpowering the hold she has over it.

One more minute passes, and I continue to infuse more and more mana into it, making the color a darker and darker shade of blue.

Hmm, how far can I push it? It still doesn't feel like I've reached a limit, so I activate more of my skills, and then getting an idea, I use [Redistribution] too in combination with [Mana Infusion].

Why didn't I think of it sooner? I should be able to [Redistribute] my own mana, right?

Notifications ring in my head, and a massive amount of mana quickly leaves my body, moving at dizzying speed through [Mana Infusion] into the javelin in my hand.

The weapon made of mana at first becomes darker, and then it starts changing. Wisps of vibrant light blue and purple pass through it, mixing and creating a beautiful tricolored shine, and the javelin starts to hum in my hand, seemingly becoming even more dense.

I quickly stop redistributing mana, and even then, I feel the weapon I made fighting against me, threatening to explode and release the massive amount of mana I infused it with.

Oh, this can't be good.

Chapter 129: Let's be more careful

I stand up and quickly throw the weapon I created with all the force I can muster, even boosting it with kinetic energy.

The javelin flies, shining in beautiful light blue, light purple, and dark blue colors, leaving a trail of mana behind it. It pierces through three houses before it untangles, releasing all the mana it held in one massive explosion.

Threads of mana wave from the javelin, slashing and cutting apart the surrounding area. Tendrils of three different colors and even a shockwave can be felt as the densely squeezed mana expands.

As a result, a massive area around the javelin ends up destroyed, breaking apart, and debris of stone and wood falls down with loud noises, releasing dust and small pieces of debris that immediately get blown away by the wind.

The best part is that it wasn't even meant to be an attack. All of this was only densely squeezed mana untangling as I released my hold over it and stopped forcing it to move.

Yes, I said that, the best part!

The heck, how great is that? Sure, I could do something similar using [Redistribution], but that's not the point.

Just how strong can my armor be? How strong can my projectiles be if I learn to control it a bit more? And why the heck did I not think of redistributing my mana to make it faster and push through the limit I felt? It sounds so logical now that I get to it.

I quickly check the notifications.

[Redistribution - lvl 23 > Redistribution - lvl 24]

[Mana Infusion - lvl 10 > Mana Infusion - lvl 11]

[Mana Infusion - lvl 11 > Mana Infusion - lvl 12]

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

[Armament - lvl 28 > Armament - lvl 29]

Oh my, I like this! Let's try it again!

"Nat," I hear, and turn to Tess, who looks at me with a serious look on her face. "That javelin contained more mana than my entire mana pool."

Tess is there with her stern gaze, her features in a serious expression. The weight of her words hangs heavy between us. She seems to be warning me, indirectly telling me to be more careful.

Ok, that's quite scary now that I think about it.

"Can you keep watch?" I ask instead and don't even bother sending another signal. If no monsters come after this, nothing will lure them closer.

The blonde just shakes her head and sighs, yet she still keeps watch. Her eyes continue to pierce through the darkness around us and look for mana signatures moving towards us.

And I create a small orb of pale blue mana and start infusing it with as much mana as I'm able to. At some point, I have to stop, unable to push more. It just feels like there is resistance as if the orb is full. But then I use [Redistribution]

This time, I'm more careful and observe as the light blue and purple colors get inserted into a dark blue orb. The colors do not mix to create other colors; instead, it looks as if they all swirl inside the orb. Imagine dropping drops of dye into a glass of water and then swirling it without the colors mixing.

Actually, it's quite beautiful.

Seeing that I can push even more, I force the mana inside the orb, and now I notice that it really has become heavier. How does it even make sense? If mana had such weight, wouldn't I become heavier every time I use mana?

Yet it still somehow does, the tricolored orb with mana swirling inside it and with every passing moment threatening to explode right there in my hand.

As I watch it, it just feels like something I shouldn't be doing, like something I shouldn't be ABLE to do.

At that moment, I hesitate. All my senses warn me, nearly screaming in my head and as I'm about to push even more mana into the small orb, I slowly come back to reality, feeling as if I just woke up.

This is dangerous; I should give it some time and not push it the way I did when creating my second construct. There, I also hurried too much and made my move earlier than I should have, and it almost cost me my life.

So let's wait. Let's think about it more and examine it more.

As for the orb, I shoot it as far as I can, and after a few seconds, it expands into a bubble with a surface made of tricolored mana, a bubble as big as an entire house.

While expanding, the orb's surface is firm, winning against the material the house is made of and pushing it away while staying anchored to the place as it expands.

Then, the bubble made of mana bursts open with an audible pop, and as if affected by some extremely strong siphon force, the pieces of the trashed house are pulled to where the center of the orb used to be, crashing against each other, and some breaking even further as they spin for a while around the center.

Then, for a short moment, silence ensues before the wind and mist fill out the empty space in the air. The house is gone, destroyed by an orb not bigger than a grape. An orb I could fill with even more mana.

Yup, let's be more careful. Very careful.

What appears after a few more minutes is something we decide not to fight and hide from without any hesitation. We came here to level and hunt, not to die, you know. This is just a straight-up unfair match.

The monster is massive, easily as big as a house and a bit, walking through the streets without any worry in the world. Its head towers over the slightly smaller houses. One of its eyes is missing, and the other one, milky white, glows in a sickly green color, shining even in the darkness of the city and the mist.

The monster walks on all fours, weirdly limping yet moving nimbly. Over the middle of its back, three projectiles made of green mana float. Mana arrows, each as big as a car and elongated into a sharp shape.

Yup, Bambi's curse is back and stronger than ever before.

[Undead Aberrant Deer - lvl ??]

So yeah, we both sit inside a house while the massive undead deer passes by. Each of us limits our mana as much as we can and pulls it all back into our bodies in an attempt to stop its leakage outside that could warn the monster.

There is also a worry that it might find us through heat detection or sniff us out or whatever, but that's something too late to worry about.

The massive monster appeared almost out of nowhere and rushed towards where my orb exploded, destroying a few dozen houses that stood in its way, literally bulldozing through them without taking any damage.

There isn't a single thought of fighting it in my mind. I touched its mana only once, and the feeling of it disturbed me deeply.

This is not a fight I should take right now, not even with Tess by my side.

So there we are, both close to each other, nearly hugging, as I try to create a disrupting field around us, reducing even the small mana particles we leak to smaller ones, all while only controlling my mana.

Tess's eyes are firm, and even in this situation, she is reliable as always. She is not using any skills at all, and we are not even looking towards the monster, as there are monsters able to detect even someone just looking at them.

Hell, the Undead Aberrant Deer could be now easily staring through the window at us.

The only sense left to us is hearing and feeling the vibrations. Even through the raging wind, we hear the monster's steps and feel vibrations going through our bodies every time it takes another one.

The monster continues to destroy a few more houses near the palace where the orb exploded, and we only sit there, waiting for minutes after which the silence ensues after a few more steps the undead monster takes.

But we continue to stay in that same place for one hour longer, not daring to make any move and limiting our mana. Only after a long while, I let out a quiet sigh of relief.

We survived, but goddamn it, that was tense.

Finally, after an hour of sitting in the corner of the room, I open my eyes and lift up my head to look outside at the result of the monster's attack.

And there, staring right at me without blinking and from behind the window, is the eye nearly as big as me.

The deer's only eye that glows in a green color.

Chapter 130: How much is your mana?

I put my hand on Tess's shoulder and squeeze it strongly, giving her a warning not to move at all and not to do anything stupid. I can feel her body tense under my hand as she, too, stares right at the monster's eyes outside the window.

She then does nothing to fight and continues to suppress her mana while staying quiet.

The eye continues to look at us, a milky white blind eye of the undead aberrant deer. There are no eyelids to blink, and the sickly green color slightly lights up the room.

I calm my breathing even further, and even though of the situation we are in, my heart continues to beat calmly. I avert my gaze and just look at the green light that lights up one of the walls.

A few moments later, the light disappears, and I see the monster walking away after I look outside the window. It moves quietly, not even touching the houses near it. This time there are no vibrations as it walks.

A few more minutes pass, and then a massive wave of mana hits up. The monster jumps high in the air and then starts running on it as if it's ground, while small flashes of mana light the surroundings every time its hooves hit the air.

It finally disappears and I let go of Tess, and we continue to hide our mana until the morning when the wind stops and the mist disappears.

"Well, that was something," is the first thing she says, her voice still bearing some tension. "Maybe we should just try to find monsters next time instead of luring them to us?"

Maybe we should just not leave the hideout at all?

"What level do you think it was?" Tess asks.

"150 to 300. I think that's the range for two question marks," I say and explain a bit more when she asks me.

"Interesting. I think I agree with you and I also have a few theories."

"That makes me curious. Do tell," I say as we walk back to our hideout, side by side. The tension is slowly disappearing now that there is a light.

"First, the wind is here either created by the field around the city or used to cancel out any flames that could burn the city. It's probably also partially working during the day, but it's much stronger at night for some reason."

"Oh, that's quite a good theory," did she get that from seeing my flames die out quickly in the wind?

"The second theory is that the mist somehow confuses the monsters and blocks their ability to sense mana, helping people hide during the night. Only really strong pulses of mana allow the monster to detect the source."

"Are you maybe really smart, Tess?"

She laughs shortly as she jumps over the debris, softly landing on her feet. I can see her using some mana to do so, "It's just basic observation."

Not wanting to be left behind, I also add something, "And I think that the version of the story for this floor that the natives told isn't something we should fully trust. Not because they are lying to us, but because it's all just rumors and legends they have."

"Sounds reasonable. The quest objective is to put the saint to rest, which made me think that the saint will be undead, as it says to put to rest instead of killing. That's quite weird," she says.

"But it won't be as simple. It says 'to final rest,' so maybe he or she really became undead, for a while, after dying and then returned back to life? That could explain why the field around the city is still working." While waiting for her answer, a small orb of mana floats in the palm of my arm, and I continue to infuse it with mana.

"That makes me curious about what we'll find in the middle of the city, with hopefully more water and flora. And also, what do you want to do with that Cipher guy?" She looks at me, a slight annoyance flashing through her eyes.

I see, she dislikes the guy as well.

"Let him deal with the natives. If he goes too far, I'll do something about it. And we just need to keep him alive for water," I say, and to be honest, I really wanted to try to learn his water skill, but now?

I reach the point of resistance, and I can't infuse more mana into the orb. So I use [Redistribution], and my mana pushes through that resistance, and wisps of purple and light blue mana start filling the dark blue orb, mixing and swirling inside.

"I'm still amazed at how much mana you can pack into that thing," Tess's voice is curious as she stops and observes the orb floating in the palm of my arm. "Is the orb the best shape for training?"

"Yup, it feels the easiest to use, and it's the simplest to create," I stop pushing mana inside the orb, and currently, it's only half as strong as the one from last night. "But you know, it's getting kind of scary, Tess."

"Oh yeah? Did you realize it only now? How much of your mana did you even use on the one from before?"

"I don't know, maybe 10%?"

Her step falters, and she stops and gives me a long, examining look. "You are not joking," she declares, reading it from my face.

"Why would I lie to you about that..."

She lifts her hand, stopping me from talking. "Nathaniel, my mana stat isn't even at 100. How much is your mana?"

After a quick check, I tell her, "284 and growing."

Another long pause, and then a sigh. "Let's ignore the numbers for now, but the last time you created the orb, it felt like something I would need all my mana to create, yet you said it was only 10%. The numbers don't fit."

"Oh, it's simple. Efficiency. I have multiple skills and passives and even a trait that help me with that."

What do you think I risked my life so many times for? I would be super mad if something like this wasn't the case.

She opens her mouth, pauses, gives it a bit more thought, and then opens it again, "You do you, Nat. Just be careful, okay?"

That's why I like Tess.

"Yup, do you need any help with your skills? Maybe I can offer a bit of advice," I offer, and I believe that. I know that I'm good when it comes to handling mana.

And I'm also curious about her skills, to be honest. Currently, I do not have time to learn from her as I have a lot to go through, but just satisfying my curiosity a bit is enough.

"Well, my main one is [Psychokinesis], and that's something you probably won't be able to help me much with. [Farsight] is growing nicely; I can see really far, and when I put in effort, I can see mana. And by that, I mean the mana around every person that their body leaks."

"Oh, that's quite cool. So it only works with sight, and there isn't any other sense it affects?"

"Yes, only sight, as the name says. Is there anything you're talking about?"

"Yup, you can evolve your skill..." I then explain my past experiences to her. To her, it's a bit of a surprise, but in the end, she agrees that it makes sense.

However, she still doesn't agree with me on one thing. She wants to keep her [Farsight] to only include sight and take it to the extreme. It's not a bad way to go about this, but neither is mine where [Perception] includes multiple senses. But hey, we will see.

"Currently, I'm working on my [Lightning Armor]," As she says it, lightning starts to crackle around her body, the same she used in our fight versus the werewolf. "It boosts my stats and also has defensive capability."

I can see that she is quite happy with the skill, a small smile appearing on her lips as she manipulates the lightning around her body.

I'm not going to lie; it looks pretty as flickers of red and white lightning crack over her body, making her blonde hair stand up slightly and putting some light on her face, lighting up her smile.

I think it fits her.

"Oh, and one more thing, this one is a bit more weird-sounding, [Declaration]."

The moment she says the name, I know it's yet another powerful skill, similar to [Disintegration] or [Manipulation] and probably [Focus].

"So, what does it do?"

"Currently? Nothing, but I'm trying to Declare this javelin to be mine. If I'm right, it will mean I can move it even if it's way out of the range of my [Psychokinesis]," she then shrugs her shoulders.

"Maybe you should think a bit bigger. How about you try to Declare that your wounds are healed? Or Declare that your weapon is much stronger than it is?" That makes her look at me, and I can see thoughts wildly going through her mind.

"Skills with such unclear names usually have a lot of options to be used," I finish. It's something I've given a lot of thought to, and I don't think I'm wrong.

Level 30 for a skill? That sounds like a beginning. I'm sure as time passes, the level-ups will become much harder, and the skill will become much stronger. Even Lissandra's world-ending [Singularity] had to start at level one, and the same goes for the skill named [Dawn] of the man named Tristan, a skill with a quite silly and not dangerous-sounding name that wiped out the life from the surface of an entire planet.

It's already been 10 minutes since we came back to the hideout when I walk up to Lily, who sits near Isabella and Biscuit, two girls happily talking together while the mighty divine beast endures.

When I get to them, Lily looks up with a smile. "Hello!" she says.

"Kitty man!" Isabella shouts, and I silence her with one long look.

"Never mention it again, and I'll let you play with Biscuit one more time," I say.

"Three times!"

"Two."

"Deal!" she giggles and goes back to hugging Biscuit, who looks at me.

Is this disappointment in your eyes? Please forgive me, Biscuit! I'm a weak, weak man.

But anyway, "Lily, you and I, let's go out."

I need to raise her level a bit since it's too low. Going out with just the two of us will attract less attention when we leave the hideout. Doesn't that make sense?

So, Lily, why are you looking at me like that?