

Tutorial 191

Chapter 191: We have a deal

Not messing around, I quickly explain it to Sophie. "Lissandra left something for me: coordinates to her world. You probably can't see them in the system shop because you don't own any, and they seem high up there when it comes to pricing, but I do. The prices of coordinates start at twenty thousand shards, and some of them are much, much higher."

"So where do I come in?" Sophie asks.

"It's simple. You will learn the coordinates and 'save' them. Then I will sell my coordinates to the shop. If I am right, at that point, the knowledge of them will disappear from my mind, and they'll probably get deleted if I etch them into a mana stone, no matter who holds it." I did think about it a lot, and I'm sure they would disappear from the mana stone. The system wouldn't allow such an easy workaround.

I continued, "Then, you will teach me the coordinates again, and I will try to sell them again. In the best case, I can sell them multiple times as we repeat the process. In the worst case, I can sell the same coordinate only once, and if that happens, you will sell them as well after teaching them to me. This doubles the number of shards."

The system probably won't allow me to keep selling the same coordinate over and over, but it's worth a try. If it doesn't work, I can double the number of shards I get from the coordinates and still retain them. Even that much is beneficial.

Sophie is the most skilled in Group 4 when it comes to handling mana, and the system most likely won't try to delete coordinates from her mind, unlike if they were saved into an item.

I'm sure it will take some time for her to learn them, but it would take much longer for everyone else in the group. Plus, I'm certain some of them wouldn't even be able to do so.

There's also the possibility of using Sophie's [Mind-fuckery] skill and having her just share the coordinates with others instead of making them learn it. That would be great.

"What's in it for me?" An expected question comes from Sophie.

"You can keep half of the shards you get from selling your coordinates. The remaining half you will use to buy stuff I tell you." The offer I give her is fair, I think.

But someone else has a different opinion. "Soph! Ask him to become friends with us instead, and he can keep all the shards!" Little Isabella chimes in.

"Izzy, don't be silly," Sophie's voice is gentle. The expression she shows now is so different from when she talks to me.

"It's you who's dumb, Soph!" The little, angry, kitten-like girl uses her small hand to hit Sophie's arm, to which her older sister continues to smile.

When she turns to me, her expression changes. "I want something else instead," she says.

"Go on."

"Clean slate." Isabella still complains after her sister says that, but Sophie now seems serious.

"Explain," I feel intrigued by what she means.

"I know you have a problem with me, and both of us know why. Honestly, it's tiring to keep tiptoeing around, and you must be aware of it as well," her green eyes don't lie as she honestly tells me what she thinks and wants. "I made a mistake, a terrible one because I was scared back then. What it did to you is..."

"Unfortunate?" I offer.

"Yes... unfortunate. I want you to know I would do even worse things if it meant protecting Isabella," Sophie says. "Much, much worse." Her voice is sharp, and she ignores the worried expression her sister shows.

"That's reasonable," I say. I would do the same. That's where the two of us are somewhat similar.

Sophie nods. "I do think so too." Then she hesitates, "Still, I will continue to do such things. To these fake people from the floors and maybe to other groups if we meet them and I am forced to."

She spends a bit more time thinking or perhaps looking for the right words to say or the courage to say them, "But I don't want to do it to anyone from our group. I don't expect all of us to become friends, but I want to work together with others without having to see them look at me that way. You may not realize it, but most of the others see me in a similar way you do. Even though Tess is trying, they don't trust me fully," before I say anything, she says what I wanted to say, "Not without reason. I know."

"Sophie, you can be more direct with me. Just say what you want to say," I interrupt her this time.

"I want a clean slate. I want to start over and to do that I will start with you, in hopes others will follow. I will even give you all the shards I would make if you want. I just want us to forget the past," she seems like she doesn't know where to put her hands, and little Isabella ends up grabbing them and smiling at her sister as if giving her some bravery.

Then I feel a bit of mana from Isabella, mana that flows into Sophie.

"If I attack you or anyone else, you can do whatever you want. I am not so unreasonable as to not expect that. I just want you to stop looking at me the way you do. Feel free to constantly check the minds of others to see if I didn't mess with them. Or continue to strengthen your resistances every time you are near me or sense me using mana. I already know you do that, and I don't blame you. But please, don't look at me with eyes that tell me you will kill me the moment I make a small mistake or someone uses a skill on you again that would make you less rational."

She pauses, but Isabella uses more mana and that seems to make her older sister continue talking.

Sophie's voice breaks a little, and the wetness in her eyes isn't feigned at all. "It's scary," her voice is quiet, "it's terrifying to be around you." As Sophie talks, Isabella squeezes her hands. The little girl seems proud while Sophie looks like she is about to cry. "I made a mistake, and I will make them again. It's pathetic, I know, it's all consequence of what I did. But I am tired, I'm so tired of shaking every time I talk to you." Sophie falls silent and, after giving her a short hug, Isabella stands in front of me. Her mana and her skill [Empathy] reach out to me, and I allow it to happen.

"I did help you too. I kept watch while you slept, back at the start of the second floor. To protect you from the bad guys from Hard difficulty when you were weak."

"Yes, you did," I agree with her.

"So forgive Sophie. We will give you all the shards too." The little girl is serious, and it takes only a moment for her to gauge my decision from my feelings, and then she goes rushing to Sophie with a big smile on her face.

"Okay," I answer to Sophie, "We have a deal."

Her green eyes follow me as I leave the room, and I leave the sisters to deal with it.

She reminds me too much of myself. I have long since noticed that she is also trying the same way I am.

Anyway, I did it only for the shards and to pay back to Isabella.

Yup.

"So we sold the bracelet you left with us," Tess says the moment I sit down with her and Hadwin. Everyone else disappeared suspiciously.

"Well, I told you to sell it if you really needed to, but was there really such a need?" I ask.

"What, you did? Then why is everyone acting like you will come up and chop off their left leg for selling it?" Hadwin looks between me and Tess for a moment and then realizes it, looking at the young blonde. "Tess..." he almost doesn't seem to believe it.

Tess only smiles shamelessly, "I need to have some fun as well, and seeing them talk like Nat will come back and eat them was somewhat cute."

I can totally understand her. Tess is someone who likes to pull off pranks like that once in a while.

"Anyway, we did have one high-positioned lynthari bother us the moment we entered the city. He really seemed interested in Maya and Lily. You probably already found out how weird they are. He kept lurking around for the two days we spent in the poorer parts of the city, and then most of our valuables disappeared." Both she and Hadwin seem ashamed as Tess says, "I still have no idea how that happened."

"I think that annoying lynthari did it," Hadwin joins in, "He probably wanted to take all the valuables we have and then offer us to work with him."

"I disagree, Hadwin. He would have taken all our valuable equipment too, yet only the trinkets disappeared. Plus, lynthari from what we saw until now seem harmless towards humans. They are weird, and sometimes annoying, but even Isabella didn't feel any bad intentions from them. Not even once in the nine days we've been here. And we met or passed by hundreds of them."

"Relying on her skill too much won't do us any good," Hadwin shoots back at her and they bicker a bit longer, both defending their own opinions.

"So yes, that's when we decided to sell the bracelet. I know you started experimenting with the crown and the sword you left with us is something we can use hunting. We did have Sophie negotiate and she used her skill to get us a much higher price than we would get otherwise."

"Oh? No protections against mind manipulation?" I ask this time.

"We were careful and did check it. You know, at first, she did get some extra food while buying it. Then influenced someone to give her a small discount and such. Isabella kept monitoring the area and Sophie also was careful, and we didn't find any defenses against it." Tess looks into my eyes, "Either mind manipulation is extremely rare and there are few defenses against it, or they never had to deal with such a skill."

"We are testing it slowly. Getting a better price for the bracelet was the first big test, and we might slowly use Sophie's skill a bit more. We could get a lot of secret information, really good equipment that we could even take to another floor."

As Hadwin says that, I also think about a few ideas. If they truly do not have the concept of mind manipulation or it's something extremely rare, we could end up getting the best items this floor can offer. Just by having Sophie manipulate some people. Sure, as of now the strongest ones I saw were close to level two hundred from my estimation, and there could be stronger ones.

That's why we will have to be careful and slowly exploit her skill. It's quite dangerous, mind manipulation, isn't it?

A curious question flashes through my head. What would happen if Sophie returned to Earth now? She should be able to manipulate the most powerful or richest people on Earth to do what she wants.

"That's what happened to the bracelet, Nat," Tess continues, "The house is ours, there is even a big basement that is shielded against mana detection or leakage. From what we know, it could be good enough even for you with your mana, so take a look at it when you are free. The view is nice; we still have plenty of mana stones left."

"They use them here as currency," Hadwin adds, placing a few mana stones onto the table.

Each of them is a bit different, and the biggest one is the size of my pinky. They are all oval-shaped and seemingly beautifully processed. Just a look is enough to tell me which one has the greatest value.

The surprising part is that all of them can hold some mana or be used to etch mana circuits inside and turn them into heaters, make them radiate cold, turn them into lamps. The more expensive ones seem to be able to handle a lot more mana and circuits, but something tells me I shouldn't do that.

"That one is worth a few hundred thousand dollars if we try to convert its value to Earth's," Hadwin confirms.

"I see," I say and put it into my pocket.

Hadwin opens his mouth to say something but then decides against it.

So I take a few more valuable ones.

"Anyway, we were able to find out what Calamities are and identify three out of four," Tess continues, seemingly unbothered. "These three calamities are called as follows: The Fallen Hero, The Living Tree, and The Colony."

Chapter 192: Information on Calamities

"It's one of the information pieces we paid for. I think it was one of the most expensive ones," Hadwin glances at Tess, and she nods, confirming it.

While taking the rest of the mana stones I didn't pocket off the table, he continues, "The first one we learned about is the Colony. We've already had the luck of meeting some of them."

"Good ol' bus-sized ants," I say.

"Yes, millions or perhaps even billions of ants. No one knows. The entire thing we considered a mountain range is their anthills, and they crawl all over it and inside the holes that cover the area." Hadwin says.

He scratches his chin, "The weird thing is that they refuse to leave their area and do not attack if you don't enter their territory. As for where they came from, no one knows. Some people say they came from a different planet through the tear in space. Someone else says they all come from their queen who used to be a strong monster that leveled up in a terrifying way."

"I also heard they could be a failed experiment. A weapon one of the countries created to fight in one of their wars," Tess joins in.

"Well, not like that matters. It's hard to imagine we could wipe out all the ants, the entire Colony that is probably considered to be one of the four Calamities," I say.

As always, the system doesn't hold back when it comes to throwing all the challenges at us. Some of us aren't even level one hundred, so how the heck is it even possible to wipe out the entire Colony?

"Any more info on ants?" I ask.

"Not much, to be honest. Only crazy people go to their territory, and most of the time, they don't come back. But back to other Calamities..."

Before Tess can continue, I interrupt her, "What is down in the tunnels? Are they... weak to fire?"

"They should be full of mushrooms and other stuff ants like to eat. Apparently, they can be a bit flammable, yes. Nat, what did you do?"

"Nothing," I answer quickly. "So imagine if someone, hypothetically and by mistake, did drop an orb full of fire down there; what could have happened?"

"Well, if that fire could set their food ablaze, the result could be quite terrifying, especially down in the tunnels." Tess's eyes are sharp as she says so.

"Well, it's a good thing nothing like that happened," I say.

It's fine. Totally fine.

"Yes, it's a good thing nothing like that happened," Tess's eyes say that she knows.

Dang it.

Tess then sighs and continues, "I did find some info about the Fallen Hero while Hadwin researched the Colony." She flicks a strand of hair off her face, "The Fallen Hero is what is left of someone who died long ago. From what we found, this place also uses titles such as 'Paragon', and 'Champion' that are similarly strong, and 'Absolute'. The Fallen Hero was someone like that, a man, human, that was said to be the Champion of an era a long time ago."

"Currently there aren't any Champions or Absolutes, none that people or lynthari here would know about. The highest level they know about is somewhere in the mid-two-hundreds," Hadwin adds some details.

“As Hadwin says,” Tess patiently continues, “We think the situation will be similar to the Saint. The Fallen Hero is dead and only his body is alive. From what we found out, he is kept moving by an ancient set of armor that feeds on the mana of his still-beating mana heart and moves automatically, killing everyone in sight. They call that armor 'Valorplate' and have long ago lost the knowledge to create them.”

I try to imagine this in my head, and it sounds kind of scary. The body of a champion is used as a puppet by some sort of armor, powered by Champion's still-beating Mana Heart. That is scary.

“Tess, I want that armor,” I say.

“Why?”

“The name sounds cool. Valorplate. Like damn. I want that armor. Do you think it's epic or higher rarity?”

“It's either one of the best possible equipment within the epic category or something a bit higher. It could be that the fallen hero is a Calamity only because of the body of what used to be a champion powering the armor. Also, I think it would fit Hadwin better, with his skill.”

Caught in the crossfire, Hadwin continues to flick his eyes between me and Tess. But I can see it! The greed in his eyes. You can't call yourself a man if you're not attracted to some cool equipment, especially one with such a name.

Tess might be right. I don't even like to rely on equipment, and it would surely be better for someone like good ol' Haddy, but still!

Valorplate.

We're already fighting over the loot, and we haven't even killed the Calamity.

“Any estimation on level?” I ask.

“Three question marks for sure,” Hadwin stretches on his chair, “The fallen hero calamity is on a battlefield, some desert-like area. Once in a while, someone tries to kill him. Either for fame, for the Valorplate, or for levels. Sometimes it's a small group, in other cases an entire army. Yet for hundreds of years, the body of the dead champion in the armor continues to walk around the desert and attacks everything in sight, never leaving the place.”

“We think this floor might have natives of a lower average level than the second floor. The second floor seems to be somewhat special with plenty of Champions, Paragons, and even an Absolute. The 3rd and 4th floors so far seem to have lower-leveled people,” Tess says.

“We found out that this floor is somewhat safe, so we might have even a few years to level up or prepare. We could try to get all the good equipment, maybe we can earn a lot of money and just hire a lot of people to help us finish the quest. There are multiple ways we could go about it,” Hadwin shrugs his shoulders.

“Damn, it looks like you guys were super busy. So what about the 3rd and 4th calamities?” I ask.

“We didn't find any information on one of the calamities, so that's that. As for the third one, it's the Living Tree. It's a giant tree that towers over what used to be the old capital. Some call it the Demonic Tree even,” Tess says, “Apparently, a few hundred years ago, it sprouted out in the middle of the capital and killed everyone in sight. We don't have more reliable information.”

“That's a lot to take in,” I say.

Well, as Haddy said, it's not that bad. We can cheat a bit and maybe hire natives to help, steal, or buy some powerful equipment, observe, get more information, and plan the perfect attack. Out of all the floors we were on, this one seems like the best place to spend some time on. All the calamities seem to be tied to one area, other than the 4th one we know nothing about.

But who do they think I am? Hiring help? Getting overpowered equipment? I'll take on the Calamity on my own. Maybe some other than ants, yup, let's leave ants alone; I don't want to piss them off more than I probably did.

“As for the city, you've already met lynthari. They are weird but somewhat harmless. They live longer than humans, they are born stronger, and most of them don't have to worry about money even once in

their life.” Tess slides a few papers in front of me, “You can go through what we found; Hadwin did a nice summary.”

“Oh, one more thing, probably an important one. Lynthari often are too lazy to do anything and just like to observe humans. The ones that lead the city created an association you can join with your team, or guild if you will. You can even join alone. You pay registration and...”

I interrupt him, “Haddy, are you talking about adventures, rankings, guilds, and quests? Like in games?”

He gives up and sighs, “Yes. It's exactly like that.”

Tess nods in confirmation when I look at her, “You can imagine how excited the boys got when they heard that. They also registered our group as a small guild.”

“What is the name?” I ask.

“Angry Kittens,” Hadwin pushes through his teeth.

Oh boy.

I then glance at Tess, and even though she tries to keep a neutral face, I can see the corners of her lips lift up slightly.

I will turn Angry Kittens into the best guild this place has ever seen! People will keep talking about Angry Kittens in years to come. Angry Kittens will be written down in history as the noblest and...

Why are you hiding, you little shits?

I stop in front of the room where I sense three boys and Lily.

After a knock, I say in what I think is a soft voice, “Hello guys, can you open the door?”

It doesn't work.

"Nat! I swear it was Lily's idea!" Kim blubbers out from inside to Lily's complaining.

"Oh? I don't know what you mean... Kim. Just open the door. I want to talk." Me using his surname instead of his first name seems to cause even more panic.

Then I start enjoying it. Is this what people meant by it being fun having friends? This isn't that bad.

"I heard about the guild name you guys picked. I really like it," I say.

"Fuck, he hates it," I hear from inside, "He won't believe it if we blame it on Lily." The voice of one of the twins continues in a whisper.

"We are friends, brothers almost, aren't we? Min-Jae?" I use my trump card.

"Fuck, Kim, do not open!"

Oh, it seems I have failed. But it's fine; I'm still quite enjoying it. Should I try something else?

"Lily? I wanted to see you." I say again, and in what feels like half a second, the door opens. Lily looks up at me with big eyes.

In the corner of the room, three teenage boys freeze and stare at me like a deer staring at a car.

"See boys? Why aren't you more like Lily here?" I tap her shoulder, "Why are you even so worried?"

I notice Lily trying to lean against me while my attention is on the boys. Damn, she sure doesn't give up easily. I guess I'll really have to reject her out loud sooner or later.

"You," I point at Aaron, "Angry kitten number two. What sub-class did you pick?"

"Diligence," both of the twins say at the same time. "It's already helping with [Connection]

"Yup! It feels like we can keep them up for longer." Interesting, that makes me even more curious about the others.

"Min-Jae?" I turn to the younger boy.

"Envy," he says quietly, looking down at the ground. "I think my skills become a bit stronger when I am against a stronger opponent than me."

"Oh? How does it work?" That sounds super useful.

Seeing my reaction makes the boy breathe in relief, and his eyes glow as he looks up. "Right? It sounds super cool! I only tested it against Tess, and I'm not sure, but I would bet I became a bit stronger."

"Power of love," I hear from Dennis.

"Totally," Aaron adds in quietly.

To annoy Min-Jae, they don't even communicate telepathically and just whisper it out loud.

I let the boy fight and turn to Lily, "And you?" I ask her.

"Not telling!" the petite black-haired girl resolutely shakes her head.

"Yeah, I bet it's because it's lust," one of the twins whispers loudly again.

That almost makes me giggle, especially seeing Lily's reaction.

I then leave the four members of Angry Kittens behind and send my mana through the house to find others. I'm curious about what they picked.

"Me? I picked Patience," Maya wipes sweat off her face and answers easily to my question. "It boosted my [Focus] a bit, but it affected [Armament] the most. It now lasts much longer."

"I think that's a good choice," I tell her, and she nods.

"What did you pick?" she asks, and I hesitate for a moment.

Maya notices that and waves her hand, "You don't have to tell me," she reads the mood quickly and changes the subject. "Tess here, did go with Chastity," she points at Tess with whom she was sparring before I came. Maya is smiling slightly as she does so.

Tess doesn't even seem to be bothered by suggesting the name of her sub-class. "It was an easy decision. Chastity suggests self-control, purity, and clarity. It did exactly that. [Psychokinesis] feels purer and stronger, [Farsight] now allows me to see better, there's some sense of clarity to it, and it feels like I might be able to do more than just see far and see a bit of mana. But I have a feeling that it most affected [Declaration], though it's still hard to explain."

"Pretty good decision," I react, and Tess nods.

Knowing what I am curious about, she answers, "Hadwin went to hunt with Sophie and Isabella. Hadwin picked Temperance and it made his body tougher and [Strengthening] much stronger. I think out of all of us, he has one of the best fits with his main skill. As for Izzy... she told me not to tell you. Something like she will use it as a trading chip for something." Tess lifts up her eyebrows.

Dang it. Do I have to sell Biscuit again just to satisfy my curiosity?

Chapter 193: Welcome gift

Behold, my new house! It has two floors and a sizable garden that seems to be a rarity in the surrounding area. In the garden, there is well-taken care of trees, grass, and flowers. The house itself is

made from wood and big grayish bricks and it's on a hill that overlooks the city, so the view is amazing, and the person who designed the house took that into consideration.

There are multiple large balconies and terraces that offer a comfortable view of the city while still allowing some privacy from the neighbors.

The street the house is on is made of cobblestones, and even the surrounding houses seem to be similarly well-designed.

So, yup, the house is mine and I don't care that Sophie used her mambo jumbo to get a better price for my bracelet that paid for all of it.

Maybe I can just train and experiment here while asking rent from Group 4 which seems to plan to play on the guild and go out for hunting. I won't only freeload but I will also make some money, which are mana stones here, and buy myself some good stuff.

Currently, I'm sitting on the large balcony of my room, and in my hands are papers Hadwin and Tess left for me, all with some basic information they were able to gather.

Most of the info is useless as I don't want to deal with this kind of stuff. As always, I will leave it to Haddy and Tess and if they need any help they can ask me anytime.

I'm like a parasite exploiting my extroverted group members who take care of boring stuff.

Good!

So yeah, there are guilds, there are houses that give quests to those guilds. Stuff like, "Kill twenty giant hedgehogs that started to block trading roads" or, "Bring me a live specimen of a giant ant."

Some of them pay much better than others and the payments sometimes are items, but most of the time they are Mana stones.

The stronger you are, the more dangerous quests you can take.

Exactly like in games, and that makes me curious. This kind of system isn't that bad, so did it come into existence naturally or is it something that the system set up for us, people from Earth? It could be both, and the system is also collaborating with these quests.

One piece of information that I found interesting is that the moment you accept a quest from the adventure guild, the system gives you the same quest and the reward is a few shards. The system, being as greedy as it is, doesn't offer that many shards, but it might change if they rank up and are able to take more dangerous quests.

Angry Kittens have a lot to do. I'm also amazed by what they were able to achieve in just 9 or so days. Sure, they had the cheat code called "a lot of money" and "mind-blender missy", but they were able to collect a lot of information.

Monsters around the city, maps, information on Calamities, details on the city and lynthari, some powerful individuals in the city, information about shops, auctions, blacksmiths, and enchanters. All this stuff. The amount of information is staggering and it all sounds so interesting.

From what I understood, the main difficulty of this floor, which makes it Hell difficulty, is to actually kill one of the Calamities.

How the heck do you kill millions of bus-sized ants? How do you kill the Fallen Hero which is creepy armor using the body of a Champion as a battery? How do you deal with a giant sentient tree that wiped out an entire capital?

Hell difficulty is different here. It's not an imminent danger, just finishing the task is extremely difficult. Plus, with my theory that you can spend an entire five years on a single floor if the floor quest allows it, it is nearly confirmed, and looking at the luxury and somewhat peaceful atmosphere of the city, this floor doesn't seem like that bad of a choice.

Obviously, I won't have that. If the rest of Group 4 really wants, they can stay here, but I will just take a few months to get my rapidly growing power under control, practice my skill, and then I will look to deal with one of the Calamities.

Hmm, the Fallen Hero seems like a good choice. And nope, it's not only because of the Valorplate. Damn, that's a cool name.

Anyway, a lot of stuff to do. When Sophie gets back, we can talk about selling the coordinates. Then I need to check my new skills, especially [Mana Domain], which seems to be the best thing I got from my Primary class.

Then I need to experiment with [Resonance] a bit more. I think I am underusing the skill.

Another goal is to turn [Mana Infusion] into [Infusion], but who knows how long that will take?

Then there are my Constructs that need a bit of upgrading.

Another round of Active Tempering after I get used to my mana a bit more.

I need to test out my sub-class more and the passive it gave me to see if there are any effects I might have missed.

Oh, and then there is my new epic passive [Mana Reservoir]. The passive just creates another Mana Pool outside of my body and who knows where and in what dimension. That reservoir only starts slowly filling when my mana is maxed out, but the advantage is that it doesn't strain my body at all.

At first, I was disappointed and thought that the epic passive might not live up to its name, but it doesn't seem that bad. Already plenty of time has passed since the Reservoir started filling, and it's nearly as big as my current mana pool inside of my body. That's like doubling up my mana for single use. Sure, it will fill super slowly and only when my mana is topped up, but it will allow for some huge burst of mana when it's topped.

So I will wait a bit longer before complaining or being happy. It might allow me to get a bit more mana than my current mana pool.

And then there are also Mana Stones I would like to experiment with. I already started on the floor before, but I plan to create constructs inside of the stones or maybe on the items. That's also something

I started trying to do with the Crown of the Last King. If I'm right, this is how enchanting should work, and I might be able to get something out of it.

Bored after all the planning, I send a pulse of my mana through the house and notice that Biscuit, alone in the room, is about to leave the area.

Huh? Alone?

I hide my presence and keep mana inside of my body and under the Mantle and send only the tiniest mana thread to track the doggo, something I'm sure he won't notice. Well, not yet, I can't underestimate our future corgi overlord.

As he exits the house, I watch him from the balcony.

Biscuit slowly walks on his short legs, wobbling from side to side. The burrito-like doggo seems to have a plan.

My curiosity peaks, and I just watch him as he reaches the wall around the garden and expect him to create his creepy mana arms to climb over, but instead, Biscuit uses the new thing he learned. Like a blimp, he starts slowly hovering, and then at a very slow speed, he floats higher and higher. It takes a few dozen seconds just to reach the top of the wall, move over it, and then a similar length for the doggo to land.

With Biscuit's mana arms, it would take like a second, yet the doggo seems proud. He looks around and then, with a cute wobbly stride, he heads into the city.

And I follow him.

Biscuit confidently walks between the people and he totally ignores them. Only once in a while does he sniff in the direction of merchants selling some food, yet, amazingly, he even ignores that.

He doesn't hurry, and it takes quite a long time for him to reach what looks like the poorer parts of the city. Then, the doggo walks into one of the darker alleys between two tall houses.

"The fuck is that?" an angry voice says from inside the alley, and the man tries to kick him.

Instead of kick landing, at a dizzying speed, one of Biscuit's purple mana tentacles appears and hits the man, throwing him against the wall.

The man slides down and groans with pain. Biscuit then ignores him and continues to pass through the alley.

I carefully follow him, and when I get inside the alley, far behind Biscuit so he doesn't notice me, I stop in front of the man.

"Fuck, was that a shitty animal. Hey, you, stop looking around so creepily and help me," he says to me.

After looking at him for a moment I stomp on his shin, breaking his leg with an audible crack. The leg he tried to kick Biscuit with.

I ignore the man's painful cries and continue to follow the doggo.

After a few more minutes, Biscuit stops and looks around. When he doesn't see anyone close by, he starts hovering again. The corgi-shaped blimp slowly floats right up, and after what feels like a minute, Biscuit reaches the roof of one of the houses and continues his wobbly walk on the roof.

Where is he going?

It doesn't take long for me to get my answer: It's food, obviously.

Dang it, Biscuit.

The doggo reaches an older, big house that has a few smaller buildings nearby, and each of these small, barely room-sized buildings keeps spewing smoke from the chimney. Looking a bit longer, I identify

them as smokehouses. Observing a bit more and watching people open and close them, I realize they are smoking deer meat.

Most likely, it's something similar to what I gave Biscuit, which made him pick me over Isabella's amazingly smelling, expensive-as-heck meat that I still want to try myself. But I've known Biscuit for a long time. His favorite snack seems to be deer meat, similar to the one we smoked on the first floor.

It's almost cute that the small animal prefers this kind of meat, most likely because of some fond memories from the first floor. It was at that moment he ate the meat of the deer monster that he started being different from a normal dog.

I watch as he spends a few more minutes floating toward one of the smokehouses. Biscuit then uses his mana arms to open it and grabs a few pieces of dried deer jerky with the same arms. The cute little doggo drools while doing so.

Then he creates another tiny mana arm that reaches into his clothes, the ones Isabella put on him, and pulls out a small piece of glass. It's similar to the mana stones they use as the currency here.

He must have seen people buying stuff with mana stones and wanted to do the same, not realizing that there's a big difference between a normal piece of glass and a mana stone.

Biscuit places the piece of glass in front of the smokehouse after closing it and then leaves the way he came.

I don't follow him this time and just take the longer way to get back to the house on the hill.

When I get back to my room, I find a few pieces of dried deer meat on the table next to my bed. Just from a glance, I realize it's more than half of the meat Biscuit was able to get today.

It's a sort of welcome gift, something that the doggo considers extremely precious, yet he still wanted to share with me.

For a long time, I just sit there and stare at it.

Chapter 194: Evening Experiments

I will take down anyone who ever tries to mess with Biscuit.

Must protect!

The little doggo is too precious for this darn world, and I don't care if he might become Earth's Absolute or some eldritch abomination that will end the world. Even those creepy mana arms, I can deal with.

Biscuit can do whatever he wants and must be protected at all costs.

Damn, if I were a more emotional man, I might have started crying back then, seeing the affection of the little animal.

One hundred boops for almost making me feel that way!

It's already late afternoon, and I spent the day slacking around, doing some tests with Mana stones and my new skills to avoid feeling useless. I also swiped some sweets from the kitchen.

While I was locked in my room, sitting on the armchair near the balcony and training while enjoying the view of the city, I tried to examine the web made of mana that Sophie set up.

It's something I don't think I'd be able to create right now. It's as frustrating as it is amusing. Of course, I would like to know how to do that, but at the same time, I don't feel a real need to learn it, already having plenty on my plate.

I like that others are also experimenting, and even the kids are slowly using their brains more, choosing what they want to do and improving. It's good for me. If members of Group 4 improve, I can pick a thing or two I like and try to learn it from them if I think it'll fit into my build. It's like having them experiment for me!

Good, very good.

(You did mess with my web.) Sophie's voice sounds in my head the moment she, Isabella, and Hadwin enter the house.

(I just tried to observe it a bit, but it was too trigger-happy.) I send back at her and sense their presence as they return from the hunt and walk through the house.

(That's the point, isn't it? It's here to detect intruders.) Sophie feels more relaxed than ever before.

It seems like the deal we made about a clean slate made her happy. I don't think she fully believed me, but Isabella most likely confirmed my honesty to her older sister.

(We can start with the coordinates in 1 hour? Living room?) I suggest to her.

(Deal.) She answers and she and Izzy move through the house. Soon they enter the bathroom, probably to take a bath or shower and clean off the dust and sweat from the hunt.

I'm already turning off my [Perception] when Sophie's mana spikes up a bit, and an area forms around the bathroom—an area that I can't see through with my [Perception].

What the heck! Does she think I would peek?! I already located all the restrooms and bathrooms and excluded them from my senses other than just feeling mana signatures.

Annoyed, I stand up, walk a few meters toward the sweets I put on the table, and grab a few. Then I activate [Tether], and with the skill consuming a chunk of my mana, I teleport and reappear back in the armchair where I left the anchor.

[Tether - lvl 1 > Tether - lvl 2]

Nice.

I pop a few sweets into my mouth.

The skill is still disorienting to use and takes too long to create to be useful in combat right now. It also requires a sizable chunk of mana that would be easy for an enemy to sense and try to mess with the anchor. But for hit-and-run tactics, it should work wonderfully. Especially when I learn to leave longer-lasting anchors and multiple of them.

(Kim is asking you if you would like to be guild master.) Another telepathic message reaches my mind, and I identify it as Dennis.

The same as with Sophie, I let it connect. I've long considered an enemy doing something similar and disrupting my concentration, but my construct called Mana Sovereignty Mantle would block it too. Yet every time I feel their mana or Biscuit reaching my mind, I let some of it pass, just enough for them to talk to me.

(What do you think?) I send back to Dennis.

(I'll tell him you are not interested!) He says quickly.

Before he cancels his [Connection], I send him another message, (Dennis, it's fine to mess around a bit, but don't forget where we are, okay? Don't let your guard down no matter how easy it seems right now.)

(Tess and Hadwin keep telling us the same, heh. Thanks.) After that, the presence of his mind disappears.

When it's about time, I leave my room and walk downstairs where Lily greets me immediately, "Aren't you bored being locked in your room?"

"No, I had company." I can't help but tease her, and Lily's wide-open eyes are fun.

"Wh-what?" she stammers, "Who?" she looks around.

"The best company, obviously, myself." I pass by her.

"Nat! You can't do that to me," she complains and quickly takes a few steps, walking by my side.

It's not like I lied, though.

"By the way, I've learned a few things, and I can't wait to show you!" her voice is excited, and I can see that she also has fun discovering what she can do with her skills.

Skills that are maybe too strong. Heck, her [Disintegration] made even a cockroach-like Absolute hesitate.

"Sounds fun. Some other day then? I have something with Sophie right now."

"Sure!" she says happily, but there's a weird glint in her eyes, which quickly disappears.

Did I imagine that?

"Nat," as often before, Izzy welcomes me with a short hug and then moves back to Sophie.

The two sisters are sitting on the couch, wearing comfortable-looking homely clothes. There's some warm drink in front of both of them, and they have a big blanket wrapped around them.

"Hey," Sophie just says shortly. She and Isabella both have black hair, green eyes, and similarly tanned skin. It's extremely easy to identify them as sisters.

Well, it looks like Izzy will be there as well during our experimenting. Aaaand Lily too. I glance at our healer who sits on the couch I planned to sit on, one that is opposite Sophie and Isabella's, with a small table in between.

Lily shamelessly ignores my look.

Damn, she knows that with my tendency to lose body parts, I need her, and she can annoy me almost freely.

Dangerous, Hell difficulty people are dangerous. And shameless.

Jerks, all of them.

"This is what I was able to do. I tried to copy what Lissandra did, but I wasn't able to do it fully," I pass a small mana stone of lower value they use here to Sophie.

I've tried to do what Lissandra did while giving me the coordinates of her world. She did it in a few seconds and with a tiny amount of mana. I spent a few hours and used a lot of mana, yet it feels not even close to being right. The coordinates are currently stored in my mind, but "writing" them down is something else.

Sophie reaches for and takes the stone, then leans back while Izzy snuggles up to her under the blanket. As she examines it, her little sister starts dozing off.

"I tried to mark parts that feel off," she says after a few minutes and hands me the stone.

Then I spend a few minutes examining it, "I disagree with this one. I think I did it correctly," I say and hand her the stone.

Sophie shakes her head after just a moment, "No, it's bad, look," she gestures and puts the stone on the table, and both of us touch it with the tip of our pointing fingers.

"If you do it this way, then this twist will break everything," she explains while both of us use our skills to watch what's happening inside of the stone.

Sophie with her [Manipulation] and me with my [Mana Manipulation] and [Perception].

"But if I do it the way you told me, it will block this part," I point out.

"Oh, you are right. Hmm, how about changing it like this," she reaches out and makes a small change before I'm able to say anything.

The delicate structure inside of the stone immediately dissipates. It's as if every twist and corner is supporting the structure of the coordinates.

"Oh, sorry," Sophie immediately realizes what she did.

"It's fine, I'll try to do it again. This time you can watch how I'm trying to inscribe it. It might help." I say as I take out another mana stone.

The living room is dimly lit, and it's getting darker outside. There are blankets on the couch, and the house has become quiet as everyone does their thing inside their rooms or quietly relaxes somewhere.

Isabella is already asleep, and I can hear her soft breathing, a child with a blanket over her and resting against Sophie, who is leaning over the table and touching the mana stone between us.

Like me, her eyes are also glowing while we experiment, and every obstacle only seems to make her more eager to finally succeed. It's as if she doesn't even remember why we started doing this and just enjoys the work we do.

At some point, Lily also tries to lean against me in a similar way as Isabella does with Sophie, but I just pinch her nose and push her back, to which Sophie gives me a slightly surprised look.

"What?" I ask her. I don't have to explain anything. It's fun pinching Lily's small nose.

That's how we spend our evening and a significant part of the night. In the end, we didn't succeed. No, this feels like something that might take at least multiple weeks, maybe months. Yet I can't deny that I have fun doing it. Working on something I consider interesting and with someone who shows a similar level of excitement isn't that bad at all.

I also notice that as time passes, Sophie becomes a bit less stiff, her words become less cautious, and deeper into the night she doesn't have a problem actively disagreeing with me.

We confront each other's opinions and improve our skills in the process.

I wake up and stretch in my bed. Ever since the body upgrade at level 100, I don't need to sleep as much or watch my food intake and can go a few days ignoring it, yet I still prefer doing so. It's more a psychological thing than a physical one.

For a moment, I just look at the ceiling and replay our experiment with the coordinates from last night in my mind. I grab one from the small table near my bed and examine it.

Yup, not even close. This will take longer than I thought. Maybe one or two months if we work together?

Cockroach Lissandra did it so quickly; it made me think it would be easier. Well, at least it will get me a good amount of shards. Maybe even enough for another amazing passive. I'll have to see how much the system will try to scam me.

I stand up, stretch a bit, and while yawning, take a shower in the bathroom connected to my room. The shower is similar to the one in Edwal's manor on the third floor. Heated with a mana stone that apparently needs to be changed fairly often and powered by more mumbo jumbo stones with weird etchings.

Similar to stones I encountered on the second floor, they seem to be coded to prevent their competition from copying them easily. The act of coding them decreases efficiency a bit, but I think that's something they don't care about. Maybe I should try to decode some just for the fun of it.

After taking a shower, I use the anchor I left over my bed to teleport back onto it and quickly burrow into the blankets. This anchor took an immensely wasteful amount of mana, just to stop it from dissipating while I took my shower.

I burrow deeper into the bed. It feels so good, damn it. Maybe I should just stay like this the entire day. The sensation of a warm shower followed by slipping back under the blankets is amazing. Something worth trading an epic item for.

But anyway, what does my passive, Mana Reservoir do? Is it already full?

I check the mana pool that is separated from my body and realize that it's already twice the size of my mana pool and showing no signs of being full.

Oh boy, this is getting scary.

Chapter 195: Set up

It seems that the passive I got with my Primary Class isn't as bad as I thought it would be. My mana is currently at 609 stat points. Then the 1st Stage of Attribute upgrade adds another 609 to that, making it 1218. That makes the Mana Reservoir 2436 points big, and it's still filling up.

Like, heck. Isn't that maybe too strong? I mean, I won't complain, obviously, but what the heck?

The reservoir is filling slowly, and getting it to this point took multiple days, as every time I spent a bit of mana, it stopped filling. Plus, I keep taking mana from my natural mana pool and only letting the reservoir fill. So there are disadvantages. Plus, it's also nearly a one-time use, and then there can be situations where I will keep using my mana and it won't be able to fill.

But!

This is really getting scary. The thing isn't even filled yet. Where will it stop? Three times my mana? Four? Five? After I sell the Coordinates, I really should buy another high-grade passive or start saving for one.

A beam of light shines through the window right into my eyes, as if telling me to finally get out of bed. With a sigh, I do just that and go through the clothes and put on something more fitting.

Everything in the room is something the others bought. With my money.

I'm rich, but I could be richer.

Maybe I really should be an ass and ask for rent from them. I can ask for it jokingly, and some of them might take it seriously and give me some money.

At that moment, a weak pulse of mana is sent through the web Sophie set up. I'm able to sense it only because I keep observing it, and I quickly follow the signal and detect movement at the entrance to the land the house is on. I switch to [Perception] and detect 3 men standing there. One of them senses my perceiving touch and does something that blocks it.

Wow, so rude.

I send my mana again, this time I change the frequency a bit and do it more carefully, and the man doesn't notice it anymore. Amateur.

A mana signature exits the house, and I identify it as Haddy, who quickly approaches the men. I also notice Sophie and Tess, who are carefully watching the interaction, ready to join.

The trio talks to Hadwin for a while, and then Haddy gestures for them to leave. At that moment, one of the men swings at Hadwin, and the older man lets him hit. Even though the man is using mana, there's no damage dealt to Hadwin. Instead, he just smiles, and I sense him using [Strengthening] and then Hadwin punches the man who attacked him.

Immediately the other two attack as well, one using some lightning attack and the other one by boosting his body.

Hadwin just lifts his eyebrow and allows a few hits to land, showing total disrespect, and then beats them up, breaking some bones in the process. Then he just throws them away.

He literally throws them.

Way to go, Chadwin!

Curious, I turn to Sophie's web and push on it in a way I know she'll notice.

She identifies that it's me and connects to my mind. (Please, do not break my web, it took a long time to set up and I'm still working on it,) Sophie says immediately.

(Who were those three chumps outside?) I ignore her words and ask her instead.

I can almost hear her sigh. (Some random guild full of jerks that keep wanting to get us to join them. Probably so they can scam us for commissions.)

Well, I guess it's not even surprising.

(Tess and Haddy didn't tell me anything,)

(Tess said not to bother you with little stuff like this. We can deal with it even without you.)

(And the real reason is?) I ask.

(She doesn't want you around, beating people before we find out a bit more about the power structure of the city. Anyway, I'm going to hunt with Izzy and Hadwin, so tonight again?)

(Yup.)

Her touch then disappears.

Damn, Tess, I wouldn't go around beating people... okay, I would. Hmm, maybe I should track those three men and see where their base is.

At that moment, I hear knocking on my door.

I get up and open it, and there, Tess stands. "Nat, Sophie told me you asked about what just happened. So, please, do not go out and track them." She seems serious as she says so.

It seems like I was read like an open book.

"Okay, I won't," I say after a bit of thinking.

They seem to have fun dealing with those goons, so I will let them. But if they push harder, I won't hesitate to use it as an excuse to beat up a few jerks.

Mana Cycling is fun. The technique I learned, among other things, from Lissandra, is enjoyable. I use it to move mana through my body, and at this point, it's something I do almost subconsciously. I also changed it a bit from the version Lissandra taught me and adapted it more to the way I handle mana and my body.

It's surprisingly helpful. My mana, which is now multiple times higher than any other stat, is easily dealt with between my constructs that use some, passives that help me, my trait, and Mana Cycling.

Having so much mana isn't something people usually do, but for me, it's fine.

Lvl 159

Strength: 51

Dexterity: 49

Constitution: 147

Mana (Stage 1/3 - Vast Mana): 609 + 609

And I bet I could handle more! It's not just an excuse to keep constantly dumping stats into mana, nope. My estimate is that in a few more days, I should be ready for Active Tempering which will improve my strength, dexterity, and constitution again. I just need a bit more time to get used to my mana which increased by 200 after the Primary class I picked.

I also have another thing added to my to-do list. My new skill called [Mana Domain]; I came up with a way to improve it by a lot. The first step is to evolve my [Mana Infusion]

[Mana Domain] infused with [Resonance]? Good luck avoiding attacks of resonating mana that can come from any side. Or good luck avoiding constant pressure that wants to disrupt your mana.

The same goes for kinetic energy or thermal one. I could literally keep a heat-filled dome around myself or the one filled with kinetic energy.

With a few level-ups of the domain and increasing its size and with my nearly bottomless mana reserves? This added to the original effect of my skill that allows mana within the dome to move as easily as the mana inside my body, which would turn it into some terrifying stuff!

There's also one more interesting thing. Creating anchors for [Tether] is easier to create within my domain, and I don't even have to stand close, an arm's reach to the point where I create the anchor. Within the domain, it's fine even if it's on the edge of it.

Sure, the anchors could be destroyed, and they are still easy to detect, but nothing I couldn't improve with time.

But even this feels just like the start. I'm still inclined to think that [Mana Domain] will be much stronger at a higher level. Currently, it allows only doing stuff with my mana, but sooner or later I should be able to dominate all the mana within the domain, and that's when I think the skill will truly shine.

"What do you think, Biscuit? Am I correct?" I ask.

Currently, I'm alone in my house, and everyone else went to hunt or gather information. A tiny part of me feels ashamed as if I'm slacking even though I'm training.

There's a real reason for that. I have a lot of mana and yet, by my standards, I'm not handling it properly. It's like people from Hard difficulty. They did have similar stats and levels to us, but their usage of skills was lacking in comparison to us, Hell difficulty enjoyers.

Not wanting to end up like them, I can only stop leveling and focus on improving my control.

(Food.) Biscuit just yawns lazily and puts his head back down on my lap.

“It's easy for you to say, you can learn new skills anytime you want,” I complain.

(Sustenance. Easy.)

“What? You try harder only when you need more food, and right now there is enough of it, so you don't need to?”

(Food.) The doggo confirms.

I can't even refute that. This telepathic, burrito-like, floating, potty-mouthed divine beast is probably the strongest one of us.

Still, I boop his nose a few times, “When you become a real divine beast or something stronger, you will have to remember good ol' Nat, okay? I will be leeching off you.”

Biscuit doesn't even bother to answer, and his cheeky eyes seem to be smiling before he closes them again.

POV Lily Chen

“Listen, Tess, you guys just need to shut up and join Blackstone. Our guild is much bigger than yours, and we already have backers that can help you guys get better-paying jobs. It's a win-win.”

The woman saying that is only a bit older than Tess. She's a brunette with a curvy figure, and her eyes are yellow, reptile-like. Probably some trait, as Tess mentioned after we met her for the first a few days ago.

She's really rude as she and two more men stand in front of us, by her side. They are not allowing us to pass.

It's annoying, to be honest. Tess and I just wanted to go out and hunt a bit.

"As I told you before, our guild is not interested in that, Eve. Just let us pass." Tess says.

"What kind of name is 'Angry Kittens'? You guys clearly don't take it seriously." The woman takes a step closer and places her hand on Tess's shoulder. Her smile is creepy, and she keeps glancing at me and my right hand.

It's probably my fault. They saw me before I finished restoring my right hand and guessed that I'm a healer capable of regenerating limbs, or we have one, and that's the main reason they want us in.

"Tess, we would treat all of you nicely, trust me." Her hand continues to squeeze Tess's shoulder, and she shows her teeth while smiling.

To me, it's surprising how confident they are. I can't see their levels, but Tess said they're just a bit over one hundred. Tess and Hadwin also wanted to keep Nathaniel out of all of this. Something about not always relying on him for help with something they can handle, but I think they just don't want him to blow things up.

I'd like to see that, though. I don't like this woman and the way she looks at me. But I'm not worried. If she touches me, I'll use [Disintegration].

"Eve, get your hand off me."

My attention is immediately drawn to Tess, who said that. Tess is smiling, but this smile feels dangerous.

"Come on Tess, quit joking. You will get in trouble the moment you try something," the brunette laughs and gestures to the two men who move closer.

"Lily, don't kill anyone," is the last thing Tess says before white and red lightning sparks around her.

Her fist moves at a dizzying speed, hitting Eve directly on the nose, breaking it, drawing blood, and sending her flying even though the woman tried to block the attack with mana.

Tess smiles refreshingly.

Then one of the men grabs me. Being careful not to kill him, I lower the power of [Disintegration], and a short pulse of grayish mana disintegrates his arm up to the shoulder and I take a step back.

"Huh?" he utters before he starts screaming.

Tess quickly deals with the other man. It doesn't even take three seconds.

"So annoying. Blackrock is just a small bootlicker guild that clings to a bigger one. Their guild master isn't even at level 120," Tess says.

She remains calm even in this situation. In some ways, she's really similar to Nat. Is that why he feels so comfortable around her?

"You bitch," Eve lisps from the ground, blood on her face, "just wait..."

A squad of guards followed by one male lynthari quickly arrives. Too quickly, almost as if they were waiting nearby.

"Oh, it's cute Eve. What happened to you? Did they attack you out of nowhere?" the lynthari asks while the human guards wait. He smiles at the woman who glares at us hatefully.

The lynthari feels young and even though he tries to control his expression everyone can see that he is having fun.

"This might be a little troublesome," Tess sighs, "It looks like we've been set up.

POV Lily Chen

One of the unspoken rules of the city is to never mess with lynthari. So we let ourselves be taken to prison and locked in a room, both together. It's a reasonably nice room, but it's unsettling to be confined here. I'm troubled by what Eve said; maybe we'll face problems, as Tess mentioned.

Tess tells me to expect that we'll spend a few days here and that they'll most likely try to mess with us while we're here. They might kidnap us or force us to pay outrageously high fines for "seriously" hurting them. And if we can't gather enough money, they could force us to join their guild.

But only a few hours later, the door unlocks, and a young man enters the room. His face has no emotion on it, but his brown and gray eyes seem to glow with hidden cheekiness as he looks at us.

As always, he moves with such confidence, and unlike almost everyone else, he doesn't emit any mana I could detect.

It's like he dominates all of it and doesn't allow it to escape his control.

"Are these your friends, feral one?" A lynthari enters the cell. The way she speaks and moves makes her seem regal, even though there's a long scar across her face.

[Elemental Warden - lvl ??]

Her hair is white, and her cat-like eyes are golden. She is unearthly beautiful and probably extremely wealthy, judging by her enchanted jewelry and clothes. Her clothes are also very pretty.

"Yes, Myrra, these two 'angry kittens' are my friends," Nathaniel says.

Chapter 196: In order to have some fun

Wow, Tess seems really down, seeing how she keeps avoiding my eyes. What now, you silly tall blonde? You keep bullying me by reading me like a book and then saying how you will take care of everything. So, will you do now?

"Tess, just let me. I'll take care of everything," the moment I say that, I can see she realizes what I'm poking at and how much fun I'm having.

Right now, Tess really seems like an angry kitten.

"Feral one, you truly are ruthless," Myrra, the first lynthari I met even before I entered the city, notices as well. She's a level 188 Elemental Warden, the highest level I've seen so far in the city.

"Nat, you know it's not our fault. They kept trying to force us into their dumb guild," Lilly says in their defense.

"Ha! Blackrock was just a pawn, a small guild. It's one of the five big ones that wanted you guys and operates behind the scenes," Myrra tells Lily and I listen to them in the back of my mind.

So, things went like this: Tess and Lily were imprisoned. We learned about it a bit later from the association of guilds, and then things went downhill. Normally, they would just get out, as I'm sure they were innocent, but one of the five largest guilds in the city kept meddling behind the scenes to the point where they could spend a really long time in there.

I'm sure during that time they would try everything to get Lily, because, of course, it's always the healers these guys are after.

This is what Hadwin and Sophie found out, and then I got the idea to use Myrra here, who left me her address in case I was looking for a job.

Exactly as I expected from her level and wealth, she seems important, and it took only a few hours to get to this point, with Myrra being really helpful.

"Well, it's the lynthari that rule the city. I didn't expect you to be so corrupt." I tell her.

"Feral one, obviously they are corrupt. Only our young ones help with the leadership of the city, and they like to mess around," Myrra giggles and her tail continues to swing from side to side as she shows me her sharp canines.

She seems to be enjoying herself, "Usually this wouldn't have happened, but you guys seem to have caught the interest of someone high up there," she narrows her eyes, looking at Lily, "Is it because of her?"

"Nope," I say.

At that, Myrra becomes even more amused, and even her ears perk up a bit. The entire time, I feel her mana in the surrounding area, touching each of us carefully, observing us. There is especially a lot of it around me, and even her eyes seem to glow slightly in the dimly lit prison cells.

When we start walking outside of the prison, a few human guards and a single lynthari that's present even bow to her, letting us pass without any problem. There, we meet Hadwin, who is here with Aaron, and Tess and Lily rejoin them.

"I'll be back a bit later," I wave at them and then continue to walk by Myrra's side.

"Your friends are also interesting, aren't they?" she licks her lips.

"Why don't you tell me, why are you so interested in us, Myrra? In exchange, you can also ask me something," I offer.

Walking through groups of people that are still out on the streets, she gives me a long, examining look before answering, "All of you are young, yet I can smell powerful skills from you. That much isn't that surprising, but I can even recognize that you are someone who only started dealing with mana not a long time ago. A few months, a year at most. Yet..." she doesn't finish.

A few lynthari recognize her and gesture a greeting towards her. Myrra returns that greeting with a smile.

"It's something new to me and let me tell you, I rarely get to deal with something new and interesting," her eyes full of mana seem to pierce through me. She also probably has some skills or maybe a trait that allows her to know that much.

I just keep bumping into all these old weirdos who are so bored that they don't have anything better to do than just bully poor old me.

"Moreover, it's fun to observe humans once in a while. Humans live shorter lives, much shorter than us lynthari, so just watching them, living, expressing all these emotions is exciting. I especially like to watch humans like you, feral one," she shows me more of her canines.

Myrra is tall, easily two or three heads taller than me, the same as all lynthari who tower over humans. And she is powerful. Her level isn't that high, but she did have a lot of time to master her skills and her power, and that's evident even to the naked eye.

She continues, "You seem so distant. So prideful and so confident. Almost regal. Like Champions of ancient times. It makes me want to see you broken," her tail stops moving, she opens her eyes wide, and a shadow lands on her face, "I want to see you crawl, defeated, I want to see you begging for mercy after being beaten by your enemies. I want to see you cry." her voice is full of emotion.

The tall lynthari takes a step closer, our faces nearly touching as she bends down, "And even more than that, I want to see you succeed. I want to see you prove that you are as powerful as you think you are. Oh, just the sight of you tearing apart your enemies with that distant look on your face and with your beautiful eyes," she sighs while showing dreamy expression.

Dude.

System, what the fuck is wrong with you and with all these people within the tutorial?

I quickly leave as soon as I can. Thankfully, Myrra still seems somewhat amused and doesn't ask for anything for her help, but I'm sure it will come. It almost feels like I made a deal with the devil.

But there's one fun thing: she says she will leave it up to us to deal with all this stuff and if we don't push it too far, she will stop other older lynthari from interfering. Another condition is to not hurt lynthari, no matter what they do.

When I reach my house, everyone else is inside.

To be honest, this entire situation is kind of crappy, and I can't imagine what else Tess and Lily could do. Killing people from that small guild or guards would bring more trouble than it's worth. People who went after them seemed to do it with the intention of getting them into prison as they did, they just didn't expect to get beaten so quickly and easily.

"We are free to deal with the guild on our own, but touching lynthari is a no-no, no matter what they do. Minimal damage to stuff not belonging to the guild is also a must," I say the moment I enter.

That immediately starts a conversation between Haddy, Tess, and Maya.

From the paper I saw before, there are three types of guilds. Simply separated as big, medium, or small. Angry kittens are small if even that. Blackrock is small, slowly becoming medium. The ones supporting are big guilds, and there are five of them here in the city: Luminous Order, Storm Brigade, Serpent's Eye, Obsidian Circle, and Veilwalkers. The one messing with us seems to be Serpent's Eye.

Each of the big five seems to have a guild master that is around the two-hundred-level mark. Guilds mostly consist of humans, and only very rarely are there any lynthari in there.

So, we should expect a guild leader of a bit over 200. A dozen or two guild elites at around 170, a few more dozen at around 150, and maybe a few hundred under level 100. For each guild big guild.

Yup, I could take them.

"Nat, I hope you didn't have to give up anything to that lynthari," Hadwin joins me while others converse around the table. I'm once again sitting in the armchair that they now usually reserve for me.

"Oh, no worries, Haddy. She's just one of those weirdos that is more creepy than dangerous."

“Good. Tess seems annoyed, but I really don't know what she could have done,” Hadwin changes the subject.

“We'll get her to beat up a few people to make her feel better,” I answer him.

At first, I was a bit annoyed with some jerks messing with me right when I started my training, but this doesn't have to be that bad. I can beat up a few people and examine the skill level of someone around my level. I haven't had much opportunity to do so, so I'm quite curious.

Could I take on an entire big guild by myself? Something makes me want to try just that. One Sparrow obliterator 5000 could be enough to wipe out an entire guild house. Or one ANTomic bomb. Would they be as flammable as ants?

Oh boy, let's quickly forget about that. I'm still nervous thinking about it. Leveling shouldn't be that easy, and the system surely won't let it go.

But that also makes me curious. I did deal with a few hundred ants, bus-sized ones. So, how could a much smaller guild compare to them?

The ants were extremely flammable, probably their weakness, and even though they were big, their physical stats weren't that amazing. What was amazing about them was their communication and the way they could fuel each other's skills, and I think that's where plenty of levels and skills went. Otherwise, the ants didn't feel as strong as their level might hint.

A single level 100 ant felt more like a level 50-70 monster. Just a bit big. As always, there are advantages and disadvantages to everything, and something tells me that the guild might be a bit more dangerous than a few hundred ants and that makes it sound fun.

“I think they're not only after Lily; they probably know that we did mess around to get more mana stones, for the bracelet and all the other stuff,” Tess says, and as I catch that, I focus back on the conversation.

“Tess, there's no need to plan that much. Just point me in the right direction, and I will fuck them up,” I tell her.

“No, Nat, I have a better idea,” Tess's eyes glow dangerously, “We will fuck them up.” She stands up, and a smile slowly appears on her face.

Oh boy, she is angry.

“We will beat the leader and his underlings and replace or have Sophie to manipulate them. But before we do that, we need to collect more information: their numbers, strength, allies, and locations. We know that the lynthari won't step in, so we just have to deal with humans.”

“I like that,” I say to her.

The way these guys mess around with us feels annoying. It's not like I'm BFFs with everyone here, but how dare some lowlife gangster think they can mess with something that I consider mine?

Obviously, taking over a big guild won't be easy. Beating them? Simple. Taking over and making it run as before just with some changes will be a challenge.

A few days have passed and our plan is still very simple. We'll beat up the leadership and see if Sophie can make them... more friendly towards us.

Unfortunately, even this isn't that reliable. I removed her construct from my mind before, didn't I? Well, it's something we'll work around after dealing with them.

So now, everyone is collecting information. We've spent nearly all of our remaining mana stones. Tess keeps watching their headquarters from a distance. Izzy and Sophie as well. Sophie also manipulates a few of the weaker members into telling us everything they know. About mind manipulation, healing skills, their guild — and oh boy, there's a lot.

They were worried that they might know about Sophie, but mind manipulation is something they don't even know is possible, at least not the guild members we asked. As for healing, they really are after

Lily... again. Poor girl, always the target of kidnappings and the unfortunate people who try. Only a dumbass would run into her terrifying skill.

Oh, and one of the big five guilds, Serpent's Eye?

Yeah, they're assholes, total assholes. Even lower-ranked members know about some of the shady things the guild does. A little bit of blackmailing, the kind where they ask for money so nothing will happen to your shop. Some stealing of other people's prey. And a few much much worse things.

At first, I thought it was almost childishly villainous, like bad guys from cartoons, and that makes me wonder if it's also something the system changed. You know, creating an environment we are somehow accustomed to.

But the more I listen, the more I realize that all these acts are targeted to gain money, power, or both at once. It seems cartoonish but very human-like.

I also keep forgetting that this is a world where there are people capable of destroying an entire city on their own so the rules are a bit different. Plus, there are the lynthari, all-powerful and always watching with amusement, allowing humans to do nearly whatever within these unsaid basic rules, all in order to have some fun.

In the end, it doesn't matter. Everyone here is just a shadow, a copy of a person who is most likely already dead or maybe even never existed.

And they shouldn't have messed with what is mine.

Chapter 197: Just be happy

Turns out the Serpent's Eye guild master is a normal-looking man. Average height, has a plain face, and even the clothes he wears aren't eye-catching. The man doesn't seem strong, dangerous, or authoritative. Yet, his level...

[Mana Harbinger - lvl ??]

Somewhere deep inside, I feel my competitive spirit rise.

So, how did we find the man? Well, we didn't. He found us.

It was late afternoon and on arriving back at our base, my luxurious house at the top of a hill overlooking the city, I see the open door.

"I hope you don't mind that we let ourselves in," says an average-looking man, seated on my couch, as we enter. He moves a bit to make himself more comfortable and continues, "Or did you think that we didn't know about your clumsy attempts at spying on us?"

Looking around I notice 12 more people spread out in the living room and kitchen, all of them over level 150.

"In fact, the lot of you were so clumsy, I would almost consider it cute. Angry Kittens indeed." He continued in a deep voice, exuding confidence and a bit of a sneer at the end.

Some of his goons seem amused by what he said, snickering even while others are carefully looking around or appear bored. They seem to not understand why their guild leader would be bothered to personally meet this group. Most of whom felt weaker than them.

It isn't surprising, since I am the only one in our group over level 150.

The looks they give us are annoying

The guild master, nonchalantly seated on my couch, props his legs on my table

It's infuriating.

"Anyway, you must understand that I'm quite annoyed that you guys beat up my people. Twice," he shrugs his shoulders. "And I don't know how you got the lynthari to stop sticking their noses into this but don't misunderstand. That's all they'll do. They won't care anymore, no matter what happens to you."

The twins keep everyone connected, and they've been talking ever since we arrived. I'm the only one who hasn't joined the conversation and blocked their attempts to do so.

"Hey, you, weirdo, stop staring at me," the man bangs the table with his boots, a big smirk on his face. When I don't react or answer, he laughs out loud. "Go on, keep hiding your mana. You might surprise some people with your immense mana pool." As if on cue, several men who came with him giggle.

Should I just kill him right now?

"So, my offer is simple, and I would recommend you guys not refuse. It's a great opportunity," another round of cruel laughter ensues. "Serpent's Eye will be joining Storm Brigade and going on an expedition fairly soon. You might be asking: why is he telling us this?"

The man's eyes scan each one of us, taking turns. Despite his taunting demeanor, his skill seems real. No matter how cartoonishly evil you appear, you won't become one of the most powerful people in such a large city without some skill.

"It's quite simple! Both Serpent's Eye and Storm Brigade, two of the big five," he pauses briefly, emphasizing the fact, "can take one small guild with them on this expedition. You know, mentor some people, bring in talented individuals from guilds under them. The usual stuff. And we've decided to pick Angry Kittens."

The way he says our guild name disgusts me to my core.

I hold myself back. The rage that keeps trying to surge to the surface is well-controlled, to the point where I almost want to smile, given how angry I am.

How dare he act like that in my house, towards my people. The man doesn't know he just signed his death certificate.

I finally allow the twins to connect me to the others, and immediately the conversation stops when they notice I've joined.

(Tess, accept his offer,) is the only thing I say before cutting off the twins' [Connection].

For the rest of the conversation, I look around and etch the face of each man present into my memory. I remember the words the guild master said. I remember the faces of the men who laughed the most. I remember their mana signatures.

Then, when the conversation ends, the guild master stands up and approaches me. He reaches out, gently tapping the top of my head a few times and then my cheek, all to the laughter of his men.

“Good boy, you're hiding your mana sooo well,” he says condescendingly, as if talking to a child. Even more people start laughing.

This time I answer, “Thank you, sir,” I feel the corners of my lips turn upwards, and I smile at the man, “Thank you very much.”

The expedition the man mentioned? Well, apparently they plan to sneak into the old capital. You know, the place is taken over by one of the four Calamities, the Living Tree.

Two out of the five big guilds of the city – oh, the city is called Virelia – so yeah, two guilds are joining forces. By using a map they recently acquired, they plan to sneak into the city and into the house of a man who used to be a Champion.

There are multiple pieces of high-graded equipment they want to get, along with all the wealth the man might have amassed.

Champions, in my estimation, are probably around level 400-500, so it's no surprise that the man possesses many items that might interest people who are a bit over level 200 at most.

Their plan is painfully obvious. During the expedition, most of the Angry Kittens will unfortunately perish, and the remaining members will be absorbed into the grand Serpent's Eye guild.

Lily doesn't seem to be the only one they're interested in. They've also got their eyes on Tess, and I barely noticed, but I caught the guild master's glance towards Sophie. They seem to harbor some information or suspicion regarding her skill.

There's a bit more information they provided, but I leave it to the others and return to my room, still feeling a wild rage under my skin.

Without hesitation, I sit on the bed and close my eyes, then start another round of Active Tempering.

I calm myself, set the Mana Regulator to thirty percent, and kinetic energy enters my body as I slide into deep [Focus].

As kinetic energy flows through my body, I move my mana in the way Lissandra showed me, and I've further refined it. My mana infuses my bones, muscles, nervous system, and veins, and the strain I feel intensifies.

Taking a short pause and a deep breath, I change the frequency of the kinetic energy. Something I learned to do thanks to Absolute from the second floor, and improved upon by observing the undead bear on the third.

When everything is ready, I weaken my passives and reinforcement construct. I don't even need to turn them off fully since the amount of mana I possess is much higher than during the first active tempering and my constitution hasn't increased much.

I'm certain I would die if I turned them off completely.

Then, as kinetic energy starts pummeling my body, I increase the amount of mana turned into kinetic energy. Everything else fades from my mind, except for my body being pummeled by the energy flowing through it. My body is about to break but enduring thanks to the right frequencies and my [Mana Infusion].

It's painful, and I taste blood in my mouth, but as the minutes pass, I don't stop and continuously increase the setting on the Mana Regulator.

Then I remember the man, his tone when he mentioned our guild name, his laughter.

Immediately, I completely turn off my constructs and passives, and the pressure multiplies. I barely get all this energy under my control, multiple wounds begin to appear, one after another, and my body feels as if it's being pulled apart by a force too strong to handle.

I remember when the man slapped my cheek gently and patted the top of my head.

The setting on the Mana Regulator changes again.

Then I remember the way he looked at members of Group 4 as if they were already his.

I lower the effect [Focus] has on my anger, and for a few minutes, while getting blasted by all this force, I just continue to enjoy the feeling of my emotions.

When I get my feelings back under control, active tempering comes to an end. Right after, I turn kinetic energy into thermal, and while my body radiates the heat, I feel my passive working and using that heat to heal me. Slowly, but surely. None of the wounds are big enough to require Lily's help, yet there are so many of them.

Then I check my stats.

Constitution increased by 40, strength by 15, and dexterity by 10.

Lvl 159

Strength: 66

Dexterity: 59

Constitution: 187

Mana (Stage 1/3 - Vast Mana): 609 + 609

For a moment, I stare at my stat screen and then send my mana through the house while my passive continues to heal my body.

I locate every single member of Group 4, all of them actively discussing something in the living room and throwing ideas around.

A few simple words come to me. They are mine.

Group 4 is mine. They are my people and I will fuck up anyone who tries to hurt them or take them away from me.

Flashback - Nathaniel Gwyn - 15 years old

"Freak!" The man swings his fist, and the thin, black-haired boy crashes against a table before falling to the floor. Yet the boy's face remains emotionless as he rises, confronting the man, a growing bruise evident.

"Rob! Stop!" a young woman screams, rushing to the boy, hands cradling his face. "Look what you did to Nat!" She berates her husband, then turns back to the boy, "Does it hurt?" she asks tenderly.

Both, mother and her son, possess the same striking black hair and similar facial features.

"Thalia, that brat and his sister creep me out."

"They're your children, our children. How can you say that!" Although smaller in stature, the woman confronts the man, fury in her eyes.

"Who knows? Maybe you've been messing around," the man retorts with a cruel smirk on his face.

"Rob, you know I'd never... I love you," Thalia whispers weakly.

The two are both in their thirties. A young couple who became parents in their teens.

After another exchange and a few more cruel words, the man storms out after shouting a few more curses.

Thalia sighs and embraces the boy, "You have to understand, Natty. He wasn't always like this. You also should remember how he was when you were younger," Her petite frame seems even smaller compared to her 15-year-old son.

"Mom, it's fine. Don't worry about me, okay?" Nathaniel tries a comforting smile but fails terribly. A weird grimace appearing on his face.

"Silly boy..." the woman sighs, pain in her eyes. Pain and hope, "I believe Rob will come back to his old self," she smiles at her son. Even now she is hoping, but a small part of her seems to realize that it might be too late.

The boy, with his two differently colored eyes, sees through his mother's facade but remains silent.

"I'm sorry, Natty, sorry that you go through all of this because of your stupid mom. You and Victoria," the woman's voice becomes weaker. "I'm so selfish and weak." she sounds like she is about to cry.

"Don't be like that. It's something I chose to endure. It's all on me," this time a genuine smile appears on his face. "I will do that much for you. So please, just be happy."

"You and your weird pride," the woman stays quiet for a moment and then whispers, "Thank you. I love you, Natty, and I'm so sorry," she then lets go, forcing a smile on her face, "I'll prepare something to eat."

Nathaniel just nods, and the smile disappears from his face when his mom leaves the room. His expression once again becomes an emotionless mask as he stares at the door through which the man exits.

The woman thinks she's hidden it from her son, but he's noticed.

He's seen how thin she's become, he felt the twitching of her body as she tried to hide her bruises from him and the heavy layer of makeup masking even more.

Although his face remains unchanged, the look in his eyes shifts and for a while, he looks at the door before forcing a smile on his face and joining his mother in the kitchen.

Chapter 198: It's nice to see you

"Expedition will start in three days," Tess taps on the paper in the middle of the table.

It's morning the next day after we got unexpected visitors, and no one has gone out to the city or to hunt. Everyone is staying inside the house. They laugh less; they talk less.

As always, the system knows how to deliver the best wake-up calls.

"As that jerk said, the target is the house and valuables of the Champion. The house is located in the territory of the Living Tree, one of the four Calamities," she sighs. "I know we have to deal with one of the calamities sooner or later, but this feels way too soon."

"I wouldn't trust them too much when it comes to us being covert. Their hidden tunnels into the house that supposedly allow us to avoid the Living Tree sound sketchy at best," Hadwin joins the conversation. "Other than getting rid of most of us to keep some members, they most likely plan to use us as fodder."

(Food!) Biscuit sends, but everyone ignores him. Everyone except me.

I pick up the doggo and place him on my lap. He tilts his head as if in question, "It will be fine, and it's fodder not fooder." I whisper.

He woofs and bumps my chest with his small head. He continues until I pet him, and while I do so, he closes his eyes. When the little doggo is satisfied, he rests his head on my chest, and together we listen to the others.

“There's no way I'm going to their guild. If they touch me, I'll use [Disintegration],” Lily says.

“No one will be going to their guild, Lily. We're all together in this mess,” Tess looks around, her eyes determined.

However, some of our members seem unconvinced. The people who visited us last night were all higher level than us, and the guild master's strength could be felt even though he was holding back.

I know most of our members haven't even reached level 100. Yet, why are they so unconfident? From what I've seen, I could have defeated most of the guild master's goons even before I got to level 100. Sure, they are mostly at 150, but so what?

“If we get good opportunity, I will take care of the guild master, whatever his name was, and his elites,” I say, and for a moment, silence fills the living room. Yet no one seems to doubt what I said, “We will use them to get the gear and to see what the Living Tree is capable of.”

“His name is Elydor,” Hadwin says after a while. He looks like he wants to ask something, but then he just closes his mouth and shakes his head. “Anyway. I'll go over the info we already bought and find as much as we can on the Living Tree and the old capital. If we approach it smartly, we could turn it into an opportunity, as you said.” Then, without saying anything else, he leaves to do what he just said.

“Nat, do you think your lynthari... friend could help and give us some support?” Tess asks me.

I immediately shake my head. “She won't.” I can already imagine Myrra's laugh and glowing eyes if I came to her asking for help, again. From our previous conversations, I'm absolutely sure she would have me beg, crawl, and enjoy watching it. Then she would refuse to help anyway, hoping to get some “fun” emotion from me. That's how she is.

But there's also another part of me. A part that doesn't want any help.

"All that's left is for us to train for a few days before the start of the expedition since hunting is out of the question now," Maya says as she stretches her hand high above her head. "It's annoying, but that's Hell difficulty I guess. I wouldn't be surprised if it's one of the system's settings to keep throwing this stuff at us."

Oh, is Maya maybe slightly smart? Finally, someone who understands the ways of the system. I keep telling everyone how assholeish the system is.

"Nat, would you like to spar?" Maya asks to my surprise.

Oh?

"Sure," out of pure curiosity, I agree, and like curious little kittens, four teenagers follow us: Lily, Min-Jae, Dennis, and Aaron.

Izzy, Sophie, and Tess stay behind with the best doggo of the 4th floor.

When we get to the garden, I notice that it's not in the pristine state as it was when I came here. There are some burns on the ground, deep slashes, cracked ground, and ruined grass.

It somehow irks me. Should I make them pay?

Maya stops opposite of me, and I notice the moment she activates her [Focus]. Her eyes become clearer, and her movements as well. Like a wild beast that is controlling all its power, ready to explode in a deadly attack. Her mana moves smoother than before, and armor forms around her body. Unlike mine, it's bulkier and seems to be thicker, and the mana that creates it becomes a darker shade of blue than she was using before.

"Nice improvement," I tell her.

"You haven't seen anything yet," Maya answers me, and affected by [Focus], her words sound calm and confident.

A sword forms in her hand. The weapon is big, massive, and nearly as long as Maya. Yet, because it's made of mana, it's much lighter, and Maya has also heavily invested stat points into physical stats so she moves it lightly.

I also slide deeper into [Focus] and observe her.

Maya's mana moves, and for a moment it wildly charges through her body. During that half-second, her armor becomes dark blue and non-transparent. Her body also gets a boost, and she rushes at me.

During that brief time, she reaches me and swings her sword three times before her body returns to her original stats.

I dodge all the attacks: the first by tilting my head, the second by jumping over the blade, and the third by stepping backward.

Before she can deal with the aftereffect, I kick her chest armor, and she staggers backward.

"Damn, I hoped to get one hit in," she says.

"Oi, wouldn't that cut me in half..." Before I can finish, she does it again. Her armor becomes darker, and her stats significantly strengthen, along with her armor and weapon.

I use [Tether] and create an anchor, right after I jump backward, only for Maya to follow me. She passes by the anchor I left in the air without noticing it and stops to swing at me with the anchor behind her back.

At that moment, I activate [Tether] and reappear behind her in the place of the anchor.

"Nothing personal, ki..." I jump back before I can finish my sentence, I feel movement on the back of Maya's armor, and a spike extends from it, aiming for where I stood before I dodged.

"I didn't know you could teleport," there's a surprise in her voice, and even through [Focus], I can sense her emotions.

Tss, so bad! How can her [Focus] be so inadequate?

"I didn't know you could turn into a hedgehog," I counter, to her amusement.

"That's the nice part of sparring with you; I can throw anything at you without worrying that you'll get hurt. Oh, maybe you getting hurt would be even a bonus," Maya winks at me, and I see that she's serious.

"What about forgiveness? It's rude to hold a grudge for so long. It happened on the 1st floor, didn't it?" I poke at her.

"Ha! As if you didn't do the same."

My silence is enough for her to confirm that, and she laughs shortly.

Her armor once again turns into a darker shade of blue, and the sword in her hands transforms into a spear that elongates, trying to stab my head.

I deflect the spear with the back of my hand and dash at Maya, who continues to track my movement, once again deep inside [Focus]

I reach her, and, still boosted by her skill, she lets go of her spear. A dagger forms in her hand, and she stabs at me. I simply cover my palm with resonating mana, allowing her to stab that palm. The dagger seems as if it's going inside of my hand, but any mana that forms the blade and touches me dissipates as if it's made of snow and melting in contact with red-hot iron.

Seeing that it doesn't work, she moves closer to me, and multiple spikes made of mana stab at me from her armor. They are disrupted as well, and her mana returns to a paler blue, causing her to lose some strength.

As she staggers slightly from the aftereffects of her skill, I place my palm on her shoulder, disrupt her armor, and push her away.

"Damn it, I was hoping for something," Maya deactivates her skills and sighs. "You didn't even get serious."

"It's a gift. Some people are just born pretty and talented, that's why I have to suffer all this envy." I shrug.

She rolls her eyes. "Any good advice for me?"

"What's the name of your new skill?" I ask instead.

Without much hesitation, Maya answers, "[Boost]. It's a simple skill; I can enhance my stats for a short moment, and my armor becomes stronger. I haven't used it on [Focus] yet, though."

"Sounds pretty good," I reply.

I've matured, haven't I? I've learned not to complain when people acquire impressive skills. After all, I have strong skills of my own, so there's no reason for jealousy.

"It also allows me to 'boost' my healing speed or my senses a bit. It's still at a low level, so it's challenging, but I believe it'll improve."

"Hmm, I see."

Maya takes a step backward, "Nat, why are you creating that mana baton in your hand?"

"Maya, let's spar some more."

"Hey, hey, hey, I don't like the look in your eyes or the tone of your voice, Nat. At least tell me what I did!"

"So, why did you fight Maya?"

"Tess, I did it to help her improve! She gained one more level in [Armament] and two in [Boost]," I mention the name of Maya's newest skill through clenched teeth.

"Damn it, Nat."

Later that day, I find myself in the garden again, this time with a different member of Group 4, Hadwin. Hadwin watches me closely. It seems that news of my training with Maya reached his ears, and he's on guard.

"So, what are your skills?" I ask him. "Any new ones? Come on, you can tell me, did you acquire [Singularity], [Invincibility], or maybe something like [Immortality]?"

"What are you even talking about? I have no new skills. I still have [Disruption],

"Oh? You didn't get a new one?"

"Do you think it's that easy? No, I didn't even try. I've mostly focused on [Strengthening], and it has served me well. It's versatile. I can enhance my body and my weapons. It's simple but effective," Hadwin shrugs. "That's why I have this." He shows me the epic sword he holds.

The sword once belonged to one of the three warriors from the 3rd floor, the one held by a man named Aias. I entrusted it to Tess, along with a bracelet and a crown that Lily is now trying to use.

I agree with Tess on this; the sword is in the best hands and will be most useful with Hadwin.

"I'm curious. Punch the palm of my hand. First, only with your stats, then with [Strengthening]." I point my palm to Hadwin.

Without hesitation, he swings his fist and it hits the palm of my hand.

Oh? That's quite good, isn't it? It seems he has invested some stats into strength and not only into his constitution. When he swings again, this time using his skill, I notice the force of the attack and even use some mana to boost my body. His fist hits my palm, and I add even more mana to strengthen myself, trying not to show it.

He's getting closer and closer to level one hundred. Not too long ago, I was sixty levels higher than him, but I felt that punch right now. Sure, I'm not oriented towards physical stats, but I still think it's impressive. I've also witnessed his endurance, so Hadwin is building up quite well.

"Have you used your upgrade token yet?" I ask, genuinely curious. The upgrade token is something he should have received around level 75.

"I haven't used it yet. I'm deciding between upgrading constitution or strength," he looks at me, a question in his eyes.

"Constitution or strength seem like a good choices for you or maybe start allocating more stats into mana," I raise my hand to stop him, and he closes his mouth, a knowing smile on his face. "It's not what you're thinking, Haddy. Upgrade your constitution or strength and begin allocating more stats into mana so you can use your skill more frequently and for longer durations. Don't invest too much into mana; in your case, maybe twenty percent should be enough. Then put around thirty into constitution and the rest into strength and dexterity. Or mix it up and go with forty for strength, and twenty for mana if you want to double up. Oh, and you could also..."

"Nat, check the community," Min-Jae interrupts me mid-sentence shouting from the window overlooking the garden.

I open the Community.

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) -Dude, finally we are out, I fucking hate the third floor.

Lootenant (Hell, WhiteWing) -Tell me about it. Do you think anyone is here?

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) -You're sitting next to me, so why are you asking me in the community? And yes, I bet that mana maniac and Savi are already here.

Noname (Hell, group 4) -Sup.

Lootenant (Hell, WhiteWing) - Of course, he is...

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) - Fuck you, Noname, and it's nice to see you.

Chapter 199: Your face

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) - Is Savant here as well?

Noname (Hell, group 4) -That loser? Savant arrived a week after us.

Mari (Hell, WhiteWing) -You guys should compete during the tournament.

Mari is one of the members of WhiteWing. She barely speaks, usually letting Lootenant and Brainiac take the lead, but she sometimes chimes in to poke fun at people. Other members of WhiteWing don't seem too interested in the community and rarely talk.

Savant (Hell, Alone) -That's the plan.

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) -Savi! How did you clear the third floor on your own? You're a monster.

Savant (Hell, Alone) -Do not call me Savi. I used my brain, obviously.

Noname (Hell, group 4) -Can you invest stat points into intelligence?

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) -You wouldn't, even if it was possible, Noname, lol. Anyway, we lost one of our members. Edwal killed him, you know, the guy Echo who joined us from the Hard difficulty.

Grumpy (Hell, group 4) - Sorry to hear that (T△T)

Lootenant (Hell, WhiteWing) -Yeah, he was a nice guy, but he angered that lightning jerk.

Hadwin (Hell, group 4) -So how did you guys clear it?

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) -Well, we got the warriors first, one after another, and then we went for the king. That guy was no joke, I tell you. But you know, teamwork. There are 12 of us. How about you?

Hadwin (Hell, group 4) - Ten. And even if we consider other groups that are still clearing the 3rd floor, we still don't know who the remaining ten members are, the ones who haven't spoken up until now.

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) - Yeah, it's interesting. Anyway, how we dealt with the saint is a secret, so don't even ask.

Noname (Hell, group 4) -No one was going to. Even I'm not that shameless.

I say that after deleting the message where I was going to ask just that.

Noname (Hell, group 4) -If you're in the mountains. Well, I left quickly.

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) -Great, just great.

Mari (Hell, WhiteWing) - Wow, if even he says that, we should probably leave.

Brainiac (Hell, WhiteWing) -Nice one, Noname! Try sharing more, maybe you'll be able to get something through.

I ignore the rest of the conversation. As time passes, we've learned how to send subtle hints like this to others, and they return the favor. It's not much, but it's something.

In my case, I issue danger warnings. Other members of the community, wrongly, view me as someone who impulsively jumps into danger, so when I mention being cautious, they interpret it as a severe warning.

They better repay the favor later.

I leave Haddy and the others to chat in the community and head back to my room. Here, I sit in an armchair that offers a beautiful view of the balcony and, by extension, the city called Virelia.

Damn, I really wanted to explore it a bit more, perhaps go on a treasure hunt, check out the auctions, or simply examine the trees. Instead, I have to deal with a bunch of guys who have a death wish.

Still, there are a few days left, so I can work on my constructs. Out of the four, only one needs some tweaking. Reinforcement. Currently, it drains my mana and uses 30% of it to fortify my body. The efficiency isn't great, so that's what I'll work on. I'll also increase the amount of mana it consumes. 40% should be enough.

I enter [Focus] and begin.

Instead of taking just a few hours, it takes almost an entire day and I end up improving all of my constructs:

Reinforcement (Construct)

Kinetic Mana Heart (Construct)

Mana Regulator (Construct)

Mana Sovereignty Mantle (Construct)

Reinforcement has become more effective. Oh, I didn't touch Kinetic Mana Heart; that thing is scary. I don't know what I was thinking when I made it, and now that I know a bit more and have more experience, I'm hesitant to modify it. I might be some kind of genius. 3rd floor Nat was impressive, I must admit. Dumb, but impressive. Good job, weirdo!

The Mantle shows slight improvement, as well, but it's not much.

However, the biggest change is in the Mana Regulator. The construct can now regulate the amount of mana that my Reinforcement and Kinetic Mana Heart receive. So instead of Reinforcement constantly consuming 40% of mana, I can adjust it. It can take all of my mana or none - though the latter isn't something I would want to test.

While the efficiency isn't as high as when I reinforce my body manually, the gap is narrowing, which is a positive sign.

And speaking of impressive? My Mana Reservoir is filled. My newest and passive is now full of my mana, ready for use.

It's three times the size of my entire mana pool.

If my calculations are correct, I currently hold as much mana as if I had 4,872 stat points invested into it: 609 base plus 609 from attribute upgrades, and then that amount times three due to the reservoir.

Sure, I know there are upgrades, passives, active skills, and perhaps other stuff that could increase mana to that amount much sooner and others should be capable of it as well, but this volume is still amazing to me.

I love it and I'm a tiny bit scared.

Both of us are sitting on the couch and Lily hands me a crown made of silver metal that the last king wore.

"I tried and tried, but couldn't do anything. I'm not sure what the Saint did to link it to her healing powers," Lily says, sounding a mix of disappointed and frustrated.

I take a sip of the hot drink I'm holding and stare at the crown in my hand.

Given more time and without the expedition coming closer, I'd examine it a bit more. But I'm already busy leveling up the new active skills I got from my primary class and haven't had the chance to work with Sophie on coordinates.

I decide and hand the crown back to Lily, "You can keep it and continue experimenting when you have time. Even if you destroy it I won't mind."

"Oh..." Lily responds, glancing between the crown and me, "Okay, I'll try!"

"Maybe you should give it to Dennis or Aaron. They might use [Connection] to explore the link it had with the Saint," Sophie suggests.

Both she and Izzy are seated on the couch opposite us, wrapped under blankets and also sipping hot drinks.

"The twins aren't very good at handling mana," I tell her.

"So the crown still functions as a receiver and connector but needs a... signal," Sophie asks.

"Yes, the plan is to have Lily serve as the new signal," I say, giving the black-haired girl a pat on the shoulder. She nods energetically in agreement.

"Boring," Izzy sighs.

"Your face is boring," I answer quickly, catching her off guard.

"No, your face is boring!" the young girl fires back after a moment.

"Biscuit doesn't think so, right buddy?" I turn my head to the right, and the best doggo lying on the couch next to me woofs, "He says your face is boring, Izzy," I tell the little girl.

The youngest member of the angry kittens doesn't seem to like that, and I can see her gears spinning as she tries to come up with a comeback.

Before she can retort, Hadwin joins us, pulling a chair closer, "We should be ready now. I checked our bags, and we have enough calorie-dense food to last us for a week and plenty of water for at least a few days."

Tess moves closer and picks up Biscuit, placing him on her lap as she sits next to me. The best doggo doesn't mind much and closes his eyes as she pets him, "In the worst case, we can use the system shop, so there's no need to worry about food and water," Tess says.

"Do you think we can use them to deal with the Living Tree Calamity since we will be there?" Hadwin asks Sophie.

The black-haired girl shakes her head, "I won't be able to manipulate the guild master or most of his stronger men, maybe just meddle with them slightly."

"Well, maybe Biscuit said so, but when you were gone, he agreed that your face is boring!" Isabella finally comes up with an answer and says it while smiling victoriously at me.

So weak! "Oh yes? Yesterday, he told me in my room that your face is boring!"

"Maybe we could pit them against the tree somehow and then finish off the one that remains, but we don't even know how strong the Calamity is," Tess continues talking to Hadwin while petting Biscuit.

"Yes, dealing with the Calamity still feels premature. We should focus on survival and not be too ambitious. Just testing it a bit would be enough," Hadwin stands up, "I'll go talk with the boys. Good night."

"Night, Haddy! Your face isn't boring at all, unlike Nathaniel's," Isabella chirps cheerfully.

"Biscuit, minus fifty nose boops if you tell Izzy that her face is boring," I turn to the doggo.

Immediately, the little divine beast opens his eyes and turns to the little girl. (Bor...) Biscuit starts but doesn't finish. He turns to me, a stern look in his eyes.

Have I been betrayed?

"Plus fifty more nose boops," I say to the little traitor, but the kind doggo doesn't budge, and Isabella comes rushing to hug him.

"You guys just need to stay careful, and I will handle the Serpent's Eye guild," I tell Tess, Sophie, and Lily, "As for the Calamity, we'll avoid it as much as possible. If it's as strong as the Colony, we won't stand a chance without either gaining more strength or having a solid plan."

The ants weren't that powerful, but their sheer numbers posed a challenge. I suspect there are even stronger variants. Currently, it's hard to even imagine a way to defeat this Calamity named the Colony. The Fallen Hero and Living Tree should be at least on a similar level of strength.

Sophie turns to me, "Can you really fight their guild master? He seems to be close to or over level 200."

"It doesn't matter," is all I tell Sophie, and after studying me for a moment, she nods.

After that, I spend some of my shards to buy five pieces of rare equipment. Hadwin uses one of my epic swords, so he doesn't get anything. Lily already received a rare amulet from me that helps her defend against magical attacks, and Tess got an endurium javelin back on the third floor. So, these three don't get any new items.

We don't have enough mana stones to buy good stuff in the city so I buy four rare light armors for the twins, Min-Jae, and little Isabella. For Sophie, I buy a bracelet that appears to improve her concentration and should enhance her primary skill.

One thousand two hundred shards vanish just like that, leaving me with 890 shards. But I don't mind. It's just a bit awkward to see them thanking me repeatedly.

Now that I think about it, they live in my house, they receive expensive items from me, so why am I the one doing all the giving? Where's my plan to stay in the shadows and let them handle the burdensome tasks?

As I watch the twins and Min-Jae excitedly putting on rare armors and checking the effects, I'm already thinking about what I should get from them in exchange. However, I come to a strange realization.

I could ask them to show me everything about their skills, classes, passives, and traits, and help with testing, but they already do that for free. I can ask for mana stones, but I suspect they would give them to me without any issues, only being curious about what I would test. Well, if they had any.

It's unnerving not to have a clear give-and-take.

When I get to my room and start monitoring the house, I do it more carefully this time, using [Perception] more deliberately. It still annoys me that I couldn't locate them properly as they sat in the house, despite my skill. Yes, I wasn't fully attentive in using the skill, and the guild master of Serpent's Eye is at a higher level than me and probably countered it. But still, it left me feeling annoyed.

Maybe I've become too overconfident lately, intoxicated by all this power, and becoming more and more careless.

This night, I don't sleep and continue to ponder over it while monitoring the house. I find an odd comfort in feeling the mana signatures of everyone in the house.

Chapter 200: The Old Capital

"We came to bring you to join the expedition," one of the men says as all of us meet in our garden.

There are five guild members from Serpent's Eyes, all a bit under 150. Even though it's considered rude, they send their mana to check out our strength.

I use my Mantle and Mana Cycling to hide most of my mana, as before, so they just glance over it in a similar way as their guild master did. Just like him, they think I'm at a similar level to the rest of group 4 and am just trying to hide my mana.

Taking our stuff, we follow them out of our house. Everyone is quiet.

As we pass by one of the restaurants, I notice Myrra sitting on a balcony, eating something and looking down at us. The weirdo lynthari smiles at us, and when she meets my gaze, her smile broadens and she mouths something that I don't even bother trying to decipher.

It doesn't take long before we leave the city, closely following the five men. A bit further, we meet the main group which is separated into two smaller groups. One of them is Serpent's Eye with their guild master Elydor and around twenty of his guild members, all of them clearly top of his guild. A smaller, but elite force.

Storm Brigade also has around twenty people with them, standing to the side. Unlike Serpent's Eye, they all wear clothes of a similar shade of blue and each has a brooch pinned on their chest. A simple silver piece of metal shaped like lightning.

Then there's another small guild, Blackrock, the guys who kept annoying our group members. They, along with us, will mostly provide support, and probably act as cannon fodder, even though no one says it out loud.

Curious to gauge the reaction of another of the five big guilds of Virilia, I watch Storm Brigade, but they barely show any interest in us. All of them have somewhat stern expressions. Their guild master is called Obelia, a sharp-looking woman with pale brown hair, and her eyes are silver with circuits covering the surface. Most likely a trait.

Elydor approaches us. This time, he's not as provocative, which confirms my suspicion that he just wanted to provoke us into attacking him so he could deal with us before the expedition. Since it didn't work, he chose a different approach.

"Just listen and don't do anything on your own," he advises shortly. The implications of not doing so are clear but it sounds somewhat empty, knowing what his intentions with us are. He then turns to leave, joining Obelia and discussing something while we wait.

(Food?) I hear.

“You just ate,” I respond. My answer doesn't seem to please the gluttonous beast, so I throw him a piece of deer jerky.

“What do you think?” I ask Tess, who stops next to me.

“Other than the two guild masters and a few others, I think most are quite manageable,” she replies.

I can't help but agree. Tess is already close to level 120, so dealing with some level 150 goons doesn't seem unreasonable. Sure, there are many of them, but I'm confident an opportunity will arise.

“I will try to focus mostly on defending and helping others, so the rest will be up to you,” she tells me.

“Yes, just do as we discussed, and it should be fine,” I respond.

While waiting, I watch a group of ten men working carefully. They clear a big patch of the ground to reveal a large circle made of some metal buried there. After pulling some Mana stones from the special box, they place them into a few slots that I make sure to remember, as well as noting which mana stones they use.

In the end, the number of stones they put into the metal circle equates to the value of multiple houses. All of the stones are glowing, filled to the brim with mana.

When they're done, they approach Obelia. After exchanging a few sentences, the woman steps toward the circle. Her silver eyes, intertwined with circuits, scan everything, and she even sends her mana into one of the stones, causing it to glow brighter.

“We are ready,” she informs Elydor.

“You heard the lady!” the guild master of Serpent's Eye shouts. “Everyone, get your asses into the circle.”

Knowing what to do, his men move in, as do the Storm Brigade. Hesitantly, Blackrock and the Angry Kittens follow.

The circle is spacious enough to accommodate all of us with room to spare.

After a final check, Obelia retrieves an item from her pocket, placing a mana stone inside it—a mana stone I hadn't seen until now, probably worth even more than the others. The moment she activates the item, the circle starts drawing power from the stones her men placed, illuminating it, entirely covered in circuits that twist, bend, and interweave.

A few more seconds later, it finally happens. All the mana gets redirected, filling the ground beneath us. What follows is the sensation of falling, immediately followed by the feeling of being pulled upwards. When it stops, a second later, I find myself in a different location.

The surrounding landscape is familiar, a vast rocky plain devoid of vegetation, with a city ahead. But this city is different from Virelia.

The old capital, is much larger, with fewer towers, albeit most are in ruins. The walls of the buildings have a faint glow, remnants of their past splendor. But the most eye-catching part of the city is the Tree.

A tree much larger than those in Virelia. This one reaches towards the sky, its branches seeming to touch the clouds and cast shadows over the entire city. The tree is leafless and appears sickly, as if dying, yet the amount of mana it radiates is astonishing, even from this distance. Its power seems close to the three-question mark hydra Lissandra once tore apart.

Tess confirms my observation: “Three question marks, the Sunseeker Tree.”

“So likely between level 300 to 450,” Hadwin chimes in, with all of us grouped together. “But it appears...sick?”

I can't help but agree; the tree seems ancient, withered, and barren. Could this Calamity be an easy one? That's unlikely. The system wouldn't allow such a twist.

The tree will undoubtedly awaken and reveal itself as the most powerful mage ever. Even the archmages from the zoo might face competition from the plant kingdom. Perhaps the future Earth's Absolute will be a random plant. A were-weed? Cinderweed?

"It doesn't feel as strong as the Paragons of the Empire I met," Sophie notes. "Even when they restricted their mana, they felt much more threatening."

"Champions, Paragons should be over 450, and Absolute is even beyond that. The tree here seems to be around 300? Maybe slightly weaker because it's sick?" I share, after observing it and comparing my impressions with what I felt on the second floor.

This observation leads to more questions.

On the first floor, the power scaling seemed relatively standard. On the third as well with most enemies were 50-100 levels higher than us, with the higher end representing the "bosses" of the floors.

The fourth floor follows a similar pattern. Slightly more challenging than the third, as there are humans and lynthari over 200, with some of us below 100, and even more stronger boss monsters in exchange for allowing us to use the city and its sources to take down Calamity.

But what about the second floor? All of us were under level 50, yet we met Champions and Paragons and even Lissandra who was well over them. How does that make sense? Is the second floor meant to be somewhat special?

I feel a presence moving towards our group, so I stop thinking and continue to track the mana signature. It's not like I'm examining it closely; at best, I can say it's like looking with my mana sense, which seems to be acceptable as long as the touch isn't too intrusive.

The one approaching us is Obelia, guild master of the Storm Brigade. She stops in front of us; her silver eyes interwoven with mana circuits study me. Her face remains mostly expressionless.

"I felt you examining the array," she says. "Next time, don't do that, please. They are sensitive, and you could end up interrupting the process." After that, the woman departs, heading back to her guild.

"I have goosebumps from the way she moves," Lily murmurs and I can't help but agree.

"Okay, fellow colleagues! Time to get ready," Elydor announces, clapping his hands together.

For tens, even hundreds of years, people have actively avoided the old capital after numerous expeditions full of powerful individuals perished. Yet, this one will be different, that's what the guild master of Serpent's Eye claims. The man had been preparing for the expedition for a long time, driven by his greed for the items he could acquire. He was even greedy and confident enough to have us join, so he could have a healer for himself in addition to the items.

His greed and confidence are almost admirable.

"First, I would like to thank Obelia and her Storm Brigade for bringing us here, saving us weeks of monotonous travel and substantial expenses," Elydor smiles.

He lifts up his hand, displaying a peculiar star-like mana stone, "This is the reason we are here: a record created by a man who served the Champion that once resided in the old capital. The record was made before his death and passed on to his family in hopes it would aid them in the future. The most remarkable part is that the man managed to flee when the old capital fell, surviving the onslaught of the Living Tree," Elydor points at the colossal leafless tree standing in the distance, overshadowing the city's remnants.

"After I, with a lot of luck got this record, it took years to decode. A challenging task, revealing much about the immense skills of a man who served under a Champion." He reaches into his pocket and tosses another stone towards Obelia, who swiftly catches it. "A copy for our esteemed colleagues, as promised."

Obelia stares at the stone for a moment and then hands it to the woman next to her who takes out some items and starts examining it.

"Original," Obelia says shortly to Elydor.

Annoyance flashes through the man's face, but it disappears as if it never existed, and he smiles. "Sure, dear Obelia," he then hands the original to one of his men who takes it and moves towards the Storm Brigade, holding it while they observe it

[Mana Harbinger - lvl ??]

As I look at the text over Elydor's head, I think about how strong he could be. Surely as strong as one of the three warriors from the 3rd floor, but stronger than the last king?

When I look at Obelia, I also check the text over her head.

[Stormshaper - lvl ??]

These two will be the biggest problem and around five more that are close to 170.

Seeing that most of the expedition just sits down with a few keeping watch, I do the same, looking at the city in the distance and the giant tree that towers over it.

"It's creepy, isn't it?" Lily plops down next to me and then moves even a bit closer, our shoulders almost touching.

Damn, even here she keeps trying that? It's silly but I gotta admire the grind.

"Lily." I hesitate for a moment. Should I say it out loud now? It could mess with her a bit and having a freshly rejected healer could get dangerous.

"Yup, I know, you don't like me, not the way I like you," She interrupts me. "But Nat, that doesn't change anything for me. I will keep trying and will keep trying to sneak to you while staying patient." Her smile is warm.

"What are you, a stalker?" I ask.

That surprises her and her eyes shake. She opens her mouth and closes it a few times.

It seems that I have caused critical damage, “Don't plant death flags and just focus on the expedition, okay?”

“So how do you even defeat something so giant?” she changes theme, gesturing at the tree. “I don't think my skill could hurt it much. It's just too big.”

“That's what she said,” one of the twins hears that as he passes by and doesn't miss the chance. That starts another round of bickering.

Yet even as they do that, I notice the way they carefully watch the people near us, and as they continue to monitor the area, everyone in their own way. Their bodies, even though relaxed, are ready to move, and their eyes are smiling as they joke, but they still feel dangerous, and wild.

And it's not just the twins and Lily, everyone from the group is like that. Tense, wild, and ready to attack.

Ten of us and Biscuit against forty elite members of two of the five big guilds plus their guild masters and another ten members of Blackrock, a small guild. And one giant tree in the distance. A tree that used to be powerful enough to deal with a Champion but for some reason lost a big part of its strength, judging by its current state.

Oh, and there are plenty of items. These items were owned by a man bearing the title of Champion. Someone like that won't have low-quality ones, right?

Anyway, I will be taking them.