

Tutorial 271

Chapter 271: Disciple

When our eyes meet, my disciple immediately hides behind the tree, and I feel her mana reaching towards me, examining me. She does it carefully, extremely so.

I think, out of all of the people Ive met up until now, she has the most covert method of sensing another persons mana. Her probing is almost unnoticeable, just a whisper in a hurricane. I try to replicate it and examine her as well, but I can tell she has defenses in place, guarding against her own techniques, so I ease off.

Sure, I could still do it, but there is no need to freak her out.

Instead, I continue to recline on the grass, enjoying the warm rays of sunlight on my skin and the slight breeze; the weather is really nice.

Her probing stops, and she continues to observe from her hiding place, so I open my system messages.

Train and protect your disciple.

A disciple was chosen from the tutorial database, this disciple was chosen for their similarities to you. There is much to be gained. Tread carefully!

Killing your disciple is not allowed and will be punished severely.

The longer your disciple stays alive, the bigger your rewards for this Floor quest will be.

There is nothing on my disciple; there are no stats, no information about her.

Maybe its on purpose? The words over her head say "disciple" and nothing of her level or class. Is this meant to encourage me to bond with my disciple, in good faith or poor, and learn these things from her?

The system puts a lot of emphasis on the word "disciple," so it's probably some sort of preparation for the future, as I predicted.

The system also said that my disciple was summoned from a database. So that probably means this Floor was created as a playground for her and I.

I look towards the tree again, and my silly disciple is still hiding. I'm extremely curious, and I want to inquire about her race, traits, skills, and level, all that good stuff. But I know if I do so right away, I will just scare her even more. So, I just close my eyes and wait.

It takes almost thirty minutes before I hear soft steps and the sound of water; it sounds as if someone is drinking straight from the lake.

Then there is another period of silence and a few more steps, heading my way; they are extremely careful and soft. The girl stands over me now, and through sheer force of will, I do not open my eyes.

Damn, I hope she hasn't pulled out a dagger to finish me off. There's still blood on my clothes from my wounds, so maybe she will because of fear.

Actually, wouldn't that be a funny way for me to go?

Okay, okay, let's calm down. I'm in too good a mood from my successful rounds of testing.

Then I almost start when I feel a wet touch on my forehead, but I still hold myself back.

The little girl with her tiny horns and blood red eyes continues her task. Gradually, as I realize what that is. She is using a piece of cloth she's dipped in water to wipe the blood from my face.

Unable to resist any longer, I slowly open my eyes without looking at her; instead, I stare at the sky.

She hesitates, before continuing, Does it hurt? she whispers in a soft voice.

Her face stays close to emotionless the entire time as I watch her with my peripheral vision. She is careful to control her expression, very much so. And it's an act.

She's not doing this now because she's worried about me. No, she is doing this to look innocent in my eyes, to get on my good side, and to gain favors. It's a simple, calculated move. The actions of one who's been hurt over and over again and can't trust people, so she pretends. To survive and to not get hurt.

I don't find it repulsing; no, not at all. I find it endearing.

I turn my head, and my eyes meet hers. Just for a short moment, we look into each other's eyes before she turns her gaze away.

Please, don't hurt me, she whispers.

Even these words are calculated, to maximize pity. Yet they are real all the same, the bruises on her body are proof of that. Her arms are pale and thin, her clothes are made of extremely cheap material, and she has no shoes.

I don't answer. Even if I tell her I won't, she will only pretend to trust me and expect it all the same. Things like this are best proven with action, not words.

Carefully, to not scare her, I sit up and face her, taking the opportunity to examine her a bit more.

Her horns are smaller than my pinkie; her eyes are deep red. When light shines on them, they become even more vibrant. They are pretty and contrast beautifully with her brown hair.

Why are you here? I ask.

She examines me as well, fixating on my contrasting eyes. For some reason, they fascinate her, but she doesn't ask about them.

I was told that you would be my master and I your disciple. The voice told me that you would help me become stronger.

Oh? Did she get a system message? Did the system pretend to be some godlike being and talk in her head? Or has she been programmed to think that?

Okay, so how about this? You won't lie to me. If you don't want to answer my question, you don't have to, you just can't lie. In exchange, I won't lie to you.

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I know this conversation might be too heavy for someone this young, but if she is anything like me, this should be reasonable.

She carefully considers this, and nods.

Somehow, I find it cute. Her face trying to hide emotions, the tiny horns poking from her head, and her red eyes.

Next, I will become your master. I will train you and help you become stronger. I will make sure no one hurts you and that you have as much food as you need.

Her expression immediately breaks revealing her suspicions, before she puts a small fake smile on her face.

Yes, please! she shouts, adding emotion to her voice.

Even knowing shes putting on a mask, while trying to hold on to some hope, I almost fall for it.

It won't be free obviously. You will have to tell me about your skills, class, and stats, and answer some questions for me other than ones you won't want to.

I... will do so, she nods, and this time I can tell she is a bit more serious.

Of course, good things don't come for free, so she feels more comfortable when she has to do something for them.

What is your name?

The little girl looks at me, eyes wide open. A hint of surprise and fear in them.

Carefully, she opens her mouth to lie, but then, looking at me, she whispers, I don't want to tell. Her voice is extremely weak, and I watch her squint her eyes, her body tensing, expecting a blow.

She could try to lie, but she decided to take a chance and uphold our newly formed pact. It's mostly childlike naivety and I can't see it as anything else, no matter how hard I try.

I see, that's fine, I answer.

Her body stiffens even more, and her eyes blink up, our eyes meeting for a second.

I don't know your customs, can you tell me why you can't let me know your name?

It's forbidden, she answers.

I decide not to push any more, Okay. Are you hungry?

This time she perks up even more, finally letting herself eye the pile of things I left near the lake. Materials, clothes, food, mana stones, valuables, everything I looted... everything I brought from the fourth floor. There's plenty there.

Yes, please... master.

I stand up, my body healed, but aching, yet I do not regret a thing. Something tells me that what I just did with the black mana was a bit, just a little bit dumb. But I'm sure 1st floor or 2nd Floor Nathaniel would try the same without hesitation. Both of them were risk-takers. Hell, 3rd floor Nathaniel and his kinetic mana heart would probably do the same, so I can't be left behind by those weirdos.

I will totally try it again as soon as possible. Well, maybe after upgrading my kinetic mana heart. I wanted to do it before my disciple came, but well stuff happened.

Taking a few more steps, I go through the pile of stuff. Unfortunately, there are no clothes that would fit her, but I scroll through the system shop and find some, as expected, but they cost 30 shards, almost as much as uncommon gear.

It looks like the system is trying to make me a few shards lighter.

When I buy them, I pretend to grab them from the pile and set them in front of her. The clothes are simple, but the material feels nice. A white shirt, brown pants, and even some shoes. Nothing to sing about, but even that seems to greatly surprise the little horned creature.

They are yours, according to our deal. Please wash first, I grab one of the towels I bought with me, I will go scan the area so you will have some privacy.

Before she can react, I use kinetic energy to push myself into the air, higher and higher.

High up, I take a deep breath while keeping myself afloat at the spot.

Noname (Hell, group 4) -This floor quest sucks, I dont know how to deal with kids.

Izzy (Hell, group 4) -My disciple is almost as old as me!

Oh boy, I did not think of that at all.

Noname (Hell, group 4) -Are you ok?

Izzy (Hell, group 4) - Yes! It's fun! My disciple is really cute, and her hair is blue and keeps floating around like fire. I want that too!

Noname (Hell, group 4) - How did Soph handle you getting separated?

Izzy (Hell, group 4) -

Noname (Hell, group 4) -Still, dont do anything stupid.

Izzy (Hell, group 4) - Ive already heard it from everyone else

Well, it looks like Lily is teaching Izzy how to use emoticons nice.

Noname (Hell, group 4) - Archdeer meat.

I say the password in the message.

FoodFood (Hell, group 4) -Asshole!

Noname (Hell, group 4) -Please dont tell me you also have a disciple.

FoodFood (Hell, group 4) - Food!

What the hell.

At this point, I'm not even surprised, instead, I'm extremely curious. Unfortunately, I don't think I will be able to get an answer.

Seeing that no one else seems to be joining, I exchange a few more messages with the two youngest members of group 4 and turn off the Community.

Still floating high in the air, I reposition myself to lie on my back.

The air here is colder, and the wind is stronger, but the view is amazing, and I really enjoy the feeling of it. Things like this keep reminding me how much everything has changed over the past year, and I love it. All these powers and options that have opened to me and expectations of more in the future.

Lulled by the wind, I spend a few more minutes like this before deciding to land back on the ground.

The little red-eyed girl is already sitting there in her new clothes, clean, but still bruised. The towel is carefully hung on the branch nearby, and I notice that she even cleaned the branch a bit to not dirty the towel.

All the food I left for her to eat is still there, untouched. My disciple just sits there in front of the food, stomach growling, eyes flicking at it, not daring to touch it without my express permission.

Starting now, you can take any food I have or water and eat it anytime you want, without asking me, I say.

Her pupils expand, yet she still doesn't take it; instead, she looks at me, surprise apparent on her face.

She is still suspicious, I see.

With a sigh, I make my voice a bit haughty, It would be annoying to have you constantly asking for food, I say, knowing this is reasoning she would accept more.

This time it seems to work, and she nods, immediately grabbing a few pieces of fruit and slowly nibbling on them.

For a short moment, a happy smile crosses her face as she tastes the sweet fruit, and she grabs another piece.

Chapter 272: Bribes

I came up with the best way to ask questions of my untrusting disciple.

The answer is simple. It's money and items.

Yup.

It's totally not suspicious, like some random adult offering candy to a little kid. Not at all.

I'm too curious to spend weeks gaining her trust, so I have decided to use some things I bought from the 4th floor. I try with rare items, mana stones, more food, and the little girl loves it, even though she tries to hide it.

After hours of observing her, I've come to notice the imperfections in her facade. It's easier than usual, probably because it feels like talking to myself.

What is your race? I ask her after sliding a rare amulet to her. The item is capable of creating a barrier to shield against mana-based attacks.

It's useless to me, but her hands nearly shake as she takes it.

While she quickly hides it under her new clothes, I notice a subtle and mischievous smirk on her face. As if she thinks she is scamming me.

I will need more to answer that, she says, already becoming braver in my presence.

She seems to think I'm someone rich and powerful, who has no idea how much these items are worth, so she's decided to scam me for more.

How cute.

Sure, I say and put a few lower-grade mana stones and a small bag in front of her.

After grabbing it all, she puts her newly gained things inside.

I'm half-demon, half-human, her voice quietly sounds, and she examines me carefully, I don't know who my parents are or which one of them was a demon.

Are demons feared where you come from?

People don't like them very much she doesn't say more.

The half-demon girl becomes more rigid, and it's easy to see how they treat her wherever she is from. A young kid without any parents or family, from a race that is feared and hated. They probably treat her extremely poorly, all while thinking they did her a favor just by letting her live.

I don't like that very much. It's only been a few hours, but she is my disciple, and my disciple being treated like this shows disrespect for me as her master.

Okay, it's decided, before she returns back, I will teach her some nice explosive skills and where to kick to make it hurt as much as possible. The little half-demon has a lot of self-control, but she is timid and weak, and that's something I can help with.

I take more food and throw in some sweets and set it in front of her. As if trained, she waits for my question.

Tell me your level, your skills, your class, and your passives.

When she hesitates, I add a bit more to the pile.

Level 6, skills are [Concentration] and [Mana Manipulation], I have no class and one passive, it's common Mana Channeling.

I nod, and she quickly takes all the food, keeping some on hand to slowly nom on.

It looks like the system didn't lie and even our skills are similar. So, what is the exact purpose of this Floor? To train someone like me to become as strong as possible and then get as high a reward as possible?

Whatever, I will find out sooner or later.

Okay, my silly disciple, I say, changing my bearing, much to her surprise.

I quite like her personality and the skills she has. She also feels like an underdog to me. Bullied, at the bottom of the ladder, and who doesn't want the underdog to win? Especially when this one is my disciple.

Oh no, we can't have that. I will turn this half-demon into a terrifying being.

My name is Nathaniel; use it if you want or do not; it's up to you. You can call me master or hey you; I don't mind. I will train you and I will protect you while you are here. I will ensure that you do not go hungry and that you have nice clothes.

Her expression isn't exactly trusting, but that's fine. I will say what I want to say and prove the rest with action.

In exchange, I will need information regarding your skills, your classes, and your growth so we can make you as strong as possible. I might also ask a few things about the place you came from. As always, you can decide not to answer any questions you are uncomfortable answering. Is everything understandable so far?

She nods.

Good, now I would like to set a few ground rules. First, never betray me. Im trusting you and I promise that I will never betray you if you dont betray me first.

The little half-demon nods once more, her big red eyes observing me, Master she asks carefully.

Yes?

Do you not hate me? Do you not find my eyes ugly and horns disgusting?

Damn, Im quite good with kids, am I not? The change is staggering. Oh, maybe it's because of the food? Or maybe she feels a kinship with me as well.

In place of an answer, I lean in close and let her look me in the eyes, Do you find my eyes ugly?

No! Masters eyes are beautiful! she shouts, maybe she really thinks that, or perhaps she has a fear of antagonizing me.

Thank you. I also find your eyes pretty and your horns cute, led by curiosity, I also reach out and touch one of her horns, pulling on it.

The texture is nice and it doesnt feel cold, rather it has a strange warmth to it. When I move it from side to side while holding it, her head moves too and the shock on her face almost makes me laugh.

I let go and she puts her hands over her horn protectively.

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She looks angry, but to me, it's more like an angry little kitten rather than anything to be taken seriously. Even as her face tries to remain expressionless.

Try filling this mana stone with your mana, I say and hand her one of the smaller mana stones I used for practice some time ago.

I take a moment to add some simple inscriptions to the mana stone, making it easier to infuse it with mana.

Then I stand up and fly high into the air. Even now, I keep myself afloat as if I were laying on a bed and position myself so I can see her just in case. The little half-demon doesn't seem to notice the anchor I left next to her, just in case.

Further away, I have some space to think about how I should deal with her. There are multiple options.

One of them is keeping my distance, training her and making her as strong as possible for the best possible reward.

Another one is to be fair, a bit harsh and use training methods that are more demanding, producing better results. That would include some pain from her side and the risk of her hating me.

Of course, I also have the option to become unhinged, treat her poorly, and train her through fear. She is just a fake so that wouldnt be so bad, right?

I dont like that last option at all and there is no need for it.

My disciple seems to have a personality I can appreciate. She seems to be the type that likes to keep her distance while tending towards honesty when she has no reason to lie. And I wont lie, I pity her a bit. As with the many times before, it's hard for me to treat kids harshly.

But this is dangerous as well.

I just ended the 4th floor and Myrra, someone I've come to appreciate and befriend, stayed there with little more than a tiny speck of hope of Lissandra reaching her. Heck, for all I know, the floor disappeared immediately. Or maybe even nothing changed. Maybe Lissandra already counts as a

tutorial attendee and even though she is not showing in the community, maybe the system still has some errors that need to be fixed.

Bringing me back to the main point - should I open up a bit? Should I allow myself to befriend my disciple, only to end up saddened when the floor ends?

As I like, I leave it up to future Nathaniel to deal with and open the Community.

I click on the Normal difficulty and a chat opens.

Noname (Hell, group 4) -hello.

One (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -oh, there is really someone from Hell difficulty!

Eve (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -I thought they were making fun of us.

One (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) - Noname, how is Hell difficulty? Is it true that you have a corgi and a snake that are probably stronger than us, lol?

Eve (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -I think that little girl was just making fun of us, One.

Patriot (Normal, OnlyDads) -she sounded honest.

Patriot (Normal, OnlyDads) - hello, Noname!

Noname (Hell, group 4) -I dont know about the snake, but the corgi would surely take on some people from Hard difficulty.

One (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -heh, they are all the same.

Two (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) - I told you, all people from Hell difficulty have a screw loose

Eve (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) - please, Noname, dont add fuel to the fire. These two are annoying enough as it is.

One (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) - thats not what you said on our date.

Eve (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) - screw off, you made me pay even for you!

One (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) - equality.

Eve (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -how is that equality!?

Patriot (Normal, OnlyDads) - what level are you, Noname?

Noname (Hell, group 4) -I would rather keep it to myself. How come you guys didnt join our Community?

Patriot (Normal, OnlyDads) -heh, thats fine. You dont have to tell.

Two (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -you cant join a Community that is in a higher difficulty than yours. This means Hell can join every Community while Hard can join every other than Hell etc.

Oh? Thats interesting and it explains why these people havent been in our Community.

Noname (Hell, group 4) -On the first floor, we had to survive for 30 days in a forest full of monsters that became harder over time. Cinderbear, battle trolls, phantom goblins. The second was to watch the end of the world caused by a skill powered by an unknown rarity sword, the third was to kill the body of a dead Saint Absolute that caused the end of the world, the 4th was to kill one of 4 calamities, each of them over level 250. What were your quests?

Two (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -holy fuck, is he lying?

Eve (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) - I think that girl said something similar.

Two (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -they could be both lying.

Eve (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -there is no real reason to.

Eve (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -Our first floor was similar but the monsters were probably weaker. The second floor was to survive a war between two small nations. The third we had to find the cause of the Decay. The fourth one did have this race of cat girls! They were so tall and cute, I wish I could take a picture! There we had to help free an old capital from the Living Tree.

Two (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -I want my lynthari mommy back

What the fuck?

Eve (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -creep.

Two (Normal, Ominous Latin Name) -I saw you trying to pull their tails!

I leave the Community before they continue.

It's interesting to see the differences between each Community and seeing Easy and Normal it looks like a lot of them take it much easier than any of us here in Hell. The proof will come when we finally meet face to face and I'm already curious about their level of skill.

A bit over a month remains until the tournament and more questions come. What will happen to the floor and floor quest during the tournament? Will they pause?

I float a bit lower to get a better view of the half-demon below me.

The entire time I'm up here, she keeps working on the mana stone. Her brow is furrowed, and as she does so, she even ignores the items she's been holding so covetously ever since I gave them to her.

She doesn't nibble on the food; the bag is forgotten on the side, and she only has eyes for the mana stone.

Her mask cracks even more, and the corner of her lips lifts up in a smile as she manipulates her mana and works on the task I gave her.

What she is showing me right now is something I know very well, and the moment I see her like that, I know I won't be able to treat her harshly or keep my distance. No, she and I both share the same love for this thing called mana.

And just like that, it's decided.

System, you bastard, the end of this floor is going to hurt, isn't it?

Chapter 273: Train and protect

My disciple is a weird little creature.

The young half-demon doesn't notice when I return, and I can see her shaking slightly, sweat on her brow. However, she still finishes the task I gave her, and when I move closer, she hands me a mana stone that contains a tiny bit of her mana. The amount is so small that it barely penetrates the surface.

Taking no note of that, she wipes sweat from her forehead, and I could swear for a moment a smug smile flashes on her face.

Wow, just wow.

In the end, her mood changes gradually, as if she comes back to the real world outside the fascinating qualities of mana, one that contains people as well. Her defenses shoot up, and her expression firms, an apparent attempt at hiding her feelings. It's not good to let a person you don't trust know that you like something. It can be used against you.

As I examine the stone, she patiently waits, and I notice that she is still shaking. Was it too much for her? It could be that; I have no experience helping someone as young as her train.

Good job, I say simply, to her surprise.

The little half-demon doesn't seem to be used to compliments, and after a bit of hesitation, she nods, Thanks, master, she says carefully.

I hand the stone back to her, You can keep it and train when you feel like it.

The mana stone contains something like an extremely simple labyrinth. If she sends her mana through the right circuit and it reaches the end of the labyrinth, I will know.

I intend to improve her [Mana Manipulation] and to see if her [Concentration] will help her with it.

Of course, it could all be useless, as my only experience with learning is from being self-taught, and after becoming Lissandra's disciple for a short while, she just threw me down in the tunnels full of giant serpents and imps.

Good old times.

Damn, now I really want to return to those tunnels and beat up every single monster that's left.

Master? a soft voice sounds, and I return back to reality.

Two deep red eyes carefully observe me when I ask, Yes?

Are you strong? her question is timid somewhat but calculated.

I guess she already judged I'm not someone who would react by asking How dare you ask me such a question.

Still, I give it a bit of thought. Am I strong? Probably?

Out of people from group 4, I'm currently the strongest of course, only after our future corgi Archmage. And perhaps Noodle. He is still small and weak, but our future animal overlords can't be underestimated.

I did watch other members fighting and spent some time comparing myself to them, and even then, I can with confidence say that I would be capable of fighting and winning against any of them.

A fight 1v1 against the Fallen Hero might be possible as well, but it wouldn't be as nice as what they did, and I would need to put my life on the line.

I'm also stronger than Myrra, who bears the title of fake Champion candidate.

My level is 214, but I'm most likely closer to someone at 240-250.

Am I as strong as a Champion disciple? Probably if I fought against a weaker one, but so far, it looks like anyone who's earned that title is extremely talented.

As for the Champion, nope, there is no way. From what I know, the Champion is someone over three question marks, so most likely over level 450, more likely even higher.

Then there are titles such as Absolute and the title of Ruler - the being from the Beyond trial mentioned it. Ruler. I don't know, but it sounds like a title given to someone even stronger than Absolute. The main hint is that the Ruler of Greed is someone who has something to do with the tutorial that was even capable of replicating Absolutes.

There is also the possibility that the Absolutes are weakened in the tutorial in comparison to their real strength, but it's hard to confirm it with the information I have.

Instead of answering, I ask the question, Who is the strongest being you know in the world?

She answers without any hesitation, The Hornless Demon for sure She then hesitates, The Undying Dragon is strong too, and the humans have the Bloody Hero. I can't be sure, sorry.

That's fine, do you know their levels or titles? Champion? Absolute?

She wipes sweat from her forehead again, and I notice that she is still shaking. Did she really overextend herself so much?

I don't know, she shakes her head.

I see, to answer your question, I'm strong and will become much stronger, that's something I'm sure of and have pride in.

She gulps and then asks, Can I go and take a sip? My throat hurts a bit.

Go ahead, I answer, and when she starts heading to the lake, I stop her, Where are you going?

I can drink from the lake; master's water is precious She stops when I lift my hand.

Jumping to my feet, I pass by her and examine the lake with my [Perception]. I repeat it multiple times, but I don't notice anything.

Then I step closer and cup a bit of water in my hands and smell it, and it seems normal, Did you drink from here?

Something in my voice must scare her, because she only nods, her face becoming more blank. She is still shaking, and I notice that she is sweating more and more.

I take a little sip of the water and examine how it tastes.

It's normal to me.

Yet the entire time we've been here, I haven't noticed any animals, or insects, coming to drink from it. There are no fish either.

The lake is calm and beautiful, and the water looks extremely clear, but I've only seen animals far off in the distance.

Put a finger in your mouth and vomit out as much water as you can, I order her.

Hearing the urgency in my voice, she goes to the side and does just that.

Noname (Hell, group 4) - is the water poisonous?

I try to ask in the Community, but my message gets censored, so I make multiple attempts to circumvent it, but each message gets blocked.

Even that much is enough.

I made a mistake. Even though I've put most of my stats into mana, I have plenty of points in constitution, thanks to tempering, mainly. In comparison to a level 6, I'm much more resilient.

The narrative has been illicitly obtained; should you discover it on Amazon, report the violation.

So, is the water poisoned? It's possible.

I open up the system shop to try and find some medicine, even though I hadn't found anything like that before. There are no potions, no healing tattoos, nothing. When I delve deeper, I find out that even buying water and food is impossible at the moment. It looks like obtaining supplies on my own is part of the 5th floor.

Taking a few steps, I stop in front of the little half-demon.

After throwing up, she wipes her mouth and sweat, yet she is still shaking.

I-Ill be fine she mumbles weakly and tries to put some strength into her posture to look stronger, Just a few minutes.

Is this silly little girl that the systems thrown at me worried that I will leave her alone if she causes trouble?

Seeing that she is still shaking, I start converting kinetic energy to thermal and radiating it from my body. I even create a thermal orb that I place next to her and then grab a blanket from the pile of things I bought with me.

Understanding me, she wraps the blanket around herself, and even in this situation, she curiously observes the thermal orb. She even wants to ask me about it, but then changes her mind.

Such a dumbass, she reminds me of someone.

Hand, I tell her, and she pushes her small hand from under the blanket.

I take her hand and send my senses through her body, examining it and looking for something. The best case would be if it's being caused by mana; in that situation, I would be capable of getting rid of it.

Another option is to try to somehow apply my passive to her and heal her. But I dont even know if thats possible, and even if it is, I could end up hurting her badly. Thermal energy isnt exactly easy to handle.

In the worst case, I could buy an item to give her some sort of healing like the Ethercrystal sword. The rarity of items with that kind of effect is usually epic at least, but I can sacrifice around 4 thousand shards to not fail the quest.

After examining her, I find nothing and conclude that its whatever is in the water is biological and not mana-based.

Not knowing what else to do, I just tell her to lay down, and I sit next to her, keeping a watch and observing her state.

Truly a nice start, damn it. I'm used to people having a higher level, she is so fragile and so weak like this.

While waiting, I also check my notifications.

The ability to pass your teachings and experience is an important skill, and the relationship between disciple and master is to be taken seriously.

Train and protect your disciple for three weeks. After that, they will return to their world, relying on the knowledge they've gained from you to survive in its harsh conditions.

Remember, the better you do, the higher the reward will be.

Good luck!

So, three weeks. So far, it looks like this floor will be on the shorter side.

I check on my disciple, and she is still shaking, only her head poking out from under the blanket. Once in a while, she opens her eyes to check on me and to look around. It's like a wild animal watching for danger.

Pretending I do not see it, I let her do so and continue to go through the system messages.

Side quest: Find out what happened to this world.

Reward: 5000 shards.

Side quest:Locate the Mirror.

Reward:???

Side quest:Locate the survivors.

Reward: Food and water supplies.

Side quest:

Reward: Survival.

That's unusual; the system doesnt give this many side quests that often. What interests me the most are the rewards for the mirror quest and the last one about Calamity.

I wonder, what are the rewards if I kill it? And more importantly, should I even try? The system rarely gives these warnings, and the entire quest seems like a joke.

After checking the quests, I spend my time working solely on the preparations for upgrading my kinetic mana heart.

Checking on my disciple a few dozen times, I can tell that she is slowly getting better. She is still shaking, and her small body seems even more petite, but she is at least sleeping. She instinctively moved closer to me, In her sleep, as if she was seeking protection.

Poor little thing. Remembering how careful she was, it's not something she would usually do, and that shows how big a toll it has taken on her.

As always, the cheeky system needs to throw some bullshit into the mix to make the floor more difficult.

Just in case, I activate my domain and place traps all around us. Thin threads of mana that will cut anything that runs into them, thinner threads that will warn me when they break, and dozens of mana orbs frozen nearby that I can instantly seize control of for attack and defense.

I even set some triggers that would make another set of mana projectiles shoot towards any trigger that happens to be activated, this one inspired by an assassin from the second floor. Obviously, all made by me, in an extremely janky way.

The assassin would be proud.

Then I also tie anchors to a few projectiles that I shoot as far as I can. In the worst case, I will grab my silly disciple and just teleport us away.

It feels like an overreaction, but it doesn't cost me much, so it is fine.

After that, I take a few deep breaths until my heartbeat slows down, and [Focus] filters out useless emotions as I delve into the upgrade of my mana heart.

Domain encompasses me, [Mana Manipulation] grabs control of my mana which I channel throughout my body, etching and improving on the pathways I made before, and scratching out the less efficient ones in exchange for plenty of pain. But that much is fine.

[Infusion] activates as well, working along with [Resonance] to allow me to change my body.

[Infusion - lvl 20 > Infusion - lvl 21]

The process is much smoother than it was on the second floor, and I connect the new pathways to my Mana Regulator right away, improving on that as well.

As I've done many times before, I delve deep into my mind and body and the outside factors lose their meaning and become even more distant. And here I am. Tinkering and changing things that will make me stronger. Working with my own power to make it happen. A feeling of satisfaction permeates me.

I try hard, I get rewarded.

Unlike the real world where you can try extremely hard, do everything right, and still get screwed over, the world of the system feels fairer.

Yes, even here there is a difference between talents; otherwise, there wouldn't be 5 difficulties, but a lot of it comes from how much you are willing to put in. How much are you willing to bleed and hurt just to make things happen?

I know that I'm not the most talented person ever. My talent lies with mana, but it's far from the kind of thing to be seen once in a millennium. Even Lissandra confirmed it, and she reached a place near the top.

But who cares? Who are they and the system to tell me how far I will go?

No, I will try hard as I always did, and climb higher than anyone else, and then it will be me looking down at all these so-called geniuses.

It becomes easier and slowly I sense that I'm coming to the end. Everything falls into place, and the last checks confirm that my creation is as good as I can currently make it.

I send mana through the improved web of pathways I've tied around my heart and a new notification sounds.

Congratulations, you have upgraded your second Construct. The name will be changed, and the construct will be shown in the status under active skills and over passive skills.

Well done!

Thermokinetic Mana Heart:

Alongside its ability to compress mana, the heart works as medium for converting the rhythmic motions of the heart and mana into two Primordial energies, Kinetic and Thermal. The Thermokinetic Mana Heart is a harmonious blend of these forces, offering a reliable and steady source of power.

Chapter 274: We are leaving

I diligently observe my body and my upgraded construct while I slowly let more mana trickle into the pathways I created or upgraded.

The heart that gigachad Nathaniel from the third floor created in his moment of genius, or stupidity, slowly activates.

The name is simple: Thermokinetic Mana Heart, so I hope when I upgrade it for the next time, it will be a bit cooler. Not like it would change anything, but it would surely be nice. Thankfully, the heart can do everything I wanted it to do. It can compress mana, which should make my skills stronger, as well as my kinetic and thermal energy. There is no way it will be up to the task of creating black mana, but even that is enough as it will allow me to practice and prepare for the future.

Checking on my sleeping disciple and observing the quiet forest around us, I make the decision to test my upgrades. I change the setting on my Mana Regulator and allow my heart to start compressing the mana it generates.

As expected, the generation of mana slows down, but the mana it creates feels different.

It's a slightly darker shade of blue, though its still transparent, and when I use it to power my skills, I do notice a small difference.

I decide to change the setting again and it starts compressing it even more, as the shade of my mana grows darker. The current compression seems to be fifty percent of what the heart is capable of, so I hold there for a while.

Right away, I can tell that I won't get anywhere close to creating black mana, but this also feels somewhat reasonable. If it was easy to imitate that, everyone would be doing it.

My ability to create black mana feels a bit like cheating, and I'm only capable of it because of [Focus]. Once again I find myself thinking that it could be a much stronger skill than I originally thought. As

expected from my most treasured skill. Hopefully, it will grow until I can start making fun of Lily's [Disintegration]; that would be nice.

Next, I test my thermal energy generation. Up until now, I had to transfer kinetic energy into thermal, so it was kind of annoying. Getting it directly should reduce waste and improve the speed at which I can create it.

When thermal energy flows through my body, I immediately notice the difference in its quality.

The last remaining wounds from upgrading the construct disappear nearly immediately, and when I force thermal energy out of my body, it seems to be a deeper shade of gold than usual.

I watch as the flame flickers over the palm of my hand and control it carefully.

It wouldn't be good if the heat it released killed my disciple. I never got used to fully controlling my powers as people around me grew with me. The little bit of heat I release might be no problem to someone from group 4, but would probably burn any human from Earth alive. Even the pressure of my fully released mana could be capable of that.

It's an interesting thought. My body itself is turning into a weapon, and if I don't control it, even walking around without controlling my mana or constructs could kill people with lower levels. Or it could kill this disciple of mine. I wonder if that's part of the lesson of this floor, to learn to control my powers around much weaker beings.

After putting out the flames, I generate kinetic energy, and it fills quicker than before, and even its quality seems higher, the same as thermal.

It's already decided that I will delve more into my Primordial energies on this floor. I know I'm terribly lacking, and I use them in the simplest way, and I'm sure there is more to them. There is just so little time and so many things I want to work on.

Master? the little half-demon says in a weak voice.

Our eyes meet, and once again, I admire her red eyes. It might be childish of me, but I think they're cool and, the way they contrast with her brown hair, makes them look even more striking.

Disciple, why don't you use 'nya' after every sentence? I heard about an ancient half-demon that did so, amazing their foes and companions, and gaining the respect of their peers, I answer instead.

My good mood leaks through, as it always does after a successful round of self improvement. The upgraded construct is a huge success.

Is the master making fun of me? she asks carefully.

That simple sentence tells me her level of intelligence is higher than that of an entire race of cat people.

Half-demons 1, Lynthari 0.

Only a little bit, is there anything you want?

Can I eat some of the food you gave me as an answer to your question?

It's your food; you don't have to ask me, I answer.

Well, it's obvious that she wouldn't trust me given that she's only known me for a few hours and might reasonably expect me to go back on my word.

I watch as she gets out from under the blanket and carefully fixes her clothes, I'm sorry, they got dirty. I will make sure to clean them before returning, she says. Her old clothes are still carefully folded in the pile next to her. Rather rags than clothes.

It's fine, I reply.

Then I watch as she takes a bit of the food out and slowly eats it. She is still shaking a bit, so she wraps the blanket around herself, but she looks better now. Something shown by her getting hungry.

I stand up, grab a bottle of water from my pile of things, and hand it to her.

If you discover this narrative on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen. Please report the violation.

When she hesitates, I say, I will be asking more questions later.

Only then does she nod and, opening it, takes a few sips.

Bored and waiting for her to get better, I send my senses towards the sky. Ever since the beginning, I've felt something strange in the air and I've had trouble identifying it. When using my trait, I'm able to see faint mana waves that don't seem natural, almost as if they were man-made. Yet another mystery to uncover. Finding out what happened to this world, finding out what the Mirror is, locating survivors, and even the Floor quest. Plus, there is plenty of information to be collected from the other Communities.

The little half-demon keeps carefully looking me over, trying to get to know me and get a read on my behavior. She seems to know that her survival is tied to me and that I seem to have some incentive to keep her alive. Plus, there was a voice that told her I would be her master.

Tell me, that voice that told you about me. Do you know what it is? I ask her.

She shakes her head, I know it's something very powerful and she hesitates, I think I can trust it and...

And maybe I can trust you. She doesn't say these words out loud, but it's clear.

Well, the system does system things as always.

I open my mouth to ask more, but that's when one of my anchors far in the distance gets destroyed. The moment my connection disappears, I feel another connection using my cut-off link to track me and it locates me before I even destroy the link.

For a short moment, I feel goosebumps rise on my skin and far in the distance, a deep growl resounds.

The presence I sensed for that short moment felt terrifying.

We are leaving, I shoot up from the ground.

Without hesitation, I grab my disciple and as many bags as I can, accounting for the importance of the items they contain. Right after, I use [Tether] and transport us to another anchor.

The little half-demon sways and throws up what she ate just a moment ago, a few wounds marking her body.

I tie another anchor to a mana projectile and shoot it as far as I can, watching it disappear, boosted quickly by generated kinetic energy. In that short moment, I know that that thing has reached the lake, and I feel it tracking the remains of mana that linger in the air as it seeks us.

It locates us, and a feeling of overwhelming pressure touches me.

As quickly as I can, I generate a small black mana orb and leave it in the air before teleporting us again, hoping it will stop the tracking.

After reappearing, I notice a few more wounds on the body of my disciple. She doesn't say anything, but I notice how she is clenching her teeth. I even tried to make transport as smooth as possible, but she might be way too low level for that.

Instead of teleporting again, I leave another black orb on the ground and, holding her to my chest, lift off high into the air.

After reaching a decent height, I use [Regalia] to form a pointy barrier in front of us so she doesn't get hurt by the pressure and boost us away.

I gradually boost my speed more and more, as I observe her condition, my heart overflowing with kinetic energy. I also start radiating a tiny bit of thermal to keep her warm.

Even while flying away, I can hear a deep growl behind me and do not stop for an hour until we are far away. Only then do I slow down and gently land back on the ground.

Immediately, the little half-demon falls to the ground, her small hands grabbing the grass, and she shakes a bit, about to cry.

But she then forces herself to stop and with clenched fists, she stands up. Taking a few deep breaths, she takes a moment and when she turns to me, her face is once again calm.

Not knowing what to say, I just nod and start examining our new location. Trees much taller than normal surround us, some of them have fallen to the ground and been covered in moss. The area is colorful, full of verdant grass, vibrant leaves, and colorful flowers.

This place is strangely calming, and I gesture to her, as we walk under one of the great fallen trees to get some shade.

It's illogical as something like that will offer barely any defense, but some primitive part of my mind tries to convince me that we are safe. Yet another piece of my mind that I silence with [Focus] keeps telling me to get angry and to go and mess up whatever that thing was.

I know I might be a bit too careful at times, but there is a difference between being too careful and minimally suicidal.

Even during that short connection, I felt the danger. If that thing is not a three-question mark, it's goddamn close to one and without the proper preparations, while trying to protect my disciple, it could end badly. I could even end up killing her myself by releasing too much mana.

So, I push these feelings away. For now.

Master?

Hm? What?

It hurts. As she says that, the red-eyed girl falters, and I grab her before she falls, I'm sorry, but it hurts. Tears appear in her eyes.

Is she trying to gain my sympathy, is this some sort of a trick?

But no matter how much I look, it doesn't seem like an act. Her mask cracks and tears fall down her cheeks.

I'm sorry, I will endure, I promise, please don't throw me away, she continues to mumble.

Not knowing what to do, I just grab and awkwardly hug her.

At first, she freezes, surprised by the hug, her body stiff and her heart beating like that of a scared little bird.

I will be ok, I promise, she says again, just a few hours.

I hug her a bit tighter and examine her body.

She is thin, beaten before she ever came to this floor. Then she got poisoned, and hurt by my teleportation, and then she had to fly at high speed for a long time. She is so low-level too.

It's my fault, isn't it?

I don't have a healing skill I could use for others, and trying to use my passive could end terribly, I could burn her alive. So instead, I do something like what Sophie did to me back on the third floor after I almost died at the hands of the mage hunters that had followed me.

I infuse the tiniest bit of my mana into my disciple and move it, trying to strengthen her body and alleviate some pressure and pain.

It's difficult, very much so. Most of my skills are meant to be used for me and only me. But I keep trying even as I lift off to fly once more. The barrier surrounds us, and I release a bit more thermal energy, and then, slowly, I fly toward the ruins of a city I see far in the distance.

There are tall, skyscraper-like buildings covered in vines, and greenery, most of them are cracked, and many have collapsed. The city's architecture is unlike any I've ever seen, and even I can see that it's been lifeless for decades at least.

The system said there were survivors, so I will find them, and they had better be able to help.

Chapter 275: First contact

As I've been strengthening her body, I've come to realize that I'm not very good at it. It seems I lack the ability to help others effectively.

My body? No problem, I can move my mana however I want, I can even change my heart and slowly turn myself into a construct or whatever the end is. To help someone else, I would need much more time to examine them. Unlike Lily or Sophie, I don't have that instinctual sense and innate ability.

Another thing to work on, I hate feeling weak. Sure, personal power is the most important, but situations like this shouldn't happen to me.

The little body in my arms is still shaking, and I can feel her getting warmer and shaking more.

How weak she is, how delicate her body is. Was I like that when I entered the 1st floor at level 0?

Once again, I search through the system shop, but there isn't anything to help me.

Another thing I could do is to sell my last remaining rare passive and buy a weaker passive that would allow me to heal others, but I do not find anything like that. I barely got any offers to keep myself healed, so I guess it makes some kind of sense.

I pick up speed and I cut my arm to examine the healing process behind my passive skill. Then I stop the passive and try to emulate those movements with my thermal energy in an attempt to actively heal myself.

In the middle of my third attempt, I reach the city and land on top of one of the buildings.

There are old, broken, cracked, or straight-up destroyed buildings covered in greenery as far as I can see. Nature has taken its hold over the area now that there are no humans to prevent it.

The city is big enough to house a few million people, yet it is empty. There are trees growing from the roads, shattered windows peering out from waterlogged buildings, and car-like machines rusting away everywhere I look.

It all reminds me of Earth, yet it is so different at the same time. Nearly every building and every road has some sort of circuits running through them that were once powered by mana and seemed to have been designed to interact with it.

[Perception] reaches as far as I can, and sensing movement, I move to observe only to find a few monsters. Sensing my presence, they rush out of one of the buildings, emitting a loud screeching noise.

They have the appearance of humanoids, with gray skin, red eyes, and tattered clothes covering their forms. Blue veins run through their skin, originating from their hearts.

[Veilshrieker - lvl 123]

[Veilshrieker - lvl 98]

[Veilshrieker - lvl 113]

I watch as they screech, summoning more from the surrounding buildings. Turning their red glowing eyes on me, they start running and burrowing their limbs into the walls of the building just to get to me.

They move aggressively, pushing each other away in a show of rage and bloodlust. They wound each other, they drool, they hurt themselves, and strain their bodies just to reach me faster. There is no hesitation in them, and their eyes are filled with a single emotion.

Pure hate.

I create a field around the little half-demon in my arms so she won't hear the screeching and wait.

Two dozen Veilshriekers reach me, and the moment they step into my domain, I activate [Redistribution], immediately halting them, and they freeze in the middle of their approach.

I feel them pushing against me, hurting their bodies to do so, and the blue veins over their bodies become darker, eyes letting out a deeper glow.

But they can't move at all.

So, with my disciple in my arms, I step within arms reach of the closest one and examine it.

The monster reminds me of a human, and when I cut its chest open, its heart looks like mine. Its heart has been converted into a mana heart under the influence of the system, and is now being used to power this being.

My own heart beats, and I move the kinetic energy I collect, and a blast of it explodes through the monster's head, throwing all the blood and chunks outward with the pressure.

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 123]

The moment the monster dies, I notice its heart moving weirdly, and it attempts to send out a signal.

In a different situation, I would let it happen just to see what it is, but right now, I'm not in the position to do so. So I disrupt the signal, and when I kill the remaining monsters, I disrupt their signals as well.

A warning maybe, or a signal to summon more monsters towards their killer.

The little half-demon mumbles something in her fervent sleep, and I hold her tighter before stepping over the edge of the building and falling to the street where I absorb the inertia of my fall, cushioning my landing. The absorbed kinetic energy I release in a circle around me.

Walking through the post-apocalyptic city, I try the Community a few more times and then my Mana Wavelength Iris, all to no success. My attempts at learning active healing also fail as expected, it will take months to bear any fruit.

So I continue to move while sending my senses ahead through the city.

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 6]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 15]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 2]

My flames burn more of the monsters as I pass through a more densely populated area of the city, though they seem to be much weaker.

Most of the lower-level ones are shorter, their figures are more reminiscent of children than they are of adults. But even they show pure hate anytime they see me.

In the eerie silence of a modern city overgrown with vegetation, their shrieks sound unnerving. The way they jump and attack me, not caring about wounds or the difference in our strength, is just as disquieting.

This tale has been unlawfully lifted from Royal Road; report any instances of this story if found elsewhere.

Hundreds, thousands of them turn to ash in my golden flames, as my improved heart supplies them readily. The flames melt the sides of the buildings, turn vegetation to dust, and evaporate the monsters.

And every time any of the monsters die, I cut off any signals they send.

The young half-demon clinging to me doesn't allow me to move properly, I can't even use much mana, lest I kill her with a burst of power. It's a valuable lesson, and I gradually learn how to fight carefully from the fear of hurting her with my mere presence.

As I delve deeper into the city, I finally feel something that seems human. I take a step towards them, but then another presence can be felt nearby.

I immediately seize control of my mana and pull it back, using [Mana Domain] and [Resonance] to hide the mana leaking from my disciple and me. That done, I quickly jump into one of the buildings and step into the shadows.

Down in the streets, I can see three humans passing through. All their clothes seem to be enchanted judging by the way they make it hard to even see them, their bodies hard to focus on without using skills. Still, I do not even try to do so and just stare at them with my senses.

The three of them move skillfully, weaving between the buildings, constantly aware of their surroundings.

[Blurblood - lvl 121]

[Shadow Weaver - lvl 146]

[Spectral Scout - lvl 123]

They freeze their movement, and even though they've tried to remain hidden until now, their mana engages at full force as they try to run away.

Not even for a second do they think about fighting, and there is a reason for it.

[Veil Guardian - lvl ??]

From the street between two tall buildings across the road cracked and covered by grass, a monster takes a step.

The monster looks similar to the Veilshriekers from before; it's taller, and the biggest difference is the blades it has in place of its hands. The blades start at the elbow and are as long as I'm tall, both of them made of metal with a faint blue shine.

For a short moment, humans run but then the monster takes a step, and the humans falter and fall down. An effect reminding me of a strong gravity field.

Desperately the men try to escape and activate their skills, but the monster seems to disrupt their mana, and while observing the area, it reaches them.

I can hear the screams, even from my distant vantage point, as the Veil Guardian lowers its body and opens its mouth, eating the humans alive.

I can hear everything, and I can see how desperately two of the humans struggle while the monster devours the first one. Exactly like the monsters from before, the Veil Guardian screeches full of hate as it devours the thrashing man.

When the man dies and stops moving, the monster stops eating too.

The scene repeats with the second human, but the monster seems to be more careful this time. It eats slower and starts with the limbs so the human won't die as quickly.

Once again, the moment the man dies, the monster loses interest and finishes the last one.

Then it stands up, a tall pale figure, blue veins going through the body starting at the heart. Two long deadly-looking blades and blood that drips from the chin of the monster. Its senses, like sonar, examine the area and then it moves again.

And I, without a speck of doubt, know that this is the monster that found me back at the lake.

I give it one hour, and even during that time, my disciple doesn't wake up. No, she seems to be getting worse. She is shaking more, and her body is hot to the touch.

Well, good job, I guess. I really suck at this, don't I?

Using the least possible amount of mana to perceive the area around me and to absorb my kinetic energy as I jump from the building, I walk towards the three men's corpses.

The blood is already dry, and their bodies are cold.

Trying not to look at their faces, I examine their bodies and try to search for anything useful.

I find a small bottle of water, a tiny pack with some dense food, and some items, most of them broken, but I take them anyway, just in case.

Quickly, I leave again, reaching the rooftops and continuing from there as the sun starts setting down slowly. I think it's called the golden hour, isn't it? When the sun's rays glow with that golden color at the end of the day they make any view beautiful. Even this dead city is no different.

As far as I can see, there is building after building covered in green vines, some of them even have trees growing from their top. Buildings cracked and fallen, streets unusable and overtaken by nature. Yet in some strange, sad way, it's a beautiful view.

(Attempts number two, Owen, can you answer?) sounds in my head.

One of the items in my possession tries to connect to my mind in a way that indicates an attempt at communication, and I allow it to do so.

Looking through the items I've looted, I take out an ovular piece of metal with two mana stones inside of it and a set of inscriptions I hadn't understood until now.

(Owen, please, can you hear me?)

I examine the item and easily find an inscription that acts like a switch.

(Hello, I'm Nathaniel.)

A moment of hesitation before another message reaches me.

(Hello Nathaniel, I'm Darren, can I ask you why you have Owens Transmitter?)

The tone of his voice is not nice at all, but there is no wonder.

(I saw a Veil Guardian eating three people, and after it left, I searched their bodies,)

The silence is longer this time. I don't think he trusts me.

(Darren, I won't dance around it. I have a level 6 child with me, and she needs medical attention, a healer, or an item. She drank and bathed in the water of the lake just away from the city.)

(What group do you belong to? No, you can't belong to any, you wouldn't be asking us for help. Are you a wanderer? Merchant? Courier?)

(I can't tell you.)

(You just told me three of my friends are dead, and Im still not sure that you didnt kill them. Then you immediately ask me for favors?)

Well, when he puts it like that, its obvious it would sound bad.

(I will pay you back. Im somewhat strong, so Im sure there are things I can do for you. We dont have to meet eye to eye if you dont want to. Just leave some medicine somewhere and tell me where it is.)

The start of this floor is far from optimal and has, thus far, proved to be annoying.

Out of nowhere, I start missing the silly doggo. Being able to pet him or boop his snout would at least allow me to alleviate some of my stress.

Still, I continue, (There were some things I found on their bodies. A few mana stones with encrypted information, a weird-looking bracelet, and a small sealed wooden box.)

Seeing how dangerous it is outside and their low levels, I think most of the survivors are of similar strength, and for them to go out, they must have some important mission. Maybe one of the three items.

Darren takes a bit longer to answer, but that confirms it. One of the items I have is important to him.

(Give us the location where Owen and others got attacked. When we confirm your story, we will leave medicine in some buildings, and you will leave the items there. No need for contact at all.)

(Okay.)

After that, I describe my location as best as I can, and the transmitter turns off.

Chapter 276: Vitalist

Around half a day passes. During that time, I keep infusing my mana into my disciple. She is still sick and woke up only once, briefly enough for me to let her drink some water.

When the transmitter in my hands finally attempts to connect me, I accept it quickly.

(Darren here. We have confirmed your story, Nathaniel. To be honest, I didn't expect you to leave the items there as well.)

(It's a risk from my side, you could take them and disappear, but take it as a show of my goodwill and the trust I've put in you.)

(I see.)

As I wait for the answer, I decide not to tell him about the tiny anchor I left on one of the items. The anchor I created using my [Tether] will be used to teleport to their location the moment he refuses me.

If he does so, I will just force them to heal this little half-demon who has so far only given me trouble.

Darren continues, (You will find what you are looking for in one hour at this location.) He then carefully describes the area and how to get there.

He also warns me not to attract the attention of any veilshriekers, just in case.

When our connection ends, I put the transmitter away and look at the girl under the blanket, with a few thermal orbs near her.

Both of us are surrounded by a barrier that disrupts the mana we are letting out, making us much harder to detect. The room we are in is dark, mold growing in the corners, but it's deep within one of the skyscraper-like buildings.

The interior is simple; the furniture has been broken or eaten away by the passage of time.

You are causing me so much trouble, I sigh and poke the cheek of the sick girl. Then I pull on one of her tiny horns.

Well, it's probably my fault too, but let's not mention it. This should help toughen her up. Back in my day, I went through much worse.

I open the community and this time click on Hard difficulty.

Noname (Hell, group 4) -hello

FoodFood (Hell, group 4) -food!

Damn it, Biscuit, what are you doing here?

Noname (Hell, group 4) - food food.

FoodFood (Hell, group 4) - food food!

Samuel (Hard, Legion) - Hello, Noname.

Emma (Hard, Legion) - Another person from Hell difficulty, hello Noname, I hope you are doing well!

Fox (Hard, Hoarders) - Noname, run or these military psychos will get their hands on you, lol.

Eagle (Hard, Hoarders) - run run run run run.

Samuel (Hard, Legion) - Fox, once again, we are part of the US military, we are not military psychos as you like to call us.

Fox (Hard, Hoarders) - the world is going to shit and youre still playing at soldiers, how can you expect anyone to take you seriously?

Emma (Hard, Legion) - You can ignore them Nonaime, group Hoarders is a bit more open-spirited than they should be.

Samuel (Hard, Legion) - As Emma said, Nonaime, just ignore them. I hope we can talk during the tournament. I will be honest with you. We don't know how many people got into the tutorial or how many rounds there are. Nor do we know what's happening to Earth so I hope you will see some reason and the need for some rules for the people that make it out of the tutorial.

Nonaime (Hell, group 4) - We can talk, but I don't promise anything.

Samuel (Hard, Legion) -

Fox (Hard, Hoarders) - For all you know the earth is already overrun by monsters or people from the first 4 rounds of the tutorial. There is no need to feel any responsibility to your country. They can't control you anymore.

Emma (Hard, Legion) - Fox, some surely think like that, but not all of us do. We were given these powers for a reason.

Eagle (Hard, Hoarders) - Heh, you can do whatever you want. You can try to control all the people from Hard difficulty, but I'm sure just one person from Hell would be enough to mess you up.

Emma (Hard, Legion) - Logically people from Hell are the strongest, but I don't think it's possible for them to fight against everyone in Hard difficulty. We have over 5 times the members.

I don't know. I'm pretty sure I could take on a few dozen people from Hard difficulty, looking at what Cipher, Goldie, and the frosty guy were capable of.

I read a bit longer, but they seem to be too into fighting, so I turn off the community, deciding to save my limit and try my luck with more reasonable people.

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Once again, I poke the cheek of my disciple. It's getting really frustrating that I seem to be incapable of learning a healing skill, and I start to wonder if there's some reason for that. Is it a limit of my talent? Is it just that I'm not a good vessel for healing skills? Am I blocked by the system?

I don't mean a passive skill or a trait; I've been offered plenty of healing, but all of them seem to be geared towards myself.

Could it be because of my subclass? Is Pride something that won't allow me to heal others? That doesn't make too much sense, I think. It also doesn't feel right that the system would actively block something like that, but it already limits the number of passive skills I can have, so maybe?

Another question to get answered.

Deciding to head to the spot, I pick up the little half-demon and shrink the barrier. Then I create a small anchor, leave it here and head outside.

After moving to the rooftops, I move slowly. I try to keep as much mana as possible inside of my body and keep it from leaking, so I only boost my body and jump. The feeling is usually something I would enjoy, but the risk of failing my Floor quest after it already started somehow takes away from that.

Maybe that was the intention of the system, to give me an annoying quest and watch me suffer, or just force us into situations where we have to improvise and adapt.

After half an hour of traveling, I stop on one of the rooftops. This one is different from every other rooftop I've visited, but it's hard to describe.

Only after I get closer do I start to pick up on it.

There is a weird field around the rooftop. I barely sense any mana from it, even when I'm so close, and I couldn't see anything from further away. Just passing by, even up close, I wouldn't notice any of it.

Taking a few more steps, I pass through the barrier, and the moment I do, the scenery changes. Finally, I can see the small cottage on top of the skyscraper.

The cottage is built out of wood and looks to be cozy and clean, if a bit simple. The building is surrounded by pots containing hundreds of grasses and flowers, even a few smaller trees.

It's like a scene straight from a fairy tale and doesn't fit in with the surroundings.

Please don't knock over any of my pots, young man, a voice shouts from inside.

Walking carefully between them, I reach the door and then enter without hesitation.

So brave, the ancient-looking woman inside giggles, almost childishly.

[Vitalist - lvl 101]

I only expected to find some items, I say and stop.

The inside of the cottage is as cozy as the outside. Fitted with old wooden furniture that has been well cared for. The interior is extremely clean, furnished with carpets and flowers and weird glasses filled with colorful liquids taking up every surface. I notice several pairs of boots next to me and looking up, the Vitalist herself is wearing a pair of warm interior slippers.

Deciding that there is no reason to be antagonistic, yet, I take off my shoes while keeping hold of my disciple and step in my socks only.

So very handsome and well-behaved. An unusual combination indeed, the old woman gestures for me to move closer and points at the bed nearby.

Carefully, I lay the little half-demon on it and step back. Then I let out some of my mana using it to observe.

The woman notices and asks, What would you do if I hurt her?

I will kill you before you can, I say simply to clear things out.

I saw Lily healing a lot of times and even felt it on my skin. I will be capable of sensing if she tries anything else.

As if expecting that, she laughs again, Darren warned me about you. Things like: 'He saw the Veil Guardian and survived, you have to be extremely careful!' or 'You dumb old woman! Do you have any idea how many people rely on you? What if he kills you?'

Her hands carefully touch the little girl and even after seeing little horns under her hair, she doesn't say a word. I, on the other hand, intensify my observation and collect some thermal and kinetic energy inside of my body.

Without saying more, she just heals her. The mana she's using isn't exactly the same as Lily's. The old woman's mana feels rougher and weaker, but at this point, I'm not all that surprised.

I've long since gotten used to the fact that we people from Hell difficulty often have superior skills and abilities.

"Poor little girl. Pummeled, internal wounds, poisoned, tears in her tissues, high internal temperature, shock, small concussion," she names each wound in succession.

When she looks at me, "I can heal her, but what will you give me in exchange, young man?"

This granny is totally shameless.

"Ask Darren," I tell her.

"Fuck Darren," she answers simply.

She is quite feisty, isn't she?

She continues, "You can still have Darren owe you, but I will want something as well. The little girl would have died without my help."

"You would heal her even without me giving you anything in exchange," I say.

Her eyebrows move up, and a light flickers behind her eyes.

What now, granny? Did you think I wouldn't notice how worried you became? How quickly you started healing and your sighs of relief as the girl got better? Even though she is acting cheeky, the granny seems to be kindhearted, well, at least to kids.

"Maybe, but I think I will still get something out of you. Some small service or help. Nothing too difficult because that would annoy you and you would just refuse. But if I ask for something small, you will help."

Is there something wrong with my face? Is the system giving people the ability to read me like a book? Or is it the power of the true extrovert I've heard about so often? The power of someone feeding on the energy of introverts to survive and learn to read people not with talent but through sheer quantity of interactions.

"I'm right, I think, hehe, I might ask you later! For now, it's fine, the little girl is already healed and will wake up soon."

Acknowledging that with a simple nod, I pass by her and grab my disciple, then turn around to leave only to be met by the old woman blocking my way.

"Leaving already?" she asks.

"Yes, this place is making me sleepy," I take another step.

Her smile only deepens, seemingly not bothered that I identified the effects of the field that's been set up around this rooftop.

I also identify its source, some small item inside a compartment inside one of the walls.

She finally lets me pass, "I think you should talk with Darren. He could find a use for someone like you, and I believe it would be worth it for you as well."

"Yes, yes," I put on my shoes and then turn to face her.

For a moment, I consider releasing some of my mana and startling her for such a cheap trick with the field that was supposed to make me fall asleep, but in the end, I decide against it. It seems like I will be dealing with these people for a while. This kind of "Locating survivors" didn't seem to count as finishing the side quest.

In the end, I just step outside and knock over a few of her flower pots while the old granny screams something at me.

I knock down the last one, jump onto the roof, and head back deeper into the ruined city.

Chapter 277: Leveling up

The field around her rooftop cabin probably wouldn't put me to sleep, but if I were weaker, it could be a problem. The natives of the tutorial are dangerous, and my experiences since starting the second floor have only confirmed this. Even Thalen, Isola, and Obelia showed their true colors in the end.

Well, maybe that's too harsh. It's clear that they had their own interests in mind and prioritized them over a random group they'd only known a few weeks.

I wonder if it's something that becomes more apparent the longer you live. Obelia and Isola were probably over 50 years old, probably closer to 100, by comparison, their experience with us was much less than that. So it's not much of a wonder, in the end, that Obelia attempted to kidnap Lily, while Isola was willing to kill me without hesitation.

I do not hate them for that, but at the same time, I have my own priorities and I won't hesitate when it comes down to it. That's the kind of world the tutorial has thrown us into.

My weak disciple begins to stir, and slowly she opens her red eyes. They are clearer than before, showing no trace of hidden pain.

At first she seems dazzled by the thermal orbs floating in the air, then her gaze falls on me, before finally settling on the room itself. Her little body stiffens, ready to jump up and fight, but she meets my eyes again, as I return her gaze.

I don't say anything, but she calms down.

You can eat and drink if you want, I gesture at the supplies next to her, Or you can sleep if you prefer, but we need to move tomorrow. There are also a few mana stones you can practice with if you feel up to it.

I leave her to her decision as I sort through the items I looted from the old capital.

As Im going through them, I hear movement, as she carefully takes long, slow sips of water; followed by the sound of chewing. I, meanwhile, separate the contents of my bags into two piles.

I left some of them at the lake, but none of them are very valuable. Different varieties of hardwood, iron, old weapons, and armor. Things I wanted to examine if I got really bored, nothing important. Still, Ill go back later, if only to sell them if I cant use them for anything else.

I found a lot of items during my looting of the capital, but most of them were in such a terrible state that the system only offered a single shard for them. Just like that, my plans for the city were ruined.

After that, I chose to focus on quality over quantity, the piles in front of me now are the items that made the cut.

The first pile contains items I'm currently thinking of selling. Some rings, mana stones, a bracelet, a small shield, another amulet, and some chainmail. Each one in the upper tier of rare grade at most.

Then there is the second pile, I intend to keep these. Mana conductive paint, pieces of arcanadium, endurium, shards of ethercrystal. The bracelet from the auction that had a strange reaction to my

Primordial Energies, high-grade mana stones, some decent mana batteries, an interesting upper rare dagger, The epic aqua arcana vial, some more metal, crystals, and mana stones containing inscribed information.

There is also all the food I have and bottles of water, as well as some gold and jewelry, in case of need.

Checking the pile, I estimate that the food should be enough to comfortably last us a few weeks, maybe even months. Most of what I've brought is very calorie-dense. Plus, I don't need to eat that much anymore after my body upgrade.

Were a bit lower on water, but we should have enough for at least two weeks. I also have an epic vial that I can use to store water. There is currently a lot of water from the lake, but that's poisonous, seeing what it did to my disciple.

Master? a soft voice sounds from behind me.

Hm? I just ask without turning.

Wont you eat with me? There's a strange quality to her voice. It's hard to describe.

When I turn to her, she is sitting there, small, thin, her red eyes seeming to glow even in a room filled with shadows, and small horns poking through her hair. It almost seems like she sees some importance in eating together.

Is it some kind of custom?

Sure, I say, turning away from the pile, and sitting on the floor across from her.

She smiles, but it seems strained. She is deciding what to think of me, as I am her.

I'm supposed to be her master, teach her, and protect her. I gave her food and clothes and started teaching her, yet she got poisoned because of my inexperience and hurt while we were teleporting.

Yet, she can't just run away from me or hate me for that, without me she would die, and quickly at that.

I cant change the facts, whether I like them or not, I can only strive to work on the things I can.

Is this a custom where you're from? I ask as she carefully splits the food between us, using clean pieces of cloth to set out the food and water.

She does so awkwardly as if she is not used to it, but there is some joy in her movements. The kind of joy a person experiences by doing something they always wanted to try.

Yes, her answer is short and we leave it at that.

When it's all set up, she waits and looks up at me, and I take the first small bite from the dried fruit.

She watches me eat, her big red eyes once again reminding me how young she is. My disciple is even younger than Isabella, yet she is so different.

Finishing the fruit, I then take a sip of water, and that's when she also starts eating and drinking more water.

No matter how hard she tries, her movements are awkward, revealing her hunger, and when she is nearly out of food, I place a bit more in front of her.

The little half-demon devours it all, and when it's done, she says one simple words, Thank you.

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[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 13]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 26]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 31]

[Lvl 214 > Lvl 215]

Bit by bit, I finally level up. Even these weak monsters seem to count, and it looks like I was really close to leveling, and they pushed me over the edge.

All the stat points immediately go to support my ever-growing mana.

The entire time, I keep my eyes on the little half-demon as she fights a level 2 Veilshrieker.

This one is smaller and much weaker than the ones I've been killing, they're too much for her right now.

Wielding the dagger I gave her, she overpowers the creature. The way she fights is raw and aggressive. That's how someone weak fights against stronger opponents. Not to win but to wound and frustrate the opponent enough that they don't bother to fight her.

Well, at least she doesn't seem to be a scaredy-cat, and everything I teach her, she does her best to implement, taking in my teachings like a sponge. Her [Concentration] helps with that too, even though it's not as good as my [Focus].

When she's done, she turns to me, and I point at another monster that I've been holding with my [Redistribution]. She turns, and I release it, and then the fight starts.

The little half-demon is nimble and fairly talented. Someone like her should be capable of reaching a higher level. Unfortunately, unlike those of us in the tutorial, she doesn't have to deal with the monsters gradually getting stronger. No matter how cruel and dangerous Hell difficulty is, there is some fairness to it, and on the 1st floor, the monsters were strong, but only to the point we could mostly handle.

Unlike us, my disciple lives in a world of constant war and no place to go and find monsters matching her level. There isn't even anyone who would bother to help her.

When she finishes the monster, she turns to me, Level 9.

Good, she is close to reaching level 10 where she should receive her first trait. This is a point of curiosity for me. Will her system be similar to mine? Logically it should be, at least partially, with a few huge differences. Currently, I'm inclined to think that the system within the tutorial is here to help us grow stronger faster than we would outside of it. Or maybe I'm wrong, and the outside system issues quests similar to the floor and side quests we've been receiving.

Even while babysitting my silly disciple, I'm constantly practicing, especially examining my Thermokinetic Mana Heart and its ability to compress mana and how much it affects my Primordial energies. Once in a while, I even compress mana into the black one, just an orb small as a grape, and force it under my control.

[Focus - lvl 43 > Focus - lvl 44]

Compressing and controlling my mana is getting easier in combination with my new passives and my new trait. That's when I do it outside of my body to create a black mana dagger or black orbs. Absorbing it into my body is something I've decided to save for dangerous situations where I have no other option. Even if I wanted to try, it would be dangerous training it now, with Veil Guardian around. The monster seems to have skills that allow it to track mana to a scary degree. And it being close to level 300 makes it even more annoying. I thought there weren't supposed to be any strong monsters in starting zones, but this one doesn't seem to care.

(Nathaniel?)

While keeping my eyes on my disciple as she's fighting, Darren, one of the survivors, calls over the crude communicator and I accept the connection.

(Do you call because you want to pay me for the items I left you since you only sent me to that annoying granny?)

A short silence. Hes probably thinking about how to pay me back. Surely.

I fire off a mana projectile throwing the monster to the side before it bites into the little half-demon. My disciple doesn't seem to be pleased and attacks with more aggression, the dagger stabbing into the monster. As before, she seems to have some talent for strengthening her body with her mana, like I used to do at the start of the first floor.

(She said it would be safe to cooperate with you, so I wanted to meet up.)

Well, it looks like it could be easy to finish at least one of the side quests, even though this one only offers some food and water as a reward.

(Maybe later, I will contact you.) Not giving him a chance to answer, I turn off the communication.

"Come here," I instruct my disciple.

She lifts her eyes and obediently pushes herself back to her feet, even though she just started resting after finishing the monster.

"Stab me," I tell her.

Her expression changes as she activates her [Concentration]. She thinks just for a few seconds and then she nods.

Mana flows through her body and her red eyes seem to shine as she shifts on her feet, twists her body, and stabs me with her dagger. Her height leads her to target my belly with the thrust, and I take a small step backward, causing her to lose her balance as her strike misses.

Quickly reclaiming it, my disciple moves again, taking two short steps towards me, and lunges again, this time aiming at my leg.

Once again, I take a small step to the side and she loses her balance.

The third time, she aims at the leg again, but when I change my position again, she doesn't lose her balance. Her footwork is slightly different as she adapts her movements.

"Good, now continue," I release one more monster from my hold and it starts screeching, pure hate in its eyes.

"Yes, master," my disciple nods and faces it.

As before, I'm surprised by her cold behavior, but I guess that's her skill, even though it's surprising to see it in someone so young. It reminds me a bit of Isabella when she was still under Sophie's [Geas].

A few more hours pass, and with pauses in between, she finally kills one of the last monsters.

"Level 10!" a happy smile flashes across her face and she rushes towards me.

For a moment, it looks like she wants to hug me, but she stops and her expression changes to nearly scared as she realizes what she was about to do.

"Traits?" I ask, breaking the silence that ensues.

"I got offered five of them, theres Mana Circuit, which youve mentioned, and then there are Elemental Resonance, Sensory Expansion, Arcane Intuition, and Natural Resilience. But master, it's weird. I thought you were unable to pick your train and only awaken it."

Then she gives me the descriptions. All of them sound useful. Elemental Resonance to attune her to elements, Sensory Expansion to strengthen her six senses, Arcane Intuition to move her mana more reflexively, and Natural Resilience to strengthen her body and make it more resilient or something.

All of them pale in comparison to the first one.

But her note about awakening traits instead of picking them is interesting. Are only people who go through the tutorial capable of picking their traits? Is my disciple fake or real? And is it possible that people outside of the tutorial only awaken traits at certain levels?

"Pick Mana Circuit," I tell her in the end.

To my surprise, she doesn't even ask why and just picks it, and that leaves me at a loss for words. The little girl just looks up to me. Big red eyes, small horns near her hair, and an expression of trust.

The little half-demon tilts her head, "Master? Is everything ok?" she asks innocently.

I have noticed that she started showing me more trust after I "saved" her and after I fed her a few times, but this this feels heavy.

"It's fine, how many traits can your race have?" I ask, just in case. Humans can have only 3, so I'm curious about others.

"Only four," the little half-demon says.

"Only four?" I ask.

She nods, "I heard some powerful demons can have five."

I dont think I would like full demons.

Chapter 278: Rules

"Master! Look, look!" a silly half-demon with four undeserved trait slots rushes towards me, her red eyes mirroring her smile.

She holds up a rare dagger, coated in a nearly invisible layer of pale blue mana. It flickers and would likely disappear if it struck anything stronger than air. Yet, she is still smiling happily.

"My [Mana Manipulation] leveled up too!" she adds.

I pull my attention away from examining the effects of compressed mana on my skills, and turn to her, "Are you sure you didn't cheat?" I ask.

That scares her for a moment, but as she looks at me, she quickly regains her smug expression. "Is Master trying to tease me?"

"Maybe," I reach out and pull on one of her horns, shaking her head as I do.

Her small hands try to push me away, but even though my body is probably the weakest out of group 4, I won't lose against a level 13.

In the past few days, she has become so comfortable around me that it's scary, and she constantly fights for my attention, always rushing to me whenever she has a breakthrough in her training. At first, I thought she was just being naive and even teased her about it. Only to be looked down on by a 6-year-old girl. I swear she looked down at me like I was stupid!

I mean, what the heck!

She responded, telling me: It's fine because I'm her master.

The only way to get confirmation, is to have her interact with more people, so I will use Darren and visit their camp. I can't let her be too naive and trusting.

I would also like her to acquire her primary class before the end of our three weeks together. I got mine after we entered the second floor and back then I was a bit over level 20, and I hope it will be the same for her.

"What are you working on, master?" the girl asks, as she plops down next to me.

"I'm testing how much I can compress my mana and how much this compressed mana changes my skills when I use it to power them."

She nods, totally not understanding, yet looking up at me and listening.

"At first, I thought I would be able to compress my mana more, but at the moment it seems to be around 20% at most, and thats using the full power of my improved heart."

"I see!" she nods.

She is totally lost.

"Some of my skills react to compressed mana better, and others dont react much at all. My theory is that higher-tiered skills don't benefit all that much from a 20% rate of compression. But it could have more to do with the type of skill. For example, concentration-type skills like your [Concentration] and my [Focus] might not get that much of a boost. Maybe theres still some threshold that I need to cross before I can make it work. Maybe 20% just isnt enough. If so, how much is my black mana compressed? Is it equal to the 1st stage of Potency? Second stage? Or am I totally wrong? Is there something else in play? Is [Focus] just compression, or is it doing something else as well? The last king recognized the black mana, so what was that? Did he misunderstand, is black mana really all that unusual? Do you get black mana when you reach a certain level? Are there other ways to create it? Is

"Master?" She asks interrupting my train of thought.

"Yes?"

"Are you bullying me because half-demons can have 4 traits while humans only get 3?"

The mana stone I was holding falls from my hand.

The little half-demon is not smiling, her face is mostly blank, but something in the way her eyebrow moves and her eyes have narrowed tells me she is having a lot of fun.

Cheeky little thing, when did you get SO comfortable?

I lean closer and look deep into her eyes, but even that doesn't seem to scare her. So, I just sigh and lay on the grass, looking towards the sky.

I have been defeated.

We are currently on a rooftop that has been overgrown with grass, flowers, and even a few small trees, the cracked material of the building peeking out from gaps in the greenery.

My minion, why do you trust me so much? Answer honestly.

It's disciple, master. Not minion, she complains.

Sure, minion.

For a moment, she pouts and then lies on the ground next to me, also looking towards the sky.

Master is the same as me.

What does that mean?

I'm little and dumb and I can't explain. So I will find the words as I grow smarter.

Minions do not become smarter, they become dumber.

That's not true! she complains and I listen to her chirping for a minute longer before sending her off to practice as I do the same.

I have finally decided to sell the items I looted from the old capital. In the end, they might be good things to trade with natives of this floor, but I think the shards will be more valuable.

In the worst case, I can buy some back at a loss and trade, if I need to. I don't think they use currency here as this world seems to be firmly post-apocalypse.

I receive quite a tidy sum of shards in exchange - 5,260, to be exact, leaving me with a total of 13,542. Enough for an epic passive if I really wanted or a few weaker epic items or one stronger.

For now, I decide to keep them. I'm still seriously thinking of buying a rare passive to examine, then selling it and buying another. Sure, I would barely get any effect from such low-grade passives and I would spend some shards, but I think the knowledge I stand to gain would be worth it. It's something I'll have to add to my ever-growing list of things to try.

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My current priority is to fully explore my new construct and the effects mana has on my body. Another is continued experimentation with black mana. This time I would like to use much less, I'll probably try [Focus] again.

Maybe I could use it to run some kind of strengthening skill. Would that counteract the pressure it puts on my body? Would that mean I could strengthen my body with black mana and then generate more and use another skill?

Who the hell knows, more testing is required!

I'm also getting closer to decrypting the mana stone that was lodged in the corpse of the Champions disciple. The stone used to contain a personality imprint of said disciple, I believe he was called called Bob, I think.

Arcane archer Bob, we fought him in the ancient mine, where he guarded the array leading to the heart of the Colony. That guy. I still have the stone and haven't given up. Maybe there will be a piece of information or two. In the worst case, I will ruin the inscriptions and turn it into a mana battery.

Whispering Echo Stone (epic):The Whispering Echo Stone is a rare, iridescent mana stone that serves as a powerful mana battery and harbors an imperfect personality imprint. There is something encrypted inside.

There is also a new token I found in the system stop. I could swear that it wasn't there before as I keep checking the stop anytime I have some free time. I already bought three of these tokens.

Detachment Token: Used to remove upgrades from a skill, reverting it to its base form.

The description is short, and the price is a thousand shards for one. So, with these 3,000 of my shards are gone, and I don't regret a thing.

Symbiotic Transference, Advanced Mana Manipulation, and Dual Focus Consolidation. All of these upgrades are gone, kaput, reduced to atoms. Yet I can still use my skills in the same way as before. All of these upgrades were months and months old, and my mastery over the skill had already transcended them.

There won't be any upgrade helping me to master my skills, no, it will all be on me and me only. I could do it later when three thousand shards would be worth much less to me, but I think it's good to start as soon as possible.

And with this, a new plan came. Maybe I can use the next skill upgrade token, observe it, learn what I want, and then remove the upgrade. It should work, right? The price would probably be around 6,000 shards to do so. That's 5,000 lost by not selling the upgrade token and 1,000 more for the detachment token.

With a total budget of 10,000 shards, it's quite a price to pay, but I don't believe that epic is the highest rarity of item there is, no. There should be a rarity somewhere in the ballpark of 10 to 20, times more expensive than epic. When I am finally capable of collecting those sums on a later floor, which I logically should be, 6,000 shards will be nothing.

For now, I will buy a new rare passive instead, as they are much cheaper, and learn from it, yup. The system refuses to teach properly, so it's obvious I will use whatever I can to teach myself.

Master, you have a creepy expression, I hear somewhere in the background.

Ignoring the voice of the silver-spoon, 4-trait half-demon girl, I continue disrupting her mana, as she tries to fight against it. This has already gone on for hours, and she's not using much mana in her attempts, she can still keep up.

Still, even now, she is unable to fight against it, no matter how many times she's leveled her skill in the process.

I freeze as I open my mouth to answer her. One of the mana threads I set in the streets tore, and a signal comes to me through a thread thinner than a hair. Nearly impossible to perceive without looking for it.

But, even so, the monster down on the street stops its movement, waves of mana radiating from it, trying to detect the thing that interrupted it.

I stare over the edge of the rooftop and gesture for my disciple to remain quiet.

[Veil Guardian - lvl ??]

The monster keeps sniffing and looking around, and when its head starts slowly turning towards our building, I use [Tether] and activate one of the anchors I left in the buildings around us.

At the other end, a mana orb bursts open, releasing mana and feeding the inscriptions I've painted on the floor in mana-conductive paint. The inscriptions imitate a barrier-type skill to confuse the monster and to not be a simple pulse of mana.

Down on the street, the Veil Guardian screeches and rushes towards the burst orb. Every single step it takes cracks the road, and its movement is fluid and quick, the blades shining in the morning light.

We are leaving, I tell my disciple.

As we planned and practiced before, she quickly rushes to grab her things, and I do the same. Within a few seconds, we are packed, and I awkwardly lift her up into my arms; it's a bit more weird now that she is awake.

I leave a tiny black mana orb where I stand and start jumping from rooftop to rooftop to put distance in between us and the monster.

After landing, I create a projectile that I tie an anchor to and shoot really far away. I fire off another behind that to make the possible tracking much more difficult or straight-up impossible and jump again.

Then we move down the street, and I continue running for another thirty minutes while reducing our mana footprint as much as possible.

What is your level? I ask.

From my side, she lifts her head, her red eyes meeting mine, Fourteen. Master, are you not scared of that monster?

Not really, I grab her for a moment and jump over a crater in the street caused by an explosion long ago.

As I put her back on the ground, she asks again, Why didn't you kill it?

You would probably die if we fought. Also, I don't think I can kill it at the moment.

Is that monster stronger than you master?

Probably.

And you aren't scared? she continues to ask.

So, I pause and lower my head to her level, Silly disciple, listen carefully, I pull her horn to make sure she gives me full attention, and when I let go, she covers it with her hands to defend it.

After finding the right words, I continue, There will always be someone stronger than you. Someone more talented. Someone with a higher level. But, minion, there is no need to be bothered by that.

Disciple, not minion, a quiet voice sounds.

If you meet such a person, use whatever you can. Befriend them, act submissive, or use tricks. Spit, bite, kick at the crotch. Prepare to hunt them, cheat. In the end, it doesnt matter how strong they are, the winner is the one that is alive in the end.

But isnt that dirty?

Disciple, are you the strongest person on your planet?

N-no?

So why do you care? Powerful people can be honorable, and its better when they are, theyre easier to trick or deal with. Remember, you can only act honorably if you have the strength to back it up.

Instead of answering, she just nods.

Disciple, if you die, you wont be able to see all that is there to see. If you die, you wont be able to learn what youre capable of, and you wont eat more sweet fruit, I poke her nose.

Her red eyes are attentive, and in the morning dawn, their color is beautifully vibrant.

You can worry about that stuff when youre much stronger. You can find friends you can trust. You can fall in love. You can be honorable if thats something you want. But to get there, you need to use everything you have to stay alive."

I scan the area around us and when it feels safe I continue, "But there are some rules to follow so you dont become a savage. If someone shows you pure and unconditional kindness, try to not betray it, even if it means you get hurt. Dont be cruel without reason and always set your priorities. And never hurt kids."

I let the silence linger, "Of course, it's your life, so live it the way you want." Before she answers I stand up, "Let's continue."

After a few steps, my silly disciple rushes to join me as we continue down the street.

Chapter 279: Three Options

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 131]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 143]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 163]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 138]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 169]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 171]

I watch as each monster dies one after the other, their hearts pierced by a small orb of mana thats been boosted with kinetic energy.

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 159]

[Lvl 215 > Lvl 216]

My leveling is getting slower, and these monsters aren't cutting it. Should I go and try to hunt the Veil Guardian? The asshole is probably close to 300, but with some planning and a few well-placed traps, I should be able to kill him.

There is only one problem with that.

My disciple walks into the room from behind me, and with her tiny feet, she kicks one of the corpses.

She looks up at me, I want to be strong enough to do that too.

As I said, there is one word the ancient half-demon used to say after every sentence, earning the respect of

I'm not going to say that word!

Tsk, my opinion on lynthari is going down and down.

Taking a more serious stance, I return her gaze, and even though she is trying to act like she's mad, I can see that she's taken a liking to our banter.

Damn you, system, just how bad did she have it before to enjoy this.

Minion, it's time to decide.

I'm not a minion, I'm a disciple.

I continue, This is up to you, and I want you to consider it very carefully, so listen closely.

I take a seat on the ground and gesture for her to do the same, she takes a moment to dust off a section of the floor before plopping down across from me. She takes great care not to dirty her new clothes.

Surrounded by corpses, in a basement deep under one of the skyscrapers, I finally bring myself to ask a question I've been putting off for a while. I have had this silly disciple for 5 days, and just over two weeks remain, so it's time I asked it.

There are multiple ways we can go about your training, I lift one of my fingers, First, we can continue what we are doing now. Some leveling, some hunting, and when the time is ready, you will return to your world much stronger than when you came, with some nice memories.

She pulls her light brown hair out of her face, and her deep red eyes are glued to me.

Second, we take a more aggressive approach. You will sleep a bit less, we will hunt more, I will force you to train more and expect more of you. You will be tired, and you will get hurt.

The mood turns more serious.

Third and last, I will put you in danger, and at times you will risk your life. It will hurt, you will sleep less, and I will take a much harsher approach. With this option, you will leave this place the strongest, but the memories you take back with you will with a lot of pain, and blood, and there is a chance that you will hate me in the end.

Gradually, I let my words die away, and the silence ensues, interrupted only by the eerie sounds of a quiet room.

The little half-demon opens her mouth to say something, but I jump into her words, Think carefully because when you pick one of the options, I won't change my mind later.

I know it's a hard decision to make for someone so young, but I trust that she can decide for herself. Meanwhile, I also believe that I will finish this floor well no matter which one she picks.

At the same time, I can't help but wonder what she will choose.

"What would master pick if you were in my place?"

"Third," I answer without hesitation.

Third, she replies. Just a single word and a determined expression.

"You can think about it some more if you like."

"I don't need to."

Okay.

My disciple is currently level fifteen, so I release a level 20 Veilshrieker, and Vega jumps to her feet at the same moment the monster rushes her.

The first attack throws her against the wall, a painful groan escaping her lips. The second attack barely misses her head, and the monster's third attack painfully bruises her shoulder and cracks the wall behind her. Before the fourth attack can land, she glances at me.

And I just sit there, practicing my Mana Cycling as usual and observing the fight.

The fourth attack draws blood and she rolls on the ground, the new clothes I bought for her getting dirty and torn. Only then does the expression on her face change. It becomes more distant, and she grabs the dagger, lowering her stance and moving her foot the way I taught her.

The author's narrative has been misappropriated; report any instances of this story on Amazon.

When the monster charges at her, she waits, changing her grip on her dagger. The little girl and the monster crash against each other, the monster's attack only landing because she allows it to.

And then my disciple shows me the ferocity she learned in her homeland. The anger she's kept hidden and controlled the entire time we've been together.

The dagger keeps moving up and down, stabbing the monster as she takes on some of the weaker attacks on purpose only so she can continue to attack.

All while her red eyes seem to glow with the same hatred as the monsters.

When she is finally thrown off, she rolls a few times to escape the monsters reach and jumps back to her feet. Her mana moves through her body, and she charges again, dodging and stabbing without hesitation.

With a last hateful screech, the monster finally dies and falls down with a dagger lodged in its neck.

With bloodied hands, a bruised body, and a wild look in her eyes, my disciple turns to me. She is breathing heavily, dead on her feet after such an intense fight, and yet there she stands.

So, I release another monster from my [Redistribution].

For that short moment, shock flashes across her face. Then there is a short moment of fear and anger.

As the monster gets closer, all of that disappears, replaced by a strange mask of calm settling over her face. I can sense her erratic heartbeat through the kinetic energy.

Her hand stops shaking and she falls to the ground, rolling and using the corpse of the monster she just killed to block a few attacks from the monster I just released.

While the Veilshrieker continues to bite and scratch the corpse that separates it from my disciple, she pulls the dagger from its neck, more blood soaking into her new clothes.

With a scream, she attacks.

The exchange that follows takes even longer than before. She is slowing down, her mana is dropping lower, and she gets wounded more often, yet even then she wins.

Falling to her knees, she turns towards me, looking for acknowledgment. The dagger drops from her hands and her chest moves heavily up and down.

She smiles at me proudly.

I lift my hand and show her three fingers, "You picked the third option." Then I release the third monster.

Even though I can see the pain in her eyes, she reaches out and grabs the dagger again. Her fingers are slippery with blood, it takes her two attempts, but she soon wields it again and immediately rolls behind the monster, barely avoiding its attack.

My disciple, with sheer force of will, pushes herself back to her feet, and for a moment I can see the rage in her red eyes, as her demonic heritage makes itself known.

That rage is not directed at the monster only, no, it's directed at me as well.

Before the monster can launch its offensive, she attacks.

What's wrong with you! The granny screams and rushes to take my disciple from my arms and starts healing her immediately.

The moment she does so, the little half-demon's face grows less pale, and her breathing calms down.

She lost so much blood and she barely has any mana inside her body. Why is she so battered! The granny complains.

A little bit of training, I say.

Training? TRAINING!? Are you insane? she screams.

I didn't expect such a show of emotion. I guess she must have a weakness for hurt kids, perhaps that's why she helped before. Well, I'm sure my disciple would be fine even without healing; the problem is that it would take too long for her to get back into form. If I use the granny, I can have her train more.

To cut off the stream of curses directed at me, I take out one of my bags and put it on the table, For your current and future healing of my disciple, I say simply.

What a goddamn asshole you are, do you think Even though she is saying that she opens the bag and peeks inside, and that makes her words stop as if cut off.

She looks between me and the bag and then starts pulling out its contents.

Multiple bottles of water, plenty of food, a small bar of chocolate, a few of my smaller mana stones, and lastly an upper rare item - a cape that allows the creation of a realistic, but illusory image of its wearer with a duration determined by the amount of mana used. The illusion even duplicates ones mana signature, heat, and smell. Out of the rare upper items, it's one of the better ones, even though situational.

Do we have a deal?

We have a deal, she says, still annoyed.

We leave the cottage on the rooftop an hour later, and my disciple is following me on her own two feet. Her last fight gained her a level and even more levels in her skills.

After a few hours, we find ourselves in a secluded place inside one of the fallen skyscrapers, and I set traps around our perimeter and some anchors in the event of an emergency. Surrounded by a few thermal orbs, I sit down to eat.

Unlike before, my disciple doesn't move to me, putting pieces of cloth in front of us. No, for the first time after a few days, she doesn't ask me to eat with her and does everything she can to avoid my eyes.

After dinner, I put a tiny mana stone in front of her with a new set of inscriptions. This one is meant to replicate [Oscillation], and even without being asked, she immediately grabs it and starts her attempts. A minute later, her posture becomes less awkward as she forgets about me and she focuses her attention on the puzzle in front of her.

Hearing the sound of rain, I leave an anchor near her, and with constant monitoring, I leave the room, heading towards a room with a view of the outside.

As I enter, the sound intensifies, the sound of rain constantly drumming on the stone and the road below. The rain is beautiful, and droplets filled with light blue mana shine under a sky full of dark clouds. The myriad shining blue droplets light up the dark day. Reminding me of the mana rain on the first floor. Yet this one doesn't seem to be quite as deadly given that it doesn't damage the building or the vegetation outside.

Curious, I put my hand outside, and immediately a dozen or so raindrops pierce right through, and fall to the ground, which they do not damage at all.

I pull my hand back, and for a moment I observe it while the blood flows through it, my hand pierced with a dozen holes that go through the entire arm

Well, it was silly to expect the tutorial to have normal rain.

I generate some thermal energy and send it through my body, healing my hand nearly immediately.

Then I pull the transmitter from my pocket, (Darren, so where did you say you are?)

It takes only a few seconds to get an answer.

(Oh, the guy with Owen's transmitter. Darren is sleeping. I'm Nina.)

(Hello Nina, does the offer still stand?)

(Sure, here is the location. We can specify the exact time of the meeting later. See you soon.)

Nina must be less talkative than Darren, given that the connection cuts off after she describes the location.

Well, it's time to start working on side quests and find out what this floor is about.

Chapter 280: A terrible name

As we walk through the streets, I continue to observe the small girl by my side. She still refuses to look at me, and when our eyes meet, even for a second, I can see the anger behind them. Surprisingly, that anger doesn't seem to be directed at me, and that leaves me confused.

Does she not hate me? I mean, I wouldn't blame her for it. After the first fight, I forced her into a few more like it, and this time we didn't even go to the healer. Even now, she is bruised, her clothes bloodied and torn.

Yet, I ask her before every fight: First, second, or third option?

And as she did the first time, she answers simply: Third.

There is no hesitation in her answer, no hate towards me. Still, she doesn't invite me to have food with her, she talks less, and she delves into training, usually not responding to my taunts.

Well, it's fine even if she hates me. I just need to make her as strong as possible. Because of her wish, because of the floor quest, because of the fact she is currently my disciple, and my Pride won't allow her to be weak.

I've noticed that you haven't been very aware of your surroundings lately, I tell her.

Immediately after, a dozen or so veilshriekers pour from the fallen building around us and charge. [Redistribution] encompasses them all, and I stop all of them other than level twenty-one. That veilshrieker reaches my disciple and crashes against her before she has a chance to react. A pained scream escapes her mouth, and I force myself to stop myself from helping.

I watch as she pulls out the dagger, but the monster hits her hand, sending the dagger away. For a short moment, a look of panic appears in her eyes, and she looks toward me as if asking for help. I just return her gaze.

Her expression changes, the panic disappearing from it, replaced by a blank expression. She twists her head, avoiding another punch, and then she bites into the monster's hand, drawing blood.

A weak, smokey mana emerges from her hand, slowly taking the shape of a dagger, and she stabs it into the monster's neck. The dagger dissipates, not even piercing the skin, and the monster throws my disciple aside, and she rolls on the ground until she hits the side of the building.

The bloodthirsty monster screeches and rushes her again.

Meanwhile, my disciple pushes herself back to her feet, grabbing a piece of wood from the ground. She quickly coats the stick in her pale blue mana, bringing it to a point. Her red eyes are calm, yet full of emotion held back by her will, and she charges the monster as well.

She dodges the swing and stabs deep into the monster's thigh, and the monster screeches in pain, scrambling to pull it out.

My disciple, not wasting a moment, jumps on the monster and stabs her fingers into the monster's neck, coating them in her mana. Again and again, she repeats the movement, even as the monster falls to the ground and weakly swings its arms at her. She ignores the feeble blows and doesn't stop until her control wavers and her fingers slide off the monster's skin, without piercing it.

Her chest moving heavily, she stands up and looks towards me.

I weaken my Mantle and then slowly move my mana so she can observe the process. A dagger made out of mana forms in my hand and then dissipates.

When I do it for a second time, I feel her senses touching me and observing the process. Her senses should be heightened after a life or death situation, so I create another mana dagger. And I do so slowly, even if it is extremely wasteful and inefficient. It should be easier to observe this way, and she can take care of the rest later. First, she needs to learn how to do it.

When I feel like she has had enough, I let her go so that she can explore the rest on her own.

I turn to the remaining veilshriekers, still held in place by my skill, and with a high pitched shriek, a concentrated blast of kinetic energy tears through them. Each one dies as Half of their body explodes into a vapor of blood, bones, and flesh without damaging the surroundings.

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 16]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 38]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 19]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 27]

Again, side by side, we start walking through the street.

It only takes a few minutes before a weak voice next to me says, I'm sorry that Im weak, master.

Its the first time in days that shes talked to me, I think about it a bit more. In the end, I ask, Weak?

Yes her head is down, yet I can feel her using her mana to scan the area around us, she hasnt done this since Ive been taking care of it.

I stay quiet, and after a moment of silence, she continues, You want to help, you let me decide for myself, yet I still I was looking for help from you. I got scared, I got angry at you when you didn't help. Angry at you even when you were so nice to me.

What life did she even have to consider what I'm doing nice?

Minion, that's your problem, I say, and she looks up at me.

When she tries to avoid my gaze, I grab one of her horns and force her to look at me, You should be angry at me, I'm an asshole, I declare proudly. I said I would help you, yet you keep bleeding under my care and even risking your life. You are so young, yet Ive forced you to make such a hard decision. What am I but an asshole?

I sense a few monsters beyond the range of my disciple, and before they can interrupt us, I create an anchor next to them and send a blast of kinetic energy through.

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 61]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 12]

The narrative has been illicitly obtained; should you discover it on Amazon, report the violation.

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 7]

[You have defeated Veilshrieker - lvl 9]

Still holding her horn, I shake her head. My silly disciple. It's not you who is wrong. It's the people around you. Everyone is an asshole, everyone is annoying, everyone is a weirdo. You alone are normal; that's how you should look at it.

At my declaration, she wants to say something, but I shake her head more.

You are weak? So what? Do you plan to stay weak forever? I don't think you do. Just do the best you can and give it time. Make your decisions and follow through. Who cares what anyone else thinks? Who cares if people call you names and laugh at you? Just nod, smile, and agree with them. And then, when they least expect it, come back and fuck them up.

Isn't it all simple?

Have pride in yourself, my minion. I let go of her horn and drop to my knees so I can look into her eyes, You will fuck up, you will make mistakes, terrible ones, but such is life.

Master

Yes?

I'm not a minion, I'm your disciple.

I don't remember my disciple being such a crybaby.

Master is mean.

I didn't hear you.

Master is an asshole! she shouts at me.

I feel a small smile crawl onto my lips, Yup, I am, so what are you going to do about it?

I will become stronger and beat you up.

Damn, I'm almost proud of this silly disciple of mine.

As a reward for her dedication, I grab her horn once again and shake her head. What makes me even more proud is that she actually tries to kick me, and I let her. There is barely any damage, but I appreciate the spirit.

I let go of her horn once more and sit down, and she joins me. In the middle of the street, surrounded by empty skyscrapers overgrown with vegetation, she takes out a few clean pieces of cloth and lays them out in front of us.

Will you eat with me, master? she asks shyly. As is her custom.

Gladly, I reply.

She smiles and takes out a few pieces of fruit and a bottle of water which she offers to me. She only ever does it with her food, the food she bought from me with information, or by completing tasks. She never takes any of the food I've given her access to.

Gradually, I'm coming to realize that she hasn't been angry at me at all, nor has she had any ill feelings towards me. No, she was too ashamed, maybe even scared that I would ditch her if she didn't do well. There was anger too, directed at herself not me.

I watch as she uses a bit of water to clean her bloodied hands and then takes a sip. When she grabs a piece of sweetened dried fruit, she takes a bite quickly. Her favorite snack, as I've come to learn.

We don't talk during the meal any more than we did before, waiting until we have finished, she grabs the pieces of cloth and then carefully gets rid of leftovers and dirt that got on them. She carefully folds them and puts them into one of the bags I gave her.

Observing her and her mana for a bit, I reach out and form a small dagger out of [Regalia]. I attempt to imitate her mana frequency and constantly change it with my [Resonance]. It's not perfect, but similar enough.

You will be using this mana from now on. You can train with it as well.

She takes the dagger from me thankfully and starts to examine it.

The dagger is dark blue with streaks of light blue mana. I used quite a bit of it, so I'm sure the dagger won't dissipate anytime soon. A week or even more should be fine. I haven't given it any enhancements.

No, the dagger is mostly normal, the only exceptional thing about it is the mana circuits I left inside. Pathways she can use to train and as inspiration for her weapon.

The circuits are the only part I'm somewhat worried about, so I will make sure to check them every time.

Next, your detection is lacking. Starting now, you will maintain it constantly and you will focus on making it as efficient as possible. It doesn't matter if we are speaking, training, or fighting. Constantly. Understood?

Yes!

Good. I like how you fight, so for now there is no need to change that much. Some might tell you that you should focus more on defense, but they are wrong. You can defend as much as you want, but if you don't have enough power to kill someone, it's a waste of time. No, you are lucky to have me as your master. I will teach you some powerful attacks, and I will help you avoid some of the small mistakes I made.

The way she listens and nods at my every word feels heavy. No matter how she behaves or what she went through, she is still very young and naive. But no worries, I'm here!

We will make you into the most powerful half-demon ever. I find it strangely fun. Is this why people like pet simulators so much?

The level of trust she's giving me feels undeserved, but I will make sure she won't regret it. It will be hard, it will be difficult, and I'm sure there will be times when she will want to cry, but in the end, I'm sure she won't regret it. Because if you are powerful enough, you can do whatever you want and not be swayed by anything.

Then I will teach you where to kick to make it hurt and what to be aware of. She looks like she will become pretty when she grows up, so I will teach her where to kick a man, or woman who becomes too touchy. A few broken arms and well-aimed kicks should show them the limits.

There is a bit over two weeks left, but there is so much I can teach her.

Master?

I cut off that line of thought and look at her, Yes?

I lied to you, she starts, and this time her voice sounds weak, but she is not using her skill to escape the emotions, I don't have a name, they always called me things. The most common was

No need to say more. I interrupt. It's clear that it's not something nice.

I'm sorry for lying that it is forbidden.

I don't know breaking our deal like that right away. Is that how you treat your master?

I'm sorry, her voice becomes even weaker.

So to punish you, I guess I will have to do something. Maybe I can give you a terrible name, right?

She looks up, her eyes big and shaking.

Maybe Pipsqueak? Or how about Minion? Nathaniela also doesn't sound bad, I wonder.

Master?

We already have Biscuit and Noodle, so how about Mochi or Omelette?

I

Not letting her speak, I continue, Vega... I will call you Vega. It's decided and there is no room for argument."

For a short moment her eyes water and cloud over, but she quickly blinks a few times and wipes them on her sleeve.

Poking her cheek I continue, It has a little bit of meaning behind it, but for now you will have to suffer without knowing. Maybe I will tell you one day.

The smile on her face is as big as Ive ever seen. Gone are the calculating expressions and plays on my sympathy. The little half-demon just seems to be happy.

I'm Vega? she asks.

"Yes, because I said so. You can complain when youre stronger."

She wipes her eyes with her sleeve again, "Master is an asshole."

"Yup."