

Tutorial 391

Chapter 391: ????

Did I just commit suicide by adding two skills to the mix? Well, poor future Nathaniel indeed. Poor guy.

Rest in peace.

Fuck.

I activate my [Mana Crown] and extend [Mana Domain] around me and through my body. Then I use [Focus] to better split my attention between the skills.

Myrra is currently working on her lessons with Lissandra, that damned woman. Doesn't that cockroach have training of her own to do? Why does it always look like she has so much free time?

I resolve to stop wasting energy on my petty complaints and shift my focus to concentrating on my training.

Two orbs are floating in the palm of my hand. It goes better now with my crown activated, I'm using it as a crutch to help with my training. The five skills that have the highest chance to get there are [Focus], [Redistribution], [Mana Manipulation], [Perception], and [Resonance].

I would love to replace the last two with [Mana Crown] and [Mana Domain], but both of these skills are as difficult to level as [Tether] is.

For the following ten hours set aside for mana shaping, I continue to just split the two orbs over the palm of my hand while a few of my skills run in the background.

As the hours pass, I do not find it boring. Annoying, yes. Frustrating, totally yes. But it's not boring.

Every time I think I'm done improving the process, I come up with another idea. A slight change to the shape of the orb. I find that by tweaking the density of the orb I can pull on it with more force. Denser mana being easier to move.

I guess it also shows how much effort I've put into making black mana usable, setting normal mana aside, as even Lissandra pointed out. That damned past Nathaniel is always causing more trouble for future Nathaniel and me with his ridiculous bullshit.

Once I've finished, I check the notifications.

[Mana Crown - lvl 24 > Mana Crown - lvl 25]

[Mana Crown - lvl 25 > Mana Crown - lvl 26]

[Perception - lvl 46 > Perception - lvl 47]

Okay, this is bad. Why the heck did my crown level instead of [Mana Manipulation]?

"I need to fight monsters. The stronger, the better," I tell Lissandra.

"No."

Well, I could fight the woman in front of me instead. She won't kill me, so she might even work better than the monsters.

I stand up, my crown still active brimming with mana, and my skills start activating as well.

Lissandra watches calmly. "How much do you really want to rely on life-and-death situations to force yourself over the line?"

Her words hit hard and that causes me to hesitate.

She continues with the same calmness, "If you only rely on fights to push you through and treat training as an afterthought, you will never grasp the skills properly. Then, one day you will get into a fight, expecting yourself to break through, but there will be nothing. And you will die."

Frustrated, I still release a huge chunk of my mana at her.

She pulls a bit of mana from the dagger, using it to disrupt the field of mana around her canceling out any effect it may have had.

"I won't lie, combat has its place. When all your senses are heightened and the rush of battle is all consuming, it can allow for some unique opportunities, but you shouldn't rely on that alone."

Taking a few steps, she stops in front of me. Before I react, she presses the tip of the black dagger into my chest, barely piercing my skin. Like a vampire, the black dagger I made so long ago starts pulling the mana from my body.

It's been heavily modified of course, and it feels more solid than simple mana that I could disrupt. Lissandra sure made some big changes when she turned it into her external mana heart.

"Why did you decide not to kill me?" I ask her directly.

It's probably not the best time to be asking. But I need to know why she didn't kill me when I first appeared.

Why did she break ranks with the ruler of Envy when she was clearly ready to take me out?

This time she answers, "Because you are trying, little pup. I've seen too many candidates and disciples grow complacent as their hunger for growth faded away."

The dagger absorbs half of my body's mana, and only then does Lissandra stop, taking a step back.

“Maybe it’s just because you don’t know anything about the world. Maybe it’s just your inexperience and lack of information pushing you along. But seeing you try so hard and show such passion allowed me to recognize something. I, as well, have grown complacent and that’s how you found me on the second floor.”

I put my hand over the small wound she left on my chest, blood flowing around my fingers as it starts to heal.

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“Now that I look back on it, I despise how pathetic that version of me was. Where was that hunger that allowed me to survive the war and become a Champion? Where was the greed that made me one of the youngest Absolutes ever? Where was that pride that allowed me to reach the top and the wrath I turned on everyone who dared to defy me?”

Her words quiet down, a memory flashing behind her eyes.

“All of it eroded. Dampened. A fake without a spark. I was a shadow of myself, fit only to be manipulated like a toy, even before I was trapped in the tutorial. But then you appeared. Throwing away the powerful item I gave you, sacrificing it to witness the last moments of my old self. A brilliant flame of determination she discovered once more before the end.”

I find myself grasping for a response, but nothing feels right. So I listen, as she puts her true feelings on display.

“I only truly realized when I saw you again a few days ago. Even though you were clumsy, I could see the signs of the path you’re trying to carve. Your passion shining through. And so I remembered that it was thanks to you that I was able to regain what I had lost. And for that, I will face the Ruler, I will break the deal I made and I will change my plans. As my thanks, I’m even willing to end you and I will without hesitation if it comes to it. Should you fail the same way I did, I will kill you. For ruining that beautiful image.”

“I see.”

“Is that enough of an answer for you, little pup?”

“More than enough.”

“Great. Now for the next three hours, you will continue your assault on me. You will use the same pathetic attack you attempted just a few moments ago. If you fail to improve, I will destroy that damaged ax.”

“And if I succeed?”

“I won't destroy it.”

Almost three hours later, I'm being left in the room with Myrra as Lissandra heads out. I'm barely starting to catch my breath, curled up in the corner of the room. My head is spinning, and even now my hands are shaking. Every sound and even the soft light seemingly make it worse.

Well, at least the ax is safe. That shitty weapon better prove itself useful in the future.

Squeezing my hands into fists, I wait for ten more minutes and then, as Lissandra said, the inscriptions all over my body activate. The Burden Enhancement Inscriptions.

Just on time as the three hours passed and five hours of training of kinetic energy started.

My body crumples to the floor, and more than ever before, I find myself wanting to remove these inscriptions. It would be simple enough; she didn't make them permanent on purpose, and I examined them extensively.

Instead, I reach for the kinetic energy stored in my core and let it flow into my body.

Five hours pass, and by the end, I'm able to twitch my pinkie.

I don't remember the last time I was so happy.

Without even a moment to rest, I find myself being led out of the Workshop by a man whose class is Solar Ascendant. I figure his class has to be somewhere around level 300 where two question marks become three. Probably one of Champion Niall's disciples, along with the other man.

My head is still spinning, but at least Lissandra didn't put any limit on me, and in the next five hours, I'm allowed to hunt as much as I want.

When the doors open, the man gestures for me to leave.

"I will be back here in five hours, good luck on your hunt."

The door closes, and I'm left alone in the shadow of the giant metal door.

I have no weapons, all I've brought are the clothes on my back, which I will have to replace once again because of all the damage they sustain.

I place a series of anchors, using them to leapfrog out of the dead zone surrounding the bunker. Then I boost myself high up and use a nice chunk of my mana to activate [Perception].

When I detect the first one, I head there. Now without the inscriptions Lissandra made, I let kinetic energy flow through my body instead of mana, strengthening it.

Vega always has preferred doing things this way; though I would rather use mana instead. Both for the efficiency and the fact that I'm more used to it.

I do have to be more careful though, a burst of kinetic energy can easily surpass the damage from a similar burst of mana.

The first monsters I face are old friends.

[Ebonwood Stalker - lvl 230]

[Ebonwood Stalker - lvl 212]

[Ebonwood Stalker - lvl 216]

[Ebonwood Stalker - lvl 222]

[Ebonwood Stalker - lvl 199]

They do seem to be fairly common in the area.

Now that I'm not having my mana throttled or trying to test my efficiency, I try to move kinetic energy through my body the same way I do with [Infusion] and armor. I find it clumsy, but the sheer amount I have stored in my Vortex Core does render the monster's attacks useless.

Their spikes stop the moment they touch my skin, their kinetic energy being absorbed. The same goes for their other attacks. I redirect that energy and use it in my own attack.

The amount of mana I use is limited, rather I force myself to fight with kinetic energy. The fight takes much longer than it should but the goal was only ever experimentation.

In the end, I flood my body with kinetic energy and tear them apart. I still remember my fight against that group from before.

[Lvl 239 > Lvl 240]

Then, using [Perception], I head deeper into the forest. My Mana Wavelength Iris, put on hold as the trait is the main reason I haven't used [Perception] much lately.

Five hours later I return to the iron door feeling much better. I think I might have grasped strengthening my body with kinetic energy just a little bit better. I already have a few cheeky plans for the next time Lissandra activates my new inscriptions.

As on cue, the door opens and instead of the Solar Ascendant, I find myself faced with a young woman who smiles at me the moment our eyes meet. It's a bright, cheeky smile without any hint of ill will.

The woman looks a few years older than me. Her blonde hair falls over her shoulders flowing down her form like a waterfall. Her eyes though, are surprisingly normal, their common brown color, providing a pleasant contrast to her hair.

Her clothes are simple. Clean and sturdy without being pompous, consisting of a pair of black pants, and a white shirt with long sleeves. She wears no jewelry other than a necklace with a single beautiful mana stone that gleams like somebody trapped a galaxy in its facets.

"May I have a bit of your time? That bitc... ehm, pardon me, your companion, master, whatever she is, has already been informed. I've agreed to help with your training."

[Mana Juggernaut - lvl ????]

That's a lot of question marks.

I take a step back allowing Champion Niall to exit the Workshop.

"Sure, I've got a moment," I answer and the door closes, leaving us outside.

Chapter 392: Surprisingly human

Champion Niall looks surprisingly healthy. However, Lissandra did say that she still has a few years until one of her seizures kills everyone around her in a flood of mana. That is the end result of having a damaged mana heart.

Yet she shows signs of suffering from such an affliction. Her steps are energetic, her voice is strong, and her mind is sharp.

I don't probe her with my senses very much, I still don't know how much that would insult her. She's still a Champion despite her injuries.

What I want to know is how much it's affected her. Are her injuries enough to leave her hamstrung or are the effects more subtle? My theory is that her wounds force her to manually control her mana. It seems like that should be trivial for someone at her level, but I don't really have a frame of reference. It won't be that simple, I'm sure.

Another thing is that my theory about levels is almost confirmed. 450-600 is likely where Champions are made.

As for Absolutes, I didn't see any question marks over Lissandra on the second floor, so I guess it's impossible to see anything. The question is if there are another 150 levels between Absolutes and Champions or if Absolutes start somewhere between the levels of 600-750.

"She called you little pup, is that some sort of sexual play you guys have?" Niall asks out of nowhere.

What?

She giggles at the look on my face, "That bitc... that woman, she looks like the type."

"You're no fun," Niall sighs. "But I can't blame you. Even I have trouble when it comes to getting a read on her. I keep feeling like I should be able to splat her against the wall, but something about her makes me think that I would regret the attempt. The last time I felt that way was before Tassian became our Absolute. That little shit was scary even as a Champion. Did you know I used to push him around when he was a kid? Who knew that little jerk would grow into such a powerhouse."

Niall seems to be the talkative sort, spewing information about anything that comes to mind.

"I met someone called Nevan not long ago." I say, interrupting her tirade and hoping she recognizes the name.

Fortunately, she takes the bait, latching on to the new subject, "Oh, the Alloysmith. So you found Veil Ignition Station no. 4. Did he survive?"

"I didn't know him very long; he died because of mana radiation."

Her eyes focus on me for a moment before she continues down the path leaving me to follow.

"It's good you are not lying. I kind of liked the guy and if you were the one who killed him, I would get mad." Just for a faint moment, I can sense her mana and it's an unsettling experience.

It's not quite "end of the world" scary, but even as wounded as she is I have no doubt that she could do some major damage.

"You've reached the second stage of mana Potency, right?" I ask.

That makes her pause just for a moment, "You cheeky little thing. Do you even know how rude it is to ask something like that?"

"I do not."

"Didn't that scary bitc... your companion teach you anything?"

I look around just to be sure and lower my voice, "Her definition of teaching is throwing me into a tunnel full of monsters, miles below the surface."

"You know you don't have to whisper. Even though I can't see through her, I'm quite sure I'm stronger than her. Probably. Maybe. Who knows. For real, I fucking miss Tassian, he was always the smart one."

"How come he..." I shut my mouth.

The air around us changes, heavy with her mana, which does feel extremely threatening.

Niall smiles when I stop mid-question. And the mana about to tear me apart slowly flows back into her body.

How come he got tricked and the Veil got overtaken by a trapped divine beast? That's what I wanted to ask.

As if nothing happened, Champion Niall takes another step and I follow her. My heart is beating wildly in my chest.

"I have promised to give you a short lesson." She pauses. "Maybe I shouldn't call it a lesson. That woman asked me to stop just before it kills you. She said minor wounds are fine."

"Is there any value in that?" I ask.

"You, my sweet, careless young man with pretty eyes, are the type who learns best while experiencing things on your own skin. Your companion said that it's best to beat the knowledge and experience into you. And that's extremely fascinating on its own because you are clearly a mana user. I knew lots of people who learned that way, but most of them were brawlers. Fucking psychopaths."

"Isn't that only logical though? You get a better feel for the skills and their nuances if you experience them directly."

"Damn, you really are one of them. They said the same things, and giggled every time someone found a new way to mangle their bodies," she sighs.

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I decide to ignore this kind of insult. This youthful Champion is surprisingly chatty and... human? Is that the right word to use?

"What are you thinking?" She asks, taking notice of my gaze.

Her question doesn't feel like a threat so I answer, "You are a Champion so I expected you to be more... well, different."

"Ah, well I'm the first Champion you've had the chance to interact with, is that it?"

"Yes."

She pauses for a moment, stops walking, and stands silent for a moment, surrounded by the trees. As the light falls on her, she reflects.

"I think I would be different if you had met me about 150 years back. Back then I probably wouldn't have given you the time of day, but losing a war and being forced to cower like a rat in the tunnels changes a person a bit."

I stay quiet, not wanting to set her off. Niall notices that.

"I take that back. I think I may have. I can see that fire in your eyes. Even now it feels like you are looking down on me. Not directly, but as if everything I am, and all my powers are nothing more than a step on the path to something greater. Has anyone ever told you that for all your looks you have an extremely punchable face?"

"I hear that a lot."

Her mana seeps into the air, just a little bit and I can hear her heart beating. The rhythm is uneven, broken. Then I realize that her heart has been destroyed. Dozens of pieces held together by the force of her will and a myriad of inscriptions, and perhaps something I can't quite detect.

Even now she has to focus to keep everything together at all times.

Why doesn't she come up with a different way? Lissandra is fine without a mana heart. Why can't she fix it? She's a Champion, her knowledge should be immense. Why doesn't she get a transplant? Why is she not looking for a healer or a means of fixing it?

Why...

"I know what you are thinking. To say it simply, why can't that bitch fix her own damn heart?"

She expects an answer, a reaction. And the barest slip could bring my death. Even so, I reach for my mana as well, letting it seep into my body. My heart thumps wildly as I face her like a candle against a forest fire.

"Something like that," I say.

In response to the movement of my mana, which she must have sensed, her own rises to meet me. Despite being wounded, she still has the mana of a Champion.

"Let me show you then."

Her mana surrounds me, creating a dense sphere, within which her mana takes on an almost tangible quality. Within that area, I can feel the beating of her mana heart. Broken, and no less powerful.

With each beat it sends more mana through the sphere, limited to avoid killing me. And I can sense the ever-changing frequency and rhythm of her heartbeat. Through her demonstration, I begin to feel just how difficult it is to keep in one piece.

Then there is something else, a piece of something I can't identify. A piece of some metal, a tiny mana stone, or a projectile of a powerful weapon. From which seeps an endless and horrifying strain of mana, a clear attempt to kill the person it's lodged inside. The only thing keeping it contained is the heart around it.

"You used your heart to trap that thing and stop it from killing you."

"At least you aren't stupid." Her mana disappears as if it was never here. "I don't know what kind of bullshit they used but the thing is clearly meant to be effective, even against someone at the level of an

Absolute. The moment I try to move it out of my heart I will die before I even realize what's happening. Fucking great, isn't it?"

"Won't it lose its power? It's probably been more than a century."

"It's already weaker than it was. At this point, it's about who can last longer, and in another ten to a hundred years it should weaken enough for me to remove it. The question is if I can hold on that long. That creepy woman told me she could show me new ways to fight it. Would you believe that? A bitch with a level even lower than yours called me stupid for being unable to remove it and compared me to some goddamn pet some court lady had."

I can totally imagine that.

"Is this the place?" I ask as Niall stops walking.

"Yes," Niall says, lifting her hand as her mana floods into the air. Then it presses down on me from the sky like the hand of god.

The trees, a small hill, and any flowers and boulders in the area. All of it crumples under the mana pushing it into the ground. The sound of trees snapping and boulders shattering fills the air. Niall pushes even further and her mana starts to oscillate until an area the size of a street is cleared of everything that filled it. A perfect circle of empty space, the compressed soil gleaming like polished stone.

She doesn't stop there and her mana oscillates again, carving into the surface, creating a circle with more inscriptions inside.

"This is something we used to do for our warriors. A rite of passage you might call it. I'm sure it's something other planets have as well. We did it for those we thought might have to face a Champion or Absolute."

Not even for a moment do I look away from her work, and even though I feel the annoying jittering of nerves, I can't help but be fascinated by the process. The way this woman moves her mana is so different from Lissandra, yet she's clearly powerful and skilled in her own right.

“Did it help them to face Champions or Absolutes?”

“Not really, and if it was up to me, I would have probably replaced it with something more modern. But the traditionalists loved it. You know the types: 'When I was a young lad, we did this and that.' It's not horrible, even if it is terribly barbaric.”

“What's the point?”

“To ensure that you don't piss your pants the moment you enter an Absolute's domain, specifically by having you experience something distantly similar. But the one I'm making has been modified, by that woman's request. At first, I didn't understand what she wanted me to do and she had to simplify it.” There Niall pauses and shakes her head before she continues, “You chose mana Amplification as your upgrade, right?”

“Yes, 1st stage, Vast Mana currently.”

“Your companion and I are Mana Potency. Both have advantages and disadvantages. One of the biggest disadvantages for Amplifiers is that their mana tends to be lower quality if that's how you want to think about it. That means it's easier for your enemy to seize control or disrupt your attacks, even without the skills. I sense you did something that makes it difficult for people to grasp mana inside your body but it doesn't affect the mana outside of it.”

Great, another thing I need to fix. Though I had plans for that anyway, of course, the cockroach had to take notice right away. Well, I better make sure not to let these opportunities go to waste. It's like she is offering them to me on a golden platter.

“That makes a lot of sense. So is there a common way to fix it?” I ask.

“Not really. Most of the time Amplifiers brute force a resolution with high level skills or some other bullshit. But you do have a few interesting skills that could help you, at least according to that woman, so I'm going to let you experience it for yourself. The rest will be up to you.”

Chapter 393: Dome

Niall continues her lecture as she completes the circle, “Someone with a Potency upgrade is always going to have an easier time hardening their mana against external influence. You Amplifiers have to

work harder for it. Looking at the modifications she told me to make, you seem to have some skill, or trait, allowing you to change the frequency of your mana. So this experience on its own should be of some benefit to your growth.”

I can already sense more work ahead of me. Each of these techniques alone is going to take years to grasp properly, and I can't focus on them currently because of the death sentence waiting for me if I do.

Damn, Lissandra and her insistence that I raise five skills to level 50. She's straight up crazy; three alone was too much.

“Let me guess, as long as I'm in the dome, my external mana will grow more difficult to manipulate as time passes,” I say.

“It will, obviously. But past a certain level or when you find yourself faced with certain opponents, it's just something you're going to have to deal with. There are classes, skills, and traits that will cause you a great deal of pain otherwise. Your first instinct might be to engage in melee at that point, but that's where they're going to want you. And I'm sure you already know a few people you wouldn't have a chance against in that scenario.”

Upon hearing her words, Tacita comes to mind. If I wasn't able to use my external mana, it could end up being... interesting.

“Can you declare me a Champion candidate?” I ask.

That makes Niall falter, and just for the shortest moment, her mana wavers before she continues.

“Fuck, you are shameless. Are you always like that?”

“You're not wrong, but damn. A few decades ago, I would have splattered you against a wall for even asking. As for declaring you a candidate, no. In the future, assuming someone doesn't just kill you for being a pain in the ass, you will learn just how rude these questions are. Then you will finally appreciate the beautiful Champion Niall, who once had the pleasure of being courted by hundreds of the finest young men.”

“Well, I appreciate that even now,” I say, and I mean it. I don't expect any of the Champions I meet in the future to be anything like her.

It's better now, but at times I still find myself wanting to dampen my emotions with [Focus], but that's not on the table right now. Of course, I blame Cockroachsandra.

For now, I decide to silence myself. It's been much the same with most of the powerful people I've met. They don't tend to mind honest answers; they far prefer it over lying, fake behavior, or ass-kissing. But in the end, they are used to being in control, so asking too many questions or trying to lead the conversation will cause them to push back. It could come in the form of a slap, a burst of mana, or finding oneself splattered against the wall.

I'm quite proud of myself for this observation. For an extrovert class tutorial attendee like Tess or Gareth, it might be simple, but I, as with many things, tend to learn through suffering.

Niall pauses in her work and turns to me, “I can still see that mischievous light in your eyes, and your mouth's hanging open like a fish. I won't answer, but I'm curious, what questions would you ask if I were to allow it? Be honest; I promise not to punish you no matter what questions you mention.”

I observe her for a moment, and she honestly seems to mean it, so I decide to take her up on the invitation.

“What level are you? How old are you? How long did it take you to become a Champion? What did you gain by becoming a Champion? What does being a Champion candidate entail? What traits do you have? How did you split your stats? What effect does the second stage of your attribute have? How high level is an Absolute? Why can't there be more than one Absolute? How do you become an Absolute? Being Absolute seems to be special, so what does it have to do with managing the planet? What does it mean for a planet to awaken? Are you from the 1st Generation? What happened during your 1st Pairing and what does it mean to win or lose a Pairing? Who referees the pairings? What happens to the losers of a Pairing? Why do planets have to fight if they're Pairing? Do they really have to fight? What have you learned about the Veil? Who caused your wound? At what levels do you get body strengthening? At what levels do you get primary class upgrades? What is your subclass? How do subclasses work? What are the differences between subclasses...”

“Enough, enough, enough.”

I shut my mouth immediately.

"I know I said I would let it slide, but I really feel like..." she gestures, a swing with her arm. "Well, anyway, I'm done here. It's fairly simple; I'm going to activate the dome, and it will stay up for five hours. I made it so it constantly disrupts the mana inside just like that woman wanted. It's not efficient, it's more like we're abusing the abundance of mana in our surroundings, so it should be easier for you to endure it."

Well, now it makes sense that Lissandra couldn't do it. It uses too much mana on purpose, likely to mimic huge areas of effect, maybe even domains.

"There are three things the dome will do. First, it disrupts mana like many domains. Second, it imitates the kind of pressure a weak Champion could generate. It's not concentrated pressure, and I weakened it a bit, but it should be enough to cause you some serious trouble. Lastly, and that's what that woman wanted, the longer you stay in there, the worse the disruption and pressure will become. Five hours should be your limit after which it might be fatal."

It looks like Niall misunderstood Lissandra. It's clear as day that this is a challenge for me, to stay there as long as possible. The goal isn't to escape within the next five hours like Niall seems to think.

"How do I get out?"

"You only need to touch the wall of the barrier, and it will disappear."

"And that's going to be easier to do at the start, before any pressure has a chance to build and it's going to become harder the longer I stay in?"

"Yes, the higher the pressure, the harder it is to reach the wall of the barrier. At some point, it becomes quite deadly. Kind of fucked up, but you can guess whose idea it was."

"Got it."

"I'll be back in five hours." She waves, and then the dome activates.

The dome covers an area the size of a city block.

Before I have a chance to wonder why the domain had to be so big, something pushes at me from all around. Creating a feeling of constant danger. My mana senses are gone, every bit of mana pours from my body, torn apart and reduced to the tiniest of particles. It even begins to affect the mana clinging to my skin, and weaving through my hair, leaving me with what I have inside my body.

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The pressure then starts increasing, along with the disrupting effects and the constant feeling of danger that's begun to twist at my insides.

As a test, I channel mana into my surroundings, only for it to be destroyed all over again.

I walk for a bit and stop in the exact middle of the dome. For now, I wait, observing the effects as my senses are distorted by the dome.

I try to create a dagger while using [Resonance] to test different frequencies. The result looks terrible, and it's hard to maintain.

Niall said the field was meant to mimic the pressure generated by one of the weaker Champions. However, what she probably meant was the pressure of their unrestrained mana combined with some sort of domain.

She probably expected me to react worse, but so far, it hasn't been all that bad. It may have only been a moment, but it wasn't long ago that I felt the pressure of Lissandra's Avatar. And I still remember the 2nd floor quite vividly, even though it was almost a year ago.

So this is nothing. I have any number of ways of fighting its influence.

One hour passes.

The pressure increases, gradually approaching the levels Niall warned me about.

I find it fascinating that they use something like this to train the warriors and mages before sending them off to face Champions and Absolutes. Just so they don't panic when the time comes.

Two hours pass, and I'm sitting in the middle of the dome. Everything beyond the blue walls of mana is blurry, and the ground I'm sitting on is unnaturally smooth. Polished by Niall's mana to create a workable surface for her inscriptions. I examine them for a while, remembering some of the more interesting twists.

When I try to locate the power source, I fail to do so. For the next thirty minutes, I attempt to find it but to no avail. Even my eyes do not help.

[Resonance] levels up once as I struggle to keep the dagger from breaking down. At this point, it's just a short blade more reminiscent of a nail than any knife.

Another unrelated thought comes to my mind. Back then, I thought black mana was the second stage of the Potency mana upgrade. But as I've come to see Lissandra's Avatar and sense Niall's mana, I think I may have been wrong, perhaps my black mana is something else entirely.

Three hours pass, and my dagger flickers and finally disappears. At a high cost to my mana and concentration, I attempt to activate it again.

I repeat it over and over again.

A tiny bit of mana forms in the palm of my closed hand, which I open only to watch the resulting construct disintegrate.

But I refuse to stop.

Again.

And again.

[Resonance - lvl 47 > Resonance - lvl 48]

Then, a few minutes later, it becomes impossible, and I feel that pressure amplifying around my body without reaching inside. Yet.

Six hours pass.

[Mana Domain - lvl 40 > Mana Domain - lvl 41]

[Mana Domain - lvl 41 > Mana Domain - lvl 42]

[Infusion - lvl 29 > Infusion - lvl 30]

[Perception - lvl 47 > Perception - lvl 48]

Seven hours pass

[Mana Domain - lvl 42 > Mana Domain - lvl 43]

Eight hours pass.

My domain is gone, and I'm unable to activate it at all, I can't even push it a hair's breadth from my skin. Not even with help from [Resonance]. The pressure at this point is strong enough that I'm sure if Niall hadn't prevented it from being able to pass inside my body, it would be causing me quite a bit of trouble.

I haven't got a single wound to speak of, but I'm sure if I stay just a bit longer, something bad will happen.

I stand up and take a step, immediately falling to my knees. When I push myself up, it happens again.

Amusingly enough, I catch myself being annoyed by my inability to find a cause. Is it another effect of the dome? Any problem with the simulated domain? The strength of the mana disrupting effect? What? How? Why?

Finding myself unable to rise to my feet, I start crawling. Questions and frustrations flashing through my mind. It's funny.

It takes me five minutes of crawling before I'm halfway to the dome's wall and the pressure increases. The disrupting effect starts seeping through my skin, ignoring my Mantle.

Of course, it makes sense that someone at the level of Champion would be able to do that, but it once again reminds me that there are still a lot of people more powerful than me.

It's only been a year since I started, so that's no real surprise. I still have a long way to go.

But I will get there.

Thirty of crawling minutes later, I finally touch the wall, and in a blink, the dome disappears. The sounds of nature around come rushing in, and I feel a soft wind on my skin. The pressure is gone, and I finally grab control of the mana raging inside my body.

I'm covered in dozens of wounds, small and large. Disrupting my control over the mana inside my body proved to be quite an effective attack. I have to constantly use Mana Cycling to keep it under control because of my stat imbalance. Having it run wild reminded me of the good ol' days.

Catching my breath, I lay on my back and send thermal energy from my core through my body.

I reach my hand towards the sky, and a drop of blood falls from a torn finger, landing on my cheek as I watch the wound close.

I hear a voice say, “You are one crazy motherfucker, aren’t you?” and recognize it as Niall, watching from her perch nearby.

“I dozed off in there; the pressure was too weak.”

“Cheeky little shit.” She snorts, sitting down on the grass next to me.

“Did anyone tell you your language is kind of...”

“Many times. They tried to beat it out of me when I was younger. But it’s hard to do, and I still blame the five older brothers I grew up with.”

“Sounds like a good excuse. Can you give me ten minutes? I should heal enough to walk by then.”

“Take half an hour.”

Chapter 394: Cooked

In the end, I healed enough to not have to be carried in a princess carry, something Niall hinted at with a smirk. After opening the door and passing me onto the Solar Ascendant guy, Niall leaves somewhere.

Passing through the tunnel full of greenery, we walk slowly. The man probably sees my still far-from-perfect state and walks slower.

I notice that he is smiling for some reason and is nice to me. Should I tell him I'm not into men?

“It’s been a long time since I saw Lady Niall smiling that way,” he breaks the silence finally. “In the past few years, she was always in a gloomy mood, even though she tried to hide it, constantly worried about something.”

“I guess it’s not easy to defend that many people.”

“It is not. But I think it was her other problem she was worried about. Lady Niall holds no secrets from us, so I know your companion helped her. But she also seemed to have fun with you out there. So I want to thank you for that. She deserves it as she suffers a lot because of us all.”

On our way back, we even stop to eat some food from something reminiscent of a food stall that is there for all the people working on the fields covering a huge part of the tunnel.

Against my will, I learn that he and that Reaper something class guy look at Niall like a daughter, used to be bodyguards in the noble house of Niall’s father. Just from the way he talks about her, it is nearly as if he sees her as a child. Someone most likely over 200 years old and a Champion.

As much as I complain about this kind of info dump, I come to think it wasn’t that bad, as I learned a bit about how others might see Champions and about the world from before the war.

Lissandra, who has nothing better to do as always, looks at me. “The inscriptions I made are all messed up and need to be redone, give me a bit of your mana.”

I do so, and five minutes later, I’m on the floor again, fighting against the pressure on me using only kinetic energy.

After five hours pass, I’m punished for my success. Being able to move my pinkie finger seems to be enough of a reason, and Lissandra increases difficulty. The next time it will be even more difficult; I’m sure of that.

Currently, both me and Myrra exit the Workshop for 5 hours of hunting and then 1 hour of rest before more training.

“You sure I shouldn’t carry you? You still seem to have some internal wounds. Silly feral one. You’re supposed to train to not get hurt, not hurt yourself to train. So typical of you.”

“I blame my environment and the people around me affecting me the wrong way.”

She nods seriously, her tail twitching and showing her amusement, "That seems to be the case."

"Actually, am I not a victim here? I should report it to someone. Physical and psychological abuse or something."

"Indeed, feral one, it's quite serious what's happening to you."

I jump away from her, and she does the same. Where we stood, the earth bulges and dozens of spikes pierce the ground. Through them mana flows, strengthening them.

The spikes explode, and hundreds of small projectiles from stone crash against the barrier I make and the similar one made of Aurora glass Myrra creates.

More than the attack, I watch Myrra's defense. Even now, I'm quite fascinated by Aurora glass. The crystalline material with reflective facets that go through multiple colors according to Myrra's use of the skill, element, or whatever it is.

It's something she gets from a combination of her fire and ice attacks, I think.

Aurora glass seeps into the air, dozens of tiny reflective particles she uses similarly to my anchor and teleports through, disappearing to hunt the monster who attacked us, leaving me behind to deal with the other one.

[Veil Guardian - lvl ??]

Tall, pale, and with voidsteel blades instead of forearms and hands. As many times before, the monster screeches with a voice full of hate, and I cut off the signal it sends to the Veil.

Blue veins going through its skin increase in number, and the gravity field envelopes the area, crushing the trees and boulders under the pressure.

The monster charges at me.

I use [Resonance], and the effect of gravity disappears. It's so easy to do it now, and I try to mimic what Lissandra did when I attacked her before with her [Disruption].

Instead of using a lot of my mana, I reach only for a few percent and create a single projectile.

As Veil Guardian reaches me, I send kinetic energy through my body and dodge a few times, avoiding the swings of the voidsteel blade.

Kinetic energy is different to use; unlike using mana, even the movements look different. It's not as smooth; instead, it is a burst of speed added to movements.

I elongate the projectile over my shoulders, creating something akin to a spike as long as my forearm that I start to spin around its axis.

The voidsteel blade cleaves deep gashes into the ground and cuts through the boulder behind me. A few trees fall down as an invisible slash leaves them cut smoothly.

Dodging under the last swing, I boost my body, take a step closer to the monster, and hit its chest with an open palm, adding kinetic energy to the strike.

If you find this story on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen. Please report the infringement.

The force of the attack makes the monster stumble back, and I shoot the projectile I was creating, accurately piercing through the Veil Guardian's head.

[You have defeated Veil Guardian - lvl 273]

My instinct screams at me to use more mana, to move more, but I push these habits down. Not with my skill but on my own.

I check, and there is barely any dent in my mana reserves; it's already nearly filled back.

Cutting the voidseel blades off the dead body I sell them to the system shop. Then, using only kinetic energy to strengthen my body, I rush towards where I sense more monsters.

Five hours later I check my notifications, and there is only one.

[Lvl 240 > Lvl 241]

"Myrra, am I cooked?"

"Feral one, as far as I can see, you are not cooked? I don't even know what using 'cooked' in this context means." She reacts a bit confused.

"Based."

"Based on what?"

Even though it was only one level up, I am in a good mood, so I decide to mess with her a bit more. All with the use of knowledge from the twins and the confusing gibberish they used all the time together with Brainiac.

"Would you say I'm the goat?"

"Did you get hit somewhere? You clearly aren't a goat."

"Oh, I didn't say it before, but nice drip, I like your clothes, they are lit."

"You are indeed even more annoying than before. Wanna have a fight? No cheeky stuff, just body strengthening, I will beat it out of you."

“Mood. But anyway, let’s get some bussin’ food.”

“You little shit...”

Her reaction makes me even happier and I dodge the kick she throws at me. The next time I meet the twins, I will have to ask if I used these words correctly. They are still confusing as fuck.

Walking through the entrance tunnel after being let in by Niall’s Frozen Reaper guy, I allow myself to relax just a bit. Around 50 minutes remain before another round of training, so I decide to examine the place a bit.

“And by the way, it’s your rest time, so why do you keep that orb near you and train shaping? A little bit of rest is fine.”

“I’m on a time limit here; as you might have noticed, our companion requires me to level up 5 skills.”

“It was you...”

“Would you believe that? Five skills to level 50.”

“But it was...”

“So yeah, I have to train a bit more.”

Myrra sighs and looks at a man who's been staring at her; that makes him turn away quickly and rush behind the trees.

“If you need help, feral one, I’m here. I owe you a lot, and if it comes to it, I will fight with you against Lady Lissandra if you fail.”

It's as if she declared she is willing to die with me and for some reason, I can't find the right words to react to it. Such a surprising declaration out of nowhere catches me off guard.

She notices it and smiles with her fangs showing. Her tail shows she is even more amused than before, and her ears perk up.

"Am I also cooked now, feral one?" Myrra asks with a bright smile.

"We have to do something about your habit of picking up weird words, the same with 'nya' before." I decide to ignore it for now and push by her, heading deeper into the workshop.

"Did I use it incorrectly? Should I call myself goat instead?" She quickly catches up to me and walks by my side.

"Please stop, I'm sorry for teasing you before." Seeing the lynthari I once considered majestic using these words ruins my image of their entire race even more.

"Based."

"..."

"We are going to get some bussin' food? Do you think they have restaurants here? That would be cooked!"

"That's not even how you use... whatever, why are you so quick to catch these things up?"

"Feral one, I might not be at the level of Lady Lissandra, but my talent is quite good. Out of all the lynthari, I was considered the most talented in millennia."

Even though she is still smiling, it makes me remember that her entire world is gone. She might not consider herself fake or doesn't consider it at all, but it doesn't change that fact.

Unlike me, who will most likely return to Earth, she has nothing left. Just that crazy woman by her side who pulls her around.

The way she always tried to stay by my side ever since we met again now makes sense. We weren't best friends or anything like that, but I'm someone she knows, and we probably did have a better relationship than she currently has with Lissandra.

Not having time to grieve, having to fight to survive, unable to hear a lot of things because of the censor preventing it, the risk of dying at any moment.

"Maybe your talent is at the level of pets the court ladies from Lissandra's planet used to have," I tell her.

I start noticing just a bit of clinginess from her. The way she talks quickly and stays nearby. As if an animal looking for someone to share warmth with.

Even though she tries hard to not let it show. "Maybe in a few months. So far, none of us are a match for them, feral one! But one day!"

Walking and joking, we pass through the tunnels and a few caves.

All of these places are huge. The walls from which they got massive crystals for Skyhold Islands. The giant tools they used to create parts of them.

One of the rooms has a pillar in the middle that looks like it could move up and down, imitating hits of a hammer. Just that pillar is as big as buildings, and there are more things like that.

It's all fascinating even when they are sitting there and collecting dust. Some even used as meeting spots for kids that run around and play. The inscriptions look fine, so it all could probably work with a lot of effort, but they are not powered, mana too precious to waste like that.

"It's like a city," Myrra says. "Thousands of people. Gardens, fields, waterfalls. Seeing it used this way is nice, but sad at the same time. Do you know what I mean?"

“Yes. It used to be a busy place, full of people working on yet another part of a Skyhold Bastion. Hammering sounds, rails used, materials mined.”

It all feels a bit post-apocalyptic. As if a once prosperous city was left behind and taken over by nature, the trees piercing through the roads and growing in the middle of the streets. That kind of feeling.

All radiates this feeling of nostalgia and the tools created by generations of people, most of whom are already dead. It's something proven even by most of the tools left behind being taken apart, to serve in a better way.

In the end, we don't find any stalls offering food and just walk around, and the hour of rest passes like that.

When it's about to end, we turn around and return to our apartment where Lissandra sits, working on the arm of the Saint. It might be me, but the arm seems to be a bit smaller than before.

Lissandra glances up from the arm at the orb that still floats near my shoulder and I train with constantly.

It's to the point the entire time while walking with Myrra I also had to keep up my healing passive from the strain and effort I put into that shaping exercise.

“Continue what you are doing but with no healing for the next 10 hours,” she says simply and continues to work on the arm.

Chapter 395: I will give it my all

Sset - You didn't join at the scheduled time yesterday.

Noname - I was in the middle of training. Will tell you all when we meet again.

Sset - Sure, as for us, we already located the Black Tower. It will take us a few days to get there.

Noname - Planning to go in already?

Sset - We'll see. We need a bit more information. The twins have been fine so far, but they still have to endure a lot of bullshit. If possible, I will get them out.

Grumpy -Hello Noname, are you doing ok?

Noname -Yes, it's going pretty well so far.

Grumpy -Good! I examined that finger bone you left with me a bit more and got a few ideas. We can try them out when you get back.

Noname -Sure. I have to go now.

Grumpy - Later!

I turn off the Beyond Community and check my quests, just in case. Though I still have one side quest:

Side quest:Reach level 250

Reward:body upgrade

As for the floor quest, it's the one for the 6th floor. There is no further mention of my training or my two week timer.

It really seems as if Ruler of Envy used the function of summoning a disciple here, combined it with the running instance of my 5th floor, and twisted it. And that seems to have caused some kind of backlash, so it looks like the Rulers can't mess with the tutorial as much as they might like.

I wonder how the Ruler of Greed feels about that.

The murderer from Easy difficulty, likely desperate to escape his imprisonment and our plans to permanently kill him, accepted the first suspicious invitation, only to have his status taken.

All of that begs the question; Is the tutorial the creation of a single Ruler, a collaboration, or is it a product of the system with some wiggle room for the Rulers to exploit? Can they mess with the system itself? That seems unlikely; in that case, they would probably be able to mess with the tutorial more. They still seem to be bound by some rules.

Somebody comes to a stop in front of me and I pause, shelving my thoughts and looking up. Lisandra stands there.

“You will speak with the Champion. She said she will only share the information I need after dinner... with you.”

“Uh, what?”

“She took a liking to you, little pup, and she wants to mess with me like some common child. So just go, we will be leaving soon afterward. We’ve wasted enough time here.”

There are no more words from her as she returns to her seat in the corner, continuing to work on the arm, which I note is significantly smaller than before.

“Are you being courted by the Champion, little pup? Be careful what you drink; she might be trying to take advantage of you,” How quick she is to tease me.

For some reason, I don’t find that funny. Niall is extremely powerful, and it would be a simple matter for her to do whatever she wants, no one here could stop her. This palace could easily be a lawless hellhole if someone as powerful as she wanted it that way.

“She’s just trying to spite Lissandra. You can imagine how she deals with her.”

“Whatever makes you feel safer, feral one. Well, it doesn’t have to be so bad. She’s quite the beauty, as far as human women go, I think. You might even get some gifts from...”

I shoot a mana orb at Myrra, who returns fire with shards of her Aurora glass. I block with a small barrier and sigh. Not wanting to push things further, I head outside.

“At least dress yourself up...” I hear Myrra shout from behind me.

The Frozen Reaper guy greets me as I leave the apartment. Unlike the other one, he doesn’t seem to smile much and leads me quietly through the tunnels after greeting me.

It takes 5 minutes, but we enter one of the big caves which opens out into a beautiful green patch of forest and a pretty clearing. Crystals as tall as me poke up from the ground, shining with soft blue and yellow lights emanating from their cores. Niall sits on a blanket, spread over the grass, nomming on snacks.

“Is this a date?” I ask as I plop down.

“Ha! You might be somewhat handsome, but I’m sorry to announce you are far from my type.”

“Sounds good.”

“That woman is extremely tiring. I’m trying to be nice, but even I have my limits, you know.”

“Wouldn’t it be easy for you to deal with her?” I can’t imagine Lissandra being strong enough to face the Champion directly, even in her weakened state. From what Niall showed me before, I guess she could use a third of her full strength? Maybe a bit more if she decided to risk the backlash. She has been severely weakened, but she’s still powerful enough to deal with almost anything that gets thrown her way.

Lissandra could probably deal with her through some fuckery, but it wouldn’t be clean.

Niall lays on her back and looks at the ceiling, which, I find, is full of crystals as well. "Probably yes, but that woman is sneaky. If I failed to kill her in one hit, she would pull some bullshit, and a drawn out fight would probably cost the lives of the people around us or attract attention from the Veil."

"Makes sense," I say, grabbing a snack from a convenient plate and moving it closer to Niall.

She smirks, opens her mouth, and I throw it in.

"I could get used to that. I heard about some noblewomen who had a bunch of bare-chested pretty men to feed them grapes. What do you think?"

"Will you answer a few of my questions if I do?"

"No, I won't. And stop asking so much. You have question after question. You probably have centuries to live, so enjoy the process of learning and growing stronger. It will be lonely and boring once you get to the top."

"I don't know if I have that luxury, but I won't bother you."

"Good. Anyway, your subclass is Pride, right? Yet you wouldn't have hesitated to do what I requested?"

I throw another piece of fruit into her mouth before answering, "No, I wouldn't. It's a low price to pay."

"Weirdest fucking pride I ever met."

"Thanks." Multiple questions come to my mind, but I hold them in, laying back on the blanket instead.

It's nice and cozy here, and after days of no sleep and nearly nonstop training, I allow myself to relax just for a tiny bit.

"You seem to be in a better mood than you were," I tell Niall.

“The method your companion gave me is amazing. I don’t remember the last time I saw something like that. She might be better than Tassian was with his emblems. It’s kinda scary.”

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“So it’s going to help with your heart?”

I feel a mana wave wash over us as Niall checks if anyone is around.

Only then does she continue, “If it had continued like this, I would have been dead in 5 years maybe, but with this method, I can get that thing out of my heart in a year or two and then heal fully. I can be a proper Champion once again.”

“It was that bad?”

“One hundred years, that’s how long I’ve been fighting it. It tires you out and changes you as a person. Dozens, hundreds of failed attempts, feeling powerless. All the self-doubt... But now there is hope, and I will give it my all. Just like you, little psychopath.”

I turn my head to the side. Niall is looking at the ceiling with a smile on her lips. It’s the most real smile she’s ever shown me. As if a flame that was about to die off regained its former brilliance. It’s pretty.

“I see.”

“You seem like the type who can keep his mouth shut, but if you tell anyone else, I will pull your head off your neck.”

“Sounds like a reasonable thing to do to such a shameless traitor,” I note.

“I know, right?” she smiles, “Now take this mana stone. It contains the formation she wanted, and tell that creepy woman thank you from me.”

I take the mana stone. It's small, and when I try to inspect it, I find it to be encrypted. Rude.

"I will pass it along and wish you good luck with your heart."

"Luck won't have anything to do with it. I'm a Champion, am I not? It's time to remind myself of that."

Back in the room, I pass the stone to Lissandra and head to the couch. Soon my kinetic energy training will start, and I would rather be immobilized there than on the cold floor. I'm almost glad for that, as my social batteries are getting dangerously empty. I might need to close myself in a dark room for a few days and turn off my notifications.

"It's all here," Lissandra says. The monster obviously decrypted the stone within seconds.

Well, Niall didn't seem like the type to break a promise. Most of all, she seemed honestly happy while trying to hide it.

"Give me your mana, little pup."

"Sure," I sigh and start sending it towards her.

Then I pause. Something's not right.

"How much?"

"All of it, the mana from your reservoir as well."

I stop and cut off the stream, my mana seeping back into my body.

It becomes quiet.

Lissandra stands there in the middle of the room. Wearing her casual clothes, a black dagger on her waist, but something feels off.

“Why?”

“So I can kill that Champion. Our little kitten doesn’t have enough for me to do it cleanly.”

She takes a step towards me and reaches her hand.

“No,” I say.

Lissandra tilts her head, “Have you forgotten what she is, little pup? Just a fake. The shadow of a Champion that ceased to live millennia ago.”

“I know. She is fake just like you.”

She doesn't let it show, but I know it hit her. It must have.

“Not even close to being like me. Why are you reacting like this, I wonder.”

That makes me think for a moment before I answer, “If you asked me a few months ago, I would have probably done it without hesitation.”

“So what changed?”

“One of the reasons I want to become strong is so that I can do whatever I want. To stop being forced into things. To stop making compromises I don’t like.”

“Such a childish reason and something impossible for you. You will never be that powerful.”

“Then I will die trying to reach that level.”

“I see.”

“Because that’s how I want to live. Any wrong done to me, I will repay tenfold. Any wrong done to those I care about, I will repay a hundredfold. And if I don’t feel like it, I won’t kill. I don’t care if it’s because I’m in a good mood, I don’t care if it’s because I slept well, or if it’s just because they showed me the slightest bit of goodwill.”

Congratulations, you have fulfilled the requirements to level up your subclass!

[Initiate of Pride] > [Adept of Pride]

You have started to build your own pride, a pride unique to you with its own effects and bonuses.

You will now also have an easier time detecting those with the same subclass and be able to determine the stage of their subclass.

The effects of the previous stage are now strengthened.

You may choose one skill that will be affected by your Pride the most!

I push these notifications away and face Lissandra.

The silver-haired woman smiles softly, “Congratulations on reaching the second stage of your subclass,” she says.

Without any movement from her, the inscriptions for my Burden Enhancement flare into full effect, and I freeze on the spot.

Immediately I rush to gather my mana and deactivate the inscriptions, but Lissandra is already standing in front of me. The black dagger pierces my skin, the tip of it just barely touching my heart. A disruptive effect floods my body, putting an end to all my efforts like it's nothing.

Instead, I flood my body with kinetic energy, and the fingers on my right hand flex as I force myself to move.

"Impressive, little pup. You really do have a tiny bit of talent for kinetic energy, I must admit." The mana she absorbed turns to her, and she quickly makes some changes to the inscriptions, and I find myself unable to move at all.

"I understand your Pride better now. It has the potential to make you very powerful, no, it requires you to be very powerful. It will support you, and make you even stronger, but if you fall, it will crumble with you. The moment you give up, it will make your downfall truly terrible. It fits you well."

The black dagger continues to absorb my body's mana, which is already thirty percent gone.

"If you do anything, little kitten, it will end badly for you. I'm not going to hurt him." Lissandra says that single sentence and Myrra stops mid-step.

Seventy percent of my body's mana is gone, and Lissandra returns my gaze easily.

"If I had you decide between Myrra and that Champion, I'm sure you would pick Myrra without any hesitation, little pup. It's just that you are that greedy, and that might be a reason why..." The rest of her words get censored.

Lissandra seems amused, noticing it as well.

Ninety percent.

And all of my mana is gone.

"I would like the contents of your reservoir, but this should be enough." She says pulling the dagger free, but the inscriptions remain, and with them my inability to move.

No matter how much I try, or how much kinetic energy I use. Giving me a last glance, Lissandra exits the room.

A minute passes, and my finger twitches again.

Two minutes pass, and more fingers move.

Three minutes, and I twitch my leg.

A single powerful pulse of mana washes through the entire workshop.

Just one, and then there is nothing.

The lights flicker, and the air filtration starts shutting down. At the same time, alarms start sounding, and screams of surprised people reach me pouring in from outside.

Both of my legs move, and I stand only to immediately fall, my face buried in the cold floor. My kinetic energy is nearly gone, and slowly being replaced by my strained mana regeneration.

The door opens again, and Lissandra enters the room. Her right arm is hanging uselessly at her side, broken, and twisted, blood dripping from it. A deep wound mars her face, and one of her eyes is injured. Nothing else. Though she does carry a small bag, containing a few spare items and the remains of a certain heart.

"We are leaving. You will be going first." Lissandra moves her hand and the inscriptions on me lose their effect, making me stumble.

Forcing myself to calm down, I look at her.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Control your emotions.

It's too late to do anything now.

I take a step toward Lissandra and then pass by her, opening the door.

Fire fills the hallway heading toward me, and I reach into my reservoir, absorbing the power of these flames until they weaken, revealing a man with an expression of wrath on his face. He doesn't bother to control himself as the invisible heat fills the tunnel. There are no flames, yet the air flickers and the walls glow red hot, melting like butter.

I activate the tiny anchor I left in the hallway the moment we came here, which is behind him. The anchor explodes with kinetic energy, gouging at his back and causing him to stumble. Seizing his moment of distraction, I absorb all of the heat and then release it at once in a thin, laser-like stream.

He lifts his hands in front of his head and even manages to block the attack for a moment, dispersing it across his palms, but it's too concentrated, and it pierces through his hands and head.

[You have defeated Solar Ascendant - lvl 266]

[Lvl 241 > Lvl 242]

Then, as people flee in confusion to the ringing of the alarms and the functions of the Workshop slowly die, we exit the compound and head north.

Chapter 396: Cinder

A day passes, and during that time no one says a word. The training didn't stop even then.

I was forced to move under weaker Burden Enhancement Inscriptions. I fought the monsters attacking us on the way, the ever-strengthening Veil in the sky spewing more and more monsters.

Veil Guardians are the norm at this point, I even welcome them as I take the opportunity to sell the voidsteel blades.

There is no rest for me, and rather than the usual three hours of variety training, I find myself devoting that time to fighting. I manage to raise my level once more in the process, slowly approaching my goal of reaching 250.

Lately, I've been finding myself incorporating mana shaping into my fights as well.

It's quite a lot. Only a few days have passed since I began 14 days with my "master", but I'm already starting to notice signs of exhaustion from the lack of sleep and the abundance of overtraining. I don't mind much, it helps take my mind off the slew of useless thoughts and gives me time to regain control over my emotions.

It's also when I decide to limit my use of [Focus] when it comes to regulating my emotions even after meeting Lissandra's conditions. My overuse of the skill was probably preventing my subclass from leveling. Looking at it now, it's so obvious.

Myrra gives me space to clear my mind, which I appreciate, and when we finally stop for a break, Lissandra steps in front of me.

"I had expected you to attack me at least a few times, little pup. You know I promised not to kill you unless you failed to follow my rules."

She lowers her face, catching my gaze.

I return it.

Slow breath in. Breath out.

Good.

Now continue to calmly circulate your mana.

Good.

“Oh, so you’re biding your time until you have a better chance, little pup, you are...”

I open my mouth, just as I had so long ago with her descendant, an orb erupting forth and heading right for her eye.

Lissandra tilts her head in an amazing show of her lightning-quick reflexes, and the orb grazes her cheek. Behind her, the orb explodes, releasing a burst of kinetic energy and pushes her towards me.

I boost my movement with a lot of kinetic energy, and a blade of mana forms in my hand, while my other hand reaches towards the black dagger at her waist.

Then the world turns upside down. I feel a blow to my shoulder and in my belly and find myself lying on my back.

An impulse to jump back and attack again is sent through my body, but I force it away and stay down.

Lissandra looks down at me, and I watch as she reaches her hand up, touching the wound on her cheek, a bit of blood staining the tips of her fingers.

“Little pup, your movements are terrible. Stand up and repeat after me.”

I do as I’m told, and she reactivates the inscriptions for Burden Enhancement. Not at their full power, but still enough to make it difficult for me to move. Then, she slowly starts moving her body, slim muscles rippling as she takes a stance and then slowly moves her hand in a punch.

Her body twists, feet burrowing into the ground as she does so.

The movement is short and thrown at a normal speed, it would be quick. It’s the kind of movement that sacrifices a bit of power to land a few quick blows. And it’s probably been adapted to synergize with a variety of skills. Moving kinetic energy through my body, I mimic that movement.

Even before I finish the movement, I stop and start over again.

Lissandra steps closer, “Widen your feet a bit more. Send more of your kinetic energy to your feet and circulate it through your entire body from there.”

Over and over again, I repeat the simple movement.

“The last part is the most important. A short punch during which you release all the buildup.”

And more.

“Again. Don’t think about trying to use it in combat. It’s an exercise meant to show you some of the ways you could move your body. We don’t have enough time for me to teach you proper martial arts.”

At some point, she increases the power of the inscriptions, and my movement slows even more and I’m forced to fight them with more kinetic energy just to move.

The sweat plasters my shirt to my skin and drips from my nose.

I catch myself gasping for air, and my mind focuses on completing the next movement and sending the next burst of kinetic energy through my body to help me move.

By the time we stop, it’s dark outside.

Lissandra releases the inscriptions and wanders off into the forest, where soon after and far in the distance, a huge piece of the nearby mountain disappears, and the stones start floating in the air. Mana envelops the area, and I recognize it right away. It’s the Veil Weaver, a monster with extremely potent telekinesis.

The Cockroach is probably somewhere around my level, I would say. The moment she used Hadwin’s arm to regenerate herself, she had to start over, leveling up and all that stuff. Of course, she has the

advantage of a shitload of knowledge, and at this point, I'm not sure if I want to know what level her skills are.

Stolen story; please report.

Actually, I would love to know that.

That's also why I don't think Veil Weaver will be enough to end her.

Keeping part of my mind on the fight ruining the landscape all around us, I wonder if I should take the opportunity to assign the bonus from my subclass to a skill.

This is like the passive skill combination token all over again, I hesitate. I can't help but think that I might get more out of my training if I wait. I already have way too many things I need to work on, and experimenting with the effects of Pride would add more to the pile.

One of the problems is obviously the system and its habit of drip feeding me information as I progress through the floors.

As of now, I've pretty well confirmed that Initiate of Pride was helping me control my mana and that the effect has grown stronger.

I have a theory that it might even be making it easier for me to gain skills like [Mana Crown] and [Mana Domain]. In addition, it might have influenced my primary class offers.

Or maybe it didn't. The relationship between subclass and primary class is still unknown. My primary class offers more direct boosts like stats, passives, and active skills - so far, the only way we've found to gain active skills other than learning them is through a primary class. Subclasses, on the other hand, are more indirect. It seems to work more like a passive with a broader scope of influence.

Looking at the new stuff it unlocked and my new ability to sense other devotees of Pride, I find myself wondering if reaching this new stage is going to open further avenues for improvement in the future. What happens when I reach Master of Pride? Will I have influence over others with the Pride subclass?

Are Blights and Radiances separated into groups according to their subclasses, do they create some sort of bond between users?

More to think about and drag out of Lissandra. Even thinking about her right now sets my blood boiling though. Yet it's all useless. It's too late for Niall, and me throwing yet another tantrum won't help.

It's so easy to forget that natives are just fakes, but at the same time, I might like it more that way. It makes all these floors feel more real, and that might be the point.

Soon after, Lissandra returns. The wounds she had as we left the Workshop are long gone, and in the fight with Veil Weaver, she didn't get any new ones if I remember correctly though Hadwin had a low grade healing skill so that doesn't mean much.

"We're leaving right away. The Veil will notice that one of its stronger monsters has gone missing."

She seems to know quite a bit about the matter, perhaps she learned a few things from Niall or maybe she made her own observations. Either way, Myrra and I quickly follow after exchanging a quick glance. Our training continues nonetheless, and that leaves the two of us killing most of the monsters.

Three days later, my level went up by three. [Mana Manipulation] reached 49, and Crown leveled up once as well.

I only have eight days, and a few hours, to fulfill Lissandra's requirements.

In the past day, we've flown under the radar, avoiding any Veil monsters to keep from revealing our location, though the countryside we find ourselves passing through is entirely devoid of them.

We pass huge cities, empty and destroyed, and smaller rural villages, located next to massive craters.

We see an absolutely massive forest burned to ash, leaving naught but a rocky plain behind.

Crushed mountains.

Rivers that drain into craters the size of cities.

The destruction is all encompassing, and we pass through a number of places filled with mana radiation. Places where Champions must have clashed, even hundreds of years later, signs of their skills and powers remain, like scars upon the land.

We also pass by an ancient battleground where an Absolute once fought, something Lissandra points out with keen interest.

There, inside one of the lakes, lies the skeleton of a monster. Something I fail to identify, there's only half a skull and a few rib-like bones pointing toward the sky.

The remains alone are at least as tall as the tallest skyscrapers back on Earth. The bones are blindingly white, yet no flesh or connective tissue remains. There is no way something like that could decay after a mere 100 years. The flesh of powerful monsters is capable of lasting so much longer. No, it looks like something ate that monster, either during the fight or after, and only left the bones behind.

The water in that lake is eerily still and impossibly clear, seemingly transparent. There are no monsters either.

We avoid that place as much as we can, making a huge half-circle around it. Lissandra orders us not to touch any water from that area.

A day later, we reach our destination, passing over a hill crowned with trees covered in poisonous bark, which proves harmful even to us, despite our high levels.

"I never want to see that forest again," Myrra hisses.

"Nice jinx."

"Screw off, feral one."

Looking down the hill, we see a huge cleared area, devoid of trees and stone. And the ground itself has been polished to an extremely smooth surface, almost looking more like metal than dirt.

There is a single pyramid, and resting against its side are the skeletal remains of a snake.

The problem, as far as my brain is concerned, is that the pyramid is huge, extremely huge, and so are the skeletal remains. It's difficult for me to even grasp the sheer size of these things.

"This is one of the Veil Ignition Stations. It functioned as a converter, converting the power of a dormant volcano into mana. There was a Champion who made it possible using his trait and skill. He is long since dead, but the station still has a bevy of impressive defense mechanisms."

Lissandra takes a step and heads down the hill towards the city.

"There are people here," I note.

"Yes, the defenses are set to attack any Veil creature that gets close, so people chose to settle in this place, turning this device into their city."

Device. The word alone almost makes me laugh. That thing is way too big to be a simple device.

"From the information I got from that broken Champion, the city is a lawless place, full of gangs fighting for territory and resources. Even now, they probably have groups devoted to breaking into the more important parts of the station."

That piques my interest, and my inner loot goblin awakens. I'm quite good with inscriptions, am I not? I should be able to get into some of the more fancy places. Maybe I'll be able to find some more interesting stuff to sell. A Veil Ignition Station reselling arc 2.0 might be on the menu.

"And what are you looking for here?" I ask.

“You’ll see when we get there, little pup. And control your mana more, that orb over your shoulder is a disgrace considering the amount of time you’ve spent on it.”

I do as I’m told, and our steps continue, resounding in strangely distorted echoes as we cross the metallic surface, which radiates just the slightest bit of heat.

As we get closer, the pyramid and the skeleton start to look even bigger, and I have to tilt my head high up to see the top of it.

With no one to welcome us, we pause for a moment when we find ourselves standing in front of the pyramid.

“Veil Ignition Station no. 2, also called Cinder,” Lissandra says, and we head in.

Chapter 397: Clash with the locals

The Veil Ignition Station known as Cinder, is a pyramid made of metal. Up close the surface isn’t quite as smooth as it looked from a distance, its sheer size serving to smooth out any inconsistencies in its form.

The exterior is covered in a combination of silver and gray metals, with orange-ish veins of a different material tracing its way through the surface.

The external surface is covered in huge doors, leading to a vast multitude of terraces. Each accounting for an area spanning several city blocks, and higher up the surface, I begin to see a number of stone and wood clinging to the metal exterior, as various humanoid figures bustle about.

“This is where I leave you for now; you two go on together. I will rejoin you later.” With that, Lissandra strides off, entering the pyramid through a long tunnel leading to what appears to be an elevator shaft.

“Want to go up from the outside?” I ask Myrra.

"I don't mind," she answers, and with that, we start scaling the pyramid.

Despite her apparent lack of enthusiasm, I can still see her tail swaying from side to side. Myrra is a curious creature, and she's never been able to hide it.

And, it's not like I'm not curious myself. The only thing that could be an issue is the relative strength of the natives. Myrra and I both have inscriptions restraining our bodies, and they're always active at some level. It's not terrible, but it's powerful enough that it's forcing me to use kinetic energy just to be able to walk.

Plus, Lissandra decided that I was finding things a bit too easy, and added a disrupting effect to interfere with my mana, not unlike the imps from the tunnels she left me in. Most of my focus and attention is being taken up by the process of walking without my mana ruining my body.

It's a lot. And Myrra isn't so different.

She must have guessed what I'm thinking about because she jokes, "If we get our asses kicked by some level 100 guy, I'm leaving you and running away."

"I don't know, sometimes I feel like a level 50 would be enough to kick my ass." I use just a bit of kinetic energy and boost myself up onto one of the terraces, which I find to be individual segments of the pyramid.

"That's pathetic, feral one. Not even I feel that way. To get me, they would need to be level 51 at least."

"The way you move your mana is pathetic. I've never seen such a poor form. I swear..."

"...I swear I knew noble ladies whose pets had better control over their mana than you," Myrra finishes, clearly annoyed by the comparison. Her canines drawing free of her lips.

We jump a few more times, slowly moving toward a group of people, and I continue to examine the pyramid as we go.

As I do, I come to find my first impressions vindicated, the metal surface is nearly perfect. Even after who knows how many years, it hasn't taken any significant damage, though there are scratches here

and there. However, we are on the opposite side of the structure from the skeletal remains of that giant snake. I'm sure that part is damaged.

Another interesting thing is that as the day turns into night, the pyramid is getting warmer while the surrounding area is getting colder. Not uncomfortably so; but enough to create a cozy pocket of warmth that is slowly rising in temperature.

It seems like the pyramid is absorbing heat from the surrounding area and it doesn't seem like it'll be done for a while yet. I'm curious to see how high it'll go.

Before we can reach the platform and the humans on it, a few of them start heading our way, with weapons drawn and skills at the ready. The men and women approaching us are dressed in mismatched armor, not to mention their weird mix of weapons and wild eyed expressions. Each one is around level 100.

What surprises me most though is the way they go about trying to estimate my power. It's not something I've seen in a long time. It's terrible like I'm being repeatedly slapped with wet spaghetti.

"We will need you to pay a toll to enter," the woman with the highest level speaks first, stepping forward and gesturing, "The ax and the blade should do."

She seems to be indicating my Flamebearer and voidsteel blade, which I've continued to carry despite the fact that I rarely have a use for them.

"Just kill them. I bet they have some nicer stuff as well." One of the others smirks, already holding his weapon.

"Maybe we shouldn't; they must be somewhat strong if they've managed to make it all the way here."

"Oh, shut up, Veril. Anyone could do that. There aren't many monsters in the area, and just look at them, they look like they're about to fall apart. Look at them, they're bleeding."

The bleeding in question is a side effect of our active inscriptions and the occasional lapse in control. Though I'm not really willing to explain that. I'd rather listen to their conversation. After all, I've found myself in quite an interesting situation. Like low-grade thugs stopping the protagonist from reaching a certain area.

It's a fun experience until one of them decides to attack us from behind, using the others as a distraction. The way he moves makes it clear he's going in for the kill, his blade lashing out for Myrra's neck.

Before he even reaches her, he staggers, the dagger tumbling from his hands, a deep cut violating the integrity of his neck, as Myrra's Aurora glass shimmers in the air.

Three more jump at me, one seizing control of my shadow in an attempt to bind me, as another's skill struggles to disrupt my mana, leaving the third man to rush me as armor made of mana begins sprouting from his body.

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

Each of them stops mid-attack and I place three anchors. Three bursts of kinetic energy erupt next to them, and their headless bodies fall to the ground.

Somebody screams, and projectiles crash into Myrra's barrier of Aurora glass and I retaliate by launching a projectile at the attacker and receive a notification confirming the kill.

Myrra boosts herself towards two more of the attackers, throwing one off the pyramid and far into the distance, as he flails his arms before crashing into the ground and lying still. Either dead or acting. The second attacker dies as Myrra caves his chest in with a single punch, probably destroying his heart.

The last one tries to escape so I teleport through an anchor I placed on him grabbing his arm, and pulling him towards me, dislocating it. He's the one who noted that we might be a little bit strong.

He keeps screaming, either out of fear, desperation, or pain. If it's the pain, I'll be disappointed; his wounds are barely worth mentioning.

For a moment, I glance up at the hundred or so people looking down at us. They've clearly separated themselves into distinct groups, probably gangs. Some are laughing, some are pale in the face. I also notice a few of them rushing up the pyramid, eager to spread the news.

"If you don't put a stop to all this screaming and whining, you will die."

It takes him a moment, but he does manage to shut himself up, clenching his teeth, as I notice the tears in his eyes. He is fairly young, barely twenty years old, and most of his items are barely in the realm of uncommon grade.

[Shadow Whisperer - lvl 78]

Myrra steps closer as well, towering over the young man whose heart begins to beat even faster.

"What are we asking him?" Myrra turns to me.

"Good question. What does Lissandra want here?"

"Something stashed away in the pyramid? The remains of a Champion? More information? Not like she will tell us."

"That's true." I shake the young man, "Who're the highest level people around? Who runs the place?"

"Champion Zey and his five disciples! They live at the top!" he manages to get out, and I notice that he's started to sway. It's just a dislocated arm! Why's he being such a wuss about it?

"Someone pretending to be a Champion?" I ask Myrra.

"For sure."

“He is not! He beat the Arch Serpent and saved us all those years ago! It's him who controls all and gives us warmth so we can survive the night. It's him who defends us against all the monst...”

With a sigh, I let him go and push him to the ground with a weak burst of kinetic energy, sending him to the ground, where he smartly stays lying without any movement.

Is he a possum or something?

Then I use another one to jump to the next platform, repeating the action twice more, Myrra following behind.

So someone's probably found a way to control a few of the minor functions of the Veil Ignition Station, it's probably someone from before the war. Champion Zey, he seems to be calling himself, taking advantage of the title to cling to power. Almost like a cult leader.

It's a different style of governance from the Sanctuary, the Workshop, or even the Bastion, but it's not really surprising.

Of course, there is the slim chance he turns out to be a real Champion, but I have a feeling Lissandra would have told us if that were the case.

We finally reach a platform with buildings, I give them a glance. They're all wood and stone construction with some weird glue-like material to serve as the mortar. All of these buildings sharply contrast with the smooth metal of the pyramid.

It makes for a rickety, ratted out mess, as we saw from the lower platforms. People walk around in old, tattered clothes. There are shops and craftsmen in some of the buildings, but none of them seem any better constructed for it.

I guess the higher on the pyramid, the more powerful the people and the nicer the buildings we can expect to see.

“Fuck, these inscriptions are going to kill me, feral one,” Myrra complains, approaching me.

“They’re fine.”

“Then why do you look like you’re going to pass out? Look, your mana’s leaking and you’re bleeding all over the place!”

“Isn't this much normal while training?”

I do not get an answer, and her expression takes on a mix of amusement, pity, worry, and frustration. Her fluffy tail all but confirms it as it flits about in a confused manner.

That's when an item falls between me and Myrra. I sense it heading our way, but I’m curious to see what it’ll do.

It turns out to be an orb the size of my fist, and it turns out to contain a decent amount of heat, not to mention that the container seems interesting on its own. The orb’s been made from a thin glass-like material engraved with simple inscriptions. I wanna say that its rarity sits somewhere around uncommon? Maybe a step away from rare, but no higher than that.

The surface starts to crack as I kneel down and poke it.

The cracks grow wider, and one of the inscriptions starts to shine just a touch brighter, serving to release the concentrated heat in a single burst.

To be honest, the whole setup is clumsy, nearly to the point I'm surprised that it seems to be working.

More heat passes through the crack, and it expands, the inscriptions bursting into full activity as I grab the orb, leaning in close to examine it further.

All of the heat contained inside is released at once, rushing to melt my face off along with a small area around me. It’s a bit amateurish by my standards, the blast isn't all that concentrated, and its simple release mechanism only serves to weaken the effect.

I absorb the heat of the explosion and start spinning it around my head before absorbing it into my body, using it to fuel my passive and heal some of the wounds caused by my lapses in control.

Lissandra's inscriptions are truly evil. I'll just have to learn how to make and improve on them, maybe.

Looking up, I catch a glimpse of Myrra, who's already reached our attacker while avoiding another orb. At this point, she merely breaks his neck and throws him into the distance.

It must be nice to have such high natural physical stats.

"Want to catch some and gather information?" she asks as she nimbly lands next to me.

Even though she complains about the inscriptions nonstop, she also seems to be doing well. However, she doesn't really have much choice now that Lissandra's decided to teach her. I'm sure that cockroach wouldn't have bothered if Myrra weren't talented.

"Let's just climb higher. If they attack, we kill them. If not, we leave them be. There doesn't seem to be much to learn here, we should probably head higher before trying to ask again. Catching that fake Champion and his "disciples" are optional."

"Sounds like a plan, feral one. Let us head higher then. I'm eager to find out what's inside and at the top."

Chapter 398: Heading inside

About a third of the way up the pyramid I signal Myrra to stop. Then, while keeping my mana in check, I send my senses out, probing the area around the Veil Ignition Station.

I find my suspicions confirmed, the temperature out there is dropping rapidly. And not just the weather; no, the pyramid is absorbing heat at a scary rate, pulling in energy from a huge area. All that heat is being absorbed by the metal and sent somewhere inside, part of it radiating from the surface.

The drop in temperature is so huge I'm sure I would die out there without the use of my thermal energy, not just because of my stats either. I don't even think Myrra would have much of a chance. Especially seeing how effectively and hungrily the station devours any heat in the area.

Myrra notices it as well. She herself has a taste for fire and ice based attacks, so I'm sure she can sense that much.

"So that means the Ignition Station is at least partially functional," she notes.

"Seems like it."

What really surprises me though is that we see a group of about 100 people at the bottom of the pyramid putting on something like a space suit with a number of mana stones connected to them. I can't exactly puzzle out what purpose they're meant to serve from up here, but my best guess is that they serve as insulation against the extreme elements outside.

These weirdos are planning to head out.

Most of them are carrying a number of big baskets, while others are left to pull even bigger ones, connected to ropes.

They then proceed to throw the resulting clumps of frost into the baskets behind them, and once one place is cleared, they move on.

That begs the question though, is this where they get their water?

As I look around, I keep finding more and more groups like that, spread all around the pyramid, each crew containing at least a hundred people who work quickly to harvest the ice.

Once in a while, one of them starts panicking, touching the suit he is wearing. It seems like it must have taken some sort of damage. Maybe a broken mana stone, damaged suit, anything.

At which point it only takes a few seconds for that man or woman to die, their bodies ignored by the others. Left behind to be collected the next day, if only to recover a suit that could still be repaired or the items the person in question happened to have on them.

“They don’t drink the water from the area, and there isn’t any source in the pyramid, so this is probably the best method they have,” Lissandra says, appearing out of nowhere, also looking down at these groups of people.

“Don’t they have people with skills that could help with that?” Myrra asks. It’s a naive question.

“People like that tend to be grabbed by the ruling factions and used as a means of control,” I explain.

“Such childish games,” Lissandra chuffs, probing Myrra and me with her senses before nodding in an affirmative manner. “We’re spitting up again. Pup, you’re heading into the pyramid. Kitten, you’re going to the top. Do whatever you want, and we’ll meet here in 24 hours.”

For a moment, it almost looks like I’m getting some time off. Time I would, of course, use to train. But Lissandra doesn’t disappoint as she turns to me and grabs the bits of mana my body is leaking.

She forms a small orb out of that mana and makes it float over my shoulder, “Keep that orb from breaking down for the next 24 hours. If you use too much mana, it will burst. If you use too little, it will disappear. The amount required to maintain it will change over time.”

Of course, it will. I don’t respond, already turning my attention to the orb. Right away, the orb almost bursts, and then while I lower my mana, it almost disappears as the requirements change.

A few seconds later, they change again, and then a minute later it happens again. There is no rhythm or consistency; the changes seem to come at random. Sometimes it happens after half a second, sometimes it takes a full minute. Even then, the constant and unique changes make the experience far from simple.

What an evil thing. How do I make one?

At least Lissandra did have just enough common sense to weaken the inscriptions on my body, just a bit, the added disruptions to my mana easing off a bit. Of course, they're not entirely silent either. The amount has been perfectly calculated to leave me just capable enough to do anything else.

Myrra also gets a similar task, and then both women disappear on their way, leaving me on my own as I try to grasp the orb and stop it from bursting open. It takes ten minutes before I'm used to it to the point I can use kinetic energy to force my body to move.

For a moment, I almost feel like just sitting down and laughing. I need to use kinetic energy to move, I need to take care of the orb, and I need to take care of my mana which is constantly being disrupted.

What amuses me is that I'm not even that angry. I'm caught up in the sheer humor and absurdity of my situation while I can barely walk like a drunkard.

I could probably use my domain or crown to make it easier, but that would ruin the point of training. So I continue with some more normal methods.

It's in this state, that I walk through the platform, terrace, whatever it's called, and head towards the skeletal remains of the snake. It takes me a while, and as I make my way over, I'm already growing used to it.

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Of course, five men stop me just as I get to some of the more broken parts of the pyramid and the huge bones.

They stare at me, I stare at them. No one says anything until a man with a level of around 200 smirks, his eyes shining a bit, most likely a trait.

All five of them attack me at once, their similar lightning based attacks working together, as they link through the man with the highest level.

Not knowing what would happen to the orb Lissandra left to me if I used [Tether], I use [Resonance], and the attack dissolves into nothing just as it's about to reach me.

I boost my body closer to them with an external application of kinetic energy, and the air resonates, letting out a high pitch as I get within effective reach.

Two men die immediately, their heads exploding as a result of their terrible defenses.

The third one shoots a lightning burst at me which I block with a barrier. I immediately reform it into a spike that pierces through his heart, destroying his shield as it takes form.

The fourth one starts running, my mana projectile piercing his knee before lashing its way through the back of his neck.

The leader charges me with lightning surrounding his body, short bursts of lightning shooting towards me in quick succession.

Just for a moment, my eyes activate, and then I disrupt his armor, and he staggers, surprised. Even so, he lifts his arms to protect his head, and the armor starts to reform. But not in time.

A spear made of mana pierces his chest, and the wound starts healing thanks to some kind of regeneration skill he seems to have, so I change the spear's shape, tearing his chest apart from the inside.

When he falls down dead, I take some time to calm my mana and the orb that changes frequencies multiple times in three seconds. Then, moving my body with kinetic energy, I kneel down in front of the man and send my senses towards his eyes, examining his traits.

Like me, he does have some inscriptions, but most of them are too detailed to get any useful information. They work a bit differently in the body than they do in weapons.

I noticed a long time ago that traits just tend to be that way. And I'm sure the system's doing everything it can to make it much more difficult to obtain traits. It would also be possible for me to emulate Min-Jae and my minion in this matter, but even then, the traits were far weaker than the original.

It would be nice if I could steal traits in a similar way sometime in the future, but if it was that simple, everyone would be doing it. There must be some sort of trick up the system's sleeve.

So, taking my time, I pull out one of the eyes and check the connections and nerves, and at some point, I cleanly cut it in half, examining it visually from the inside.

There are a thing or two I notice but nothing too interesting. The trait also seems to be much weaker than my eyes, so in the end, I just give up and let go.

I clean my hands on the man's clothes and stand up, quickly checking their pockets for goodies. And of course, I take a few small mana stones, along with some pieces of metal and bone that I failed to identify, before continuing on my way towards the skeletal remains.

I find more on the other side of the pyramid than the skeletal remains of a huge monster. though it wasn't really all that visible from afar there is still some flesh remaining. And I do find it interesting that the bones suck in the heat from the pyramid seem to be allowing that energy to flow through them.

After ten minutes of watching people work, I come to the conclusion that that's part of what allows all these people to carve out the flesh and scrape the bones for materials, shaving them into some kind of bony dust.

It seems like they also waited for the night. I know I didn't see them during the day. They wait for the pyramid to absorb heat, some of that heat is absorbed by the bones and warms them up, boiling hot in some places. Which, in exchange, allows them to scrape the bones of a very high-level being and separate out some tiny pieces of its flesh.

It probably represents the work of generations among these people.

So fascinating. Generations of people over hundreds of years. Thousands of people eating the flesh of the same monster. Trying to come up with ways to use the bones and the other parts. Coming up with ways to get more out of it.

It's something I would never see if I was on Earth. Something I would never even think of. Yet here it is, thousands of people crawling over that humongous corpse just to dine on the scraps.

I could sit and watch this for hours, but I have to remind myself what I'm here for.

Before entering the pyramid through the hole in the side, I take out my voidsteel blade and use [Resonance] to make it even sharper. Then I carve out a few pieces of bone, which I stash neatly away.

Lily can check it out for me later. Our project to make my bones stronger and improve my mana conductivity seems to be going well.

Now that I think about it, it might be weird for me to keep giving her pieces of bones, not to mention the human remains, she is a teenage girl after all, but I'm sure she doesn't mind.

A few people shout at me and others even throw some attacks my way, but I ignore them mostly, only blocking the ones with a chance of connecting. Then I slide through a hole in the wall and into the pyramid.

The hallway I find myself in is extremely smooth, and there are no inscriptions anywhere to be seen. There aren't even any lights. More than a hallway, it looks like a vent to channel heat through. I even have to lower my head a bit as I enter.

In front of me, I create a single thermal orb that lets out soft yellow light.

Once again, I pause to concentrate on the mana orb which is in the process of changing its parameters multiple times, each worse than the last.

Once it calms down, I continue on, feeling the warmth from the walls now even more than before. Soon enough, I might find myself being forced to fight against that heat; it's getting a lot warmer really fast.

It takes me five minutes to find a way through, but I do eventually find the entrance to a much bigger one, and I increase the size of the orb.

The light falls upon the smooth surfaces of the tunnel. It's hot here and very quiet. My only light comes from the orb, the pyramid has, thus far, proved itself devoid of any other sources of light. As always when I find myself in a place like this, I feel my excitement spike, the experience further enhanced by the fact I'm alone.

It's been a long time since I've truly had an opportunity like this. I've had my Minion, Duplicaniel, and the tournament, with its abundance of people to get in my way. And after that, I wound up with Lissandra and Myrra. I think I've been handling things well, and if need be, I'm perfectly capable of dealing with it.

But now, I'm on my own, exploring this place that once served as a channel for the traits and skills of a Champion. I find myself feeling quite pleased with the situation.

Yes, I think pleased is just the word for it.

As I head deeper into the pyramid, I ignore the fact that not one of the natives tried to follow me in.

Chapter 399: Heat

One hour into my explorations and I'm starting to find that the deeper I go the hotter things become. At this point, I've begun to notice inscriptions buried within the huge plates of metal this place has been made of. They run through the entire structure of the pyramid, absorbing the heat from outside and sending it further inside.

So of course, I use my thermal energy to track where it's heading.

Sometimes I have to backtrack when I reach the end of a tunnel, but so far things are going well and my steps continue to echo as I walk through the metal channels.

I really wanna know what kind of metal this place is made of. I take the opportunity to touch the walls with my damaged arcane ax to touch the walls just to see what happens.

Nothing too amazing, as it turns out, though when I use the ax, I find it easier to absorb the heat. Maybe the composition is similar, maybe it's an effect of the ax or maybe it's a similar alloy.

I do eventually finally find tunnels meant for humans to pass through, rather than continuing through the heat pumps.

Not knowing how to get there, I focus on the thinnest part of the wall and channel a significant amount of my mana, combined with absorbed thermal energy, into a laser-like stream. This concentrated beam cuts a small hole for me, though it depletes a good chunk of my mana.

The new tunnels I enter aren't much different from the ones I just left. They are just a bit colder and sometimes there are working lights and more inscriptions. And so my journey continues.

I'm using a bit of kinetic energy to power my body just so I can move, and my [Focus], not to regulate my emotions but to deal with my disrupted mana and that evil orb over my shoulder.

Within five hours I start getting bored of the never-changing walls and twisted tunnels and having to retrace my steps, so I'm happy when I finally find a room.

The door is obstructed by a dozen or so corpses each one wearing some sort of suit not unlike the ones the natives were using to scrape frost outside. However, these seem tailored to deal with the heat.

I can see that from the inscriptions placed on the multitude of mana stones each suit contains. There's even some kind of weird dust coating the surface of the suit, which I recognize as the powder being painstakingly scraped from the bones of the dead serpent.

Each of these people is totally dried up, their skin shriveled, and burned. It's difficult to even describe properly. They must have been here for quite some time.

What seems interesting is that the heat here isn't that terrible. I don't even need all that much thermal energy to deal with it. Plus, my physical stats couldn't be much higher than theirs, heck they're probably lower in some cases assuming they were close to 200.

Does that mean that the heat is going to increase at some point, is that what killed them? I note that down for further observation and decide to keep an eye on it. Then I examine the door they tried to open, some tools have been left lying on the ground. Most of them have been scorched if not straight-up melted so not anything useful for me to loot, so I turn to examine the door instead.

The surface is smooth like the walls, only differentiated by the slightly darker color of the circular door. inscriptions have been carved into its center, And I can sense the way they continue under the surface.

Well, this is certainly going to be fun.

I continue to juggle Lissandra's training training while turning part of my mind to the lock itself.

In the end, it takes me two hours to figure out how the locking mechanism works. However, after that, it only takes me five minutes to unlock it with a combination of thermal energy and [Resonance].

[Resonance - lvl 48 > Resonance - lvl 49]

The circular door moves backward, sliding away from me before slowly rolling to the side, and admitting me to the room. There, I find even more corpses, Men and women in the same suits as the ones outside. All of them are close to the door, and some of them have clearly damaged their hands.

Did they get trapped inside? Were the people outside trying to get them out or were they trying to escape the heat?

Some of the corpses inside are also clearly damaged, parts of their suits have been burned, often leaving the bodies missing limbs.

But soon enough the ones responsible reveal themselves.

[Ashen Phantom - lvl 150]

[Ashen Phantom - lvl 101]

[Ashen Phantom - lvl 123]

They're an ashen shade of gray and built like goblins, though the Ashen Phantoms seem to be sneakier.

I can sense that as heat concentrates in one place, they tend to appear there, using it much like a [Tether]. The moment they appear the heat in the room drops, all of it channeled through the monsters who start burning hotter before wordlessly charge me.

Curious, I shoot a mana projectile at one of them, only to have it blocked by a blast of heat. Then, while protecting the evil mana orb, I use [Redistribution] to try to absorb heat from them.

It works surprisingly well, there's almost no resistance as I steal all the heat they just absorbed and once I decide to push more even the heat they did have slips away.

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Before they even reach me, they are cold, their ashen skin growing sickly, as their movements slow.

As a test, I throw a gout of yellow flames at them, but the monsters just absorb them, becoming lively again and forcing me to jump back a few times to dodge their attacks. Then instead I concentrate my flames more and a golden aura envelops them.

[You have defeated Ashen Phantoms - lvl 123]

[You have defeated Ashen Phantoms - lvl 150]

[You have defeated Ashen Phantoms - lvl 101]

They die right away. Surprisingly easy.

When I move closer to their bodies, they are already turning to ash that keeps burning with small golden flames of my primordial energy.

Am I really that hard a counter for them? I would have expected them to handle the heat better, but this? There was barely any resistance.

I kick one of the bones and it dissolves into a small pool of ash. Then I use a blast of kinetic energy to destroy all that remains. Everything with Phantom in their name shall be destroyed.

Instead of bothering with them longer, I examine the room and unfortunately, it seems to be empty, already looted who knows how long ago.

Done there, I leave it and head deeper into the pyramid, following the heat.

Over the next two hours, I find multiple groups of natives, all of them dressed in the same weird suits. Sometimes they're near a set of rooms, other times I find them in the middle of a hallway. All of them are very dead and none have anything valuable enough to loot.

After that, I don't find any more. Either they avoid these parts of the pyramid or they aren't able to go that deep.

At this point, I'm forced to use [Redistribution] and thermal energy to deal with the heat. Even so, I can feel my clothes sticking to my body as sweat drips from my brow. It's at this point that I activate [Mana Crown] to help me handle the training while I feed it bits of my mana.

After activating it, it becomes much more manageable to do all these things at once and the heat becomes bearable as I stop holding myself back.

I'm attacked a few dozen times as I continue on my way. All assaults launched by Ashen Phantoms who just appear from points of heat they've focused into a small point. I can't really complain much given that it doesn't take much to kill them.

The deeper I go, the higher level they are, and they're already pushing level 200.

I had expected to be much deeper by now but all these twists and dead ends do a good job of wasting my time. Even the inscriptions and the way they funnel heat seems to have been designed to trick me.

Two hours later, and I experienced what probably killed the first group I met.

Immense heat fills the tunnel out of nowhere. Rushing from somewhere near the center of the pyramid rolling like a wave through the hallway. It crashes into me, burning the ends of my hair and singeing my skin in the process. The air becomes dry and the tunnels brighten, the heat causing them to shimmer like the northern lights.

I'm forced to stop and concentrate on dealing with the sudden assault, both [Redistribution] and my thermal energy working double time. My body becomes so filled with heat that I heal at the same speed I'm getting burned.

When I try to counter it with barriers made of mana or my domain, I find the result so ineffective that I decide to continue with thermal energy.

That's also when the monster attacks.

[Heatseeker - lvl ??]

At least level 290 from my estimation.

It's barely as tall as me, but it is much longer. Of all of the animals I've seen it reminds me most of a centipede, though its face is more humanoid. It moves through the heat as if it were, skittering along with a series of quick, twitchy movements.

And when it notices me, it pauses for a second before its movements speed up and it starts absorbing the heat that currently fills the tunnel. Huge concentrations of the captured energy dancing across the monster's flayed form.

The Heatseeker charges me, its humanoid mouth opening and launching gouts of flame at me.

Freed from the burden of the formerly blistering heat of the hallway, I grab a chunk of thermal energy from my Vortex Core and concentrate it even further.

My golden flames meet those of the monster.

It's not even a fight. My flames pierce through, enveloping the monster and setting ablaze in a wreath of golden flames that spreads across its body in the blink of an eye. The humanoid face of the centipede-like monster twists in pain, its flesh burning and twitching and spasming until it finally expires.

[You have defeated Heatseeker - lvl 291]

The heat then starts filling the hallways once again, forcing me to fight its influence once more and it only takes another minute before it recedes once more.

As it slowly weakens and the temperature returns to previous levels, I almost feel cold despite the actual temperature.

After examining the corpse, I ignore the heat hallways I wanted to head to. Leaving them in favor of the tunnels the heat wave and Heatseeker came from.

Why are the monsters here so weak against thermal energy?

At some point, I find more and more burns on my body as my concentration begins to fail. Even so, I continue.

All the water I had on me has already evaporated and I eat what food I have on me.

At times I catch myself wanting to just sleep, but I push these silly thoughts away.

It would be easy to return, but I just don't feel like it.

Hours later, and I finally find another door. It's circular as well but the inscriptions cover the entire surface. The heat here is higher than it's been anywhere else. Rivaling the heat wave from before.

The 24 hours Lissandra gave us to explore the pyramid and meet her passed a few hours ago.

Ah well, sucks to be her.

I reach into my body and remove the inscriptions she placed on me. With the Burden Enhancement Inscriptions gone, I can move without having to use kinetic energy and my mana feels so tame, it's crazy.

Then I look at the orb over my shoulder. I can't believe I've managed to keep that evil thing alive for so long.

I send a burst of mana through it and in a deep moment of satisfaction, watch it burst open.

The heat around me becomes barely a nuisance as I give it that much more attention.

I turn to the inscriptions on the door and start working on them.

Let's see what this place is hiding.

Chapter 400: Living quarters

While I work on the door, the heatwave hits three more times, forcing me to focus on defending myself until it passes. And once it's gone, the "code" changes and I have to start over again.

With each attempt I make, I am getting quicker at it, so it's only a matter of time before I unlock it before the next heatwave.

What's nice is that during the heatwave, more Heatseekers start appearing, and the centipede-like creatures with human faces continue to fall to my concentrated thermal energy. I even fight some of

them without it to better gauge their strength, and I find that it's entirely possible to defeat them without thermal energy.

My voidsteel blade actually cuts through them quite easily even without support from my skills. The only disadvantage is that it's getting just a tiny bit damaged. It would probably require me to kill hundreds of Heatseekers to destroy it, but the damage is there. Not like it doesn't make sense; these monsters are all close to 300, but none of them have broken that particular threshold.

I level up once during that time, and my crown gains a level as well.

The crown is currently active, and filling with my mana. There is also an orb made of thermal energy filling as well.

I thought of just either filling the crown or the orb, but in the end, I decided to split my resources between the two of them. I always liked to be versatile.

When I finally unlock the door, it slides back and rolls to the side like the one before. After I pass through, it closes behind me, and I watch it happen. I don't even create an anchor outside.

Being on my own has a bad influence on me. Maybe present Nathaniel messed up in his own way.

Noname - Seems like I won't be using Community that much. I need to focus on other things.

Reliable Tess reacts quickly; she, like most of us, has been constantly checking the chat, for seconds at a time.

Sset - Got it. Good luck.

Noname -Luck doesn't have anything to do with it.

I turn off the Community and then stop and stretch. My body feels so light and warm. I even notice that I've been subconsciously using bits of kinetic energy to add power to my movements. However messed up Lissandra might be, her training methods do work.

Fulfilling my expectations, a few Ashborn Phantoms attack, only for me to kill them one after the other. Dozens of them throw themselves at me while the heat in the room I just entered gradually increases.

Soon enough, another heatwave hits, and with it, three more Heatseekers, each one bigger than the last and each one has three question marks but they're probably no higher than level 299.

Thermal energy flows from my Vortex Core, and through my arm, as I use [Infusion] to fill my ax, the damaged blade of the weapon glowing with my golden flames. Kinetic energy flows through my body, giving me a comfortable feeling mana strengthening never did.

The first Heatseeker attacks me while the other two start absorbing the heat from the room, channeling it into the flames they use to attack me. And despite their strength, they can't seem to damage the metal the pyramid is made of.

So far only my thermal energy seems to be capable of that.

I miss my first few shots at the Heatseekers, the monsters are quick and twitchy, but I use the golden orb over my shoulder, and fire a laser thin stream of thermal energy easily cutting into the monster.

Newly slowed, the monster fails to avoid me, and a single swing of my ax sends thermal energy coursing through the monster, burning it even surrounded by this crazy heat.

[You have defeated Heatseeker - lvl 299]

I hold Flamebearer in front of me, absorbing the monsters' flames, and though they dance around me they fail to reach my body.

The sound of them passing through the air reminds me of a plane starting, and once I've gathered enough energy, I stop absorbing and swing, adding a bit of my own thermal energy into the mix.

A huge wave of flames explodes from me filling the room, bits of golden flames dancing within the monsters' yellow, and devouring the Heatseekers, reducing them to ash in the process.

[You have defeated Heatseeker - lvl 299]

[You have defeated Heatseeker - lvl 299]

[Infusion - lvl 30 > Infusion - lvl 31]

With the monsters gone, the heatwave disappears as well, the room cooling off, as the residual heat is absorbed by metallic walls.

The light dims again, plunging the room into a nearly pitch black darkness. The only source of light is my thermal orb and the walls, though it's not much. Even though it's made of metal it looks like a flame has somehow been trapped inside it, letting out the faintest orange glow.

I take a moment to examine what I thought was a room, but in the end, I identify it as another tunnel that was blocked off by the door.

It is mildly disappointing, but I don't mind it that much, opting to head deeper inside.

After two days of wandering around and killing any monsters I see, I've gained another level. Bringing me up to level 248.

My skills leveled up a bit as well, leaving me with this:

Active skills:

Focus - Lvl 49

Perception - Lvl 48

Redistribution - Lvl 48

Resonance - Lvl 49

Mana Domain (Pride) - Lvl 43

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Infusion - Lvl 32

Mana Crown - Lvl 28

Mana Manipulation - Lvl 49

Oh, and I strengthened my domain with Pride, using the point I was given when I reached Adept in my subclass.

After thinking about it for the past few days, I just decided to go with the option that makes the most sense instead of just going with my most commonly used skills. From my point of view, it just seems like my domain is the most fitting place to invest it.

I've started testing things out, and my domain has been strengthened significantly. Not so much its size, but its quality has definitely improved. It's gotten a lot easier to make my mana do what I want within its bounds, but that's not what I was aiming for. My theory is that it will be much more difficult for anyone to take control of my mana or disrupt it with my domain activated. It just feels like my Pride won't allow it.

Of course, it's still going to be possible for monsters like Lissandra and others much stronger than me, but as with a lot of things I do, I had the future in mind when I did it.

I've also decided to avoid letting it blind me and impede my growth as the black mana did.

Even so, I still think it could maybe have been better to use with my other skills.

[Mana Manipulation]? To give it an effect like my domain without having to activate it. Maybe applying it to [Mana Crown] would have improved my control or offered something better. And I think about it [Redistribution] also sounds like it could work nicely with Pride.

I'll probably be having these thoughts for a long time, but I still think I've chosen well. Even if it might not be the best option currently, it will influence my future options for my primary class and passives. The system always says rewards are offered according to my performance, so it knows how I use my skills and chooses rewards accordingly. I could spend an endless amount of time theorizing, so I may as well put a pin in it. I have something more interesting to deal with now.

I have found the loot.

The owner of the pyramid didn't even try all that hard to hide it. Just a few traps, one of which cut off my left arm and removed my feet below the ankle.

Another trap with spikes that I couldn't detect piercing through my side.

Another one that tried to fry my brain with some kind of mental attack. Though, I still regret destroying it to stop the attack, rendering it impossible to examine.

And a few more lost limbs and a day or something later, I have reached a truly beautiful place.

Living quarters.

As with everything in this goddamn pyramid, it is huge. Like a skyscraper plopped down in the middle of the pyramid, It seems out of place, surrounded by all this metal, but this place is shielded, and the heat is much lower there.

There are no elevators and only stairs, but I quickly locate the core. A pillar made of white crystal somewhere in the middle of the living quarters. Well, not just living quarters. There are workshops here as well, from what I saw as I was passing by.

So I reach the core, and using my [Resonance]

It takes an hour, and I blame it more on my lack of sleep rather than the amazing defenses or difficulty of the task.

Connecting to my crown, I redirect a part of my mana to the core, and it floods it with shiny light blue particles of mana. The lights dance inside nicely, and then it takes two more hours for me to take over the controls and light up the place.

One after another, the lights in the walls start glowing and after days in the dimly lit tunnels, it feels nearly alien. Cozy, but alien nonetheless.

I glance at my left arm which is still missing a hand. It will regrow soon, but it's annoying because I can't use a mana prosthesis properly; the hand keeps growing and interfering with it. Well, it's not like it's anything new to me.

I take a huge chunk of my mana and use [Perception] and [Focus] to get as much out of it as possible. I send a pulse through the living quarters like a sonar wave, trying to locate anything interesting.

[Perception - lvl 48 > Perception - lvl 49]

Huh.

I did have to get a few of my skills to level 50, didn't I? The cockroach threatened to kill me if I didn't.

Instead of bothering with more useless stuff, I create an orb over my shoulder. It's an imitation of that evil orb Lissandra made for me before. Mine's still not perfect, but it's good enough to train.

Since I don't have to deal with the Burden Enhancement Inscriptions, disrupting mana and heat, I create another evil orb and head to the lowest part of the place while training. I have sensed some nice stuff down there.

On my way there, I stop in front of a room with expensive-looking doors. They're made out of some weird wood and delicately inscribed. In fact, some of these inscriptions are only there to make them look nicer.

With a blast of kinetic energy, I turn them into mere scraps of wood. Their defenses were inert, my mana in the core supporting the most important functions of this place.

I enter a room that seems to be really luxurious. One of the huge windows even offers a view of what probably used to be a huge garden. Now it's dried up, and the trees have been reduced to giant hunks of dry wood.

There are layers of dust everywhere, but it's still been well preserved. There isn't much humidity in the pyramid, so I guess it makes sense.

First, I reach a small stand where drinking glasses sit under a few faucets. I send a bit more mana to the core through my [Tether] I left there and then reactivate the inscriptions directly, bypassing the broken mana stone.

A hissing sound pours from the pipes for the next thirty seconds, before being replaced by a quiet bubbling. A stream of dirty water shoots from the pipes, and it takes another thirty seconds for it to clear up and correct the flow. I use it to wash off one of the glasses and then fill it. Without much hesitation, I drink the entire glass in one go.

Disgusting.

I fill another one and drink it as well. Then a few more. The longer the water flows, the better it tastes. That, or it's already killing my taste buds. Both options are fine with me.

I stop the water and then head to another room, which is entirely made out of white polished stone, with hundreds of holes in the ceiling.

The clothes I'm wearing end up on the ground, and for a moment, I look at them. Then I burn them in the golden flame of my thermal energy until nothing remains.

The room turns out to be a shower, as I had expected. At first, dirty, disgusting water pours down, again as was expected. It takes a minute of me standing under it before the water flows properly or clearly.

There doesn't seem to be any soap or Old Spice shower gel, so I just stand there for a few minutes until I feel cleaner. All the dirt and sweat I've collected ever since the start of this little adventure with the little kitten and cockroach are washed away. The experience leaves me feeling much lighter.

After that, I spend a good ten minutes choosing new clothes in the small room I find nearby. There are dozens of articles, and most of them are in a good state. Only clothes made of certain materials seem to have been ravaged by the passage of time.

Using the mirror I wipe clean with one of the shirts while inspecting my reflection.

Black shirt with rolled-up sleeves. I really like the material. The pants are light brown and feel nice as well. The shoes do not fit me at all, so I go barefoot. I've gotten used to the experience since the tutorial started. Some shoes just can't handle too much explosive movement, so it makes sense.

Maybe I could open a shoe shop for superhumans when I get back to Earth. I bet a lot of people will need them.

In the end, I also use [Resonance] to trim my hair and "shave" the stubble from my face.

I loot the place as well, taking interesting mana stones from appliances and a few stones from the walls. I fill a few bottles I found with water and pick up some replacement clothes as well.

Only then do I head to the bottom of this place.

If I'm right, it's where the armory is.

