



MY
NECROMANCER
CLASS

Part 6 - Alone

AERO REVIAN

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Alone

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Stamina

“Hm, I wonder if Lamp gets a class from, well, literally being the lamp carrier...” he watched it for a moment as they walked to the back of the chamber.

“Red will level up soon too, but I haven’t really given it any special treatment. I’m guessing it will be a basic class since it’s just been using swords and hammers all this time.” he thought as they approached the back of the room.

Jay actually preferred this much more than to how it was with the mana conduit and humans; sometimes you would get a class which matched your experiences, other times it was completely random.

At least Jay could guide the skeletons, or even discover new classes. It would be better to hand-pick your own army’s classes rather than have it filled with many strengths and weaknesses arising from randomness, as in the grand scale of war, having uniformity in troops allowed a tactician to shine.

At the back of the room there was a large stone table, about chest-height. Chips and dust of stone covered it, along with minor scrapes and cuts all over the surface.

It seemed to function as part of the weapon forge, which has its fair share of usage over the years.

Behind the table, a few broken weapons sat on weapon racks and a small passageway led further into the pyramid.

“Hm, probably the exit.” Jay guessed as he strolled around the table and all the other junk. Before departing, he had Sweeper and Red quickly search the area for any items, but they came back empty-handed.

Anya patiently followed him, while Sweeper covered the rear of the party, just in case.

There was always the chance that the walls could drop and two of the dual-wielding statues would spring out to ambush them after all.

The passageway was small compared to the rest of the pyramid, but large enough for a statue to walk through.

Jay assumed this passage was for maintenance as there were no decorations or even simple pillars - just some more pieces of broken sword

or snapped spearhead rubble occasionally on the path.

A light at the end of the passage appeared, and soon some distant steps could be heard.

Jay held his hand up, causing all the party to stop as he listened.

“... Marching?” he whispered as he listened intently.

“Let’s get closer and see.” Anya whispered back as she gazed at the end of the tunnel.

Jay nodded, but had Dark take the lead and walk further ahead of the party.

“If it’s going to become an assassin, it would need to get better at sneaking, so it might as well start its training now.” Jay thought.

“Hmm, come to think of it, I haven’t seen many assassin classes....” he scratched his chin, “actually, I have seen none. I wonder if they’re forced into the military or something?”

“It might be a dishonorable thing to be an assassin, but it technically isn’t me carrying it out, so I don’t really care.”

“Besides, most people who bring up honor are like that Matheson brat. Just hypocrites using it to manipulate people.” he frowned slightly. He thought it was quite a sad thing, as the idea of honor would probably be a good thing if people used it correctly.

The sounds of marching became more apparent as they neared the exit; Jay’s guess was correct.

Crouched down just before the passageway ended, Dark watched.

Jay thought that Dark seemed happy that it made it to the end without being detected, though to Anya, it just looked like all the other undead skeletons.

The light greeted them once more as they found themselves in another courtyard.

Two walls on either side of them led to two pillars which acted as guard towers. There were statues patrolling on the walls while a line of spearmen statues stood between the pillars.

It was just like a mirror image of the entrance to the pyramid, except this time, they would have to escape. The only difference was that there were no dihexapedes attacking or any of the magic-casting floating statues.

“Hmm...” Jay squinted, looking for any weakness or path of least resistance.

Suddenly, a statue on the wall turned and looked directly towards them.

Saying nothing, it pointed its spear upwards and then slammed it into the ground.

DOON! ~

A deep thud sounded in the whole courtyard, and all the statues suddenly turned to look at the undead and humans standing in the entrance.

For a moment, it was silent. Both parties just watched each other, seeing what the other side would do, until finally the march began.

The statues were the first to make a move. They all took a step forward as they marched in sync, causing more deep tremors with each step.

“Shit.” Jay pursed his lips.

“So much for finding a weakness and busting out.”

He casually turned and walked back into the passageway as the skeletons went past him and made a defensive formation.

Three skeletons remained just outside the door, with two behind them in the passage. Blue was at the center, of course, as it was currently the strongest skeleton.

Jay realized they would have to slowly retreat into the passage as they killed statues, but that would benefit them, as it would be two skeletons versus one statue.

“Fire your bolts. The quicker we get this over with, the better.” Jay said, a tone of boredom in his voice.

Anya nodded, but looked a little confused. They were going to kill about fifty statues and he seemed bored?

How? Why? It made little sense. Most adventurers would pump with adrenaline and excitement right now.

In truth, Jay was a little more disappointed than bored. He had used this tactic before, so all he had to do was keep summoning skeletons and wait.

To excite a necromancer, one needed a diverse battlefield with fluid battle tactics; to manage the ebbs and flows of a full-scale war is what he subconsciously desired. While he didn't have the forces necessary to wage a war, this still felt like child's play.

Still, he would at least enjoy seeing his minions crush some enemies.

Pshew! ~

Anya began launching bolts from behind the group of skeletons.

The statues simply raised their shields, though, so for now she gave up trying. It was a fearsome statue formation; each of them had their spears

pointed and their shields raised as they slowly marched forward, forming a semi-circle formation around the passage exit.

It was like a wall of pointy death with no cracks to get through. A perfect formation which had only been honed after all the centuries.

“Hmm. Get back.” Jay said.

The skeletons all retreated into the passageway after his orders. It made little sense to fight them out in the open like that.

All of them stood about 10 meters deeper in the passage.

“That’s better.” Jay smiled, seeing the first statue have to enter alone.

Unfortunately for the statue, all it could do was thrust its spear because of the narrow passage.

It would be a decent attack under normal circumstances, but since that’s all it can do here, it became obvious and easy to dodge.

The skeletons displayed their nimble capabilities once again, easily dodging each thrust that came their way and retaliating with a hammer smash.

The only disadvantage of the skeletons was that they had to break down the statue’s shield before they could do any significant damage to the statue behind it.

The skeletons were already used to its thrusts and even seemed to get better at dodging them, so it was only a matter of time.

*Crack! ~**Crack! ~**Crack! ~**Crack! ~*

Hit after hit, they whittled down the first shield, and it wasn’t long before it finally crumbled. The statue went down soon after - without its shield, it could only continue to thrust helplessly.

[100 Exp]

The enemy statue crumbled, and unlike the statues at the start of the dungeon, these had no concerns about stepping over their dead comrades. Jay guessed they had lost more of their mind.

The shield-breaking process started once again, and after a while, the second one went down.

[100 Exp]

“Hm. Seems like it’s a battle of stamina?” Jay raised a brow. “maybe a test of stamina is more accurate...”

“Well, the undead have unlimited stamina so... I guess we just wait while I pass the test.” he shrugged with a slight smile.

“Yeah. As long as your skeletons don’t die, it seems we’ll be fine.” Anya smiled, happy with the easy experience points. She did a lot of the damage in the last battle so she didn’t feel guilty for taking a rest and letting the exp float in.

Time passed and the 2 vs 1 battles raged on. 3 vs 1 with Anya helping.

At first, Jay and Anya watched with their weapons raised, but nothing happened so soon they lowered them - then leaned against the walls, then stashed their weapons away, and eventually they were sitting down.

Jay, of course, was sitting down on the chair he brought from home, having a small feeling of superiority for being so prepared.

Anya began sharpening her throwing knives, bolt tips and examining her crossbow as she leaned against the wall.

“Well, I might as well do something productive, too.” Jay thought as he took out his old, familiar book.

“Oh, a new page?” he smiled, opening his immortal book with hungry eyes.

For some reason, he was craving a new lesson. It was almost like he missed it.

Managing Affairs

[Immortality Research - 5%]

“Oh? Good.” Jay grinned, looking up from his book as he noticed the tunnel went quiet - the fighting had finally stopped.

During the fighting, the skeletons only had to be re-summoned twice, and after meditating a few times, Jay’s mana pool was almost completely full again.

Over time, the skeletons took damage and died, dropping their hammers, but Jay sent Dark in to grab them before the statues could advance any further.

It would have been a nightmare if he missed this minor detail and lost the hammers, but thankfully, he fixed the issue before any problems came up.

One by one, the statues moved into the killing tunnel only to slowly get ground into dust - the only reason Jay and his party would move back would be due to all the debris from the statues’ bodies.

[2550 Exp]

A few hours later, Jay and Anya both grinned with excitement as they shared the exp.

At first they got ready for a long battle and rested, but the constant trickle of exp made them smile slightly each time.

“You haven’t leveled up yet?” Anya asked, tilting her head to the side in curiosity.

“Mhm. As a necromancer I need more.” Jay said, dismissing her as he packed up his chair and book. Because of his disguise stone, his status still said he was a level nine necromancer after all.

“Shall we get going?” he said, pointing to the end of the tunnel.

“Sure.” she nodded back, packing away her leather-wrapped sharpening kit.

As they walked out, Jay had his skeletons collect all the soul stones and rings.

[Soul Stone] (Empty) x 52

[Helvetian Ring] x 34

Jay gave Anya her cut of the rings and they continued through the passage, entering the courtyard.

Jay had a quick check of his class as they walked.

< [Necromancer Level 11] > (Pure)

[Race - Human]

HP: 93/93

MP: 68/68

Strength: 20

Dexterity: 25

Vitality: 35

Energy: 40/40

Exp: 5330/15000

{<[Skills]>}

<~ [Necromancy Skills] ~>

[Raise Feeble Creature level 4]

[Summon Bone Helminth]

[Shell Restoration Level 1]

[Unstable Teeth Level 2]

[Shift] ~ [Living Blueprints] ~ [Transplant] ~ [Amputation]

[Uncaring Rip]~[Pitiful Mortal]

[Necrotic Sense - Level 1] (Passive)

[Scrimshaw Level 3] (Passive)

[Undead Mastery Level 3] (Passive)

< [Other Skills] >

[Asklin] (Equipment)

[Dagger Proficiency level 1] (Passive)

[Poison Resist 11%] (Passive - equipment)

[Running level 2] (Passive)

[Stress Response] (Passive)

[Sword Proficiency Level 1] (Passive)

[Class Utility] (Passive)

{< [Research] >}

[Chimera Research 17%]

[Immortality Research 5%]

[Skull-shield Projector Research 32%]

[Dread-mourn Turret Research 22%]

“Fuck yeah, one-third of the way to level 12... heh,” He thought, having to stop himself from grinning suspiciously.

“Oh... I got some new research too? Huh... I should check my class more often... I thought I was much closer than thirty-two percent towards learning that energy field.” His ecstatic mood calmed as he pursed his lips.

“I guess I have a lot to learn.” he humbly nodded to himself as he walked quietly, following his gang of skeletons through the passage.

Stepping into the light, he noticed everything was made from the iconic black slate stone: the walls, the pillars, along with the ground.

“Hm. A simple courtyard.” Jay said as they walked.

Looking around, it was easy to tell there was nothing here since everything was flat, angular, and smooth.

“Well, it looks like we successfully completed pyramid number four.” Jay smiled.

“That was way better than the third one...” Anya nodded, smiling back, “though it would’ve been impossible without the skeletons, sacrificing themselves and then fighting endlessly. I don’t see anyone doing that without at least a party of four.”

“Yeah, they’re almost too useful,” Jay joked, as he looked at his skeletons approvingly.

“Next pyramid?” Anya pointed.

“Next pyramid.” Jay nodded as they began walking out of the courtyard and down a ramp between the pillars.

The path to the fifth pyramid this time was a cream-white color. Compared to the black stone they had been walking on all this time, it seemed quite regal. It was a welcome change.

Looking ahead, there was a large black wall around the fourth pyramid with a large white-stone gate.

“Hmm... I’ve never heard of the gate before...?” Anya said, looking a little confused.

For a moment she wondered why no one had told her about the gate when asking around at the guild, but she simply figured that perhaps no one expected her to make it this far yet.

Perhaps the veterans wanted her to focus on what was in front of her rather than what’s ahead.

Jay and Anya carefully approached the white gate as they moved along the road - but to their surprise there were no traps, ambushes or even

patrolling statues.

The silence was quite unnerving, and now Jay thought he actually preferred something to fight. It would be better than the haunting, quiet tension.

Finally, they made it to the gate, and Jay rested his hand on it as he examined it.

“Huh, it’s bigger than I thought it would be.” Jay said as he looked upwards.

It was so tall that it seemed like it leaned over them.

The gate itself was completely smooth, like two large slate slabs with a crack in the middle. It had a lip at the top, but there was no way anyone was scaling its flat surface.

Now that he was close enough, he could even see his reflection. Jay thought it must have taken years to polish it to make it this shiny; it was simply pristine.

Unfortunately, the gate didn’t open and there was definitely no way he and his minions would have the strength to push it open - but after a moment of analyzing, Jay received a strange notification.

[!]

Opening it, it took him to his inventory - there was an item with the same [!] notification next to it.

“Hmm...” Jay looked at it suspiciously.

He had felt a strange connection to this item since he entered the dungeon, but he soon forgot all about it - though now, it seemed to beckon to him more than ever; it was like it wanted him to pull it out of his inventory.

Sullivan stared at Lannister inquisitively across his desk, wondering if he could trust him to protect his daughter.

“Your head mage seems to have an attitude.” Lara said, breaking the tension while looking absentmindedly across Sullivan’s book collection.

Sullivan smiled slightly. “Viladore? He’s an odd man, but he does his job and wants to be left alone. Did he do something?”

“No... It’s what he didn’t do. He didn’t even look at us as we passed him. It was like he was possessed.” Lara shrugged.

Sullivan gazed at her for a moment before glancing at the door where Viladore had just left.

“Well, let’s talk about why you’re here.” Sullivan gestured to the other seat in his room; Lara took the message and sat down.

Next, he bombarded them with questions covering many topics:

- How will I contact you?
- When? Procedures?
- Sending letters and other items?
- How will you ensure their safety?
- How will you meet their leveling needs?
- How do you deal with... ‘annoyances’...?
- How do they leave? Will you teach them that?
- Their responsibilities? What do you gain? What’s the goal of your academy?

Lara and Lannister answered patiently.

They were not typical questions, but then again, there was nothing typical about this situation.

People would join them as a last refuge - but this was more like an interview. But what other options did Sullivan have?

Lara wanted to tell him to ‘take it or leave it.’, but she knew that there would be severe penalties if they lost their only opportunity to bring a human necromancer into their ranks. It was crucial that everything went smoothly.

After all the questions and the finer details were resolved, Sullivan finally released a satisfied smile.

“Make sure you take care of them.” he slowly spoke with his smooth but powerful voice, his blue eyes seeming to glow ever so faintly for just a moment.

The power behind it seemed like it was almost like a threat, but Lannister just nervously smiled back.

“Of course...” he nodded, “but there is one last thing. We would like to place some listening devices around the guild for security.” Lannister said, taking a light-purple crystal out and showing it to Sullivan.

“Don’t worry, they won’t be visible.” he said while adding some mana to the crystal.

The crystal turned a deeper purple and eventually turned black. Once it was completely black, it instantly vanished from sight, though it was easy to tell there was still a physical object in his hand.

A small smile formed on Sullivan's face as he watched. He had seen these only once before in his military life - though back then, someone presented it to him as an assassin's tool.

"Don't let anyone see you place them." Sullivan nodded.

Lara gave a smile and was the first to stand up; she was just glad the meeting was over.

She contributed little to answering, but her body guard role of protecting Lannister was just as important.

"Just a moment." Sullivan raised his arm.

"Hm?" Lara gave him a curious look as Sullivan pulled out a communication crystal.

"Margie, I have two friends here. Could you give them a tour of the guild? Also, show them Jay's room and Anya's room, and let them wait in the guest quarters once you've finished."

Margaret knew exactly who they were and was glad she could be of some help.

"Absolutely Sully." she smiled.

Sullivan tried to not look awkward as he put the crystal away. He really wished she wouldn't call him 'Sully' in front of outsiders.

"Oh, the guest quarters won't be necessary, but we appreciate the hospitality." Lannister smiled.

Lara gave him a look of disapproval. But it would be better that they kept their time here to a minimum, so Lannister ignored it.

A gentle knock on the door and Margaret escorted them out of Sullivan's office.

After the door closed, Sullivan got up and looked around his bookshelf, finding an invisible object there.

He smiled, almost chuckling, while shaking his head before putting it back again.

Alternative Thought

[!]

Jay took out the item from his inventory, attempting to inspect it again - but as it sat in his palm, it began to vibrate and move around radically before floating upwards.

“Hey!” He tried to grab it, but it sped upwards too quickly.

Without a second thought, he threw his shield upwards at it, as if he was trying to knock a bird out of the sky, but he simply missed.

The item flying away was the porcelain locket, which he found in the ruins near the first pyramid when he first entered the dungeon.

“Dammit...” he frowned.

A skeleton sheepishly brought him his shield as he continued to watch the flying locket.

As it sped upwards, it was releasing some sort of power and left a light blue trail behind it; it flew close to the white gate as if it was hugging the wall, but wasn't quite close enough to touch it.

Suddenly, like a wisp, it disappeared somewhere over the top of the gate, leaving only a blue trail behind it which quickly disappeared too, going over to the other side of the wall somewhere.

Jay watched and waited for a moment, but nothing happened.

“Well, shit...” he continued to stare upwards, hoping for something, but he felt like he just got robbed.

“What was that?” Anya quizzically asked.

“Oh, some weird locket I found in the ruins near the start of the dungeon. It gave me a strange feeling a few times, so I held onto it. I can't really describe it...”

“Huh. I guess it was magical.”

“Oh, could it have been magical?” Jay retorted sarcastically, “was it the blue trail of light or the flying that gave it away?”

Anya said nothing, only looking at him with a frown.

Jay sighed, “Sorry... It's been a long day, and I just lost something... I really just want to get this quest finished.”

“It's ok. Let's just try to find a way forward.”

Jay gave her a warm smile back with a nod.

Jay was going to add that the porcelain locket gave him of a feeling of loneliness, but he left it at that. While Anya was as close as a friend would be, he considered her as merely an acquaintance - besides, their relationship was merely situational.

“Hmm...” Jay gazed at the large black walls on either side of the gate. They seemed to go in either direction forever. There was no way around.

After backing up from the wall a bit, he had a thought.

“I wonder... can I throw a skeleton over the wall perhaps?” he thought, scratching his chin.

Jay was thinking outside of the box, on a different level - the dungeon wouldn't have factored in such crazy ideas to its design; the wall was incredibly high, so it would be a stretch to throw a skeleton that far, but what's stopping Jay from trying?

He knew he couldn't do it alone, but surely if every skeleton grabbed a leg of the smaller one, Dark, maybe it would be enough.

Jay only had twenty strength after all, but combined with the other four skeletons, it would reach seventy-one.

Seventy strength is high for someone on Jay's level. If someone was level eleven and had invested all their attribute points into strength, it would reach seventy - though they would be the melee equivalent of a glass cannon: high damage, low health and slow movements.

Anya noticed Jay looking concentrated, so she stood back and gave him some room as she watched patiently.

The next thing she saw him doing was strange, and she wanted to immediately question him, but decided to just wait and see. Besides, Jay seemed a little frustrated with this never-ending dungeon.

Jay had his smallest skeleton lie down while he stood over it and channeled his glowing necrotic mana, sending it over different parts of its body and slowly severing different bits of bone.

Eventually, the poor creature wasn't even able to stand up - it lost its feet, hands and ribs, along with its tibia, fibula, radius and ulna (forearm and shin bones).

“This should work.” Jay smiled.

Oddly enough, Dark didn't look betrayed - in fact, it even looked excited somehow, ready to carry out its mission as it wriggled helplessly on the ground.

The four other skeletons all grabbed one of its upper leg and arm bones and swung the amputated skeletons backwards and forwards while Jay grabbed its skull.

“Here we go.” Jay smiled.

After a few more practice swings, they released the skeleton; it rocketed upwards and even whistled through the air. There was little resistance, and it folded its elbows into its body and went skull-first.

From a distance, it would have looked like a skull and a spine flying upwards, like a large undead ballistic missile.

Surprisingly, the skeletons didn’t need his help to throw it over as Dark went easily sailing upwards and above the black wall. Eventually, it disappeared over the top, wriggling wildly in the air as it reached the apex of the throw.

It seemed like it was even trying to swim through the air at one point.

“Huh, that wasn’t so hard.” Jay nodded.

Next he planned to send bones over so Dark could eat and regain its limbs - then it could wander around and hopefully open the gate.

[Your feeble creature has died]

“...” Jay looked up, confused for a moment. It had lower health after he took some of its limbs away, but he didn’t expect it to simply die.

Anya was still looking excitedly at him, realizing his plan. She gave him an approving look as she waited for the gate to open - of course, she didn’t know that Dark just died and thought Dark had opened the gate somehow.

“Fuck... I guess it took fall damage without its legs to brace the drop.” Jay thought, pursing his lips.

“Maybe it’s face-planted? It didn’t have much health so maybe its skull split in half.” He raised an eyebrow.

“Something wrong?” Anya asked, seeing his expression change.

“Nope, not at all. Why do you ask? Everything’s fine.” he bluffed.

“Oh, good. Never mind.” she shrugged. “Pretty awesome idea, by the way.” She smiled.

“Thanks. We’ll see how well it works.” he shrugged, not revealing anything.

“Dammit... fall damage. The skeletons are light, but I guess they at least need legs to land properly.” Jay thought to himself.

Unknown to Jay, the porcelain locket was still flying beyond the other side of the wall, and finally it found its target: a pedestal near the front of the pyramid which had the perfect indentation - Its rightful home which is socketed itself into.

DRRRRRRR!~~~

A deep, vibrating rumbling sounded as traces of dust and pebbles shifted off the walls.

The heavy ancient white gate opened inwards, beckoning them in.

“...” Jay was confused, since Dark had died on impact.

“Nice. Looks like your plan worked.” Anya nodded with a smile as she grasped her crossbow and got it ready for a fight.

Immediately he re-summoned Dark before Anya could enter and see the dead skeleton body - though this time, Dark was brought back using Helvetian bones; no longer was it a feeble creature, but was now a skeleton instead. Smaller than the others, but a skeleton nonetheless.

The five skeletons formed a line in front of Jay and Anya, walking forward into the gate; the gate was incredibly wide though, and the skeletons standing side by side made up about one-fifth of the gate.

What greeted them on the other side of the gate, though, made all of them pause.

“What the fuck...” Jay whispered.

Anya lowered her crossbow as she gazed for a moment.

The Dead Legion

The gate opened slowly, only to cause Jay and Anya to grip their weapon tightly for a moment once they saw what was on the other side.

Before them, a sprawling legion of stone guards were waiting.

Thousands of them, all kneeling towards the pyramid, surrounding it from every side. Behind the wall there were no more ruins and no traces of destruction - only a flat plane of the black stone covered with the statues.

To the left and right there were thousands more statues, stretching as far as the wall went - yet none of them moved at all.

Surely they would have heard, and even felt, the deep groaning sounds of the white gate opening?

Jay and Anya only held their breaths. They didn't dare make a sound.

As they watched for a moment, though, nothing happened. There was no movement on either side of the wall; only the soft cold wind which seemed unending in this dungeon.

"Surely they would have done something when Dark came flying over the wall?" Jay thought.

"But I heard no statue movement... and why are they all kneeling..."

Jay squinted at them, looking a little more closely.

In front of each of them, small piles of stone rubble formed.

"Hmm..." he squinted, trying to see it more clearly.

Something wasn't right.

Jay had Dark move forward and walk closer to the kneeling statues.

Still no reaction.

Next, he had Dark move between some of them.

Still, no reaction and not so much as a tremor.

Finally, he mentally commanded Dark to attack one of them.

Shring~!

Darks daggers gashed one of the statue's heads, leaving a puff of stone dust in its wake and some small pebbles which echoed in the silence.

Still, there was no reaction.

"Huh?" Jay thought, beginning to move forward slowly.

Anya remained still, but Jay and his skeletons continued to approach the kneeling statues.

When he was finally close enough, he tried to analyze them, yet there were no notifications or anything.

Getting closer, and a little bolder, he marched forward and spartan-kicked one from behind, causing it to face plant and crumble.

No notification, no reaction. Nothing.

With a sigh, he went to stand in front of one.

“I see...” he had a solemn look on his face as he checked over the statue.

A large gaping hole was in its chest - the soul stone had been ripped out completely.

The Helvetian statues were basically just that - unliving statues.

It was strange, as it seemed that the statues did this willingly; each of them in kneeling positions and forming perfect rows and columns, like the orderly troops they were.

“It’s ok,” Jay waved, “they’re all dead.” He called Anya, who rejoined Jay at his side with a puzzled look.

“What happened here...” Anya whispered, feeling like her voice traveled past many of the statues in this massive area. She didn’t want to take the chance of waking any of them until she knew for sure.

“No clue... but I guess we’ll find out.” Jay said, looking towards the pyramid.

The party walked across the endless field of Helvetian soldiers towards the fifth pyramid, weaving through the dead statues. It was an eerie feeling.

Each of the kneeling statues were still as tall as them, silent as they eternally sat, and Jay and Anya solemnly navigated past them quietly.

Jay wondered how such an enormous army originally could have been sustained with food and weapons, but then he remembered a mural he once saw of Helvetia.

The vibrant green city was thriving with plants and life, making it seem that they were just as in touch with nature as they were with magic.

Losing their living, breathing city must have only fueled their desire for revenge even more deeply.

It seemed backwards as they went from a city filled with nature, life and magic to a paved, cold wasteland where the statues were very much anti-magic.

Up ahead, something stood out. It was a strange triangular prism pointing out of the ground; a monolith. Like the path and the gate, it was

similarly a cream-white color. It was about five meters tall and as wide as Jay's shoulders.

Despite itself being white and implanted into a white path, it stuck out like a sore thumb, like a beacon amongst the endless black-stone soldiers.

"Odd..." Jay thought as he approached it.

Jay checked the surrounding statues before getting closer, making sure they were actually deceased, like all the others.

His escape plan so far was relatively simple: run.

The numerous dead soldiers would block the path of any other pursuing statues, as they were large and wouldn't be able to slip through the graveyard as easily as Jay or Anya would.

Thankfully, there were no living statues around and Jay concluded it wasn't some elaborate trap, so he approached the white monolith.

Jay saw his reflection as he drew nearer to the white monolith, and after looking at each side, he found that at the back of it, something was socketed into it.

"Hey, here you are," he smiled, immediately trying to pull it out of the socket; it was the white locket he lost, which had since flown away.

Unfortunately, it wouldn't budge, and neither could he try to pry it out as the white locket was a perfect fit - there was absolutely no seam.

Jay funneled some mana towards it, but it acted as if it were now just another inanimate object.

"Mm" he frowned lightly. Whatever he had sensed in it before had similarly disappeared, its power all gone.

As the triangle monolith was halfway between the pyramid and the gate in the middle of the road, it seemed quite obvious this was some sort of automatic gate key - but Jay only had more questions.

- Why was this one key left outside the gate?
- If not for Jay, who was it meant for?
- Whose magic charged the key, and why did he feel a strange connection to it?
- Why had the gate been shut in the first place?
- And what did that have to do with all the guards being mass-executed, or 'freed,' as Sedulus would say?

There were no obvious clues around, and nothing else on the otherwise smooth monolith, so for now Jay only had one choice: to move forward.

“I will just have to find my own answers,” Jay looked towards the fifth pyramid.

Once again, the party crept through the destroyed statues and eventually got to the pyramid entrance.

A short staircase led to the flat entrance area, which was lined with white pillars on either side. They made the pyramid from the black stone but they made the floor and much of the inside from the upgraded white stone, polished to a shine.

Compared to the rest of the weathered pyramid, the white stone seemed relatively new.

Jay and his party ventured into the large entrance area, each of their steps making echoing noises. It was akin to a grand cave they stumbled into.

Soon it became darker, and they found themselves at the bottom of another staircase, yet this time there was light at the top peeking down towards them.

“Let’s go slowly.” Jay whispered, sending his skeletons up further ahead of them.

The staircase was long, wide, and the roof was high. It was like scaling a small mountain as they went upwards and even had to stop a few times, taking a rest and eating some travel rations.

Finally, fifty minutes later, they reached the top.

The room was majestic, massive, and dazzling; streams of light came in from somewhere in the ceiling, lighting up the entire room as it bounced off white pillars and the white polished floor.

It was an understatement to say the room was massive; at a glance, Jay guessed that it could have fit the whole of Losla in it.

“Hmm, it’s bigger on the inside?” Jay thought as he looked around.

While the pyramids were massive, they did just walk up the stairs for a long time, so it was hard to tell if there was some sort of dimension-type magic at play. Each pyramid since the first one only got bigger and bigger, so Jay couldn’t be sure.

“Oh well.” He shrugged, not thinking too deeply about it. It wasn’t like it mattered too much, after all.

Large pillars lined each wall, each as wide as the white gate they just passed through, and each of them engraved with imagery of plants, trees,

flowers, horses, glade deer and all manner of life; even a snake raven was depicted among some other creatures Jay had never seen.

Jay and Anya could only look around in awe at the craftsmanship.

It seemed the craftsman had spent hundreds of years on this - and knowing the longevity of the statues, it probably did.

“Surely they would have told me about this...” Anya gasped, looking around the room.

“Eyes forward.” Jay whispered, pointing to the middle of the room.

In the middle of the room, three giant thrones on an elevated platform overlooked all things below them.

The large throne in the middle which was the size of a house, decorated with complex patterns using the white and black stone. Even from here, they could tell it demanded respect.

Jay and Anya approached slowly, trying to look out for any traps or tricks. Like everything in this dungeon, nothing was straight-forward.

They slowed down as they approached, seeing figures on each throne, and the largest one was in the middle.

On the large throne sat a slender, tall statue. It was made from black stone like all the others - though much of its armor had been gently chipped away, replaced with some new white stone pieces to cover up the unsightly stone masonry work.

At first it alarmed Jay to see such a large slender statue, but he noticed that like the statues outside, it also had its soul stone missing, taken from its chest and placed gently on the arm on the throne - though it was apparent that it was removed with the utmost gentleness and care.

Jay sighed, glad that the larger statue was dead. He was glad he wouldn't have to fight someone like Sedulus.

The two other thrones were more normal sized - at least normal sized by Helvetian soldier standards. However, unlike the large throne, its occupants were still moving.

Jay and Anya had ventured a little too closely as the statues simultaneously stood up.

Two smaller slender statues, each female-shaped, and each with new white stone armor stepped off their thrones as they noticed the trespassers in their pyramid.

“Go.” Jay said, sending his skeletons in immediately.

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Royal Servants

“Go.” Jay said, not wasting any time as two statues got up from their thrones.

Thankfully, the larger statue in the middle throne was deceased so for now, there were only two enemies.

The skeletons charged ahead, their hammers and daggers hungry for some action.

Since fighting their way out of the fourth pyramid they had not served their master very much and were raring for a fight - though they always desired to fight, so there was not much of a noticeable difference.

Jay had formed a bone pile at his side as he prepared to raise any downed skeletons, while Anya took a knee and aimed her crossbow as she waited for an opening.

By now, they were accustomed to fighting together and knew their roles well.

Blue was in command of the skeletons once again and made Dark go to distract the statue on the right while all the other skeletons targeted the enemy on the left.

Once again, Jay was pleased seeing his little commander skeleton, Blue, make suitable tactical decisions.

Sure, Jay could make better strategies, but if he is ever going to make an army, he would need experienced commanders, and it seemed like the only way to get them was to train them himself.

The battle was still quite far away from Jay and Anya, because of the room being so large, but he was close enough to see what was happening.

The undead engulfed the left statue and were decimating it, while the statue on the right was attacking wildly but unsuccessfully. Dark was dipping, ducking and dodging around with its high dexterity.

Jay smiled with an approving nod, glad that his assassin-skeleton was having to practice its agility, which was a necessary skill of any assassin.

Meanwhile, the other four skeletons had surrounded the other statue and was making it suffer - though it wasn't taking damage without giving some in return.

It slashed at the skeletons with a single dagger and landed a few cuts.

“Strange. Only a dagger?” Jay thought.

The slender female statues weren't heavily armed like Sedulus, not even as much as the soldier variants. Each of them simply had stone daggers which they waved around with little precision or power.

He assumed they would have equipped them well, like the dead army of statues outside, but all they had was a single dagger each - and they weren't even using them very well.

“They're not soldiers.” Jay thought. Still, they were attacking and hostile, so Jay continued the attack.

Seeing that there was no trap or other enemies in the expansive room, Jay began walking closer to the battle.

The statues were doing minimal damage to the skeletons, and they were quite weak so he had no fears as he added the bone pile back to his ring.

As he drew closer, something else stood out to him: they weren't just any ordinary stone daggers.

He didn't see it at first, but each of them released a soft blue shimmer and left a faint dark-green scrape on the skeletons each time they slashed against their bones.

The daggers seemed to be coated with more of that mana-conducting material, coating it in a complex pattern across the blade.

Anya crept forward beside Jay and prepared to fire, but Jay just held his hand up, gesturing to her to wait a moment and save her ammunition.

Slowly, he continued to walk forward and analyzed one of the statues.

< [Royal Helvetian Maid - Level 6] >

[80 HP]

<[Skills]>

[Brittle Armour]

- 40% damage reduction to slashing, stabbing damage.

- 20% more damage taken from crushing damage.

[Helvetia's Revenge]

- Magic damage immunity.

- Any wielded weapons become cursed.

[Pristine Cleaning] (Passive)

[Master Sculpting] (Passive)

[Master Gem Cutting] (Passive)

<[Description]>

[One of the remaining royal servants of the Helvetian Kingdom, turned to stone. Once esteemed, content with serving their queen and happy with their duties - now hopeless, empty, lost.]

“Huh, only level six and not even any skills? Way too easy... I guess they would have been annoying if the middle statue was still alive. It’s no wonder the skeletons are having such an easy time.” Jay shrugged.

Jay wondered what the effect of their magical daggers were, which allowed them to cause green cuts. He guessed they crafted these after they turned to stone as the weapons would be cursed. The maids were merely channeling mana through their arms into the dagger somehow, and the dagger was doing the rest - so there was nothing about its effects on their skill list. Unfortunately, because of the Helvetian curse, Jay wouldn’t even be able to find out what effects the daggers had.

After pondering for a moment and checking the health of the skeletons, Jay simply assumed it was some sort of toxin or a poison, as the skeletons took no extra damage.

This theory made the most sense to him, as maids wouldn’t have been good at fighting; they were not warriors. A strong magical poison would therefore be suitable for them.

Still, he wasn’t willing to test it with his own flesh. Why take unnecessary damage and pain?

While the battle was going smoothly, Jay imagined it would actually be quite a hard fight for regular adventurers, having to contend with whatever poison was constantly being applied... yet something about it seemed so alluring. Perhaps it was his necromancer class, having a subtle sway on his thoughts.

It seemed to have a very long duration too, as most of the cuts on the skeletons were still coated with a sickly dark-green substance.

Add the middle statue into the mix and it would have been an absolute nightmare - thankfully it was deceased before Jay even got here.

It wasn’t long till the left statue fell in battle, succumbing to the relentless skeletons, who only took minor cuts in return.

[215 Exp]

With the first statue dead, the skeletons all rushed over and bullied the last statue, pummeling it without remorse as they took the pressure off Dark.

Dark sneaked a few hits in as payback, adding deep cracks to the back of the statue's knee joints and causing it to stumble a few times.

Jay was glad he forced it to use the dual daggers against the stone statues, as the skeleton had inadvertently learned a form of vital spot targeting.

"I wonder if I should make Dark some armour... hmm, perhaps?" he scratched his chin as he thought, "but perhaps armour would only slow it down. Cloth armour maybe? Hmm, but where would I even start? It's not like I can just request someone to make some cloth armour for a skeleton, and anything for humans would be too big."

The statue was about to die and crumbled, so Jay put his thoughts of Dark's armor aside for now.

[215 Exp]

With all the enemies dead, Jay happily went up the ramp and approached the large throne - but before he got to it, one of his skeletons approached him, looking absent minded at him with its hollow eyes.

It just stood in front of him and gazed.

"Huh? What?" Jay raised a brow, wondering why it was behaving weirdly.

It took a moment, but then it finally clicked.

"Oh, Red, you leveled up?" he grinned, "Good, here, eat your fill!"

Jay quickly made a feast of bones fit for a king - an undead king, anyway. The skeleton happily obliged as it munched away at them.

Anya thought it sounded like it was eating dry rice and snapping sticks, so she got used to the unearthly eating noises quite quickly.

Before checking Red's role choice, Jay grabbed the soul stone off the throne.

[Greater Soul Stone] (Empty)

"Finally." he smiled, looking up at the statue - he paused.

"Such beauty..." Jay's smile left him as he looked over it. He was simply stunned.

Every detail was pristine and perfect; the lips, the nose, the eyes - even its eyelashes survived the petrification process and somehow the passage of time.

Jay could only imagine how beautiful such a being was before they changed it into a statue.

“Perhaps it wasn’t hellbent on revenge like the others, maybe it just wanted to be with its people?” Jay thought, assuming that such a beauty would never have such bitter thoughts of revenge.

Still, it was just an assumption after all - perhaps it could have been this one who suggested the revenge pact in the first place.

It almost seemed like an offence to turn such a beauty to stone, but it was now the shining centerpiece in this decorated room so at least its beauty still lived on in some form.

After staring for a moment, Jay snapped back to reality and wasted no time in looting its dead body. No remorse, no hesitation.

[Helvetian Ring] x 6

[Highborn Helvetian Ring]

[Porcelain Locket]

In the statue’s hand was a stone tablet too, but Jay checked his loot before investigating further.

< [Highborn Helvetian Ring] >

[Protection from a single calamity]

[0/1 charge]

[Can be recharged]

“Wow...” Jay immediately added some mana to it.

Despite his mana being necrotic, the ring greedily gobbled it up.

Jay could tell that the ring wouldn’t be filled for quite some time, so he stashed it away; he decided he would charge it later when he had no use for his mana. He may need his mana for more enemies after all.

The next item Jay brought out was the porcelain locket. This time, he gripped it tightly in his hand, stopping it from flying away and opening some other gate - or even closing the one they entered through.

It was simply too dangerous to let it fly away as it could trigger a trap or any other danger. There was no way of knowing until after it was done.

The porcelain locket had the same strange energy within it, and Jay felt an odd connection to it again. He realized it was another key - but he still didn’t understand the weird feeling it gave him.

“Perhaps it’s the magic of whoever charged it? Hmm...” he squinted at it, wanting to know its secrets.

“All right then. Keep your secrets...”

“For now.” he stashed it away again.

Anya made her way back to Jay - just as he was about to look over the stone tablet in the statue's hand.

At this moment, two skeletons each brought back a soul stone for Jay along with four more Helvetian rings from the maids; eight in total.

Jay pocketed the soul stones but decided to let Anya have the eight rings as he was quite content with the highborn ring he just found.

Plus, he just got six rings for himself anyway, so he really didn't mind giving away some charity.

"Thanks" Anya said, grabbing the rings off the skeletons "This throne seems... off." She remarked as she stood on the platform and began looking around.

Jay shrugged, "Seems okay to me," he said casually, grabbing the tablet from the middle throne and began to read.

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Hidden Carvings

[My love, read the back of my throne and you will understand everything - Your Queen]

“Huh, so she was the queen.” Jay nodded.

It made sense, but he didn’t want to assume until he knew for certain, and it wasn’t like he could analyze the dead statue.

“Back of the throne...” he said as he walked around.

“Huh, no wonder the throne is so big... I mean, the queen is tall, but not that wide.” he thought as he saw engravings covering the whole back of the throne.

They made the lettering large to help with engraving it, and it almost seemed to be written with a sense of elegance and care - rather than a desperate rush like in other parts of the dungeon.

Anya was still strangely walking around the throne, looking at its base as she seemed more interested with something else, but Jay just left her be; he had a message to read after all.

[Words to Helotian, my love. I have received word that the cult is dead. The revenge pact is complete. Our beloved son has dealt with them himself - though unfortunately he has since lost his sanity to another of their curses, and wanders the world. End his torment if he ever returns, but know that I have sent guards for him. As for the soldiers, I have freed them from these stone shells, and soon I will be free. I long to reunite with you. I ask that you end the spinning of the crifex rings and join me; let the attunement fail. I will wait for you on the other side. If you ever see our child, don’t be alarmed if he attacks. Have mercy by freeing him too. Forever yours, your faithful queen.]

“Huh, so the pact is done? I guess Sedulus will be happy.” Jay thought, “and to think she wanted to give up.” he shook his head.

“Well, there is one more pyramid to do, but I think completing this quest will be better.” he nodded.

“Yeah... the last pyramid can wait. I want those quest rewards” Jay’s eyes were filled with anticipation as he thought about the three new skills he could try out.

Jay went to tell Anya that he was done, but she was crouched down, still looking around the bottom of the throne.

“Anya?”

“Hm?” she didn’t look up.

“What are you doing...” Jay said, though it almost seemed like he was mocking her.

“Look, the throne. It doesn’t line up with the room or the other two thrones. It’s different. There’s got to be a secret or something.”

Jay looked a little more closely, and he noticed it too.

For such delicate and fine craftsmanship, it made little sense to have this ornamental finely carved throne, the defining center-piece of the room, to be off center like this.

“Oh yeah. Weird...” Jay thought as he looked closer.

“Let’s try to push it.” he suggested as the skeletons came over the help.

“Okay.”

They all lined up and pushed, but it was simply too heavy.

“Hmm... we need to make it lighter.”

Jay immediately had the skeletons break down the queen’s statue and move her rock chunks off the throne.

It felt wrong to destroy this natural beauty, but it was necessary. Right now, Jay’s curiosity was the stronger force.

After that, the throne groaned and shifted for a moment, but stopped.

“Needs more work.” Jay said to his skeletons as they began their demolition work again.

They started smashing their hammers against the large decorative armchair parts of the throne, and soon two large chunks fell off, each taking two skeletons to move away. He preserved the back of the throne for the engraved message on it.

“Okay, push!” Jay commanded them all at once with a grunt.

DRRRRRRRR

Slowly, the statue moved back into place until it seemed perfectly in line with the room.

It looked fine to Jay, but Anya insisted on adjusting it a few more times before she was satisfied.

Jay and Anya looked around the room for a moment, patiently silent as they looked and listened for anything.

Would a staircase appear in the ground? Would enemies come out of a hidden passage? Perhaps a treasure chest would fall down from the roof?

It was anyone's guess.

However, to their surprise, nothing happened.

"Uh.." Jay looked at Anya.

"Just give it a moment." she held her hand up, sure that something was going to happen.

They both waited longer, but soon enough, Anya gave up.

"Ugh, damn. I guess it was nothing." She pouted.

"Hmm, maybe we're going about this wrong? Maybe we should move it even further off-centre," Jay shrugged, and Anya raised a brow.

"Good idea!" she smiled, excited as she went back to pushing the statue.

All of them then repeated the process, but pushed from the other side this time.

DRRRRRRRRR

The statue went back to its original position and then kept going as they continued to push.

Anya and Jay both smiled as they looked down while pushing - there was something below the statue, a small opening glistening from within.

It seemed roughly made, but was filled with the same tablets the queen was holding - all nestled in some shining gold coins.

"Jack-fucking-pot" Jay grinned, his eyes shining right back.

With the statue fully moved, it was time to get the loot. Remembering what happened to the ore, Jay just added it all to his inventory. He wouldn't let it disappear like the sparkling ore did.

[500 gold]

"Only five hundred gold? So stingy..." Jay pursed his lips.

Unfortunately, the stone tablets didn't enter his inventory, so he quickly got on his knees and pulled them all out of the hole, though he soon found it was merely a carved out hole in the white stone platform so he let the skeletons finish grabbing all of them.

Anya looked at him with puppy dog eyes, and Jay knew what she was waiting for.

"250 gold, here you go." Jay smiled, "Nice work noticing that." he encouraged her.

"Thank you very much. Imagine what the last pyramid is hiding..."

“Hmm, about that. I won’t be doing that today. Two is enough I think. Plus, I have to go back to the start for my quest.” Jay said, casually stretching his arms.

“Oh ok... well, maybe tomorrow?” Anya looked a little dejected, but had some hope in her eyes.

“Sure, maybe tomorrow.” He nodded back.

Jay was glad she didn’t force him to make any promises as he looked across the stone tablets.

There were many of the tablets, but Jay was thankful as they had numbered them.

“Hm, I hope it’s a treasure map, but probably not.” he thought as he glanced over them, seeing they were all text.

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The Truth; Blind Love

[If you are reading this, you will come to know the truth about Helvetia. You will hate the truth, even though the truth will ultimately set you free.]

[Years before the event, the event which cursed our land, a building was destroyed in a large spell wave. This was soon blamed on a cult - though at the time, no such cult existed.]

[Our queen secretly constructed the cult; the details were as intricate as the craftsmanship in this chamber.]

[Truthfully, there was no real cult. It was all a lie.]

“Wow...” Jay passed Anya the tablets he read and continued reading the others.

[The cult was made to protect the prince.]

[The source of the explosion was because of the prince, after all. The prince, seeking power, began his own forbidden mana-craft research before ultimately using it for political means: terrorism. He hated his father, who gave himself longevity with magic.]

[For the prince, the idea of ruling started like a pleasant dream. Over time, it turned to a longing, then a passion, and eventually bitter frustration. Anger followed, and year after year, decade after decade, step by step, he changed.]

[A small stream can cleave mountains when given enough time, and the prince was much less than a mountain. A similar method was used to make our citizens trusting and unwary.]

[The prince would never ascend the throne as long as our king lived, and it seemed Helotian would live forever - but perhaps turmoil would get him ousted?]

[After the prince's incidents got worse, the need for the construction of the elaborate fake cult only grew bigger.]

[The forbidden magic was growing stronger than he could have ever imagined, and it only fueled his desire for more. Our prince began testing it on surrounding nations and this only increased the need for the growth of the cult, causing it to eventually become an international network.]

[Our queen, of course, loves her son and took measures to protect him: she continued to make up the cult propaganda, eventually causing the

military to chase the cult around the countryside - ironically, she saved them from the event.]

[The military had departed to chase the elaborate cult, yet the cult was able to easily escape the military as the queen secretly fed them information.]

[The prince uncaringly proceeded with his experiments. The sacrifices he made so far would count for nothing if he stopped now, so he continued in his madness. He quickly lost control as his forbidden magic grew, and we all know what happened next. The event: Helvetias destruction]

[The queen, the prince, and the esteemed noble were spared from the calamity through the highborn rings. Still, they turned to stone to avoid suspicion, while others chose it for revenge: the revenge pact.]

[Even after turning to stone, the prince was still seeking power. He made himself an enemy of Helvetia and gathered his own troops, promising them immortality for service and rallying them in hidden parts of the country.]

[Despite there being nothing left, he still wished to rule over a cursed wasteland. He merely wanted power for the sake of it. He didn't care how many would suffer along the way.]

[The queen, still wanting to protect her son even after the disaster, made a move to destroy the military. Eventually, she ripped their soul seals out after declaring the cult to be destroyed, freeing them from the pact and allowing them to die. After all these years, it will be a sweet release.]

[The queen declared the prince had slain the cult and the revenge pact was complete. Now we could all be free.]

[It was not mercy to her loyal troops, but she did this to stop them from capturing the prince if this truth was ever revealed. There were fates worse than death, and the anger of Helvetia burned brightly in the hearts of every single soldier. Helvetian's were united in this respect as they constructed the pyramids.]

[Over the years, she changed the black pyramid to white, a sign of peace and newness. A declaration of change - a signal, beckoning her son's return.]

[Eventually, she longed for what Helvetia once had: all the flora and fauna, plants and animals, which now surround the throne only as carvings.]

[Time passed, and they had not seen the prince for hundreds of years. Eventually, the queen decided she should move on. After so much time, she

realized this immortality they gained was nothing, but a trap brought onto themselves.]

[In the end, in her last days, she agreed with the prince: only a God should rule eternally.]

[We, her loyal servants, are tasked to protect the message inscribed on her throne, the lie meant to make peace - but if the king, the prince, or whoever reads it are not satisfied, they will hopefully find our tablets; the truth.]

[We buried these under her throne, as we believe the king or prince would be hesitant to disturb the remains of her stone shell.]

“Shit. All to protect the prince? A whole empire destroyed on the whims of one selfish child...” Jay shook his head, clenching his jaw in anger and frustration.

“The queen should have disciplined her son in the very beginning. Perhaps it wouldn’t have come to this - instead she covered up his behavior, which only let it grow.”

“Such a waste... so many lives were affected.” Jay pursed his lips.

“Still, I guess it’s only a dungeon.”

Jay decided that if he ever found the prince, perhaps he wouldn’t kill him - it seems that living as a cold statue forever and slowly losing your mind was a more fitting punishment.

Ever-present Trap

Jay handed the other tablets to Anya. She didn't seem to understand them, but he didn't feel like explaining it to her, so before she could finish reading them, he unsummoned his skeletons and gathered all their hammers, daggers, and bones.

"Thanks for your help. I'll let you know about tomorrow." He waved as the dungeon exit emerged nearby.

"O- oh. Okay. Thanks, looking forward to it." Anya said, holding two tablets.

[Party Disbanded]

Jay disbanded the party with Anya before he left the dungeon - he knew there was an exp bonus waiting for him when he left from his necrotic helminth in wolf's quarry dungeon, and didn't want to share.

~Outside of Mist Keep Dungeon~

Night time. Few adventurers were around, chatting about how the dungeon went and giving either other pointers and tips - suddenly, the dungeon door opened and out stepped a grinning adventurer wearing a green coat with some strange light-gray armor, but they suddenly the smiling adventurer disappeared right back into the door again, leaving as quickly as they appeared.

"What the? Who was that? I thought we would be the last ones? Did anyone analyze them?"

"No clue. Weird... where's the rest of their party?"

Suddenly, the dungeon door opened again and out stepped Anya who was now level nine. Unlike Jay, she had a very placid look on her face as she exited.

"Hey, she's level nine now," an adventurer pointed.

"Wow, someone finally caught up to that loner guy. I wonder if he says anything." another added.

"Heh, we'll be level nine soon too. I actually don't think it's that impressive anymore." One shrugged.

"Pff, you're still level six though." another grinned back.

"Yeah, well, I'm just... having fun." the level six adventurer shrugged.

Anya ignored them as she headed home, back up the mountain trail.

[2400 Exp]

Even as he re-entered the dungeon, Jay was still smiling.

“Ah, so much exp.” Jay grinned broadly, “the helminth is so awesome.”

“Now... here we are again.” he looked around, remembering how he first crafted his first bone hammers here.

Jay was back at the very start of the dungeon since he couldn't enter the first pyramid. Technically, it wasn't conquered, so this was the quickest way to get to Sedulus and complete his quest.

Since he brought his skeletons out, all the enemies had respawned, meaning he could easily get the soul stones from the weaker level three statues at the starting zones.

“Alright. Let's do this.” he said as he pulled out his bone hammers, daggers, and formed a large bone pile.

The five skeletons were brought back to their former glory and were quickly rearmed with their bone weapons.

“Now, Red, you will be staying with me for a moment.” Jay said while gesturing for the other skeletons to leave. They sprinted away to hunt more statues - with Blue in command of course.

Next, he analyzed Red.

< [Germinating Skeleton Level 4 - Red] >

[Type - Undead]

[Role - Unclear]

HP - 75/75 (+20, equipment)

MP - 10/10

<[Skills]>

[Bone Eater]

[Scrimshaw Level 1] (Passive)

[Undeath] (Passive)

[Fear] (Weak) (Passive)

[Shade Vision] (Passive)

<[Description]>

[An abomination, its existence spits in the face of life and death - and they spit back. Stop it before it's too late. Execute with extreme prejudice. Burn the bones.]

[Please choose a role from available categories - Available categories are based on the skeleton's qualitative experience. If no choice is made, a random role will be assigned once the skeleton levels up.]

[Warrior]

[Guard]

[Zweihander]

[Commander] (1)

"Hmm, similar to Blue... except with four choices? Huh? And what the hell is a zweihander?" Jay wondered, raising a brow.

He began retracing all the weapons that Red had used and the roles it had taken, but to his surprise, it really wasn't given many special assignments or weapons - neither did it ever command other skeletons.

"Red had used a bone dagger, then an arming sword, and a bone hammer which it... huh... It has been dual-wielding the bone hammer..."

"I'm guessing the guard class would be a standard one-handed soldier with higher health, and the warrior will probably be one-handed with higher strength, so the zweihander must be a two-handed weapon class with high strength. Like a heavy hitter I'm guessing."

"It makes no sense that the commander role is there though. Perhaps since I already unlocked it with Blue?"

Jay paused for a moment as he considered his options.

"Do I even need a heavy hitter though?" he scratched his chin, "Well, without Anya around it would actually be great, but even with her around I have been attacked and even forced to go on the defensive." He pursed his lips.

"Hmm... The zweihander role sounds cool, but what I need right now is a guard." Jay nodded.

"Still, I can always make some zweihander skeletons in the future when I have more of them - as long as the roles I unlock stay unlocked."

[Choice: Guard]

With his choice decided, all Jay had to do now was level his skeletons up; he was excited to see what would happen once they hit level five, but he decided to not do anything too drastic; he still didn't know the mechanism behind the skeleton leveling either.

"Since the other skeletons are gone, you might as well continue to guard me," he said, as Red stood by his side and started looking for any threats.

“Good old Red.” he nodded as he walked up the desolate hill towards the first pyramid.

As Jay reached the top of the hill, he was pleased to see his other four skeletons already having engaged the two stone statues at the gate ruins, and as he walked down towards them, they already reduced them to rubble.

[35 Exp] [35 Exp]

The enemies here were only level three, so the skeletons made quick work of them.

Jay recalled when he first fought these two statues. Back then, they seemed like powerful, threatening warriors. Each of them was like a veteran and he even was wounded by them.

At this stage, some adventurers still had trouble with these two gate guards; few could solo them without taking any damage.

But now? Well, in Jay’s eyes, they were nothing more than a few walking soul stones waiting to be collected; their size didn’t matter either, he would reduce them to rubble whether they were giants or not.

Dark scrambled back to Jay with two more soul stones while the other skeletons ran off into the city, finding more targets.

After dropping them off, Dark rushed back into the ruins too.

[Soul stone] (Empty) x 2

“This won’t take long.” Jay smiled as he casually strolled through the gates towards the pyramid.

A sense of relaxation came over him as he walked and he began to wonder why he received a necromancer class in the first place.

All this time he had been focusing on survival, and there was an ever-present background fear driving him forward to learn about dungeons, slaying monsters, growing his skeletons, and learning more about his power rather than questioning it.

He thought it made sense to become a necromancer after his life as a butcher, but now that he had a relaxed mind with some time to think, he couldn’t help but question everything.

- Why is there a rumor about not getting a class if you don’t touch a mana conduit? He still got a class.

- Why is it a law that you have to touch one? Why enforce it if it’s such a good thing to do? That doesn’t make sense.

- Did he actually meet anyone who didn’t touch one? He wouldn’t know, analyzing others doesn’t show their class - but he had never heard of

anyone he knew who didn't get one.

- Why don't they teach younger people anything about classes or dungeons until they actually get registered at a guild?

Jay was still strolling slowly through the city as his skeletons did all the work, but despite the relative calmness of the dungeon his head was swirling, a sense of dread building in the depths of his mind.

"What the fuck is actually going on..." he stopped walking.

Jay simply had no answers, but the questions still bothered him as they swirled in his mind.

Now that he had some time to slow down and let his thoughts drift, he realized something wasn't right. He felt like he was in a trap designed for him since before he had been born into this world; all that had to happen was for it to spring.

"Shit... what have I been doing this whole time..." Jay paused and looked at his hands. He took in a deep breath of air, "I need to get a grip. This isn't meant to be a fucking stroll in the woods." His hands gripped tightly into fists.

"My life is in danger and always has been... and what have I been doing? Just running around dungeons at my leisure... Pathetic." he told himself with a bitter sneer.

"Even other adventurers with normal classes work harder than me, and their life isn't even on the line... I need to wake up to myself." he bit his lip.

"I have to focus on my strength, then when I am powerful enough, and the time is right, I will reveal my strength to the world. Hmm. Maybe it would be better not to reveal it..."

"But I want... No, I need to find every single answer about the mana conduits. Until I'm satisfied, I will scour the cracks of every mountain, walk in the depths, and ascend into the skies if need be, and I will tear this entire world down if I have to."

Soul

The skeletons made quick work of any statues blocking their journey to the first pyramid. It was a one-sided slaughter.

[35 Exp] [35 Exp] [35 Exp] [35 Exp]

[Soul stone] (empty) x 4

[Helvetian Ring] x 2

The skeletons continued to hunt the weaker level three statues while Jay marched towards the first pyramid with renewed determination.

Before Jay could even reach the first two sets of guards, the skeletons had already decimated them; they descended on the statues like a shadow of death, leaving a path of rubble in their wake.

None were spared and there was no mercy. The statues may as well have bowed down and offered their necks on a chopping block.

Finally, they got to the pillars in front of the pyramid with the same three guards. The spear statue in the middle was still wearing its strange black helmet, but it would be useless against these barbaric skeletons.

Again it happened: Before Jay even got there the skeletons had killed the two swordsmen statues at the sides and then made quick work of the spearman statue. It was like they were clearing a path for their king.

[35 Exp] [35 Exp] [40 Exp]

[Soul stone] (empty) x 3

[Helvetian Ring] x 1

Previously, the dungeon had felt like a slow, tiresome grind, but it now felt like a massacre. Jay was pleased seeing how much stronger he and his minions had become.

The lower level statues simply had no hope; they barely got to swing their weapons before they broke down and crumbled into dust before the assault of the undead.

As for landing a hit on the skeletons? The statues might as well be dreaming.

While walking, Jay recalled how there was actually no way to get to Sedulus through the front of the pyramid. The first time, he had escaped a jail cell, walked through a series of passages and passed through moving walls, so he knew he would have to go through the back entrance.

As he walked around the side of the pyramid, the skeletons continued their rampage with no restraint or hesitation.

[35 Exp] [35 Exp] [35 Exp] [35 Exp] [35 Exp] [35 Exp]

[Soul stone] (empty) x 6

[Helvetian Ring] x4

The statues in this part of the dungeon fell one after another with little resistance.

Jay didn't mind walking around the side of the pyramid, since he still needed to collect about thirty soul stones, but this was a simple task now, and the quest would be over in no time.

Finally, he reached the back and found the familiar passageway into Sedulus's tomb.

Before entering, Jay checked how many soul stones he still needed.

[Soulstone: 489/500]

"Argh, come on." He said, frowning slightly.

More exp notifications popped up, and Dark came running back with two more soul stones.

Jay practiced his mana sense ability while he waited, trying to expand it as far as possible. He activated it again and slowly began walking around.

It drained his mana rapidly, but he didn't care at this moment since he would not need it anyway. He simply wanted to train until he actually gained the skill.

Meanwhile, Dark continued to return with rings and soul stones until Jay finally had enough.

Thankfully, it didn't take too long since the skeletons were conducting a one-sided slaughter.

[Soulstone: 501/500]

"Huh? I have... an extra soul stone? Wait... so I can get more than the quest requires?" he raised a brow.

Jay's eyes gleamed for a moment, realizing this meant that there would probably be extra rewards if he got another one hundred, or even five hundred soul stones.

He seriously considered doing it for a moment, but with a sigh, he decided to just take the reward; he was already beginning to feel overwhelmed with everything he needed to do, while there would always be more quests in the future.

Jay entered Sedulus's lair with resolve, fixated on finishing the quest and getting his rewards: three new skills and an ancient Helvetian spear.

Entering the darkness, he found the tall, slender statue once more, sitting silently at the head of the table.

It seemed like Sedulus hadn't moved an inch since the last time Jay was here, and for a moment he feared she had died somehow.

Jay didn't really care if she was in a deep trance or sleep or whatever else a statue could do - he had a quest to turn in and he wanted his rewards, "Sedulus?" he called.

No response.

"Hello, Sedulus?" he said a little more loudly.

Still no response.

"If she reset after I left the dungeon, I am going to lose my fucking mind..." he thought, gritting his teeth.

He wanted to shake the statue awake.

"Young one. Jay. Hello." the old voice sounded once more.

Jay's clenched jaw instantly relaxed and a smile soon came over his face, he was instantly relieved.

"I have finished your quest." he smiled, "five-hundred soul stones, two large soul stones, and three greater soul stones."

"Also, I have one soul stone with a soul still in it. I'll throw that in if you can sweeten the deal a little." he winked.

"A soul... still in a soul stone?"

"Yep." Jay said.

A moment of silence passed. It seemed the statue was deep in thought.

The statue still hadn't moved yet, and to Jay it felt like he was talking to a wall.

"Break it." the statue said.

"Oh... and you will add more to my rewards?"

"Yes. Free their soul."

"Sure thing" he nodded.

Jay took the soul stone out, but before he went to smash it, he had an idea. He used his mana sense ability and concentrated it around the soul stone in his hand.

Next, he equipped one of his hammers and smashed it down while maintaining his concentration.

A crack in the stone let something out. It wasn't visible but he could feel it.

It was tangible and almost acted like a bubble, trying to push to the surface of Jay's mana and escape, but Jay just added more mana and pushed it back down.

"So this is a soul..." he thought, squinting as if he was trying to see anything.

Somehow, the soul became stronger as it pushed back against his mana. It seemed that the more mana he added to block it, the stronger it got.

[Soul Sense level 1 - Acquired]

Jay ignored the notification and continued to trap it, but his mana was burning away like paper at this point, and he couldn't do anything to keep it contained any longer.

Jay felt light-headed as his mana got low and lost concentration for a moment. This was the opportunity the soul needed.

The soul suddenly shot off somewhere out of his mana sense range. All the pressure it built up against Jays mana had suddenly propelled it away at a high speed when the mana-wall went down.

"Hmm. Well, that won't happen again for a while, but at least I got something out of it." he thought as he went to check his notification.

Rewards

It surprised Jay how he still didn't have a mana sense skill after all his practice, yet he picked up this new skill on the first attempt.

[Soul Sense]

- Grasp the intangible

- Offend life and death at your own risk

“Hmm... I really shouldn't mess around with this.”

“It's odd how it's called 'sense' even though I literally restrained a soul.” Jay thought before Sedulus spoke.

“Young one, you have done well.” Sedulus held out her hand as Jay received a notification.

[Complete quest?]

[Yes/No]

Jay immediately selected 'yes.', his eyes glowing with anticipation.

< [Quest Complete - Hidden Quest - Soul Liberation] >

[Gather soul stones and bring them to Sedulus]

[Progress - Complete]

[Skill Acquired - Mind]

[Skill Acquired - Mark]

[Skill Acquired - Host]

“Fuck yes.” Jay couldn't help but grin broadly. He didn't care about the soul sense skill anymore as these are the ones which would help him now.

Finally, all his hard work to do this quest had paid off.

“Young one, the spear is yours... I removed much of the curse.” Sedulus gestured to the large black-stone spear sitting on the table.

“To end the curse, you must stop the spinning of the crifex rings in the last pyramid...”

Another notification for a quest appeared, but Jay quickly accepted it and ignored it - right now he just wanted to check out his new weapon.

Its design was simplistic and angular with refined, flat edges. Jay could tell that an experienced craftsman made it, and he guessed it was probably the same craftsman he slayed in the fourth pyramid - at least before they lost their minds.

“Thank you for freeing my people... now, I wish to join them.” the old statues voice got softer as she said the last part.

Jay’s smile disappeared as he knew what he had to do; what he was about to do. He had made a promise, and carrying it out was now his duty.

He started telling himself it was just a dungeon, and that Sedulus was just a part of it - but his heart wasn’t listening as a feeling of cold loneliness crept into it.

Jay didn’t possess immortality yet, but there was still a vague connection between them; he felt like she was an older sister or a mother. Perhaps the one he never had.

Sedulus pointed to her chest as Jay grabbed the ancient’s spear from the table.

“...” he had no words to say.

Slowly he thrust the spear into the slender statue’s chest, killing her with her own weapon.

It seemed that there was a powerful force behind the spear, helping him to push it deeper until he received a notification.

Sedulus’s last gift became apparent as her cold stone arms dropped to the side. Cracks spread from the spear until she crumbled into pieces.

[Level Up]

Jay still would have needed 9,000 experience to level up, and he quickly realized this was a last gift, as she did not promise it in the quest rewards at all.

“Thank you Sedulus.” Jay whispered, sensing a presence slowly drifting out of the statue’s remains.

Instead of trapping it with his mana, he gave it a gentle push upwards and a sense of peace and relief filled his heart; Jay wondered if that was what the soul was feeling, and if he somehow sensed its emotions.

He couldn’t be sure, but in the end, he was glad.

Now that he could analyze the rewards, he started with the spear.

< [Knowing War Spear] > (Cursed)

[Unknown Material]

[16 Damage] (Two handed)

[9 Damage] (Single handed)

[Curse - Weapon is weakened until the curse is removed]

[Curse - 50% less damage when wielded by non-constructs]

[Curse - Locked Skill]

[Curse - Locked Skill]

“Damn, that curse is powerful.” Jay pursed his lips.

Checking over the fifty percent damage decrease, he realized it would still be useful in his skeleton’s hands, as they technically counted as constructs.

Jay realized he could still make Red switch to a zweihander role (two hander skeleton), but he saved the spear for now and stored it away in his inventory. He still needed the extra protection after all.

As for the spear’s skills, there was no sign if they were passive or active, so he would just have to wait and see.

“Now, my new skills...” he smiled as he went through them.

It had been a while, so he mostly forgot what they did - he just remembered they were useful.

< [Mind - Level 1] >

- Craft a rudimentary sentience. Form a basic mind.

- 25 Mana

<[Mark]>

- Use your mana to mark an enemy or object. A bond will exist between you and the mark.

- Mark is undetectable(weak) and invisible.

- Can place the mark using vision alone

- You will know exactly where the mark is

- 0/10 marks used

- 1 Mana to Mark (Decreases maximum mana by 1 until the mark is removed)

< [Host - Level 1] >

- Project your mind into your own constructs

- Control them as if they are your own body

- 1,000 meters maximum projection distance (0.6 mi)

- 5 Mana per second. Doubles for every 500 meters projected.

“Awesome. Pretty heavy mana usage but I’m sure they will all be useful.” Jay thought.

He could already imagine marking a gold coin to find out where a treasury might be hidden, or marking that brat Matheson to one day execute divine justice.

Sure, it would lower his mana pool, but the benefits outweigh the costs.

As for mind and host, Jay tried the latter immediately as he pictured Red and used the skill.

Immediately, everything went black, and he felt a sense of weightlessness - then suddenly the world reappeared again from Red's perspective.

To his surprise, everything was black, white and different shades of gray, with no color at all.

The next thing that stood out was that there were no shadows. Instead of the pitch-black corners of the pyramid, they appeared as simply being dark.

"Must be the shade vision skill of the skeletons." Jay said - but all that came out was a chattering clicking sound from his skeleton jaw moving.

Jay turned around to look at his body and realized he made a mistake. His nose was bleeding and his ass was sticking in the air after he face planted.

"Dammit..." he thought as he went to walk over to prop his body up.

As he took the first step however, he ended up jumping instead, almost landing on his own body.

It was at this point that he started feeling dizzy - his mana had been draining all this time and suddenly he was sent back into his body.

"Ouch." Jay wiped some dirt off his face and ignored the pain.

"Quite an interesting skill..." he smiled, "now I can fight with them till death."

"I'll definitely need a much larger mana pool though."

Jay immediately opened up his level-up notification and was greeted by five attribute points and one skill point.

Of course, he put all his attribute points into energy, raising it to 80.

Since Jay checked his class recently, he now realized that leveling up gave him one HP, two MP, and one point of energy gave him two MP; this resulted in his mana pool jumping from 68 to 80.

Next, he decided where to put his attribute point - but now that he discovered that the skeletons could have roles, he only wanted to discover more of them, so he opted to add it to his [Raise Feeble Creature] skill.

He considered adding it to [Undead Mastery], however most of the skeletons weren't even level four yet, so he would hold off on it for now.

After adding the point into [Raise feeble creature level 5], another notification greeted him.

<[Skill evolved]>

{ [Raise feeble creature level 5] has evolved into [Raise Lesser Undead level 1] }

“Huh?” Jay raised a brow.

He had never even heard of a skill evolving. He thought it would probably be a regular thing and not something related to his special class, but they had kept most of the information relating to adventurers hidden from younger people so he couldn't be sure.

Jay quickly checked the new skill.

<[Raise Lesser Undead level 1]>

- Imbue a skeleton with necrotic energy, raising it to fight for you.

[HP: 30]

[Damage: 5]

[5/7 Raised]

[“Raise”][“Arise”]

[5 mana+3/level of creature]

“Awesome, two more skeletons?” Jay grinned.

“So I'm guessing the skill evolved when it hit level five?” he guessed as he pulled more bones from his inventory.

With no hesitation, Jay summoned two new skeletons - unfortunately his mana was still too low to summon two of them, as he did just use most of it using the [Host] skill.

His mana had only just reached up to 5 when he summoned the first new skeleton, and he was already regretting it as he felt some dizziness.

The skeleton formed as usual, but Jay immediately realized another aspect which made this evolved spell great: It used human bones.

The new skeleton was still smaller than the others, but taller than a feeble creature.

Its human skull came up just below Jay's shoulder as it stood there, ready for his orders.

“Finally, I don't need anymore of those stinking marsh rat bones. That actually works out great because I have an almost unlimited supply of Helvetian skeletons.” he smiled lightly.

Jay was glad he wouldn't have to return to the stinking swamp anymore. He still needed teeth for his unstable teeth spell, but he was sure he could find other ways to get them, and he believed he could copy his helminth's spell eventually, finally putting his goblin wand to use.

Jay's mana reached zero, and he was feeling slightly dizzy, so finally, he decided it was time to leave; it was already nighttime in the outside world after all, and all this time he was fighting yawns.

His skeletons were still culling the stone statues, but he quickly recalled them, taking their bones back into his gauntlet and their weapons back into his inventory.

Before leaving, he did one last check of his status.

< [Necromancer Level 12] > (Pure)

[Race - Human]

HP: 94/94

MP: 80/80

Strength: 20

Dexterity: 25

Vitality: 35

Energy: 45/45

Exp: 70/20,000

{<[Skills]>}

<~ [Necromancy Skills] ~>

[Raise Lesser Undead (1)]

[Summon Bone Helminth]

[Shell Restoration (1)]

[Unstable Teeth (2)]

[Host (1)]

[Mind (1)]

[Undead Mastery (3)] (Passive)

[Necrotic Sense (1)] (Passive)

[Scrimshaw (3)] (Passive)

[Soul Sense (1)] (Passive)

[Shift] ~ [Living Blueprints] ~ [Transplant] ~ [Amputation]

[Uncaring Rip]~[Pitiful Mortal]

< [Other Skills] >

[Mark]

[Asklin] (Equipment)

[Dagger Proficiency (1)] (Passive)

[Poison Resist (11%)] (Passive - equipment)

[Running (2)] (Passive)

[Stress Response] (Passive)

[Sword Proficiency (1)] (Passive)
[Class Utility] (Passive)
{< [Research] >}
[Chimera Research (17%)]
[Immortality Research (5%)]
[Skull-shield Projector Research (32%)]
[Dread-mourn Turret Research (22%)]

As the dungeon exit emerged from the ground, Jay decided he would dedicate tomorrow to training: upgrading skills, crafting equipment and creating minds...

As for Anya, well, she would just have to wait. Besides, Jay wasn't very interested in storming the last pyramid to remove the rest of the curse from his new weapon, anyway. He wasn't a spearman after all.

Sure, it would make one skeleton powerful, but in a group of skeletons he couldn't really picture it making much of a difference. Completing that curse-removing quest, which he didn't even look at, was just a secondary objective in his mind.

As Jay walked back home, he considered his next steps.

"There were better ways to spend my time," he thought, "such as exploring more of the wolf's quarry dungeon. Using the mark skill, maybe I could create a basic map in that dark labyrinth..."

"Though, I am getting sick of the dark." he shrugged.

As Jay approached the north bridge of Losla, he heard some deep marching sounds in the distance. They were like the Helvetian guards, but not as heavy - though they were similarly in sync. Whoever was marching must have been well-trained.

It sounded like some troops were approaching Losla from the north.

Looking around, the guards all looked focused, but not like they were ready for battle. It was more like they were getting ready for their commander to walk by; their uniforms all looked perfect and unwrinkled as if they had never been worn.

"Hmm, I wonder what's going on..." Jay wondered as he walked by the guards casually.

A little smile formed on his face, and he was glad he didn't have to be so formal like them.

Switching Guards, Switching Undead

[2600 Exp]

Jay woke up early today, with another smile on his face after he received exp while he slept.

“The helminth sure is great,” he smiled; he was already over 10% of the way to level fourteen. The next highest level adventurer was Anya at level nine.

Needless to say, Jay was unmatched - of course, his disguise stone still said he was level nine.

He had planned to pick up the money from his butchery shop last night, but Trenly hadn't separated it from the rest of the gold used for expenses, and neither was he here this morning, so as Jay left for the wolf's quarry dungeon he decided to come back later on in the day for gold collection.

“As for today, I will focus on training and learning,” he nodded.

He decided that learning the bone helminths [Spectral Bolt] spell would be the most useful to him at the moment so today he gave it the utmost priority on his list of objectives.

It would be ineffective against the Helvetian guards, but he already decided he would look for a different dungeon. Wolf's Quarry dungeon was one option, but he was getting sick of the darkness all the time, and desperately wanted a change.

As he walked to the Wolf's quarry, he realized he hadn't seen his little necrotic parasite in quite some time.

“I wonder if it has grown bigger. The helminth was level one when I was level ten, so it should be level three now,” he thought, as it leveled up along with him.

Jay already decided to practise and train at the guild, as it was safer than doing it at home where he could be seen through his window or would be distracted by Trenly's noisy meat chopping downstairs - though he would need to use the outside target area to practise his helminth's necrotic bolt spell.

He had his own private room at the guild and Viladore to help him there too, so he would make it work.

Sure, for extra safety he could do it in an instanced dungeon, but they were all either cold, dark, or stinky inside - much more preferable to practice in a warm, quiet, and safe room.

Jay noticed something strange as he exited Losla - there were new guards around. While it was normal to get new guards, these were an oddity because of the armor they were wearing.

Two heavily armored men stood vigilantly at the bridge as they watched the north.

Thick and segmented dark-gray stone-like armour covered their bodies from head to toe, covered by a loose black tabard which had a symbol Jay had never seen before.

Jay stared at their armor for a moment, getting ideas for his own armour designs as he tried to peek into the sides - though he was soon noticed by one of these new guards.

The soldier only turned its helmet and glanced at Jay through its tiny eye slits. No words were spoken, but Jay understood he had to leave as he felt a threat of danger, a wave of killing intent surging towards him radiating from the guard.

He quickly glanced towards the bridge and went on his way after a slight nervous shudder.

“Shit... I should have checked their level.” He pursed his lips as he kept walking; he didn’t dare to look back.

“Why are they here? Who even are they...” he wondered.

Being from a small and unimportant village, Jay had never even heard of the mage hunters, much less their new name, the ‘safety bearers’.

The last time he felt such a dangerous aura was during his first meeting with Sullivan.

“I’ll find out once I get to the guild, though I guess it’s good we have some powerful people protecting Losla, anyway. I wonder if it has to do with the wood elementals attacking?” he guessed, as he made his way to the wolf’s quarry dungeon.

When he got there, Jay quickly entered to collect the fresh blue-bone corpses his helminth had waiting for him.

In total, there were about forty-two skeletons. It seemed that the helminth was still moving bones back, and it had been focused on killing the helpless wolves without rest.

Despite eating the soil regularly, and being partly mineral themselves, the silt-wolves were literally being attacked from it randomly. Paranoia and stress ruled over them now, and they all lived in fear after being terrorized for the last few days by the glow of necrotic bolts.

Jay sensed the helminth was quite far away, as it had pushed the wolves out of their territory or killed them off. He had to wait a moment after he commanded it to come to him, even though it headed straight for him as it dug directly through the earth.

“Hmm...” he quickly planned his next steps as he waited near the mining camp’s light.

The helminth returned, snapping its jaws at its master - its way of saying hello. Jay smiled, but quickly grimaced a little as it regurgitated some bones for him.

“Good job...” he praised it, though a little unconvincingly.

Jay had it attach onto his armour using its [Sentinel Form] and it quickly disappeared; like before, it ended up as the familiar dark-blue amulet with a dark-green crossbow bolt image hanging on his chest, along with the invisible feeling of the helminth around his neck.

“Good.” he smiled as it seemed to get comfortable and stop moving.

Jay quickly exited the dungeon - only to enter again straight after. The whole dungeon reset and all the wolves respawned.

Next, Jay summoned his seven skeletons:

- Blue, Red, level 4
- Sweeper, Lamp, level 3
- Dark, level 2
- Unnamed Skeleton, unnamed skeleton, level 1

The troop of undead looked impressive to Jay, especially the ones with the spectral armor and helmets on. Jay couldn’t help but pause for a moment and smile at their glory.

“Alright, let’s get you all equipped.” he nodded as he stood next to the mining camp’s lamp as he pulled out all their weapons.

Jay only made the bone hammers for the Helvetian dungeon as the enemies had the [Brittle armor] passive, but in this dungeon his swords did eight damage while the bone hammers only did six, so he went to give Blue, Red, Sweeper and Lamp an ossein arming sword each; the smaller skeletons would get daggers.

Jay still had to upgrade their weapons now that his scrimshaw skill was level three, but once again, he left it for another time. He had other priorities.

Unfortunately, as he went to check his inventory, he couldn't find the weapons.

"Dammit... Looks like I will make you new weapons after all." he shrugged.

Jay couldn't find the swords as they simply didn't exist anymore - he held onto them for too long, and because of their [Life Span] attribute, the weapons had all disintegrated back into bones.

The only one who still had weapons now was Dark, which received the same two daggers it was using last night.

Jay checked them while handing them back, and they still had nearly nine hours left. Of course, he added some mana and brought them back up to twenty hours of life.

Jay formed a bone pile as he crafted.

"Defend me." He ordered as he sat down under the lantern to craft all the swords and daggers the skeletons would need.

He didn't expect to get attacked, but it was better to have precautions.

Jay decided he would send his band of skeletons to cull the silt-wolves with their new weapons before analyzing his helminth. For efficiency.

The skeletons all formed a defensive circle around their master and his bone pile as the familiar green mana glowed in the dark depths of the mineshaft dungeon.

Heavy Infantry

Jay started with the swords first, and like last time, he used the silt-wolf bone, as it was stronger than human bones.

“Ah, my best work yet.” Jay gazed at a new ossein arming sword as he analyzed it.

[Ossein Arming Sword Level 3]

[Silt-wolf bone]

[12 damage] - Slashing, piercing.

[Sharpness +]

[Lifespan - Requires necrotic essence to maintain its form]

[Current lifespan: 96 hours]

Compared to before, the sword was longer and skinnier now. It looked less like a wide-bladed short sword and more like a normal sword you would see adventurers using.

As Jay stared at its edge, it seemed to give off a sense of sharpness, and an ever so faint ringing noise sounded in his ears.

“Ugh,” he looked away, “weird.”

Jay didn't understand the subtle aura he was feeling from the sword but he assumed it was to do with the new [sharpness] stat he saw on it, so he simply accepted it with an uncaring shrug before handing it to one of the skeletons.

Of course, he crafted an extra one for himself before equipping the rest of them as well.

Next, he crafted some daggers for the level one skeletons, but he only gave one of them a dagger as an idea suddenly popped into his head.

“Hmm...” He made another sword with a longer grip and gave it away. A level one skeleton happily grabbed the bone sword, but was forced to use two hands to dual-wield it, as it was a little too large for it.

“You'll be my first zweihander.” Jay nodded, anticipating its role selection when it would hit level four.

Since only four of the skeletons had armor, Jay considered making armor for all of them, though after some consideration he decided it would take too much time and too much mana.

After all, he had other priorities today... though he paused as he realized something.

“What if...” he scratched his chin as a fire seemed to suddenly light behind his eyes,

“... if there is a class associated with wearing armour?”

The more he thought about it, the more he smiled, and soon a devilish smile formed on his face, and his curiosity drove him for the next few moments as he immediately crafted armor for one of the smaller skeletons.

The new armour was smaller to suit the level one skeleton, but just as thick as the spectral armour of the level four skeletons, which gave it a thicker, heavier look overall.

As it equipped the armor, the small skeleton looked more like an undead dwarf with hulking armour that it kept from its previous life.

After crafting greaves, a helmet and vambraces, he still wasn't pleased, so Jay went the extra step and finished its whole armor set, adding a basic chest-plate and some upper leg armour.

Unfortunately for the poor skeleton, Jay had to remove its head to fit the chest armor into place, but once it was on it was a snug fit.

Initially, Jay was trying to fit the armor to the skeletons body and didn't give a single thought about aesthetic, but it ended up having a gothic style about it, and despite its basic structure it looked quite imposing.

He wanted to craft gauntlets (hand armor) and sabatons (foot armor) but that kind of armor was a bit more advanced, requiring moving parts, and right now it was simply beyond Jay's scrimshaw skill level.

Apart from its feet, hands, and gaps between the armor pieces, everything else was now covered by chunky light-gray armor. It truly looked like a little soldier ready to take on a fearsome beast three times its size.

“Hmm,” Jay smiled, “with enough time I could cover it completely and no one would even know it's a skeleton...”

“Well, I guess it depends on what the analysis skill tells them.” he thought.

“I wonder... if Anya analyzes Blue, would it tell her its name and percentage health, or treat it as a monster and tell her everything else...”

Jay decided he would ask her when he next saw her, which would not be long as he headed to the guild, anyway.

After its upgrade, the skeletons' green, hungry eyes peered out from behind its T-visor as it seemed to want to test out its new armor - perhaps even more than Jay did.

These level one skeletons had not had the privilege of fighting monsters yet, and that seemed to only add to their slaying spirit, their bloody hunger.

However, Jay wasn't quite done with upgrading his heavy infantry skeleton.

Unlike the zweihander skeleton, this one still had a hand free, so he created one last item for it.

Before their beady floating eyes, a kite shield formed. It was slightly too large for the level one skeleton, but Jay wanted it that way, as he believed it would force it into becoming some sort of heavily armored soldier class.

After crafting the shield, Jay thought he was probably close to leveling up his scrimshaw skill, but he remembered he had to craft multiple daggers to level it last time, so he decided he wouldn't grind it to the next level. At least not today.

With a dagger in one hand and its shield in the other, the heavy infantry skeleton was finally ready.

The skeleton seemed to struggle with the weighty shield, but Jay didn't care, as it was meant to be heavy, and Jay thought this would only contribute more to its role choice.

"It will be fine once it levels up anyway... and then I will find out if its armour grows with it too." Jay thought as he watched it.

He hoped that was the case, but he knew its weapons wouldn't grow along with it, so he guessed its shield wouldn't either, meaning it would soon be a comfortable size for this undead.

With a nod towards Blue, the skeletons departed, but Jay gave them one last order as he noticed one of them was too slow to keep up.

"Keep the armored one at the front." Jay commanded.

His training style was pretty hands-off but so far it was effective.

The heavy-armor skeleton was forced to move to the front, and because of that, all the skeletons had to move at jogging speed - rather than at their inhuman sprinting speed like they usually would.

"Good." Jay nodded, seeing his skeletons leave in an orderly march.

Jay watched them pass along the silent river and head into the darkened tunnel before venturing deeper into the mine. He had a proud smile on his face as he watched his soldiers carrying out their duties.

“Alright, no slacking.” He said to himself as he willed to exit the dungeon.

Jay left the bone pile in the dungeon in case any of the skeletons leveled up or needed to heal using their bone eater skill - though he knew he would have to come back at some point, as the level one’s didn’t come with the recovery skill. They would probably die and become food for the other skeletons if he left them long enough.

Still, they were only here to get him experience and possibly some more silt-wolf bones too.

After leaving, Jay made his way to the guild, periodically practising his mana sense skill along the way.

As he got back to the path and walked through the rocky outcrops, he noticed more of those black guards standing outside the guild entrance.

“... Damn, more of these guys?” Jay frowned lightly as he slowed his steps; these guards made him feel like they could almost read his mind.

“I’ll have to adjust my plans.”

Diluted Intelligence

“Young master, please reconsider going out today. You only just woke up after what happened...” Hodley said, standing in the hallway with a concerned look.

“Ugh. Get out of my way.” Matheson pushed him to the side, ignoring him with an angry look.

Matheson had mostly recovered after being pierced by treant antlers.

His bones still felt bruised, but they were mostly fine and he wanted to get back to training as quickly as possible.

The pain during the attack was so great that he simply forgot the experience; his brain wouldn't let him remember it.

Yet for Matheson, that changed nothing anyway. This was just another setback.

Whether or not he remembered the painful experience, he only cared about getting stronger. He had a better grasp of the world now and knew that strength reigned - even all the political games played by men he considered cockroaches had one purpose, and that was to gather strength so they could impose their will onto others.

Similarly to Jay, he wanted freedom too, though admittedly of a different sort.

As Matheson left the gate of the mansion, he noticed a guard with heavy black armor.

He immediately turned around and went back to grab Hodley by the collar, who was still following him around begging him to rest.

“Why are the mage hunters here?” he glared at Hodley like a wolf ready to strike.

Matheson thought he wasn't important or strong enough for his father to send a mage hunter to guard or imprison him, but neither did he think he would be exiled to Losla in the first place.

It seemed something big had changed while he was recovering.

“A-ah, young master. I did some investigating but I shouldn't tell you here... Please, come inside and have some tea.” Hodley let out a nervous smile, glancing up the street.

Matheson glared at him with disdain and grunted, letting go of his collar and walking past Hodley back into the mansion.

Hodley quickly followed. They both entered a private room and Hodley quickly told Matheson everything he knew from his information gathering efforts - which was actually just asking a mage hunter some questions and providing a large sum of gold.

It's probably why there was still a mage hunter loitering around their mansion - to get more gold.

After listening for a moment, Matheson understood everything - at least everything that Hodley understood.

"So, they're looking for something powerful..." he nodded as if he was deep in thought.

"Yes! Oh, isn't it exciting. To deploy the mage hunters even to Losla. It must be an amazing treasure I'm guessing; I heard the royals deployed them across the whole kingdom. I can only wonder what it could be, I bet it could make anyone's dreams come true," Hodley looked whimsical as he nursed his tea on his stomach.

Matheson was quiet for a moment before he stood up and he peered out the window at the mage hunter in the street.

"He doesn't seem to be looking for anything..." he said as he stared for a moment.

"Well, maybe he's making sure other people haven't found it," Hodley replied quickly, and a little nervously.

"What is the treasure?"

"I don't know, I only know that it's powerful. He wouldn't say more than that."

Matheson looked for a moment longer before deciding.

"Fine. I will stay until lunch, but no longer." he sighed.

"Very well. Thank you, young master." Hodley bowed as he left the room, even though Matheson wasn't even looking at his formal display anyway.

Matheson quietly remained at the window, his eyes fixed on the mage hunter outside as another passed by.

"Seems like they're creating guard and patrol routes..." he thought.

Viladore's lips curled into a cunning grin as the mage hunters made their homes inside the guild.

However, apart from Viladore, everyone in the guild was tense and high-strung. Even Lillian wasn't her usual self - she was actually acting sincerely kind, and the only person who felt normal was Viladore.

Sure, while Viladore was doing forbidden research, but he could easily hide all that. Even the black cube would seem like just another strange mana stone, and it wouldn't move or even make a noise unless Viladore wanted it to.

Yes, Viladore was relaxed for a different reason, a smile forming on his face, though this was the cunning smile of opportunity.

"Now... How do I make them arrest Jay, but keep him alive while also imprisoning him near me..."

"Or even give me custody over him for research?" his eyes gleamed as he continued to fiendishly smile.

Now that Viladore wouldn't need Sullivan's help or permission, because of the mage hunters being here, he had thought of new ways to achieve his goals.

Suddenly, Viladore got up from his desk and left his room. He then went to another room in the association where he knew some of the higher-ranking mage hunters were having a meeting.

Two black-armor guards stood silently outside the door and Viladore quickly stood at attention before them.

"Ex-research division three, sub-division eight, materials analyst number three-two, requesting a hearing,"

The mage hunters didn't move, but after a moment, its helmet tilted forward and looked directly at Viladore, immediately making him tense.

"Granted. Twenty Seconds." a husky deep voice came from somewhere within the armour as the helmet looked upwards again.

Viladore knew what this meant and patiently waited in the hallway.

After exactly twenty seconds the mage hunter suddenly stepped to the side with a heavy thump as its foot landed, revealing the door behind it. Viladore knew this was his queue to enter.

While focusing on keeping his breathing calm, he slowly turned the handle.

As he stepped inside, Viladore felt even more tense.

Despite being a powerful mage, he felt like he walked into a room of wolves; each of them having the power and authority to execute him on the spot - and with relative ease at that.

Inside, two more guards stood at either side of the room, while two other mage hunters sat in front of a desk.

One more sat on the other side of the desk and was looking over files which included maps, recent events, and deaths. Still, none of them had removed their helmets as they looked over documents.

Viladore thought it was strange information to be looking at, but he ignored it as it was none of his business anyway.

Viladore saluted, remembering his old training, "Ex-researcher -"

"What do you want?" They cut him off mid-sentence.

Clearly, he was no longer recognized as a mage hunter. He was a bug like the rest of the civilians.

"I- I was just seeing if I could offer my services and help in any way. I was part of the ma... safety bearers after all." he nodded with a shaky smile.

One guard suddenly stepped forward and held out a goblet filled with a silvery liquid.

"I see." Viladore nodded.

He knew exactly what he had to do. It was an identification practice, and he plunged his hand into it before slowly bringing it out again.

Some of the silvery liquid clung to his skin and remained on the top of his hand, forming words.

[Viladore. Telekine. Materials Research.]

Viladore held his hand out so that the mage hunter could read it before wiping the silver liquid back into the goblet.

"Hmph. You're useless. Fuck off." he grunted.

Viladore opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but no words came out as he feared saying anything may lead to his death.

The pressure the guards were emitting on him only made it worse, and he realized he would probably just waste their time.

So far, the mage hunter officer only said two sentences and Viladore only dreaded what he may say next; he was not willing to test his patience.

The door opened behind him and a guard inside the room stood closer to him, pushing him out slowly.

Viladore didn't need another clue to leave immediately.

"Fuck.. how do I manipulate such aggressive fucking idiots..." he gritted his teeth as he walked back to his room. He finally looked as tense as everyone else.

"Still... I would say my introduction turned out well. I didn't die after all," he shrugged.

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Guild Repurposed

Jay decided not to bring his bone helminth into the guild. If someone grabbed the bone amulet, he wasn't sure what would happen.

He had planned to take it right into the guild and analyze it now that it was level three; he was even going to have it in its natural form and let it cast spells alongside him at the target rocks.

But now that these strange black guards were here? He wasn't dumb enough to take such a chance, and neither did he have absurdly good luck.

Worst-case scenario: The helminth would automatically attack someone and reveal Jay as a necromancer - they would execute him on the spot.

This was slightly more likely with all the aggression that the mage hunters were showing him.

Best-case scenario? They would leave him alone and he would copy the necrotic bolt spell from his helminth today.

Obviously he could just learn it another time. The benefits came nowhere near enough to outweigh the risks, even though he sensed the Helminth was in a relaxed state.

As he approached the association, he was finally in view of the guards and knew they could see him, but he still needed to ditch his helminth.

He suddenly grabbed the top of his pants before looking around and walking behind a rocky outcrop, out of sight.

With no one watching he had the bone helminth reformed into its physical form. As it sat on the ground looking at him it snapped its jaw a few times, as if greeting its master again.

Before hiding it, Jay finally analyzed it.

< [Bone Helminth Level 3] >

[Type - Undead, Parasite, Spellcaster]

[HP 50/50]

[MP 30/30]

<[Skills]>

- [Sentinel Form]-

- The helminth coils around its master, becoming an un-targetable piece of their armour.

- Periodically lashes out at attackers or fires spectral bolts at foes.

- When its master is attacked, the helminth loses health instead.
- [Natural Form]-
- Allows HP and MP regeneration.
- +200% HP and MP regeneration.
- The helminth detaches from its master and acts as an individual construct.

[Spectral Bolt]

- Its jaw unhinges and slowly winds open before quickly snapping shut, a bolt of deathly energy firing out through its closing jaws.
- 5 magic damage (necrotic)
- Can only hold 15 bolts; new bolt produced every 300 seconds.
- 1 mana

[Ensnare]

- Can ensnare enemies and root them to the ground, making them unable to move.
- 3 second snare.
- 1 minute cooldown.

[Symbiotic] (Passive)

- Starts at level 1. Levels up with its creator.

[Grave Visitor] (Passive)

- Can travel freely and silently through the soil and ground
- Can covertly collect a nest of bones underground

[Grave Soil Miasma] (Passive)

- Enemies near the bone nest will be distracted by hallucinations

“Fifty HP? It was only ten last time I checked, what a great bonus.” Jay smiled.

It was especially good since the helminth used its HP to shield him when it was on his body. It was basically a free fifty HP.

Next, Jay saw its new skill [Grave Soil Miasma].

“Mi-as-ma?” he said slowly, “I wonder how effective it will be...”

“I wonder if it can control the hallucinations?” he thought, scratching his chin.

“Ah. I better get back before they get suspicious.” he said with a sigh before turning to the helminth.

“Hide underground and don’t come near the guild. Don’t let anyone see you either.” he said.

The helminth lowered its head and seemed to look sad for a moment as it looked in the guild's direction.

Jay watched it with a raised brow, wondering what was going through its hollow skull and its strange behavior.

The helminth turned back to Jay and snapped its jaws once before burying itself underground.

"I guess it really wanted to be with me?" Jay thought.

With a shrug, he partly undid his pants and walked back to the path, doing them up completely just as he got back to the track.

"Actually, come to think of it... maybe I do need to pee..." he shrugged,

"Oh well. It can wait."

As Jay approached the guild, there was a startling difference: the floating mana stone gate had disappeared.

The boulders used to form it had all been dumped just outside the gate, no longer floating or even rippling with light-blue veins.

Jay thought it was a shame, but he guessed that perhaps it was meant to represent something - what it represented, he wasn't sure.

Perhaps the mage hunters simply didn't need a gate.

As he passed by the black-armor guards, neither of them questioned him, and Jay didn't look up at them, though he heard one of their helmets turn with a soft ceramic-grinding sound.

Still, Jay decided not to look, not after what happened last time he stared at their armor.

Behind the black armored guards were some of the normal Losla guards, but they said nothing either; they looked even more tense than Jay as they stood at attention like statues. It was like they were about to welcome a royal to the humble compound.

"Huh. I guess I won't be asking them who these guys are." Jay thought as he kept walking.

He kept walking past quietly as he went to ask Margaret.

Beyond the gate, the courtyard felt completely different.

There were no adventurers practising, none passing in and out of the guild to trade, and none of the usual lively atmosphere. It was eerily quiet, as if the whole place had been abandoned.

“Lara, the portal is almost ready. Another hour and I can activate it at any time. Have you heard anything at the guild?” Lannister asked as he formed mana into glowing golden glyphs around the stink-rat marsh.

Lara was holding an invisible crystal, while a blue string of mana went from it into her wrist.

“Not yet.” she frowned.

Lannister nodded and went back to forming the glyphs and runes.

“... Damn. Why didn’t he return to the guild last night? That would’ve made this so much easier.” She thought as she shook her head.

While monitoring the guild with her ears, she was monitoring the forest with her eyes, and also, with her mana too; as a gravity mage, she could detect changes in the gravitational field if any of those mage hunters in the heavy, thick armour ventured closer.

The heavier they were, the easier they would be to detect.

Thankfully, the mage hunters hadn’t yet started scouting the surrounding forests; many of them were resting from the journey and setting up guard or patrol routes.

Thankfully, there were few adventurers in the guild today, so there wasn’t too much background noise.

A few moments later, she narrowed her eyes as she clutched the spying crystal a little more tightly.

“I hear someone now, can’t tell if it’s Jay though. I’ll switch over to the one we left in his room.”

Quiet Indifference

Walking into the association, Jay glanced at Margaret.

She glanced back at Jay without a smile or a hello and quickly went back to her notes.

Jay was glad that a black-armor guard did not replace her, but she was acting very differently, and Jay decided to mimic her distant and detached behavior.

“Hello. Who are these new guards?” Jay approached the desk and asked quietly.

Margaret didn’t look up for a moment, and Jay thought it was quite rude, but he soon understood why.

“These are the safety bearers. They protect us from people who become monsters or get dangerous classes. Isn’t it good that they’re here?” she said, stressing the words ‘dangerous classes,’ “We’re safer than ever, so don’t mind them.” She added.

“Fuck.” Jay’s eyes widened for a fraction of a second before he blinked. He stopped breathing for a moment as he knew they were both being watched, and that this was a warning; he was one of such monsters which would be hunted by them, and since Jay knew what she was like, it was clear she didn’t believe those words at all.

“I’m in the middle of my enemies.” he thought, trying not to look around.

He quickly thought of something innocent to say after nodding for a little too long.

“Oh, good, but doesn’t that mean there will be a monster coming?”

“Well, if it does, I’m sure we’ll be in expert hands. Anyway, I have work to do, so what do you want, adventurer?” a slight smile appeared on her face before it disappeared just as quickly.

“Ah, nothing else... thanks.” Jay tried to say as casually as possible.

“She probably doesn’t want to talk much around them...” he thought as he walked to the hallway.

“And showing me any favoritism or friendliness might be suspicious I’m guessing, so she was a little rude.”

Jay had to pass by another guard as he walked to his room, and as he walked by he tried to keep his breathing as calm as possible.

Now that he realized these were soldiers specifically equipped and trained to hunt and kill people like him, they had a completely different feel about them.

If they flashed killing intent at him as an innocent civilian, they would definitely not hesitate to execute him on the spot if he was any sort of threat.

He felt like each of his footsteps were way too loud as he walked down the wooden hallway past the guard.

Finally he reached his room and after he closed the door, he couldn't stop himself from breathing more quickly and feeling dizzy. He almost felt like his face was red, but there was no way to tell; he was having a mild panic attack.

He leaned against the door for a moment as he got his breathing under control.

"I need to leave Losla." he whispered to himself.

"But first, I need to calm down and think." He thought as he sat on his bed and tried to control his breathing.

As he calmed himself down, he noticed an envelope on the bedside table.

"Huh, it's from Sullivan?"

Without waiting a second longer he tore the envelope open and read.

[Jay. The guild isn't safe for you, but it never was.]

"Yeah, no shit." Jay murmured as he kept reading with a frown.

[I know somewhere that you will be safe, and this is where I am sending you and Anya.]

[The safety bearers are coming - they're also known as the mage hunters. If they know about your class, they will execute you.]

"Coming? He must have written this before they arrived." Jay pursed his lips regrettably.

[Someone named Lannister will soon contact you. Trust them to take you to this safe place, an academy, and do everything they say until you get there.]

[I may or may not see you again, so please take care of Anya. I have risked my life to protect you, so protect her in exchange.]

[With that being said, I have left you with one last gift under the bed. I hope it serves you well.]

Jay checked under the bed and found a large folded up dark-brown leather blanket.

“Huh, a blanket?... Is he implying something?” Jay was confused for a moment.

He analyzed it.

< [Noon-leather Blanket] >

[Blocks mana flow]

“Hm.. blocks mana flow? Interesting.” Jay gazed at it carefully.

The blanket was leathery on one side and soft on the other, so he was glad he had a water-proof, warm blanket.

It tempted Jay to test its mana-blocking abilities, but he wasn't sure if mage hunters could detect his necrotic mana, and didn't know what capabilities the mage hunters had, so he decided not to; this was his first time learning about noon-leather and coming across the mage hunters after all - both would rarely ever come to such a small and irrelevant town.

After storing the blanket in his inventory he had calmed down and read the rest of the letter, though there wasn't much more other than a 'goodbye', and a 'please destroy this letter after reading it'.

Still, Jay stashed the letter away.

“Perhaps it will come in handy someday, or perhaps it will help to light a fire, who knows.” he shrugged.

Jay was realizing now that if he left Losla, he would have to survive in the wilderness, but now that he learned of this 'safe place' that Sullivan was talking about, he put his plans to buy survival materials aside.

It wasn't like he would need much survival gear anyway though, as he had his swag (small tent), cooking utensils, and other comforts such as his chair which he scavenged from his own house.

Either way, he knew he had to leave - and he could only hope this 'safe place' was very, very far away from these mage hunters.

Slowly, he realized his whole life was about to get turned upside down. He came here to train today, and now all of this was happening.

Jay still had low mana after all the crafting he did in the cave, so before leaving the guild to plot his next moves he meditated and bring it back to being full, as well as to calm his nerves and help him think clearly.

Viladore was almost chuckling in his room as he saw his cube growing; it meant one thing - Jay was back.

Now all he needed to do was provide an excuse to have him imprisoned here, or even gifted to him as a research subject.

While researching on live humans was illegal in this kingdom, they would not consider Jay a human if he was simply too powerful, and Viladore's first idea for a lie was that Jay was an F-variant class.

"Hmm, but If I go with that lie, they will check his class after they arrest him... dammit. How do I get around that." he pursed his lips as he tried to come up with ideas.

He needed the mage hunters to arrest Jay without killing him or checking his class.

Soon however, he was distracted by his cube. To him, watching it grow was mesmerizing - though he knew it would soon stop when Jay left, and so he got right back to scheming once more.

Jay was quietly meditating in the room; his heart calm as he nourished his mind with mana.

"Jay?" a woman's voice broke the peaceful silence from somewhere in the room.

Jay immediately opened his eyes, startled as he looked around.

"What the hell was that?" he saw the door was still closed, he was sure he was alone.

"Perhaps I just connected to some spirit?" he wondered.

Again, a female voice sounded from somewhere in the room.

"Hello, Jay?"

Jay looked around immediately but couldn't find the source of the sound, though he cautiously replied.

"... hello?" he said slowly.

"Hello, Jay. Are you enjoying the room? How is your stay going? By the way, what was your last name?"

“Uh... Yeah it’s alright? And it’s Hart, Jay Hart.” he answered, wondering why he was being asked how his room was.

Lara was the person behind the woman’s voice; she had to ask such questions to confirm that it was actually Jay she was talking to - after all, they had never met.

“Good. I am Lara, Sullivan may have told you about a safe place and I -”

“Well, he mentioned someone else, but not a ‘Lara’.” Jay cut her off.

“...” Lara shook her head, disappointed that they did not mention her. She continued, “... Lannister is my colleague and we are here to recruit you - but time is of the essence. Please come to the stink-rat marsh as soon as possible.”

Jay didn’t reply as he thought for a moment.

He hesitated to trust strangers, but Sullivan’s letter urged him to trust them, and he had no other options for the moment other than to flee into the wilderness.

“I’ll be there.” he bit his lip and sighed as he replied.

“Come as soon as you can. Also, grab the items I left under your pillow. You’ll need them.”

“Right.” he nodded as he tossed his pillow aside.

He found a strange hexagonal silver ball which had polished sides; each of them were like tiny mirrors.

The other thing he found was a purple crystal.

“Add mana to the crystal until it disappears.” the voice said.

“Uh... so... I’ll do it when I leave the guild.” Jay said slowly; he was still unsure if his necrotic mana would trigger some sort of advanced mage hunter alarm.

“Ok, well just hurry and leave, we have little time.”

Jay stashed away the items instead of analyzing them; he decided to do it while he walked to Losla to save time.

“Be quiet, I’m about to open the door.” he said quietly to where her voice was coming from.

Lara disconnected from the crystal and turned to Lannister.

“He’s on his way.”

“Good,” he nodded as he stood up, “It’s ready, we just have to trigger it. I’ll set up more minor teleport traps in the forest, just in case.”

“Good. Anya should be here soon too.”

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A Quick Stop

Viladore watched Jay exit the guild as his black cube stopped growing again. He overheard the conversation between Lara and Jay as he had his own listening device in the room.

“Fuck... dammit, fuck... what do I do.” he gritted his teeth.

His future was slowly walking right out of the guild; his mind was running as it looked for ideas.

Suddenly his lips curled into an evil grin.

“Well, as it turns out, giving him the goblin wand came with some strings attached. There’s no record of him buying one, and he wouldn’t have found it in a low level dungeon around Losla.” He grinned, “Ah, I am so generous... but I’ll need something else to evoke a reaction from the mage hunters...”

Viladore began writing a formal letter to Sullivan alleging Jay’s thievery. After dropping off the letter at Sullivan’s door, he planned to inform the mage hunters. He would have told the mage hunters first, but this was part of the current operating procedure.

Viladore believed that if he quickly told the mage hunters about Sullivan’s inaction, then Sullivan wouldn’t be able to do anything and Jay would be brought back to the guild - made to give him back the goblin wand and then held there for a few days.

He planned to accuse Jay of stealing something from the mage hunters too, which would be enough for them to spur into action rather than letting the local guards handle it.

This wasn’t the end goal of Viladore’s scheme, but he believed it would give himself more time to think of another plan to keep Jay there indefinitely.

[600 Exp]

The exp from the dying silt-wolves relieved some of the tension Jay was feeling, though it seemed the pace of the skeletons was slow as the heavy-armor skeleton was made to march at the front.

As Jay walked towards the gate, he unconsciously quickened his pace a little; the slightest shiver traveling down his back - though he had other things on his mind.

“I want to stop at the wolf’s quarry and pick up the skeletons and all their freshly crafted weapons, but it’s on the north-west side of town. It’ll take too long...”

It was a little disappointing, but he could craft more weapons for them anyway.

“Besides, that woman sounded urgent, so I’ll only stop at the butchery and pick up the gold. It’s along the way anyway.”

“A quick in and out, then I’ll be gone.” he nodded as he went down the hill.

As Jay looked over Losla and its cobblestone streets for perhaps the very last time, he felt somewhat melancholic. It tempted him to slow down and start reminiscing about his hometown, but the more he thought about it, the more he realized he couldn’t really pinpoint many warm, pleasant memories.

In Losla, his life had just been a constant struggle as he worked by himself as an underage butcher, and then as a dangerous adventurer when he received his class.

No one had ever seemed to care about him. This realization, while cold and empty at first, almost felt freeing to his heart. There was no one to say goodbye to. No one to miss. No one to worry about... no graves to attend someday.

“Oh yeah...” he thought, realizing that his life in Losla had kind of sucked. He wasn’t a burden to anyone, but was invisible and alone, which was almost as bad as being persecuted. At least people who had insults hurled at them had some form of human connection.

“Actually, fuck this town. I can’t remember the last time someone helped me with anything.” he sped up even more as he walked.

“People were buying my meat and never so much as cared that they were buying it from a child. I even gave discounts to those in need... But did anyone ever help me? No.”

“And sure, some would smile, fewer still would ask how I’m going, but ultimately it seems like no one really cared... come to think of it, I’m glad I never told them. I would just despise their help at this point. I served them, and they forgot me; I’m forgettable.”

“When I became a higher level, people started looking at me but hardly anyone approached... those who did only wanted a favor or some extra hands,” he pursed his lips.

“Yeah... I think I’m just about done with helping others and receiving nothing in return... I won’t be like that anymore. I’m not alone now, no, the truth is, it has always been me, by myself, alone. But I won’t blame them, I will accept it. I will embrace it.”

“Besides, now that I’m getting stronger, people need me and I don’t need them,” he nodded. “Yes... I’m sure one day they will beg for my help. I wonder if I’ll give it.”

As Jay walked out of sight of the association, he finally checked the items he had found under the pillow.

<[Warp Disruptor]>

[~Charged~]

[Prevents warp, teleportation and trans-reality effects]

[Requires mana to function]

[Current charge: Can disrupt (7) times]

“Anti-teleport, huh? Strange. Why would they give me this?”

It didn’t really make sense to Jay. Wasn’t he supposed to be leaving today? - If anything, he expected something to help with teleporting rather than to block it.

With a shrug he stored it away anyway and checked the purple crystal.

< [Stealth Shard] >

[~Attuned~]

[~Uncharged~]

[Can be attuned to another stealth shard, forming a connection.]

[Exchanged Senses - activated when charged with mana]

[Exchanged Senses: no longer visible, but can now communicate]

Next, he added mana to the purple crystal.

“Cool...” he watched as it became black and then vanished from sight - though he could still feel its weight in his hand.

For some reason he almost felt dizzy while holding it but seeing nothing, it was like his brain couldn’t make sense of it so he looked away.

“Hello?” he spoke right into it.

Thankfully, he did everything correctly as Lara responded shortly after.

“Hey Jay. Store the crystal in your inventory and you should be able to hear my voice in your head. To talk back to me, you will need to take the crystal out again though.”

“Got it. I’m on my way now unless you have any other instructions.” He then stashed it away as Lara said nothing in response.

As Jay approached Losla he saw more of the black armored guards. The sheen from the stone-like metal was hard to miss.

There were a few other villagers walking around the streets now, so he felt safe trying one of his new abilities: mark.

When the guard had their back turned, Jay stared at him and used the spell.

Suddenly, a long red strand of energy grew out of Jay’s body and attached to the guard.

“Shit...” Jay paused in shock, seeing the large red strand between him and the guard. It was like a giant bed sheet. The guard would execute him instantly if he knew a spell was being cast on him. Jay thought this was his end.

“Fuck... how could the skill say ‘undetected, invisible’ and do something as flashy as this?”

As Jay watched though, people seemed to ignore it though; they kept going about their business as if nothing was happening. Some of them even walked right through the red strand, passing harmlessly through it as if it were a mist.

Jay sighed in relief as he realized only he could see it.

Thankfully, the mage hunter didn’t turn around either, so it seemed that it truly was ‘undetected’.

Slowly, the red strand left Jay and coiled around the guard before disappearing.

Jay kept walking past as innocently as he could - but now there was a difference: he could sense the guard.

Similar to his necrotic sense skill, he knew exactly where the guard was even while he wasn’t looking at him.

While he couldn’t sense which direction the guard was looking, he was nevertheless satisfied with the skill.

Besides, one maximum mana to track an enemy was an excellent trade-off.

“I guess it would be ten mana if I used all the marks, but that’s fine.” he nodded with a sneaky smile.

As Jay looked over the mark skill, it was now at 1/10 marks. He realized the skill didn’t have a level, so unfortunately, he could only have ten active marks at once.

He had a cheeky smile as he thought about marking every human in sight, but he thought it was probably best that he couldn’t.

Still, as he passed through Losla, he saw a few more guards, and added two more marks.

Jay ducked around a corner and his butchery shop was in sight - but he sensed something wrong: One of the marks was moving towards him, and at a high speed too.

Beginning to panic a little he looked around for somewhere to hide. A small alleyway on the other side of the street.

He dashed into the alley; it was some trash piled up on one side, along with a stray cat which quickly scurried away, startled as Jay charged in.

The mark was already in the street, and Jay thought he was too slow, though to Jay’s surprise the mark passed by the alleyway. A small puff of wind entered the alleyway as the mage hunter passed by at high speed.

Jay released a heavy breath as he felt like death passed over him.

He stared back into the street, wondering what the hell was making the mage hunter speed through the streets so quickly... and coincidentally in his direction. Jay definitely wouldn’t have seen them coming if he didn’t use the mark skill, but even with the warning it wasn’t enough to evade; They simply ignored him as it seemed the mage hunter had other priorities, uncaring of any peasant it trampled.

He sensed the black guard speeding down the street, so he crept to the end of the passage and peeked around the corner. He expected them to be out of sight by the time he got to the corner, though they suddenly halted.

“... what?” Jay hoped it was a mere coincidence the mage hunter stopped right outside of his butchery.

Search

“I have a crime to report, and it seems the guild leader doesn’t care so I am bringing it to you.”

Viladore gained another audience with the mage hunters - though it cost him gold this time.

After attempting his persuasion he noticed they simply didn’t care, so it forced him to add a riskier lie.

“It seems he has stolen one of your gambesons from the guild laundry area too.”

It was a reasonable lie, as the guild had been ‘gifted’ with laundry duty for the mage hunters.

The mage hunter slammed their fist down on the table, causing a shimmer of blue energy to travel across it as the table was reinforced with magic.

The mage hunter officer stared at Viladore for a moment; waves of killing intent quickly filled the room and almost made Viladore feel like he was suffocating.

The mage hunter seemed like they wanted to sentence the thief to death, but now Viladore had to spend the next few minutes trying to diffuse the mage hunter.

He wanted a strong enough reaction so that they would bother with arresting Jay, but not so strong that they would execute him. It seems that Viladore miscalculated.

Still, Viladore had the gambeson in his inventory, so he could simply ‘find’ it again and say it was misplaced.

As for the other ‘stolen’ item, well, Jay still had the goblin wand which was originally a gift.

Viladore thought that his ex-mage hunter status, along with Jay having ‘stolen’ his goblin wand, would be enough to gain wardenship of Jay.

They then removed Viladore from the room - he left them, unsure if they were going to act at all. Such was the nature of the mage hunters.

Jay remained staring from the alleyway as the guard suddenly saw Jay's butcher shop, their boots cracked up parts of the cobblestone street as they stopped their momentum immediately.

"What is he doing..."

CRASH!

"H-!" Jay had to stop himself from yelling as he watched on in horror.

The guard suddenly jumped right through the front window of his shop, his house, shattering the glass and leaving a large hole behind.

Another mage hunter showed up shortly after and didn't even need to kick the door open - they simply ran through it like it was paper.

Screaming and yelling sounded as more things continued to smash within the shop.

Suddenly a young man's limp body was effortlessly tossed out of the shop.

They threw Trenly through the window, his body scraping across the street as he squirmed from pain.

Jay stepped back slightly, hiding more of himself in the alleyway. He couldn't blink as he watched on, powerless to do anything.

A mage hunter jumped back out through the window and stood over Trenly.

"Argh! Someone help!" he called with no answer.

Trenly's arm was broken as he writhed in pain in the street; all the onlookers didn't make a sound as they feared the mage hunters. All they could do was watch.

The mage hunter stood over Trenly with a hint of anger in his eyes.

"Where is Jay?" he growled.

"I - I don't know!" he whimpered.

The mage hunter planted a foot right onto Trenly's ankle, twisting his boot on it.

"Graah!" he yelled in pain.

"I - I really don't know, please, please stop!"

Jay couldn't keep watching, especially now that he knew they were looking for him. The sheer brutality of their tactics was hair-raising.

He dashed back into the alleyway and took a deep breath as he tried to calm himself.

“Fuck... they’re looking for me? Have they found out?” he gritted his teeth as he looked down the alley.

He quickly hid behind some large half-broken barrels.

“Fuck. I should have just gone straight to meet Lara...” he thought, but had an idea.

“... maybe Lara can help?”

Jay quickly pulled out the invisible crystal.

“Lara, the mage hunters are looking for me. They broke into my house when I wasn’t home. I’m still in Losla.”

No response.

Jay wasn’t going to just wait to hear her voice, his life was in his own hands, so he began to quietly summon his skeletons.

There weren’t many hiding places in the alley so he made them hide under some junk and not move, blending into a trash pile.

They would be his only defense so he wanted them close by and ready to fight - not that they would last long against the mage hunters.

Next, he used the disguise stone to change his name and level, though under such stressful circumstances thinking of a name was harder than it had to be.

<[Status Concealer]>

[Input Name] [Bob]

[Input Level] [4]

[On]

[Bob - Level 4]

He believed the average name and low level wouldn’t make people even look twice at him, and that’s what he wanted, however there was still a problem: his face and appearance still wouldn’t change.

It would only be a matter of time before he was recognized.

One thing was still true: Jay needed to escape Losla.

~Adventurer Association, Losla~

BOOM!

Viladore’s door was suddenly blown off its hinges and turned into splinters of wood and dust.

Despite the intense energy, Sullivan entered with a calm demeanor - though a raging savage was hiding behind his eyes.

“Viladore. I received your letter, and I heard the mage hunters are going to arrest Jay. What is the meaning of this?” His voice was as smooth and cunning as a vampire.

Viladore sneered, “He’s a petty thief. I requested they do something about him, since you have done nothing.”

Sullivan didn’t fall for Viladore’s trap. It was clearly a betrayal, and there was no use convincing someone who was lying to your face. Viladore was lying, and they both knew it.

Sullivan’s eyes glowed brightly, and Viladore’s responded with their own shine, and for just a moment, some objects in the room floated before -
BOOM!!!

The desk between them turned into splinters. The floor cracked. Sullivan had blown apart the wall behind Viladore as his body instantly went from being normal to ruptured and bleeding.

Viladore gritted his teeth as he spat blood in anger. At the last moment, he shielded his black cube to save it from destruction.

Sullivan’s eyes narrowed on the cube, sensing the surrounding mana. Sullivan spoke - his voice filled of mountains of ghastly power and threats of death, yet only one word came out.

“Stop.”

Visible waves of air rippled from his mouth as he spoke right at Viladore’s face.

The force radiated from Sullivan, pushing the rest of the objects in Viladore’s office out of the broken wall, though most of them had turned to dust or crushed under the pressure. Everything was in ruins.

Viladore froze for a moment as his skin rippled. His body told him not to move a single muscle as he froze in fear, obeying the powerful spell-word.

Sullivan grabbed the black cube. In a split second, he took something dear from Viladore. A kind of justice would take place.

Viladore’s eyes bulged in fear and disbelief, his body trembling with anger.

“This seems important to you.” Sullivan whispered, looking at the cube.

Yet before Viladore could reply, Sullivan’s face turned from its calm look as it twisted in a fury of raging anger. His fingers dug into the cube.

Suddenly, he threw it out the window with such speed that it caused a whistle in the air.

Viladore's eyes were red as all he could do was watch. He grit his teeth so hard that blood flowed from his lips.

Sullivan's adventurer strength caused it to travel far beyond the walls of the guild. It was gone.

Sullivan turned back to Viladore to deal out more justice, but heavy footsteps came from the hallway. The mage hunters moved.

All of it happened so fast, but not fast enough for the elite mage hunting soldiers of the ancient Astratan kingdom.

The mage hunters asked no questions. They were here to detain both Sullivan and Viladore, and whoever would threaten their position.

They stomped through the door, turning it to splinters as the effect of the spell-word ended. Viladore could finally move again.

"He tried to kill me!" he yelled, blood flowing from his mouth.

The mage hunters knew Viladore was an ex-researcher who worked for them, while Sullivan was exiled here for sheltering a variant. They said nothing, but showed favoritism to Viladore.

While they planned to arrest them both, they would take Sullivan captive first.

They didn't speak as they turned their swords to Sullivan. Sullivan misread their intentions.

His eyes glowed with power again.

"Kneel."

Another wave of force pushed everything back.

The ground cracked under the spell; the walls barely remained standing even though they were reinforced with magic.

It smashed Viladore into a wall, knocking him out.

He pushed the mage hunter's back, but not far. Their armor blocked most of the spell. No one was kneeling.

However, they considered this a direct attack on the mage hunters, the royals, and all of Astrata. They fed their black armor with mana, preparing themselves to execute this offender of peace, justice and safety.

[Auxiliary Chapter] Endless Dispute

The wall is covered with senseless, disordered patterns of black and white; its length endless in either direction. Its height? Not high enough.

Each day it moves, shifting itself backwards and forwards. No one knows how the wall moves or why, and no one has even seen it move.

This is the immortal wall.

“Why do we live near the wall? Why do we guard it?” Young one asked.

Elder pointed backwards, “Look behind us. Those grand stone castles, as impenetrable as the immortal wall itself. The abandoned vast cities, the elaborate gardens, even the temples in the horizon behind us; the grand buildings which seem to touch the sky. None of us know all of our past, though we are surrounded by distant memories of it...”

Elder smiled, “Why do you think we aren’t living in them? Hm? Those grand monuments which fill us with awe?”

“Ah, they’re cold?”

“Pf- Ha!” Elder grinned.

“Well yes, I suppose that’s one reason. But young one, the soil near the immortal wall is different. It’s the only place where food grows. Well, to be more precise: food only grows near the wall, and since the wall is ever-moving, we someday must abandon the buildings we create, leaving them in the past as we stay with the fertile land. If you travel far enough away from the wall, you will need to take plenty of food with you - but if enough of us leave to sit comfortably inside of the grand castles we’ve left behind, the monsters will rush over the wall and destroy all of our food, all our progress. Even with all of us here, they have to be fought off. They never let us rest for too long...”

“Why do they attack us, Elder? What’s on the other side of the wall?”

“I don’t know. No one does... On the other side of the wall, it seems like everything grows and dies simultaneously in a chaotic ever-changing mess. Even things that shouldn’t grow or even move sometimes spring to life; it’s nothing but utter chaos on the other side of the immortal wall.”

“Can we go over the wall?”

“What? Into that land where anything and nothing could happen? I don’t think you understand... there are no rules out there, none bound by logic. No sense... Nothing, and everything. You could walk and suddenly your legs turn into snakes, or you fall into a never-ending hole, or perhaps... you will stumble across a grand treasure - though in all the chaos, even finding something useful is rare, not to mention the beasts and horrors you will have to contend with just to bring them back. But you won’t make it back without being changed, scarred. The chaos changes boys into men, and

some men into monsters, but when they return, these men who would never leave the wall - not to rest in the castles behind or venture into the chaos again. They know rest is just as dangerous, so they stand here, living on the boundary between madness and monuments.”

Young one looked at the wall, a spark of desire in his eyes.

“I can see what you’re thinking: You want to risk it all. But who got the treasures we have now? Well, the wall shifts and moves backwards and forward all the time, but for the most part it moves forward, entering the chaos. The beasts come across, we slay them and the chaos is nullified, leaving treasures behind. In a way, the fertile soil is a treasure in itself. It’s why we need to move our farmland all the time. Food only grows near the immortal wall. It’s why we call the great cities and castles and structures our past, for we cannot live there though it may make us comfortable.”

Elder nodded, as if he was agreeing with himself, his voice seemed to become heavier, “Mm... there is no life behind us, but on the other side there can even be too much life, which spills over the wall and becomes our problem.”

“I-I see...” Young one frowned.

Elder smiled, “Don’t worry too much. We can deal with one of the grotesque beasts at a time. If we cannot slay it, they always return to the chaos after they’ve caused some here. We rebuild, regrow, and put everything in order like we always do, and then prepare for whatever threat may come next. Plus, when you slay your first beast, it will reward you with strength, able to slay greater and greater beasts each time. This is the gift of the wall.”

Young one slowly nodded, feeling insightful, “So, if the castles are our past... then the chaos is our future?”

Elder gave Young one a warm smile, appreciating his simple outlook.

“Almost, but not quite. We make sense of the chaos,” he pointed to the wall, “and we make it our own.” he pointed to the past, “And without both, we perish, though we cannot live in either. We are beings of both worlds... yet those who choose a side and embrace it are nothing but monsters of their own creation.”

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