The Princess

And The

Apocalypse

**By**

**Trevy Burgess**

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0. Prelude - The Last Child

Just because the world is ending,

Doesn’t mean it’s ending…

**August 17, 2057.**

**Today, the last child on Earth was conceived.**

I was conceived in the back seat of a hundred-year-old Chevy. But I didn’t know this until after the world ended.

Thirteen-year-old boy Todd Williams led twelve-year-old girl Betty Winthrop to a barn on Betty’s family’s farm. There, sitting in all its glory, was the vintage Chevy.

The act was quick and memorable.

Unfortunately, it was memorable for the wrong reason.

A booming voice called out, scaring the snot out of both kids.

Attention people of Earth, we of the Divine Empire  
have noticed your species has started   
tampering with the behavior of Conscious Agents.

This has caused irreparable damage to your world. Therefore your world must be reset, to protect the integrity of the Universe.

Fear not. We have contingencies to deal with this.

You have been moved to a temporary holding area as we create a new world for all of you to live in.

And no, returning your world to its former state is not possible, since you are all infected. Only integration into the greater whole can handle the infection.

Once integration completes, you will become citizens of a vastly greater universe than you can imagine.

Our connected system of worlds is a meritocracy that venerates personal strength above all else, be it physical, intellectual, or magical.  
  
Our technology is just a means to that end.  
  
Since you have chosen to explore greater realities,   
we will start testing your entire race.  
  
However we are not cruel.  
  
Therefore, from the start of this announcement  
you will no longer be able to conceive any children.  
  
All fetuses will be allowed to come to term.  
Anyone attempting to abort a fetus shall be killed,  
should the fetus die.  
  
Furthermore, all diseases shall be eliminated  
 and everyone above the age of 35 will have their age slowly reduced to 35.  
  
This protection only extends to genetic disease and old age.  
You can still die from accidents, improper living, violence, and status ailments such as poison.

This protection will end when testing begins.  
  
Formal testing shall start,   
when the last child becomes 16 years old.  
  
At that time, you will be moved to a brand new world where you can start a new life as pioneers.

To help you survive, you will be given a choice:  
1. Take with you whatever you are physically carrying  
2. Choose any one item from your world.

Good luck people of Earth.  
May you all succeed and become full-fledged citizens  
of our connected worlds.  
  
By the way, congratulations on conceiving   
the last child before the test…

“We better dress,” Todd said as he stepped out of the car.

They quickly dressed.

A police siren started blaring, again scaring the snot of both kids.

Looking around, they discovered it was just one of those stupid amber alerts on their cell phones.

Attention everyone, by order of the president, starting today it is illegal for anyone to have an abortion, and all abortion clinics shall be shut down.

That was it. That was all.

“I better go,” Todd said and headed off.

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Months later, Betty’s parents found out she was pregnant. They all tried to reveal the father, but she refused.

“Don’t you know relations with a minor are a crime?” Officer McButtley asked threateningly.

“That’s precisely why I will not tell you,” Betty retorted. “I’m not stupid you know. Unless you want to use interrogation methods the military uses. Who wants to torture a twelve-year-old girl?” Betty asked, glaring.

“We can’t do that,” Officer McButtley objected. “There are child protection laws.”

“Then stop questioning me,” Betty stated firmly.

“But who will raise him?” Councilor Haggins asked.

“My parents, of course,” Betty replied. “He is after all the last child on earth to be born. And I shall be his big sister.”

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From then on Betty and Todd only met in secret. Knowing they could never have more kids, Betty found plenty of time to get Todd to play with their baby.

Unfortunately, there was little time for romance. Wars became worse in many places as ethnic cleansing became a winning strategy by multiple hostile states.

Unemployment skyrocketed, as countless people refused to work. Fortunately with universal robots, the lack of laborers wasn’t a problem.

Violence was an unwanted neighbor as pessimism gripped the world. Along with the violence came a huge spike in suicides as apathy ravaged millions.

Conspiracy theories were rampant throughout the world, fueled by the occasional mysterious message. Each time, the messages would shake up those still doubting the messages.

In the background of all the turmoil, governments mandated survival training for everyone in preparation for the Testing.

Despite the message, the test had already begun.

But in the end life went on.

1. Where did civilization go? – Right, it was Rebooted

Are we in a simulation?  
If so, the graphics are amazing  
but the plot is terrible.

I was at my sister’s home. At 7:28PM, May 17, 2074, I would officially turn 16.

It was now 7:16, 12 minutes to Doomsday.

Sister Betty’s husband, the man I called Uncle Todd, stood next to us in the living room.

Shortly after graduating highschool, Sis informed mum and dad that she met someone named Todd.

One year later they married, and I became the best man. That was fun. After that, they moved into a new apartment and I started living with them.

Half an hour to doomsday, my sister revealed to me that she was my biological mother and the person I called Uncle Todd was in fact my biological father. That was followed by my conception story, explaining the secret.

That was a lot to process, but I didn’t have time to think about it. We were preparing to leave for our new home – a Wild West we must conquer.

“Unc, Sis, is it possible for you to carry my stuff? I would like to perform an experiment. If I succeed, we will have a great advantage for the test,” I said.

They looked at each other and slowly nodded.

“Yes Luke, we trust you,” Sis said, smiling. “You are one of the smartest people I know.”

“Thanks Sis, Unc. At 3 minutes, you should put your backpacks on,” I said. “At one minute, carry my stuff.”

“Isn’t that cutting it close?” Unc asked.

“We already practiced,” I reminded Unc. “One minute is a very long time, especially when you are over encumbered,” I replied as I removed my boots.

I placed my boots on my backpack.

Four minutes left

I was planning on waiting, but I was getting nervous.

I helped Sis and Unc place their backpacks on their backs, along with their ammo bags. They then hung their rifles over their shoulders. Unc took my rifle and Sis took her recursive bow and quiver filled with hunting arrows.

Two minutes left

Unc fiddled with the sword on his hip, and I stared at the disassembled glaive sticking out of my backpack.

One minute left

I helped Unc lift my backpack and placed a shoulder strap around his neck. There was so much stuff on him that he was completely hidden.

I then placed the ammo bag around Sis’ neck. She too was buried. Both staggered under the weight.

Both were super strong after sixteen years of training. However, almost 165kg of weight was hard for anyone, and each showed the strain.

I then held Unc and Sis by the arms and waited as the countdown slowly ticked.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0

For a moment nothing happened.

Then the world turned dark.

Choose:   
1. Everything on your person   
2. One item from your world

I chose the one item, visualizing it in my mind.

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The world brightened and I found myself in a valley in a mountain range.

Off in the distance was a river. Next to the river was a village.

It appeared to be early dawn as the sun was near the horizon. That made sense. We needed time to establish a base for the night.

Unc and Sis dropped to the ground and I helped them remove the excess weight.

“Luke, you’re naked,” Sis exclaimed, shocked.

That explained the breeze.

“No time for that,” Unc warned. “We have company.”

Out of the village came green-skinned humanoid creatures. They only wore skirts made of green hair. Was that body hair?

“Let’s use our pistols first,” Unc advised. “We have thousands of rounds.”

Feeling a little exposed, I grabbed my ammo bag and readied my pistol. Unc and Sis did the same.

The nearest goblin looked at us lustfully and cackled.

“Don’t you dare look at my son like that, you disgusting pervs,” Sis shouted angrily and began shooting.

The closest goblin grunt died with a bullet through the brain.

Wishing I had time to change, I started firing, focusing on accuracy.

I wasn’t panicked. After all, we all trained with state-of-the-art VR devices and on the firing range.

Well maybe a little stressed.

There were literally hundreds of grunts coming at us. And I ran out of bullets.

“I’ll reload,” I called and dropped my gun. I began filling clips with bullets.

“Here,” I said as I reached up with a clip.

“Just toss it to the ground,” Unc said. He went to one knee and picked up the cartridge. Sis did the same, allowing us to become more efficient.

I had experience refilling cartridges at breakneck speed. However, there was a big difference doing it on the paintball range and doing it with monsters in front of you. Hungry monsters. With big teeth.

My fingers started to bleed as I rammed bullets. Looking up, I saw goblin warriors coming. The only reason they hadn’t come before was because they were so slow, compared to the grunts.

“Damn, the warriors take three shots,” Unc grumbled.

“At least the shamans are soft,” Sis said as she popped a cartridge out and slammed in a new one.

I barely dodged a spear and resumed refilling bullets.

In front of us was a growing pile of goblins.

Then the berserkers came out.

“Well, the good news is the grunts are out of the way,” Unc said. “They are way too fast. I’ll focus on the berserkers.”

“My fingers are going numb,” I grumbled.

“Let’s switch,” Unc suggested.

“No,” I replied. “I don’t think I can hold a gun right now.”

“Just a little more buddy,” Unc said. “Damn, it takes five bullets for the berserkers. Only eye shots save bullets.”

“I have bad news,” I said. “Half my handgun ammo is gone.”

“Damn,” Unc cursed. “I can’t believe we might run out of bullets on the first day.”

“This battle isn’t fair,” Sis yelled. “I hope the others aren’t facing this, or the human race will be wiped out.”

Finally, the last berserker fell.

Suddenly a message appeared in my mind’s eye.

Congratulations candidate on surviving.

You have defeated a goblin village

As a party member, you share all experience and awards.  
  
Challenges will be scaled as appropriate.  
  
All loot will be shared equally.

We rested for a moment, and I felt my body buzzing with exhaustion. I said, “We should loot the bodies.”

“Shouldn’t you dress first?” Sis asked, looking embarrassed.

In all the excitement I forget my lack of clothes.

I hesitated a moment and then quickly opened my backpack. I got my prepared clothes out and quickly put them on, followed by my steel-toed boots.

I then walked up to the nearest body and tapped it with my foot.

“It’s asking if I want to enable automatic looting,” Sis said.

“Say yes,” Unc replied. “We don’t have time butchering corpses.”

I select ‘Yes,’ and all the bodies disappeared.

I removed and assembled my glaive. Finally, I placed my backpack on my back and then hung my rifle and ammo bag on my shoulder.

“Now, what do we do?” Sis asked.

“Let’s explore the goblin village,” Unc replied. “We might be able to loot something useful.”

Using my glaive as a walking stick, we headed to the village.

Arriving, we found plenty of loot.

“How do we loot this?” Sis wondered.

I held an item. A moment later it disappeared. “It’s easy to store stuff. Just intend it,” I said. “It seems we have some sort of dimensional storage.”

I also put my backpack away, leaving only my ammo bag and weapons. Unc and Sis did the same.

Half an hour later, we finally looted the village.

“Now what,” Unc asked? “It’s getting dark. We need to secure a place for the night.”

“Why don’t we stay here,” Sis said. “We should have dinner while it’s peaceful.”

“I wonder what I have in my inventory,” I said.

Suddenly in my mind I became aware of everything in my inventory.

“Checking my inventory is easier than I realized, although I was expecting menus and stuff, as in video games,” I said. “Instead it’s just remembering. I have 3 gold, monster cores, armor, weapons, and potions.”

I paused and then screamed in excitement, almost jumping up and down, “I have it. I have it.”

“What do you have Luke?” Sis asked.

“Why are you so excited?” Unc asked with a smile. “Did you find some epic loot?”

“Better than that,” I replied excitedly. “Do you recall we can choose to bring a single item from earth?”

“Yes,” Sis replied, confused.

“Well, I chose the Earthroamer, Apocalypse edition. Guess what? I have it,” I shouted.

I walked to an empty space and intended the vehicle to appear. It did so.

“Holy cow,” Unc exclaimed.

“How is that possible?” Sis asked.

“The instructions said any one item from Earth,” I replied. “It never said I had to own it. So I chose the Earthroamer Apocalypse. Come, let’s go in.”

The camper door was near the back.

“I remember the ads,” Unc said. “They said it was the one thing every party should have. I never took it seriously.”

Entering in from the passenger side, to the back of the Roamer was a closet and storage draws. Not sure how valuable a wine rack was, but it was there.

On the driver’s side was the wet washroom. Moving forward was the residential fridge, with microwave/convection oven/air fryer on top. Following that was the washing machine/dryer stack, then table-top space. Finally was a dinette seating four people.

On the right was the kitchen area with sink and induction stove. Forward from that was more storage and extra counter-top space. Finally was the couch.

Both the dinette and couch could turn into beds. And of course there was the king-sized bed over the front cab.

Finally there were some overhead cupboards.

“How much does this thing cost?” Unc asked as he circled the Earthroamer.

“Around 1.8 million dollars US,” I replied. “This edition has a wind turbine built in. With plenty of sun and wind, we can go at least 100km a day in the wilderness without ever having to plug in. With four electric motors, it’s both fast, maneuverable and powerful. That’s what the web site said anyway.”

I walked to a control panel and said, “The Roamer is fully charged. We can get over 500km on the highway.”

“Is it safe from monsters?” Sis asked, worriedly.

“Unfortunately, no,” I replied. “Although sturdy, these things aren’t built to be tanks. However, we have cameras and proximity detection.”

I activated security and the alarm sounded, showing Unc walking around the back.

I turned off security and said, “With this we should be able to sleep safely at night. And of course, we can live like civilized people when not fighting monsters.”

“Look what I found,” Unc called from the front cab.

Sis and I slipped through the front hatch into the cab.

The cab had two front seats with a central console between. Behind them were two rear seats with a space to enter the rear through the hatch.

Sis took the right back seat, and I took the left. In the center of the dashboard was a touch screen. It had some text.

Candidate Luke Winthrop, to help your race with your Initiation, we have supplied your race with several pieces of evolutionary equipment.

Each of these pieces of equipment is tagged with the name Apocalypse.

Of the 7,187,577,878 Earth citizens, 1,738,274 people have chosen an Apocalypse item

This Item is soulbound to you.

Select Name

“What should we call it?” Unc asked.

That was a tough question. We wracked our heads for a few minutes.

“*Dragon’s throne*,” I said suddenly.

*Dragon’s Throne* has been recorded.

Would you like to share experience with Dragon’s Throne?  
No/Just Me/My Entire Party

“Select ‘My Entire Party’,” Sis ordered. “This is our home from now on. I want to help.”

Unc pressed, ‘My Entire Party’.

A new screen appeared…

**Throne Base Stats:**

**Speed: 54**

**Strength: 47**

**Toughness: 14**

**Restoration: 0**

**Stealth: 0**

**Metamorphosis: 0**

**Interior Space: 0**

**Abilities: <NONE>**

**Achievements: Giant Killer 1, 2 (+15% to all stats)**

**Free Points: 40**

**Current Level: 0**

“What is Giant Killer?” I asked.

Unc clicked on a question mark. “For killing a monster, 10 levels above, you get the title Giant Killer 1 and +5% for all stats. For monsters 20 levels above, you get Giant Killer 2 and +10%,” Unc said, reading the help.

I checked. My personal stats were.

**Base Stats:**

**Speed: 8**

**Strength: 12**

**Constitution: 7**

**Stamina: 14**

**Restoration: 2**

**Nerve: 9**

**Manna Control: 3**

**Achievements: Giant Killer 1, 2 (15% to all stats)**

**Class: <None>**

**Abilities: <None>**

**Free Points: 40**

**Current Level: 0**

I shared my current stats. Sis and Unc did the same. The only difference was that they had higher stats. That wasn’t surprising, considering they were training since before I was born. Strangely, I had the highest Nerve.

“I’m not sure how to upgrade myself,” I said. “For the Earthroamer, we don’t need speed or strength.”

“How about Stealth,” Sis suggested? “The best defense is not being noticed.”

“How many points,” Unc asked? “Toughness is obvious. I assume restoration will repair all damage.”

I suggested a layout for making the stats multiples of five and Sis and Unc agreed. Unc pressed the Finalize button. The final stats showed:

**Throne Base Stats:**

**Speed: 54 -> 55 \* 1.15 = 63.25**

**Strength: 47 -> 50 \* 1.15 = 63.25**

**Toughness: 14 -> 20 \* 1.15 = 23**

**Restoration: 0 -> 10 \* 1.15 = 11.5**

**Stealth: 0 -> 20 \* 1.15 = 23**

**Metamorphosis: 0**

**Interior Space: 0**

**Abilities: <NONE>**

**Achievements: Giant Killer 1, 2 (15% to all stats)**

**Free Points: 0**

**Current Level: 8**

So, each level gave 5 stats points to distribute.

We ignored Metamorphosis and Interior Space since they didn’t seem security related.

The Earthroamer shuddered and then settled down.

“Freaky,” Unc said. “It’s almost as if the *Dragon’s Throne* is alive.”

“I feel safer for the night,” Sis said. “But tomorrow I want to level up the Throne more. I want a safer home. In the meantime, we should put our stuff away. Then we can have lunch.”

We returned to the back, and I began pulling out stuff from my backpack. Non-perishable food stuff went into the cupboards and everything else went into my storage. I then removed some of the perishable items from my storage and placed them in the fridge. Unc and Sis did the same.

“Holy cow,” Sis exclaimed. “This has plates, glasses, and cutlery.”

“And a wine rack with glasses, but sadly no wine,” Unc lamented.

“Yes,” I agreed. “Earthroamer prides itself on being fully functional. Everything is designed to be secure when going over rough terrain. There should be some induction pots and pans as well.”

“I found them, as well as some towels and stuff. Too bad there is no cleaning stuff. Doesn’t matter. I have dishwashing detergent, soap and shampoo.

“This stinks. There are no shopping centers or Bamazon.”

I played with the settings. “The water tanks are full.”

After that I focused on my stats. How should I allocate them? I wanted to learn magic. But I also wanted to be safe.

Just like the *Throne*, I focused on making my stats even.

**Base Stats:**

**Speed: 8 -> 10 \* 1.15 = 11.5**

**Strength: 12 -> 15 \* 1.15 = 17.25**

**Constitution: 7 -> 15 \* 1.15 = 17.25**

**Stamina: 14 -> 15 \* 1.15 = 17.25**

**Restoration: 2 -> 10 \* 1.15 = 11.5**

**Nerve: 9** **-> 15 \* 1.15 = 17.25**

**Manna Control: 3 -> 15 \* 1.15 = 17.25**

**Achievements: Giant Killer 1, 2 (15% to all stats)**

**Current Level: 8**

“Unc, Sis, I decided to try a balanced build since this is real life. It’s strange all my stats are now multiples of 5. Here are what my stats will be once I confirm,” I said. “Have you ranked up yet?”

“No, I haven’t,” both Unc and Sis said in unison.

“That makes sense,” Unc said. “In real life, all stats should be interrelated. Min-Maxing could be harmful for the health and being a glass cannon will get you killed.”

“I’m confirming now,” I said and rested back in my seat.

I confirmed my choice. A moment later my muscles started twitching. “That’s strange,” I said, starting my commentary. “My sight became blurry and now seems sharper. My hearing seems to have improved, and I feel my thoughts are clearer. I’m also more aware of my body. It feels as if energy is flowing through my body. It’s both freaky and comforting.

“I’m going out for a second.”

I stepped out and then ran around the *Throne*. I then did some quick exercises. Five minutes later I returned. “My stats have definitely increased, along with my senses. So that’s what Nerve is. No. There’s more to nerve than that.

“I think I’m starting to understand the stats.

“Speed and Strength builds are possible. However, both require Constitution, or you’ll tear ligaments. No. Strength requires Constitution. Speed requires Stamina. Strength too…”

“So, you can focus solely on either Speed or Strength. However, you require Constitution or Stamina to be at similar values. But you can have less Stamina, unless you want to be a long-distance runner,” Unc said.

“Close,” I said. “Too much strength and not enough speed and you will not be able to hit anything. Too much speed and your attacks will be weak. No. Supersonic things hit hard. But then you will need Toughness, or you will break on impact.

“Or you can become a pure Wizard type, which only requires Nerve and Manna Control, unless that puts a strain on the body. It probably does.”

“What about Restoration?” Sis asked.

“You know how aging has resumed today?” I asked. “I have a feeling a high enough Restoration value will stop the aging process. I want you two to have that. You’re my family. I don’t want you both to get old and die.”

“That’s so sweet,” Sis said and gave me a hug.

“No problem, buddy,” Unc said and ruffled my hair. “I am planning on doing a balanced build for now. I wonder if classes are possible, one focusing on guns and bombs. I don’t want stupid swords and arrows, although I put enough time training.”

“Mithril swords and armor piercing arrows,” I said with a smile.

“Then for you, Speed will be a dump stat. You definitely need nerve to be aware of your surroundings, at least a little. Manna might be used for magic bullets and bombs. We don’t have enough data to know.”

“I’ll spread my points out evenly too,” Sis said.

For a few moments nothing happened. Then they too shuddered. Sis and Unc shared their stats.

“I’ll make dinner,” Sis said.

“Does this use propane?” Unc asked.

“There is a pullout cooking area outside in the back,” I replied. “It’s below the wind turbines.”

I began playing with the control panel. It was getting dark outside and so I placed the RV into night mode and enabled security. Blinds lowered and the stabilizing legs extended. With full electric, there was no sound.

“By the way, why don’t you two sleep in the overhead bed? I’ll sleep on the sofa bed,” I suggested.

“Are you sure?” Sis asked. “That seat looks narrow.”

“It’s a folding bed,” I replied. “I have my sleeping bag, since I don’t think it comes with blankets by default.”

I pulled out the pullout drawer under the dinette couch. “Skip that. Everything is here.”

Remembering something I read on the web site, I opened my laptop and plugged it into a nearby wall socket. I then searched for a network.

*Dragon’s Throne* appeared and I connected without needing a password.

I then opened the file explorer and saw a network drive. Searching, I found what I was looking for.

“Unc, Sis, you know that the United Nations created an archive of all published books, documentaries, university courses, trades, and who knows what else?” I asked.

“Of course,” Sis replied. “You have the 18TB version on your SSD, don’t you?”

“Well, the full version is over 187TB, and it’s included in the *Dragon’s Throne*,” I replied.

“Isn’t that unfair?” Sis asked.

“Not so,” I replied. “The world had over 16 years to prepare. Most of that information is useless to us, since it all deals with knowledge a survivor doesn’t need.

“Even the 450GB archive has all the practical knowledge we need to survive and build a settlement. All you need is a cell phone and a portable solar charger.

“So not having that doesn’t make sense.”

I paused and then said, “I think I understand.

“The first test was enduring the knowledge the world as we understood it would be gone.

“Only people from the Last Generation wouldn’t understand.

“The next was how well we prepared. The third is using this knowledge to survive, one way or another.”

Unc and Sis were some of the first children of the Last Generation, and I was the last. Everyone under 35 was.

“That’s true,” Unc said. “Just because we have knowledge, doesn’t mean anything if we don’t use it.”

“Dinner’s ready,” Sis said.

I helped bring the food to the table and we ate.

Halfway through dinner a monster approached. An infrared image of the creature appeared on the overhead monitor.

The weird armadillo-like creature waddled around, but apparently it didn’t see us, since it just moved away.

“I want more Stealth, as well as more Constitution,” Sis insisted. “These monsters are going to give me a heart attack, especially at night.”

I felt sorry for all the people without a relatively safe place to stay. Even with low defenses, our situation was vastly better than everyone else.

After dinner we cleaned up and then I set up the hider bed for the night.

That night I barely slept. Too much happened that day.

Moreover, my body was buzzing with too much energy. Not knowing what else to do, I spent all night just observing.

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Day 2

By the time I awoke, the blackout blinds were up, and Sis was cooking breakfast.

I put the bedding away and restored the hider bed.

“Did you sleep well?” Sis asked.

“Not really,” I replied. “My body was buzzing with too much energy.”

I went to the washroom and did my thing. After that I stepped out and joined Unc wandering around.

“Morning Unc,” I said. “I wonder where everyone is.”

“Probably being tested like us,” Unc replied. “This is a nice place to create a settlement. Too bad there isn’t anyone here.”

“Breakfast is ready,” Sis called.

We entered and I said, “Since aging has resumed, I assume that means women can now have children.”

“Are you thinking about a baby brother or sister?” Sis asked.

“Why not?” I asked. “You’re married, aren’t you? Not now of course.”

“What should we do now,” Unc asked?

“Let’s follow the river,” I said. “Perhaps we can find people along the way.”

“Upstream or down?” Unc asked.

“How about downstream?” Sis asked.

After breakfast I helped clean up and we entered the cab. Unc took the driver’s seat, Sis took the back seat, so I took shotgun.

Unc pressed the start button and the stabilizing legs retreated.

We drove down river for a few minutes, and then we arrived at an obstruction, where the mountain canyon narrowed and pinched.

The area was littered with large piles of boulders some three stories high, right up to the river. The other side of the river was a steep embankment, and the narrowed river was deep and swift.

Apparently, the nearby cliff had a landslide.

“What should we do?” Unc asked.

“I guess we walk,” I said.

We stepped out of the RV, and I stored it away.

“I forgot that,” Unc said.

We started climbing the rubble and threaded around house sized boulders.

As we travelled, I heard a growl, followed by two more.

Unc made a wait sign and crept forward. We waited and then he returned.

“We have a problem,” Unc said. “There are three dragons, level 89 each.”

“We should go back,” Sis suggested, worried for my safety.

“Perhaps,” Unc said. “However, what’s to stop them from coming at us later? They can fly, after all. Also, they have trapped a group of people. They can’t reach the people, but the people can’t escape.”

“How can we take down dragons?” Sis asked, horrified.

“Describe them,” I said.

“One is a wind dragon,” Unc said. “The second is an earth dragon, and the third is a water dragon. I have a picture.”

The dragons were definitely scary, but also beautiful.

“We could do eye shots,” Unc suggested. “We have armor piercing bullets. We also have handgun-launched grenades. We can stick one up their nostrils. However, this is your call, Betty.”

Each nostril had enough space for my head.

“But isn’t it dangerous?” Sis asked.

“I understand you wanting to protect Luke,” Unc said. “The question is, do you trust our skill to attack before they can react? Do you trust our training? I don’t know if our bullets can pierce their scales. But their eye balls and eyelids should be weak.”

Just then we heard a scream.

“Let’s do this,” Sis said. “I don’t think I could live with myself if we ran away.”

“Here’s the plan,” Unc said.

After some preparation, we headed out.

I held my riffle against my right shoulder and my revolver against the barrel. The grenade was snug against the barrel.

Slowly I advanced to my target, which was the wind dragon.

My heart was beating a mile a minute, but then it slowed down. The world seemed sharper than ever as I held my breath and took a stance.

I took aim and said, “Okay.”

Sis said, “Okay.”

“Hey assholes,” Unc called.

In unison the three dragons turned, looking for their next victims.

The dragon stared at me, and for a brief moment I was gripped by intense fear.

“I have a gun, asshole,” I hissed, and the fear released me.

To the left, Sis said, “No one threatens my son.”

“Amen,” Unc agreed.

I took aim at a nostril and pulled the trigger. The grenade blasted forward and entered the target nostril.

I raised the riffle and, still holding my breath, shot at its eye.

The gun shuddered as the kickback slammed against my shoulder. Again, I fired.

The dragon shook itself and took a deep breath. That was a bad decision. The grenade got sucked deeper into its nasal passage.

I quickly took aim at the other eye and fired, again feeling the recoil.

The creature roared in anger and opened its mouth. Into its mouth I fired in rapid succession. This staggered the dragon and it took several steps back.

I kept firing for what seemed like forever, but was less than 5 seconds.

At the 5 second mark there was an explosion. Similar explosions were heard as Unc and Sis fought.

The monster was badly injured but not dead.

I quickly loaded a new grenade as the dragon shook itself. Unfortunately, the dragon’s head wasn’t in position. So I ejected the spent riffle cartridge and loaded my next one.

I waited, wishing we had a mini-gun with a belt feed. Unfortunately those things were too big to bring.

Finally, the head looked at me. The left nostril was destroyed, so I targeted the right. I fired the grenade.

The grenade flew true, aided by my riffle scope. Again, the stupid creature inhaled. Again, I fired at the now blind eyes.

I couldn’t fire quickly, because of the kickback. However, it was sufficient. The dragon collapsed.

The other two dragons collapsed as well.

“Did we get it?” Sis asked.

“No,” I denied. “We didn’t get a system notification.”

“Advance,” Unc called.

I advanced, making sure every shot count. After all, I only had 20 rounds in each clip.

Suddenly the monster opened its mouth and sucked in air. I let go of my riffle.

“Toss grenades in mouth,” Unc commanded.

With practiced movements, I dropped my gun. I grabbed grenades and pulled the pins, one-handed. A moment later the grenades entered the dragon’s mouth.

Glancing to the side, I saw Unc and Sis exercising the same maneuver.

“Dodge,” Unc called.

I did as instructed as the monster released it breath. There were deafening explosions as the wind attack detonated the grenades.

I suddenly knew we had succeeded. Furthermore, we had earned some sweet achievements.

A moment later the dragons disappeared.

“We did it,” I shouted, feeling weak in the knees. I quickly retrieved my dropped equipment, and the others did the same.

A group of twenty-some people approached us.

“How the hell did you take down those monsters so fast?” the person that looked like their leader sputtered. “You were almost a blur.”

“Not that fast,” I denied. “My speed is still in the human range.”

“It was all a matter of training,” Unc said. “We spent thousands of hours training to fight overpowered fantasy monsters. Luke here started when he was just two. Then all he could do was swing a Nerf sword, which he liked hitting everyone with. When he was three, I gave him a Nerf gun.”

“We have some healing potions,” Sis said. “Who needs them?”

While Sis and Unc triaged the injured, I said, “We cleared a goblin village out. We are hoping to find people to colonize it.”

“We would love that,” leader John said with genuine gratitude.

I handed over some healing potions.

“Don’t any of you have guns?” Unc asked in a judgmental tone.

“None of us thought modern weapons were allowed,” John objected. “All the most trusted social media said that.”

“You’re clearly the victims of Fake News,” Unc sneered. “We also trained with bows, swords, and spears, just to cover all bases. You lose nothing by taking guns.”

“But we can only carry limited weight,” John complained.

“Then discard excess weight…” Unc began, his temper rising.

“What’s done is done,” Sis interrupted, not wanting to have an argument. “Everyone’s healed up. Let’s go.”

We led the group back the way we came. An hour later we arrived at the goblin village.

Unfortunately, the goblins were starting to repopulate, along with looted items.

The goblins were few, so Unc gave the order to use our bows and swords.

Thankfully our guests showed some competence. They too had archers and melee fighters. So we let them handle the small fry.

“We looted the village, but we don’t need the stuff,” Sis said. “We can let you have it.”

Sis brought out all her junk goods. Unc and I did the same.

“Sort yourself out,” Unc said. “Take any house you want.”

“What about you?” John asked.

“We have our own accommodations,” Unc said. “We are going to do a perimeter sweep. See you later.”

As we walked away, Sis asked softly, “Could we have helped more?”

“No,” Unc replied. “We can’t have them rely on us. It will probably get them killed. More importantly, I’m guessing an AI is managing these encounters. If so, they will all be tested, regardless of what we do.

“Let them level up with low level monsters. We can handle the bosses.”

“This should be out of the way,” I said. Unc agreed.

I took out the *Dragon’s Throne*.

Unc entered the driver’s seat and we joined him.

The dashboard had a new message.

Free points: 45

New achievements:

Giant killer 3 (+10%, all state for killing 30 above)

Giant killer 4 (+10%, all state for killing 40 above)

Giant killer 5 (+10%, all state for killing 50 above)

Giant killer 6 (+15%, all state for killing 60 above)

Giant killer 7 (+15%, all state for killing 70 above)

Giant killer MAX (+15%, all state for killing 80 above)

Dragon Killer (+10 all stats)

“Stingy,” Unc muttered, even though the rewards were enormous. Our actual stats were double our base stats.

“Our modern weapons are at the limit of usefulness. Hopefully we will find something more powerful,” Unc added. “By the way, what’s your ammo status?”

“I only have three grenades left,” I said. “My riffle bullets are still good.”

“Same here,” Unc said. “I didn’t think we would be fighting dragons on our second day.

We redistributed our handgun bullets before.

Looking at the dashboard, Sis said, “Put 20 on Stealth, 10 on Toughness, and 15 on Restoration.”

Unc did as instructed.

**Throne Base Stats:**

**Speed: 55 -> (55 + 10) \* 2 = 130**

**Strength: 50 -> (50 + 10) \* 2 = 120**

**Toughness: 20 -> (30 + 10) \* 2 = 80**

**Restoration: 10 -> (25 + 10) \* 2 = 70**

**Stealth: 20 -> (40 + 10) \* 2 = 100**

**Metamorphosis: 0 -> (0 + 10) \* 2 = 20**

**Interior Space: 0 -> (0 + 10) \* 2 = 20**

**Abilities: Amphibious Mode**

**Features: Level 1 Store**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats)**

**Current Level: 8 -> 17**

Again, the *Dragon’s Throne* shuddered. This time it was much stronger. The vehicle seemed to transform into something more alive than artifact. A moment later the sensation disappeared.

Level 1 Store available

Where would you like the terminal?

Inside/Outside

“Choose outside,” I said. “I don’t want strangers entering our home.”

Unc pressed ‘Outside’ and we exited.

On the passenger side of the *Dragon’s Throne* was the screen.

The screen listed useful items such as soap, toiletries, basic foods such as coffee and such.

Two items caught our eye. The first were signal flares. The other was something called a village stone.

“Let’s distribute our stats,” Unc said. “I want to be prepared.”

“Okay Unc,” I said. “I’m convinced that the 15 in nerve really helped my aim and reflexes, and Constitution let me better handle the recoil.”

“I agree,” Sis said. “I handled that fight better than I expected. I don’t know what Manna does, but Nerve is amazing.”

“We should share what we found,” Unc suggested. “I’m betting we have the highest stats. This system seems stingy.”

“Why do you think that?” Sis asked.

“We fought level 89 dragons,” Unc said. “Yet we only came to level 17. I guess we lost some because we used modern weapons, although we would have died without them.”

I shared my new layout and pressed confirm. Strangely, I got a pure balanced stat sheet.

As before my body spasmed, my senses blurred and then sharpened.

**Base Stats:**

**Speed: 10 -> (20 + 10) \* 2 = 60**

**Strength: 15 -> (20 + 10) \* 2 = 60**

**Constitution: 15 -> (20 + 10) \* 2 = 60**

**Stamina: 15 -> (20 + 10) \* 2 = 60**

**Restoration: 10 -> (20 + 10) \* 2 = 60**

**Nerve: 15 -> (20 + 10 + 17) \* 2 = 94**

**Manna Control: 15 -> (20 + 10 + 17) \* 2 = 94**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats)**

**Auto Points: +1/level – Manna, Nerve**

**Class: Mastermind**

**Abilities: Analysis abilities 1**

**Current Level: 8 -> 17**

“I was given Grenadier as a class,” Unc said happily. “It gives +1, Strength and +1, Constitution, which is retroactive. These stats seem crazy.

“The grenadier fights with guns, bombs and swords. Although a bayonet does more damage, since it combines swords and guns,” Unc added.

“Unfortunately the skill is at Level 1, so I can only create one type of item. I chose Level 1 grenades, since we still have plenty of bullets. Unfortunately level-1 Grenades are 10% as strong as regular grenades.

“It will take almost a minute to generate a grenade and I can only carry 1 at a time. And I can’t place them in my storage or keep them too far from me, or they will disappear.”

“I have a class called Mastermind,” I said. “This class seems to focus on mental abilities. However, at Level 1, my abilities seem completely standard. For instance I can concentrate on one thing at a time, analyze stuff, think, reason, am aware of my surroundings, and so on, just like everyone else.

“I do have +1 per level for both Nerve and Manna.

“Unfortunately I got no offensive abilities or useful skills” I finished.

“That’s okay,” Unc said. “We still have guns and bombs.”

“I was given a choice between Barbarian – how rude, and valkyrie,” Sis said.

“What is a valkyrie?” Unc asked.

Sis paused as if remembering and then said, “A valkyrie is a close quarter fighter with some unique abilities such as intimidation. The most important is speed and the ability to fly.”

“That’s so cool,” I exclaimed.

“It also gets a strength boost based on who she is defending. When fighting with you two, I can get perhaps 10%,” Sis said. “However, it will increase if you two are in danger. I can even get a 100% boost, if I go into Valkyrie mode. I just chose this.

“I get a +1 per level for Speed and Constitution, and \*2 on speed.”

“I suggest you don’t neglect Nerve. If this is too low, your reaction time will lag,” I warned. “You might even run into walls.”

“I want to try my speed out,” Sis said and dashed forward like a marathon runner. She then jumped into the air like superman. We watched her flying like a bird, until finally she returned.

“Oh man that was fun,” Sis said.

“That’s amazing Sis,” I said. “You looked like a real superhero. You just need a costume and a superhero name.”

“Too bad I can’t use arrows or guns,” Sis said.

“You can,” I replied. “However, your speed will be wasted if you do. On the other hand, you can use thrown weapons, since they rely on speed and strength.”

“Time to see the loot,” Unc said.

“I have a Wind core, 120kg of dragon steaks, 356 Gold, and a cape and boots,” I said. I quickly switched my boots. The new ones were vastly more comfortable. I left the cape in my inventory.

“I have a Water core, 120kg of dragon steaks, 356 Gold, and pants and Boots,” Sis said. She entered the *Dragon’s Throne* to change.

When Sis returned, Unc said, “I got an Earth core, 120kg of dragon steaks, also 356 Gold, and a jacket and boots. I wonder what these cores are good for.”

Unc took out his core, and then his riffle.

Sensing what Unc was about to do, I said, “Wait a minute. Put your bayonet on first.”

Unc paused a moment and took out his bayonet. He then attached it to the bottom of the barrel, below the laser scope.

“Should I just place it on the riffle?” Unc asked.

“I guess,” I replied. “Your guess is as good as mine.”

Unc placed the core on the rifle. The core disappeared and the riffle seemed to transform. “Sweet,” he exclaimed. “I now have a sturdier weapon. Bullets currently have a 100% increase in penetrating power.

“The Grenadier class kicks ass.”

That sounded impressive, but that just meant it had twice the penetrating power of a rifle bullet. And all we had to do was take down a dragon.

I considered giving Unc my core but changed my mind. Cores may not be additive.

Unc put his boots and jacket on. After that, he bought the village stone and I bought a flare gun and 25 flares.

“Put the *Throne* away,” Unc said. “It’s time to return.”

I did as instructed and we headed back.

Upon arriving we found people wandering around.

“Call everyone here,” Unc commanded.

A short time later everyone assembled.

“Okay everyone, it’s time to properly establish this village,” Unc said. “I only have two rules. The first is, don’t be an asshole.

“Second, I will not tolerate anti-Last Gen people. I will personally hog-tie any such person and feed them to the monsters.”

“But it’s all their fault,” a man in the back said angrily. “If the last child was dead…”

The man was interrupted when Unc charged and punched the man in the jaw. There was a loud crack as the man’s neck broke.

The man’s body disappeared before it could hit the ground.

People quickly retreated, terrified at the display.

“Damn,” Unc said. “I vastly underestimated my strength. I even held back.”

Unc then said menacingly, “I will not tolerate anyone threatening my son.”

Everyone looked at me, clearly noting I was barely sixteen. People murmured, “Last child.”

“Yes, Luke is the preverbal last child. Anyone who doesn’t like my rules may leave now,” Unc declared. “Luke, put your cape on.”

I did as instructed, wrapping myself in the cloak’s armor.

Unc paused again but no one moved.

“Very well,” Unc said. “Let’s begin.”

Unc tossed the village stone to the ground. The stone sank into the ground. A moment later an obelisk rose from the ground.

The top of the obelisk had a sign saying, “Village of Luke.”

At eye level was a screen.

Unc played with the screen, getting to know it. He then clicked on the owner’s tab.

“As the owner, I have the right to tax the citizens. Tax is currently set at the default value of 5%,” Unc began.

“That’s not fair,” Someone shouted.

“You’re free to leave,” Unc said with a shrug. “It’s my stone after all, and my village.”

After people quieted down, Unc continued. “That is to say, 5% of all your experience will be your tax, from the time you register. I’m setting it so that 100% is used to upgrade the village.

“Currently, no monsters will be permitted to spawn within 500m of this obelisk.

“Unfortunately, I don’t know what Level-2 benefits are yet.

“Register now, whoever wants to stay here. You can always unregister should you want to leave.

“According to these instructions, those who stay but do not register will have the urge to leave.”

“Will you be registering?” John asked.

“No we will not, since we are not staying,” Unc said. “I completely forgot to introduce ourselves. That beautiful woman there is my wife, Betty Winthrop. That handsome young man there is my son Luke Winthrop. I am Todd Winthrop.

“John, since you appear to be the leader of these people, would you like to be the mayor. Does anyone object?”

No one objected.

Unc played with the board again. A moment later a blue oval appeared on the ground. Unc moved the oval and people moved out of the way.

At some 4m from the obelisk, the oval disappeared, and a message board appeared.

At the top of the message board was:

Village of Luke

Below that was…

Landlords: Winthrop Clan

Village Mayor: John Hendricks

Village Laws:

Don’t be an asshole

“Luke, take out the flares,” Unc said.

“Yes dad,” I replied. I placed the flares on the ground next to Mayor John. I then placed one of the flares in the gun.

I fired the flare straight into the air, when Unc, corrections Dad nodded. I then placed the gun with the rest of the flares.

“Okay John, that should attract people here,” Dad said. “The more citizens you have, the faster this village will turn into a town, and the more comfortable your lives will be.

“This valley is huge, hemmed in with those cliffs on each side.

“Now for the last thing before we leave. This screen is a kiosk for buying household items.

“You pay with the money dropped by monsters.”

Dad didn’t mention there was also a 5% tax on all transactions, going into a fund available only to Dad.

“How is any of this even possible?” John asked.

“You know the theory that this world is a simulation, don’t you?” Dad asked. “Apparently, they can hack the simulation. That’s the only explanation I can think of.

“Remember to fire the flares daily. We will return when the village needs upgrading.”

“Where are you going?” John asked.

“We will be looking for other survivors and hopefully establish more villages,” Dad replied. “One last warning – Monsters can wander in at any time, so you should always be on guard.”

“Before we go, we should explain what we know about stat management,” I said.

For the next hour I explained as best I could the interrelationship between stats. It was a painful process, where people kept asking the same questions. Eventually dad got angry and said we were leaving.

As we walked away, Dad asked, “Should we go up or down?”

“If we go down, the area should open out, allowing us to potentially meet more people,” I suggested.

Dad reached out and rubbed my head. “It feels good to be called, Dad,” He said.

“Yes dad,” I said with a smile.

I took out the *Dragon’s Throne*.

Before we could enter, John called to us and we turned.

“What do we do if we run out of housing?” John asked.

“You build more,” Dad said with a frown. “Are you saying none of you have a cell phone and a solar charger? Those things can fit in your pocket. The emergency archive is small enough to fit in the memory of any modern cell phone. Knowledge of carpentry, stone working, metal working, house building and everything else is there.

“Your phone AI can guide you.

“Or just hope your new arrivals aren’t luddites.”

With that Dad walked around to the driver’s side of the *Dragon’s Throne*. Mum slipped into the back seat and I took the front.

“Where the hell did you go?” John asked, surprised.

Dad just chuckled and drove off.

“I’ll go back and start lunch,” Mum said.

Now past 1:00PM, a late lunch was better than no lunch.

C:\Users\Burgess\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\0LM9LILP\MC900065312[1].wmf

We drove downriver to near the landslide and Dad parked. Dad placed the *Throne* on camp mode. The stabilizing legs extended and the wind turbine in the rear rose into the air, ready to recharge the batteries on a gentle breeze.

We joined Mum in the camper side. Meal preparation complete we had lunch.

Half way through lunch Mum stopped eating and seemed sad.

“What’s the matter, Betty?” Dad asked.

“We are so overpowered,” Mum said. “+100% to all stats and that +10 is no joke. Will Luke ever find someone who can walk by his side?”

“Of course,” Dad said. “Of the over 7 billion people in the world, I’m certain at least a few million can compare with our level of skill and preparedness. After all, we just followed governmental guidelines. The training may have been grueling, but it wasn’t rocket science.

“And don’t forget, Luke is beautiful like his mother.”

The new Earth

The old heavens and the old Earth shall pass away,   
and a new one shall take its place

Annie Ereinion[[1]](#footnote-1) stood in her training room. On nearby tables was her survival equipment.

30 minutes to Test time.

For a moment Annie regretted not having her parents with her. She also felt resentment for not being able to have friends.

It’s hard to make friends when your parents kept moving you from city to city and country to country since you were a child.

Annie’s only real companions were the robots that took care of her needs and the trainers whose only desire in life was to torture her.

10 minutes to Test time.

Annie pulled the rolling carts towards her, then slipped herself into the backpack on the table behind her.

Carefully, Annie wrapped the numerous bags around her neck, adjusting her rifle so it wouldn’t poke her in the neck.

Thankfully her armored clothes prevented the equipment from bruising her.

Three minutes to Test time.

Finally everything was loaded. However, most of the weight was still on the carts.

At the insistence of her trainers, she had practiced this maneuver hundreds of times.

One minutes to Test time.

Annie pushed off from the counter, staggering under the immense weight.

She trudged a few steps until she was no longer touching any supports.

With a wobbly hand, Annie grabbed her glaive and positioned its butt on the top of one of her military boots.

The weight was suffocating as a booming voice counted down the seconds.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0

For a moment nothing happened.

Then the world turned dark.

Choose:  
1. Everything on your person   
2. One item from your world

Annie chose 1.

The world brightened and Annie found herself in a glade. Looking around, she was relieved to find no monsters about to kill her and no imminent treats. She turned around and again found no immediate treat.

Annie focused on her backpack and imagined pushing it into an invisible space. For a moment nothing happened. Then the backpack disappeared.

Feeling relief, Annie did the same for everything but her rifle, gun, and ammo bag. Finally unencumbered, she looked around again.

Turning around was a good thing. Off in the distance three trolls approached.

From folklore Annie knew that trolls had hyper healing, but were weak against fire.

Annie put her non-essential weapons away and opened her bag of Molotov Cocktails. These were the fancy ones that would self-ignite when the bottle broke.

Annie grabbed a bottle and pitched it at the nearest charging troll. Immediately she pitched the second, and then the third.

The bottles shattered against the trolls’ hairy chests, covering them with a jelly substance that immediately started burning.

The trolls charged forward, ignoring the fact they were on fire. Annie dodged back out of the way.

Quickly grabbing a handgun, Annie fired at their faces. That worked, sort of. The bullets staggered the monsters but didn’t kill them.

By the time Annie shot the third troll, the first troll’s face had healed and it was ready to go.

Annie continued firing, all the time retreating. She was starting to panic. She had just finished the first clip and was now on her second clip. She only had two more clips. Reloading mid-fight was impossible, since this wasn’t a video game.

“Damn, just die already,” Annie cursed and the trolls, now walking torches, trudged forwards like undying zombies.

Suddenly the closest troll stumbled and fell, followed by the second and finally the third.

Annie knew she had won. She kicked a body.

Would you like to turn on automatic looting?  
Yes

No

Annie selected yes, wondering why that was a choice.

“Now how do I find what I looted, and what…,” Annie began.

New achievements:

Giant killer 1 (+5%, all state for killing 10 above)

Giant killer 2 (+10%, all state for killing 20 above)

It was then that Annie realized the trolls were level 27.

“What a shitty world,” Annie muttered as she just rested. However, there was no time to rest. It was time to look at her base stats.

**Speed: 9**

**Strength: 9**

**Constitution: 6**

**Stamina: 12**

**Restoration: 4**

**Nerve: 11**

**Manna Control: 9**

**Achievements: Giant Killer 1, 2 (+15% to all stats)**

**Class: <None>**

**Abilities: <None>**

**Free Points: 20**

**Current Level: 0**

“Where should I allocate points?” Annie mused. “With guns, the most important thing is speed and accuracy, plus a little Constitution. Stupid kickback…” Running and dodging was essential.

That in mind, Annie updated her stats.

**Base Stats:**

**Speed: 9 -> 15 \* 1.15 = 17.25**

**Strength: 9 -> 10 \* 1.15 = 11.5**

**Constitution: 6 -> 10 \* 1.15 = 11.5**

**Stamina: 12 -> 12 \* 1.15 = 13.8**

**Restoration: 4 -> 4 \* 1.15 = 4.6**

**Nerve: 11 -> 20 \* 1.15 = 23**

**Manna Control: 9 -> 9 \* 1.15 = 10.35**

**Achievements: Giant Killer 1, 2 (+15% to all stats)**

**Class: <None>**

**Abilities: <None>**

**Current Level: 4**

For some reason Annie felt the new System was rather stingy.

After a few minutes of rest, she looked at the loot. What she found was some Silver and some healing potions.

“Why am I trapped in a stupid video game?” Annie muttered. Video games were for fun, not spending your life in life and death fights.

Unfortunately, ten minutes later more monsters found her. This time the enemies were grey wolves. The monsters were only around level 16, but they were over 30 of them.

Annie desperately fired her handgun as the monsters charged. But no matter how many were killed, more came.

Suddenly one bit Annie’s leg. Fortunately the padding saved her. However, the pressure was rather painful.

In desperation Annie grabbed her knife and stabbed the wolf in the back of the neck, at the same time firing her gun with her right hand.

Annie felt blood on her leg, but didn’t have time to worry about it.

Quickly Annie swapped cartridges and continuing firing.

Annie let loose a stream of unladylike profanity as she fought for her life.

The fourth cartridge emptied and Annie was forced to use her rifle. This was awkward at close quarters.

Running around the field with all her might, Annie kept firing. Unfortunately Annie discovered a drawback on her leveling strategy. She was running out of stamina.

Constitution was also needed, as she was bleeding from countless wounds.

Finally, the last monster died and Annie let loose another stream of profanity even a pirate would be proud of.

*In another place far away, a woman said to a man, “Where did our little girl learn such profanity?”*

*The man replied, “Let her be. She’s doing amazing.”*

*The woman nodded and said, “Let’s pray she conquers the water dragon.”*

Annie took out her healing potion and drank it. Immediately all her injuries disappeared. Feeling relief, Annie put on newly acquired wolf armor. She then allocated her 20 new points.

Realizing her weaknesses, Annie focused on increasing her shortcomings. Also, she felt keeping her stats at multiple of five was important.

**Base Stats:**

**Speed: 15 -> 20 \* 1.15 = 23**

**Strength: 10 -> 15 \* 1.15 = 17.25**

**Constitution: 10 -> 10 \* 1.15 = 11.5**

**Stamina: 12 -> 20 \* 1.15 = 23**

**Restoration: 4 -> 5 \* 1.15 = 5.75**

**Nerve: 20 -> 20 \* 1.15 = 23**

**Manna Control: 9 -> 10 \* 1.15 = 11.5**

**Achievements: Giant Killer 1, 2 (+15% to all stats)**

**Class: <None>**

**Abilities: <None>**

**Current Level: 8**

Annie thought of eating but she wasn’t hungry, just annoyed. She hated being hunted, hated being out in the boondocks, hated the fact there was no hotel nearby, and more importantly, hated the fact there was no washrooms available.

After sorting herself out, she continued walking. Barely three hours had passed and already so much had taken place.

Just as if the world couldn’t get more evil, it did.

From out of a nearby lake a water dragon emerged.

Annie’s only reprieve was that the dragon seemed to be slow outside the lake.

“Oh for crying out loud, does the world hate me?” Annie shouted angrily. “You want a piece of me? I’ll give you a piece of me.”

Swapping bags, Annie grabbed glass balls filled with Fluoroantimonic Acid and pitched them at the monster.

The balls flew true and slammed into the dragon’s face. The dragon staggered back as its face dissolved into a bubbling mass.

Annie then followed that with armor-piercing bullets as she charged forward, cursing the creature and ordering it to go to hell.

The dragon opened its mouth, but closed it when it swallowed another globe of Fluoroantimonic Acid.

Keeping at least 3m of distance Annie continued firing.

Again the dragon opened its mouth, but this time got a grenade for lunch. Unfortunately the grenade didn’t explode, so Annie chased it with a volatile cocktail.

Again Annie peppered the creature with bullets, waiting to toss in another acid bomb.

Then the grenade exploded an agonizing 5 seconds later. A moment later Annie received a notification the dragon had died. “Good riddance,” she muttered as the dragon disappeared.

Finally Annie received a notification that was actually good.

Free points: 45

New achievements:

Giant killer 3 (+10%, all state for killing 30 above)

Giant killer 4 (+10%, all state for killing 40 above)

Giant killer 5 (+10%, all state for killing 50 above)

Giant killer 6 (+15%, all state for killing 60 above)

Giant killer 7 (+15%, all state for killing 70 above)

Giant killer MAX (+15%, all state for killing 80 above)

Dragon Killer (+10 all stats)

Annie relished the victory for a few seconds and then allocated points. It was way past time to add to restoration, especially because of the stat boost.

Should she put points into Manna? Right now it seemed like a dump stat, and speed and strength was good enough for now, especially since she still had plenty of bullets and her chemicals were good for hopefully one more dragon. So she focused on Constitution, Stamina, and Restoration.

**Base Stats:**

**Speed: 20 -> (20 + 10) \* 2 = 60**

**Strength: 15 -> (20 + 10) \* 2 = 60**

**Constitution: 10 -> (25 + 10) \* 2 = 70**

**Stamina: 20 -> (20 + 10) \* 2 = 60**

**Restoration: 5 -> (25 + 10) \* 2 = 70**

**Nerve: 20 -> (25 + 10) \* 2 = 70**

**Manna Control: 10 -> (10 + 10) \* 2 = 40**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 all stats)**

**Free Points: 0**

**Current Level: 17**

Annie was glad she no longer had fractional stats.

Checking her loot, Annie found gold, dragon steaks, a weird orb, a pair of boots and pants. She quickly put the boots and pants on, since they had higher stats.

She paused as she changed. For some reason the evening sun caused the skin on her legs to appear golden yellow. She ignored it as an artifact of the light.

Annie sighed. She did well against the water dragon, but what about the next one? She had limited chemical weapons and no way to replenish them. Hopefully the next monster would be low level grunts she could grind on with just bullets.

By now it was late evening.

Walking around, Annie found a large tree. She quickly climbed it and found a spot in the branches she could stay for the night.

Taking out equipment, Annie created a makeshift camp and ate some cold cereal, followed by a coke.

Annie then spent a restless night, woken up constantly by terrifying noises.

There was one piece of good news. The water pants had the magical effect of negating a person’s need for going to the washroom.



Day 2

The next day, Annie woke, realizing she had overslept. She had a quick breakfast and put her equipment away.

Annie then climbed down and walked along the lakeshore.

The walk was quiet, too quiet. Why weren’t monsters attacking? It was past noon and still nothing. The previous day she was literally attacked less than a minute upon arriving.

Suddenly there were footsteps behind Annie.

Annie spun around and aimed here riffle.

“Stop,” a teenage boy shouted. Next to him were two adults.

Annie lowered the gun and said, “Sorry. I’ve been a little on edge in this nightmare. I wish my parents were here. I wish my trainers were here.”

“Oh my god, an elf,” the boy exclaimed.

“Where?” Annie asked, surprised, as she spun around, her stress disappearing at the strange revelation. There was no one behind her.

“Luke means you dear,” the woman said.

Annie frowned and said, “I’m no elf. I’m just a human like you.”

Luke took out his phone and showed it to her.

Looking back from the phone was not Annie. Corrections, it was her, but made to look like an elf. The person on the screen had pointy ears sticking horizontally out like a freak, golden yellow hair, a slightly golden yellow tinge to her fair skin, and large purplish sparkly eyes. It was as if the melanin of her fair skin was replaced with a new chemical.

The stranger looking back had an unearthly beauty, but it wasn’t her.

“Oh my god, what the hell happened to my face?” Annie screamed in fright. She removed her gloves and found her hand’s skin color had changed too. She put her glove back on and the teen put his phone away.

“It’s okay dear, we’ll figure this out,” the woman said.

“The important thing is you look healthy,” the man said. “My name is Todd Winthrop. This is my wife, Betty Winthrop, and our son, Luke Winthrop.”

“I am Annie Ereinion,” Annie said and shook their hands. “Pleased to meet you.”

“May I ask your level, and achievements?” Todd asked.

“I’m level 17,” Annie replied. “I have Giant Killer MAX and Dragon Killer.”

Todd looked at his wife in excitement clapped. The woman hugged Annie.

Annie just stood there, enjoying the hug, but not sure what happened.

Seeing the confusion, Luke said, “We too have the same achievements and level.”

“I have to warn you,” Annie said. “I used half of my bombs fighting the trolls, wolves and dragon, although I still have plenty of ammo.”

“We cleared a goblin village yesterday,” Todd said. “Then we found some people to start a new village. You’re not going to believe it but none of them had modern weapons. They believed Fake News and so didn’t bother to bring any.”

“That’s weird,” Annie said. “At worst, just discard the useless weapons.”

“I know,” Todd said happily.

“How would you like to join our team?” Betty asked. “We could definitely use you.”

“I would love to join,” Annie said happily. “Being alone sucks.”

Would you like to join Todd’s team?

Yes

No

Annie chose, ‘Yes’. A moment later, an RV appeared in front of her.

“Holy cow,” Annie exclaimed. “Where did that thing come from?”

“That is our Earthroamer,” Luke said. “You know how we had a choice between what we are carrying and a single item from Earth? I got my parents to hold my equipment and chose Earthroamer Apocalypse. Strangely, it is defined as an evolutionary item.

“We share our experience with it and it gets stronger.”

Would you like to share experience with the *Dragon’s Throne*

Yes

No

Annie selected, ‘Yes’.

“I’m sharing experience with your *Dragon’s Throne*,” Annie said. “I think it’s only fair.”

“Our *Dragon’s Throne*,” Luke corrected. “You are part of the party now. We share all experience from now on.”

“Yes dear, you are part of our family now,” Betty added.

Annie felt good, finally feeling that she belonged.

“We are looking for survivors, but everyone seems to be spread out,” Todd said.

“Or eaten,” Annie added sadly. “I wonder how my parents are doing.”

“I know,” Betty said. “Hopefully they are still alive and thriving. We made sure our parents were trained well.”

“This is probably a good time to stop for lunch,” Todd said.

Just then they were interrupted by loud growling as a large pack of some hyena-like creatures attacked. They weren’t hyenas, since normal hyenas didn’t have horns and saber-tooth fangs.

“Glaive please,” Betty said and Luke handed her his glaive. Luke, Todd and Annie then started firing at the Rabid Hyenas.

In the meantime Betty charged forward and swung the glaive with inhuman speed, slicing throats like a vengeful spirit.

The battle dragged on for around 12 minutes as monsters constantly streamed from the forest. Fortunately the density was low enough for them to refill cartridges.

Strangely, the creatures treated the Rover like some sort of rock and just charged around it.

And finally the siege was over.

“Mum, you were amazing,” Luke called out as Betty returned.

“Yes you were,” Todd said.

“I got 3 levels,” Annie said. “That was more levels than I expected.”

“That might be because I used my class skills instead of my guns,” Betty said. “Unfortunately they aren’t good enough to take down a dragon.”

“Let’s upgrade the Throne,” Todd said. He entered the driver’s seat. Betty hesitated a moment and then took the passenger’s seat. Luke opened the rear cab door and passed to the seat behind Todd. Annie took the remaining seat.

“What should we put our points on?” Todd asked.

“Can we spend it on the last two stats?” Luke asked. “I’m curious as to what they do. Also, since we are four now, more space might be nice.”

As before, the Roamer shivered like a wild animal, when Todd pressed ‘Confirm’.

“Holy cow,” Annie exclaimed. “What the hell was that?”

“I know, it’s freaky,” Luke agreed.

**Base Stats:**

**Speed: 55 -> (55 + 10) \* 2 = 130**

**Strength: 50 -> (50 + 10) \* 2 = 120**

**Toughness: 20 -> (30 + 10) \* 2 = 80**

**Restoration: 10 -> (25 + 10) \* 2 = 70**

**Stealth: 20 -> (40 + 10) \* 2 = 100**

**Metamorphosis: 0 -> (5 + 10) \* 2 = 30**

**Interior Space: 0 -> (10 + 10) \* 2 = 40**

**Abilities: Amphibious Mode,**

**Simple Slideouts**

**Features: Level 2 Store**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats)**

**Current Level: 17 -> 20**

“Look, we have slideouts,” Todd said. “Let’s go look.” He sat on the central console and swung his legs around. A moment later, Betty followed.

The change was noticeable. The cabin was at least a meter longer, and looked more like a home than a vehicle.

Dad pressed the camp mode button and the entire driver’s side slid out two feet. The passenger side too also slid out.

The rover rocked slightly as the stabilizing legs adjusted itself.

The central aisle was now 4 feet wider than it was before.

“Amazing,” Betty said. “It’s so spacious.”

Spacious was a relative term. Expeditions weren’t known for spaciousness, just ruggedness. The floor area was still less than Annie’s bedroom.

“I can’t wait to see what more we can unlock with more XP,” Todd said excitedly.

“I better start cooking,” Betty said.

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“Annie, I’ll show you our store,” I said excitedly. Being able to talk to an actual elf was a once in a lifetime experience, which hopefully would last a lifetime.

The fight with the monsters was strangely fun with her next to me.

“You have a store?” Annie asked, surprised as she followed me.

Outside, I showed Annie the store panel, then the different features. I enjoyed watching her as she excitedly perused the catalog.

“We have a level 2 store,” Dad said. “Anything new?”

“Just more items you would find at Ballfarts or Homely Depot,” I replied. “Annie likes all the new clothes.”

Dad just laughed.

“Hey, clothes are important,” Annie said angrily. “But no sizes are shown.”

“I’m sure the store knows what size you need,” Dad said. “Just be sure. I don’t think we can return items. Then again, we haven’t had time to explore.”

“Dinner’s ready,” Mum called.

Annie sat beside me, opposite Mum and Dad. As we ate we made casual conversation.

“Do you know any languages?” I asked, hoping she knew the elf language.

“Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, and Alfin,” Annie said.

“Never heard of Alfin,” Dad said. “What does it sound like?”

Annie demonstrated and Mum said, “That sounds pretty.”

“Can you teach me it?” I asked.

There was no question Annie was an elf, even though she thought she was human. Therefore, learning the elf language would be fun.

Also, interacting with such a cute girl with such unearthly beauty was fun too.

Annie gave me a smile and wiped hair from her face. Mum and Dad saw that and smiled.

“Aah,” Annie screamed when she accidentally touched her own ear, reminding her of her transformation.

I felt the urge to hug the girl, but didn’t think that was appropriate.

“It’s okay dear,” Mum said. “We are here for you.”

Meal finished, Dad got up and started clearing the table.

“I’ll help you,” Annie said and took dishes.

Dishes done, it was time to hit the road.

There was a knock on the door.

“Who could that be?” Dad asked. “Also, so much for stealth,” he added.

“Come in,” Mum called.

The door opened and two elves entered.

“Hi, Annie dear,” the woman said. “Yes, we’ve been keeping secrets from you.”

Annie looked at the two people in shock. “No way,” she exclaimed in shock.

“We disguised ourselves as humans because we wanted you to grow up in human culture,” the man said.

“Our oracles said this world, and this young man in particular will play a critical role in our kingdom.”

“In other words, everything that has happened is your fault,” Annie said, angrily.

“No dear it’s not,” the woman denied. “What’s happening is beyond our control. It happened because humans meddled with forbidden technologies.”

Annie just crossed her arms and glared.

“For context, life arose on a planet in what you call the Large Magellanic Cloud over 7 billion years ago. In time, our ancestors, the Progenitors discovered the true nature of reality,” the man said.

“Reality is created and maintained by entities called conscious agents. The Progenitors’ technology allowed them to program these agents.

“They then used this knowledge to create god-like powers. Eventually their civilization began to stagnate.

“What was the point of colonizing star systems, when it was just the same thing over and over again?

“With no challenges, their race started to die out. Being immortal, the process was incredibly slow, but their destiny was seemingly cast in stone.

“After countless years with no children, it was then they as a society decided to limit their technology, and focus on a path of infinite personal growth.

“This way, all citizens could have the challenges they needed to thrive.

“The answer was an AI, whose sole purpose was to challenge the Progenitors’ descendants and keep them challenged for all of eternity.

“Out of necessity, this AI is beyond the control of all sentients.

“This AI or what your people colloquially call the System gave citizens two choices:

“1. Fight monsters, conquer dungeons, build empires or do whatever you want as you explore endless worlds and alternative realities. And yes, even our oldest have more to explore than they know what to do with. We are told, Life will never get boring, even for them.

“2. Colonize a terraformed world and live entirely with Newtonian Laws. Since the System is constantly launching probes, the number of potentially habitable worlds is constantly increasing.

“There are more vacant planets ready for colonization than there are people on Earth. And that was before your population crash. And that number is constantly increasing.

“Your world is one such colonized world and established with Newtonian Laws. Humans are just one subspecies within our Divine Empire. Hundreds of other planets contain human colonies within our empire, and thousands more outside.”

“But life existed on this planet for billions of years,” dad objected.

“Your scientists assumed that, because they rejected the idea of divine intervention and the possibility that your planet was terraformed. Their only choice was to believe in Gradualism, where evolution happened over billions of years.

“So much of what your science believes about your world is just plain wrong. Worse yet, your scientific authorities actively attacked anyone who opposed their closed-minded points of view.

“Your science even has a saying, ‘Science advances one death at a time,’ meaning, new ideas are only accepted when the old guard dies off, and the cycle begins again.”

I looked at Annie. Despite herself, she was drawn into the story.

“Why do we have so many sub-species? Because it’s more fun that way. Genetic drift, isolation, environment, and strange pathogens allow for a vast diversity in human expression, far greater than you have experienced on Earth.”

The man looked at me and said, “Congratulations on being the Last Child. Because of that, the underlying conscious agents regard you as being special. The same is true with our girl for various reason.

“Over the course of time, we never discovered any foreign life within the rest of the universe.

“The Progenitors conjectured our presence has prevented the development of sentient life anywhere in the universe. It’s like an egg cell. The egg actively blocks all sperm cells from entering once the first sperm cell enters.

“Unfortunately, since fast travel is only possible where the underlying conscious agents have been modified, and since probes can only travel at less than the speed of light; we have no way of knowing if our species is truly alone.

“And even the best telescopes have found nothing.

“We only came to formally introduce ourselves. And yes, we are still keeping secrets.”

“Please take care of our child,” the woman said. “Annie, be a good girl and become strong. And dear, try not using so much profanity.”

“Here’s a little secret,” the man said. “We are all conscious agents. There is no death. Even if we should die, we really do not. So you really should have fun.”

“I don’t see how destroying civilization or forcing people to fight to the death could possibly be called fun,” Annie said angrily. “And what’s up with these stupid ears?”

“We told you dear,” the woman said patiently. “The System is beyond anyone’s control. It deemed your world was unrecoverable. It made the decision to force everyone to start from scratch.

“For good or bad the System is working exactly as the Progenitors intended. Its vastness is beyond imagination, even by Progenitor standards, and we are all literally part of it.”

“You mean like God,” Todd said.

“Essentially yes,” the woman said. “Its reach will eventually extend to the farthest reaches of space as the entire universe gets assimilated.

“And we are all part of its greatness.

“And as for your ears, that’s part of you.”

“And yet I was normal until just yesterday,” Annie pointed out.

Her angry face was definitely cute.

“Do you really hate those ears?” the woman asked.

“YES, YES, YES,” Annie shouted. “And these oversized purple eyes and weird skin color and EVERYTHING.”

The man nodded to the woman and the woman sighed. “Fine,” she said reluctantly. “Put this necklace on. It contains the spell that made you look human your entire life.”

Annie put the necklace on and then looked at herself in her cell phone. She rubbed her ears. “Finally,” she said, looking relieved.

Annie’s new, human appearance was rather attractive. However, other than a slight change in complexion and facial features, she was basically the same – a tall, slender, athletic, teenage girl with a blond ponytail, blue eyes, plump cheeks and kissable lips.

“It’s time for us to go,” the woman said. “Give us a hug.”

Reluctantly Annie gave her parents hugs. A moment later, they disappeared, leaving us alone.

“It couldn’t have been easy living with your parents,” Mum said.

Annie nodded and said, “They are always out on business trips. I’m tired of constantly travelling around the world, never being able to make friends.

“You poor thing,” Mum said and gave Annie a hug. “You can stay with us for as long as you like.”

“Thanks Mrs. Betty,” Annie said tearfully.

“It’s time to go,” Dad said. “Those monsters aren’t going to kill themselves.” He headed to the front.

We followed and took our places in the front. Mum took the front passenger seat. Annie sat behind Dad and I sat behind Mum.

Dad pressed the ‘On’ button and Dragon’s Throne switched to drive mode.

The central screen turned into a map of the area.

“I didn’t know we had GPS,” Dad said.

Dad zoomed out and we discovered colored dots surrounding us. According to the map the furthest dot was almost a mile away. Beyond that was shrouded by the so-called fog of war.

Most of the dots were yellow. One was red, and a few were green. There were also a cluster of blue dots.

The dots were moving.

“I wonder what the meaning of the colors is,” Dad said. “There’s only one way of finding out.”

Dad started driving.

For a few moments I just listened to the sound of the tires as they rolled over the ground.

“Annie, can you please teach me that Alfin language?” I asked.

“Sure, but what’s the point?” Annie asked, staring out the window.

“To pass the time,” I replied. “Unless you want to play, ‘I spy’.”

We approached a yellow dot and it appeared to be a three-horned sheep.

Dad stepped out of the roamer and immediately the sheep attacked. A moment later it was dead. Dad got back in and we drove off again.

The next dot was green. This time the monster was a spiked turtle. The creature looked at Dad and walked away.

On return, Dad said, “Okay, so Green means non-aggressive. Yellow probably means aggressive but something we can easily handle. I’ll avoid the red for now. Time to look for the blue dots...”

“How do I teach?” Annie asked. “Let’s start with basic phrases. What should we use?”

“What time is it?” I asked.

“What time is it?”Annie translated.

I repeated a few times as Annie corrected my pronunciation. We continued driving with Annie translating various phrases.

Language Skills, Level 1

“What was that flash?” Annie asked when she saw me momentarily glow.

“I just got Language Skills, Level 1,” I said excitedly. “It seems that is part of my Mastermind class.”

“I thought anyone can learn languages,” Annie said.

“That’s true,” I agreed. “Other than the pompous name, I’m not sure what my class does.”

Our conversation was interrupted when we approached a group of blue dots. They were surrounded by yellow dots. Up close the blue dots turned out to be people.

The people in question finished the monsters off with guns, bows and melee weapons as we approached.

We stepped out of *Dragon’s Throne* and greeted them. As expected, they got surprised by our appearance.

Dad did introductions. “I am Todd Winthrop and this is my wife Betty. That is Luke and Annie.”

“I am Lisa,” a woman said. “You’re so lucky to have kids. I put off getting children and then it was too late.”

Annie looked a little surprised but then smiled.

“You should be able to get children, now that the world has changed,” Mum said. “However, I suggest you establish yourself first before having children.”

“We started a village upriver,” Dad said. “Around 6km upstream there is a landslide. Go beyond that for another 7km and you will see it. By the way, did you see the signal flares?”

“No we didn’t,” a man said.

“We should have told them to fire the flares once an hour,” I said.

“I know,” Dad agreed. “By the way, do any of you have cell phones with solar chargers?”

“Of course,” another man said. “We all do, including the emergency archive.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Dad said happily. “The citizens are all luddites, so technical help will be vital.”

“What sort of technical help?” a woman asked. “I’m not good with computers.”

“Knowledge of how to build a log cabin, furniture, and other stuff,” Dad said. “You know. Just regular artisan stuff.”

“There is a 5% tax on experience,” Mum said. “This will be used to upgrade the village to a town, making the place safer and more livable. The mayor is a man named John.”

“I’ve seen city building tutorials on YouTube but never tried,” a man said.

“You have your archive,” Dad said. “Remember to fight plenty of monsters. By the way, the village has a store you can buy stuff from…”

Dad was interrupted as the people badgered him with questions.

“Please tell Mayor John to fire the flares once an hour,” Dad said. “We are going downstream to find more people. We will return to upgrade the village when it gains sufficient experience.

“Actually with the number of people you have, perhaps we should return tomorrow.”

We waved goodbye to the new villagers and watched as they headed upriver.

“Should we have told them about your store?” Annie asked.

“Our store,” I corrected.

“Our store,” Annie said.

“What good would that have done?” Dad asked. “It currently doesn’t have weapons or ammo. It’s a bit of a walk, but they should reach by tonight.”

“I counted 57 people,” I said.

“Too many to fit in the roamer,” Dad said. “It’s time to look for more survivors and hopefully more goblin villages to conquer.”

“Are goblins the only ones to create villages?” Annie asked.

“Don’t know, perhaps draugr villages,” Dad suggested.

“I wouldn’t want to live in a village filled with undead,” Mum said, disgusted.

We got into *Dragon’s Throne* and continued driving.

As we drove, the river we were following emptied into a lake.

The lake looked rather pretty, surrounded by forests and hemmed in by steep mountains cliffs.

As we drove, a new symbol appeared on the map. “There it is,” I called.

On the other side of the lake were ornate metal doors.

“Is that a dungeon?” Dad asked as he stopped the roamer.

“How do we get there?” Annie asked.

“We drive,” I replied. “The *Throne* is amphibious.”

“Good point,” Dad said, and turned left. “I wonder if we should just drive in.”

Putting words to action, Dad slowly drove in. In moments *Dragon’s Throne* was floating.

Dad pressed the pedal and we moved forward.

“It seems straightforward to move and steer,” Dad said.

“This seems almost cheating,” Annie said.

“I agree,” Dad said. “However, we received a notification that these Apocalypse items were available to everyone. Of the 7 some billion people on earth, only around 1.7 million have one of these items.

“On the other hand, this seems to be purely a quality of life thing.

“On the other hand, I’m sure quality of life things will become available when other people establish villages and upgrade them. After all, the Village of Luke already has a store and some houses.”

We arrived on the other side and drove to the gate.

“Should we enter?” Mum asked.

“We should prepare first,” Dad said. “Let’s get into the back and we’ll discuss this.”

We headed back and sat at the table.

“We are surrounded by red dots. Does that mean there are stronger monsters than the dragons we faced? Or is it being calculated based on our firepower?” Dad asked.

“Anyways, I am a Grenadier. Grenadiers are soldiers that focus on artillery, which I can create.

“However, swords have 10% more penetrating power and bayonets have 20% more.

“At level 1, I can create grenades. Unfortunately they are 10% the strength of a normal grenade. They also take 1 minute to create and I can only carry 1 at a time.

“I also have +1, Strength per level and +1, Constitution per level.

“I wanted to use my grenade, but was afraid of hitting Betty.”

“Same here,” I said. “I was given the class Mastermind. With this, all mental abilities are trainable. I do get +1, Nerve per level and +1, Manna per level. I have it set as hidden. I don’t want people thinking I’m pompous.”

“You mentioned language before,” Annie said.

“Yes,” I replied. “That’s the first to have awoken. However, I don’t seem to have battle skills, although I should have good aim and technique.”

“I have valkyrie,” Mum said. “That is a melee fighter that focuses on Agility and Constitution. Strangely, I can fly. I also get 2\* on Agility, which Luke said I should temper with Nerve, or I will end up crashing into things and missing enemies. I also get a boost in strength when defending my loved ones. I also have an intimidation skill.

“In games you can min-max stats, but not in real life,” Mum added.

“Unless it’s Manna and Restoration if you don’t mind living on potions. Probably,” I added.

We then discussed our theories on stat distribution.

“We didn’t tell the new guys about stats,” Mum said.

“Too late now,” Dad said.

“I have Battle Alchemist,” Annie said.

“An alchemist can create and transmute chemicals and elements. They are also immune to the negative effects of the chemicals they create. The drawback is that they must taste or breathe all the chemicals before they can understand them, starting with the basic elements and graduate to larger and larger molecules, as our level increases.

“So proteins and such will be impossible for a very long time. Since I am at level 1, I can only understand elements in their elemental form. Going past 1 might be a pain.

“Anyways, I get boosts on Stamina and Constitution.”

“That’s okay,” Dad said. “Just because you are starting slow, doesn’t mean you will remain weak.”

“Okay, so we have a vague idea about our classes,” Mum said. “Now we should take stock on equipment.”

“Well we still have a few grenades for emergencies,” Dad said. “And we have guns.”

“I still have a few chemical weapons,” Annie said.

“Seriously?” Dad asked, surprised.

“I have Teflon-lined balls filled with Fluoroantimonic acid, the world’s strongest acid,” Annie said. “It doesn’t matter how strong a monster is. There is no way it can defend against acids that dissolve metal.”

Annie showed her Styrofoam packaged balls of deadly liquid.

“I wonder if we can reproduce these things,” Dad mused.

“Impossible,” Annie said. “Fluoroantimonic acid reacts violently with even moisture in the air. The only reason I have it is because my parents never spared any expense when it came to my equipment and training, even when it came to semi-legal substances.

“I even have a few napalm-filled volatile cocktails.”

“That’s amazing and a little scary,” Dad said. “Other than guns and chemical weapons, what other battle skills do you have?”

“I’ve trained in martial arts such as karate and medieval weapons, such as swords, bows, spears, throwing knives and clubs,” Annie added with a smile. She took out her glaive.

“Okay, that’s pretty standard stuff,” Dad said. At Annie’s look, Dad added, “That sounds like the training plan released by the government.”

Annie nodded. “A lot of people hated it, claiming it was too extreme.”

“Most people never bothered training, pretending this day would never come. Bet they are crying now,” Dad said grimly.

“There is one thing we haven’t discussed,” Mum said. “Should we enter?”

Dad brought out his pad. “Betty, do you want to take notes?”

Mum took the pad and stylus.

“Write two columns, one for entering and one for leaving,” Dad said.

After discussing, we came up with:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Leave | Enter |
| * Safer * More time to meet more people * Fight known monsters, instead of getting surprised * No traps * Not getting trapped | * Possibility of new achievements * Unusual loot |

“Annie’s parents said the System was created to eternally challenge us,” I said. “If that’s true, then the System isn’t malicious, in that it’s not trying to kill us.

“Think of it like a zoo keeper keeping carnivores near herbivores. The herbivores aren’t in actual danger, but they don’t know that.

“It’s not the same, but I’m willing to bet difficulty scales according to our abilities. Those people we rescued were never in danger, since they had hiding places. It seems they were just incentives for us to fight.”

“Good point,” Dad said.

“However, even in the real world with no divine System mixing things up, people still die,” Mum pointed out.

“And there are hostile people everywhere,” Dad said. “With no cops, the crime syndicates and petty crooks can run free.”

“So you’re saying, people are more dangerous than the System,” Annie said.

“Absolutely,” Mum said. “Monsters are honest, like animals.

“Just like going off into the wilderness or climbing mountains, our foolishness and accidents can get us killed.”

“So we need to level up to protect ourselves from people, correct?” Annie asked.

“Absolutely,” I said. “Combining what your parents said with the fact we have this dungeon means we can conquer it if we are careful, and bold.”

“What about traps?” Mum asked.

“We will just be careful,” Dad said.

“Traps are probably in deserted rooms and corridors,” Annie said. “That’s what my tutors said. Traps are unlikely in areas with monsters and boss rooms. Also, all traps should have telltale signs if you are observant.”

“If our assumptions of the System are true, traps should all be marked somehow,” Dad said. “Too bad we don’t have a rogue.”

“Perhaps we can get secondary classes,” I suggested.

Dad got up and we exited.

“I’m putting the *Throne* away,” I said. A moment later it disappeared.

“How did you do that?” Annie asked, surprised.

“It’s soul bound to me since I chose it,” I explained. “Originally I found it in my inventory when I arrived.”

“What will happen if someone is inside?” Annie asked.

“I’d rather not find out,” Mum said.

“But we only had two choices, the one item or what we had on our backs,” Annie said. Her eyes unfocused and then she blushed red.

“Yes that’s what happened,” Dad said with a chuckle. Annie only blushed deeper. She was caught fantasizing about naked me. That made me happy.

I adjusted my riffle on my shoulder and gun in my hand.

Making sure we were all ready, Dad placed a hand on the door.

C:\Users\Burgess\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\0LM9LILP\MC900065312[1].wmf

The door creaked opened, as if it were ancient.

“Helmets on,” Dad commanded.

I glanced at Annie and found she also had a helmet fitted with a headlamp.

We entered a tunnel lit by the flickering light of torches. The corridor was bare other than soggy moss growing on the walls and hanging like curtains from the ceiling.

The air was heavy with a damp musty scent, somehow reminding me of a graveyard, a swampy graveyard of a horror movie.

The doors slammed shut with a loud bang as we fully entered, scaring the snot out of me, and perhaps a little squeak.

“Did they really have to make that noise?” Dad asked to no one.

I quickly scanned the moss-covered ground. If there were traps, they were well-hidden.

The fire light cast weird shadows making the corridor rather creepy, and the humidity of the tunnel was stifling.

“Damn, what a stink,” Annie muttered.

“Standard procedure, no touching anything,” Dad said. “Scan the ground.”

“Obvious traps should be more dangerous than subtle traps, I assume,” I said.

We slowly walked forward and I scanned every surface. Dungeons were scary.

Just then a zombie stepped out of a corridor I didn’t notice because of the flickering light.

Draugr Warrior, Level 21

“I’m having a bad feeling about this,” Mum muttered and charged forward with her glaive, more flying than running.

She succeeded in beheading the monster, but not before knocking her 2m glaive against the stone walls.

The rotten head fell over and disappeared with the body. However, its passing increased the stink in the air.

“Better take my sword,” Dad said.

Mum put the glaive away and took the sword. She strapped it on and drew the blade.

We proceeded forward and encountered another draugr.

“Those things are terrifying,” Annie said, her voice trembling with fear.

“Don’t worry dear, I won’t let anything hurt you,” Mum said as more undead approached.

“Terrifyingly stinky,” I added. “Talk about BO.”

I fired a head shot at one with mum’s bow. Its head whipped back and took damage but didn’t die. I shot another one in the heart, but this didn’t even stagger it.

“What are you doing Luke?” Dad asked.

“Just probing for weaknesses,” I replied. “Fire could work, I suppose.”

“I have some…,” Annie began, clearly eager to blow things up.

“Don’t waste your high level weapons,” I admonished. “Later we’ll make homemade volatile cocktails. No need to worry. Mum is kicking ass and we have stamina potions.”

“Based on the games I’ve played, I’m betting there is either finite draugr or a spawn point we can destroy,” Dad said.

“Annie, let’s resume our language lessons,” I added.

“Right now?” Annie asked, surprised.

“This is actually a perfect time,” I replied. “For instance, what is a zombie called?”

We arrived at a room and Mum entered. Having more space, I took out a goblin club, and Annie did the same.

There was a new monster there.

Zombie Wolf, Level 23

It attacked with surprising speed. Mum handled it, since her speed was ridiculous, maybe a little too ridiculous.

At the same time the rest of us launched our attacks. I began smashing heads with all my might.

Following my lead Annie started bashing in heads. I looked at her and noticed that bashing heads had reduced her anxiety level.

Out language lessons were also helping.

Language Skills, Level 2

Both Dad and Annie glanced at me but were too busy to say anything.

“Mum, remember to put more into Nerve,” I called, noticing Mum struggling with her speed.

“Thanks Luke,” Mum said and continued the battle. “Controlling this speed is hard.”

Analysis, Level 1

Dad also seemed more relaxed as he sliced undead with his bayonet. You would think fighting with a huge knife stuck to the barrel of a riffle would be hard, but Dad made it look easy. He was treating his rifle like a spear.

The more we fought, the greater the smell of mold and mildew increased.

Finally the room was cleared and Mum said, “I think the stink of mold has entered my skin. My mouth tastes disgusting.”

Looking around, I spotted a pile of yellow material.

“Annie, try tasting that,” I said. “That looks like sulfur.”

Annie grabbed a rock and tentatively licked it. She glowed for a moment and she said, “My alchemy skill leveled up.” She harvested the rest.

Annie took in a deep breath and she glowed again. “Recognizing Nitrogen and Oxygen. I understand now. To build up my knowledge, I need to start with simple elements, or simple molecules like O2. However, I can’t understand water until I understand hydrogen.”

“No problem,” I said. “We can do some electrolysis at home.”

“Time for the next room,” Dad said through clenched teeth and then coughed. The stink was clearly getting to him.

“I wish we hadn’t entered,” Annie muttered, terrified. Mum and Dad were also scared, despite them being around 30.

“I find clenching my stomach and focusing on breathing helps me,” I said as we return to the corridor.

“Dad, bring up the rear please,” I said. “Draugr might have flanked us.”

“Okay Luke,” Dad said.

Slowly we proceeded through the corridors.

“You’re right,” Mum said. “It does help. But it’s still stressful.”

Both Dad and Annie agreed.

Soon we were at our next room. As before, this one had several draugr and wolves.

This time we encounter a spear user.

Draugr Spearist, Level 24

Presumably spearist was gander-neutral word for spearman.

Dealing with this opponent was tricky, since the spearist had greater range. However, fighting against spearists was part of my training.

I took out a goblin sword and blocked the spear. I then spun around moving forward, grabbing the spear with a free hand. I then let go of the spear and swung two-handed with all my might.

The head went flying. Unfortunately the sword edge dented when it hit the spinal cord. It didn’t matter. I still had 14 cheap goblin swords, not including the swords my family had.

The moment the head popped I turned to my next opponent. I switched back to clubs, since that was more effective.

Finally the last monster died, leaving us alone with some strange ore.

This time the ore was glowing rocks. Unfortunately, the rocks were the only source of light in that room, since there were no torches.

“We should collect…,” I began.

I was interrupted with a unanimous ‘No’.

I waited for the others to leave the room and quickly took the ore. Darkness wasn’t dangerous, just monsters. And the monsters were already cleared out.

The fifth room saw something different. It was a pile of copses.

“Bingo,” I said, as a draugr rose from the pile.

I let Mum and Dad deal with the undead. Instead, I approached the pile and started smashing it with my club.

Annie joined me in smashing with a vengeance. Mum and Dad couldn’t help, since the pile was still spawning monsters.

Draugr didn’t have flowing blood, but some reddish-brown sludge, so there was minimal splatter. It was different for the copse pile. Blood, guts, and other unspeakable substances flew as we smashed, covering us all in a revolting slime of various colors.

Finally, after what seemed like ages, the pile disintegrated and stopped spawning.

“Revolting,” Mum said, looking green around the gills.

“Is it over?” Annie asked.

“Sorry,” I said. “We still have more rooms to clear.”

I heard groans as we made our way out the door. The good news was the draugr were relatively slow, at least for us, despite all being at a higher level.

I voiced my observation and added, “Isn’t Giant Killer MAX and Dragon Killer amazing, especially how it stacks? It’s quite a cheat. With that we can hit above our level. Did I say above? I meant way above. And we are barely getting injured.”

That improved everyone’s morale.

“By the way dad, why don’t you use your magic grenades?” I ask.

“Oh yea, I forgot,” Dad said sheepishly.

It wasn’t long until we arrived at another room.

“Okay everyone, stand back,” Dad said and lobbed the grenade from behind the door. The grenade was weak compared to a normal grenade, but it did the job. And so we continued with our new strategy, where Mum fought in the front and Dad watched our back as he created new grenades.

For some reason the explosions definitely improved morale. There’s nothing like blowing things up.

Half an hour later Dad lobbed his 10th grenade and he flashed with a greenish light.

“Eureka,” Dad shouted happily. “My class just upgraded. I’m choosing riffle bullets. They may be wimpy, but I can create one every 10 seconds. More importantly, I can completely fill one clip with bullets, auto-loading the bullets as I use them.”

As we travelled down the corridor, Dad fired his riffle, and then spent time in the back regenerating bullets. That wasn’t a big deal since Dad also had Mum’s riffle on his back.

“Damn, how long is this stupid corridor?” Annie asked. “It’s not much of a maze, if we only have one corridor with a bunch of connected rooms.”

“And we only got 2 levels so far,” Mum grumbled.

“That’s because Mum is too overpowered,” I said. “On the bright side the monsters are getting stronger.”

More archers kept coming, along different types of zombies, both human and animal.

“How long is this stupid tunnel?” Annie demanded. “How many rooms have we cleared so far?”

I paused and then calculated the distance as I attempted to visualize the path.

“175 so far,” I said. “As for distance, I guess over 6km.”

Spatial Awareness, Level 1

We then entered a new type of room. This had no undead, but just a solitary red ornate chest.

As we walked in I asked, “Is that a mimic?”

Upon uttering the sentence, red demonic eyes appeared on the chest. The chest lid opened, revealing vicious fangs. It let loose an ungodly scream and started bouncing towards us.

This unfortunately paralyzed the others. With hackles raised and heart in my mouth, I retrieved a battle axe and swung down with all my might.

There was a loud crash as wood splinters flew everywhere.

Intimidation Resistance, Level 1

“Damn, that was scary,” Mum said as she pressed her hand to her chest.

“And I thought the undead was scary,” Annie said.

“You took action when the rest of us were paralyzed,” Dad said. “Good job.”

“Thanks dad,” I said happily. “And I even got an ability called Intimidation Resistance.”

Arrows came flying at us from two archers as we entered the main corridor. Before I could react the arrows were shredded.

With determination Mum continued her march forward, shredding zombies like a farmer harvesting wheat. Soon enough, the draugr archers were dispatched.

Unfortunately, more draugr archers appeared to take their place.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the corridor came to an end. In front of us was an imposing pair of iron doors carved with scowling demonic faces.

Above the door was a plaque.

Castle of a minor vassal of the King of Abomination

“Is this the boss room?” Dad asked.

“I hope so,” Mum said. “How far have we been walking anyway?”

I try to calculate the distance, but it is harder because of the greater distance.

Spatial Awareness, Level 2

“Almost 17.4km,” I said. “Holy cow! It’s the next day, 2:24PM. No wonder I’m feeling groggy.”

“This is probably a good time to allocate points,” Dad said.

I allocated points, intentionally avoiding Manna and Nerve.

**Base Stats:**

**Agility: 20-> (26+10) \* 2 => 72**

**Strength: 20 -> (26+10) \* 2 => 72**

**Constitution: 20 -> (26+10) \* 2 => 72**

**Stamina: 20 -> (26+10) \* 2 => 72**

**Restoration: 20 -> (26+10) \* 2 => 72**

**Nerve: 20 -> (20+10+23) \* 2 => 106**

**Manna Control: 20 -> (20+10+23) \* 2 => 106**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats)**

**Auto Points: +1/level – Manna, Nerve**

**Class: Mastermind**

**Current Level: 20 -> 23**

“What a freaky sensation,” Annie muttered as her body rippled with her stat boosts.

I paused as I admired her beauty. Her stat boost definitely helped.

“Yes, it is better than caffeine,” Dad added.

“I agree,” Mum said.

“Are we ready to enter?” Dad asked.

We all nod and Dad placed his hand on the door.

Do you wish to play on Hard Mode   
(No modern weapons, only abilities and medieval weapons)?  
Possibility of Epic Loot based on Performance

Yes/No

“What do you think?” Dad asked.

“I no longer need modern weapons,” Mum said.

“Dad, show me your riffle,” I said.

I examined the side of the gun and saw a brown marble embedded in the butt of the riffle. Along with it were indentations for several more.

“Dad, do you see this?” I asked, excitedly. “It looks as if your riffle can accept additional dragon orbs. Here try it.”

I returned the riffle and handed Dad my wind orb.

Dad took the orb and placed it against the butt of his riffle. The riffle glowed green and absorbed the orb. A green marble appeared in one of the indentations, next to the brown marble.

“Bullets travel 50% faster. That means more penetrating power. Thanks Luke,” Dad said excitedly and gave me a hug.

“I discovered something new,” Dad added. “I can enable or disable effects on projectiles and my bayonet.”

“Mum, I’m guessing you can upgrade a melee weapon since you are a melee fighter,” I said. “The question is what kind of weapon do you want to upgrade? Although I don’t know what water will do. We need to hunt more dragons. We also have those other orbs from the other monsters.”

Mum took out her water orb. She hesitated a moment and placed the orb on her glaive. The weapon glowed blue as it absorbed the orb.

The nicks and scratches on the blade slowly disappeared.

“Water has a repair function,” Mum mused. “It also has a lubricating feature, making it easier to slice through things.”

“Can you use this?” Annie asked dad sheepishly.

“Are you sure?” Dad asked.

“Of course,” Annie replied with determination.

“Go ahead dad,” I said. “It should add less friction to bullets, and make your bayonet more stabby.”

“Is stabby a word?” Dad asked with a smile as he took the orb and placed it on his riffle. Again it glowed with a blue light.

“Yes, this does have a repair ability. With less friction, bullets will travel further and penetrate deeper. Of course, that is only relevant for massive monsters. Thanks Annie,” Dad said and gave Annie a hug.

“I feel confident fighting with this riffle, even without bullets.

“But what about you two?”

“Annie, have some salt,” I said and took out my salt and pepper shaker. It was a tiny thing, barely the size of my finger tip.

“Sodium and chlorine,” Annie said and accepted the shaker. She put a few grains of salt on her hand and licked it.

“Thanks Luke,” Annie said and handed the shaker back. “I can now synthesize both sodium and chlorine but it’s slow.”

Annie took out a dadao, a larger version of a cutlass. Designed for cutting, this was perfect for draugr.

Annie concentrated on the blade. At first nothing happened, and then the color changed. A moment later it flickered with flames as the suffocating humidity reacted with the sodium on the blade.

Annie glowed briefly as her class advanced.

“Sweet,” Annie exclaimed happily. “I even leveled my class. I even have a new ability. It makes applying chemicals to weapons 10% faster. It can level up.

“Unfortunately, I can only create a coating a few microns thick,” Annie said. “However, I can continuously regenerate it.”

Annie paused in wide-eyed wonder and said, “So that’s what battle in Battle Alchemist means. Thanks Luke.”

Annie gave me a quick but very enjoyable hug.

The flames died out the moment Annie lost concentration, but were quickly reignited. “I feel confident with my sword skills,” Annie said as she held the weapon two-handed.

“What about you?” Mum asked worriedly.

I took out two goblin swords. The quality was crap but we had plenty.

“If I’m correct, Mastermind allows me to be quicker in the mind department. It also helps that Nerve improves reaction speed, among other things.

“I have plenty of strength and agility, combined with hundreds of hours of sword practice. I think I should be fine.

“Skill trumps strength and speed if the differences aren’t too great.

“And the good news is we are finally learning to use our classes.”

“Are you ambidextrous?” Annie asked, intrigued.

“Unfortunately no,” I replied. “My off-hand is crap, no matter how much I practice. I’m only holding this in my off-hand because I don’t have a shield. It won’t get in the way if that’s your concern.

“I’m putting my ammo bag and guns away.”

“If you’re all ready, I’m pressing yes,” Dad said.

We all nodded. The iron doors swung open and burly guards turned to stare at us with milky white eyeballs.

Draugr Brute, Level 32

“I don’t think I will ever get used to those dead eyes,” Mum said with a shudder. A moment later we charged into a large hallway that had seen better days.

The only good news was that there was no moss underfoot to cause us to slip. It was then that I realized that if there were traps in the hallway, it was the moss, inviting us to slip and fall.

Trap Detection, Level 1

Was that even a skill? It was just observation.

I took a sword-fencing position and attacked the nearest draugr.

The room rang with the sounds of weapons clashing. My opponent was skilled with the sword but slowed by the fact that he was dead and didn’t know it.

Suddenly another draugr tried to flank me. I switched my attention and blocked with my off-blade. Jumping back, I swung my main sword and decapitated my sneaky assailant.

I went back to fighting my original opponent, and then the opportunity arose. I blocked with my main blade and then swung with my off-blade. It worked.

My off-blade couldn’t fence properly, but it could do simple things such as block and slice. But damn, it was awkward.

I glanced at my companions. Mum was going all out like a whirlwind. Dad and Annie were fighting but were having problems dealing with back-stabbers.

“Dad, Annie, to me,” I called. “We’ll cover each other’s backs.”

“Okay Luke,” Dad said. “Aah,” he screamed as a draugr stabbed him.

The sight of dad getting hurt made me furious. I had the urge to charge, to protect my family. I quickly reigned in my emotions. Rash actions would get all of us killed.

Self Control, Level 1

That surprised me, but I had no time for that.

I concentrated and time seemed to stop. For a moment I debated what to do, but there was only one thing to do.

I pulled back my off-hand and tried to whip my sword at the monster’s head.

I had to use my off-hand, since my main hand was engaged in fighting an opponent.

For some reason I felt as if I was moving through molasses as I performed the action. Furthermore, my muscles screamed in agony. The sharp pain felt like my muscle fibers were tearing.

Struggling with all my might, I succeeded. However, the flight of the sword was rather slow.

Time Slow, Level 1 -   
Perception of time will slow,   
with the side-effect of increasing metabolic rate.  
Prolonged use will cause heat stroke, torn muscles, ligaments and broken bones.

Then came another message…

Hyper Movement, Level 1 -   
Hyper accelerate while in Time Slow. Drains Manna, Stamina

The blade flew straight and true. Despite being slow, it embedded itself to its hilt in the draugr’s head, staggering it, but didn’t kill it. Stupid undead! A regular creature would have died.

A moment later Mum finished him off.

Ambidextrous, Level 1

With Dad safe for a time, time resumed. I suddenly felt mental exhaustion and a little feverous, no doubt side-effects of the skill use. Also, my off-arm was in agony from the overexertion injury.

I had taken damage, weakening my arm considerably.

I resumed the previous fight and slowly my brief fever and exhaustion disappeared. My high Restoration did its thing, repairing damage in my torn muscles, but it was slow.

Finally I arrived at Dad’s position. “Here drink,” I said and stuck a potion into his mouth. He quickly swallowed it while stabbing furiously with his riffle’s barbet.

“Thanks,” Dad said as he fired off a shot. A moment later he tossed a grenade, causing draugr to fly in all directions.

I looked at Annie, who was now making the third edge of our war triangle. Unlike Dad, she was able to use health potions occasionally, when she held her sword one-handed.

I retrieved a second sword from my inventory and resumed fighting. Amazingly, I found it a little easier to fight with my off-hand.

After what seemed like an eternity, the enemy wave slowed and then stopped.

I quickly downed a potion as the numerous scratches covering me healed.

“I unlocked a few skills,” I said and shared what I got.

“Are you turning into a ninja?” Annie asked. “I can’t believe someone can move so fast.”

I thought of my skills, Trap Detection, Self Control, Time Slow, Hyper Movement, and Ambidextrous or dual yielding.

“I don’t think so,” I replied. “Although I suppose they are all rogue skills.

“But right now I’m really hungry. Using that Time Slow and Hyper Movement skill is draining. Using my off-hand tripled my energy cost. I will need to invest more into Constitution, so I don’t tear muscles.”

We all paused to have a quick bite to eat.

“It felt like the wave would never end,” Annie said. “Do you think that could happen?”

“Unlikely,” I replied. “However, that might change in the throne room. If that happens, then we will have no choice but to kill the boss first.

“Time to allocate stats…”

This time I got 2 levels. I put all 10 points into Constitution. I needed more protection if I wanted to use the Time Slow skill.

**Base Stats:**

**Agility: 26 -> (26 + 10) \* 2 => 72**

**Strength: 26 -> (26 + 10) \* 2 => 72**

**Constitution: 26 -> (36 + 10) \* 2 => 92**

**Stamina: 26 -> (26 + 10) \* 2 => 72**

**Restoration: 26 -> (26 + 10) \* 2 => 72**

**Nerve: 20 -> (20 + 10 + 25) \* 2 => 110**

**Manna Control: 20 -> (20 + 10 + 25) \* 2 => 110**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats)**

**Auto Points: +1/level – Manna, Nerve**

**Class: Mastermind**

**Current Level: 23 -> 25**

As we rested I asked, “Do you have carbon?”

“No,” Annie replied. “CO2 is still out of my range. I can only handle 2-atom molecules. Why do you ask?”

“I got some wooden arrows as loot,” I said. I retrieve it and started burning it with a lighter.

“Are we ready to continue?” Dad asked.

“Another 5 minutes,” I said.

Slowly the shaft started to blacken. Another minute later flames raced across the shaft.

“That should be good enough,” Annie said and I handed her the arrow.

“And the tip also,” I added.

Annie frowned at the arrow in distaste and licked the charred part of the arrow. She then licked the arrow head.

“That worked,” Annie said, excitedly. “That gave me Carbon and Iron. With moisture I have hydrogen. With three different atoms, I can make hydrogen cyanide or HCN.

“Too bad we can’t summon the *Dragon’s Throne*,” I said. “The store should be filled with plenty of chemicals you can train against.”

“How about volatile liquids or solids?” I asked. “We still have the empty health vials.”

“Other than cyanide, I can create hydrochloride acid, but I’m not sure how useful they will be against undead,” Annie said.

“We’ll be more prepared next time,” I said. “There’s a huge difference between speculation and experience.”

Dad opened the next door and we advanced.

We immediately engaged the draugr in combat, and my sword broke.

That’s what happens when using cheap goblin weapons. The draugr weapons were no better. At least they were plentiful.

I quickly retrieved a new sword and continued the fight.

The fight continued as before. Fighting monsters were a pain, and by pain, I meant it hurt when I got stabbed by blunt knives, rusty swords and overgrown finger nails.

Mum was amazing. Dad was also mastering his class and could now fire 1 bullet per second or so. Soon he should be able to fire multiple bullets a second, or use more powerful bullets at a lower continuous rate.

Also, I noticed Dad was chucking grenades at a faster clip.

Even Annie was kicking butt with her flaming sword, which would flare up when cutting draugr. They maybe copses, but they were still damp on the inside.

However, I had no offensive skills I could rely on.

I continued fighting, wracking my brain on what to do. How do I get my own fighting skill?

Never the less I continued doing my part in our battle formation.

Finally the battle ended and the room was cleared.

“Mum, pass me your bow, since you’re not using it,” I said.

To took the bow and hooked the quiver on my hip. I then filled the quiver to capacity and then placed the extra arrows into my inventory. There were almost 300 low-quality goblin and draugr arrows.

“Is that allowed?” Annie asked.

“It may be made of modern materials but it is still a bow,” I said. “I still need strength and training to use it.”

I put the bow away and instead took out a goblin bow. “On second thought, there is no point in taking chances.”

“I will start with the bow, then switch,” I said. “I’m ready dad.”

The doors swung open and we found a new type of monster. This draugr had two heads.

I started shooting arrows as fast as I could. Unfortunately, removing an arrow, notching it and firing took almost two seconds. It didn’t help that the goblin bow was crap.

Aiming at a location where Mum wasn’t, I just focused on spreading the hurt.

It helped that we were at the doorway, thus preventing us from getting flanked.

I realized this was a good formation. Dad and Annie were protecting me, while I just shot arrows.

Arrows couldn’t one-shot the draugr, but they did soften them up. Also, I could now help Dad handle the ever-present archers.

In the end I put the bow away. It was almost completely useless against undead. “Okay, let’s go in. I’m wasting my time with arrows.”

We move in and I resumed double-wielding my swords. They were definitely more effective.

“If only we had some holy magic,” I muttered. “I wonder if healing is harmful to them.” With that, I tossed a health potion at one of the heads of a two-headed draugr.

The vial hit the face and broke. The liquid soaked into the dead face and dissolved it. Seeing the effect I tried a second on the second head. It worked, destroying the monster.

“It worked,” Annie said happily.

“Yes, but we don’t have enough potions,” I said. “I guess the only thing we can do is grind.”

And grind, and grind, and grind.

Finally the room was cleared.

“This is seriously stressful,” Mum said.

“On the bright side, I now have 3 more levels,” I said.

I decided to add to Strength, Stamina, and Restoration.

**Base Stats:**

**Agility: 26 -> (26 + 10) \* 2 => 72**

**Strength: 26 -> (31 + 10) \* 2 => 82**

**Constitution: 36 -> (36 + 10) \* 2 => 92**

**Stamina: 26 -> (31 + 10) \* 2 => 82**

**Restoration: 26 -> (31 + 10) \* 2 => 82**

**Nerve: 20 -> (20 + 10 + 28) \* 2 => 116**

**Manna Control: 20 -> (20 + 10 + 28) \* 2 => 116**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats)**

**Auto Points: +1/level – Manna, Nerve**

**Class: Mastermind**

**Current Level: 25 -> 28**

I finalized my stats and as always I felt waves of energy ripple through me. It’s funny. Nerve and Manna were still higher, even though my base stats for the others were higher.

I watched as minor scratches healed without potions. As always, I was slightly stronger than before.

“I’m feeling reluctant to continue,” Dad said.

“I know,” I said. Dungeons are definitely stressful.

I steel myself up and get a notification.

Mental Fortitude, Level 1

That was my 8th mind-related skill.

I looked at Mum, Dad, and Annie and wondered what to say. “It can’t be that much longer. As the saying goes, ‘This too shall pass’. Besides, our training was more grueling, wasn’t it?

“And of course, we are now ass-kicking strong. And with double the ass-kicking strength as someone our level, I say we are actually cheating.

“Trust in your party members. Together we are strong.”

That lightened the mood.

Charisma, Level 1

Again I got a new mental power, which was just the ability to communicate.

“Don’t jinx us,” Annie scolded with a smile. “And you’re starting to look like a light bulb.”

“Okay folks, time to kill some zombies,” Dad said. “They will not kill themselves.”

The next room contained a new monster. This zombie was 260cm tall, had the proportions of an upright hippo. But that wasn’t the scariest part.

Draugr Butcher, Level 35

“Zombies are supposed to be animated copses,” Mum said. “So why the hell does that draugr have a giant mouth on it disgusting belly.”

The mouth on the monster’s belly bellowed, as if being insulted by what Mum said.

It was rather hard fighting the butchers while surrounded by weaker but never the less dangerous monsters.

One of the butchers charges at me with a ball and chain. “Scatter,” Dad shouted and quickly dodged. The spikes on the ball jammed into the floor, briefly trapping it. While distracted, I charged forward and began stabbing.

Once again my sword broke, so I switched again.

In the meantime, the others were busy fighting both regular draugr and the two remaining butchers.

The butcher freed his weapon and began swinging his weapon.

I quickly moved towards a group of draugr.

Jumping on the back of a wolf, I proceed forward, with the butcher following me.

My tactic was successful. The butcher’s ball slammed into the other draugr, killing a few and scattering more.

Tactics, Level 1

Using this tactic, I ran around the room, taunting the butcher. “Hey fatso, the beluga whale wants to know why her son is so ugly.”

“Grrr,” it screamed and chased, swinging his weapon around him, hitting draugr in the process.

More and more draugr got wiped out by the butcher’s unconcerned actions.

“Thank you for helping us out,” I called out. “You have a big mouth. Why don’t you demonstrate how you…”

Just then the butcher grabbed a draugr and stuck it into its belly mouth. Its health increased. The other two did the same.

“That’s cannibalism, mush for brains,” I called out. “I wonder what will happen if you don’t have food.

Mum switched tactics and now attacked the other undead, depriving the butchers of their meals.

“Mum, drink a health potion,” I called out, realizing she wanted to puke.

“Thanks Luke, I feel better,” Mum said.

Finally the weaker mobs were gone and we focused on the butchers, fulltime.

Again I dashed around and again succeeded in getting them to hit each other.

Finally Mum put the last butcher down with a stab to its gut.

“I think I’m going to get nightmares from this,” Annie muttered.

“Look there,” I said, pointing at a gold crown on the massive doors. “I’m guessing we are at the boss room.”

The door wasn’t there a moment before.

“Finally, time to prepare for the boss battle,” Dad muttered.

I allocated my 10 points from leveling twice, focusing on Stamina and Restoration.

**Agility: 26 -> (26 + 10) \* 2 => 72**

**Strength: 31 -> (33 + 10) \* 2 => 86**

**Constitution: 36 -> (36 + 10) \* 2 => 92**

**Stamina: 31 -> (35 + 10) \* 2 => 90**

**Restoration: 31 -> (35 + 10) \* 2 => 90**

**Nerve: 20 -> (20 + 10 + 30) \* 2 => 120**

**Manna Control: 20 -> (20 + 10 + 30) \* 2 => 120**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats)**

**Auto Points: +1/level – Manna, Nerve**

**Class: Mastermind**

**Current Level: 28 -> 30**

“I’m going to use my potions as weapons now against the boss,” I said.

“My element creation speed has increased,” Annie said. “My flames are hotter now.”

“I too leveled up,” Dad said. “I can now create grenades in 20 seconds, and continuously shoot 2 bullets a second.”

“I have more control of my speed, as long as I don’t go too fast,” Mum said. “Also, my attacks seem to be hitting harder.”

I took out a great axe and swung it around. I then hit it against the walls, getting a feel for the weapon.

“I should have tried this before,” I said. “Maybe I should have added more to strength. Too late now.”

“I’m opening the door now,” Dad said. “Let’s get this over with,” he said wearingly.

The throne room was huge. A faded red carpet headed from the doors to an elevated dais. Atop that on a huge throne stood the most disgusting thing I had ever seen.

It was as if someone took dozens of copses, partially melted them, and poured them into a pile. Except the pile was humanoid shape in that it has arms, legs, torso and a lumpy head.

Multiple faces adorned the body with hands and feet sticking out at odd angles. It was terrifying, revolting, disgusting, and all kinds of wrong. It was aptly named.

Draugr Abomination, Level 47

A moment later I heard the sounds of barfing as Mum, Dad, and Annie let loose at the disgusting sight.

I too felt like barfing, both at the horror and the smell.

“Breathe through your mouth,” I called. “Also, take another health potion.”

I regulated my breathing, getting a grip of my emotions. It was my duty to protect my family.

Self Control, Level 2

I charged forward, swinging my battle axe. As always the low level monsters were the first to attack.

The room was filled with loud crunching as necks got sliced and heads got smashed.

Unfortunately, since I was the sole source of agro, more than my fair share of monsters attacked me.

A wolf snuck in and bit my leg. I was ready and slammed my axe into its back. The pain was excoriating, but I forced my thoughts to ignore it.

Pain Control, Level 1

I continued fighting, hacking and slashing as the wave continued.

Finally the others overcome their revulsion upon seeing me fighting and begin fighting as well.

This battle was identical to the previous one. The only difference was that we had a spectator. However, the flesh blob was unmoving, like the contents of a butcher shop dumped in a corner and left to rot.

Unlike the other Draugr, this one had a strong smell of rotting meat and rancid fat. Glancing at my people, I knew there was no way they could handle the Abomination.

“Don’t worry everyone,” I called. “Remember, we are strong. We are brave. We are the Dragon Liege.”

Where did Dragon Liege come from? No idea. It just popped into my head. However, now that I thought of it, it was a great name for a party of adventurers roaming through the world in an Apocalypse vehicle.

“Dragon Liege, sitting upon our Dragon Throne,” I declared. “We are Dragon Liege. We are Dragon Liege. We are Dragon Liege.”

Slowly the others echo me, until it becomes a roar.

Charisma, Level 2

“I want to travel around the edge of the throne room and arrive near the throne there. This will allow me to attack the boss directly, while you can protect me.”

“Why you?” Dad asked.

“Because I’m guessing the stink will increase when I start attacking. And I can handle that stink better,” I replied.

“Annie, is there any water in the health potion?” I asked.

“I have no idea what’s inside,” Annie replied, pausing a moment as she stabbed a monster in the throat.

I switched to one-handed fighting and held out a bottle.

“Try to…,” I began.

“I can’t make bulk sodium,” Annie said.

“No problem,” I replied happily. “There are plenty of ways to kill a monster.”

The number of monsters slowly diminished as we slowly inched along the wall.

“Are we defeating the monsters?” Mum asked, hopefully.

The hope was dashed when the Abomination howled.

Immediately doors flew open and a hoard of monsters entered. The number of monsters returned to the original level and the doors closed.

“It’s okay,” I called. “We aren’t losing recourses. In fact we are gaining potions and weapons slowly as we progress. I already have 45 health potions.”

The battle was fierce as we made our way around the throne room.

Mum had switched to a battle axe, now that she wasn’t able to freely travel around the room.

Finally we arrived at the throne dais.

“Is everyone ready?” I asked. “The boss will attack soon.”

“Go ahead Luke,” Dad said. I got similar responses from Mum and Annie.

I held a sword with my off-hand and whipped a healing potion at the boss.

The boss screamed and more monsters entered the throne room. At the same time the boss got up.

“I’m transferring all…,” Dad begun.

“Keep a few,” I said as I lobbed more potions.

A moment later I received 70 minor potions.

“Hold your breath,” I call as I saw the boss opening his mouth and taking a deep breath.

A moment later, green smoke escaped the boss’ mouth. Despite holding my breath, I felt like gagging.

On the bright side, the potions were causing damage.

92% Health

“I can toss a…” Annie said.

“No,” I said hastily. “Have faith in us. Just attack like usual.”

I felt my off-arm burning with fatigue as I swung my sword, as if my life dependent on it.

Ambidextrous, Level 2

“I can’t believe how many abilities I have leveled up,” I said. “Stomp coming.”

A moment later the throne room shook as the boss stomped his foot.

All about us, zombies fell to the ground. I too staggered, but I was ready. Mum, Dad, and Annie also staggered, but they too maintained their balance.

I took out my battle axe and hooked it on my shoulder, ready for use, then continued lobbing potions.

83% Health

The boss swung his hand at us. I was ready for this and so I dropped my sword and swung my axe, two-handed.

The axe sliced the hand off, but the hand remained.

Okay so the hand was a threat, so I smashed a potion onto the severed limb.

77% Health

“Hold breath,” I called as the boss once again opened his mouth. And into its mouth flew a health potion. Unfortunately it didn’t break.

More and more potions were thrown as the boss suddenly staggered.

“Guard me,” I called as I took my 2 handed axe and swung with all my might.

Again, pieces went flying.

The boss staggered back, away from me. Since I couldn’t attack directly, I switched to lobbing potions.

Again I targeted the pieces on the floor.

62% Health

“Stomp coming,” I shouted and braced myself.

Again the throne room rocked. Again I staggered, but quickly regained my balance.

Again I tossed potions.

Back again the monster came closer to me.

I looked at Annie and my parents. They were exhausted defending me.

47% Health

The cycle of attacks continued, and then the blobs I couldn’t purify started moving.

Now the others had to deal with a new treat.

I continued lobbing potions. Despite a steady flow of incoming potions, the total number of available potions was dropping.

Fortunately, the boss’ health was also dropping.

29% Health

Again the boss came close again and again I swung my axe. As before, I targeted the blobs with potions.

14% Health

“Hold breath,” I shouted again.

This time I sent in two potions into its mouth, then I stabbed with my looted lance. I felt a satisfying thunk as the blade broke the bottles.

7% Health

I felt excitement but suppressed my emotions.

“It’s not over yet,” I called. “Another attack is coming soon.”

Sure enough, the boss charged us, intending to squish me.

I continued whipping my potions until my arm got numb.

And then with barely 5 potions left, the boss stopped and disintegrated.

The other draugr stopped moving, and then they too disintegrated.

Dungeon cleared

Achievement gained:   
First Dungeon (+1 All Stats),   
for completing your first dungeon

Dungeon Mastery (+2 All Stats),

For exceptional performance

In a blink of an eye a chest appeared in the center of the room, alongside a pedestal.

I ran to the chest and opened it. Within was an attractive ornate glaive, with a grip in the middle resembling that of a bow.

Epic Elemental Bow Glaive

Double-doors appeared the moment I picked up the bow.

“It says here that we can claim the dungeon core,” Dad said. “However, this dungeon will shut down if we remove it.”

“Shut it down,” Mum commanded. “I HATE this dungeon. I want it gone.”

Dungeon will shut down in 1 minute

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I put the glaive away and stepped out into the great outdoors. It was already evening.

Behind us was a solid wall of granite some 30m tall.

Surrounding us was sparse woodlands, almost like a park.

Grass and wild flowers claimed the 60% of remaining space.

To the right, a large lake was being refilled by a waterfall, cascading down the cliff. A salmon the size of a car jumped out of the water before returning.

“That’s a big fish,” I said, pointing.

Off in the distance there were monsters that looked like mutant cows and giant bird-like creatures.

“Salmon, chicken and beef,” dad mused. “We just need pork. Scratch that. I saw some boars and some woolly rams. We have a full farm here.”

Before I could comment, mum declared, “This place is magnificent, but I need a shower.”

I took out the *Dragon’s Throne*, and immediately Mum entered. A moment later the slides came out and the stabilizing legs extended.

I went to the side and hooked up the outdoors shower and quickly hosed off my boots. I wanted to undress but Annie was there. So I handed the shower hose over and stepped back.

“Annie, we have a washing machine and dryer,” I said.

“Hurray,” Annie said excitedly.

I went to our store and bought some items. I handed two towels to Dad and one to Annie and said, “I also bought a night suit.”

Dad went in, presumably to give it to Mum.

“Annie, I’m going to look around,” I said. “You can shower after Mum and Dad.”

“Okay,” Annie said and headed for our store.

I looked around but there was little to see. Exploration could wait for tomorrow.

I then heard gunshots and quickly turned around.

Mountain Cow, Level 32

The cow had muscles on top of muscles, red skin and vicious looking horns. Strangely, it had gentle looking eyes.

It was the mutant cows I saw in the distance. For some reason two came here without me noticing.

However, Annie had seen them and was running towards me with her gun.

A moment later the second one fell with a bullet in its head.

“What did you get?” I asked.

“Cow hides, horns, and 45kg of prime steak, and some coins,” Annie said. “I also got milk from one and cheese from the second one.”

“What’s going on?” Dad asked as he ran towards us.

“Just hunting,” I replied. “By the way, we are having steak for dinner. I’ll get the outdoor grill ready.”

We walked back to the back of the *Throne* and I yanked out some pullouts.

“Shower is free,” Mum called. “I’m making dinner.”

“Mum, Annie caught us some steak for the BBQ,” I called. “Dad, why don’t you shower first?”

“Okay Luke,” Dad said.

“Can I do anything?” Annie asked.

“Sure,” I said. “There are folding chairs and a table there. Pass mum the steak.”

“Okay,” Annie said and headed for the door.

“Just deed the steaks to Mum,” I said.

“Oh, I forgot,” Annie said, blushing.

“I guess you like chemistry,” I asked, changing the subject.

“Yes,” Annie said excitedly. “Chemistry is the basis for everything. Yes, particle physics is important, since it defines chemical reactions. But they are just Lego blocks and limited in number.”

“I’ve read about Donald Hoffman and his theories of conscious agents,” I said. “Was that really so dangerous? Was this assimilation thing necessary? After all, there was no reason for the assimilation to be so harsh. Especially if other realities can be created.

“I suppose the Progenitors were idiots in their own way, just like most people on Earth.”

“Why do you think most people are idiots?” Annie asked.

“There are many examples,” I replied. “I saw a YouTube video about a law they created to protect birds. Then there was an oil spill. The helpers came to clean up the birds but the stupid cops arrested them, since it was illegal to touch the birds. Never mind that the birds were dying, all because of mindless obedience to some stupid law.

“I find things like this happening everywhere,” I said, feeling my emotions rise.

I took a breath and continued. “It doesn’t matter. Those stupid Progenitors tried to solve their problems with a sledge hammer, instead of only intervening when…It doesn’t matter. The only thing that matters is living our lives as best we can.”

“What if mum heard that?” Annie asked.

“She would say I was a heretic,” I replied.

“Would they hurt you?” Annie asked worriedly.

“Of course not,” I replied. “As they said, our meeting wasn’t a coincidence. It was meticulously planned, possibly since before your birth. They should know what kind of a person I am.

“Don’t you think it’s…How old are you anyways?”

“Shower is ready,” Dad called.

“I’m 16. I was born May 4,” Annie said.

“So you are barely 2 weeks older than me. That’s something to think about, isn’t it? Go take a shower,” I said.

Annie looked as if she wanted to argue, but changed her mind and entered.

I looked up at the cloudless evening sky and wondered about aliens, or should I say humanity’s distant relatives?

I’m wakened from my reverie when Annie called out, “Okay Luke.”

I quickly entered the washroom and took a shower. Shower done, I put on my new pajamas and slippers and stepped out.

I stepped out and joined the others. External lights lit the outside, making the outside peaceful.

“Where did you…” Mum began. “I should get a night suit too.”

“Steaks should be ready in another 10 minutes,” Dad said, performing his manly duty of barbequing meat.

Mum spent five minutes shopping, and then entered the Throne to change. Ready for bed, mum sat on a chair.

“Why don’t you sit down?” Mum asked.

“If I did I will fall asleep,” I replied.

“Yes, sleep sounds nice right now,” Mum said.

“Isn’t eating before bed bad?” Annie asked.

“For sedentary people, yes,” I replied. “However, I think we lost quite a bit of weight.

“What kind of music do you want?”

Annie offered a suggestion and I complied.

“Steaks are ready,” Dad called. “Eat up, we have plenty.”

“That’s too much,” Annie grumbled.

“Nonsense,” Dad denied. “You’re a growing girl. Besides, we have an unlimited source of beef.”

I sat down and ate the steak. “It’s amazing,” I said.

“It is, isn’t it?” Dad agreed. “What did it come from?”

“Mountain cows,” I replied.

“Now this is glamping,” Mum said. The stress of the dungeon was finally leaving, after a delicious dinner.

“I agree,” Dad said. “The marbling reminds me of wagyu beef.

“Next time we should try our dragon stakes.”

“And we have ice cream,” Annie said. “It seems the store is all about quality of life.”

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All the needful had been done and the dinette area and couch had been converted into separate beds. I let Annie take the dinette bed.

I was now sitting outside next to the Dragon’s Throne.

I had 15 attribute points, so I decided to spend them.

**Agility: 26 -> (26 + 13) \* 2 = 78**

**Strength: 33 -> (34 + 13) \* 2 = 114**

**Constitution: 36 -> (50 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Stamina: 35 -> (40 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Restoration: 35 -> (40 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Nerve: 20 -> (20 + 13 + 33) \* 2 = 136**

**Manna Control: 20 -> (20 + 13 + 33) \* 2 = 136**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats),**

**First Dungeon (+1 All Stats),**

**Dungeon Mastery (+2 All Stats)**

**Auto Points: +1/level – Manna, Nerve**

**Class: Mastermind**

**Current Level: 30 -> 33**

“Aren’t you coming in?” Annie asked.

“It’s only 8:00PM, and thank god there are no mosquitoes,” I replied.

Of course, if there were mosquitoes, they would probably be the size of normal birds.

“My body is buzzing with too much energy. It’s a weird feeling, as if electricity is flowing through me, starting from my butt and going to the top of my head.

Annie grabbed a chair and sat beside me.

“Does it bother you that my parents are playing matchmaker?” Annie asked.

“You’re a very pretty girl in both your forms,” I replied, feeling my face turn red. This was the first time I ever confessed to a girl. “I like both your intelligence and personality. I enjoy being with you.”

“What about your parents?” Annie asked, blushing.

“They were concerned because they knew our strength would skyrocket and were wondering if I could meet someone who could walk by my side and care for me,” I replied.

“They are really happy you are here.”

“They seem rather young for adults,” Annie said.

Thirty five was now considered an adult, since that was when aging stopped. And my parents were barely thirty years old. People could tell.

“That’s because they are Last Gen, just like us. Mum conceived me when she was only twelve and my dad was thirteen,” I replied.

“Seriously?” Annie asked, shocked.

“Mum kept my father’s name a secret until two days ago, to protect my dad,” I replied. “Until then I called my grandparents mum and dad.”

“So you didn’t know your dad?” Annie asked.

“I did know him,” I replied. “Sis would take me to see him whenever she could, and he would play games with me and buy presents for me. Off course, preparing for the apocalypse was just a game for me then. Then they graduated high school and I attended their wedding as the best man.

“They have now decided to let the secret be known. They can no longer get in trouble, since cops no longer exist.”

“My family is more boring,” Annie said. “I grew up never knowing any relatives but my parents. And my parents only visited me maybe once a year if I was lucky.”

“My parents aren’t going anywhere,” I replied, sensing my parents were listening.

“What should I call them?” Annie asked. “Mr. and Mrs. seem too formal.”

“How about uncle and aunty,” I suggested.

Annie yawned.

“Go to bed,” I suggested. “I’ll come in when I’m feeling sleepy.”

“Why are you staring at your hand?” Annie asked.

“I told you I’m being flooded with these weird sensations of energy flowing through me,” I said. “Now I can see a fog around me. It’s at the edge of awareness. Here’s the funny thing. I can make this white mist swirl around my fingers.”

“Can you concentrate it around your fingers?” Annie asked.

“You do know it’s just my imagination, don’t you?” I ask. Never the less, I concentrated.

Slowly the mist concentrated around my finders.

Annie leaned closer and stared. “More,” she commanded.

I complied and concentrated. The mist concentrated even more intently.

“I see it,” Annie said excitedly.

“You do?” I asked, surprised.

Annie nodded and then said, “Can you separate it into colors?”

“What color do you want?” I asked.

“Fire,” Annie replied.

I focused, imaging flames. After a few moments the image of flames appears.

Annie stuck her finger in the imaginary flame and jerked it back with an “Aah.”

“Damn, that hurt,” Annie grumbled.

“What’s the matter, Annie,” Mum called and rushed out, followed by dad.

“Why is there fire on your fingers?” Dad asked, surprised.

“I do believe I can do magic,” I said with a smile. I visualized the mist gathering more and more and the flame increased as I did.

I concentrated the flame into a ball and threw it at the dark silhouette of a tree. The fire hit the tree and exploded, shaking the tree.

“Pretty impressive,” Dad said, whistling. “So Masterminds can throw fireballs.”

“I don’t think so,” I replied. “Let’s try ice.”

I imagined the vapor transforming into a shard of ice. Unfortunately that didn’t work. Instead I seemed to create an area of coldness.

“Annie, take out your sword and cover it with sodium,” I instructed.

“Okay,” Annie replied.

A moment later, Annie was holding a sword. I saw the mist being drawn onto the blade.

I explained what I saw. “I think skills are cheats or preprogrammed ways to manipulate this mist. I also think I can do this because of my high Manna Control score.

“I guess only Annie’s parents know.”

“What was that glaive?” Dad asked. “It looked almost like a wizard staff, one with a wicked blade at the end.”

<Pole weapon with straight blade and twin axe heads>

Getting up, I took it out and held it by the central padded grip. “It said it was an elemental glaive bow,” I said.

I held it like a bow and imagined pulling a string.

A glowing string appeared in my fingers, along with a foggy arrow. I imagined the arrow being made of fire and the mist took on that property.

At the same time I felt a strain. “It feels like pulling a real bow.”

I continued holding until the strain was too great and I let go of the arrow.

The arrow hit the tree, causing it to almost explode.

“Holy cow,” Annie exclaimed.

Dad just whistled and Mum didn’t say anything.

Next I tried imaging an arrow made of light. I fired it at another tree. This time it punched through like an overpowered laser.

“Damn, that would have been helpful for the zombies,” Dad said.

“Now I’m the weakest,” Annie grumbled.

“Not so,” I replied. “Your sodium blade may not burn in dry air, but it should when it cuts through monsters. Then there are poison arrows and weapons. Then there are your explosives and other dangerous chemicals.

“You have only touched the surface of your abilities. You know how important chemicals are.”

“That’s true,” Dad agreed. “This is just, what, the third day?”

“Can’t you do that?” Annie asked me.

“In theory yes,” I replied. “The white mist seems to be the basis for everything. However, I feel I can only create simple thing like fire. The bow, on the other hand helped me create the different types of elemental arrows. It had the programming, which I conveniently tapped into.

“Let’s try water.”

“It’s getting late,” Mum said with a yawn.

“Okay Mum,” I said and put the chairs away. “I guess tomorrow we can examine the dungeon core.”

A quick pit stop later and I slipped into the couch bed. Across from me, Annie slept in the dinette bed.

City Building

Day 4

Next morning we all got up late. After staying awake for two days, that wasn’t surprising.

Mum started cooking, after we put the bedding away.

“Here is the dungeon core,” Dad said and handed it to me.

I examined it and said, “According to the description, this can create a Fast Travel gate.”

I selected the option and the device split into two parts.

“It can connect any two locations in the universe. It is normally used on a portal platform of a town or mansion.”

“Did you say mansion?” Dad asked.

“Having a house would be nice,” Mum said. “No offense Luke, but I would like a little more space.”

“No problem Mum,” I replied. “After breakfast we can buy one. That way we can have our own rooms and Annie can have her own alchemy lab.”

“So what should we do now?” Dad asked. “Shall we head west?”

“One way is as good as another,” I said, shrugging. “I’m going outside to look around.” Annie followed me.

As we walked I noticed a translucent white crystal near the lake. Picking it up, I handed it to Annie. “For you my princess,” I said with an exaggerated bow.

“I’m not a princess,” she said, frowning as she accepted the quartz crystal.

“And yet you are making me retrieve samples for you,” I said with a smile.

Annie stuck her tongue out at me, but then sampled the crystal. She then briefly glowed.

“Breakfast is ready,” Mum called.

“Okay Mum,” I said and we headed in.

After brunch we decided to travel west, following the curve of the lake.

At the western end of the lake, a stream flowed westward. The stream flowed another kilometer, when it spilled over another granite cliff.

We got out of the *Throne* to look around.

I looked over the ledge and said, “That’s quite a drop. At least 30m down. I don’t see any rocks below. This cliff is solid granite, just like the previous cliff.”

Below was a lush forest, heading downwards towards the sea in the distance.

“The elevation difference seems to have made a big difference in flora. I’m guessing below is warmer and more humid, while here is dryer.

“I’m starting to better see how this was formed, geologically,” I said. “Looking at the rock striations and the type of rocks, I’d say this formation is a few million years old, when a fault line broke, lifting this.”

“But wasn’t this place terraformed?” Annie asked.

“Maybe,” I replied. “But this god system seems to like making things look as if this world is the product of natural evolution.

“Have you noticed how our inventory works? When I take out the *Throne*, it’s just there, as if we are swapping realities. However, there seems to be protections, so I can’t spawn the Throne in a cliff. No. Small items are definitely being replaced, so we should still be careful.”

I paused and then said, “How do you tell a natural world from an artificial world designed to look natural? Even the mountain canyons we were in previously looked perfectly natural. If I find a geologist I will ask.”

I walked to the store panel and quickly found the mansion stone. I read the detailed description and bought the item. It was only 10 gold. Then again, the real cost was upgrading the mansion. That was going to be a money sink.

“Find anything?” Dad asked.

Just then the Marketplace screen switched to the main screen and started beeping and flashing.

“‘Please allocate points,’” Mum read. “It seems insistant.”

“Okay, let’s do it now,” Dad said and tapped on the button.

“Dragon’s Throne has new stats. That’s just weird. Why would it have Nerve and Manna? Is it truly alive?”

“I want more stealth, since it seems stealth is not enough,” Mum said.

“Okay, we can add every time we upgrade,” I said. “But I’m interested in adding to the two new stats. And I think the *Throne* wants that too.”

I suggested a layout.

“Whatever you say,” Dad said. “You’re the mastermind.”

“Don’t say that,” I said, feeling embarrassed. “That sounds incredibly pompous.”

I distributed the 65 points from the 13 new levels…

**Throne Stats:**

**Agility: 55 -> (55 + 13) \* 2 = 136**

**Strength: 50 -> (50 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Toughness: 30 -> (30 + 13) \* 2 = 86**

**Restoration: 25 -> (25 + 13) \* 2 = 76**

**Stealth: 40 -> (50 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Nerve: 0 -> (20 + 13) \* 2 = 66**

**Manna Control: 0 -> (20 + 13) \* 2 = 66**

**Metamorphosis: 5 -> (15 + 13) \* 2 = 36**

**Interior Space: 10 -> (15 + 13) \* 2 = 36**

**Abilities: Amphibious Mode,**

**Simple Slideouts,**

**Store Pillar**

**Features: Level 3 Store**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats),**

**First Dungeon (+1 All Stats),**

**Dungeon Mastery (+2 All Stats)**

**Current Level: 20 -> 33**

The Dragon’s Throne shivered as usual.

“Dragon’s Throne seems homier,” Annie said.

“I agree, and also more luxurious,” Mum said.

The throne was more boat-like and bespoke, like something created by an artisan.

“Damn,” Dad said. “It looks amazing, like something only the super rich could afford.”

“A luxury home and fancy toys,” Mum said. “That’s what life is all about.”

The screen changed and our party screen appeared.

“Hey, this says I can disguise my class?” I said.

“What’s wrong with being a mastermind?” Mum asked. “I think it’s amazing my son is a mastermind.”

“First, it doesn’t seem to do anything,” I said. “Other than Hyper Movement, everything seems just human abilities, such as Self Control and Pattern Detection.”

“What would you disguise as?” Dad asked.

“How about ranger?” I suggested. “With my manna control, I think I can fake it. And I already have that Elemental Bow Glaive.”

A question mark appeared near the apply disguise button. I clicked on the button and got a list of possible disguises.

Top of the list was shaman – similar to ranger, but more focused on magic to affect the natural world. I selected Shaman.

New disguise established

Luke Winthrop, Shaman, Level 33

Before I could celebrate, a new message appeared.

Detected a mansion stone in inventory

Do you wish to integrate with Dragon’s Throne?

Yes/No

“Say ‘Yes,’” Dad said. I took the artifact out and pressed ‘Yes.’

A new message appeared.

Establish base as needed.

Base will share Stealth.

Extension Base can be upgraded using Gold.

“Sweet,” Mum said happily.

“I’m getting addicted to this leveling up stuff,” Dad said.

“But how do we get off this ledge?” Annie asked.

“We do have some climbing rope,” Dad said. “We’ll figure something out. Or we could drive. Maybe there is a way off to the side.”

“But first I need to water some flowers like a good shaman,” I said and headed in.

I entered the Throne and got a surprise. The washroom was missing, replaced with just floor space and a large window.

To the left, which was the back of the Throne was a door.

“Everyone, come look what I found,” I called.

The others entered and Mum said, “What happened to the washroom?”

I opened the door, and found the missing washroom.

It extended 2m deep and 4m to the right. In other words, it extended beyond the physical confines of the vehicle. The only thing it didn’t have were windows.

“How is that even possible?” dad asked and stuck his head out the new window.

“Apparently this is an example of the Interior Space stat,” I said, stating the obvious. “But first I need to water some flowers.”

The others exited, letting me do my thing.

I stepped out and Dad asked, “So Betty, do you want your mansion here or in a town?”

Mum thought for a moment and said, “You mentioned stealth.”

“Yup,” I agreed.

“And we have a portal,” she said.

“Yup,” I agreed.

“If we had a house in town, then stealth wouldn’t make sense.”

“Yup,” I said with a smile.

“And town would be crowded. Okay, having the house here gives us the best of both worlds – A private ranch surrounded by beauty, and a town we can visit at any time.”

“I see you made a decision,” Dad said.

“Yup,” Mum agreed.

“I love the wild flowers, the stream, the fruit trees…”

Just then a fruit tree whipped out a branch and snagged a giant turkey. A mouth opened on the trunk and the turkey got shoved in. A moment later the tree looked like a regular tree.

“Yikes,” Dad exclaimed. “I almost forgot this new world is dangerous.”

“But trees are immobile,” I pointed out. “Also, our new home will have its own safe zone.”

“I guess nowhere is truly safe,” Mum agreed. “Can we move it later?”

“I assume so,” I said. “This will be an extension of the Throne.”

“Don’t forget,” Dad said. “With all these farm type monsters, we can eat bacon and every day, along with steaks, fish and chicken.”

“Annie, do you have an objection?” Mum asked.

“Me?” Annie asked, surprised.

“Well you are now part of the family for as long as you want,” Mum said.

“Thanks Aunty,” Annie said and gave Mum a hug.

“I love this place,” Annie said. “I can’t wait for sunset. And with a travel gate, we have everything anyone can possibly want.”

“How about Luke?” Dad asked.

“I agree,” I said. “I envision a BBQ area, swimming area and sauna. Midnight swims illuminated by stars sound fun.

“Also, this ground spears to be solid granite, meaning no possibility of a landslide.”

After discussion we placed the stone near the river and around 50m from the cliff.

An obelisk rose from the ground with the title Dragon Castle.

The space around the obelisk transformed, removing all obstructions and leaving a circular area with a well-trimmed lawn. The western edge of the circle overlapped the edge of the cliff.

“So you’re calling it Dragon Castle?” Dad asked with a smile.

“Actually I didn’t,” I replied and examined the interface. “It just named itself. But I think it’s appropriate. I’m adding 500 gold.”

“How much do you have left over?” Mum asked.

“Around 27 Gold,” I replied. “I have all the equipment I need and we will get more soon enough.”

“Here are 500,” Mum said and Dad and Annie contributed as well.

“Is that a lot?” Annie asked.

“Can’t be that much, since we did get it in less than 3 days,” Dad said.

“Yes, but most people don’t fight dragons on a regular basis,” Mum pointed out.

“What’s that blue line?” Annie said.

Surrounding them was a blur circle.

“That is the boundary of the no-spawn zone,” I replied. “In other words, monsters can’t spawn here. And with stealth, monsters should ignore us.”

“Sweet,” Mum said happily.

We explored the different layouts for our new place. About us the holographic outline of houses appeared.

Being the owner, I found I could customize the layout as needed.

In the end we went for a bungalow style that everyone liked. It took most of the 2000 gold for a bare-bones house but it was worth it.

Facing east were the bedrooms. Annie and mine were identical with a large bedroom, a walk-in closet and our own washrooms.

Beyond that was the parent’s master bedroom. Other than bigger, it had a similar layout.

The west of the house had a kitchen, living room and a spare bedroom. All were large and amazing.

The washrooms and kitchen were pricy since they were functional.

Unfortunately we didn’t have enough for Annie’s lab. That could wait.

I positioned the house away from the cliff, so we had plenty of space for a BBQ, huge patio, possible swimming pool, and who knew what else?

“It’s nicer than I expected,” I said as we explored the inside.

“I should hope so for almost 2000 Gold coins,” Dad said with a laugh.

“Too bad we don’t have furniture,” Mum said sadly.

“Do you want to buy furniture now, or wait till we get more gold?” Dad asked.

“I suppose we can wait, then can get nicer stuff,” Mum said.

“What’s that cable thing in the front of the Dragon’s Throne with the cables?” Annie asked.

“It’s the winch,” I replied. “The cable should be over 100m,” I said. “I completely forgot about that. I have an idea.

“I can winch myself to the bottom and then set up the other terminal of the portal. Then I will come back and then we can exit together.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Dad said.

“That sounds dangerous,” Mum said.

“As long as I’m tied securely to the winch there will be no problem,” I said. “After all, it is designed to carry thousands of kilograms of weight.”

“I’ll bring the Throne to the edge,” Dad said and headed out.

I took one of the portal terminals and placed one piece near the house. I then waited as Dad drove the Throne near the edge.

Dad got out and pulled the winch cable out.

I wrapped the cable around my legs and shoulder and hooked the hooked end to a link, securing everything.

“Is that safe?” Mum asked worriedly.

“We don’t have a rock-climbing harness so this will have to do,” I said.

Dad slowly let out the cable and I walked backwards. At the edge dad slowed down and lowered me over the edge.

For all you rock-climbers and BASE jumpers out there, I think you’re crazy. This was definitely scary.

Biting down on my fear I said, “Okay Dad.”

Mental Fortitude, Level 2

At least I got a perk for that.

Slowly the winch hoisted me down as the cable gave me a wedgie.

After what seemed like forever I finally arrived at the base of the cliff.

“Okay Dad,” I called out and let myself out.

I then placed the other terminal of the gate on the ground and stepped through.

“That looked scary,” Annie said by way of a greeting.

“It was,” I agreed.

“I’m putting the winch away,” Dad said and reeled the cable back. Moments later everything was stored.

“If everyone’s ready, I’m putting the *Throne* away,” I said.

Hearing no objection, I put our ride away.

Dad led the way into the portal and I went last.

Arriving at the bottom, I put the portal gate away.

“Damn, there’s no space for the Throne here,” Dad said. “I guess we walk like normal people. I suppose we head for the sea.”

To the right was the waterfall and pool. From that pool flowed a steam presumably to the sea. It was definitely warmer and more humid here, explaining the change in vegetation.

We followed the river but not too close. The river bank was packed with underbrush.

After waking 10 minutes, we were accosted by several boars, around level 27.

“Time for some target practice,” I said and took out my bow glaive.

Taking aim I imagined a water arrow. And nothing happened. Panicking a little, I fired a fire arrow. That worked before.

Fortunately this worked, maybe too well. There was an explosion which killed the creature, tossing shrapnel everywhere.

“Please be careful Luke,” Mum scolded.

“Sorry Mum,” I replied as I prepared my bow again.

I fired light arrows at nearby trees as we walked downhill. It was good practice.

“I wonder if I can use iron,” I said.

I pulled back on the imaginary sting and visualized the iron arrow. Unfortunately that was a failure.

So far I now had Fire and Light.

What didn’t work were Darkness, Water, Stone, Iron, Wind, Lightning, and poison. Were healing arrows possible? Was the failures a limitation or my inexperience?

Anyway, the light arrows were working like a charm, so I decided to stick with them for the time. The fire seemed good for AOE attacks because of the collateral damage.

I took out my phone and started playing music.

“Wouldn’t that attract monsters?” Mum asked.

“Only if they have good taste,” I replied. “This is one of my favorite bands.”

Slowly we advanced, killing monsters along the way.

“Aah,” a scream echoed through the forest.

“This way,” dad said as we ran.

Soon we arrived at a group of seven people surrounded by wolves.

The four of us immediately attacked, with me firing light arrows. After firing dozens of arrows, I was finally getting used to regulating the power output.

It seemed the closer to my maximum power output I came, the longer it took to charge the arrow. Also, the harder it became to hold the arrow back. Off course that would change when manna control increased.

The group had guns, but for some reason they were crap using them.

“Are you folks all right?” Dad asked. “Do you need healing?”

“I am Todd, this is my wife Betty. These are Luke and Annie.”

The introductions continued.

“We are heading to the ocean,” Dad said. “Would you like to come with us?”

“We would love to,” a man named Bill said.

“How did you get classes?” another man named Ruby asked.

“You get it when you reach level 10,” Dad said. “I think. I wasn’t paying attention. It seems to be based on your personality, abilities, and desires.”

“We’ve been stuck in this damn forest for days, surrounded by scary monsters,” a woman named Suzy whined.

“Why didn’t you go downhill?” Annie asked.

I was wondering that same question, but didn’t want to ask it.

“What good would that do?” another woman asked.

“Never mind,” Dad said. “Let’s go.”

We continued walking and other people slowly joined us.

“It seems sound is a good way to attract people,” Mum said. “By the way it’s evening. We spent too much time building.”

“I guess we should stop for dinner,” Dad said. “We have plenty of boar meat. We can share that.”

I wanted to share the store with everyone, but didn’t want to reveal our Throne.

Suddenly a feminine voice seemed to talk to me, explaining what to do.

I followed the instructions and a pillar appeared with the store screen.

“Everyone, this is a store kiosk,” I said. “You can buy items using the coins dropped by the monsters. I’ll demonstrate.”

“Where did you get that?” a man asked.

“This is an item we found in a dungeon,” I said, lying.

I bought some items that would help cook the boar meat, as well as compostable plates and utensils. It was time to cook.

The area became noisy as the new people socialized. That was great, since it attracted people.

The good news was that our guests’ mood was vastly improved by the hot meal and store-bought goodies. The store was definitely a great way to encourage monster hunting.

Finally after spending over an hour we finally headed out.

“Todd, I have to warn you but there’s a goblin town near the sea shore,” Bill, a newcomer, said.

“That’s great news,” Dad said with over-exaggerated enthusiasm. “We can take over that place and establish a village.”

“You don’t get it,” Bill said. “It’s huge.”

“How far away is it?” I asked. “And what does huge mean?”

“It’s another two hours away,” Bill said.

“Mum can do some reconnaissance,” I suggested.

“I’ll go now,” Mum said and dashed off.

“It’s too dangerous,” Bill objected worriedly. The others agreed.

“Listen, everyone,” Dad said. “You need to grab the bull by the balls, or you will never succeed. Betty is unbelievably powerful. I assure you she will not get hurt.”

“In the meantime we need to decide on a battle strategy,” I said.

“Aren’t you a little young to talk about battle strategy?” a man asked.

Before Dad could shout at them, I asked, “Have you studied war strategies and tactics? Have you done any war simulations? There are some great strategy games out there, some even endorsed by the military.”

We played strategy games, but that was never our focus.

“To start off, we defeated a goblin village of 47 houses,” I said. “We did that on our first day here.”

I looked around. Sure enough, they were impressed.

“Let’s start by finding out our skills and abilities,” I said. “How many people have modern weapons and know how to use them?”

Leadership, Level 1

“What’s that light?” someone asked. I had to explain class abilities and leveling.

Slowly we worked out a strategy while we waited for Mum to arrive. I let Dad do most of the strategy, since he had vastly more experience with strategy games, including ones developed by the military.

People with lower-powered weapons would attack the weak goblins, while the ones with the stronger weapons would attack the hobgoblins, berserkers and brutes.

Finally Mum arrived, “There are around 284 houses. It’s getting dark. I think we should wait for tomorrow.”

“Okay everyone, make camp here,” Dad said. “Feel free to hunt monsters, so you can buy stuff at the store.”

“Do you think we should do an advanced trip?” Annie asked.

“Probably wouldn’t do any good,” Dad replied. “However, we can attack 20 minutes before the others arrive. Then pull back when the others come.

“Ideally, I want to deal with the shamans first, then the archers and spear throwers.

“After that, we can let the others fight to gain experience.”

We planned a basic formation. Other than the size…

“I have a recording,” Mum said and showed us a video of the village.

“It’s huge,” Dad said.

“In addition to goblins and wolves, there were also ogres and trolls,” Mum said.

“I have fire arrows for the ogres and trolls,” I said. “Let’s try this. We give our riffle cartridges to Annie. Then Annie, Dad and I fire long range. At the same time Mum goes in with her glaive.

“We could attack from the trees so we can ignore the grunts,” I said. “Hopefully we can clean the greatest treats, so the others can handle the rest.”

“Should we move closer?” Annie asked.

“That’s a good idea,” Dad replied. “That way, our people will be fresher.”

“I found a good place to set up camp for the night,” Mum said.

“Okay everyone, it’s time to move out,” Dad called to the others. “We found a better place to camp for the night. Please pack up your stuff. Remember, once we arrive, I expect everyone to go hunting to gain a few levels.”

“Are there any weapons in the store?” Bill asked.

“And armor and potions and spell scrolls,” Dad said. “However, they are horribly expensive. The weapon drops are good enough.

“Luke, put the store away. It’s time to go.”

Amid grumbling, I put the stuff away and waited for the others to get ready.

As we walked, monsters attacked. I noticed Dad struggling to remain still while the others fought. We fighting helped no one.

Eventually we arrived at the camp site Mum scouted. Situated next to the stream flowing from our waterfall, the area was large enough for everyone.

I put the store up.

Aside, Dad said, “I feel bad about sleeping in a fancy bed while everyone else has to rough it.”

“I suppose we should rough it at least once,” I said.

I went to the store and said, “Everyone, please set up your tents as close to the store kiosk as possible. For tonight we will be guarding all of you, so you can be rested for tomorrow’s battle.

“And to help you all get ready for tomorrow’s battle, we will be having some dragon stakes and Dad will be buying everyone some booze.”

Everyone yelled in excitement.

As evening came, the meat was roasted, along with plenty of side dishes.

Then came the party where all the young adults and full adults partied. Unfortunately Annie and I were the only ones who didn’t drink, being the only underage people there.

Dad took us aside and asked me, “Can we really guard everyone all night?”

“Don’t forget, we have our Throne keeping us safe,” I said. “Everyone’s within the area of protection. And we have designated washroom areas. So I see no problems from stray monsters.

“I adjusted stealth so only people can see us.

“Then tomorrow we give them a hearty breakfast and a pep talk, and then off to battle.

“Also I reached Leadership, Level 1, so that should help.”



-- Day 5 --

The next morning everyone got up and people with cooking skills started breakfast.

However, I suggested to my party that we offer regular meat for breakfast. The dragon stakes would be kept for later, after we conquered the town.

The others agreed.

“Morning everyone, our mastermind will be saying a few words,” Dad said. Did he have to say mastermind? That was embarrassing.

“Hi everyone,” I began. “I notice that we have quite a few arrivals who don’t know me.

“So let’s begin by introducing ourselves.

“That is my dad, Todd Winthrop, my mum Betty, and my companion Annie. My parents have been training since the announcement. Annie and I have been training since we were in diapers.

“And yes, I shot my first gun when I was four years old. Of course, Dad was holding the gun when I pulled the trigger. I still remember the kickback. It was both fun and scary.

“Annie is a rich girl who had the best trainers. She too had grueling training.

“In addition to regular survival training and camping in the wilderness, we also participated in mock battles with other preppers. And Dad is a strategy game junkie.”

I paused to wonder where all those battle fanatics we trained with were.

“Speaking of training, I want to share with you some of what we learnt about leveling and classes…”

That took some time, since there were plenty of questions.

Finally I turned back to the upcoming battle.

“I feel confident in defeating the goblin town. Why? That’s because my parent and I already took down a goblin village by ourselves.

“And remember the dragon steaks you ate last night. Where do you think they came from?”

I turned to Dad. “Do you want to explain the plan?”

“You do it,” Dad said.

I hesitated and then nodded. “I’m sure you are all worried about fighting a goblin town. However, everyone will be safe if you stick to the plan.

“The fight will be as follows.

“The town will send out their grunts first since grunts are fastest. Don’t forget the goblins riding wolves.

“Those with melee weapons will handle them. This is especially true for people who have little experience handling guns. Friendly fire is a real danger here.

“After all, there are 67 people here.

“People with more experience will handle the stronger goblins. Handguns are fine for the shamans and archers. The berserkers, brutes and hobgoblins need riffles.

“Raise your hands if you have armor-piercing bullets. How about grenades?

“Being a grenadier, Dad will organize the long-distance fighters to fight the ogres and trolls and will be our general while in battle.

“He will test you to make sure you can handle a gun properly. Only those he approves will be allowed to use guns. We don’t want people getting shot by accident.

“The rest of us will be protecting you to make sure everyone is safe…”

As I kept talking ideas kept flooding my brain as to the best tactics for our rag-tag group of soldiers.

And then came the message I was expecting.

Leadership, Level 2

Charisma, Level 3

Strategy, Level 1

I then noticed a subtle change in attitude as I talked. The people were taking me a little more seriously.

It helped that I glowed several times as my class abilities leveled.

“Any question?”

For the next half-hour I fielded questions. Eventually everyone seemed satisfied with their role assignments.

After the meeting Dad asked me, “Did you have to name me the general?”

“You have the most knowledge on tactics,” I pointed out.

“But people’s lives are on the line,” Dad objected. “And you are a mastermind.”

“We all have faith in you,” I said and gave him a hug.

Sighing, dad walked away.

I turned to Annie and asked, “So Annie, how many chemicals have you identified?”

“I got 23 more elements,” Annie said and listed them. “I’m also getting more complex molecules, such as benzene.”

“Good work,” I praised and Annie blushed. “Do you have lithium?” I asked.

“Where would I find lithium?” Annie asked.

“Right here,” I said and handed Annie a spare battery.

“Cutting open batteries are dangerous,” Annie noted.

“If you clear an area of moisture it should be safer,” I suggested. “Let’s go there. Would you like me to do this?”

I took out a table and chairs and place the battery down.

“I’ve never studied electronics,” Annie confessed.

“No problem,” I replied. “First remove the packaging to reveal the cells. Then c…I better make sure this is fully discharged. I don’t have a ceramic knife. Or maybe I do.”

I dashed away and then came back. The item was a paring knife costing 1 gold, and a reel of copper wire.

The copper gave Annie one more element.

I placed a wire on both the cathode and anode of the wire, securing it with used chewing gum.

Now for the tricky part; I stuck the wires into a tiny piece of meat.

“Come let’s have breakfast while the battery is discharging,” I suggested.

The meal was great. However I missed the dragon steaks. They were truly addicting. It made wagyu taste like crap, even when not properly cooked in a…We really needed a barbeque area for our house, then we could hunt more dragons. This time we would butcher it.

Even though each dragon gave over 120kg of steaks, that was nothing compared to the total mass of the dragons.

Shaking myself out of my reverie, I said, “Annie, let’s leave this for later. I don’t want to rush it.”

“Okay Luke,” Annie said and I put the stuff away.

As everyone got up to leave, I said to everyone, “By the way, I forget to mention. The reward for conquering the town will be a dragon steak dinner.”

Bartering, Level 1

Seriously? Was there anything that wasn’t a mental attribute?

As we led the way, Dad said, “Luke, I noticed you changed the plan.”

“There were flaws in last night’s plan,” I said. “This should maximize experience gained by our new citizens.

“Mum, remember to stay with the melee fighters as much as possible. I don’t trust the aim of some of our guests.”

“Why do you say that?” Annie asked.

“Most people aren’t like your parents,” Dad said. “Apathy and false information prevented most people from seriously training. They just pretended the day would never come.

“As it stands, many of these people may have never fired a gun. I bet many have guns because the government was literally giving them away to anyone who wanted them.

“That will be fine after we establish a town, since non-fighters are needed. However, they are dangerous now.”

We continued walking, occasionally killing monsters along the way.

“Okay everyone,” Mum said. “We are close.”

“Positions everyone,” Dad said. “Okay Betty.”

The others continued marching, since the town was in a clearing near the shore.

I burst out into the clearing and headed for the town.

As I watched, the town starting mobilizing troops. I considered climbing on top of the Throne, but changed my mind. I didn’t want it put in danger.

As expected the grunts were out of the town first, riding on wolves.

However, the melee fighters were now exiting the jungle. Dad shouted orders and everyone complied.

The clash came as the ranged fighters exited the jungle.

By now Mum was back and fighting alongside the melee fighters, along with Annie.

I stood to the side and took aim.

For a few seconds the two armies fought. Then the hobgoblins came out to play.

“Remember to let our melee fighters handle the grunts,” Dad called.

Then I saw a shaman. I charged my bow and fired. The light arrow hit the shaman, killing it.

Marksmanship, Level 5

The 5 was surprising. However, I supposed that was from my years of training with rifles and bows. And of course marksmanship improved when you were firing while going through an obstacle course.

Finally the archers came out, along with several more shamans.

“Okay gunners and archers, kill the archers and shamans,” Dad shouted. “Fire at will.”

The glade rang with the sounds of gunfire. Unfortunately, half the shots missed, wasting bullets.

I was right not to trust the new guys, unfortunately.

Finally what I was waiting for happened. The berserkers came out, along with the trolls and ogres.

I charged my glaive bow with fire and took aim. Targeting a troll, I fired. A moment later it hit the troll.

I visualized my arrow continuing to burn and took aim at another troll. That too was hit.

I felt a strain as I short the third. Shooting the forth arrow was much harder.

I tried to shoot the fifth, but I couldn’t overcome the strain. As a result, only a feeble arrow formed.

Out of manna I took out my riffle and started shooting at berserkers, brutes, shamans and archers.

Finally the first monster burnt to death, freeing an arrow. I used that arrow to hit another troll. Again I returned to my gun.

Again I switched to arrows as monsters burnt.

Looking around, I saw the formation was working. “Don’t go too far ahead,” Dad shouted. “Let them come to us.”

I smiled, knowing Dad was warming to his role of general.

Unfortunately I was now surrounded by wolves. So naturally I started swinging my glaive.

As I was chopping heads, a thought came to me. Could I cover the blade with fire? That seemed realistic.

As before I focused on the mist and drew it to the blade. The blade glowed red with a blue sheen of flames.

I knew instantly this was how the weapon was intended to be used.

Unfortunately, this meant I had fewer arrows for the trolls.

Damn! Fighting like this was exhilarating.

I then heard a scream. Looking up I saw a woman getting chewed on by multiple wolves.

I quickly whipped out my gun and took aim. I felt rushed but I took my time. I didn’t want to accidently shoot the woman.

The wolf dropped dead with a hole in its head.

Marksmanship, Level 6

I guess that was a trick shot, considering how stressful the shot was.

At the top of my lungs I shouted, “I CAN SHOOT AT CLOSE QUARTERS BECAUSE I HAVE MARKSMANSHIP, LEVEL 6. AVOID THAT UNLESS YOU HAVE PROPER MARKSMANSHIP.”

Now that my immediate area was cleared, I was able to shoot long range at the enemy.

I felt a little sorry for our makeshift army. They all had low stats compared to us. And this was probably their first battle. Too bad they would have to wait for the end of the battle to level up.

After nonstop fighting, my cartridges ran out of bullets. That was a pain since I now had to refill my clips. That was rather tricky, since I had to split my time between swinging my glaive and ramming bullets into clips.

After what seemed like an eternity, my sole cartridge was full. I regretted giving the rest to Annie.

Of course by now the ogres and other heavy hitters were on us. As a result, I couldn’t use my gun, so I swung and stabbed with my glaive, slicing monsters with its glowing blade.

I then realized why trolls were weak against fire. It was because the fire cauterized the wounds, preventing super regeneration.

I paused a moment to play music on my phone and then resumed.

The area was filled with the song, *Battle Cry*, by *The Dungeon Bosses*, a band popular among the Last Generation. I even got to see one of their concerts, when we went to Australia for some training.

I tossed a grenade at a large clump and shouted, ‘Grenade’.

I found it interesting how long 5 seconds was when battling.

I quickly tossed healing potions to several injured people as the battle continued.

Just then we had our first fatality. That wasn’t surprising, but still painful to see.

I tossed a fruit bomb into my mouth and started chewing. I then focused on increasing my speed.

Finally the grenade exploded.

I then faced another troll. Anticipating his swing, I use my weapon not to block the club, but to push myself out of the way. Then swinging my glaive, I rammed my blade into its neck.

I then noted that the glow on my blade was slowly increasing. Having Manna control was one thing. Being able to master it was another. That meant the blue plasma cutter would improve with time.

I continued attacking, focusing on the concept of the plasma cutter as my weapon stabbed repeatedly.

I then glanced at Annie. She was having a problem. Or should I say her sword was. It was corroded. Was she using hydrochloric acid or something stronger?

I quickly deeded my entire inventory of swords to her. With my epic weapon I didn’t need them.

“Thanks Luke,” Annie called and tossed her useless weapon.

I slowly fell into a haze as I fought. Pain Control was already at level 3. Unless you are overpowered, you would still get hurt fighting hoards of monsters.

The good news was that I was getting a slow but steady stream of health potions. However that was not enough. I decided to invest more in Constitution and Restoration. I really didn’t like getting hurt, even though I could handle it better. Of course the wise person would get armor.

Another piece of good news was that there were no longer any ranged enemies to deal with. Also the grunts were gone.

The bad news was our fighters had to deal with the more powerful monsters.

“You may not realize it but you are all getting incredibly strong,” I yelled out, giving encouragement to everyone in range. I really needed a megaphone.

Could I use the Throne? Probably. However, I would need to stop fighting to hook up my phone. Or if I could use wind magic, I could amplify my voice.

“Also, we are also getting plenty of gold,” I added. “Can you imagine what stuff you could buy when we win?”

I could only imagine what the others were going through. If I was getting tired, then the others were worse. This battle was rather different than the zombie dungeon. The stresses were fundamentally unique, as now we had people to defend.

I switched to a sword and used my other hand to select different music.

Slowly the number of monsters decreased and finally stopped.

People cheered as the last monster was cut down. By now it was past 3:00PM. Our campaign had lasted quite a few hours, causing us to miss lunch.

“Luke, have we conquered the town?” Dad asked.

“I doubt it,” I replied. “I’m a little nervous about entering the town. I’m afraid of an ambush.”

Raising my voice, I said, “Okay everyone, it’s time to allocate stats. For now allocate evenly until you get a class. Then you can specialize.

“For those wanting to min/max, remember there are both advantages and disadvantages. For instance armor can make up for constitution. However, too much strength will tear muscle fibers and break bones, so a minimum of constitution is required. So whatever you do, start by allocating one point at a time, so you understand how the points affect you.

“Tell us if you need help with classes and point allocation.”

As expected we got swamped with requests. That was okay, since we were building a community.

Leadership, Level 3

Where the hell did that come from, I wondered? No matter. I had work to do.

“Everyone, eat something,” I called. “Once we rest a bit we shall march into the town. Be warned, the town still has goblins and also some sort of big boss.

“Also, if you have classes related to rogues, assassins and spies, I will need to talk to you. The battle for the town isn’t over.”

Two people approached. One was a rogue, the other was a shadow operative. I wasn’t sure what the differences were, but whatever.

“My concern is we might be ambushed as we enter the town,” I said. “I assume, if there is a boss, it will be in the center of town.”

The two, calling themselves Dark Blade and Viper agreed with me. And yes, those were creepy names.

After a strategy meeting we headed out.

Dark Blade and Viper went ahead and Dragon Liege followed, followed by the others. The plan was to reach the town center, then spread out to cover the rest of the town.

As we progressed, I wondered if we could secure the town by night.

We entered the town and immediately monsters popped out of windows and doors. Damn. I was hoping I was paranoid, but I wasn’t. Or perhaps my preparation caused this to happen.

As before, I handled the ogres and trolls with my plasma blade.

Then suddenly I felt an arrow hit me from the back. Fortunately my cape went rigid, preventing damage.

“Be careful,” Dad shouted. “That is how people die.”

Again we had a death march as monsters charged us, wanting to kill us.

Finally, after over half an hour we arrived at the center where the town hall stood.

The town was rather packed with houses. However, there was space around the town hall.

I wasn’t sure why that was so, until the main doors to the town hall opened and two giants, Level 42, with axes emerged.

Apparently, the space in front was designed for big battles. This was reinforced by the fact that a translucent green barrier formed around us, preventing any retreat.

“It’s okay everyone,” Dad shouted. “Believe in yourselves and your team. We can do it.”

Dad spoke too soon.

Immediately a hoard of goblins emerged from the manor. And then the doors slammed shut.

“Oh, oh,” I muttered as I blocked a swing. The giants were surprisingly fast, forcing me to just run around and dodge.

It didn’t help that I was surrounded by stupid mobs.

Fortunately the other fighters were now attacking with melee and ranged weapons.

Slowly the number of goblins dwindled.

As I was distracting a giant, Mum went behind him and chopped his head off.

The other fell moments later.

Suddenly the main doors opened again. Again two giants emerged, along with another horde of goblins.

Oh great, it was one of those.

“Can we blow the doors down?” Dad asked.

“Try if you want,” I said. “Use your magic grenades.”

There was an explosion as the grenade detonated at the base of the doors. The only effect was to kill nearby goblins. The door was unharmed.

“We need to dash in the moment the doors open. Then comes our battle with the final boss,” I called.

“If there is a final boss, will there be loot?” Annie asked.

“If there isn’t, we can just tackle another dungeon,” I said. “Don’t worry. We will get a weapon for you too.”

“Dad, Annie, have you allocated yet?” I asked.

“No, Luke,” Dad said.

“Same here,” Annie added.

“Perfect,” I said. “I’m allocating my 15 points to speed. We barely have time after the doors open. For Mum, Nerve is more effective.”

**Agility: 26 -> (41 + 13) \* 2 = 108**

**Strength: 34 -> (34 + 13) \* 2 = 94**

**Constitution: 50 -> (50 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Stamina: 40 -> (40 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Restoration: 40 -> (40 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Nerve: 20 -> (20 + 13 + 36) \* 2 = 138**

**Manna Control: 20 -> (20 + 13 + 36) \* 2 = 138**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats),**

**First Dungeon (+1 All Stats),**

**Dungeon Mastery (+2 All Stats)**

**Auto Points: +1/level – Manna, Manna Control**

**Class: Mastermind**

**Current Level: 33 -> 36**

The battle with the new horde of monsters continued like before. However, I was ready to enter.

Dark Blade and Viper were also ready, as they were both in front of the doors.

Finally the last monster fell and the doors swung open.

Dark Blade and Viper tried to enter, but were hampered by the swarm exiting.

Of course Mum entered first, followed by Annie, them me, and finally Dad.

Dad barely made it in time as the doors slammed shut. Although he spent little on speed, sheer brute strength and the stat boost of our cheats did the trick.

Unfortunately for Dark Blade and Viper, they couldn’t enter. After all, we had over double the number of levels, and that Giant Killer MAX stat boost.

The room was surprisingly large at maybe 80m long. At the far end, sitting on his throne was the Goblin Chief.

The chief was at least 4m tall and built like a tank. He had a massive broad sword and covered with armor.

The chief roared and immediately grunts charged in with swords, ready to carve us into hamburger.

“Luke, how do we handle this?” Dad asked as he started shooting.

“Let’s start by handling the mobs first,” I said. “Why does it feel like conquering a dungeon?”

I looked at Annie using equipment that couldn’t handle her skills. She tossed her ruined sword away and pulled out another. If only she had proper equipment like mum, dad and I.

“Annie, how would you like to fight the boss? We can make sure the ads don’t bother you. Use whatever tools and equipment you want.”

“Are you sure?” Annie asked.

“Yes,” I replied. “You aren’t forbidden from using modern weapons.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?” Mum asked.

“Everything is dangerous,” I replied. “However, fortune favors the bold.”

As if to taunt me, the boss bellowed and the doors opened, ushering in berserkers and brutes.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “We can do this. The boss is level 65, but you handled a dragon before. And now you’re stronger and faster.”

“Okay Luke,” Annie said. “However, if I die I will haunt you.”

“I don’t mind, since it will be a cute ghost,” I replied.

“Leave the sweet talking for later,” Dad said and Annie punched me in the arm.

“I need to get closer,” Annie said.

“Lead the way,” I said.

Annie moved forward and then stopped. She then decided to follow the wall like we did in the previous dungeon.

“For some reason this reminds me of a game named Valheim,” Dad said. “In it you needed to defeat certain bosses to obtain necessary materials for advancement.”

I was about to comment but stopped. I didn’t want to jinx my plan.

We travelled slowly since there were so many mobs. As we moved, I wondered why the others weren’t entering. Our future townspeople should have defeated their opponents by now.

Just then the doors opened and a horde of monsters exited. I saw a few people try to enter but failed. The doors shut.

For a moment the number of monsters in the room dropped by half, but then it returned to former levels.

I looked at Mum. She couldn’t rely on her speed since there were too many mobs. Dad was pressed against the wall, firing his gun almost continuously.

“Got a boost dad?” I asked.

“How could you tell?” he asked. “Yes, I can produce 1 riffle bullet a second. I can even get an armor piercing bullet every 10 seconds, which is rather scary, if you think about it.”

“I agree,” I said. “I bet there are things out there that might shrug off a nuclear blast.”

“Scary,” dad said.

Why were these battles so incredibly hard? The only reason we haven’t been killed was because we have been fighting defensively.

Before I could say anything, Annie said, “Uncle, can you toss some grenades in front of us?”

“Okay Annie,” Dad said and did just that. Fortunately that was one of his weak ones.

There was an explosion, causing chunky goblin blobs to fly everywhere.

“Gross, I got some in my hair,” Annie grumbled.

“And I got some in my mouth,” Mum said.

Never the less the explosion allowed us to advance further.

Suddenly the doors opened again and more goblins rushed out. That worked well for us, since the decrease in density allowed us to advance further.

Again the doors closed and again we had to slog forward.

It was a strange thing. We were just strong enough not to get seriously hurt, as long as we remained vigilant. However, our weakness forced us to travel at a crawl.

Finally we reached about 4m from the throne.

Suddenly I heard gun fire. From the corner of my eyes I saw the boss getting up as it defended itself from bullets using his sword.

Then a bottle went flying at the Goblin Chief. Instantly it lowered its sword to protect its stomach.

That was a bad move, since…

“Aah,” I grunted in pain as a brute got a hit in. I was so distracted by Annie that I lost concentration.

I quickly returned my attention to where it belonged. However it was hard, considering the noise the Chief was making.

I stole a glance and discovered his face was melting. Immediately I had the overwhelming urge to barf.

A moment later I heard barfing sounds as mum did just that. Fortunately that didn’t prevent her from fighting.

“What’s going on? I can’t see,” Dad said.

“Dad, you don’t want to see,” I said. “Chemicals are nasty.”

A moment later I heard thuds, as if things were being thrown.

Just then the interior doors opened and the goblins charged out of the room. In moments we were alone in an empty room.

“Did we win?” Dad asked.

“I guess we did,” Annie said. “Man I’m pooped.”

I turned to see an ornate gold chest.

I walked up to the chest and knelt down to it. I didn’t open it. Instead I placed both hands on the lid and waited for the others.

Once the others were by my side I said, “Oh spirit of the universe, please give Annie a weapon that is compatible with her class, talents and skills.”

I then turned to Annie and said, “Open it.”

Annie stepped forward and opened the chest.

Within was a spear weapon. One side had a 1m long twin-edged blade. The pole was metallic in appearance that looked like a puzzle box.

Annie spun the weapon around her head and did some practice jabs. She then popped out cartridges from the pole side and returned them.

“This is amazing,” Annie said excitedly.

“Yes, but we need more cartridges,” I said.

Suddenly the room transformed and we found ourselves in a much smaller room. The dungeon was no more.

The doors opened and the others rushed in and Annie put her weapon away.

It was now 6:23PM. I had advanced **<2 levels>** from that campaign and now had 10 free attribute points to spend.

In moments the room was filled as everyone crowded in.

We walked to the end of the room containing a raised platform and waited.

Slowly everyone settled down and Dad said, “Luke, do you want to say anything?”

“Everyone, let’s take a minute in memory of all the people who sacrificed themselves for us to obtain this place,” I said.

Everyone went silent. I counted to 60 and then said, “The first part of the battle is won.”

There was a ruckus as everyone started arguing. After awhile Dad finally got everyone to quiet down.

“It’s time to set up the village stone,” I said.

Dad took that as a queue and tossed the stone onto the ground next to us.

In a moment the town pillar appeared.

“Dad, can you set it so the border is permanently visible?” I asked.

“Can you do that?” Dad asked.

As I was looking through the options I said, “This stone can only create a small village. In other words, it will only cover a small part of this town.

“That means the houses outside the safe area will spawn goblins.”

Again there was arguing. Again dad had to calm everyone.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “All you have to do is register here and then hunt monsters. 5% of your experience will be used to upgrade this village.

“Eventually, the entire goblin town will become a safe zone, when the village upgrades.

“Okay I got it. The border will now be marked. You can claim any house within the border to live in. And of course, you can shop for anything here at the kiosk.

“Remember, the more monsters you fight, the faster this village will become a safe place for you to raise your children.”

“Did you say children?” Someone asked.

“Indeed I did,” I replied. “In 9 months from now I will no longer be the youngest human, indigenous human on earth.

“I can’t wait to say hi to the kids from the new generation.

“Okay cooks, it’s time to prepare our victory feast,” I said.

“That’s right,” Dad said. “Luke promised dragon steaks for our victory celebration, with plenty of booze.”

Everyone cheered.

We walked out the front doors and into the large area in front of the town house.

It was time for our victory dinner, so we gave the cooks more dragon steaks and a few other items.

For the time being our jobs were over and we stood by the side.

“Uncle, did you have to call the town Annie?” Annie asked.

“Would you have preferred Princess Annie?” I asked.

“Would you prefer I called you Mastermind?” Annie asked angrily.

“No thanks,” I said. “So how’s your weapon?”

“Amazing,” Annie said happily and took it out. “I can load multiple chemicals in these cartridges and expel them either from here, or coat the blade with them. Yes, this can become either a melee weapon or a ranged weapon. I can’t wait to get some monster orbs to expand its functionality. Thanks Luke,” she said and gave me a brief hug.

“We do have the orbs from the weaker monster. They should work. I assume they can stack.

“The next thing we need to do is set up your lab, so you can become overpowered,” I said.

“I thought you could just generate them,” Dad said.

“Only in microscopic amounts,” Annie said.

“It’s strange Dad can create ordinance in large amounts,” I said.

“Actually, they aren’t exactly real,” Dad said. “They sort of exist and sort of don’t. I don’t understand it myself. I just know it just does its thing.”

“Do you have fluorine?” I asked.

“I got it when I brushed my teeth,” Annie replied.

“What can you do with hydrofluoric acid?” I asked.

Annie took out her weapon and concentrated. She then stabbed a tree. Other then mechanical damage, nothing happened.

“Hydrochloric acid is relatively easy to make,” Annie said. “I can make it in our back yard.”

“I can’t wait to buy some furniture for our home,” Mum said. “Tomorrow we are taking a break from adventuring.”

“I just thought of something,” I said. “We need a sound system.”

“For our home?” Mum asked.

“That too,” I said. “I meant this village. During the day it can play music, drawing people here.”

“Luke, take me home,” Mum said. “I want to do some shopping before dinner.”

“Okay mum,” I said. “Let’s enter one of the houses.”

We stepped beyond the village stone border and entered an unclaimed house, and got a surprise. The house was disgusting. It looked as if animals used it as a den. It was stinking and covered with junk.

On the other hand, there was loot scattered among the junk.

I took out the Gate and Mum immediately stepped through. I followed her and then brought out the Throne.

Stepping to the Throne’s store, I said, “Beds.”

A list of beds appeared. I selected one and then bought some linen. I then bought a few more items. Once purchases were done, I deeded all my gold except 10 to mum.

“Thanks Luke,” Mum called out and I headed in.

Arriving at my room, I positioned my new bed and added the needed linen. After that I set up my computer desk and gaming chair. The final step was to plug in the mouse, keyboard and large monitor into my laptop. With laptop and monitor plugged into the wall outlet, my room was finished.

Exiting my room, I walked through the kitchen and out the back. Using my remaining gold I created a large patio.

I placed a comfortable outdoor couch built for two and sat down with a drink.

While sipping coke I imagined our new outdoor space. A swimming pool would be nice, along with a Jacuzzi, and a nice sound system, and a barbeque area, and a…

“Annie, Betty, are you ready? Dinner is ready,” Dad called.

“Just a moment,” Mum called as she shopped.

A door opened from the side of the mansion pillar and Annie stepped out.

“Where did you come from?” Dad asked, surprised.

“I found something really freaky,” Annie said. “Follow me.”

Mum finished her shopping spree and we followed Annie to the *Throne*.

Annie entered the *Throne* and then stepped into the closet I had yet to open.

“Holy moly,” Mum exclaimed, shocked.

I was shocked too. Instead of a simple closet, there was a large room, extending beyond the confines of the Throne.

Apparently this was another example of the Interior Space stat.

Although surprisingly large, the room was rather bare.

“I think this can become much bigger,” I said.

I then noticed three doors against the wall. Each had plaques above them marked, *Luke’s Village*, *Annie’s Village*, and *Dragon Castle.*

“That’s amazing and so convenient,” Dad said. “Now we can return to the first village.”

We exited the Throne and I put it away.

We then stepped through the portable gate and back into Annie’s village.

I put the gate away and we headed back to the main party area.

The air was filled with the scent of a barbeque as we returned.

It was time to socialize.



\* Day 6 \*

The party was fun and before we left, we once again warned everyone that only part of the town was conquered, meaning goblins would be spawning the next day.

On the bright side, the established village ended up as a Level-2 village. That wasn’t surprising considering the number of people we had.

An important task was to appoint a mayor. This time it happened to be a woman who held the most respect.

We also suggested people who wanted to leave take village stones to create their own villages.

After the party we returned home. Since we no longer needed the spare gate, I put it away.

I placed the couch near the cliff, where the view was best and invited Annie to sit with me, with the excuse for more language training.

And of course the sunset over the island-studded ocean was amazing with reds and oranges coloring the sky and clouds.

My mind was filled with thoughts of fire pits when Mum told us to go to bed.

I went to sleep listening to the gentle sound of the nearby waterfall.

The next day, we returned to the new village and gave last minute advice.

Dad and I went to Luke’s village and talked to its mayor. The village had leveled up with the addition of the previous group. All in all, the village was progressing well.

In the meantime Annie set up a lab on the patio and busied herself making dangerous chemicals.

Mum enjoyed herself decorating the house with furniture. Unfortunately that only lasted till afternoon, when she ran out of money.

Mum wasn’t happy, but at least we now had a comfortable living room and kitchen.

It was time to hit the road and conquer more dungeons and goblin villages.

With the final boss battle, both I and the Throne leveled. I had **<2 new levels>** and the Throne had 7.

For the Throne, I dumped 10 into Stealth, Nerve and Manna Control, and 5 on Metamorphosis.

**Throne - Stats:**

**Agility: 55 -> (55 + 13) \* 2 = 136**

**Strength: 50 -> (50 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Toughness: 30 -> (30 + 13) \* 2 = 86**

**Restoration: 25 -> (25 + 13) \* 2 = 76**

**Stealth: 50 -> (60 + 13) \* 2 = 146**

**Nerve: 20 -> (30 + 13) \* 2 = 86**

**Manna Control: 20 -> (30 + 13) \* 2 = 86**

**Metamorphosis: 15 -> (20 + 13) \* 2 = 86**

**Interior Space: 15 -> (15 + 13) \* 2 = 56**

**Abilities: Amphibious Mode,**

**Simple Slideouts**

**Features: Level 3 Store**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats),**

**First Dungeon (+1 All Stats),**

**Dungeon Mastery (+2 All Stats)**

**Current Level: 33 -> 40**

And off course mine was:

**Stats - Luke:**

**Agility: 41 -> (45 + 13) \* 2 = 116**

**Strength: 34 -> (40 + 13) \* 2 = 106**

**Constitution: 50 -> (50 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Stamina: 40 -> (40 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Restoration: 40 -> (40 + 13) \* 2 = 126**

**Nerve: 20 -> (20 + 13 + 40) \* 2 = 146**

**Manna: 20 -> (20 + 13 + 40) \* 2 = 146**

**Achievements: Giant Killer MAX (+100% to all stats),**

**Dragon Killer (+10 to all stats),**

**First Dungeon (+1 All Stats),**

**Dungeon Mastery (+2 All Stats)**

**Auto Points: +1/level – Manna, Nerve**

**Class: Mastermind**

**Current Level: 36 -> 40**

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We headed to the beach and I looked back from where we came from.

The mountain range, running north-south, looked amazing with its snow-capped peaks. At the base, the rock ledge could be seen.

The land curved outwards both north and south, allowing for much greater land area.

There was no question that the mountain range was like none seen on Earth. Of course, the original message did say the old world was gone.

We decided to follow the beach since driving there was easier.

After 10 minutes, dad said, “That Nerve really helped the radar thing,” Dad said as he drove. “There are people all over the place.”

The radius was now almost 5 km.

“Hopefully they will hear the music and go to the villages,” Mum said. Thankfully I budgeted for the sound systems. Admittedly the sound was crap, considering I only spent 20 Gold on each system.

However it was loud.

“Perhaps we should add signposts,” I said. “I’m going out. I want to see what they have.”

“Okay Luke,” Dad said stopped the Throne. I stepped out.

Using voice commands, I found the required direction signs. They were 50 Bronze each or 2 per Silver or 200 per Gold. I bought 200 with ‘Annie’s Village’ written and 200 with ‘Luke’s Village’. By now I was almost completely out of cash.

Buying a sledge hammer, I rammed one of Annie’s arrow signs into the ground.

“Why don’t we walk?” I suggested. “It will be hard helping people if they can’t see us.”

“Good point,” Dad said.

The others exited and I put the Throne away.

“Mum, Dad, do you want to learn Elfin?” I ask.

“I’m not good with languages,” Dad said.

“Me neither,” Mum said.

“No one is good with languages compared to Luke,” Annie said with a laugh.

Was I really that good or were they all exaggerating?

I was spared from answering by a scream.

Charging forward, we found a group of around 12 people facing a pack of wolves.

“Let’s just do crowd control,” I said. “I don’t want to deprive people of experience.”

“Okay Luke,” Dad said and took aim at a wolf that was about to bite a woman.

I rammed down with the metal-covered butt of my glaive, causing a wolf to get stunned. This allowed the man to kill the creature.

For the next ten minutes we softened the monsters up for our potentially new residents.

Finally the last monster died. Needless to say we got no levels. That fight was too easy for us.

“Thanks for the help,” a woman said gratefully. She then looked at Annie and me and added, “It’s been a while since I’ve seen kids.”

“I’ve never seen children, except in videos and pictures,” Annie said.

“Just wait till next year,” I said. “Anyway, if you go that way, you will reach the sea. Head left and eventually you will reach a newly established village.

“It has available houses as well as a store you can buy stuff from.

“Alternatively, you can follow us. We plan on travelling south until we reach and conquer another goblin village. And to do that we need residents. After all, what is a village without people?”

“Isn’t that dangerous?” a man asked.

“How many of you have guns?” I asked.

Several people raised their hands.

“How useful are guns?” another man asked.

“Amazingly useful for the weak monsters,” I replied. “By killing weak monsters with guns, you get to level up. Then at Level 10 you gain your class. After that guns become less important.

“However, there is no substitute for guns especially during this first month. We have used over half of our ammo, but it was well worth it.”

“What kind of classes can we expect?” a woman asked.

“Not a clue,” I replied. “The number of classes is huge, ranging from rogues to alchemists to gunners to shaman. I believe it depends on your innate traits and personality. Focus on what kind of person you are and what you feel comfortable doing for the rest of your lives.

“Remember it doesn’t have to be combat related.”

“Can we do magic?” a lanky man asked.

“Absolutely,” I replied. “We do have an attribute called Manna Control. However, this is not necessary.

“I believe everyone has manna, and this increases with level. This then is used by the various classes automatically. For instance, my dad can create bullets automatically. However he still needs to train.

“On the other hand, a person who has high manna control can do this. Everyone can do that.”

I raised my hand and formed a fireball.

“I can’t tell you more, since I’m still learning.”

I paused and then said, “We discovered an amazing item. It’s a portable store. You can all buy stuff before either going to the established village or conquer a new village.”

At that I took out our store front. As I did, I realized the Throne might have other forms we could use. Its Metamorphosis skill was truly impressive. I just had to figure out how to use it for different types of transportation choices.

As usual the sight of the store kiosk surprised everyone.

People immediately lined up to purchase items. Mum and dad helped, since getting to know the store was time-consuming.

In the meantime I stood by Annie and practiced increasing my vocabulary.

Eventually everyone completed their purchase.

Then we headed for the new goblin village. I was expecting more people to head for the beach. However, it seemed being alone was scarier for them than being with us.

I took out my phone and found I was still connected to the Throne via WIFI. More importantly I had the map.

We headed out with me leading.

“What are you saying?” a man asked as Annie and I talked.

“Just passing the time with some language training,” I said. “Feel free to talk. That way other people will hear and come.”

And so like the Pied Piper, we collected more and more people as we went.

The trip was long and eventful. Fighting monsters and rescuing people was becoming a normal occurrence.

“We are coming close,” I called, pointing. “We conquered a village on our first day this size.

“For three people, that was hard. However, with the number of people we have, that shouldn’t be a problem.”

I then got everyone together and we talked strategy. It was simple. Dad would organize the distance fighters and handle overall strategy, and mum would organize the melee fighters.

Annie and I would help as needed. Other than that we would keep out of the way. Our first goblin battle took less than half an hour. Considering the number of fighters, this should be faster.

“Attack,” Dad shouted and we headed out.

I watched with Annie as dad got his fighters to kill the various goblins. Then mum handled the monsters that reached us.

“They are getting good at it,” Annie said.

“Especially dad,” I said. “He’s a natural leader – what’s leader?”

“Gebuch,” Annie replied.

“Gebuch,” I said as I killed a shaman. All in all, the battle was relatively peaceful – for us anyway.

Less than half hour later the village was taken and Dad had set up a village stone.

Half hour later we were ready to head off.

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“Everyone, there is a goblin town there,” I said, pointing at the map on my device.

I then helped the others set up maps on their own devices.

“If mum and dad swept along these paths, we could pick up all these scattered people. Annie and I can take these paths.”

“That’s a lot of people,” Mum mused.

“But there are so many people out there. Too bad we can’t save everyone,” Dad said sadly.

“We don’t need to,” I replied. “Thousands of people throughout the world are creating communities. Just look at social media. There are countless thousands of people just itching to create communities.

“And since we are literally part of the System, or if you will, God, everyone should be where they best want to be.

“But people aren’t that strong,” Annie said.

“That’s probably because of our preparedness,” Dad said. “I’m sure there are plenty of people out there who are way stronger than us. It’s time to go. Meet you all at the destination.” He headed out.

I began playing music and singing as I walked. Occasionally monsters attacked but they were weak.

After 5 minutes the first survivor appeared, followed by the next.

“We are going to colonize a new village,” I told the arrivals. “My group has already colonized three villages. Would you come with us to colonize the next one?”

Then the next group of people came and I had to do the same. Thankfully my new followers started explaining what we were about to do. The constant explaining was getting tedious.

1. Scion of kings: https://amazinggameroom.com/fantasy-names/dnd-elf-names/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)