

Chapter 91: Worm

The spear shook and twisted itself free of the thick, white flesh, bouncing on the rock-covered grass before flying back straight towards Meren who caught her weapon out of the air.

“That was so cool,” Tanniya couldn’t help but comment.

“Now’s not the time for flattery,” Meren said, taking a few running steps and then throwing the spear again, so fast it broke the sound barrier.

Riza winced at the audible shockwave once more as she quickly pulled herself back to her feet, helping Lefie up as well.

The demon screamed in pain. All its tongues suddenly seemed to focus, straightening and then pounding into the earth in front of it, filling its mouth with raw resources like a starving child eating food.

In just a second, the hole was already big enough for it to descend.

Shit.

“It’s coming for us,” Riza warned. It was likely going to appear right under them.

Without saying anything more, she grabbed onto Lefie’s waist, holding on tight, and summoned an ascending fog staircase.

The moment her feet were off the ground, Lefie clung to Riza for dear life, as their height increased from only a metre to three to ten to more.

“I’m not looking. I’m not looking,” She began to mumble to herself, eyes closed, as Riza brought them even higher.

With how long it appeared to be, Riza wanted them high enough to be out of its reach and that meant a hundred metres in the air.

She ascended faster than she had before, the lack of hesitancy in her mind showcasing itself in her feet; she treated the fog like a staircase and could climb as quickly as one.

Her two feet landed on the final step at the top, and [Intrinsic Tank] activated again, quickly forming a wide platform to stand upon as the final steps were reabsorbed into her.

As soon as Lefie's feet hit the solid fog, she collapsed onto her knees and breathed deeply, catching herself.

Riza rushed to the edge, looking over the side.

Everyone had spread out. The trees shook violently. Then it appeared, right under Adewyn.

She reacted right in time, throwing herself to the side as the ground opened up a split-second later, the tongues whipping through the air, searching for her.

The demon shot up with speed rivalling a dolphin jumping out of the water. It lengthened, straightened, and then flopped down to the ground like a whale, its tremendous mass shaking the very air itself.

As soon as it reappeared, Meren started throwing spears at it again. The demon winced from each impact, constricting slightly before relaxing, but still alive.

Tanniya had returned to their campsite, grabbing the tree logs and throwing them at the demon.

They exploded into a shower of splinters before even making a dent.

She looked frustrated, Riza could see, and began to run at the demon.

She rocketed forwards and then jumped, sailing through the air like a plane. Arm held back, at the last seconds, it sprang forwards on a spring, punching the demon and sending ripples down its fleshy surface.

Riza watched as its entire head section slid back a few metres from the impact, only to recover and lash out at Tanniya, moving its entire, bulbous head against her.

She barely stood a chance against its weight. The creature moved with such speed, the moment it hit the woman, she was flying through the air backwards, bouncing and tumbling and rolling on the ground for tens of metres before coming to a stop.

More and more of the demon was being pulled out of the ground as it coiled upwards. It slithered and snaked on the ground, pulling itself towards either Meren or Adewyn, whoever was closest. The tongues reached out, impossibly long, only to be deflected with their weapons.

Adewyn's enchanted greatsword swung through the air, knocking a tongue out of the way but not even cleaving through it. She looked annoyed as she had no time to rest, her sword dancing around her as she batted back the battering of whips.

Lefie had quickly gathered herself and joined Riza on shaky legs looking over the side.

"You okay?" Riza asked.

"No," She moaned with a tone that broke Riza's protective heart. She dropped herself to her chest, flying flat, and with one hand, grabbed onto Riza for dear life. With the other, she dangled it down over the edge and pointed at the demon.

A [Lightning Bolt] blasted out of her hand, tracing a straight line down to the demon dissipating against its skin.

Many more followed it, each incrementally stronger than the previous, but none of them looking like they affected the creature one bit.

Fuck. Its constitution must be insane. Lefie's not doing any damage.

But the lightning did do something.

Meren dashed closer and instead of throwing her spear, she waved it in the area in front of her, and then pulled it back sharply. A seconds later, it lit up with an electrifying, yellow glow. Sparks danced along the shaft and Meren thrust the spear into the demon.

Tendrils of lightning whipped out, gouging lines of flesh away with its burning heat as the weapon penetrated deep into it.

Then, the worm froze. Its tongues stopped striking and its body stopped thrashing for a few seconds.

Meren thrust with her spear, Adewyn slashed with her greatsword, and even Tanniya had arrived to deliver a hard punch or two.

And then it started to move again. Ignoring its assailants, it twisted around like a tremendous machine, unstoppable in its path, until facing south.

What is it...

The worm lunged forward with incredible speed, its tongues digging into the earth as realisation dawned on Riza.

It's facing Rensenfeld.

"Someone stop it!" She shouted from her high tower, her voice failing to carry all the way to the ground. There was no way she could leave; the moment she was any distance away, the platform would lose form and Lefie would drop out of the air like a stone.

Thankfully, the ground team had the same idea. Meren stuck her spear in and grabbed the demon, pulling as hard as she could backwards.

Adewyn did the same with her greatsword but even the combined strength of the pair of them only slowed it down. Tracks formed beneath their feet as they were dragged alongside it, their muscles taut with energy.

Then Tanniya darted in, sliding to a standstill before its massive head. Her hands snaked through the air with precise, controlled speed as she grabbed one tongue after the other, collecting them like bunches of flowers.

The slapping and lashing of the tongues didn't hurt her, however, nor did they knock her off her feet somehow.

She wrapped the writhing appendages around her fists and her forearms and *pulled* with meteoric strength.

She stood her ground, barely even moving, as she pulled the partially-buried worm head back onto the surface.

And then Tanniya took a step backwards. Her foot smashed onto the ground with the weight of the demon itself. One foot, then another, then another.

The demon attempted to thrash, to writhe, to escape her clutches but both Meren and Adewyn kept it straight and trapped, forced to move forward on a gentle incline as more and more of its tail end was extracted from the earth as Tanniya gradually moved backwards.

Adewyn pulled back her arm and with as tight a fist she could muster, she drove it right into the side of the demon and grabbed on with all her might.

With her other arm, she withdrew her weapon and balanced it in the air above her, muscles tensing as she charged a skill.

Seconds passed, as the demon was pulled even further aground, and then Adewyn's sword came crashing down.

It cleaved through its section of flesh, dousing Adewyn with bursting, thick blood as a wound as large as a person was carved into the thick, white skin.

The demon shook with desperate energy, managing to throw Adewyn off but not Meren, who held on throughout.

“Get me lower!” Lefie whispered urgently, tugging on Riza’s arm as the pair of them watched. “So I can do more damage.”

Riza looked at the demon before nodding.

“Alright.”

She grabbed the teen with both arms and held her tightly to her chest, a somewhat hard feat by their similarity in stature.

Standing up, Riza looked at the fog floor beneath them and then it vanished.

The fog whirled around for a split-second before being sucked back into her, and she suddenly dropped one, two, five metres through the air before using the skill again.

Another fog platform appeared below her and she landed hard, her knees buckling from the impact as she fell forwards, managing to catch herself with a hand before crushing Lefie.

Getting back to her feet, she dropped again, managing better this time.

It was hell on her knees, and she made judicious use of [Heal] to keep them intact as she fell many metres through the air until they were only ten metres above the demon.

Riza took no chances and pulled Lefie tightly around the stomach as the girl peered over the edge once more.

Arm outstretched, another [Lightning Bolt] fired from her hand, [Range Compression] enhancing the damage even further.

But it still wasn’t enough. No matter how close they got, the combination of Lefie’s metamagic and the demon’s stats meant she’d do minimal damage.

Jupy would be better but even he would struggle; the demon undoubtedly had high vim.

They carried on like this until the demon’s tail finally appeared above ground in totality.

Riza stared at it in shock, taking in the sheer size of the creature.

It’s-no... It can’t be...

She didn't want to acknowledge it but the fact of the matter was, the demon was over a hundred metres long, and likely closer to two hundred.

And there's more of them. Running about, beneath the ground.

This wasn't just a threat to this world. If it appeared on Earth, it'd be a threat there as well. Cities would be destroyed before it was.

For the first time since fighting it, Riza felt a chill spread over her, as realisation of just how mighty the demons forces were hit her. She squeezed even tighter and Lefie squeaked in pain, bringing Riza back to the present.

Finally free, the demon tensed and then whipped its tail all the way around its body far faster than it should've been physically possible too.

The mighty, fleshy thing hit Tanniya dead on, managing to knock her back and forcing her to let go of its captive tongues.

Tanniya bounced a good distance before stopping, the demon taking this opportunity to once more burrow underground.

Poised like a scorpion, its tail stopped anyone who came close to its head as it managed to finally submerge its entire mouth underground and resumed digging.

Panickily, everyone grabbed onto the creature again except, this time, Tanniya sprinted around to the end and threw herself at the tail, flailing about mid-air before grabbing onto it and pulling it to the ground with unexpected grace and competence.

Her feet crunched into the earth as she tensed up, summoning all her energy as she held herself in a firm stance and shifted her grip to hold on even tighter, her fingers digging deep into the flesh.

Even for a tapered tail, it was still absolutely massive, providing plenty of space to hold on to.

Seeing what was happening, Meren pulled out her spear and dashed to join Tanniya at the tail end.

Adewyn did the same except, she pulled her greatsword with her, slicing along the length of the demon as torrents of blood poured out, coating the landscape red.

Jabbing her greatsword into the creature like a piercing, she joined in on holding the demon.

With the three of them, they pulled and pulled and finally managed to move the demon backwards.

The ground folded away as the demon slithered backwards through it, plumes of rock emerged from the mouth end as the tongues failed to grab and hold onto something.

Lefie continued to throw bolt after bolt at the it, [Conductivity] ramping her damage up to max by now, but still not enough to deal any significant damage.

Then Riza got an idea. She told Lefie to stop and pulled her to her feet once again. She quickly explained her goal and what she wanted Lefie to do and the teen nodded along, agreeing to it.

Now, instead of [Lightning Bolt]s, Lefie conjured water. Lots and lots of water, arranging it in the air like a flechette, frozen in time. Millions of little ones were dropped from planes as cheap but effectively ammunition in the past but they were effectively against humans, not demons.

This, though, was something bigger. A couple of kilograms in weight, it took a lot of essence to construct it and hold it and freeze it as Lefie got to doing that as well. Ice permeated from the outside in, solidifying the whole weapon before it was ready.

Riza had Lefie use [Manipulate Water] to position it over the edge of the platform, right above the demon.

Then, she let go.

It dropped the ten or so metres, colliding with the demon and smashing into a million little icicles on impact.

Fuck! Riza groaned. Not the outcome she was expecting.

But it wasn't nothing. On second sighting, she could see a small spot of blood where the weapon had hit.

"That didn't seem as good as the lightning," Lefie commented, worriedly.

"No, but it can be far better."

"Keep it there. Whatever you do, make sure it doesn't move!" Riza sent a [Message] to everyone on the ground, getting confused agreements in return.

“Sorry, but we need to go higher,” She said, holding a reluctant looking Lefie in her arms again.

The foggy staircase appeared again and they climbed, higher and higher than they had before.

The hundred metre mark was passed, and then the two hundred, and then the three hundred.

The ground team managed to keep the demon from burrowing underground but they didn't manage to stop it from moving completely. Still, it was good enough.

Lefie was frozen solid, both by the extreme cold this far up and by the terror of falling.

“It's okay, I've got you,” Riza cooed in her ear, holding on tight. She gave a reassuring squeeze as they walked to the edge of the fog platform.

Again, Lefie made the same ice flechette and watched it fall. They could just barely make out the impact, ten metres to the demons right.

Adjusting, another flechette was made in the new location, this one landing a metre to the left.

Finally, the third flechette met its target, dealing significantly more damage. The pair watched as the worm writhed in pain and Lefie nodded in understanding.

“That one hurt,” She said.

“The next one will hurt even more.”

With [Way of Water], [Maximise Mastery+], and [Manifold Mastery+], Lefie could conjure up to 300 kilograms of water, and 300 kilograms she did.

A supercharged [Alter Water] to freeze it quickly meant she was incredibly drained afterwards.

The flechette was massive compared to conventional ones, although far weaker since it was made from ice. Thankfully, it was winter, the chilly air helping to keep its form.

“On the count of three, you release it, okay?” Riza said, and Lefie nodded eagerly; anything to get down from there.

“One.

“Two.

“Three.”

The flechette dropped. Riza used [Inform], shouting at the ground team to get out of the way.

The ground darted as soon as they got the message, running away and letting the demon go.

A second or two of confusion followed from the sudden lack of restraints, and then it regained awareness and went back to tunnelling.

But as fast as it could tunnel, it wasn't fast enough to get its whole body underground. And even if it could, it wouldn't have mattered anyway.

The flechette impacted seconds later.

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“*Get out of the way!*” Riza's shouted echoed in Adewyn's head, and she let go immediately, quickly hopping backwards as she created distance between herself and the demon. Her two teammates did the same, and then she finally looked up at where Riza was.

A barely perceptible shard of something was falling through the air, heading straight for the demon.

What was it? Adewyn was unaware of a skill either Riza or Lefie had that would get any of the three of them on the ground worried or damaged.

The seconds before impact, she could vaguely make out the glistening shape of the projectile and, for a split second, realised what it was.

Is that ice?

A second later. A cacophonous boom thundered outward. The ground shook and then *caved* in slightly. She could feel the dirt loosened under her feet and then under her ass as she was knocked to it, a shockwave emanating out.

Massive clouds of dust and dirt was kicked up, showering them and hiding whatever had happened.

Sticks and stones rained down around them before clearing, a dirty brown haze lingering in the air as they looked one.

The demon had stopped moving. It was no longer white. It was pure red, and the grass immediately around it was grass no longer; blood red stones and dirt was focused around the impact crater.

And an impact crater it was. Right wherever that projectile had landed, it had cleaved the demon in twain.

Its spine was sheared right off, its ribs pulverised into dust. Blood and organs poured out of the two halves like a gloopy soup.

As Adewyn walked closer, the ground descended slightly. The rank stench of dead demon wafted towards her nose, and she ignored it, used to it she was by now.

Shards of ice were everywhere, stuck into everything.

This one attack completely overshadowed everything else they had done.

To think, we could've led with this. Adewyn chuckled cynically before looking up.

Well done, Riza. Well done.

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[Level Cap] increased to 42

As the dust cleared, from a high, Riza could take in the results of her handiwork.

Holy shit. It was dead.

“I want to go down,” Lefie moaned, and Riza quickly agreed with her.

Holding onto her tightly, they descended at a much slower and less painful pace than the last time, touching down on the ground without injuries.

It looked worse from above, where you could see everything, but even up close, it was still amazing the kind of damage that flechette could deal.

And, to think, it can be even stronger. There were two ways of scaling damage; mass and height. Lefie had reached the peak of mass she could produce but there was still a lot of height left.

For moving targets, any higher and they'd be unable to aim it better. Even now, it was an incredibly specific situation that wouldn't have worked against any other enemy. In that sense, they got lucky.

But for unmoving targets... If an enemy was sleeping or they were targeting a city, they could wipe it out.

I see why they call these rods from god.

"What the fuck was that?" Tanniya shouted as soon as the pair had landed.

She bounded over, covered in blood and looking oddly elated with the situation.

"Just a bit of ice," Riza said.

"That was ice magic?"

"No, water-"

"It wasn't even ice magic! What the fuck?" Tanniya was entirely too boisterous for Riza at the moment, and Lefie was curled up on the ground, happy to be down.

"I'm seconding her. Why didn't you use this with Death?" Meren asked, walking on over as well."

"It just occurred to me in the moment. And, it only worked because I realised I could use [Manipulate Air] to climb into the air with Tanniya the other day," Riza shrugged.

"That was all water skills, no ice skills?" Adewyn asked, having walked on over as well, finished with inspecting the corpse.

"Yeah. Lefie used [Conjure Water], [Manipulate Water], and [Alter Water]," Riza nodded.

Adewyn whistled.

"And they say that water isn't a good offensive skill tree. I have to admit, I've never heard of someone dealing that much damage with just water skills before."

"You need to be very high up for it to work," Riza said, and Adewyn just shrugged.

"Hey, what level was Death?" Meren turned and asked Adewyn.

“I don’t know. Forty-something, probably.”

“Doesn’t level 42 seem a bit low for this thing?” She pointed towards the worm demon, prompting Riza to remember the entire reason why they fought it.

And once she did, she was giddy with excitement.

Holy shit. Fucking finally! I can level up again!

So many levels. 13 new levels! That’s insane. And another boon!

Needless to say, she was freaking out internally.

“I don’t know about that. Elder greater demons are always lower level than you’d guess. Without any skills, it’s just pure stats and that’s not enough for combat. This piece of shit is better as a workhorse than as a warrior.” Adewyn glowered at the demon corpse.

“The elder greater demon that you killed. That was level 30, wasn’t it?”

“31, actually.”

“What did that look like?”

“Definitely nothing this big, I can say that much. All legs, no arms, and a disturbingly high number of tongues. It was about as big as the Lord’s Manor in Rensenfeld.”

“I see.”

As the pair of them were having a conversation, Riza had walked over towards the corpse, not caring one whit about getting her boots all bloodied. Tanniya followed after.

“What are you going to do now that it’s dead? Raise it like the rest of your demons?”

Riza dropped to her knees before it, gently placing a hand on its rapidly cooling skin as she leaned in, resting her forehead on it like some kind of beloved toy.

“No. I can do even better.”

Life

0th Tier

[Heal+] -Learned

Restore 380 health, 4 stamina, 4 essence to a living entity

Cost: 10 es/sec

[Leech] (10/10)+ -Learned

Drain 220 points of health from a living entity

80m range

Cost: 10 es/sec

[Cleanse] (Passive) -Learned

You have immunity towards any toxin, disease, or contamination

1st Tier

[Sapping Curse] (1/10)

Prevent a living entity from recovering health for 4 hours

Casting Time: 1 sec

Cost: 5 es

[Animate Critter] (passive) -Learned

40% chance after killing an entity for the entity to be raised as a level 0 zombie

[Life Sense] (1/10)

Scan for either a general or specific form of life

4m radius

Casting Time: 1 m/sec

Cost: 1 es

[Last Words] (1/10)

Extract thoughts from an entity that died within 4 hours

Casting Time: 1 min

Cost: 5 es

Hidden Skill

Requirements: [Heal] (10/10)

[Rejuvenate] (1/10)

Restore 200 points of health and regenerate any wounds to a living entity

Cost: 15 es

2nd Tier

[Reanimate] (10/10) -Learned

Raise a corpse into a level 36 zombie

Casting Time: 1 min

Cost: 28 es/sec

Requirements: [Animate Critter] (5/10)

[Inanimate Life] (1/10)

Bestow the gift of simple life to an inanimate object

Cost: 100 es

[Remnant Memories] (10/10)+ -Learned

Summoned entities are created with a 200% higher level

Cost: 30 es

Hidden skill

[Leech](10/10)

Animation skill (1/10)

[Parasite] (10/10)+ -Learned

Implant up to 40 parasites in summoned entities. When your health drops to 0, automatically drain all the health from a summoned entity regardless of distance

Cost: 2890 es per implanted [Parasite]

3rd Tier

[Resuscitate] (1/10)

Bring an entity that has died within the past 4 minutes back to life

Casting Time: 1 minute

Cost: 1000 es

Requirements: [Rejuvenate] (10/10), Animation skill (10/10)

[Amalgam] (1/10)

Combine 5 summoned entities into one entity

Casting Time: 5 min

Cost: 500 es/entity

Requirements: [Heal] (1/10)

[Senescence] (1/10)

Alter the age of something by 4 minutes per second

Cost: 50 es/sec

Requirements: [Rejuvenate] (1/10)

[Raise Dead] (10/10)+ -Learned

Raise a corpse into an undead version of itself beginning at level 20

Casting Time: 5 min

Cost: 1 es/sec per 2 levels

Requirements: [Reanimate] (5/10)

Hidden Skill

Animation skill (5/10)

[Essence Monarch] (10/10) -Learned

Gain 40% of each summoned entity's essence regeneration

4th Tier

[Resurrection] (1/10)

Bring an entity that has died within the past 4 day back to life

Casting Time: 1 hour

Cost: 10000 es

Requirements: [Resuscitate] (10/10)

[Chimerical Spawn] (1/10)

Bestow the gift of complex life to an inanimate object

Casting Time: 10 min

Cost: 1000 es

Requirements: [Inanimate Life] (10/10)

[False Life] (1/10)

Raise a corpse into an undead version of itself beginning at level

Casting Time: 1 hour

Cost: 1 es/sec/level

Requirements: [Raise Dead] (10/10)

Hidden Skill

[Leech] (10/10)

[Essential Leech] (10/10)+ -Learned

Choose a living entity. Upon death, drain 4 stat points from its highest stat if possible

Casting Time: 5 secs

Cost: 27500 es

5th Tier

Her eyes bored into [False Life] with such intensity the skill would cower in fear if it was sentient.

Her hand balled up into a fist and she banged against the skin.

Just one level!

She had to wait.

“Better... how?”

Riza got back to her feet and shook herself off, regaining some warmth to her body.

“Just you wait. I’d need to level up first, so I need to go back to Rensenfeld. Come on.”

She walked back towards the rest of the group.

“Finished caressing the worm?” Meren said.

“Yes and she really enjoyed it. Forget that, I’m going to need all of you to stay here. Erect a camp, protect the corpse, make sure no one steals it-“

“Who would want it?”

“The Empire? I don’t know. Just stay here. I’m going back to Rensenfeld to level up really quickly and then I’ll return. Once I’m back, I’m going to raise that fucker.”

A murmur of excitement rang out amongst the group.

But first, we need to call Daven.

Riza walked over towards Lefie, who was now just sitting at the ground, staring at nothing in front of her. Riza crouched down beside her.

“Hey, slug. How are you feeling?” She said, pulling an arm around the girl.

“Riza, What does ‘New Skill Synthesis’ mean?”