

Chapter 97: Order

Plants sprouted up rapidly, reaching for the sky all around Riza before rapidly browning and greying, wilting as leaves and petals dropped off as the plant died in seconds, only for another plant to grow in its place.

All around Riza, this was happening, like a time lapse in real life. She just stared at it, amazed at the temporal anomaly, as well as its general beauty.

Much prettier than what happened with Jupy's [Lightning Bolt]. A faint smile was on her face.

Need to tell the others that it's over.

She went to use [Inform] but it didn't work. The skill didn't go through and she felt no essence leave her body.

Oh, right. Only life skills should work right now.

To test it, she used [Heal] and felt the rejuvenating essence surge through her. She chuckled a little at a realisation.

This is probably the safest place on the planet for me right now. Unless someone else has life skills, they're powerless.

And then, another realisation hit.

A level cap of 66. Fucking 66. What level was the Dreaven, the supposed person with the highest level? 60?

This is insane. And who the fuck was that demon. Was that the Demon Lord, sitting below Rensenfeld? What a fucking incredible time to make itself known.

Shaking herself down, she looked upon the corpse at the centre of the crater.

I got lucky. It had to get up close and personal and that was what killed it.

She walked a bit closer, nudging the dead demon gently with her foot.

Now, what to do with you? I can raise you, but that will take a whole hour and then another hour to give you skills to understand me. Not to mention, a full strength Demon Lord who doesn't understand me sounds like a recipe for disaster.

No, the city is still burning and I need to handle that. You can wait.

Instead, I'll do what I usually do for humanoid demons.

Bending down, Riza placed her hands on the crooked back of the demon and began using [Reanimate]

[Reanimate] (10/10)+ -Learned

Raise a corpse into a level 216 zombie

Casting Time: 1 min

Cost: 28 es/sec

Requirements: [Animate Critter] (5/10)

This is just getting ridiculous! [Way of Life] increased my maximum [Reanimate] level to 108 and it appears that this life... contamination doubles the intensity of skills. Huh. I can use that somehow, like bringing creatures here to use [Essential Leech] on to double the stats I gain.

Note for later.

Once the Demon Lord was walking about, personality replaced with whatever A.I. [Reanimate] had implanted, Riza began to jog out of the area of rapid life and death.

The total area extended far further than Riza expected. As soon as she climbed the house-sized crater, she slowed down to purposeful steps, one step directly in front of the other.

One, two, three... one hundred and thirty five, one hundred and thirty six. Riza looked up, seeing an open field in front of her, and then looked back down, taking one last, tiny step. *And a half.*

A hundred and thirty six and a half of my feet from the edge of the crater.

Two of her rather small feet was about one foot in length. That meant it was about 68 feet from the crater, and the crater itself looked to be about thirty feet across.

In total, that meant the radius of the area affected by [Leech] was about 83 feet, or roughly 28 metres. Which was a lot.

But, still, not as far reaching as Jupy's. I suppose his did travel a lot further.

The Demon Lord walked out after Riza, commanded to follow along at her heel.

"This is Riza. The Demon Lord is dead. Return to the crater." Riza used [Inform].

Quickly enough, Adewyn, Meren, and Tanniya were again in front of Riza.

"Woah. He doesn't look dead," Tanniya said, taking a step backwards once she had arrived.

"It's fine. It's just a mindless *drone* right now. I don't have time to use [False Life] on it. More importantly, why are you here? What happened?"

The three shared a look.

"When Andreyra received your message, she had already called us to return quickly. Because of the damage the demon caused," Adweyn said. "She said that the demon was unimaginably fast and... told us to kill a lot of demons in the nest to level up. Sorry about that," She finished, looking sheepish.

Andreyra gave permission to cull the nest? Drastic measures and all that.

"That's fine. We've got a bunch of beasts with Daven and Tiffany that we can use to repopulate."

"Daven's actually not there anymore..." Adewyn said, seeming a bit more confident considering Riza's lack of anger.

"He's not?"

"He was called over to help as well. The worm might've been a challenge for him," She gestured towards the Demon Lord.

"Daven. Emergency over. Return to the demons and fortify your location. I'll return once I've finished up here, which might be a couple of days." Riza immediately used [Inform], enhancing the range to the maximum.

The essence was spent so he must've been within range.

"You're fine with Andreyra letting us kill demons?" Tanniya shyly asked.

"Yes. That's fine. More importantly, what level are you all at now?" Riza asked, getting excited a bit.

Adewyn was now level 33, Meren 31, and Tanniya only level 30. None of them had reached a level for another boon but Riza inwardly cringed a little when she considered just how many demons must've died for only these handful of levels.

“It wasn’t just the three of us, though,” Meren said, looking past the quickly-appearing grove, towards where a body lay still, half-covered by the grass. “Klannar joined us, but he didn’t make it,” She said somberly.

Riza followed her gaze, sighting the motionless body. Hastily, she jogged over, seeing that it was indeed Klannar.

She dropped to her knees and rolled him over, gently moving his body into a comfortable position.

To think, you dove into battle right alongside the rest of them. A bittersweet smile adorned her face. Courageous when it mattered.

“What are we going to do with him?” Meren asked, everyone else joining Riza.

“Same thing I did last time. This isn’t like what happened with Lefie. He’s always been dead since we first met him. This is just... an inconvenience,” Riza stated, not looking anywhere but the corpse as she placed her hands on his chest.

The minutes passed by as Meren, who was personally with Klannar during most of the time after getting Andreyra’s warning, filled Riza in on what he did.

He was initially hesitant to join, having no desire to but acknowledging that there was some obligation he owed towards Riza for his new life. Meren didn’t pressure him on this, getting a sense that the demon was so strong there was a good chance they could die if they thought.

It was only once Andreyra filled them in on the details of the demon—how it moved faster than you could even see—did Klannar make a decision.

There were ice skills that slowed down his enemies and when Meren outwardly spoke about infusing her attacks with essence, he apparently felt like fate itself had decided for him; he was made for this.

There is no fate, huh. No relying on any power other than your own.

The essence flow stopped. Klannar’s chest suddenly heaved as lungful’s of air flowed into him, resuscitating him back to life.

His eyes blinked open and a strangled scream left his throat as he twisted and turned on the ground, taking a moment to focus on the people in front of him. He was breathing heavily.

“It... did we-did we... did we win?” He asked in disbelief.

Riza nodded, and he left out a massive sigh of relief, somehow sinking even further into the ground as he deflated.

“Couldn’t have done it without you,” Meren commented, and he smiled shyly, looking away from them.

Well... He doesn't need to know.

Riza got to her feet and held out a hand, which Klannar eagerly took. He felt as light as a feather as she pulled him to his feet as well.

“There were... casualties, though. You’re back to level 5 but at least you’re still alive,” She said.

“That’s... fine. It’s okay. I don’t think I want to get into another fight like that for a while. Did you see him? How he could even move like that?”

“That’s a good point. Tanniya, how could you even keep up with that thing?” Adewyn asked, crossing her arms and looking interestedly at the woman.

“Keep up?” Riza asked, slightly out of the loop.

“You should’ve seen her. You should’ve seen *him*. He threw all of us off with ease but he actually seemed annoyed with how much Tanniya was dodging his attacks.”

Tanniya looked proud of herself as she responded.

“Well, it was actually a combination of brawling skills and ka skills,” She began.

“Ka?”

“Yeah. The same skill tree that [Meditate] comes from, since everyone talks about that skill so much.”

Shit. I haven't looked at that tree in ages!

“[Concentrate] is the same tier as [Meditate] but it does something to ‘processing speed’? I didn’t know what that was but it’s apparently the same as reaction speed? Anyway, both that and [Swift Stance] meant I could just barely react to that things attacks while [Swift Fists] and [Fists of Flurry] meant I could actually keep up. Sort of.”

Ka

0th Tier

[Meditate+] -Learned

Regeneration is multiplied by 3 while one sense is subdued absolutely

[Concentrate] (1/10)

Subdue emotions while simple processing speed is multiplied by 1.2

Cost: 1 stam/sec

1st Tier

[Ruminate] (1/10)

Multiply complex processing speed by 1.02

Cost: 5 stam/sec

Brawling

0th Tier

[Unarmed Fighter] (10/10) - Learned

Unarmed attacks deal 100% more damage

[Pressure Point Detection] (1/10)

Gain knowledge of vital points on an entity

[Long-range Brawler] (10/10) -Learned

Thrown objects count as unarmed attacks at 100% intensity

1st Tier

[Powerful Fists] (10/10) -Learned

Power increases unarmed attack damage by an additional 20%

[Swift Fists] (8/10) -Learned

Unarmed attacks are 40% faster

[Swift Thrower] (1/10)

Thrown objects travel 10% faster

Requirements: [Long-range Brawler] (1/10)

2nd Tier

[Concussive Fists] (10/10) -Learned

Unarmed attack knockback is increased by 100%

Requirements: [Powerful Fists] (5/10)

[Thunderous Blow] (1/10)

Charge an unarmed attack for 1 second to increase damage and knockback by 10%

Requirements: [Powerful Fists] (5/10)

[Swift Stance] (6/10) -Learned

Decrease your response time and increase your agility by 12%

Cost: 6 stam/sec

Requirements: [Swift Fists] (5/10)

[Power Stance] (10/10) -Learned

Unarmed attacks deal 100% more damage

Cost: 10 stam/sec

Requirements: [Powerful Fists] (5/10)

3rd Tier

[Fists of Flurry] (7/10) -Learned

Consecutive unarmed attacks are 7% faster up to a maximum of 70%

Requirements: [Swift Fists] (5/10)

[Mountain Stance] (5/10) -Learned

Decrease knockback received by 25%. Increase knockback and damage of unarmed attacks by 25%

Cost: 5 stam/sec

Requirements: [Power Stance] (10/10)

[Defensive Stance] (1/10)

Decrease damage received and dealt by 2%

Cost: 1 stam/sec

Requirements: [Swift Stance] (10/10)

[Unerring Aim] (3/10) -Learned

Increase distance, damage, and accuracy of thrown objects by 15%

Requirements: [Long-range Barwler] (10/10)

Hidden skill

[Concussive Fists] (10/10)

[Siege Stance] (1/10)

Increase unarmed attack damage to non-entities by 10%

Cost: 1 stam/sec

4th Tier

[Stance Adept] (2/10) -Learned

Stances are 10% more effective

[Counter Stance] (1/10)

Instantly deal 10% of unarmed attack damage to an enemy that hits you within reach

Cost: 1 stam/sec

Requirements: [Swift Stance] (10/10), [Defensive Stance] (10/10)

[Patient Stance] (1/10)

Increase damage and knockback of your next attack by 10% whenever you are hit up to a maximum of 100%

Cost: 1 stam/sec

Requirements: [Mountain Stance] (10/10)

Riza brought up the skill trees to see what skills Tanniya was talking about and, sure enough, they made her reaction time shorter and her movements faster, precisely what she needed to fight evenly with the Demon Lord.

“Wow, Tanniya. That’s really impressive that you figured that out. Well done,” Riza said, genuinely surprised. Even she hadn’t realised the synergy.

“Does all that praise mean it’s finally time for you to uphold your end of the bargain?”

It took a second for Riza to figure out what she was saying.

“Your boyfr-”

“Ex-boyfriend. Soon to be ex-alive, I hope.”

“We can deal with that soon. Once the city is back under control and there’s no more threats, I’ll get around to it.”

“You better. Otherwise, you won’t get performances like this anymore. I’ll run in under-leveled and die instantly,” Tanniya shrugged, her own mortality apparently not that serious. Or she was joking. It was hard to tell with her generally irreverent demeanour.

Still, definitely something I should tackle when I can.

The last thing that needed to be discussed was the obviously conspicuous zone of life. All four of them were confused over what they were seeing, and only Adewyn had any vague recollection of high-damage magic causing massive damage to its environment like [Leech] did.

Although they wouldn’t die if they entered the zone, they were all recommended to not step within its proximity unless they had to.

After that, Riza messaged Andreyra, telling her that the Demon Lord had been successfully killed and they had won. She received a reply to hurry back to the city quickly.

Since Klannar was now a lowly level 5, he was sent with the Demon Lord back towards the nest outside the city while the rest returned to Rensenfeld.

But once they returned, there was something... different, to Rensenfeld. There was something in the air. Rain.

Riza held out her hand and felt the droplets collide with her skin—cold and wet.

Now, are you natural or unnatural?

For once, she was actually happy to see that it was raining. The fires had died out and while she could still hear faint shouts and screams, it was at least a modicum of improvement.

Heading into the city, the streets they chose were eerily quiet. They were walking quickly, practically speeding through the roads and intersections, until they were forced to stop, for there was a man in the middle of the road.

And it wasn't just any man; it was Sanders.

He was wearing armour, a stark difference to the last time Riza had seen him. He had been spending most of his time in the city, ever since they took over, as he never seemed all that enthused in carrying out Riza's orders. He wasn't like Daven.

The armour was piece-meal and lacking in shine, looking like common looted gear, like the thugs Riza had encountered earlier had.

In his hands was a large greatsword. Unlike Adewyn's, it appeared rather ordinary, lacking any ornate detail or expensive and finely crafted components.

He was just standing there, staring at them. The remains of a fire smouldered at his sides, the wooden frames of the houses burnt to a crisp.

His face was hidden underneath his metal helm. A foreboding visage.

"Riza!" He shouted down the street, voice bearing more intensity than Riza had ever heard before.

He walked towards them, closing the gap. The wind whistled down the hollow avenue.

"Yes?" Riza replied, her voice carrying.

Sanders stopped about ten metres in front of her. His greatsword was pointing at the ground.

“What do you have to say for yourself?”

Her face furrowed in confusion.

“The city is burning. Homes are destroyed. People are dead. And not only here. Hotton is gone. Totally destroyed by a demon you brought there. So many lives have been lost. What do you have to say for yourself?” Sanders raised his greatsword, pointing it towards Riza.

Before she could even think of a response, Meren stepped forward, not yet drawing her own weapon.

“Sanders, this is madness! You were there; you know it wasn’t Riza’s fault. The demons are the enemy here! And this? This is the Empire. They murdered the civilians, torched their homes. Riza is not your enemy!” She shouted.

“Tell that to the dead! I hear them! I hear what they say—their screams of anguish. They know who did this, why they’ve been butchered to pieces, and she’s standing right there.” He snarled with such ferocity, Riza barely recognised him.

Sanders?

“Calm down, friend,” Meren said, taking slow steps forward, hand in front of her and empty. “You’ve known me for years. We protected Litchendorf together. Riza wasn’t the reason why my mother died, nor why you died, just like she wasn’t the reason for the disaster that befell Hotton or this city, even. Calm down.”

Somewhere inside Riza, she knew she could end this all now. All she had to do was give a few commands and Sanders would turn into a mindless robot, obeying each and every order without question.

But that wasn’t Riza. Sanders didn’t deserve that.

She had raised both him and Daven out of desperation—a lack of options—but she was stronger now. In truth, she didn’t need him anymore, and if he didn’t want to work for her, there was nothing more that she was willingly to do to change that.

“I’m plenty calm, all thanks to that skill I was forced to take. My thinking is clear, and your words aren’t any more important than the hundreds of deaths caused by her hands!”

“Sanders...”

“People are dead, Meren. Mothers, fathers, children, all because of her. She chose to come here. What if one of them was your mother? Would you still proclaim her innocence? That it’s the demons who are at fault when the demons wouldn’t have even been there in the first place? Or the Empire?”

“Sanders. You know that’s different,” Meren replied in a pained voice.

“Is it? If you truly want to protect people, then there’s just one person you have to kill!”

Before Meren could respond, a sudden bolt of lightning appeared from Sanders’ hand, racing down the street right towards Riza.

Tanniya managed to react in time, immediately reaching out and pulling her out of the way as the bolt sailed past, colliding in some debris, sending rocks flying into the air.

“Don’t, Sanders...” Meren said, turning back to look at him.

He was done with talking, apparently. [Lightning Bolt] after [Lightning Bolt] shot from his hand, aimed towards Riza. His aim was bad, and plenty missed, but she shrugged off Tanniya’s attempts to protect her, taking one bolt right in the chest, feeling the energy dissipate against her skin.

It was weak, unsurprisingly, and Riza didn’t move to counterattack.

Meren was on him in a flash, knocking the sword from his hand before he even managed to swing it, and shoving him to the ground. Her hands pinned him to the street, hands held above his head as he struggled uselessly against Meren’s supreme strength.

“You may think you’re just, that you’re the good guy here, but people are dead because of you. You can’t deny that fact!” Sanders shouted as Riza walked over, intact.

“What should I do?” Meren asked, but Riza just ignored her, dropping to her knees beside her old companion and catching his hateful gaze.

“I’m sorry, Sanders,” She said before using a precisely-powered [Leech] to kill him in an instant.

He stopped squirming, his body falling limp in Meren's grasp as life left his eyes, forever staring into Riza's own.

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"So, you killed him?" Andreya asked from her position behind the Lord's desk, finally catching up on everything that had happened that day. Tanniya, Adewyn, Lefie, and Andreya were all gathered together.

"Yes," Riza nodded solemnly.

"I guess it was unavoidable. It's not the first time a Resurrectionist goes crazy from the spirits, but hopefully the last."

"Is-is that why life magic is so restricted in the Empire?" Lefie asked, standing incredibly close to Riza after hearing about what a close call it was.

"That's partly it. It's also frowned upon by Skaldur so only those who receive his blessing can use it."

"Was Sylan blessed?" Riza asked.

"Sylan, from Kratten? He must've been, but he was already capable of life magic when he was assigned to me," Andreya vaguely shrugged. "But enough about that. I've received only a few reports but the city is in a dire state."

"At least it's not burning," Tanniya commented.

"Thanks to me!" Lefie replied rather proudly.

"You did that?"

"Yep! Just one big rainstorm and whoosh! No more fire," She smiled, and Riza patted her back gently.

"Impressive."

"The fire is gone, and that's good, but we still have plenty of looters roaming about. It's a big city so I don't think they're going to stop until nightfall. Centrally, around the tower, is the most dangerous area. Gangs are armed from equipment they managed to loot from the Dominion and Chosen buildings. Most people have either fled or are hiding in their homes, unless they've been killed," Andreya said grimly.

"What about the rich area, here? How's that holding up?"

“The so-called ‘Lord’s Men’ never ventured up here but a few groups of thugs had and never returned. Most of the families employ a handful of guards who have levels. Usually, veterans who are no longer working with the Dominion or Chosen.”

“How come I never heard of this? Could they be a threat to us?” Riza asked insistently, slightly annoyed that Andreyra hadn’t told her about a potential force inside the city.

“Sorry, but there’s just been so much happening that it was never the top priority. To give you a summary, they’re each only a couple levels high. Any stronger and they would have better retirement opportunities and higher ranks upon retirement, and any weaker and they wouldn’t be employed at all.

“They’re also not a threat if you keep everyone happy. We haven’t done anything to infringe upon their quality of life so they’ve felt little difference with the change in leadership. Although, that may not be the case with the harvests coming up,” Andreyra explained.

I suppose... fair enough. I know now, at least.

“So, the rioters in the city are what we need to deal with?”

“They’re the most pressing issue, yes, but there’s the damage to houses and streets, the dead bodies, the loss of jobs and workers, the destruction of the surrounding villages who provide food... There’s a lot of work that needs to be done,” Andreyra said, and Riza could acutely see how much stress it was causing her.

She needs some help. Managing a whole city is not the work of just one person. Once this crisis is over, I’ll find people Andreyra can delegate work with. One step at a time.

To stop the rioting, a police force would be really useful right about now. Something to bring back order and control.

Except, I don’t have enough people to do that. Even if we include all the humanoid demons at my disposal, this is a city of thousands. At least, I hope it still is. I want to handle this non-lethally, with no more deaths.

How can I quickly find a large group of people who are strong enough to enforce order while also completely obedient so as to not cause more chaos?

Unless... they don’t need to be people at all?

“I’ve got an idea.”

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The entrance to the nest was thankfully undisturbed from the battle with the Demon Lord, and Riza descended down the tunnel quickly, finding Klannar resting alone in his room as she decided to check in on him.

“How are you doing?” She asked, gently, standing at the threshold of the room.

“Honestly? Better than I expected. I guess, once you’ve already died once, what’s one more time, right?” He laughed sincerely, and Riza smiled slightly, seeing that he was alright.

“It was brave of you to try to fight the Demon Lord,” She said.

“It’s the reason you brought me back, isn’t it? Tanniya’s been doing so much that it’s about time I started pulling my weight as well.”

“Tanniya’s helping me because I made a deal with her. She’s getting something in return. I don’t want you to feel like you have no choice but to risk your life for me.”

I don’t want a repeat of Sanders. Riza winced at the memory. Meren had gone off with his body to bury him in the graveyard, giving him the respect and dignity of a proper death.

“I’m alive. That’s something I’m getting out of it. Well, there’s...”

“What is it?” Riza said perhaps a little too eagerly.

Klannar shifted on the bed awkwardly before continuing.

“No, it’s... You can just resurrect people, can’t you? You can’t, like, change people while they’re alive?”

“Do you mean, like, physically? Like changing your eye colour? Because I can’t do that.”

“It’s silly anyway. The freedom to live again is enough in return for helping you out. Carry on with whatever you came down here to do.”

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Ascles wasn’t far away, just level lower than Klannar in the nest.

So far, he had been the most neglected of his siblings, with both Jupy and Nussy receiving far more attention than he did.

But, finally, it was his time to shine.

He was essentially a copy of Sanders, in case something ever happened to him. A replacement, although the thought of a demon replacing a human felt wrong when Riza thought about it.

To prepare, she had him take [Manifold Mastery] and its upgrade, as well as [Leech] and [Essential Leech].

She led him up through the nest, back into the forest, and then headed over to the zone of life.

I need to come up with a cool name for it.

Already, Riza could see a cloud of flying critters forming above it, her plan in motion.

Passing into the zone itself, she called the critters down to her, where they deposited creatures from squirrels to rabbits or even birds—usually, a group of critters were carrying just one bird—in her hands.

One-by-one, she used [Essential Leech], adjusting the cost to match how much essence she regenerated over five seconds, the same length of time it took the skill to work. Ascles would use [Essential Leech] as well, buffing his own stats.

She would then kill the thing with her sheer strength, usually by breaking its neck.

The zone meant all life skills were doubled. That applied not only to [Essential Leech], doubling the number of stat points both she and Ascles received, but also to [Animate Critter] (passive), boosting the chance from 40% to 80%.

Here was where Ascles main purpose came to fruition; whenever a critter was killed but not instantly raised by Riza, he would use [Resuscitate] on it and Riza would kill it again.

Sometimes, it would take just one [Resuscitate] to raise the critter but other times, it took two or three, but never more.

Interestingly, once something had been resurrected via [Resuscitate], [Essential Leech] no longer consumed any stats from it, so there was no infinite stat exploit Riza could use, unfortunately.

Once the critters were now animated critters, she would have a group of them gather until a couple dozen strong, and then give them all orders at once.

At first, there was a backlog but after she cleared out the first few, they started having to wait for minutes between arrivals, with Riza permitting her critters to search far and wide for new critters she could raise.

With [Delegator], each critter had strength surpassing the common man. With intelligence capable of understanding complex orders and human speech, she had ordered them to go and regain control in the city. Of course, the orders were a bit more complex than just that.

Now, all they had to do was wait as their army grew.