

Chapter 94: Analysis

“How does it work?” Daven asked, leaning against the wall, arms crossed in front of his chest. His arms and forehead shone with slick sweat, having practised with a variety of weapons once he gave up trying to replicate what the worm demon could do.

“I don’t know. I think it might work like [Inform],” Riza replied.

“Okay,” He said thoughtfully before pointing at Tiffany who was organising some demons in the distance. “Come over here,” He said at a normal speaking volume.

Riza twisted her head back and forth between the two, failing to see any reaction from the humanoid demon.

“No luck,” Daven shook his head. “I tried using it like [Inform] but without actually using [Inform] and nothing.”

Shit. And it doesn’t involve me so I can’t figure out how to use it either. Damn you, [Delegator].

“That’s okay. Keep trying it anyway. It’s just one part of the boon,” Riza said, trying to be nonchalant.

“You sounded pretty excited when you explained it to me earlier,” He shrugged.

“I’m not giving up on it! We’ll just, you know, take our time.”

“Another thing to add to my list of duties,” Daven said with a playful sigh.

“I promise I’m going to change that. Once we’re finished here, one of these humanoid demons will take a load off you,” Riza reassured him.

“Don’t worry. I can handle whatever you throw at me.”

The short break they had taken had extended once it became obvious just how far back and separate all the beast demons were. Tiffany had been hard at work in the past hour riding on the backs of the larger and stronger beast demons, directing the refugees and stragglers and collecting them in the cavern Daven had carved out in the meantime.

Riza wasn’t complaining, however. For one, she had just taken a boon and was testing it out, getting a feel for how it worked. A few beast demon

sacrifices were necessary in the name of science but at least their experience wasn't going to waste.

Secondly, she still had five juicy skill points to spend, and she was salivating at the opportunity.

The amount of freedom she felt was simply indescribable; she not only had five in the bank but another seven in her future? She could scarcely recall another time she had such vast potential laid out before her.

So, Riza took a seat again, this time on some ergonomic furniture Daven had carved out with her assistance, and began to look over her options.

Something she had avoided so far was instead of focusing on new skills, was focusing on her current skills. More specifically, on whether to upgrade them.

This will take a while.

[Leech] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Leech+]

Drain 220 health, 4 stamina, 4 essence from a living entity

80m range

Cost: 10 es/sec

[Leech] (passive)

Constantly drain 40 points of health from nearby entities per second

8m range

The first option was [Leech].

I remember when I first saw you, way back in the forest. To think, 40 damage a second, on a limitless number of enemies with that range, all for free, would've been a bargain back then.

She could almost laugh at the idea.

The passive is too little damage and essence will never be an issue ever again.

The upgraded version just isn't worth a skill point. Too niche a use. Next.

[Remnant Memories] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Remnant Memories+]

Summoned entities are created with a 400% higher level

Cost: 50

[Remnant Memories] (passive)

Summoned entities are created with a 40% higher level

Hmm. I skipped over this with [Gestalt of Life]. I can't use [Remnant Memories] with [Animate Critter] (passive) but [Remnant Memories] (passive) should work. Combine both of them together, what level would the critter turn out?

[Remnant Memories] (passive) goes to a 400% higher level, which is a five times multiplier. [Animate Critter] (passive) becomes level 36. Together, that's level 180. Holy shit. Fuck; I'm an idiot for not checking out every possible skill for [Gestalt of Life].

A giant sigh left the deflated Riza.

How many stat points is that? 900 points total. Spread across four physical stats, that's 225 for each. 4,500 health in total.

That is huge. Even without skills, all those critters cost nothing and I have hundreds of them. Against beast demons, the critters would crush them. Nests would become a cakewalk if I just sent one humanoid demon that was built like Nussy or Tanniya, for durability.

Damn.

Enough hypotheticals. How useful is it now? [Animate Critter] (passive) is level 0 so it has no effect on that. [Raise Dead] is capped at 5 and [False Life] is capped at what the summon was when it was alive so only [Reanimate] benefits from it but without skills and boons, [Reanimate] isn't combat worthy.

So, actually, [Remnant Memories] doesn't do anything for me. That's a shame.

[Reanimate] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Reanimate+]

Raise a corpse into a level 48 zombie

Casting Time: 1 min

Cost: 28 es/sec

[Reanimate] (passive)

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

The same as [Animate Critter] and its options. I've been saying I have infinite essence but if I reanimated 40% of everything I kill, even I would run out of essence quickly.

This is perhaps the toughest decision so far.

The upgraded version only increases the level. With my boons and [Remnant Memories], it's an unnecessary increase, especially because they'll never be in combat, except for one small edge case; physically large demons have minimum stats needed to function.

But then, in that case, they're probably strong demons that I'd want under [False Life] instead, so the higher level is pointless.

So, the choice comes down to making it passive or not.

Pros of keeping it the same: higher maximum level and I have complete control over what I want to reanimate.

Pros of making it passive: results in more summons which synergises with [Essence Monarch] and [Delegator]. Is completely free.

It's a tough decision. The passive does have a lot of overlap with [Animate Critter] and small animals are the majority of what I kill so, in that sense, it doesn't provide much that I can't do already.

What about [Raise Dead]?

[Raise Dead] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Raise Dead+]

Raise a corpse into an undead version of itself beginning at level 40. It has 4 additional skill point.

Casting Time: 5 min

Cost: 1 es/sec per 2 levels

[Raise Dead] (passive)

40% chance after killing an entity for the entity to be raised as an undead version of itself beginning at level 5

Okay. This is interesting. Beginning at level 40 doesn't matter since I doubt it will bypass level caps like [False Life] does. The 4 extra skill points though is huge.

[Essential Leech] is just a 5 level investment. Coupled with the fact that every summon has adequate starting essence and spirit because of [Delegator], even a pure physical summon could benefit from [Essential Leech] at a net cost of just 1 total skill point.

Now that is tempting.

The passive as well is strong. It doesn't state a cost like [Animate Critter]. Does that mean it's always free, no matter the level of the summon? Because, if that's the case, that's incredibly strong.

That's actually stupid. Combine that with [Resurrection], you can just kill and then resurrect it repeatedly until the 40% happens and [Raise Dead] triggers.

It sounds strong but this is [Raise Dead] we're talking about; there could very well be an unspoken factor at play here.

Let's see if [False Life] is different.

[False Life] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[False Life+]

Raise a corpse into an undead version of itself beginning at level 40. It has 8 additional skill point.

Casting Time: 1 hour

Cost: 1 es/sec per level

[False Life] (passive)

40% chance after killing an entity for the entity to be raised as an undead version of itself beginning at level 5

Ah. Almost exactly the same as [Raise Dead]. Why does that not surprise me?

But is the only difference the starting level? That [Raise Dead] is level 5 and [False Life] is level 25?

Maybe, but I can't shake the suspicion there's something else as well.

[False Life+] is strong. 8 additional skill points is a lot. That's over halfway to what's needed for [Perfect Body]. With [Gestalt of Life], that's- sorry, what the actual fuck?

What the actual fucking fuck? 80 skill points? The equivalent of being level 80? That can't seriously be true.

No, there's a chance it's not true. There is another number there and that's the starting level. It's very possible that [Gestalt of Life] increases the starting level but not the skill points. That has to be the case.

Riza's hands stopped shaking from the realisation once she started thinking about it more.

The more I look at it, the more I think [Gestalt of Life] was the right choice after all. Especially considering [False Life] (passive).

Already, combining that with [Remnant Memories] (passive), that's level 35. That's enough for every greater demon and humanoid demon I've ever killed. Only Death and the worm were higher level and I never even killed them.

Shit. I'd have to kill things for this to work. Just being in a party won't count.

But! [Leech] now does enough damage that I can kill anything as long as I can see it.

If that's the case, I'd also want a skill that doesn't rely on line-of-sight, like [Lightning Bolt] or [Icicle] in case another Death situation happens again.

If I do take this, I'd also want [Resurrection] as well to guarantee I can raise the things I want to raise. For just one skill, that's a lot of skill points I'd have to spend towards it.

There is another factor of the skill to consider; how does it bypass level caps?

If I killed a level 25 person, and then raised them at level 5 with [False Life], would they be able to level back to level 25 without killing anything to raise their level cap?

Or, in this context, if I automatically raised the worm after killing it at level 35, would it naturally level to level 42 or need to increase its level cap before then? Considering it was level 42 before death.

I can test this. A simple level discrepancy between level 5 and level 8 is doable. And I know just the test subject for it.

[Parasite] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Parasite+]

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

Cost: 100 es per implanted [Parasite]

[Parasite] (passive)

Summoned entities are created with an implanted parasite. When your health drops to 0, automatically drain all health from a summoned entity regardless of distance

Looks like the upgraded version just restores my stamina and essence in addition to my health when it goes off. You can probably get into a really interesting situation with a summon where you stay on low health and constantly kill yourself and create a parasite to restore a lot of stamina and essence. But, for me, not useful.

The passive, however, is incredible. [Parasite] is one of the few skills that can actually cost more than my total amount of essence so making it free is huge. Brings my total number of parasites from the double digits to the triple digits.

The downside would be important summons having parasites as well, such as Klannar or the worm demon. I'm still not 100% sure on how the skill decides

which parasite to consume so it's a bit risky to take that and potentially jeopardise future summons.

[Essential Leech] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Essential Leech+]

Choose a living entity. Upon death, drain 4 stat points from its highest stat if possible. Stats can be affected by skills and boons

Casting Time: 5 secs

Cost: 127500

[Essential Leech] (passive)

After killing an entity, drain 0.4 stat points from its highest stat if possible

Huh. Well, it's good that I've looked at that now and not after taking [Well of Power] or something similar. All my current [Essential Leech] stats can't be multiplied. Interesting.

That's only important if I do end up taking skills or boons that affect them though, which I'm still uncertain on. Although, the more levels I gain, the more stats I gain, the greater the effect of skills and so the more beneficial [Essential Leech+] becomes.

The passive, however, is also great. Although, if the past few nests are any indication of the future, I already use [Essential Leech] on the majority of things I kill anyway.

It's a quality versus quantity argument.

There's actually a numerical way of judging it.

[Well of Power] (1/10)

Power is multiplied by 1.4

This effectively quintuples my power. Currently, it's sitting at 625. With [Well of Power], that becomes 3,125. Wow. That's within an order of magnitude of [Perfect Body] stats, and I don't even have any skills or boons for it!

Forget that. That's a difference of 2,500 which at 0.4 stat points an entity, that's 6,250 entities. Except, entities can give other stat points.

I've actually killed enough creatures for my stats to represent a somewhat accurate distribution of highest stats in nature.

Calculating it now... power makes up 35% of my total stats. Although, I've killed a lot of beast demons recently and they tend to prioritise power disproportionately compared to normal wildlife.

Let's round it down, then; 30% as a rough approximation.

If 6,250 is 30%, then the total number of things I'd need to kill to equal [Well of Power] alone is... 20,833.

An average nest is like 100 demons, give or take 50. That's 208 nests. That's multiple provinces worth.

And that requires me to kill everything! Any kill that someone else gets results in fewer stats for me.

Yeah, no. [Essential Leech] (passive) is just not feasible. This would be better for someone like Nussy or Tanniya who are strapped for essence and wouldn't use the skill too much anyway.

But now that it's been brought up, do I have enough skill points for [Perfect Body]? I'd need [Essential Leech+] as well.

Riza brought up the primordial strength skill tree and began counting.

15 skill points total. So close! I have 12 skill points available to me until I hit the level cap.

I'd need to be level 45, then. That's... not impossible. Another worm demon could probably get me there. Or an Enforcer.

Shit. That's genuinely reasonable. And it's not like they're wasted skill points either; 6 of them will boost my physical stats at like half the amount [Perfect Body] would.

Just another thing to consider. What's next?

[Essence Transformer] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Essence Transformer+]

Convert health into essence

Conversion rate: 20 hp/sec

Efficiency: 50%

[Essence Transformer] (passive)

50% of health regeneration is converted into essence regeneration

Efficiency: 20%

We're finished with the life skills.

By far, the most useless skill I've ever taken. It needed [Alteration Mastery] to not kill me outright and by the time I obtained that, I was already regenerating more essence than [Essence Transformer] would've given me.

And now? Both options just increase my essence regeneration and that is no longer something I need. Next.

[Message] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Message+]

Telepathically send a message to someone of up to 200 words. They can send a message back

100m range

Cost: 23 es

[Message] (passive)

Choose an entity. You can telepathically send a message to them up to 20 words every hour

Both this and [Inform] have gotten a whole lot worse after [Delegator].

[Message+] is obsolete since I have [Inform] and [Message] (passive) doesn't matter since I have infinite essence. Next.

[Inform] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Inform+]

Telepathically send a one-way message to someone of up to 1000 words. They can send a message back

20km range

Cost: 500 es

[Inform] (passive)

Choose an entity. You can telepathically send a message to them up to 100 words every hour

Same as [Message], basically. The biggest limitation to [Inform] was range, not word count, and now I have [Seeker Mastery] and [Manifold Mastery] so that's no longer an issue.

[Intrinsic Tank] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Intrinsic Tank+]

Store and release up to 20m³ of air inside you. Produce 2% of stored air every hour

20m radius

Cost: 50 es

[Intrinsic Tank] (passive)

Store 20m³ of air inside you every hour up to 200m³. Increase intensity of air skills by 2% per 2m³ of air stored

Wow. This is possibly the first instance of a passive version basically completely changing what the skill does. Can never release the air ever, although I recall a skill in a higher tier that consumes stored air.

The upgraded version is not as bad as it looks. With all my metamagic, I wouldn't be surprised if my total capacity is in the thousands. That 1% interest is compounding and significant and it's possible I'll be in situations where the available air isn't enough to fulfil my capacity.

Although, I think that's a bit of a niche scenario. Compared to other skills, it doesn't seem that worth it. Definitely need to stress test regular [Intrinsic Tank].

The passive, as a passive, doesn't benefit from metamagic. 200% is fine but with how often I use [Intrinsic Tank], I don't think it's worth giving it up.

[Range Compression] has reached level 10

You can choose to spend a skill point to upgrade the skill or turn the skill into a passive

[Range Compression+]

Compress a skill to increase intensity by 30% for every metre reduced

[Range Compression] (passive)

Active essence skill range is reduced by 25% while intensity is increased by 50%

50% increase in effectiveness. Let's use [Leech] again and compare it to the 1,000,000 number I came up with before.

With her dagger, columns of sums began to appear on the ground as Riza crawled around like a child carving doodles into the floor.

With [Range Compression]:

10 metre range. End result: 1,104,180 damage for 1050 essence.

Now, with [Range Compression+]:

10 metre range. End result: 1,653,960 damage for 1050 essence.

550,000 increase in damage.

Crazy that my first reaction wasn't an impressed one. That's a fuck ton of damage and yet, I'm wondering if its worth just one skill point.

This is per second, as well.

In total, this consumes 400 essence a second. That's about 38 seconds of constant damage, resulting in damage totals of 42 million and 63 million.

Riza found herself smiling wildly at those numbers.

This is my reality now. Huh.

Let's test this on Jormy.

She looked up towards where the worm demon was happily waiting, its tongues idly lying on the ground out of its mouth, its mouth flaps glistening with saliva.

Riza brought up Jormy's stat screen to keep an eye on its health.

Need to be super conservative here. I wouldn't want to kill it accidentally.

[Leech] (10/10)+ -Learned

Drain 552,090 points of health from a living entity

10m range

Cost: 525 es/sec

She drained the worm for only a second before cutting it off, instantly checking the resultant damage after all the reductions.

*Shit. That was like only 70,000 damage. Jormy reduced damage by 85%.
Wow. Explains why he was so tough to kill.*

*But let's use that that 85% figure. That 1,100,000 becomes 165,000 and
1,600,000 becomes 240,000*

If I wanted to kill Jormy, that's a time difference of 8 seconds and 6 seconds.

Fuck.

Riza sat in silence, staring at the rough, angular numbers carved in the ground.

A minute passed by before she composed herself.

[Range Compression+] isn't worth it. I don't need it.

Likewise, [Range Compression] (passive) is not worth the skill cost.

So, that's that.

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A heavy, wooden door decorated in the finest golden filigree swung slowly open, a light mist drifting through the doorway as a tall woman stepped out, clad only in a light, silky dress that showed a tantalising amount of skin.

The room she stepped into was large; far larger than any of the dorms or even personal rooms she had slept in over the years.

On one side, huge windows lined an entire wall, looking out on the beautiful, bustling city, the black stone tower reaching for the skies in the distance.

Wooden panelling of the most beautiful reddish colour covered every inch of every other wall, meeting a wooden floor that was equally smooth and gleaming. A luxurious pinkish rug stretched around the bed.

A four-poster bed, in fact. Translucent red curtains were tied to the poles, the mattress so light and fluffy it made you feel weightless.

Drawers and wardrobes lined the room, mostly empty. The previous occupants of this master bedroom had cleared it of their personal belongings when they had been driven out of their very home, usurped by the very woman walking in.

Adewyn loitered by the bed, one hand idly tracing the curves of a poster, as she watched her wife in front of her, hunched over a large, dark oak desk, piles of papers and books neatly organised on top.

She traipsed over, her footsteps so slight, the smaller woman startled as she felt the arms of her wife sweep over her back, Adewyn's head coming to rest on Andreyas's shoulder.

One hand reached up to hold Adewyn's but she steadfastly continued her reading.

"I've only just arrived and you're ignoring me?" Adewyn pouted with mock sadness.

Andreyas slowed down, sighing heavily. "I'm sorry, but there's a lot I need to do. With the Lord and Riza gone, it's all left to me and with the exodus and rain, the finances are looking tight. There might not be enough rent money to keep everyone fed and a deficit like that is just going to compound and compound until people are starving and dying left and right," She rushed out, her words laced with heavy worry and anxiety.

Adewyn leaned back, her hands trailing back up to Andreyas's shoulder blades as she slowly, gently, began massaging them.

Andreyas couldn't help but let out a reluctant groan at the firm but expert touch.

“You’ve been working non-stop for weeks. If you take just a couple hours break, the city won’t burn to the ground in the meantime,” Adewyn whispered, her voice soft and relaxing.

Andreya grunted silently, words failing her as her body longed for the tempting offer.

The papers fell out of her hand before she could even resist, sliding back in her chair as she leaned into the touch.

The next few sounds of her mouth were grunts of pain and pleasure as the knots were slowly being unwound from her sore muscles.

Adewyn leaned forward as her hands slowed to a stop, softly breathing into her wife’s ear.

“Now, are you going to be good and accompany me to a lovely, warm bath willingly, or am I going to have to take you by force?” She whispered, sending a shiver down Andreya’s spine.

An incredibly pained frown appeared on Andreya’s face as she took that in.

“You test my patience one more time and I’ll spend the whole night working; just you watch,” She replied, half-playful, half-serious.

“You leave me no choice, then.”

Before Andreya even knew what had happened, the hands that were resting on her shoulders snuck down to her torso and waist and heaved her up out of the chair like she was as light as a feather.

Her fate was sealed.

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A sea of bustling, white shapes moved and pushed and shoved, all holed up together in a massive, underground cavern. Giant, stone pillars held up the ceiling and cut into a wall was a little cave of operations, and on the opposite side, a tremendously long, white worm sat waiting for orders.

Inside the cave, a model map of Toila had been constructed, done to the best of Daven’s abilities after canvassing the province over the last few weeks. It wasn’t half-bad; his [Earth Sense] skill gave him an appreciable sense of scale and distance.

Numerous, unnatural mounds had been raised in distinct locations, topped off with crude, humanoid figures. Small, barely legible writing copied from Riza's carvings were laid before each one, denoting their names.

'Edderdorf West' was in the north-west, sharing the name with the humanoid demon that resided there.

With her new boon, Riza decided to try a new naming scheme as well. 'Edderdorf West Humanoid Demon' was the full name of the summon, with 'Edderdorf West Eye Demon' its companion.

Some progress had been made on the communication front; as it turned out, with the help of Tiffany, they found out that eye demons were already incredibly proficient in it. Soon enough, all the eye demons Riza had raised at the nests were now capable of contacting each other through the benefit of the boon, with the only one capable of human speech reaching out to Daven as well.

Unfortunately, he still hadn't mastered the skill yet, and neither had Tiffany, but this was progress.

All that's left is an eye demon in Rensenfeld and leaving Tiffany next to it. She's the bridge between the people and the summon network.

Before Riza could continue that thought, she froze, a message suddenly resounding in her head.

"The rain has stopped." She recognised the voice as Andrey's, and she sounded worried.

Riza almost ran to get Tiffany but stopped herself, remembering that she no longer needed the demon; she had all the range in the world now.

[Inform] (10/10)+ -Learned

Telepathically send a one-way message to someone of up to 3000 words

300km range

Cost: 7500 es

Requirements: [Message] (10/10)

She winced at the number, consuming half of all of her essence, but that quickly disappeared as she remembered it'd only take literal seconds to gain that back.

“When did it happen? We’ve done nothing for the past hour but before that, we were clearing out demon nests in upper Toila. Could that be why?” She sent.

A minute passed, confirming the end of the message.

“It looked like the skies had been clearing up for a while but it only completely stopped just now. I haven’t heard from anyone else that something has happened to cause it. The city looks normal.” Adewyn replied.

Fuck. I don’t know what this means. If the demons are connected to the weather, if they can control the fucking weather, that has big implications. I need to check it out; see if it’s stopped here as well.

“Daven. Come with me. We’re going up.”

Daven grunted and nodded, getting to his feet and walking over towards the wall of their cave as he began excavating.

They were a decent distance underground, so the tunnels Jormy made didn’t destabilise the land above, but even so, it was a matter of minutes for Daven to produce a steep tunnel they could climb to the surface.

Riza scrambled up it like her life depended on it, poking her head into the fresh air and throwing herself over the precipice and landing on her feet.

All around her, fields of green met her eye. Off in the distance was a village, beset by sown fields, ready for planting.

And above, clear blue skies with not a rain droplet in sight.