

## 79: Slumber

The familiar chime of Rain's alarm gently coaxed him from sleep. As he came to his senses, he remembered where he was just in time and stopped himself from dropping Aura Focus. Assuming he was still in the same spot he'd been when he fell asleep, he was smack-dab in the middle of a Watch stronghold.

He'd come here late last night and found the place to be absolutely packed. By his estimate, two-thirds of the awakened in the city had shown up. In addition to Watch and Guild members, there were quite a few nobles around as well. Myth, Reason, and Mlem were there. Even Kettel had shown up, bringing a few of his unawakened friends with him. It seemed that people were more than ready to be done with the barrier, leading to the high turnout. A few people wearing the Citizen's pin had shown up, but not the Citizen herself, or the man who had spoken for her, Lord Rill. Carten was also missing, but Rain had been too tired to worry about what trouble he was currently getting himself into.

After he'd arrived, he'd spent a bit of time talking to the sentinels and chatting with people he knew, but had quickly succumbed to his fatigue. The Watch got him set up with a bunk in the middle of a large courtyard that they'd set aside for the purpose. It was normally used for training, but they'd filled it with cots that they'd brought out from storage. Their barracks weren't large enough to fit everyone, and Winter didn't pass through walls. The courtyard worked well enough, but it was hardly the best environment for getting a good night's rest. Fortunately, Aura Focus blocked out all of the surrounding chaos as the Watch tried to get people situated.

As tired as he was, it had taken him quite a while to get to sleep. He knew rationally that he was as safe as he could be under the circumstances, but rationality didn't have a lot to do with the sense of unease that he still felt. He was half expecting that, when his senses returned,

he'd find himself somewhere other than where he'd fallen asleep. It had happened before, not even counting the time he'd been teleported out of his tiny apartment. Aura Focus blocked his senses so thoroughly that it took quite a bit to wake him. It reminded him of his first party in college, just without the headache and feeling of a mouth full of socks.

Before he'd gone to sleep, he'd set his alarm for 7:00 AM, an hour earlier than the default. He wanted some time to review things before everyone else woke up. He'd debated trying to force the training dialog to appear *before* he went to bed, but decided against it. He'd already done plenty of soul surgery that day, and he wasn't sure what the limits were with regards to that kind of thing. It was possible that he could trigger it whenever he liked, but it was also possible that doing so more than once in a day would have him puking rainbows.

The pile of things he needed to investigate just kept getting longer. He blearily dismissed his alarm and pulled up his full status, moving the windows around above him to form a dome, all without lifting a finger.

### Training Overview

#### General Experience Earned

Mana Use: 10000

#### Skill Experience Earned

Mana Manipulation: 203

Aura Compression: 2993

### Attributes

Richmond Rain Stroudwater

Level 18

Experience: 22749/22750

Dynamo

Health	820
Stamina	600
Mana	7312

Strength	41[10]
Recovery	31[10]
Endurance	30[10]
Vigor	35[10]
Focus	39[10]
Clarity	221[200]

Free Points	0
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*First annoyance of the day: I can't see my stamina usage because the mana use swamped it and I hit the cap. He summoned his HUD and looked at the stamina gauge. His current total appeared next to the bar when he focused, showing 120/600. When he'd woken up yesterday, it had been at 307/400. He'd since boosted the cap using the ring, but his stamina regen wasn't sufficient to return him to full in a reasonable timeframe.*

*Hum. I checked it yesterday at 10 AM or so, then I boosted regen up to 350/day. It's been at that level for just under 22 hours. That's around 320 stamina I should have regenerated. The jogging, plus walking around and stuff, got me down to practically zero. That's a stamina usage of 307 + 320 - 120. 507. Call it 500. Let's see what that got me in terms of buff tolerance.*

## Adaptation

	Effective	Total	Base	Potential	Buff	Tolerance
Strength	5.52	41	10	23%	31	14
Recovery	6.15	32	10	41%	21	5
Endurance	3.6	30	10	30%	20	2
Vigor	7.6	35	10	38%	25	10
Focus	27	39	10	100%	29	17
Clarity	218	221	200	100%	21	18

	Current	Tolerance
Enchantment Stat Boosts	147	128
Enchantment Resistances	0	Unknown

*Woof, okay, there's a lot to unpack there. Any mind readers who don't like math might want to tune out for a bit. Let's see. Yesterday when I first set this panel up, my tolerances were 13, 3, 2, 7, 11, and 3, with an overall tolerance of 127. After I used Winter in the guild, my Clarity tolerance was already up to 9, and Focus tolerance had gone up to 13. Pretty good progress there.*

*Last night before I went to bed, it was 14, 4, 2, 8, 15, and 14...I think? Damn, this is a lot to keep track of. I should get another notebook. Putting that on the list for today. Overmana has its limits, especially since I'm not really getting much because I need to charge the armor. Anyway, one at a time.*

*Strength: My tolerance was 13 to start with. Then, I walked around and went to a meeting, but my tolerance didn't change. After that, I did a whole bunch of jogging. That brought it up to 14 when I checked last night, and it's still 14 now. Humm. I think I can conclude that time isn't a factor, only exercise. Jogging is okay for Strength training I guess, but I should try lifting weights or something. As for potential, that hasn't changed at all. It's still at 23%. In fact, none of them have. Huh. Moving on.*

*Recovery: Was 3 when I started, up to 4 last night, and now it's up to 5. I didn't take any damage yesterday, so I guess that's just from regeneration up to the boosted cap that I got from putting points in Strength. I don't think I'm going to train this one directly, at least not right now. I'll think about it later. Hopefully, there'll be a way that doesn't involve hurting myself.*

*Endurance: Was 2, hasn't changed. Okay then. I probably need to take damage for that one too. Not going to be fun. I'll think about it later. Still, I would have thought enduring all that cold air would have done...something. Oh well. Doesn't look like stamina usage counts, or if it does, 500 is nowhere near enough.*

*Vigor: Was 7, stayed 7 after a few hours of walking around, then went up to 8 after all that jogging. Now it's 10. Recovering stamina overnight must have done it. The 320 points of stamina recovery got me 3 points of adaptation. Does that mean one point per 100 stamina recovered, or is that just a coincidence? Who knows! Too many damn variables. Sometimes, I don't even know why I bother. Okay, Rain, stay focused. Time for...Focus, hah.*

*Focus: Was 11 when I started, went up to 13 after the Guild, now it's 17. I used a full mana pool on Operation Heatsink, plus the maintenance cost of Winter, plus everything I've fed into the armor, plus a bit of Purify. That should have been around...25,000 mana in total. More or less. Maybe? Honestly, I'm shocked that I can even remember this much. Anyway, that got me 6 points toward my tolerance. That's pretty good progress, but as for the formula...yeah, still no idea. It isn't 1 point per 100 mana, that's for sure.*

*Clarity: Was 3, went straight up to 9 after the Winter session at Staavo's place. That's 6 points for regenerating a full mana pool. Then, I used Winter at the guild to do another full pool. That got me up to 14, though I didn't check it until last night, which might confuse matters. Another 5 points. Coincidence? Maybe? Now it's at 18, meaning I only got 4 more points despite the fact*

*that I've had Winter on all night. Either it matters how far above your tolerance you are, or it gets slower the higher your tolerance gets...probably both. Damn it. This is so frustrating. I am not nearly caffeinated enough for this. Okay, last one.*

*Overall Tolerance: Was 127, now it's 128, and has been since I checked it in the Guild. Well, that's disappointing. I don't feel the bone fire at least. The total buff from the ring right now is 147, which was 20 points past the limit when I started. The fact that I'm still feeling okay means that being that far over the limit is safe enough. How effective is it at raising my tolerance, though? I don't know! Am I over-training? I don't know! Am I under-training? I don't know! Am I overthinking this? Yes!*

*Bah. I really should run some isolated experiments, but that would take too long. I cannot stop. The numbers must go up. He smiled. Anyway, time to set my buffs for today. I can't just straight up boost things further because of the bone fire, so it's time to prioritize.*

*Endurance, I don't really need right now. Stamina regen is more important than total Stamina. More regen means more training in less time. Plus, I want to see if training without the buff will help my potential. It's weird that none of them changed. Either it's really hard to raise them, or something else is going on there.*

*As for the next pair, Strength I definitely want. I need the health so I can avoid dying. Recovery is less important—I'm not hurt right now—but it will be important eventually. Humm.*

*On the mental side of things, Focus isn't that important. It's the same story as Endurance. More regen means more training, meaning I should prioritize Clarity. Huh, me prioritizing Clarity. Who would have thought?*

*The bottom line is that I'm taking points out of Endurance and Focus and putting them in Strength, Vigor, and Clarity. Long-term, I should probably work on Recovery, so maybe I'll put some points there too—Oh! Idea! If I turn down Strength, I'll lose health because the cap will go down. That will mean I can regenerate it to train Recovery once I put the Strength back. No pain required. Man, I should have thought of that before. Have I mentioned I need coffee?*

Glancing at the control panel for the ring, he quickly dropped his Strength buff down from 31 to 10. That would bring his max health down from 820 to 400. He gasped, feeling a most curious sensation pass over him in a wave. *What the hell was that? I feel...better. My muscles aren't sore any more. What the hell? I have less health, so that doesn't make sense...oh. Ohhhhhhhh. Overhealth is healing. When I dropped my max, the extra must have been applied to my body, fixing all the muscle damage from the running. That is so cool! I could probably do the same thing with stamina to deal with general fatigue. It's a shame that I have less than 200 right now so I can't try it.*

He shifted slightly, hoping that nobody had noticed his gasp. He hadn't been able to hear how loud it was because of Aura Focus. If anyone asked, he'd just say he had been dreaming. He returned his attention to the panels and spent a few minutes playing with the settings on the ring, pausing to review when he was satisfied.

## Adaptation

	Effective	Total	Base	Potential	Buff	Tolerance
Strength	5.52	44	10	23%	34	14
Recovery	6.15	35	10	41%	25	5
Endurance	3	10	10	30%	0	2
Vigor	7.6	40	10	38%	30	10
Focus	27	30	10	100%	20	17
Clarity	218	238	200	100%	38	18

	Current	Tolerance
Enchantment Stat Boosts	147	128
Enchantment Resistances	0	Unknown

*There, that should do. Twenty above tolerance on Strength, Recovery, Vigor, and Clarity. Endurance is the dump stat because I don't need a big stamina pool and the resists are piddly. Intrinsic Resistance would help with that, but I'm not exactly going to have a spare point for it any time in the next...ever. Oh well. That leaves Focus with the rest so I can keep my overall stat boost the same.*

*How's this look on the stats window?*



## Statistics

	Total	Base	Modifier
Health	880	880	0 100%
H.Regen	350/day	350/day	0/day 100%
Stamina	200	200	0 100%
S.Regen	400/day	400/day	0/day 100%
Mana	7115	7115	0 100%
M.Regen	2.71/s	0.253/s	-0.15/s 1130.0%

Movement Speed	10
Perception	20

## Resistances

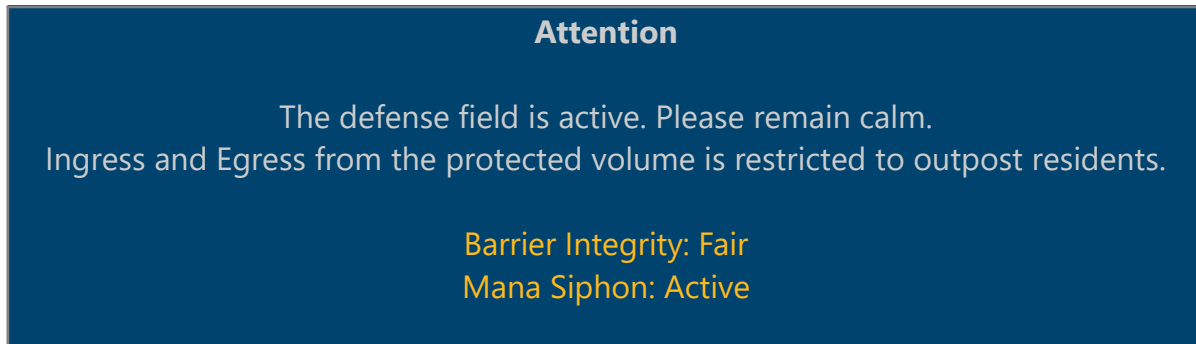
Heat	Cold	Light	Dark
1 0%	1 0%	1 0%	1 0%
Force	Arcane	Mental	Chemical
1 0%	1 0%	1 0%	1 0%

*Right, so I've got 880 max health now. I'm currently at 400 and getting 350 a day. Good, good. As for Stamina, 200 max, currently at 130 and getting 400 a day. Works for me. Mana...what the heck? How am I full? I mean, I saw the bar, but I didn't realize...damn. I'm really not awake yet. But why though? Mana Manipulation is still running to charge the armor, so why...*

He blinked.

*Wait a second here. My mana regen's way higher than it should be too. The mana siphon must have gotten weaker. Oh, come to think of it, what happened to—AH!*

Rain jumped as the Majistraal barrier dialog appeared front and center the moment he thought about it.



*Oh hey. There it is. I didn't even realize it was missing. Derp. I'm on fire today.*

*Humm, the integrity is 'Fair' and the siphon is still active, but it's way weaker...around 50% instead of 90%. That's a huge relief. Anyway, I'm at full mana, which means it must have stepped itself down pretty soon after I fell asleep. Oh well, might as well charge it up now. Hum, now that the barrier isn't really low, maybe—*

He blinked as the dialog vanished. *Ah, there it goes. Nice. The Majistraal must have set it up that way, only forcing it to be displayed when the city was in imminent danger of barrier failure.* He put it out of his mind and shifted his focus to his inventory screen. His armor was completely discharged, the Dark Regeneration rune having greedily slurped up the trickle of mana that he'd been feeding it while he slept.

## Inventory

### Dark Revenant's Armor [Bound]

- Durability: 7,704/1,309
- Hardness: 207
- Material: Dark Steel
  - Mana Conversion: 99.9%
  - Mana Saturation: 0/13,202 mp
  - Mana Dissipation: 92 mp/s
- Mana Capacitance Rune
  - 0/14,209 mp
  - Import Efficiency: 1%
  - Export Efficiency: 0%
- Enhanced Durability Rune [Inactive]
  - +12,029 durability, 20 mp/day
- Enhanced Hardness Rune [Inactive]
  - +597 hardness, 25 mp/day
- Enhanced Dark Resistance Rune [Inactive]
  - +50 dark resistance, 20 mp/day
- Dark Regeneration Rune [Inactive]
  - +1 durability/s, 0.8 mp/s

### Malleable Ring [Bound]

- Durability: 102/102
- Material: Grand Arcane Gold
- Mana Capacitance Rune
  - 115/226 mp
  - Import Efficiency: 75%
  - Export Efficiency: 0%
- Stat Enhancement Rune Complex [Active]
  - Maximum Allocation: 287 points
  - Cost: 1 mp/point/day
- Subordinate Metallic Unity Rune [Active]

He started with the ring, charging it back up to full. It wouldn't do to have it run out on him. He switched back to the armor and started pumping mana into it, but stopped when he realized that the Dark Regeneration Rune had reactivated. He'd wrapped himself up completely in his cloak before going to bed. The fact that the rune had activated meant that he was still fully covered, or that the sun had failed to rise. If he wanted the other

enchancements to hold their charge, he'd have to un-cocoon himself first. He only had a few more minutes to wait until 8:00 anyway.

When his clock ticked over, he immediately canceled Winter, opening his eyes and fighting free of his cloak before sitting up. To his immense relief, he was still surrounded by the Watch and not locked away in some dungeon or something. Around him, people were stirring, comically swiping in the air at dialogs and muttering phrases like 'dismiss', and 'acknowledge'. He smiled. *Hands-free control is so nice. Clarity for the win.*

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Around two hours later, Rain was just finishing up his breakfast. He was still in the stronghold's mess hall, which was in the Watch-only section. The sentinels wanted to speak with him once they were done organizing the officers for the morning patrols, so he'd reluctantly agreed to stick around. The basic porridge that was on offer wasn't nearly as bad as it sounded, but the freshly baked bread put it to shame. He'd eaten a whole loaf on his own with copious slathers of butter and was now working on the remains of a second. It was warm, flaky, and delicious. Better yet, it came with breakfast beer, which was not only culturally acceptable, but encouraged—in moderation, of course. There was also some oddly-spiced sausage, but it hadn't been to his liking.

He'd picked a table with a bunch of the Watch's recruits, those wearing wooden badges instead of bronze. They'd been friendly enough, and he'd taken the opportunity to learn a bit more about the Watch itself.

The recruits were called 'prospects', and they were all unawakened. The Watch wasn't like the Guild; you couldn't just pay a fee to join up. Prospects only became officers when they were awakened. To become a prospect, you had to start as a 'ward'. Apparently, the Watch would

pay impoverished families a small stipend if they sent one of their children to them for training. They also took in orphans and the like, housing and training them for free. It was less 'school' and more 'boot camp'. It was martial education with a side of mild indoctrination. Wards weren't allowed to leave the Watch's strongholds. Prospects were, though rarely and not without supervision. Rain reserved his opinion on the merits of this system. The group of them that he was talking to seemed normal enough, and a free education was nothing to scoff at, restricted as it was.

There weren't any wards in this stronghold; they were housed in one that wasn't open to the public, situated near the southern wall of the city. Once the wards turned sixteen, the most promising were added to the pool of prospects, while the rest were released to seek their own fate. The prospects themselves served as aides, cleaners, porters, and the like. Their training also continued, with the ten highest-rated in the city put in a lottery for awakening. That was done semi-regularly, basically whenever an essence monster was spotted in the Fells.

The prospects hadn't been able to tell him much about the lair itself. The officers were secretive about details. Rain did learn that blues tended to spawn in there every month or so, and were typically lower than level ten. He had been pretty disappointed to hear this, as he was hoping to somehow convince Citizen Sadanis to allow him in the lair. He wanted to raise his cap, but a level 10 blue wouldn't do it. It looked like he was just as stuck as the prospects were. Their barrier was political, his was literal. It went without saying that the prospects weren't very happy about the Citizen's order barring them from the lair.

His fellow diners had eventually been called away to their duties, leaving Rain to claim the rest of the bread. He finished off the last piece just as Sentinel Lamida walked into the room. She made her way over to him, accompanied by an officer that he recognized. It was Melka, or Mel as she'd asked him to call her, one of the first members of the Watch that he'd properly met.

She'd been there when he'd come to fumigate their barracks. He'd last seen her when she let him into the city the morning before the DKE made their move.

Lamida spoke as he got to his feet. "Rain. I'm told you know Officer Melka. Is that true?"

"Yeah. Hi Mel. How's it going?" Rain said, giving her a friendly wave.

"I'm fine," Melka said neutrally, nodding to him. "You?" She was wearing a pair of daggers at her waist, belted over her leather armor. Lamida was in her red robe, as always. It looked like they were planning on leaving the stronghold, as most of the officers didn't walk around armed in the mess hall.

"Pretty good, I suppose," he said. "I might have eaten a bit too much bread."

Melka smiled slightly. "It is pretty good, I'll give you that." Her face returned to a neutral expression as Lamida gestured for him to come.

"Follow me. Phoss wants to talk to you," she said.

Rain nodded, picking up his helmet and slipping it onto his head. He closed the visor as he stepped out of the mess hall, searching for the ornery spear-wielding sentinel. He spotted him and a few officers by the arch that led to the public area. Lamida led the way, Rain and Melka following. Lamida's expression was cool and unreadable as always, but Melka looked a bit off. She'd been pretty easy going in their interactions before, but her face right now was serious. She was touching her throat with one hand, a distant expression on her face. She dropped her hand to her side when she saw him watching.

*What's going on there?*

"Ah, Night Cleaner, there you are," Phoss said as they approached. He was also armed, carrying his spear at his side.

Rain frowned. "Sentinel Phoss," he greeted him. *That damn nickname better not catch on.*

"This way," Phoss said, turning to walk toward the front gate. "As agreed, you're free to go. To be clear, we expect you to be back here tonight to use that spell again. We're not done, even though the siphon's effect has decreased. Am I right that your spell gives you more mana back than it costs? There's nothing stopping you from using it again?"

"Yeah," Rain said, hustling to keep up with the rapid pace Phoss was setting. "I can use it as much as I want. By the way, remember what I told you that I was worried about last night? Did anyone get sick from the overmana?"

"A few," Phoss said. "Some said they couldn't sleep with the feeling of the cold, and a few others were behaving oddly this morning. I don't know that you could call it soulstrain. It was like they couldn't concentrate, but there was no pain. We've got the worst of them confined for observation, but it looks like they are recovering.

*Oh shit. That sounds like what happened to me when I got carried away before. I guess Winter can cause soulstrain after all.*

"Don't worry about it," Lamida said at his silence. "We agreed to the risk. You did warn us that it might happen. As long as there is no lasting harm, there will be no issue."

"Sorry," Rain said, looking at her. "I didn't think it would be that bad. I've used it on others before and they didn't have any problems."

"It seems to have hit warriors the hardest," Phoss said. "I was unaffected, but some are weaker than others."

"Any idea why it bothered them, but not you?" Rain asked.

Phoss turned to face him as they reached the gate. "Something something Clarity, something something magic," he said, wiggling his fingers. Rain smiled, but Lamida looked annoyed. Phoss laughed at her expression and continued. "Ask a scholar. It might just have been a coincidence. There weren't that many, and your dull friend Kebbel was fine, so it probably doesn't have anything to do with stats at all."

"Kettel," Rain said, correcting him. Dull was slang for unawakened, and while it wasn't exactly polite, it wasn't typically meant as an insult. He wasn't about to make an issue of it.

"Whatever," Phoss said, waving his hand. "In any event, it should be fine for you to use that spell out in the city. I've got my officers spreading the word about what it feels like so you don't cause a panic. That cleaning spell of yours too, in case anyone's been living under a rock."

"Oh, thanks," Rain said. *That's...considerate. I wasn't expecting that from Phoss. He's being... nice?*

"There is a condition," Lamida said, holding up her hand. "We're assigning an officer to stay with you at all times in case there are any incidents. For today, that is Officer Melka."

"Oh," Rain said, glancing at Melka, then back to Lamida. "Um..."



"Not negotiable," Lamida said. "Though if you would prefer someone other than Officer Melka..."

"No, that's not it," Rain said. "It's fine. I just...don't want to waste anyone's time."

Lamida snorted, staring at Rain. "Lie."

"I'm not lying, just—"

"I'll be blunt," Phoss interrupted him. "She's your babysitter. We don't trust you to stay out of trouble, and you're too important to risk leaving unattended. I wanted to send a whole patrol with you, but Lamida disagreed. Anything you need from the Watch, just ask Officer Melka. She is your liaison, as well as your keeper. Make sure to check with her before you decide to do anything stupid."

"Phoss," Lamida said, glaring at him, but he ignored her. Melka's expression was unreadable.

"Get going," Phoss said. "Lamida and I have places to be and you're making us late." He turned to Melka. "Officer Melka, remember what I told you."

"Yes, sir," Melka said, nodding in deference. With that, Phoss turned on his heel and strode away, Lamida following.

Rain sighed and looked at Melka, then offered her his gauntlet to shake. "Well, looks like we're stuck together."

She took his hand, shaking it curtly. "Don't worry. You'll barely know I'm there." She sighed deeply as she released his hand. "Let's go."

"Hey, um. Are you okay?" Rain asked, cautiously. "You seem a bit..."

"I'm fine," she said, rubbing at her neck again. "Sorry. It's been a long few days."