My journey through the dwarven city was… refreshing. There weren't any luckily-timed festivals, or any significant event lining up with my appearance. Just… seeing the city within the mountain, which appeared to be a massive machine unto itself, and how all of the different races inhabited it was all a refreshing experience to me.

In the process of my exploration, I saw at least three shops run by the ninja clan, each one catering to a different audience. While I did not specifically investigate them, it was easy to tell that their network extended far and wide. Part of me was tempted to reveal myself to one of them, just to see how they would react, but I managed to quell that urge before I did anything embarrassing.

As I was getting ready to leave, I heard a soft ping from my watch, requesting a sync from my online avatar. This would be the second regular check-in that we had scheduled, showing that I had been gone for roughly four hours now. With a small nod, I pressed the button on my wrist.

Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath as a rush of memories welled up inside of me. The instruction manual for the gear I had given to Tsubaki and the others all came with a clear warning that players should remember to sync their memories every day, if at all possible. This was to prevent the risk of personality deviation, which could negatively impact the player on their next synchronization.

With this rush of memories, I was able to see that our virtual selves had managed to establish a primitive forge, and were quickly making more powerful items. Dana had practically taken over as the site manager, having far more technical knowledge about the game and the inventions within it. Thanks to her guidance, the mine had been built, and Lifre was put to work extracting minerals.

My own virtual self was acting as a blacksmith, using the knowledge Terra had once drilled into me to create basic items. It had been… quite a while since I was able to use that training, but it seemed that I was still capable of doing so.

As the memories ended, I received a pleasant surprise. Messages appeared in front of me, alerting me that I had gained five levels as a blacksmith, and five more as an architect for helping to build the smelter and forge. Out of curiosity, I opened my information window, wanting to get a look at my overall growth. What I saw was… rather nice.

Name	Dale Mitchell	Race	Human(Keeper)
Health	134435/134435 (15063474/15063474)	Mana	210333/210333 (6220247/6220247)
Strength	248 (2840)	Ki	143634/143634 (8935385/8935385)
Stamina	274 (3031)	Intelligence	351 (2416)
Dexterity	299 (2792)	Wisdom	298 (3731)
Luck	110 (1522)	Charm	138 (1546)

Class List							
Alchemist 1 (359)	Archer 13 (390)	Architect 5 (330)	Archmage 32 (300)	Armorer 0 (370)	Artisan 0 (304)	Assassin 26 (395)	Bard 0 (380)
Berserker 0 (380)	Black Knight 0 (104)	Blacksmith 10 (390)	Carpenter 1 (349)	Chef 0 (380)	Cleric 0 (399)	Crusader 0 (378)	Druid 31 (400)
Enchanter 189 (376)	Engineer 0 (405)	Fallen Priest 0 (180)	Farmer 0 (304)	Gambler 0 (299)	Guard 0 (350)	Herbalist 15 (340)	Hero 7 (390)
Hunter 0 (389)	Jeweler 0 (378)	Knight 0 (369)	Leader 12 (284)	Leatherworker 0 (314)	Mage 156 (360)	Martial Artist 102 (378)	Merchant 0 (290)
Miner 0 (279)	Monk 175 (348)	Monster Tamer 50 (385)	Ninja 54 (409)	Noble 1 (203)	Painter 0 (280)	Paladin 0 (347)	Pirate 10 (333)
Priest 16 (350)	Rogue 7 (370)	Scholar 31 (480)	Scout 27 (398)	Sculptor 0 (360)	Shaman 12 (307)	Spirit Hunter 21 (245)	Spirit Tamer 28 (254)
Swordsman 6 (420)	Tailor 0 (370)	Templar 0 (365)	Warrior 21 (409)	Weaponmaster 175 (312)			

Advanced Classes							
Elemental Monk 45 (340)	Elementalist 42 (350)	Martial Spirit 7 (590)	Perfect Self 0 (300)	Pilot 0 (209)	Saint of Five Lights 149 (203)	Summoner 11 (328)	World Spirit 12 (890)

It could be seen from my levels that the world had grown to a rather tremendous degree. Each of the foremost experts in the various classes had reached a considerable level, some of which simply seemed mind-boggling. A perfect example of this was the World Spirit class. I knew that the ones who had the highest levels there would be the true world spirits, so it was rather normal for them to have such high levels.

However, if we were talking about a class that anyone could obtain… the Scholar class seemed to have made the most improvements in my eyes. With its level approaching five hundred, I

knew that we were quickly approaching a new ‘tier’ for that class. Part of me was eager to see what would happen when a base class hit level five hundred, since that was a goal that seemed almost insurmountable when I first began as a Keeper.

Shaking my head, I knew that it was time for me to return to the citadel and meet up with everyone again. Looking around, I found an inconspicuous area to cast a short-distance teleport. The long-range teleport to go straight to the citadel would likely cause a bit of a stir, and I didn’t want to use it with the possibility that I might still be under surveillance. So, instead, I simply teleported outside of the mountain, near where Tsubaki had originally sent me.

As I arrived, I could hear the sounds of massive shockwaves and furious roars. Turning, I saw a sight I had not expected in the slightest from the peaceful atmosphere within the city. A massive monster, towering at least ten kilometers in size, was smacking its fists against a barrier that rose around the mountain range.

This creature appeared vaguely humanoid, but had a rough, rocky skin. Its eyes were like empty pools of darkness, and its fists crashed down with thunderous booms against a hexagonal barrier. However, this mountain range was not simply taking the beating. No, two of the mountain peaks had opened, revealing enormous weapons that resembled cannons.

These cannons aimed towards the mountain giant, shimmering with a blue light. Every few seconds, one of them would fire while the other recharged, causing craters to form in the giant’s body. And with each blast, it let out a pained roar, its efforts redoubling.

Judging by how much health each shot from the cannons seemed to take from the giant, it could be seen that this battle had been going on for at least ten or twenty minutes before I came to the surface. Only once its health had reached the halfway point did the giant stagger back, reluctantly fleeing the scene under the direct fire of the two cannons.

Is this a normal scene? I couldn’t help but wonder, seeing how the shockwaves of the battle had been entirely isolated from the city within the mountain. There was no sense of danger, no hurried movements from the general public.

Oh, yeah! Aurivy’s voice rang in my mind, clearly answering my thoughts. *That’s the Mountain King of Kal-Thul! Born from one of this region’s tallest mountains, it considers other mountains to be its kin. When it realized that these mountains were being hollowed out for a city, it began attacking.*

At first, they had to mobilize an army of adventurers to fight back the Mountain King, but over time they began to build proper city defenses capable of handling it. Now, they’re in a tug-of-war with the giant. Every time it attacks, it gets pushed back by their cannons, and then it runs away for a time. But each time it attacks, it’s always stronger than the last due to consuming a large amount of precious metals and ambient energies.

My eyes widened when I heard that, watching the massive figure fleeing into the distance. *Is the city able to keep up if it keeps getting stronger like that?* Part of me was tempted to eliminate the giant, but it seemed as if they had this handled for the moment.

Yeah! If anything, the attacks of the Mountain King serve as a way to field-test weapon modifications. One of the cannons will always be an experimental, upgraded model while the other is an already tested model that has survived a previous attack. Aurivy seemed rather excited to explain all of this, and I had to say that it was a shock to see.

Perhaps it was because of my vantage point as a halfling, but the figure of the giant seemed incredibly imposing. If I were to fight it, I knew that I would be able to win, but the sheer size of the creature carried a certain deterrence factor. *I'm surprised that they haven't just killed it yet.*

Aurivy giggled lightly when she heard that. *They've thought about it, honestly. Its value as a weapons test subject is always being weighed against the danger it may one day pose and the minerals it has surely stored in its body. If not for the existence of the Boundless Caravan able to supply nearly limitless materials from the void, that scale may have tipped towards its destruction long ago.*

I gave a small nod when I heard that, shaking my head and casting the spell which would teleport me to the citadel. *How often does it attack?*

It differs. For the last twenty years or so, it typically attacks between every two or six months. It depends on how long it takes for it to get stronger than the last attempt. Usually, the longer it takes, the more powerful the growth. Thanks to that, the council in Kal-Thul set up a system. If the Mountain King ever goes more than six months without attacking, they would send out a group of high-level adventurers in order to weaken it.

As I nodded my head again, I saw Tsubaki standing in front of me within the courtyard of the citadel. From the rustling of her clothes, it was clear that she had just rushed here to meet me, as opposed to having been waiting here this entire time. My guess was that my virtual self told hers that I was on my way back, so she rushed here to wait for me.

"My Keeper." She said with a low bow, clearly happy to see my safe return. Chuckling, I returned to my previous appearance. Within the game, I had instructed her to act more casually, so it was obvious that she was taking the chance to enjoy the formalities that she was more comfortable with now.

"I'm back, Tsubaki. You were right, Kal-Thul was quite the sight to see. I'll have to be sure to visit that magic tournament later." Tsubaki's tails waved with joy at the praise, though she did her best to keep the expression off her face.

"Thank you, my Keeper. If there is anything that I may do to assist you, please do not hesitate to ask." She said with her head still lowered.

Unable to resist, I reached a hand out to stroke the top of her head, causing her tails to stand straight in surprise. “I will, Tsubaki. For now, how are you liking the new VR setup? I’d like to get your feedback for Ashley.”

Tsubaki’s shoulders shook at me stroking her hair, but she still forced herself to answer. “It is… quite pleasant. However, it will take some getting used to. It feels like watching a show, but being given the experiences of one of the main characters. It’s almost as if, as long as I know that there will be another installment, the wait will be worth it.”

I gave a nod to that, having felt the same thing when watching TV shows many times in my past life. It was hard to equate such a feeling to my own personal experiences, but it wasn’t an improper description. The only difference to me would be the fact that I am gaining levels whenever we perform these synchronizations. Most likely, Tsubaki is far too high of a level to receive any benefit from the low level area that we were staying.

No matter, we had all month to upgrade ourselves. Under Dana’s lead, I was sure that we would find suitably challenging opponents by the time I was planning to head back.