

Calculating...

Kay stared at the words floating in front of him. He'd gotten used to extrasensory perceptions, in the form of his magical sense for blood he got from his Class and Skills, but the feeling of there being a loading bar slowly filling with progress existing somewhere was a new one to him. It also tasted like tartar sauce and cheese in his mouth, but that was probably his brain trying to process a sensation it had no experience with.

Eventually, the words changed between one blink and the next.

User has successfully provided significant assistance towards achieving System Directive 7. User has been granted System Access (Minor).

"What does that mean?"

Input unclear. Please clarify input "that".

Kay stared at the words with a new feeling welling up in him. Earlier, he'd been feeling expectation and wonder at the idea of talking with the System. Now it was mostly apprehension and a slowly building feeling of resignation. "Are you just a computer?"

Incorrect. The existence known as "the System" is not a computer.

Kay sighed in relief. "Well-"

However, based on the User's displayed understanding and predicted knowledge base, "computer" would be the closest approximation of the existence known as "the System" available to the User.

"Oh, fuck you."

"Um, Kay?"

He glanced over and saw Eleniah and Meten looking at him with concerned expressions.

"Who are you talking to?"

"Oh, right, you guys are here too. Um, so don't freak out, but I'm talking to the System." He saw their eyes widening and their expressions shifting to shocked ones. "Again, don't freak out. Just... let me talk to it for a bit without interrupting, okay?"

They both nodded silently, and he turned back to the text. "Okay... You're a computer," He said, mostly to himself, "You're completely logical and only able to respond to things you're programmed to respond to. So... I'm just going to brute force this. I have no energy or patience to figure out your keywords or code phrases or whatever, so fuck it." Kay turned his attention fully towards the text and the System it represented. "What is System Directive Seven?"

System Directive 7: Prevent further corruption of the System.

"At least you understand 'What is' and I don't have to say 'define'. The System is corrupted?"

Yes.

Kay let out a deep breath. "I knew it was going to do that. As soon as I finished talking, I realized it was going to do that. Explain the corruption of the System."

Access denied. This information requires System Access. The User only has System Access (Minor). Would the User like to access a limited summary of System corruption?

"Yes." Kay deadpanned.

Through various sources, System data becomes unreadable or unusable to the System and thus prevents the System from functioning properly.

Kay started rubbing his face. "I understood that through context clues." He sighed and tried a different track. "Why was I provided assistance?"

The User actively pursued goals in alignment with System Directive 7, so assistance was provided to the User to increase the probability of said goals being achieved as per protocol.

"How were my goals in alignment with System Directive Seven?"

Elimination of Type 2 Interdimensional Entities aligns with prevention of further System corruption.

"Why is elimination of Type Two Interdimensional Entities aligned with prevention of System corruption?" Kay asked, then rolled his eyes. "And why do I have to ask for clarification of everything you say?" He muttered to himself.

Type 2 Interdimensional Entities have been traced to the largest amount of System corruption to date. Preventing Type 2 Interdimensional Entities from breaching into this reality has been shown to prevent further corruption and possibly aid in removing current corruption.

Kay quirked a brow up, "That's interesting. Did killing that thing just now remove any corruption?"

Calculating...

Kay glanced over at the others when he felt that sensation of a loading bar again. "So short summary of what's happening, apparently killing things like that monster or

stopping the thing that was controlling it helps the System, which is why it gave me some help." He held up the still-present sword and waved it around, "It's how I made this thing." He glanced over and saw new words, "Oh, it's back."

Destruction of the Avatar of $\phi \times | \downarrow \tilde{u}$, Lesser Eldritch Hunger reduced System Corruption from 17.583% to 17.5827%.

"That's not much... What is that percentage of?"

17.5828% of total System architecture is corrupted past a total point of inaccessibility or uselessness.

"Did that just go up?"

Yes. Corruption increased from 17.5827% to 17.5828% during this User session.

"Why did it increase?"

Access denied. Specific information about corruption sources requires Administrator level access.

"Okay... can you give me non-specific information about corruption sources?"

Three main sources of System Corruption exist: Type 2 Interdimensional Entities, active hostile action against The System by various entities other than Type 2 Interdimensional Entities, and naturally occurring errors/bugs/corruption in the System. In order, the amount of total architecture currently corrupted from each source is 15.36%, 2.1903%, and .0325%.

"... Define Type Two Interdimensional Entities."

Type 2 Interdimensional Entities are entities commonly referred to as "Eldritch Beings". These entities originate from realities antithetical to this reality, and their presence in this reality causes fundamental changes that corrupt System architecture through their very presence. This means that the intention of such entities holds no meaning. All Type 2 Interdimensional Entities must be removed to prevent corruption of System architecture and potentially remove current corruption.

"Why is that?" Kay rolled his eyes and clarified his question, "Why is it important that the System doesn't get corrupted? I get that the System doesn't want that to continue, but why is it such a big deal that you'll give me a huge jump in levels and hints on how to kill the thing? Taking it out only took away a tiny bit of corruption."

Total System collapse will result in the death of all living beings on Torotia.

"... Oh. Fuck. Uh, well... Alright then." Kay blinked multiple times in shock. "What level of corruption will result in total System collapse?"

Unknown. Modeling of potential possibilities has revealed a range of corruption possible to cause total System collapse ranges from 32.5% to 76.8%. Further access to this information is denied. Any further queries from User?

Something about the last line of that response seemed different from the rest of the text he'd seen so far, but Kay couldn't quite put his finger on what. It was almost like the font had changed a little, but he couldn't quite tell. He trusted his instincts, though, and changed topics. "Sure. What's up with guns?"

Input unclear. Please clarify input "what's up with guns?".

"Why don't firearms have Skills or Classes?"

Weapon type "firearm" does not yet exist on Torotia. As such, the Firearms Update has not been scheduled.

"Uh, what? Guns totally exist on Torotia." Kay pointed at the edge of the cliff, "There are some over there in my settlement right now. Or maybe a little farther away since people probably started running, but there are definitely firearms around."

...

Kay waited as he felt something happen. He wasn't really sure what to describe it like; it was sort of similar to the feeling when the System was "calculating" and the loading bar was filling. Obviously, the System was doing something, but he wasn't sure what.

Firearms detected on Torotia. Error: No firearms exist on Torotia. Error: Firearms detected on Torotia. Error: No firearms exist on Torotia. Error: Firearms detected on Torotia. Error: No firearms exist on Torotia. Error: Firearms detected on Torotia. Error: No firearms exist on Torotia. Error: Firearms detected on Torotia. Error: No firearms exist on Torotia. Error: Firearms detected on Torotia. Error: No firearms exist on Torotia. Error: Firearms detected on Torotia. Error: No firearms exist on Torotia. Error: Firearms detected on Torotia. Error: No firearms exist on Torotia. Error: Firearms detected on Torotia. Error: No firearms exist on Torotia. Error: Firearms detected on Torotia. Error: No firearms exist on Torotia. Error: Firearms detected on Torotia.

Kay stared in a sort of fascinated horror as the System started repeating the same two lines over and over again. The words flashed in front of him hundreds of times as he

watched. Then all the words froze and then vanished. Slightly larger text appeared in front of his eyes.

ERROR LOOP DETECTED. CONTACTING ADMINISTRATOR.

"What does that-"

ADMINISTRATOR 13 HAS ARRIVED.

An actual physical weight slammed into Kay's shoulders and forced him to hunch down as he fought against the push. It felt like someone had dropped hundreds of pounds of weight on his back, and he was struggling to keep standing. He noticed that Eleniah and Meten were also being pressed down, but they were resisting it better than he did.

ADMINISTRATOR HAS LOCATED CORRUPTED DATA SEGMENT. CORRUPTED DATA SEGMENT HAS BEEN PLACED IN QUARANTINE FOR DECONTAMINATION. ADMINISTRATOR 13 HAS DEPARTED.

The weight lifted off of Kay's shoulders as suddenly as it had arrived.

Thank you for your assistance in System debugging/System Maintenance/System corruption detection/removal.

Kay had no thoughts in his brain for a moment. The quick-moving and really jarring events had completely removed everything from his mind. Eventually, he shook his head and recovered from the shock. "You're welcome?"

Any further queries or bug reports from User?

Kay thought about it for a minute, deciding whether or not to say anything. He noticed his notifications were flashing, but he ignored it for later. He did have another "bug report", but the question was, was it worth it to submit it? In the end, the answer was yes, yes it was. "Sure. Why does every other Class that has "mage" in the name have a starting Skill of "insert appropriate element here Magic", but Blood Mage starts with Blood Puppetry?"

...

The same unknown feeling from earlier came back. Kay guessed it was some kind of search function or something.

Error detected. Class "Blood Mage" is in error. Class "Blood Mage" does not have correct starting Skill. Analyzing. ...

Before today, the fact that Blood Mage was different from the other "Mage" Classes was weird, but not really anything he could do about or find out about. Sure, he'd believed the System was something someone had made, but he didn't have any way to contact them and ask about it. Except now he did. The fact that it was an error and not an intentional design was interesting too.

Error flagged. "System" has received permission to begin debugging. Beginning debugging. Removing starting Skill "Blood Puppetry" from Class "Blood Mage" and replacing with "Blood Magic". Restoring Class "Blood Puppeteer" and restoring Skill "Blood Puppetry" to Class "Blood Puppeteer". ... Error. Corruption detected on data segment "Blood Mage Classes". Error. Error. Error. Erras! Erat\$. Jorn/ m44g. &6^haskd. 34587 24sdfg04 ()6adflugh♥ sfgp98=| ☉ 3 ☉ fsdq9867fg⊖ iuh979) (Hgs98L:HPOIU0zdvkl;j65498*/467lkjnsad98uuuuuuuuuuuu08*356x+6y↓+—♂∞+sfq;ou h987

The text started spelling out corrupted strings of random characters that built up across Kay's field of view and started to fill up everything he could see. He felt his body start to twitch as a feeling very similar to what he had experienced earlier that day started to creep in from the broken words. Something else, something alien, was once more trying to force its way into his mind. He desperately shut his eye, trying not to see anymore, but it was already too late. It was so much worse than the Eldritch Being from earlier but in a similar vein. Something so completely different from Kay's reality was trying to be inside him, and it was driving him mad. He faintly could feel two people grabbing his arms and trying to hold him down as he thrashed and gibbered nonsense, his mouth starting to foam as his teeth gnashed. Images, thoughts, and ideas flew through him, none of them his own, and he tried desperately to reject them. They made no sense to him at all; he couldn't even begin to understand them. He just knew they were horrible and wrong.

All of a sudden, between one moment and the next, he was still. His mind was his own. To him, there had been no in-between. One moment he was a complete mess, being literally driven mad by an unknown power, and the next, he was lying face down on the rocky surface of the plateau, with Meten and Eleniah on either side of him, holding his arms. He slowly turned his head to look and saw both of them were in kneeling positions, looking around in shock and confusion.

He looked forward and saw text from the System.

ADMINISTRATOR 13 HAS ARRIVED. ADMINISTRATOR 47 HAS ARRIVED.
ADMINISTRATOR 42 HAS ARRIVED. ADMINISTRATOR 187 HAS ARRIVED.
ADMINISTRATOR 29 HAS ARRIVED. ADMINISTRATOR 4702 HAS ARRIVED.
ADMINISTRATORS HAVE LOCATED CORRUPTED DATA SEGMENT. CORRUPTED
DATA SEGMENT HAS BEEN PLACED IN QUARANTINE FOR DECONTAMINATION.
AFFECTED USERS HAVE BEEN PURGED OF CORRUPTED DATA. ALL PRESENT
ADMINISTRATORS HAVE DEPARTED.

Kay slowly read the log and then nodded in understanding. If one Administrator had been enough to push him down into a hunch, that many would definitely have slammed him into the ground and pushed two tier fives to their knees.

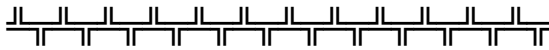
Thank you for your assistance in System debugging/System Maintenance/System corruption detection/removal. Due to your large amount of assistance in continuing good operation of the System, you have been granted one conditional Boon. You will be notified when your Boon is available. Updates regarding your submitted bug reports will be released with the next Patch Notes. This session has been ended at the authority of Administrator 13. Have a good day, User 544509812.

The text vanished, and the background feeling of there being some kind of other presence hanging around vanished. Kay sat there, processing what happened until he felt like moving. "I'm alright now."

"What the fuck was that!?" Eleniah shouted at him.

Meten nodded emphatically, his jaw moving but nothing coming out of his mouth.

"It was a lot happening all at once. Let me up, and I'll explain what I know." He pushed himself upright after they let go of his arms, and he dusted the dirt and pieces of rock off of himself. "It does explain a lot of questions we had, though," He muttered to himself. When he saw Eleniah's murderous expression, he held up his hands and took a step away from her. "I'll talk! I'll talk!"



Thousands of miles away, a man sitting on a throne opened his eyes for the first time in a very long time. Words appeared in front of him.

Alert: System Administrators have located controlled data segment: Blood Mage Class Tree. Data segment: Blood Mage Class Tree has been placed in quarantine. Data segment: Blood Mage Class Tree is no longer controlled.

"Interesting. What led them to locate it?"

Bug report from unknown user.

"Even more interesting. Can you find who it was?"

... No. That information has been locked.

"Their location?"

... Rough geographical location determined: Continent of Diushul.

"Good. Steward!"

"My lord?" A person nearby bowed to the man on the throne.

"Find me a worthwhile pawn. I have a mission for them."

"As you will, my lord." The steward bowed again, spun around, and left the room. The man on the throne leaned back against it and shut his eyes.