

## D. Diver 121

Chapter 121

The examiner from the C-Class exams is right in front of me...

The slim black-bearded man is sitting on a small couch striking a business deal with Bri.

My face goes pale and droplets of sweat start to form on my forehead as my eyes scan the room. I swallow hard as the tension only gets worse.

Rodrigo stares at me, not moving a muscle. He seems to be on guard as well, this isn't exactly the reaction I expected.

Bri slowly walks in between the two of us smiling and waving her hips back and forth as she struts forward. She looks me in the eyes and speaks in a soft yet powerful tone.

"Jay... It's a pleasure to see you again so soon."

She glances over at Rodrigo.

"It seems the two of you already know each other, how interesting."

Bri chuckles as Rodrigo finally speaks.

"Jay... What are you doing here, and how exactly do you know my sister?"

I grin. This confirms what I heard earlier was true. They are siblings.

"Well, I came here to get some loot checked out and have a weapon crafted. She's the best in town, wouldn't you agree?"

He stares at me with a cold look in his eyes, answering through a clenched jaw.

"She... is.."

My smirk grows as I start to feel a bit more relaxed. Sure, an A-Class from the Association that's actively trying to recruit me as a test subject is standing right in front of me, but there are some pros to this situation too.

"Does the Association know about your illegal item smuggling? Or the fact that you're siblings with a Black Market loot dealer?"

Rodrigo looks over to Bri, then back to me.

"No, no they do not."

He begins glowing white while standing up slowly, the look on his face turns from mildly irritated to infuriated rather quickly. I grit my teeth and start glowing gold and red while reaching for my sword.

"Stop. Stop! You two...."

Bri steps between both of us lifting her hands in the air, glowing the same white color as Rodrigo. Out of curiosity, while powering down my skills, I use inspect and Appraisal on both of them.

I audibly gulp when I see the results.

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[Lv. 488]

Active Items:

[Ring of Eternal Protection] +150% Defense

[Amulet of The Queen] +130% Mental Strength

[Greater Demon's Core] +50% All Stats

Active Skills:

Crafting [Legendary Grade]

Combat Magic [Advanced Light Summoning]

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[Lv. 1391]

Active items:

[Ring of Eternal Protection] +150% Defense

[Ring of The Dragon King] +210% Mental Strength

[Amulet of The King] +140% Mental Strength

[Ring of Divine Speed] +110% Speed +110% Agility

[Arch Demon's Core] +150% All Stats

[Greater Demon's Core] +50% All Stats

[Greater Demon's Core] +50% All Stats

[Greater Demon's Core] +50% All Stats

Active Skills:

Respawn [Advanced Rebirth]

Combat Magic [Advanced Light Summoning]

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My eyes open wide as I take in all the numbers in front of me. Bri stares at Rodrigo as he powers down his skill and the three of us stand in silence for a moment.

Briana finally speaks up.

“Brother. This is one of my new favorite clients, please don't hurt him if you can restrain yourself. Jay, the same goes for you, lay a finger on my family and you're dead.”

She smiles as these harsh words delicately flow from her mouth. Rodrigo and I lock eyes for a moment, then turn back to the powerful woman towering over us and nod. I let out a sigh while Bri's brother slouches back onto the couch letting out a few muffled words.

"So now what?"

I reply.

"Well, first of all... What was all that earlier about me being a lab rat for the Association? I think it's time we re-negotiate the terms of this mandatory contract."

He exhales from his nose.

"Nope. You're screwed, kid. They asked me to pick out any unusual hunters, and I've already submitted your name at the top slot. They won't take no for an answer. Trust me, I've been working with them for almost a decade now."

I gulp.

"What do you mean they won't take no for an answer? What'd you tell them?"

He sighs.

"Not too much. Just that you're a multi-skill user that specializes in close-range fire magic combat. They'll do an extensive test during our meeting, so they'll pick out all your fine details with a full appraisal soon enough."

I turn to Bri, then to Rodrigo, then back to Bri.

"So, I can just go rogue right? Like you? Live off the grid? I'd rather have my freedom on the run, than be locked into a slave contract with the Association..."

Rodrigo looks at me with an annoyed glare, I reply in a soft tone.

"No offense..."

Bri chimes in.

"If they know your name and have your ID, they'll find you eventually, trust me, we tried everything."

She looks at Rodrigo for an uncomfortably long time with a sad look in her eyes.

I grit my teeth and look at the red-suited man before me.

"This is your fault to begin with! What if I just tell them everything?! Huh? Stealing labyrinth resources to sell on the black market? If I'm going down, I'll just bring you with me! I-"

Bri cuts me off.

"None of that, none of that... Although I like you Jay, If you endanger my family or my business I will make sure you disappear."

I swallow hard, thinking of all the possible ways the last 3 days of my life could have gone so much differently....

The two of them could kill me in an instant, their stats and gear are off the charts.... I definitely crossed the line with that last statement, it's time to cool things down a bit.

“W-What if you just tell them it was a mistake? Say, I'm not as valuable as you first thought.”

He shakes his head.

“The meeting is already scheduled, you're going to get tested no matter what. The only thing that could push that meeting off would be your death, and considering the way you're talking right now, I don't think it'd be such a bad idea to get rid of you right here and now.”

My eyes open wide as he begins to glow with a white light. Bri sighs, showing a “Sorry kid, I tried but you ran your mouth” look on her face.

The A-Class charges up his attack while my brain rapidly searches for a way out of this mess.

“WAIT, WAIT! You need a Firestone right? Right? You need a Firestone, I have one!”

Bri's eyes perk up and she darts in between Rodrigo and me once again. The white light emanating from his body dies down and the room falls awkwardly silent. Bri nods to me.

“Continue...”

“I- Well- That's why I came up here. I wanted to have you craft another weapon for me, but it seems like you have another important client that may need it more right now.”

Briana grins.

“This is why I like you, Jay. Always full of surprises.”

I smile weakly but don't reply. She continues.

“Let's all talk about this more formally. It's time to strike a deal, don't you think?”

Rodrigo rolls his eyes as I reply.

“I- I think that's a good idea. First things first, If we can make a trade for this stone, you won't just kill me afterward right...?”

Bri frowns and turns to her brother.

“You have my word, hear that? Today he is my client, you may not kill him.”

With arms crossed, the A-Class mumbles back.

“Fine. One more word about snitching and he's toast, I'm not letting that slide again.”

He gets to his feet and starts walking to the door.

“My day just keeps getting worse! I’m going for some fresh air, see you later Big Sis, and... Jay I guess I’ll see you again soon too... Ugh, I can’t be asked to stay here any longer.”

With loud annoyed footsteps, Rodrigo disappears down the spiral staircase moments later.

Bri lets out a chuckle.

“I haven’t seen him this riled up in a while. Please don’t mind him too much, Roddy is a good guy. He’s just a bit stressed out from the exams. The Association promised him the labyrinth’s loot in exchange for collapsing it, but it seems like someone got to it first.”

She eyes my left arm, then looks me in the eyes. Bri takes a small clear tray out from under her desk and places it on a coffee table near the couch.

“Show me what you’ve got.”

I nod and reach into my item storage without another word. I carefully pull out the flickering Firestone and place it in the containment tray.

Next, the meter-long demon’s horn hits the small wooden table with a thud. Bri grins ear to ear.

“Now look at this. You definitely were the one who ruined my brother’s weekend weren’t you?”

I gulp, waiting for her to continue as she feels the surface of the smooth horn with both hands.

“What are you trying to have made here? It’s a bit short for a long sword, but fairly long for a dagger. Maybe I could make a set out of it, but-“

“A set, that would be perfect. A set of daggers.”

“You’re a dagger user all of a sudden?”

I nod, thinking about her earlier conversations with Rodrigo as I climbed the stairs.

“You have two Windstones right? Make me a dagger set with this horn and those two stones. In exchange, the Firestone is all yours.”

She grins while going through a few drawers in her desk to pull out a containment tray and an empty glass bottle. My eyes open wide as I realize what’s coming next...

“Give me your wrist. I need 16oz of blood in total to bond the stones to both knives.”

I flinch and look away as I reach out my left arm.

Without hesitation, she rips into an artery and blood gushes out into the large glass bottle in her hand. I clench my jaw and whisper under my breath.

“There has to be an easier way to do this....”

She smiles as the glass fills to the brim. I pull my arm away and use self-regeneration on my wound mumbling to myself. Bri flashes me the containment case. Inside, there are two palm-sized stones that look as clear as quartz. They both have small white streaks in them and let out a low hum.

“You know, even with a blood bond, these Windstones may be difficult to control without a wind-summoning skill. I’m sure you’ll figure out how to use them eventually, it just may take some time.”

“Yes... I’ll manage.”

Bri takes all of the items on the wooden table and brings them over to her desk. She places the Firestone in a bottom drawer and opens the Windstone’s containment case while continuing to examine the large horn.

“You can stay and watch if you’d like, this may take a while.”

I nod, then make my way over to the couch. Bri’s hands start to glow light yellow while she carefully picks up one of the Windstones.

She smirks and looks at me.

“While I’m at it, perhaps I should share a few details about that new Demon’s Core you’re nonchalantly showing off. It might be a good idea to conceal it. I can see you’ve changed a lot Jay, but you still have a lot to learn...”

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Name: Jay Soju

Level: 352

Hp: 1765/1765

Mp: 1525/1765

Strength: 861 [+809][+431]

Speed: 1017 [+610][+305][+509]

Agility: 1115 [+502][+558]

Defense: 762 [+305][+267][+381]

Mental Strength: 861 [+517][+344][+387][+491][+431]

Skills:

Absorption [Special Grade]

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Advanced Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening [Special Grade]

Self Regeneration [Special Grade]

Spacial Magic [Item Storage]

Plunderer

Telekinesis

Appraisal [Special Grade]

Conceal

Berserker

Dungeon Walker [Special Grade]

Intimidation

Dagger Mastery

Stealth

Bloodlust

Equivalent Exchange

Combat Magic [Wind Summoning]

All-Seeing Eye

Extreme Strength

Dual Wielding [Special Grade]

Telepathy [Legendary Grade]

Items Equipped:

High Ogre King's Ring [+60% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Dark Elf Boots [+60% Speed]

Ring of Protection [+35% Defense]

Griffin's Talon [+40% Mental Strength]

Enchanted Silver Ring [+30% Speed]

Serpent King's Scale [+45% Agility] [+45% Magic Resistance]

Desert Troll's Charm [+45% Mental Strength]

The Flame Emperor's Sword [Fire Aspect][+94% Strength][+57% Mental Strength]

[Greater Demon's Core] +50% All Stats

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Chapter 122

Bri throws me a handheld mirror from under her desk and I catch it clumsily.

“H-Hey what do you mean I’m showing off my Demon’s Core? How’d you even know in the first place? Is it this line? The black line on my arm? You don’t ev-“

I stop speaking as I bring the square-shaped mirror up to my face. After a few quick blinks, swallowing hard, and turning my head side to side, my mouth opens again to squeeze out a few words.

“My... eyes...they’re...”

Bri finishes my sentence for me.

“They’re almost white. Not as bad as my brothers, but to anyone that knows about the cores, it’s clear as day you absorbed one.”

She eyes me with a devious grin while I keep staring at myself in the mirror.

“My brother has quite a few, No one will mess with an A-Class, so he can do what he wants with them. You on the other hand, you’re a nobody. I’m sure it’d be best to cover up before going to that meeting today. Better yet, cover up before Rodrigo gets back. I think he was too mad to notice earlier, after he cools off, he’ll be much more perceptive.”

She giggles to herself again while looking back down at the demon’s horn and two element stones on her desk.

I reply, still staring at my light-colored eyes in the mirror.

“Well, tell me then. How can I get rid of these... these eyes?”

“Get rid of them? Impossible. I can tell you how to hide them, but it’ll cost ya.”

I sigh, rolling my newly discovered light hazel eyes.

“How much?”

“Two gold pieces. I have a magic item that’ll do just the trick.”

I click my tongue against the roof of my mouth as I reach into my item storage to grab two shiny gold coins. With a light toss, the round pieces of metal hit Bri’s desk with a clink. She grabs them both before they roll too far.

“Perfect.”

Reaching into her seemingly endless drawers, the craftswoman takes out a small black rectangular case. She throws it at me.

I catch the small rectangular box and look inside while activating Appraisal.

[Lenses Of Illusion]

I scrunch my eyebrows, then activate my All-Seeing Eye for a moment to get some extra info.

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Lenses Of Illusion



Info: A pair of contact lenses crafted using the Legendary Grade “Crafting” Skill and the Special Grade “Conceal” Skill. This item allows the user to see 25% further, and change their perceived eye color at will.

Class: C+

Type: Single Use

Durability: 100/100

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I deactivate my skills and look at the pair of clear lenses with disappointment.

“These are literally just colored contact lenses... I paid 2 gold coins for a pair of contact lenses...”

Bri laughs.

“Lenses like those are hard to come by, try them on. You may think differently about them after you see what they can do.”

With a sigh, I awkwardly place them both into my eyes. Blind and tearing up for a few seconds, they finally slip into place. The sensation of a brand new skill fills my subconscious.

I grab the mirror and bring it back up to my face. While thinking of my old dark brown eye color, the light white shades begin to vanish completely on their own.

My eyes shift back to normal, there’s no sign of the Demon’s Core at all...

I grin, then start picturing every color imaginable; red, green, yellow, blue, purple, all of them. With a laugh, I change them back to my original dark brown again.

“I guess.. they do work.”

Bri nods.

“Those will last a few months at most, so come back when you need more. Regarding your new arm tattoo, I don’t have an item in stock for that. You’ll just have to wear a long sleeve shirt for a while. I’ll need someone with a Special Grade or higher concealment skill to make any more body modification items.”

I raise an eyebrow, thinking to myself. Special Grade concealment? Like my conceal skill?

“Hey- Uh- How long do you think making my blades will actually take?”

Bri looks down at the items on her desk, then up at me.

“Why? Do you need some fresh air?”

I nod as she continues.

“Give me an hour, I’ll have them ready when you come back. Buy something to cover up that arm while you’re gone.”

I stand to my feet.

“Thanks. I’ll be back soon.”

“See you Jay. Demon Cores aren’t something humans should have in the first place. It may give you some extra strength now, but everything comes with a price.”

Bri takes a deep breath, then lets out a sigh.

“Just, be careful and cover up. I want the best for all my long-term future clients.”

I’m already halfway across the room making my way over to the stairs and waving goodbye.

“Yeah, yeah. Appreciate you Bri, I’ll be back in an hour!”

Without another thought, I walk down two flights of stairs and out the front door. Ever since the mention of a special grade concealment skill was brought up, my mind has been racing. While activating my All-Seeing Eye, I open my status and click into my [Conceal] skill.

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Conceal

Info: A basic concealment skill. Data on a user’s status can be altered. Levels, stats, skills, and buffs may be added or taken away from the user’s false status screen. Those with a [Special Grade] or higher perception skills may be able to see through the facade.

Grade: [No Grade]

[Upgrade]

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I click Upgrade to appease my curiosity.

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Upgrade: 50PP

[No Grade] -> [Special Grade]

The [Special Grade] Conceal skill allows the user to edit their status with the same basic inputs as [No Grade]. Without a [Legendary Grade] perception skill, the true nature of these modifications will remain unseen.

The [Special Grade] Conceal skill acts as temporary camouflage. The user may change fine details in facial features, skin shade, and eye color, along with minor height and weight modifications. Without a [Legendary Grade] perception skill, the illusion magic being used will go unnoticed by onlookers.

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Reading the upgrade details makes the corners of my mouth curl upwards. I upgrade it on the spot, bringing my total Proficiency Points remaining down to 52. Technically I could upgrade another skill right now, but I’ve been on a spending spree lately...

This is the last one for a while, a legendary skill upgrade would be very useful, I'll have to save up a lot more PP to make that happen.

I look down at my left arm. The black line is about 3cm thick and travels the whole distance from my wrist to my shoulder. I concentrate and activate my new upgraded skill.

"Conceal."

In my mind's eye, I picture the line disappearing. Reality begins to mimic my mental image. The dark black tattoo vanishes from my skin.

With a smirk, I open up my status.

After a full minute of concealment, my MP drops 50 points.

"Not bad... but not great."

At this rate of mana consumption, I can easily keep this disguise up for well over half an hour. It's perfect for short meetings, but I'll need to re-up on MP without being noticed.

I tighten my lips, then head off to the market by the train station to grab a new long sleeve shirt like Bri suggested.

These lenses conceal my eyes without any MP usage, and a shirt covers up my arms pretty easily. For right now, simple magic items are better than this concealment skill. In the long run, I have a feeling it'll come in handy.

For the time being, I conceal my arm while shopping. I spend almost 50 silver on a new stockpile of D-Class HP potions along with 1 full gold to buy a pile of mana crystals from a confused vendor. Sure, hunters usually don't buy crystals, but taking my MP plundering skill into account, they're actually a bit more cost-effective than MP potions.

I grab a long sleeve shirt for 20 bronze made of heavy black material and put it on over my Tee.

"This will do."

With my shopping done, I take my time on the way back. It's a really nice day out. The fresh air, busy streets, warm sun overhead, and recent stat power-ups make me feel like a million gold pieces.

I push the looming Association meeting to the back of my mind while lazily strolling back to Bri's place with newfound confidence.

It's been just over an hour. I walk back up to her office eager to see my new blades.

The woman's voice calls out before I even step into the room.

"Finally, you're back! Check these bad boys out."

Bri stands up from her desk carrying a large containment tray with two beautiful blades.

They're bright red and give off a light white glow. The hand grips are jet black and look just the right size for my palms. Both blades are slightly curved and over 30cm long. They look razor-sharp and give off a very loud hum as I walk closer.

I use appraisal along with my All-Seeing Eye.

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The Wind Tyrant's Dagger Set:

[Wind Aspect][+60% Strength][+60% Agility][+40% Mental Strength]

Info: A dagger set crafted from the horn of a Greater Demon and two cores from Wind Summoning Griffins using the Legendary Grade "Crafting" Skill.

Class: B+

Type: Fusion/Evolution

Durability: 100/100

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Bri smirks, moving the concealment case closer to me.

"Go ahead try them out."

With both hands outreached I grip the vibrating daggers. A cool rush of mana enters the palms of my hands, flowing through my arms, and into my torso through the rest of my body.

I let out a satisfying grunt while flexing my core and bracing myself as my new weapon greets me. In a muffled tone, I reply.

"Nice to meet you too."

Bri chuckles to herself as I struggle to stay on my feet.

After a few seconds, the sensation of heavy wind magic entering my body becomes bearable and I relax a bit. Staring down at the red blades glowing white, a stupid grin grows across my face. Bri speaks up.

"So... How about we test those out in the Rumble Dome I got a--"

"No! There's no way I'm going back to that suicide pit!"

She laughs.

"Hey, hey! It was just a suggestion."

Bri crosses her arms, amused at my PTSD from the last time she forced me into the underground fight ring to pay for my sword.

"Well, I know you have to go off to that meeting with my brother soon, but let me at least give you the rundown on how these blades are a bit different than your sword."

I nod while twirling the new crimson daggers in both hands.

They're begging to be used, but I have a feeling it wouldn't be pretty if I release their full power in here.

"Sure, give me the rundown. After that, I'm heading off to the Association's HQ."

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Bri stares down at the crimson daggers in my hands, then brings her gaze up to my eyes.

“Your sword is an evolution-type weapon, I’m sure you’ve noticed its stat growth by now.”

I nod as she continues.

“Well, these blades have an evolution element to them as well. The only difference is, they’re a fusion-type weapon too.”

I look at Bri with a blank stare.

“A- a fusion-type weapon means... what exactly?”

“It depends. The fact that they can evolve means their fusion ability may change in the future too.”

“...”

“Try pressing both of your daggers together.”

I do as she says, bringing the two slightly glowing blades together in front of my chest.

The hum from earlier returns, and begins to grow louder the closer the two daggers get to each other. Once less than 5cm apart, I feel a strong resistance in between the weapons.

Dense pockets of air begin to flow out of the blades, immediately filling the room with violent gusts of wind.

Bri speaks up grinning ear to ear.

“Don’t worry about my office, keep going.”

I gulp, then continue doing as she says. I focus my mana into the two blades while activating my own Wind Summoning skill along with my All-Seeing Eye to track the mana in the room much easier.

\*Clink\*

The moment I do, the two daggers calm down and the wind comes to a standstill as both blades hit each other with a light metallic ring.

My eyes widen as I watch the two blades merge into one....

The white light around them becomes much brighter, as a heavy red dagger falls into my open palms. Bri lets out a laugh.

“Well, to be honest, I didn’t expect you to control it that well on your first try. Now, try to separate them.”

I stare at the single dagger, concentrating on the odd flow of energy inside it. While gripping its handle tight, I force a large amount of mana and wind magic into the blade again while picturing it split in two in my mind’s eye.

The blade begins to glow bright white and is followed by a flash of light and a mild gust of wind. The blade comes apart into two shining red daggers again. I nod slowly while twirling the pair around my fingers.

“Another fine piece of art you’ve made Bri, thanks.”

She smiles.

“The pleasure is all mine, I’m glad we could make a deal today. You know I’m always here to do business with you.”

I smirk and give her a firm nod.

“Good. I’ll probably be back soon-”

I turn to leave, but a question has been eating away at the back of my mind... I decide to speak up.

“Hey- uh- one last thing actually. There are Demon Cores... right. Have you ever seen or heard of a dungeon core or a labyrinth core? Or uhh- something resembling a large egg-shaped crystal?”

Bri looks at me with a confused stare.

“A dungeon core?”

She thinks for a moment while placing both hands on her hips and staring up at the ceiling.

“I can’t say I have. Usually, we refer to the Demon Cores as Dungeon Cores. If you’re thinking of something else then I’m not exactly su-”

“Okay, got it. Just wondering, that’s all.”

I turn to leave for real this time, Bri is left standing there with a puzzled look on her face but speaks up as I go.

“Well, I’ll do some digging. Maybe I can find something similar to what you’re describing next time we meet. Anyways, play nice with my brother today, I’m sure in time you two will get along.”

I carefully place my new blades into my item storage and raise my right hand to wave as I walk down the spiral staircase to the lowest floor. While doing so, I switch my long sword into my item box.

The long walk into the center of town toward the Hunters Association HQ begins.

I don’t think of much on my way over, there isn’t really much to think about after all. I’ll be attending this meeting whether I like it or not.

Working for the Association wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world if it was chosen by my own free will, it’s just that comment about being their lab rat that Rodrigo brought up earlier... It still bugs me.

The sun is high in the sky, it’s almost noon.

My walk into town seems to go by very quickly. Although it took well over half an hour to get here, I’ve been daydreaming the whole way. I look straight up at the towering Hunters Association building and let out a sigh. A woman’s voice greets me as the sliding glass doors automatically open upon my arrival.

“Welcome to the Vice Region Hunter’s HQ, how can I help you today sir?”

“I’d like to pick up my C-Class license, I passed the exam yesterday. Plus, I have a meeting with-“

She cuts me off with a bright smile.

“Oh, so you’re Jay. Welcome, welcome. Please, come this way!”

I’m escorted inside without another word. The lobby is rather crowded today. There are at least 30 hunters with Association uniforms on, beside them, there are close to 20 men in suits. They’re all sharing small talk conversations, seemingly waiting for something.

Maybe it’s the event Abby was talking about last night? They could be having the rank-up celebration today, that would make sense.

The woman at the door leads me through the crowded lobby and over to the front desk where I see Rodrigo in a fresh new red suit. This one has a few black accents on the pockets and collar. The moment he see’s me, the A-Class waves.

“I’ll take him from here, thank you very much Ms.”

She bows and turns to leave the moment he opens his mouth.

“Certainly, he’s all yours, sir.”

With that, she turns to make her way back to the front doors. I open my mouth to speak, but Rodrigo is already walking toward the elevator at the back of the room.

“Come on, let’s get this over with.”

I swallow hard and follow without saying a word.

The elevator doors open moments later and we both walk inside. The red-suited man clicks the penthouse button at the top of the mana-powered selection menu and we wait for the doors to close.

Rodrigo speaks as it clicks closed.

“You know, I had a similar meeting to this when I was 18.”

“...”

“The day the Association found out I had a Respawn skill... That’s the day my contract started.”

I nod slowly, but still keep my eyes on the floor as the elevator begins to move upwards. He continues.

“I didn’t have much of a choice, I’ve been working for the Association for 11 years now.”

“...”

“Recently, things have been pretty different around here. Not in the Vice Region specifically, I usually only come back here to check on Bri... but I assumed it’s been pretty bad all over.”

I look up at him.

“What do you mean things have been different? Plus, why are you telling me all of this?”

He sighs.

“All over the country, there’s been more surges this year than I’ve ever seen in my life. They keep occurring with less time in between. Their origins seem to be the Dark Continent, but no one wants to admit it.”

I nod as he continues.

“The only reason I’m telling you this is because they’re most likely recruiting you to farm resources. Either outside the country or maybe in the city’s labyrinth, there’s no telling what exactly the higher-ups are thinking sometimes. All I know is they’ve been scouting unique combat-types more and more recently, giving high rewards to any Association members that can give them leads. That’s why I put your name on the list.”

“And....?”

“Well... It seems like I may have overreacted earlier. If my sister has grown a liking to you, then you’re an ally to me as well. My advice for this meeting is...”

“....”

“Stand out as little as possible. The less they see you as an asset, the less strict your contract will be. Don’t come off as special, and you’ll be offered the best deal. Trust me.”

I stare at the floor, taking in his advice as the doors to the elevator open and we arrive at the top floor of the Association’s tower.

The hum of mana shields fills all my senses as I’m almost blinded by the overwhelmingly white walls of the room in front of me. A deep, wise voice rings out as my eyes adjust.

I see an old man with long grey hair tied back in a man bun. His hands are clasped together with too many gold rings to count on top of the wooden desk he sits behind. Wrinkles fill the elder’s face, but he shows off his pearly whites with a professional smile.

“Welcome, welcome. Nice to see you again Rodrigo.”

As we both walk forward, the old man speaks up again.

“This must be Jay, nice to meet you.”



He closes his eyes, smiling with a closed mouth, nodding, and motioning for us to sit in the two comfortable-looking chairs in front of him.

The room around us is bare. The white walls connect with the white ceiling above, and there isn't even a single painting or shelf to give my poor eyes a rest.

The only break from the blinding white light is the full wall of glass behind the old man at his desk. It may be an odd setup, but It really is an incredible view of the entire city.

As the two of us sit down, I activate conceal to prepare my status along with inspect and Appraisal to check out the man running this get-together.

---

[Lv. 731]

Active Items:

[Ring of Eternal Protection] +150% Defense

[Ring of Eternal Protection] +150% Defense

[Ring of Eternal Protection] +150% Defense

[Ring of Eternal Protection] +150% Defense

[Ring of Eternal Protection] +150% Defense

[Ring of Eternal Protection] +150% Defense

[Scale of The Elder Dragon] +180% Magic Resistance

Active Skills:

Extreme Strength [Legendary Grade]

Extreme Speed [Legendary Grade]

Appraisal [Special Grade]

Stealth [Special Grade]

---

I let out a gasp, then cover it up with a light cough as my eyes open wide to take in this old man's stats...

He continues to smile as we seat ourselves, then starts off with an introduction.

“My name is Brutus C. Matthews. I'm the Vice Region's Head Director for the Hunters Association. Let us begin our meeting. The main topic today is Jay's new contract.”

Chapter 124

As the old man speaks, my eyes keep scanning over his status in disbelief. I've never seen anyone with more than two skills besides myself. To top it off, he's over level 700, has a 900% defense buff, and a 180% magic resistance item....

He's a B-Class hunter, with multiple Legendary and Special Grade combat skills. Today I've met 3 people that could crush me in an instant... a mere C-Class is a very little fish in the grand scheme of things.

I've heard of people buying very rare items to add skills to their status. There have also been whispers of items that can force a skill upgrade. I guess the Association has bottomless pockets for a Regional Director like him.

I stay quiet while the old man continues to speak. He reaches into his shirt pocket and pulls out a small rectangular card.

"This is for you, I'd like to congratulate you on passing your rank-up exam. I made sure this one would be extra difficult, only 43 of you passed, can you believe that?"

Brutus lets out a chuckle while placing the small white card down on his desk with a firm thud. I shift my eyes to see my face and a large letter "C" along with the Association's logo on my new Hunter's License.

I nod and go to take the card, but the Director speaks up before my hand gets anywhere near his desk.

"Please, open your status for me, Jay. I'd like to see what we're working with before moving forward."

I tighten my lips and bring my hand back to my lap before opening my status. I've been using conceal this whole time, so no more changes are necessary. I flip the blue text screen toward him.

I've deleted any unique or suspicious items from my list, such as the contact lenses and Demon's Core.

I don't bother editing my level, showing that isn't a huge deal. My skills, on the other hand, I only leave three visible:

Combat Magic [Advanced Fire Summoning]

Swordsmanship

Dagger Mastery

Rodrigo already told the Association I'm a fire user, along with being a multi-skill user. I have to make it somewhat believable that he would pick me of all people to show to the Association, but also not too unique.

I gulp as the director eyes my status. He grins, then presses a small white button on the side of his desk.

"Very good. Three combat skills and one of them is Advanced Fire Summoning. Fire is the most common combat magic, but those with the upgraded version don't show their faces very often. I knew a few hunters with that perk back in my day. Those flames don't go out easily do they?"

I shake my head as he laughs a bit and keeps babbling on.

“Well, according to your status and my full Appraisal, you have very naturally boosted speed and agility. A close combat fighter, and advanced magic user, you’ll definitely be a great asset to the Association.”

I tighten my gaze and frown a bit at his last statement, but before I can speak up, the elevator dings behind me. The director grins, pointing an open palm toward the back of the room.

“This is my assistant, Samantha. She’ll be helping us sign your contract today.”

Rodrigo gives me a side eye, then nods firmly. I’m not exactly sure what that means, but it can’t be good...

A tall blond woman with pale skin and a shimmering white dress walks over to us making light clicking sounds as her heels tap against the hard floor.

“Good afternoon Director, how can I be of assistance.”

He nods, pointing his head down toward me ever so slightly.

“I’ll begin the questioning, I’d like you to stand by and assist me as usual.”

She smiles while making her way behind the large desk to look me in the eyes.

“Very well, I’m ready to begin when you are.”

I use appraisal on the woman out of curiosity.

[Lv. 149]

Active Items:

[Amulet of Protection] +35% Defense

[Enchanted Platinum Ring] +50% Mental Strength

Active Skills:

Lie Detector[Special Grade]

My eyes shift back and forth while the seriousness of this meeting begins to sink in. She’s a walking lie detector.... I can only imagine what that skill does exactly, but I have a pretty good idea. I’ll have to choose my words very carefully from this point forward.

The Director begins.

“Well, first of all, I don’t think an in-depth physical exam is necessary. Your skills and stats are very straightforward, there isn’t much left up to chance with you. I like it.”

He shifts his gaze to Rodrigo.

“I was hoping you could bring me in a unique skill user today, so much for getting my hopes up.”

“Sorry Director, I thought an advanced fire user would suit your taste.”

Rodrigo's face looks visibly confused. It makes sense... he saw me use over half a dozen skills back in the exam, yet the Director believes I only have 3.

Brutus continues.

"Also, It's very unfortunate the labyrinth collapsed before you could reap its rewards. If there are any pop-ups in the Vice Region during the next surge, the core is all yours, you have my word."

The A-Class nods.

"Appreciate it, Director."

The old man turns back to me.

"You'll be joining the Association today, and I hope you understand why."

I stare forward but don't respond. He continues.

"As I'm sure you're quite aware, there was a pretty large surge recently. The increase in activity is rather troubling. Most private guilds have been ignoring the problem and leaving this mess in the hands of the Association. From seeing the look on your face, I can tell this may be a difficult conversation for us to have moving forward."

I finally speak up.

"Yeah. I think it might be. What's any of this have to do with me...? Why is this my problem?"

He nods and lifts my C-Class ID in the air.

"This. This is why it's your problem. What takes most people a lifetime, took you just a few months to achieve. Plus, our very own A-Class examiner picked you out as the hunter with the most potential out of all the exam candidates. I even spoke to your friend Arie this morning, he was high on the list too. He spoke very fondly of you."

I raise an eyebrow. Arie must have joined this morning like he said he would. Good for him, he's taking on his own path to glory. On the other hand, I don't exactly get to choose for myself, do I? This whole meeting feels totally off, if there's any good way out of this, I'm taking it the first chance I can get.

The Director continues, and my heart skips a beat at the next line that comes out of his mouth.

"Now your sword. I'd like to see it."

I gulp.

"My sword... why..?"

The old man puts both of his hands out on his desk.

"Don't worry, I can handle it. Rodrigo filled me in on the details, apparently, you had it made over at Apollo's in the Vice City mall?"

My mind starts racing. I look at the fair-skinned woman, then back to the Director. He continues.

“Element stones are regulated by the Association. We haven’t farmed any Firestones in quite a while, I was surprised to hear about your sword. Please, let me take a look at it.”

I gulp, reaching into my item box to take out the long dark Firestone-imbued sword. The director’s eyes light up as I place it into his open hands.

Flames begin erupting from the blade, but the old man just grins as the fire attempts to burn his hands.

“This is quite a sword. Who made it for you?”

Sweat rolls down my forehead as I think very carefully about the next words that come out of my mouth.

“I... talked to a craftsman at Apollo’s like you said. I- I- asked a short bald worker there to make my sword. Forgive me, I don’t remember his name.”

Still holding my burning blade without flinching one bit, the Director turns to his assistant. She nods.

A rush of relief comes over me, that must mean I’ve deceived her skill. I didn’t lie, just tiptoed around the truth... He continues.

“Do you have any other weapons or items that may be as unique as this one? Maybe you picked up a few things at the exam?”

I gulp, pause for a few seconds, then reply.

“I’m wearing most of my gear. Everything I own is on me right now... I- don’t have anything unique or valuable from the exam in my item box.”

The woman nods again and the Director hands me my sword back with a smile.

“Very well. This meeting was not as exciting as I thought it’d be. I think I’ll just assign you to the newly created close-combat extraction squad. A few of your fellow teammates from the exam will be on it too.”

He turns to his assistant.

“Make sure Tripp is available to give this new team the rundown. Call him to greet Jay when he finishes up here and bring him to the other team members.”

She nods.

“Of course sir.”

I gladly take my sword back, placing it in my item box, but immediately retaliate.

“Hey, hey! I still don’t get it, why is it mandatory for me to join?!”

Hearing the name of the dagger-wielding hunter “Tripp” from the association that I trained with during my break on the 11th floor of the exam doesn’t make me feel any better about this entire situation...

He sighs, placing a hand on my ID card, and pulling it back toward him.

“Sure. It’s not mandatory, it’d just be in your best interest to sign with us. I’m sure we could come up with a very reasonable contract. You understand how the dungeon system past C-Class works right?”

“... I guess I don’t.”

“Well, there’s a reason most hunters don’t level much further than the high 200s or low 300s these days. Normal dungeons begin to stop spawning around this level. Yes, of course, there are always exceptions to the rule, but those exceptions are often very volatile.”

Rodrigo looks over to me and nods slowly as the old man continues to talk.

“The only way for hunters to get stronger would be leveling in the labyrinths. All of the 8 major labyrinths in this country are highly regulated by the Hunters Association.”

He lifts my ID up in the air at my eye level.

“With that being said, we keep a close eye on hunters with accelerated growth. They’re known for either being very beneficial assets, or rogues that must be eliminated.”

He looks over at Rodrigo. He replies.

“That’s right. The Director is right.”

I stare at the ID in his hand, thinking about my options...

To a certain extent, everything he’s said so far does make sense. The Association has control over most of the dungeon industry. There’s no point in arguing a pointless matter, I might as well hear him out... He did give me the option to say no.

I bite my bottom lip, then reply.

“Fine. What would the terms of a contract with the Association consist of? I’d like to hear what you have to offer.”

Chapter 125

Brutus C. Matthews, the Director of the Vice Region’s Hunters Association branch smiles while sitting back into his chair.

“Excellent, it’s time to get down to business. As a member of the newly formed extraction squad, you’ll be farming resources for the Association. The lot-”

Before he can continue, I rudely cut the Director off mid-sentence.

“I prefer to fight alone. That’s my first request.”

With a nod, he continues.

“Please, let me finish. We’ve recruited a large number of hunters from this exam. Your group will be chosen for you, but working as a team is not necessary. Quotas must be met for proper pay, but not mandatory. All missions required by the Association will come with rewards hard for you to refuse.”

Rodrigo smirks.

“He’s not lying about that, they will always have offers worth taking.”

I gulp.

“So... what’s the catch...?”

The Director clasps his hands together and stares at me.

“There is no catch. I believe you’ll be exclusively working for us, and get exclusive rewards. I’ve been around four times longer than you’ve been alive kid, I know your type. If it’s power you want, this is the place to get it. I’ll be able to grant you access to rare dungeons and unlimited floors in the capital’s labyrinth. The resources the Association can provide will be beyond your wildest dreams.”

I clench my jaw while looking into the old man’s eyes. Everything he says seems reasonable... This all just sounds too good to be true...

Was it all just a sick delusional fantasy that they’d be slave drivers here? I’m not even sure where I got that idea in the first place... Was it Rodrigo? Was he just trying to scare me for the fun of it...? No.

It’s just because he doesn’t see my true value. That must be it. I fooled him.

I followed the A-Class’ advice, not to make myself too desirable. I stood out just enough to make it seem like I’m not hiding a thing.

Maybe joining up with the government wouldn’t be such a bad idea. The only hard part is, I’ll have to keep my powers even more hidden the higher up the ranks I climb...

Without them, I’d be stuck in D-Class or lower dungeons for the rest of my life. There’s no possible chance of trying any use of force here, that would be beyond dumb on so many levels. Using words is my best option.

After a long sigh, I reply.

“Okay. I’m interested. Let’s make a deal.”

With a grin, the old man reaches under his desk and takes out a pile of paperwork. He turns to his assistant, then to the A-Class sitting next to me.

“Samantha, thank you very much. It seems your skill wasn’t very necessary today, but it’s always a pleasure. Better safe than sorry. Rodrigo, this was your last task for our current deal. You’re free to leave or stay for the rank-up celebration if you please. I’ll send over notes to the main HQ to get your reward re-processed, you know we’ll take good care of you.”

Rodrigo gets up, shakes the Director’s hand, and turns to leave.

“It was nice meeting you, Jay. Welcome to the Association. Careful out there... As much as I hate to say it, I have a hunch we’ll be seeing each other again soon.”

He waves goodbye, and I muster out a “See ya!” As both him and Samantha get on the elevator and head downstairs.

I turn to the Director. He slides me a few different piles of paperwork along with my C-Class ID. I begin reading.

The low hum of the white mana shields all around fills my ears as we sit in silence. I slowly flip through the pages in front of me.

Over 40 minutes go by.

I’ve examined each section thoroughly and signed every page but the last one so far.

Honestly... This isn’t the kind of offer I expected at all, in a good way. These papers outline a 6-month non-exclusive contract. The only downside is, without Association’s approval I won’t be allowed into any dungeons above D-Class rated. For anything lower, I’ll be able to freely farm resources for myself or other guilds without restrictions.

The only mention of consistent pay is if I opt into weekly or monthly missions within an exclusive contract offer. This is a part of the contract I decided not to sign. It’s not mandatory for my non-exclusive deal, it’s just recommended for longer-term success within the organization.

My pay will be based on quotas. That’s it.

Apparently, there are resource farming quotas that need to be filled by teams as well as individual offers. Performance-based reward style pay is more up my alley. I’ll meet my team and get my first instructions after this meeting.

With a satisfied look on my face, I sign the final line at the bottom of the last page.

The Director smiles as I look up at him, then we shake hands.

“Welcome to the Association Jay, I can already tell we’ll be doing great business together in the future.”

“I think you’re right. Maybe I had the wrong idea about you all when I first stepped into this office. After the fact, I couldn’t have come up with a better offer myself. I look forward to working with you, Director.”

With that out of the way and a few more formal goodbyes, I take my new C-Class License and get into the elevator to head downstairs. The rank-up celebration is starting within an hour.



I press the button to the bottom floor, basically holding my breath the whole way down. I made it into the Association without exposing my secret... Maybe I can just live an ordinary life as a high-ranking hunter.

I'll have to be a lot more careful from now on.

I let out a sigh, then a light grin forms on my face. Things are looking up, today will be the start of my new life at the Association.

\*Ding\*

The elevator hits the bottom floor. My stomach drops, and the thin smile completely leaves my face as I see who is waiting to greet me.

It's a tall and slim young man with slightly blond hair. I remember him very well, and it seems he remembers me....

"Hey, hey! Could it be? Jay? It's me, Tripp! I knew I recognized the name, but never thought it'd be the same hunter. Who would have thought so many Dagger wielders would join the Association today, welcome aboard."

I blink a few times, staring at the excited man dressed in an Association get-up. He continues.

"Come on, follow me, the celebration is about to begin! I have to get you and your team situated before the event starts."

He turns and starts walking. I let out an audible gulp and follow close behind.

Does he not remember...? That we fought together while the exams were going on.... No... he said he recognized my name. Is he just that dense? Does he not see any red flags here?

A million questions race through my head as Tripp leads me through the crowd of hunters and businessmen. Sweat begins to form on my forehead and my stomach still feels like it's about to come out of my mouth.

The last few hours have been one crazy emotional rollercoaster. I can't seem to catch a break....

The moment I've been dreading for the last 15 seconds finally comes.

The blond-haired C-Class turns his head giving me a sly grin, while speaking in a low tone.

"It seems I know something the higher-ups don't. How exactly did you manage to meet me in the Dungeon Hub this weekend while simultaneously taking the exam?"

I swallow a mouthful of non-existent saliva, then begin to answer.

"I- I- have a good reason for this. It's just best we don't go into detail... Here of all places."

I shift my eyes back and forth, making sure no one is paying any particularly close attention to us.

Tripp rolls his eyes and smiles.

“Fine, fine. Keep your secrets for now, but I will find out eventually. I’m no snitch, but I always get what I want. Anyways, I’ll be your team’s guide for the first few days to make sure you’re all headed in the right direction. Double overtime pay baby!”

He makes quick eye contact with me, clearly excited about his extra pay, then turns to keep walking through the crowd.

I let out an exhale, feeling a little bit better. Tripp is not hostile... but definitely a bit annoying...

He leads me over to a door at the back of the lobby and opens it after scanning his ID on a pad above the handle. As I follow him inside, he starts giving me a lecture.

“So, first things first, this is the entrance to the hunter’s trade center. There are 5 doors at the back of the lobby, they all lead to the same place, so don’t overthink that part too much.”

I look around as we walk through a narrow hallway with a black-tiled floor and white walls humming with mana. Another door appears about 10m inside. Tripp scans his ID again, and we walk through.

“Here we are. This is where you’ll be getting your quota assignments, registering farmed materials, and buying or renting gear.”

As we walk in my eyes open wide to see a large open room with tall ceilings. The floor is still covered in black tiles, and the walls still remain white, but there are neon signs and lights filling my vision from all directions.

To my left, right, and center I see multiple rooms remodeled to look like open storefronts. They have signs with pink, blue, and green moving text that give general prices for buying and selling loot.

There are clear walls and floating shelves that hold shiny swords and various potions. Crystals and trinkets fill my vision along with thousands of questions filling my head.

There’s a credit exchange system that isn’t gold based, and it’s a bit hard to understand. I open my mouth while turning to Tripp, but he cuts me off before I can even get a word out.

“I know, I know. It’s a lot to take in. We’ll go through everything with your team very soon. It’ll make much more sense. Trust me.”

I just nod, wide-eyed taking in the view as I continue to follow Tripp through the mini shopping center. We make it to the other side and he scans his ID on yet another door. We walk through.

“This here, is our final stop of the tour. We call it the lounge.”

The two of us enter the last room, and I quietly take in the view. The name definitely suits it well.

The black tile floor is a common trend now, it stays the same. Surprisingly, the walls in this room are not mana reinforced, or at least they don’t seem to be.

There are two small-looking merchant stands built into both sides of the room. The one to my right seems to be a cafe selling drinks and small food items. The larger setup to my left is a medium-scale restaurant, it looks like they sell a variety of foods.

The center of the room is filled with tables, couches, odd-looking beanbag-shaped chairs, and about 3 dozen hunters to go with it.

Everyone here is reading, sharing casual conversation, and well... for a lack of better words... lounging around.

Tripp grins as I scan over the private resting area for Association workers, then speaks up as a group of 3 starts walking toward us.

“Looks like the rest of your team has come to greet you.”

I turn my head to see who he’s talking about, then let out a light gasp. Arie, Maria, and Abby come walking toward me in full Hunter’s Association Uniforms.

This day just keeps getting weirder.

Chapter 126

Maria is the first to run at me with arms outstretched.

"Jay! Where have you been? We couldn't find you at the hotel earlier this morning! Where'd you run off to?!"

I let out an awkward laugh, dodging the question as Maria throws herself onto me. She smiles while finishing her long hug and backing up to look me in the eyes.

"I wanted to tell you before I left this morning, but like I said, you were gone. I joined the association too! I couldn't just leave you here all alone! Plus they gave me a pretty good offer."

I nod, looking her up and down.

"It seems that way. Aren't you contracted with the Pace guild exclusively though?"

"Well... Yeah, but they let me sign a non-exclusive supplement contract. All dungeons D-Class and below can be farmed with the guild, while higher level areas will be strictly Association business."

"My contract is very similar."

Maria stands in front of me smiling ear to ear. My gaze shifts to Arie and Abby.

The green-haired girl looks like she's in her natural habitat here. A few people passing by smile and say hi as they come and leave, they already know her. Abby looks over at me.

"Welcome to the Association Jay. It isn't exactly like the warm welcome I received on my first day, but I'm glad you're here. I have an exclusive contract if you were curious. Mandatory missions are set up for me and I'm paid accordingly. My newest job is to be a part of this extraction squad. So, we'll be working together a lot from now on."

I give her a kind nod, but Arie speaks up before I can get any words out.

"Same goes for me. I signed an exclusive contract too. Different terms, but the same style of agreement. I'll be on this extraction squad. I'm glad it's you 3, trusting another group of new recruits would be a bit more difficult."

I look back and forth at my 3 new teammates in front of me, not knowing exactly what to say.

Sure, we worked together during the exams and I've even trained with Abby and Maria a few times, but after I hit C-Class I was expecting to go straight back to solo Dungeon Diving. Continuing to work with a team will be a change of pace... Arie is right about one thing, I'm glad it's them and not a group of randoms thrown together by the Association.

I let out a long exhale, then speak up.

"Well, I'm glad we'll all be working together too."

After this line Tripp steps in and has a word.

"Alright, I'll be showing the 4 of you around for a little while. I'm part of a similar group, we do weekly missions and fill certain quotas. The higher-ups told me your squad will most likely be a bit more aggressive for the harder missions. More power to ya I guess!"

He grins.

"Follow me, let's get you all situated with your duties, then we'll join the party upstairs. The second-floor banquet hall will be filled with hunters and executives within the hour. It's tradition, rather boring... but there's always good food and drinks, so we'll have to check it out."

Light on his feet, the blond dagger wielder turns and starts walking toward the door that we just entered. He motions for the rest of us to follow, so we do without another word.

There are no locks on the doors from the inside, they just click open with a slight push. All 5 of us make our way through into the bright-colored mini market. Immediately, my eyes are drawn to all the moving lights again. Tripp points to a smaller storefront at the back of the room.

"Come on, this way."

As we get closer, a short middle-aged woman with white hair and bright blue eyes begins waving to us with an overly energetic smile on her face.

"Tripp, how ya doin'? Are these another new group of recruits?"

He replies with a greeting, then steps out of the way to let us all introduce ourselves one by one. Afterward, the woman eagerly replies.

"Well it's nice to meet the lot of you, it seems we'll be doing a whole lot of business in the future. My name is Sophia Greenday, but you can just call me Sophie. Got it?"

The four of us nod as the short white-haired woman starts sifting through a bunch of small shimmering tablets. They glow with silver and white light and are about the size of an ID card. Finally, she looks up.

"Here, each of you, take your quota counters. You'll track your progress there and hand them back in at the end of every weekly or monthly cycle... Or don't hand them in at all, you just won't get paid, it's not like I care."

She lets out a laugh, then continues.

"Anyways, take a look. We have a pretty simple first week. Usually, we'd stack a few individual tasks in with the team tasks, but the director picked this one out specifically for you four."

I look down at the small rectangular card. It reads out a few lines of text.

---

[Jay Soju]

[Available Credits]: 0

[C-Class]

[Team Weekly Quota]:

[Strengthening Fragments][0/10]

[Reward]: 5 Credits

[Individual Weekly Quota]:

[NONE][0/0]

[Reward]: 0 Credits

---

I mumble under my breath.

"Strengthening fragments? What are these...?"

Tripp peeks over at my card and lets out a gulp, then looks at Sophie wide-eyed.

"Is the director crazy!? I know he said this squad would be on the lookout for some aggressive missions, but strengthening fragments? Those are only found in the Great Plains Dungeon... My squad doesn't even train there ever since the incident... Titans are wildly unpredictable! Is this really-"

The white-haired woman cuts him off.

"That's what the Director ordered. It's not like I make the rules around here, I just pay people for following them."

I continue to stare down at the shimmering card for a moment. There are so many questions to ask... but Sophie continues talking.

"Anyways, I know some of you are new here, so let me explain how this works. First things first, your team's weekly Quota. As Tripp kindly mentioned, Strengthening Fragments are only found in the Great Plains Dungeon. Just flash your C-Class cards at the Dungeon Hub and you'll be able to get in with no problem."

We all stand in a line, watching her wave her short arms as she speaks.

"Strengthening Fragments look like this."

Sophie rummages around in a few drawers until finally lifting up a small black gem in front of her face. The coin-sized crystal gives off a small shimmer, reflecting the neon lights around us a little, but overall it's a pretty dull-looking rock.

"In The Great Plains, most of the normal mobs will drop one of these once every thousand kills or so."

Abby jumps in Immediately after hearing this statement.

"A thousand? So you're telling me we have to kill over ten thousand C-Class monsters?!"

Sophie laughs and places the gem down in front of her.

"Well, there are some stronger monsters the further in you travel. Mutants aren't too uncommon, they have a ten times more likely drop rate. They may be your best bet for quicker farming."

I stare straight down at the card, still thinking over a few things said earlier. While raising my head to meet the white-haired woman's gaze, I speak up.

"Two questions. What are these credits for, and what are Titans? The monsters Tripp mentioned before..."

Sophie grins.

"Well, the credit reward displayed on your card is 5 for this task. If all of you together can farm 10 Strengthening Fragments, that reward will be paid out to each of you individually. So, 20 credits in total for the group. Credits may be exchanged for 1 gold coin each, or used as currency at any Hunters Association-run shop. The value is nearly doubled if used to buy gear or materials from the shops. Credits can only be spent or exchanged for gold, it's impossible to buy more."

She crosses her arms and looks at Tripp with a smirk, then back to me.

"Titans... They're more of a myth these days because no one is stupid enough to go deep into that dungeon to fight them anymore. Titans are enormous creatures that spawn at the back of the Great Plains Dungeon. There was a pretty bad squad wipe that happened a few years back, a bunch of high-level C-Class and some B-Class hunters just disappeared... The only explanation was the Titans, so most people have just stayed clear of it since. They're pretty odd creatures, and almost impossible to kill. If by chance you see one, you'll know what it is, and what to do.... Run."

The 4 of us stand there in silence, but Tripp chimes in to break the awkward tension moments later.

"Just don't venture too deep in, like Sophie said, they reside deep in the dungeon...."

She replies.

"Their Strengthening Fragment drop rate is almost 100% though!"

Tripp lets out a sigh, rolling his eyes as Sophie finishes up her speech.

"To be clear, you don't have to all work together. Your squad has a unique contract. Each of you just has to submit the requested farmed loot to me or one of the Association run shops within the week. Once all 10 Strengthening Fragments have been collected the reward will automatically hit your account and a new quota will appear. It seems none of you have individual tasks this week, so you don't have to worry about that. It's rather self-explanatory though"

Tripp nods.

"The Director is definitely trying to power level you 4. That's the only explanation I can think of. It'll be a brutal week of training..."

I place the shimmering card in my item box, and my teammates do the same. The blond-haired C-Class turns with a smile toward the door.

"Well, on that note, thanks Sophie, great seeing you. Let's head off to the rank-up celebration, I'm starving!"

He begins to walk away toward the exit. With a few words and waves of goodbye, the 4 of us follow. We leave the mini shopping area, walk through the narrow hallway back into the lobby, then make our way upstairs.

The crowd from earlier has mostly dispersed. Hunters and executives have made their way up to the second floor. The four of us follow Tripp to the elevator to do the same.

I'm not in much of a mood to celebrate again... Last night was more than enough partying for me.

Whatever this rank-up event turns out to be, I'm going to do whatever I can to leave early. The only thing on my mind right now is The Great Plains Dungeon...

To be more specific, the Titans. A new mysterious unbeatable opponent... I'm itching to see what a fight with one of these monsters is like.

## Chapter 127

The 5 of us board the elevator, and Tripp taps on the "Floor 2" option shown on the digital screen.

After a few seconds of waiting, we rise to the floor above us. With a ding, the door opens and we enter the banquet hall.

It's a long and wide room with dozens of circular tables and a large stage at the back. There's a live band dressed in all white setting up for a performance. Immediately, we're greeted by a beautiful young woman carrying tall glasses of Champagne.

"Welcome, welcome. Please take a drink and make yourselves comfortable. More guests will be arriving soon."

Politely, we all take a drink each.

I look around the room to see people of all shapes and sizes. It's split about 50/50 between hunters and executives in here. Using inspect, I find the average hunter is between levels 270 and 320. Almost all of them are C-Class applicants that passed the exam.

Most of the staff serving food and drinks are around level 20 to 70. The executives in suits are leveled at random. The bulk of them are between levels 100 and 200, but there are exceptions to this rule. A few level 400+ retired hunters come into my field of vision.

It's pretty clear even without my inspect skill, they wear enchanted rings and very expensive suits. The C-Class executives stand out in the crowd.

Arie is doing the same as me, taking in the view of people around us, but for an entirely different reason. He grins and raises his glass to meet mine.

\*clink\*

"Cheers Jay. Congrats on ranking up. It's time for me to get busy. My day of networking is about to begin."

He lifts the drink to his lips and gulps down the entire thing in seconds. With a swift turn, Arie places his empty glass on a passing waitress' silver tray while grabbing another from a woman walking in the opposite direction.

He walks straight over to one of the men I scanned at level 439 and begins introducing himself.

I take a sip of my drink and give him a light nod of respect. Maria turns to me as the fizzy drink rolls down my tongue.

“Hey, Jay! Abby and I are going to check out the musicians and find some seats!”

The blond and green-haired girls stare at me with excited looks in their eyes, I chuckle.

“Don't let me hold you two back, go have fun! I'll be taking care of some business too.”

They both run off, leaving me alone in the center of the crowded room with Tripp. I hear idle chatter all around. Drinks clang against each other and laughter along with talk of money and contracts fills my ears. I zone out, letting the room fall silent, just alone in my own thoughts.

This old habit of mine... Daydreaming at the most awkward times imaginable. Reflexively, I gulp down the rest of my drink to get into an even fuzzier head space. It's not that I hate being around people... I just... would rather not be around them at all sometimes. Large groups like this in a closed-off space with no plans of leaving give me a weird feeling.

I gulp, realizing my MP is slowly dropping for some reason...

Snapping out of my moment of peace, I let out a long exhale realizing my [Self Regeneration] skill's passive trait just kicked in: Poison Resistance. I murmur to myself.

“I can't even get drunk...”

With a frown across my face, I continue scanning the room, silently judging everyone that walks by.... This is not going to be a fun ceremony.

I roll my eyes and place my glass on a server's tray that's passing by, letting out another low-pitched “I don't want to be here” sounding groan.

Tripp throws his hand over my shoulder.

“You know, you can leave if you want. This is supposed to be a fun event for new hunters looking to make a name for themselves in the Association. If you don't want any part in it, feel free to go, I can cover for you.”

I perk up.

“Really?”

He points to the elevator.

“Yeah, just leave if you want. No one's forcing you to stay. Just make sure to meet up in the lobby tomorrow morning, around 9. I'll be surveying your first dive. The rest of



my squad may come along too, I swear the Director is trying to get me killed... The Great Plains are no joke."

Before Tripp finishes his sentence I've already turned and waved goodbye.

With a grin across my face from ear to ear I board the elevator, make my way down to the lobby, and walk straight out the front door. The mid-day sun shines on my face as I walk toward the Dungeon Hub without hesitation.

If it's not mandatory, I'm totally ditching that party.

The only reason I took this Hunter's Exam in the first place was so I could fight more powerful monsters. Maybe it took an unexpected turn, I joined the Association... but now I can get back to business!

It's time to go Dungeon Diving again.

As I approach the Hub, I make my way toward the C-Class gate. A couple of heads turn as I approach the guard in front of the moving stairs. Thinking about all the times I watched higher-class hunters enter this gate makes me feel pretty cool right now.

The guard on duty takes my ID.

"Are you a new C-Class? I haven't seen you enter this gate before."

"I am, ranked up today actually."

He hands my license back to me, raising an eyebrow but showing me a bright smile.

"Oh yeah? Congrats. As a solo hunter, I'd recommend trying out the High Ogre or High Orc dungeons. Even the Yeti Dungeon could be a good fit. They're good for farming mana crystals and combat items. Most of the high-grade dungeons aren't touched much these days, only an occasional B-Class team comes in and clears them on order from the Association to keep breaks to a minimum. Anyways, who am I to tell a C-Class what to do? I'm sure you've got a plan for today."

I nod firmly, walking passed the guard.

"I appreciate it, have a good day!"

I walk down to the C-Class platform. It's completely empty today. My footsteps echo around the underground train station as I walk over to the Dungeon List.

The 3 dungeons that the guard mentioned earlier are on the top of the low-grade list. There are only 7 C-Class dungeons available here in total... 5 of them are low-grades, and 2 are high-grades. There's no in-between, this is a lot less to pick from than the old D-Class platform. There are dozens over there.

I smirk, reading out "The Great Plains" as one of the options on the high-grade list. Immediately, I walk over to the pickup point to wait for a train.

Less than 5 minutes later, my ride comes and I board to make my way over to the dungeon. Still, no other hunters are in sight. I'm all alone in the C-Class raids today, everyone else must be on duty or at the celebration.

After watching the cement walls fly by outside my window, I finally arrive and make my way up the escalator to see the floating portal in the small isolated room.

I reach into my item storage and take out both of my new daggers, this will be the perfect opportunity to test them out. I jump through the spinning mass of energy and enter The Great Plains.

A wave of hot dry air hits my face as I enter the dungeon. It's nowhere near as hot as the final floor of the labyrinth, but still noticeably different than the outside world.

I step forward to hear a light crunch, then look down to see sun-bleached grass and small dried-up shrubs along the arid climate's ground. There are hills that rise and fall in the distance, making it hard to see how far out this dungeon really goes outward. Occasionally, a small tree with very few leaves no more than 5m high disrupts the nearly flat ground stretching off to the horizon.

While gripping both of my bright red daggers tightly, the trek deep into this dungeon begins.

I activate enemy detection and inspect. Sending my feelers out into the dungeon, I try expanding my range with the All-Seeing Eye ability. Seconds after I do, the first oddity of this dungeon begins to sink in.

While usually it just takes a few seconds to feel out 3km or so of dungeon radius, this one is a lot different. It just keeps on going... The first enemies I sense are around 1km away, then more 3-5km out, but it doesn't stop... 10km out, there's more... 20km out... even more, 30km... I hit a mental wall.

I turn off my perception ability to reach into my item storage and plunder the MP from a few mana crystals. This dungeon seems endless, I can't even find the back side of it with a full bar of mana. I smirk and murmur under my breath.

"So, these are The Great Plains."

Shifting my walking direction slightly, I head off toward my first opponent.

[1200m]

[Lv. 311]

The dirt beneath my feet is a light color brown, and there's a nice cool breeze that teases me every few minutes. The gusts of air are almost refreshing, but leave me wanting more as the sun beats down from above.

The walk is pretty peaceful, but I'm ready for some action.

Finally, a monster comes into view. It's already noticed me from a distance and is charging, spinning up a dust cloud in its wake. I use Appraisal to see exactly what I'm dealing with.

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Active Items:

[Ironclad Armor Set] +1000 Defense

[Rhino's Crushing Horn] +700 Strength

Active Skills:

Berserker

Body Hardening [Special Grade]

---

A large creature, over 6m long and 4m tall comes barreling toward me in shining black armor, glowing red with angry eyes locked on me, radiating intent to kill.

It looks like an oversized rhinoceros, with a huge white horn sticking out of its nose pointing straight ahead. The monster's body is covered in veins and dense muscles that bulge out of its heavy armor set. Grunts and a deep bellowing roar erupt from its mouth as it gets closer.

I begin to glow with a combination of red and golden light while imbuing my daggers with mana and wind magic.

My first fight in The Great Plains is about to begin.

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The enormous rhino creature charges at me on all fours glowing red from its berserker skill. It's covered in black armor along with shining body-hardening crystals from its second skill.

I grit my teeth and grip my wind-imbued daggers to match its energy, it's time to finally test these blades out. I take a deep breath while focusing my mana deep within the dual daggers.

It's much easier to control mana with my All-Seeing Eye active, plus all the practice I've gotten from charging up my fire-imbued sword helps a lot. The mana mixed with dense wind energy begins to swirl around inside blades as they glow with white light. Just like my long sword, these weapons have an ego of their own as well. They want to fly, their natural instinct is to release the immense winds within them.

The twin blades erupt with energy. I thrust them downwards to the sides of my body, forcing the wind magic to slice into the ground on either side of me. The brutal force of the attack blows dirt and stone in all directions as I fly up into the air. With minor corrections from my own wind summoning, I use this boost of speed to hurdle myself toward the approaching monster.

The beast grunts, raising its massive horn in the air as I fall down at it with blinding speed. Layers of dense wind cover my body, along with both my blades. Focusing straight ahead, aiming my attack directly at the creature before me, I let out a yell and release a dazzling wave of silver light.

A crescent of shimmering wind energy leaves both my daggers to form a single attack. It glistens and shines, making the dense pocket of wind magic look like a shining silver sword flying through the air.

\*SHINGGGG\*

My laser focus doesn't budge for even a second. With both eyes locked on the charging beast, I watch my new blades' first attack slice the monster in two like a hot wire melting through foam.

I land on the ground with a loud thud cracking the ground in front of the fallen beast.

It didn't stand a chance....

Grinning while twirling my still glowing blades, I admire my work as the two halves of a massive monster settle and its blood soaks into the dry ground. The red glow of its berserker skill dissipates as I watch its mass disappear over the next minute or so.

It drops a heavy mana crystal, but nothing else. I toss it into my item storage and begin wandering deeper into the dungeon.

“Well... That was a disappointment. At least I have a better feel for my new blades now.”

Sophie said there were 3 tiers of monsters in this dungeon. The regular mobs, the mutants, and the Titans.

Using enemy detection, I begin to locate and obliterate every stray monster in my path. The rhinos mostly travel alone, but the deeper I venture in, the more likely they are to travel in groups. In just under 2 hours I travel 10km into the dungeon and defeat 14 monsters. So far, all they drop are mana crystals, nothing else.

I continue onward until a much higher level pops up on my enemy detection radar.

[800m]

[Lv. 377]

[Lv. 313]

[Lv. 312]

[Lv. 310]

“Looks like I found my first mutant.”

With an eager grin plastered across my face, I start air-stepping in the direction of the 4 newly spotted monsters. I'll finally get some real action.

A few minutes later the groups of creatures come into full view as I climb over a small desolate hill. I see 3 similar monsters to the ones I've been fighting, the lower-level beasts are the first to charge. Immediately, they begin sprinting toward me. A dust cloud forms and the ground shakes, but I match their attack and lunge in to begin our battle.

The 3 disposable pawns are taken out in an instant. As the dust clears, I see a pair of glowing red eyes approach. I use Appraisal on the level 377 mutant in front of me to gauge the strength of my opponent.

---

Active Items:

[Rhino Commander's Ironclad Armor Set] +1100 Defense

[Rhino Commander's Crushing Horn] +900 Strength

[Rhino Commander's Battle Axe] +500 Strength

[Rhino Commander's Battle Axe] +500 Strength

Active Skills:

Berserker

Body Hardening [Special Grade]

Extreme Strength

---

\*THUDDD\*

\*THUDDD\*

\*THUDDD\*

A 5m tall humanoid creature glows a red and golden light, similar to my own. It has a body just like a High Ogre, quick and agile looking, but still bulky and strong. Its tough hide is that of a rhinoceros and its head matches the theme. A massive horn juts out right below its eyes.

It carries two silver axes, one in each hand. They're both larger than my entire body and the monster swings them around with ease. The beast lets out a roar releasing a murderous aura while glaring down at me. This mutant half-man half-rhino is ready to battle. Luckily, so am I.

Without hesitation, I make my move. Charging up my daggers, I let out an attack powerful enough to slice its minions in two. The shimmering crescent of energy flies through the air toward the monster's open neck. It raises both axes and deflects my attack with a loud grunt and a roar as the wave of wind spirals up into the air.

It turns to me and launches an attack of its own.

With axes held steady, and body-hardening crystals covering its vital points, the monster makes its move.

\*CLANGGGG\*

I catch its two shining twin axes with my own in mid-air. I grit my teeth and use all the strength and wind magic in my arsenal to push the monster's attack away, but it's no use... The two massive blades slowly sink down toward me as the beast overpowers my defense with brute strength.

Erupting into flames, I try to push back using every buff and skill I have. The silver axes come closer and closer. I let out a sigh and a grunt, realizing I'll have to fight with my head.

"Dungeon Walker."

Instantly, I vanish from beneath the monster's weapons and appear behind it releasing a full-powered wind attack from my daggers.

Completely caught off guard, the mutant creature takes an unexpected wind slash to the back. It lets out an angry and confused roar as black fragments of body hardening crystals shatter into the air and a bloody gash opens up between a gap in its armor.

I smirk while teleporting to its opposite side as it angrily turns around with axes ready to strike at me again. Another shimmering crest of wind magic comes flying out of my twin daggers, hitting the

clueless monster in another armor gap. It lets out a roar as black crystals shatter into the air and red blood trickles down its sides.

The beast turns again, immediately spotting me after the attack. I teleport to its blind spot to release another brutal strike. Over and over, I let out powerful attacks with my new blades. This monster isn't dumb, and it's the furthest thing from weak... I'm just a lot faster and much more agile. It doesn't stand a chance against my quickness and teleportation skill.

Over half a dozen wind slashes later, the monster begins to slow down even more. It begins having trouble holding its axes steady and its breaths become audible between grunts of pain. Another half dozen wind slashes later and it falls to its knees.

I stand 10m in front of the mutant humanoid rhino and point both my blades at the thoroughly defeated monster. Concentrating mana and wind magic into the center of both blades I slowly bring them toward each other until they meet with a light metallic clink.

The blades merge into one heavy dagger, and I charge up the final attack.

Glowing bright white, I take a deep breath in and out before bringing the blade across my body to release a ripple of glimmering silver energy.

In the blink of an eye, the attack soars through the air and slices through the bloodied mutant's neck with ease.

\*THUDDD\*

Its head falls to the floor as I power down my skills and twirl my dagger around my right hand.

[Level Up]

I patiently wait for the monster to dissolve, but it drops nothing but a mana crystal behind. I pick up the stone with a bit of disappointment and throw it in my item storage. While activating enemy detection again, I continue my trek deeper into this never-ending dungeon.

That gave me a little rush, but still, there's been no opponents worth my time.

Just over 2 more hours go by... I travel another 15km in and fight 6 more mutants along with their underlings. I've gained 4 more levels, bringing me to 357, but the only loot drops so far have been mana crystals.

The further in I travel, the tougher these mutants get, but they're still no match at all for me. I'm hoping to find one of these so-called un-killable "Titans" but I haven't had any luck.

My enemy detection skill is even acting up. Every time I try to scan for more enemies, weird chunks of dungeon space don't show up on my mind's eye radar. It's like they don't exist, or are being blocked from detection. I've experienced weird dungeon phenomena before, but usually, there is a good explanation. This just makes no sense.

I keep walking up and down the rising and falling hills hoping to come across an enemy that will put up a good fight... or even one of these mutants to drop one of those strengthening fragments. For all the hype this dungeon received, it's been a pretty boring experience so far.

Letting out a long sigh, I continue onward.

"The deeper I go, the higher the chance I'll find one of these things right? .... right?"

The hills keep bending up and down as I follow the horizon line in front of me. I'm not too worried about getting lost or going too far in, I can just Dungeon Walk back to the entrance at any time.

Another hour goes by. No more mutants or regular mobs attack me at all. The air has a unique mana consistency to it now, similar to a dungeon break. If I concentrate hard enough, it almost sounds like the dungeon around me is humming....

The eerie sensation of being watched comes over me suddenly. Even with my All-Seeing Eye activated, I can't sense the presence of anything nearby.

"This is odd..."

I look around, but there's nothing in sight...

I clench my jaw and reach into my item box to grab my sword. Switching my dagger to my left hand, I grip both weapons tightly and get ready for a fight.

Something is definitely nearby.

Erupting into flames and scanning every bit of dungeon space around me I prepare for the worst. Maybe it's like one of those giant Cyclops? Or a Minotaur creature? It could even be an even more mutated form of the Rhino monsters I've been facing. All I know is they're apparently really big and really scary. The anticipation is killing me!

Then, I see it...

Coming up from behind a hill in the distance, an impossibly huge figure walks toward me. It appears out of nowhere. My enemy detection skill didn't see it coming at all, but it's definitely here now.

I crane my neck up to the sky as the shadow of a humanoid monster casts its presence over me.

It's easily 30m tall, and completely void of any defining feature. A black mass of energy in the shape of human approaches without making a sound... Looking into any part of its body feels like I'm staring into the abyss. Its giant feet crack the ground as it approaches, but the dirt and rock that fly off in all directions are eerily silent.

Its long legs move slowly, but it covers a lot of ground with every step. The humming sensation of dense mana in the air increases dramatically as the Titan rhythmically swings its long jet-black arms back and forth while walking straight toward me. The monster is carving out a valley of destruction behind it, throwing massive chunks of earth and stone into the air like it's kicking up dust.

How did I not sense it coming? What is this thing, and how is this possible...? I gulp, gripping my weapons and charging them both up to glow with white and red light.

Activating Inspect, Appraisal, and Enemy Detection, the skills finally get a reading on this creature as it comes within range.

[250m]

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[Lv. 400]

Active Items:

[NONE]

Active Skills:

[NONE]

Bufs:

[Titan's Domain] Hidden Ability

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“So this... is a Titan...”

Chapter 129

The impossibly huge humanoid monster made of odd dark energy continues to crack the ground as it walks toward me in silence. An unnerving hum of intense mana fills my senses as the air around me gets denser and denser with a tingling magic sensation.

A Titan. This is the creature that Tripp and Sophie warned me about, the monster I've been looking for this whole time.

“Finally, I'll get to go all out.”

Readying my sword and dagger, I activate all of my stat-boosting skills to glow with a golden-red light. The slow-moving Titan doesn't even seem to register my presence... Or, at least, I can't tell if it does.

The emotionless mass of energy the size of a 10-story building trudges forward in my general direction. I begin running full speed ahead toward it. Every step I take makes the humming tone of mana grow louder and the density of magic in the air begins to make my joints tingle.

I erupt into flames, covering myself in a barrier of thick fire and wind magic allowing me to continue my charge forward. After less than half a minute, I get within range to release an attack.

Swinging both my sword and dagger, I let out a dual attack containing two crescents of white and red magic. They soar through the air, as the ominous figure in the distance stays true to its march.

My jaw drops as my attack hits the anomaly before my eyes...

Both of my attacks collide with the monster's mid-section but disappear on impact. The creature doesn't even flinch, it continues slowly moving forward without a moment's hesitation.

I grit my teeth and let out another high-powered attack with both my blades.

My high-powered energy attacks that previously sliced mutants in half like butter collide with this menace and vanish into thin air.

My heart skips a beat. I can't tell if it's fear or excitement. All I know is, this is not going to be easy.

With a smirk, I dart off to the right side. Some new positioning will give me a clear look at all of its angles, maybe there's an obvious weakness somewhere. Using my wind magic to increase my travel speed, I make my way around the Titan as it draws even nearer. I'm less than 50m away from the beast, and the ground shakes with every step it takes.



I assume, It still hasn't noticed me. The humming in my ears is giving me a minor headache, and the energy in the air feels like a full-blown dungeon break. Letting out a yell, I release another dual attack at the monster's legs.

Yet again, all the magic I throw at it immediately disappears into nothingness on impact.

It cracks the hard ground while continuing in a steady straight line forward. I run in even closer. If magic won't work, maybe physical attacks will be the only option.

The long black leg of the creature is less than 15m away now. With one long step, it could crush me under its foot from where it stands. Still, even up close there are no distinguishable features, looking at any part of its body is like staring into an endless abyss of darkness.

I clench my jaw and lunge in for any attack. The Titan steps forward, and I launch another full power strike. With both blades swinging bright with magic, I take a long slice at the monster's open leg.

My eyes widen as I feel my blades cut through the air. That's right, the air.... My red and white glowing weapons just slip through the Titan's dark flesh without making a sound or even drawing a drop of blood. I would even call it flesh, it's more like an illusion of flesh. This beast is a walking black hole.

I react by bursting into flames and shooting advanced fire magic all the way up its leg, but it's futile. All of my attacks just go right through this mysterious black blob of matter and disappear into the void.

The hum of mana is so intense up close, I can barely hear myself think. I try one last move.

“Plunderer.”

I let out a surprised gasp as the sweet sensation of newly plundered mana enters my body. Finally, I found its weakness. If this creature runs out of MP, I'm sure this ability's defensive effects will wear off eventually. I'll get to see its true form.

The Titan's leg begins to move as it takes another long stride. I air-step backward and begin positioning myself for another opportunity to plunder its mana. The giant takes a step and I lunge in to plunder more MP.

The sensation of its mana entering my body continues without a hitch. I activate my All-Seeing Eye, wondering if I'll be able to track its exact remaining mana stores. I've never tried to suck a monster dry of MP before, so this will be a first.

I let out an audible gulp as my perception ability activates. I whisper under my breath while decreasing my plunderer skill's intensity, losing motivation...

“There's.... no end....”

The dense swirling pit of mana before my eyes is like nothing I've ever seen or even thought of before. The outer layer of its body acts as a buffer to keep reality out of the mini pocket dimension of pure mana inside of it. Swirling clouds of pure white and pink mana look similar to the borders of my own spacial magic skill. A pocket dimension of seemingly endless mana.

The absurdity of how deep its MP stores go is baffling, I deactivate my All-Seeing Eye completely. Staring into the abyss might make someone crazy, but trying to absorb all of its energy would make them absolutely insane.

I'm not too sure which one I'll become by the end of this battle...

I jump backward as the monster takes another step. My heart is racing and the hum of mana in the air mixed with the nightmare I just laid eyes upon makes my headache even worse. I swallow hard, take a deep breath, and create some distance between myself and the Titan mindlessly walking forward.

"What... is this thing....?"

As I air-step further away, its dense aura fades and the humming dies down. I let out a sigh of relief and try to refocus my thoughts.

The Titan takes another step. I watch its massive foot crack the hard ground throwing dirt and rock in all directions.

This gives me an idea.... With a smirk, I ready myself for round two.

I Dungeon Walk in front of the marching behemoth. Lucky for me, it's walking in a direction I've already traveled so my teleportation skills work like a charm.

I place my sword into item storage while separating my dagger into its original twin blades form. I need pure wind energy for this attack. Charging up the two blades with every last drop of my available MP, I release an enormous crest of silver and white shimmering light at the monster's feet as it takes its next step forward.

The surge of energy I unleash warps the surrounding air as it hurtles toward the ground. It collides with the titan's foot, connecting with the solid earth in perfect synchronicity. A white flash blinds me as the wind magic expands and releases its energy on impact. Rocks and dirt fly everywhere and a massive crater is formed beneath the approaching Titan's step.

I brace myself for what's coming while grinning ear to ear. The monster's long black leg continues to step down into the hole my wind magic has created. It mindlessly falls into my trap as I closely watch the events before me unfold.

The 30m tall Titan's featureless face falls forward. I grab a mana crystal from my storage, plunder its MP, and Dungeon Walk back another 50m or so to watch the enormous monster fall to the ground.

I let out a laugh raising my daggers in the air. The battle isn't over yet, but actually landing some kind of physical damage on this thing feels great!

It almost looks like it's falling in slow motion. The titan's arms slowly move up to brace itself for impact, and its legs slightly bend to lessen the fall.

I'm eagerly waiting to see what happens.

The hum of mana begins to get louder. I gulp, realizing from almost 100m away the magic's intensity feels like I'm standing right in front of it again...

Maybe it wasn't the greatest Idea to piss off an ominous black mass of unexplainably near-infinite energy.

I twirl my blades in my hands, getting ready for whatever it throws at me. Its featureless face is still on a crash course for the hard ground and I can't miss the show. If something goes wrong here, I have plenty of time to teleport away.

The closer the monster gets to the ground the more the humming sound of dense mana around me increases... It's becoming a metallic-sounding buzz at this point. The hair on my neck and arms stands straight up. The only thing I can hear is the vibration of distorted mana in the air, and the anticipation is killing me. My heart pounds harder the closer it gets...

Finally, it hits the ground with an earth-shaking thud.

My eyes open wide as I watch a shockwave of black energy erupt from its body. The humming mass is moving toward me at speeds too fast to comprehend. It ruptures the ground, throwing mountain-sized chunks of rocks bigger than the Titan in all directions.

For hundreds of meters, the ground is covered in a veil of black energy.

I hardly let out a yell before it fully engulfs me. Gripping my blades and yelling into a silent void of darkness, the sensation of falling comes over me...

I try to use Dungeon Walker, but every pathway is blocked in my mind's eye. I'm in an isolated void of darkness with no way out. All it took was fractions of a second to trap me when I thought I'd trapped it. I'm way out of my league here and there is nothing I can do. My stomach churns as it slowly gets used to the feeling of weightlessness.

I yell, but I can't hear a thing. My breathing is heavy, but it slows down as I calm down and assess the situation. Twisting my body around in mid-air as I fall, there's nothing but darkness. The overwhelming smell here is metallic, like high-voltage electricity.

Activating my All-Seeing Eye, a few things start to become a bit more clear.

I'm surrounded by the same energy the Titan is made of. I was so far away from the monster, yet it still trapped me. How is this possible? Did I fall into a random dungeon anomaly? Is this all just a hallucination? No....

The most likely scenario is that I've fallen into its Hidden Ability. The Titan's Domain.

A small white light appears below me as I continue to fall.

## Chapter 130

The white light below me continues to grow as I fall further down into the endless void.

I try activating Dungeon Walker over and over, but it's no use. This prison of darkness is inescapable, it's the same sensation of nothingness all around me as when I tried to sense way too deep into the dungeon using my enemy detection skill. Now that I'm inside this energy I can get a better grasp on its vastness.

It wasn't that there was nothing to sense, it was that there was way too much of it. According to all my perception skills, the outside world doesn't even exist anymore... I'm trapped within the Titan's Domain. The vast realm of energy surrounding me is way too immense for me to comprehend.

Almost a full 3 minutes pass as I continue to fall. At this point, I've given up on trying to slow my descent or escape my fate whatsoever. The only thing on my mind is bracing for impact. That white light below me is getting larger and larger, meaning whatever is down there is getting closer and closer.

My skills still work, they're just isolated in this odd pocket of space. I activate my body harden crystals, try to slow my fall with wind magic, and to top it all off, constantly plunder MP from my surroundings. The air is rich with mana, I can absorb it indefinitely, but that can't exactly help me in my current predicament.

Gritting my teeth, I continue to fall. The tiny pinhole-sized beam of light below me has grown to look more like a handheld sports ball now. It's growing faster than before, but my frame of reference is skewed. There's not exactly much for me to compare it to in this pitch-black abyss.

Another minute passes of constant MP plundering and futile attempts to slow my fall. The gravity in this pocket is not normal... No matter what I do, I'm pulled downward with an eerily overpowering force. The bright white light below me is about the size of a kid's pool now, and I can tell its shape more clearly. It's a long rectangular box and growing fast...

I hold my breath as the white light fills my field of vision. The darkness above fades away as I'm engulfed in white light.

The temperature shifts from cool black darkness to hot and dry light. The mana feels more refined and denser in here, it almost feels sharp like little pinpricks as I try to absorb it. So many sensations come over my body all at one time, it's hard to keep track of these changes or even explain anything that's going on around me... I just accept my fate and continue bracing my body for impact.

Finally, I land on something solid with a loud thud followed by a series of cracks. I feel my bones crunch as they hit an impossibly hard white floor. I still grip both my red daggers tightly as black body-hardening crystals shatter somewhat cushioning the fall. I try to lift myself with wind magic, but the damage has already been done. Letting out a loud grunt and a yell of agony, I lie on the ground for a moment in horrible pain. I watch the last portion of the black abyss fade away as the white ceiling closes shut overhead.

Coughing up mouthfuls of blood and regenerating a broken arm and leg, I get to my feet very slowly. While plundering the highly refined mana from the air and floor beneath my feet, I reach into my item storage to drink an HP potion while putting away my daggers.

I blink a few times, then take a few steps forward to hear the light echo of my boots against the marble-like floor below me. I gulp, looking around in every direction to see pure whiteness.

I run straight ahead into the void of whiteness... Less than 10 seconds later my face is met with a rudely placed white wall.

**\*THUD\***

Clenching my jaw I turn to my right and try running in this direction straight ahead too. Less than 5 seconds later, my forehead bounces off another not-so-pleasant white wall of refined mana. Using my wind magic, I air-step upwards to be met with a ceiling made of the same dense material.

It seems I'm stuck in a white rectangular box... It's about 100m long, 50m wide, and 20m tall. The void of darkness I was just falling through is nowhere to be seen. I yell out into the empty white room.

"Hello?? Wha-"

I stop mid-sentence as my voice echoes eerily around the walls fading into silence moments later.

The reality of my situation begins to sink in. Activating all my buffs, and perception-based skills including enemy detection and my All-Seeing Eye, I attempt to find a weak point or some clue of where exactly I am. Now that I'm not falling through endless space it'll be a bit easier to concentrate.

I sit down, take a deep breath. Activating my All-Seeing Eye, I slowly begin to expand my range. Taking in the MP around me using plunderer, I let my perception skill's range seep out as far as it can possibly go.

I'm struck with panic as a gut-wrenching realization comes over me yet again. I vividly remember that dense swirling mana surrounding me on all sides as I fell through darkness moments ago, but a white-walled barrier is blocking me from viewing it now on all sides. There's no exit anywhere in sight. It's like trying to break out of a dungeon without a portal to escape. I can sense that there is space beyond these walls, but trying to access it physically or mentally is far beyond my current capabilities.

I gulp.

"I'm really stuck in the Titan's Domain...."

Anger rushes over me. I pull out my dagger, merge them together, then grab my sword. Without thinking, I start launching full-power attacks at the walls around me.

Metallic clangs echo throughout my white-walled prison as the crescents of energy released from my blade collide with the dense lightly humming mana shields.

Over and over... for almost half an hour straight... I continue to plunder MP from the endless supply at my fingertips and release waves of fire and wind at my surroundings.

Dripping sweat, and breathing heavily, I fall to my knees.

\*THUD\*

I lie with my back flat on the ground with my sword and dagger by either side as I slowly regain my breath. That little temper tantrum gave me a well-needed dopamine fix for the time being... My mental clarity is back. I let out a sigh, then sit up to place my elbows on my knees.

"Well... for the time being, I might as well see what I'm working with."

I begin sifting through my item storage pulling out every item I own one by one. I make a pile of useless loot that I've been meaning to sell but have just been distracted lately and never got around to it.

It contains a few swords, a shield, some charms, a staff, some clubs and spears, a massive tooth and pearl, a few old daggers, a shaman key, some cursed shackles, tons of miscellaneous coins, a few

rings I took off earlier today to fit my new daggers and lenses into my equipped items, and lastly some D-Class potions.

In a second pile, I take out the ruby-colored dungeon egg along with all of my mana crystals.

Lastly, the most important pile is my food and water. Luckily, I still have some leftover dried meat and fruit from the exam. It's a good thing I picked up extras at the convenience store during our break between the first and second tests. This is more than enough to last me a few days comfortably, maybe even a week. My water stores are even better, I have just over a dozen 1-liter bottles.

I let out a sigh while looking at my loot scattered across the ground.

“Now... how am I going to get myself out of this mess...?”