

## D. Diver 21

### Chapter 21

The next morning I woke up full of energy and got dressed quickly. It's time to grind some levels.

I grabbed my sword, 1 leftover HP potion, 4 silver coins, and 3 bronze. I walked out my front door and bought breakfast on the way to the village market.

I had a brief conversation with my old merchant friend and purchased 4 more MP potions. Today I was Orc hunting.

15 minutes later I arrived at the Pace Guild. I was greeted by Jack in the lobby.

"Hey Jay! I was expecting you. Take this."

He handed me a small card with my face and a Pace Guild Logo on it.

"What's this?"

"It's your Pace Guild ID. Show it to any private dungeon run by or partnered with the Pace Guild and you'll have unlimited access. Let me walk you to the Orc Dungeon today."

"Okay sure."

We strolled through the park. I studied the ID and we made it to the white fair tent in a few minutes.

I showed the guards my new ID and they just nodded.

We entered and Jack started rummaging through one of the top shelves in the guild's item racks.

"Here take this for today!"

He tossed me a small pouch, it looked just like the one I had on my waist.

"W-Why? I already have a bag to carry mana and potions."

Jack smirked.

"That's an item box like I showed you yesterday. It's magic item. You can store all the swords and mana in there, it won't weigh you down. Just hand over the whole bag at the end of the day."

My eyes widened a bit.

"Oh yeahhh. Awesome!"

I tied the bag around my waist right beside the pouch I already brought for today.

"Well, I think I'll be alright solo today. I'll just be exp farming. I think I can handle myself."

Jack nodded.

"Thought so. See you later tonight. Careful, best of luck in there!"

We both waved each other off and I entered the dungeon.

I started off by exploring the dungeon to appease my own curiosity. I trekked around exploring every mountain and valley this dungeon had to offer. It took my about 4 hours. In this time I faced off against 12 Orcs. I didn't have to use my fire magic once. My increased speed and agility stats were almost unfair at this point. I zipped around them and defeated each Orc in 2 shots or less. I

could take them out in 1 hit if I hit a vital organ with enough power. I gained a total of 2 levels from the 12 battles, I also had to use 2 MP potions. They weren't very efficient monsters for leveling, but it was good battle experience.

[Status Open]

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Name: Jay Soju

Level: 94

Hp: 475/475

Mp: 475/475

Strength: 230 [+50]

Speed: 269

Agility: 282

Defense: 207

Mental Strength: 230 [+46]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Items Equipped:

Stainless Steel Long Sword [+50 Strength]

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

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The Orcs dropped pretty large mana crystals, I placed them all in the item box. One of the Orcs dropped a long silver sword, I placed it in the item box as well. To my surprise it disappeared completely. When I stuck my hand back into the bag I could still feel the cold metal handle.

It's a mini pocket world on my waist... pretty cool.

After my long morning of warmups I decided to face off against the boss.

I approached the light grey spinning portal and jumped through with my sword ready.

Almost Immediately 3 Orcs came charging towards me. This is the most I've faced at once.

I decided not to take any chances and just go all out from the start. I erupted in flames and sprinted towards the approaching beasts.

Within a few seconds all 3 Orcs were sprawled out on the floor. Their necks were sliced wide open with crimson flames crackling in the silence of the empty cave. That was easy.

"GRUAAAAAAAAAR!"

The boss appeared. To my surprise he looked much less menacing than our last meeting. My first time facing the Orc boss was a mutant after all...

The monster carried a long sword this time, it didn't have that axe like the mutant. He was almost 5m tall, and a deep green color.

"Sighhhhhh"

I was really looking forward to a good fight, I guess I'll settle for some easy sparring practice.

The beast charged towards me with disappointing speed.

I sprinted towards it straight on as well. At the last moment I erupted in flames covering my body and sword. The beast shrieked as I narrowly avoided its blade and sunk mine deep into its upper chest through the leather armor.

I continued my momentum pulling out my sword and flipping over the Orc. Then, I focused all my fire magic into the tip of my blade. Without hesitation I planted my right leg and jumped with my sword in both hands to land a critical strike into the monster's upper spine.

"GRRRRRUAAAHHHHHH!!!"

The monster let out a roar as flames shot all the way through its body.

It fell to its knees. I jumped back and positioned myself for a final attack. I finished it off the next moment with a fiery strike letting its head roll to the floor engulfed in flames.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

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Name: Jay Soju

Level: 96

Hp: 485/485

Mp: 210/485

Strength: 234 [+50]

Speed: 275

Agility: 288

Defense: 211

Mental Strength: 234 [+47]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Items Equipped:

Stainless Steel Long Sword [+50 Strength]

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

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"This is too easyyyy!"

I yelled out while watching the body of the Orc boss burn to a crisp.

Apparently certain forest type beasts are very weak to fire, including this Orc species. I should enjoy it and reap the benefits while I can.

I collected the large mana crystal before being transported back to the dungeon's start point.

It was about mid day, but it'd get late soon. I trekked back towards the boss room as fast as I could. It took about an hour and a half, I fought 4 more orcs on the way but didn't level up. I drank a pink potion to restore my MP before entering the boss room.

A few minutes later...

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

I was transported back to the dungeon start point with a large mana crystal in my hand.

"Okay... one more time."

It was getting a bit late in the day but I needed to beat the boss one more time...

2hrs later, 5 Orc battles, and 1 last MP potion I made it to the boss room again. Our battle was fast, but I didn't get the exact result I wanted...

[Level Up]

"Ah mannn! Only 1 level?!??"

I was transported back to the dungeon start point.

I started sprinting up and down all the close by mountains. I wanted to find as many Orcs as possible... as quick as possible. I could tell I was so close to leveling up!

"1 Orc, 2 Orcs, 3 Orcs....."

1 hour later...

"...7 Orcs, 8 Orc-"

[Level Up]

---

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 100

Hp: 505/505

Mp: 60/505

Strength: 243 [+50]

Speed: 286

Agility: 300

Defense: 219

Mental Strength: 243 [+49]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Items Equipped:

Stainless Steel Long Sword [+50 Strength]

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

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"LETS GO!!! Finally!!!"

I yelled on top of a mountain overlooking the dungeon as I pulled my sword from an Orc's head.

I grinned as I walked back down the mountain and made my way out of the dungeon.

I did it. I reached level 100.

I walked out of the dungeon tent. It was very dark out. I stayed really late today... oops.

Minutes later I entered the guild entrance to be greeted with a nod from the tall blond woman.

"Hey could I talk-"

"Head to his office, he's back there."

"Oh okay, thanks."

I walked into Jack's room after knocking.

He looked up and smiled.

"You were in there for a long time... how'd it go?"

"Great."

I smirked and emptied the item box.

Around 3 dozen large mana crystals, 3 boss crystals, and a long silver sword fell out.

Jack nodded with a look of satisfaction.

"Good haul. Looks like you were busy today."

"Yep, I'll be back tomorrow. Well.. honestly I'll be back here everyday this week. See ya tomorrow!"

"Good to hear Jay! We've got more dungeons too. I'd be happy to show you around a bit. There's a cyclops dungeon out by the edge of town. It's recommended for level 130 or higher to solo the regular monsters and 150 is good for the boss. A Cyclops is half rock type and half forest type. They won't be as weak to fire as the Orcs.... but having a fire attack will definitely be beneficial!"

I raised an eyebrow.

"Alright. Good to know. I'll take you up on that offer soon. Let me finish up my training in the Orc dungeon. Maybe next week I'll try that one out with you as my guide."

Jack nodded.

"Perfect. Always a pleasure. Have a good night Jay."

"You too, see ya."

I walked out the front door of the guild with a huge smile on my face.

I opened up my status and stared at it all the way home. I'm really level 100... I can apply for a D Class rank now!

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Over the next 3 days I farmed the Orc Dungeon for as much exp as I possibly could.

I decided it wasn't worth my time to go to the Hunters Association to get my License renewed. I was just going to be fighting in the E Class Orc dungeon, there was no need for me to sit around wasting time in the Association's office when I could be in the dungeon leveling up.

On Wednesday I fought the boss 5 times in total, plus over 30 normal Orcs. I was in the dungeon for about 10 hours, I leveled up 7 times.

On Thursday I managed to put up similar numbers. I had 5 boss battles and roughly 30 normal Orcs. This took about 10 hours, I leveled up 4 times.

On Friday I stayed late in the dungeon, about 12 hours. I fought the boss 6 times and battled close to 40 normal Orcs. I could beat the boss in two strikes now, it was getting very easy. I only leveled up 2 times.

[Status Open]

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Name: Jay Soju

Level: 113

Hp: 570/570

Mp: 570/570

Strength: 274 [+50]

Speed: 323

Agility: 338

Defense: 247

Mental Strength: 275 [+55]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Items Equipped:

Stainless Steel Long Sword [+50 Strength]

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

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It's Friday night. I got back from my raid at the Orc dungeon and handed in the loot drop to Jack at the Pace Guild.

My silver usage has been very high this week, I've been burning through about 4 a day for MP potions to keep training. I only have 20 or so silver left. I'm looking forward to tomorrow's auction so I can make some money.

I made my way back in the direction of my apartment. I stopped at a small restaurant near the village market and got a bite to eat. I was starving... Once I finally made it home I took a long hot shower and almost instantly fell asleep afterwards.

I had a great night of rest. I woke up completely rejuvenated.

I leaned over in bed and grabbed the note the old merchant gave me with the auction address on it.

I threw 5 silver and 3 bronze in my pouch around my waist. Next, I put my sword on my back and mounted the axe on my shoulder.

I opened my door and got ready to leave.

"Oooooohhhh that's a big axe Jayyy!"

Maria was outside waiting for me today.

"Haha yeah, I'm going off to sell it."

"Mmmhm cool."

I looked at her curiously, Maria looked a lot stronger. I could tell she's been training and leveling up at a decent rate.

"So Maria. How's it going at Pace? I haven't gotten to chat with you much lately, you look like you've been training hard!"

She blushed and smiled.

"Yeahh, I just signed an exclusive 3 month student contract with Pace. My school is letting me take time off to train full time with them. Isn't that great??"

I raised an eyebrow.

"Oh yeah? I made an arrangement with Pace this week as well. What level are you now? Maybe we can train together soon."

"Oh I'm level 38! I've been training with the D and C class mages. They say they've never seen this kind of progress before. Apparently my magic is pretty strong."

She tapped her index fingers together and nervously poked at the floor.

"H-Here look at my status Jay!"

[Status Open]

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Name: Maria Cortez

Level: 38

Hp: 195/195

Mp: 195/195

Strength: 91

Speed: 98

Agility: 93

Defense: 93

Mental Strength: 176

Skills:

Combat Magic [Ice Summoning]

Items Equipped:

None

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My eyes went wide.

"What theeee.... Your mental strength is almost double your other stats! Your magic power is definitely very strong. No wonder you're already signed with Pace. Good for you Maria!"

She blushed.

"Yeahh, it goes up 4 or 5 every time I level up. I can beat monsters almost twice my level if I land a hit. My other stats are lacking for now though, so I can't even outrun or overpower monsters equal to my level.. it's a process."

She pouted.

"Hmm makes sense. Well, level 38 in just a few weeks is nothing to laugh at. Congrats, good luck with your training. Maybe we'll train together next week, I'd like to see you in action."

Maria nodded.

"Mmmhmmm, w-well good luck selling your axe. See you around soon Jay!"



"See ya!"

We both smiled and waved each other off.

I made my way towards Avery District after grabbing breakfast at the corner store.

I walked for about 20 minutes. The streets became more desolate. There were hardly any people and the surrounding buildings became less and less well maintained.

I got to the address written on the note. It was an old bar. There were two big men standing out front.

"You here for the auction kid?"

"Y-Yeah I am."

I pointed at the axe on my back.

The man pointed inside and motioned me to enter the bar.

I walked in and it just seemed like an old empty bar... this is the auction house..?

"Straight ahead and take a left after the bar. Knock 3 times on the first door to your right."

"Okay. Thanks."

I headed towards the door like the man said.

\*Knock \*Knock \*Knock

The door opened slowly and revealed an enormous room with high ceilings.

There were two large men on the inside of the door, they were most likely bodyguards.

Directly in front of me were 3 men sitting on a long table with notebooks and silver coins in a small jar.

"Let me see your Hunter's License, I'll sign ya in. You're looking to sell that axe?"

The man on the left side of the table spoke to me. He looked like he was 25-30 years old. A strong build, light skin, and dark hair. He had a few tattoos on his neck and arms.

"Yeah just this."

I handed him my license and he grinned.

"Ahh you're a newbie are ya? How'd an E Class get an axe like that?"

"Does it matter?"

He chuckled a bit.

"Nah it doesn't matter, we'll take anything here. I was just curious."

He handed me my ID back and wrote my name on his notepad. He showed the man sitting next to him something in the notepad. He looked up at me with an eyebrow raised then went back to writing something in his own notebook.

"Alrighthttt. 1 silver to enter the auction, and another silver once it's sold. We'll just take it out of the sale price."

I rummaged around in my pouch and placed a silver coin on the table.

"Yeah works for me. What's next?"

He took the silver and nodded.

"Well let me see the axe, I'll inspect it and set a starting price before I put it in on the auction lineup. It should get started in half an hour or so. We have a few good items today, but nothing too big. Yours should make it in the top 3 and stand out. I'd expect some good bids."

He pointed to the small podium in the back. Apparently that's where the auction will take place. There were a lot of people standing around chatting and waiting for the event to start, maybe 50-60 if I had to guess. Some looked like collectors, others hunters, and a some people just looked like normal thugs looking for some entertainment...

I guess this is the Avery District Black Market Auction House. I'm excited to see what happens today.

The man took the axe and began looking at it like the old merchant man usually does.

"Are you using inspect?"

He looked up.

"Yeah of course, half the people here have some variation of inspect skills. It's part of the trade so we don't get ripped off! hahaha!"

I nodded.

"Makes sense."

He went back to examining the axe.

"Good item kid. 150 strength stat with full durability. I think a starting bid of 25 silver should do the trick, you'll get 2 or 3 times that if you're lucky. There's a lot of buyers here today, they may fight over certain items and inflate the price."

I smiled.

"Sounds good."

The man wrote something down in his notepad and looked up. He handed me a small white paddle with the number "87" in black print on the front.

"Alright you're all set kid. I've got your name, item, and payment. Go wait with the others, the event will start soon. If you want to bid on anything raise that paddle, it'll be your bidders ID."

"O-Okay. Thanks again."

We both nodded at each other. I made my way towards the podium and the man brought my axe back behind the red curtains next to the small stage area.

The auction will begin shortly.

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he red curtains opened and a short fat man in a tight black suit walked out.

"Welcome Everyone!!!! To the Avery Auction House!! Today's auction is about to begin!!!"

The crowd of people drifted over to the podium to get a closer view of the stage. I followed as well. The man spoke up again.

"Today we have a total of 15 items to auction. Like usual we will start from the lowest appraised value and make our way up! Letssss getttt started!!!"

The curtains opened and a woman with long black hair in a red dress came out carrying a dark black dagger.

"Our first item for the day is going to be a plus 35 strength dagger! Let's start the bidding at 3 silverrrrr! Could I get 3 silverrrrr!"

The man started speaking very fast. The starting bid was 3 silver. It's a pretty hefty sum for a normal person, but this crowd was full of high rollers. The fun is just getting started. A few people raised their paddles but there wasn't demand for this starting item. It ended up selling for 5 silver to a short guy covered in tattoos in the back corner of the room. Looks like all the common thugs in Avery District buy high grade gear from this auction.

The next few items were similar. There were two more daggers around the same price. Once we made it higher up the list there were 3 long swords ranging from 30-50 strength boosts. These sold for about 10 silver each. It was mostly hunters and collectors that were bidding at this price range. Anything over 10 silver is a large investment.

A few more items passed. An Iron Shield caught my eye. It had an added 70 defense stat. It sold for 20 silver to a large middle aged man in the front, he was definitely a hunter.

A few more swords and daggers were sold but nothing special caught my eye.

"We have finally made it to our top 5 items of the night ladies and gentlemen!! Coming in at number 5 is...."

The woman walked out carrying a large silver sword.

"A 100 strength buff sword. We'll start the bidding at 15 silverrrrr! Can I get 15 silverrrrr!"

The paddles started raising faster now. It seems like all the big shots have been waiting to bid on the good items.

"25 silverrrr!!! Can I get 30?? Ayeeee can I get 30 silverrrr??? That's what I like to see! 30 silverrrr!!!"

The paddles slowed down and the long sword was eventually sold for 30 silver.

An identical sword came out for the next item. There were a few groans and chatters in the crowd. I guess duplicates are a bit frowned upon, but people still bid. The 2nd sword sold for 27 silver.

"Allllrlighttt. Coming in at our number 3 spot!!!"

The woman walked out with a small leather pouch.

"A D Class Item box!!! Rated for up to 10 large item drops worth of mass! I rare find indeed!! We'll start the bidding at 20 silver!!! Can I get 20 silverrrrrr!???"

The paddles flew this time.

"That's 25!!! Can I get a- 30!!! 30 going once goin- 35!!! 35 silverrrrr! An active crowd today!! Could I get 40 silver?? Let's see it!!!! 40!!! To the man in blue!! 45 can I get 45??? That's it! 45 silver!"

Eventually the item box was sold for 45 silver to a tall bald man in a dark blue dress shirt and thin framed glasses. He looked like a collector, not a hunter.

"Now coming in at our second slot for the day...."

The woman walked out from behind the red curtain carrying an oversized axe with a curved blade.

"This monstrous axe has a strength buff of 150. It is has a unique curved blade, truly a one of a kind weapon. Let's start the bidding off at 25 silver!!!"

The paddles started flying. My axe was a huge hit for some of the hunters in the front row. The tanks were eying the oversized axe in awe.

"That's it!!! 30!!! No? 35!!! 40!!! 45??? Could I get 50 silver??? Yes! We got 50!! Going once going twice- 55!! 55 silver!! Does anyone want 60?"

The salesman was speaking faster than I could even keep track of. My axe was a hit!

"Could we get a 60??? Anyone?? 60 to the large hunter up front!! 60 silver!! Going once!! Going twice!!! Going three ti- 65!!! 65 silver to the gentleman in black! 70!!! Back to the large hunter!! Can I get 75?? I hear 75 from the gentleman in black!!! Could this be- 80!!! 80 silver from the hunter!!! 80 going once... going twice... going three times... SOLD!! For 80 silver!!!"

The large hunter turned to the man in a black suit and smirked. He clearly overpaid for the axe, but he won it over the collector. It was more a show of dominance than anything.

I was grinning ear to ear. It was the same tank that bought that shield. He must be an experienced hunter, he's dropping a lot of money on gear like it's nothing... Well, it doesn't matter to me. As long as I get paid I'm happy about how this auction went.

"Now!!! The moment you've all been waiting for!! The number one item of the day!!!"

The woman came walking out of the curtains carrying a long silver sword with a thin black line running down the center of it.

"Our number 1 item today is a 200 strength buff sword. It also has a plus 30% MP absorption rate attribute. It is a beautiful sword if I do say so myself."

The crowd started talking to themselves in hushed tones. It was an incredible sword. The salesman was right.

"The starting bid will be 1 gold coin, but for the sake of the auction we'll count in silver to make fractional bidding easier. So the starting bid will be 100 silver!!!"

I've never seen an item like this in person. It's a top tier D Class item, most C class hunters wouldn't complain using an item like this...

It's perfect for hunters with a swordsmanship skill. Every attack absorbs MP from the monsters you're fighting and decreases your MP usage by 30%. That's a fairly good rate, plus it has a 200 strength buff, that's nothing to sneeze at!

"Let's getttt startedddd at 100!!!! Can I get 110?? 110!!! 120..."

The paddles were flying. It was mostly a bidding war between 1 swordsman with a green cloak on in the front row and 3 investors in suits.

I watched as they bid back and forth for a few minutes.

"220!!! Can I get anything higher? 225?? Anyone 225? 225!!! To the swordsman in the front!!!"

The investors were slowly dropping out. The swordsman was bidding strong. It seems he didn't care if it was a good deal or not, he just wanted that sword no matter what.

"225 going once, 225 going twice..... three timessss and it's sold!!! For 225 silver!!!! Ladies and gentlemen what a day!!! Congratulations to all our buyers and sellers today, I hope you all got what you came for. That's it until next week, I will see you soon!"

The man bowed and walked behind the closing red curtains. The crowd began to clear out and two small lines formed. One by the podium and one by the table where I checked in.

The buyers were paying at the podium and receiving their items.

The sellers were checking in with the event managers and receiving their pay.

I hopped in line and patiently waited.

"Okay, let me see your Hunters License Sir."

I stood in front of an older man with white hair sitting at the table. I handed him my ID.

"Ohhh so the axe was yours? Good item kid."

He started counting out silver coins.

"There's 79 silver for you. Pleasure doing business with you at the Avery District Auction House. Careful on your way out."

I awkwardly stuffed all the silver coins into my small leather pouch. There were a few wandering eyes watching me receive my payment.

"Thanks old man. I'll be back again soon. Pleasure doing business with you too."

I turned and followed the wave of people flowing out the door.

Some stayed in the bar area, others flooded out into the streets. I decided to get out onto the street as well, I'd go straight home from here.

I walked out the front door of the old bar and took a left turn.

I started walking quickly. Ever since I received my silver I couldn't shake the feeling that I was being watched.

I walked for about 3mins at a quick pace. I was about 500m from the bar. I took a back street to avoid crossing paths with any more people.

I took deep breath and let out a sigh of relief.

Seems like I was just being paranoid for no reason. I started to stroll slower in the direction of the village market.

Then I heard something behind me... footsteps...

In front of me too... footsteps....

"Don't move another inch kid."

I froze. All of a sudden there were two men in the narrow street with me.

"Drop the silver and put your hands up. Let me make this painless for ya."

The man in front of me smirked and pulled out a dark black dagger. He was the man that bought the first dagger in the auction, the short man with tattoos all over his arms. There was a dark black snake with red eyes on the back of his right hand, that tattoo stood out to me.

The man behind me didn't speak.

"CLANGGG"

I turned my head to see a taller skinny man with a long silver sword with scratches and dents all over it. He dropped the blade to the ground to get my attention.

"It's our lucky day!! An E Class comes in with an item that sold for 80 silver. A shame you're gonna have to die for it."

The man brought his blade up and pointed it at me.

"I guess there's no point in talking this out with you guys... I'll give you a fight if that's what you really want..."

"....."

"....."

The swordsman gritted his teeth. He looked disgusted by my remark. The shorter man didn't move, just kept his eyes locked on me.

Silence filled the alley.

The smell of desperation filled the air. These guys weren't playing around. They needed this money, and there was only one way for them to get it.

I drew my sword and readied myself for a fight.

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The man with the sword grinned and kept his blade pointed right at me.

"Real sorry we had to pick you kid, the boss would kill us if we didn't hit our monthly quota. I'd let you leave, but you've already seen my face. I can't let you run your mouth."

I stared him down with my sword held tight. My eyes were looking left and right spastically trying to see both men at once, but also scan my surroundings for any other threats.

"Don't even think about running either, we've seen your face too. We'll track ya down... how ever long it takes."

For an average family, 80 silver could last them half a year. To be honest, even a full year if you stretch it out far enough. Maybe I was in the wrong for flashing a full year's salary around in a rough part of town like this...

I didn't pay as much mind to the shorter man behind me. He was a bit shaky and handled his dagger poorly. I could tell he wasn't a very experienced fighter.

The swordsman on the other hand... He stared me down and I returned the favor with my own murderous glare. I could tell he was skilled with that battle worn sword, definitely not an amateur.

"Why don't you just hunt like the rest of us. You could easily make a living in the dungeons. Why rob people like me?"

He gritted his teeth.

"You don't know the first thing about the real world kid! I couldn't enter the dungeons if I wanted. I was blacklisted as a young kid for entering a D Class without authorization... the Hunters Association isn't very kind to people like me. We have to find other ways to work."

I'd heard of the strict dungeon laws, but never actually seen the result of a rule breaker...

Avery District must be full of rejects and thugs that don't fit into traditional dungeon diving culture for one reason or another...

Again, this is the life they chose. There is nothing I can say to persuade a peaceful interaction here.

It's fight or die...

"Hmmm. Well then. Bring it on."

I gripped my sword and eyed the man. We were peering into each other's souls. The fuse had already been lit, there was no putting it out now.

We both charged in at each other, swords held tight with intention to kill.

This is my first fight with a human being... but it doesn't feel much different... than a monster...

"CLANGGGGGGGG"

Our steel met with a loud metallic clang.

"CLANGGGGGGGG"

We both jumped back and countered perfectly, colliding steel swords again and again.

After this brief encounter we both jumped back. I watched him and he watched me. It seemed like a pretty even matchup, he had some solid sword skills.

"Not bad kid."

He snarled at me then charged back in.

"CLANGGGGGGGGG"

I was playing a very defensive battle, I wanted to feel him out before going full force.

"CLANGGGGGGGGG"

Our swords collided over and over as we traded even blows in the alleyway. We traded places on the narrow battlefield. I could see both men standing in front of me now.

The swordsman was grinning and had his eyes locked on me. The other man was standing 20m back.

I looked straight ahead at both of them while readying my blade. My warm up was over.

"Hey! Last chance for you two. Leave me alone now and I won't say a word. Promise."

The swordsman smirked and rolled his eyes.

"Yeah right. I've heard that a dozen times. Get ready kid, enjoy your last moments."

I nodded slowly.

The swordsman turned his head to the shorter man.

"Hey! Come over and help me out! This kid thinks he can beat us. Let's 2v1 him, he asked for it hahaha!"

"O-okay. Let me inspect him fir-"

"Don't bother!! He's a high E rank at best, I got him on the ropes! Don't worry. This will be over in less than a minute."

The shorter man looked at me and started mumbling something. His eyes went wide.

"No! He's actually over lev-"

"Shut uppp! Let's just kill this brat."

The swordsman charged in. The man holding a dagger gulped and swallowed his words following close behind his superior.

I smiled. My prey has chosen not to run.

Their fault, not mine.

I stared down the swordsman and ignited my entire body with a deep red cloak of fire. I planted my right leg and sprinted towards them with my blade pointed straight ahead.

Everything goes into slow motion for me during moments like this...

Their eyes go wide in fear and awe. I activate my full speed and maximum MP output for a full force attack.

Trails of fire are left on the ground as I sprint closer and closer to the men.

I bring my sword back positioning to strike. I focus all the fire magic into its blade, then let it glide through the air with a faint whistle.

"Shhhhhhhiingggg"

"Thuddd"

"Thuddd"

Moments later both of their heads fell to the floor before they could even think to move.

The battle was over just like that...

I win.

I looked over my shoulders to check if there were any more threats.

The narrow alleyway was silent, I could hear nothing but a light breeze.



Then I saw it... hovering over the dead body of the man with a dagger...

The blue letters that shook me down to my core...

".....N-No way....."

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Inspect[Special Grade]

[YES][NO]

I stared at the text for a moment while my heart skipped a few beats. I couldn't believe my eyes...

I gulped and chose [YES].

I dropped to my knees.

The last 2 minutes played back in my head over and over like a movie.

I just killed two men...

I had to....

Who knows what would have happened if I didn't fight back... or even ran away... they said they'd come after me. Who knows, maybe their boss would have been brought into it.

After convincing myself I wasn't in the wrong here for well over 3 minutes straight I shook my head and came back to reality.

The fact here was that there were two dead thugs lying in the road and I was kneeling over them carrying a sword.

I examined the swordsman for a second and was surprised to see that same snake tattoo with the red eyes on his right hand. It must be their gang mark or something, best not to think much of it now.

I looked over both my shoulders again to make sure no one saw this brutal event take place. Then without hesitation I erupted in flames and incinerated the evidence of my crime.

I kicked the sword and dagger that were leftover into a nearby abandoned storefront and quickly evacuated the area.

10 minutes of walking and paranoid shoulder checking later I let out a huge sigh of relief. I was getting close to the village market.

"Sighhhhhhhhh"

I have another secret to keep from the world. Just when I thought my life was getting easy... I get thrown into an even bigger whirlwind of things to think about.

Chapter 25

I walked back through the village market looking around at the stores and people simply going about their everyday life.

I felt like an outsider, disconnected from the world they were all smiling blissfully in.

They all have no idea what I'd just done....

I strolled through town a bit more. I passed the local bakery and a few restaurants but wasn't feeling hungry at all. I just wanted to go home.

I walked up the steps to my apartment, turned the key, threw my sword over by the closet, and flopped onto my bed.

\*CLINK \*CLINK \*CLINK \*CLINK

As I hit the bed my leather pouch opened and dropped all the silver coins on floor next to my bed.

"Ughhhh I can't catch a break!!!"

I buried my face in a pillow for a moment, then decided to just not pick up the mess of coins on the ground.

I turned onto my back and looked up at the ceiling with a blank stare. I opened my status...

[Status Open]

---

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 113

Hp: 570/570

Mp: 475/570

Strength: 274 [+50]

Speed: 323

Agility: 338

Defense: 247

Mental Strength: 275 [+55]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Items Equipped:

Stainless Steel Long Sword [+50 Strength]

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

---

My eyes went wide.

So monster's skills aren't the only ones I can absorb.

I shivered.

I used this power on a human because it would be a waste not to. Plus, the only reason I killed those men was self defense.

I won't make a habit of it... but if someone attacks me and I have to defend myself... their skill is 100% up for grabs. That's my self rule.

I awkwardly shook my own hand by twisting my right hand to meet my left in a position that kind of hurt my wrist. I laughed out loud at the gesture I made, but also nodded in serious agreement like I just signed a pact or something.

I took a big breath in through my nose and out through my mouth.

Seems like I've made temporary peace with my situation. Better to move on. No one else knows, so I might as well try to forget about it as well.

I grinned and laid my head back on a pillow.

I read some comics for a few hours to let my mind escape this reality for a while. It's better to distance myself as much as I can from thinking about things too much...

"Gurrrggglllleeee"

My stomach made a horrific sound. I'm starving.

I rolled out of bed and stepped over the pile of silver on the floor to grab my sword and boots.

I took 3 bronze from the dresser drawer and threw them in my back pocket.

I opened the door and walked down the apartment steps making my way towards the village market.

The air felt soft and sweet in my lungs, it was a beautiful evening for a stroll.

I grabbed a sandwich at the corner store and continued my walk into town with no clear destination in mind.

I walked through the village market to watch more people work and live their lives, then I passed the Alpine Square Starter dungeon to see a few new hunters crowded around the entrance, and lastly I made my way to the train platform.

I thought to myself for a moment... taking the train to the Hunters Association may not be a bad idea right now. I need to get my license updated... Plus, what else am I going to do today? I'm definitely not in the mood to go dungeon diving.

"Screeeechh"

The next train came about 5 minutes later, I stepped in and sat down. It's always fascinating to watch the buildings fly by while looking out the window.

"Screeeeechh"

Less than 10 minutes later the train stopped by the Association's Office. I got up and walked in its direction.

As I walked through the front doors of the Hunters Association I was greeted with that familiar bright smile of the woman in the lobby.

"Welcome back Jay. Long time no see! What can we do for you today?"

"U-Uh is Abby- I mean Ms. Sotoro available right now?"

The woman looked at me curiously.

"I believe she is in a meeting right now. It should be over with in about 15 minutes. If you could take a seat and wait for her, I'm sure she'd be happy to see you."

I nodded.

"Alright. That works. Thanks."

I turned to my left and sat down in a slightly uncomfortable chair the was sat up against the wall.

I set my sword next to me and crossed my right leg over my left knee. I had plenty to think about... so I wasn't bothered by the wait.

About 40 minutes later...

"Excuse me Jay, I'm so sorry the meeting went over by a few minutes. Ms. Sotoro is available to see you now. Pleas follow me."

I looked up with a polite smile. I hadn't even noticed that the meeting went over on time, I was just zoning out in my own world.

"Great. Let's go."

I followed the woman down a narrow hallway until we eventually got to a door.

\*Knock \*Knock

She knocked and the door almost instantly flew open.

"Jayyyy! What a surprise! How ya doinnnn?"

I was almost blinded by Abby's bright green hair and eyes as she jumped out of the door.

"Haha I'm good, I'm good. Just had to talk to you about something."

"Come on in!"

Abby motioned for me to enter the room. I nodded to the woman that walked me here. I closed the door behind me and sat down on the oval couch in front of Abby's desk. She ran over to her desk and sat on the front of it facing the couch rather than sitting in her chair. Her legs were swinging back and forth as she looked at me curiously.

Just being with Abby made me feel so much better. I got a much needed passive release of dopamine. She is so high energy and just straight up cute, I can't help but feel happy around her.

"I-I uh. I hit level 100. Was looking to get a D Class upgrade.. and didn't know if they'd ask to see my status if I asked up front. I thought it'd be better if I just went through you."

Abby jumped off the desk.

"Ouuuhhh yeah? You hit level 100 already? Lemme see lemme seeeee."

I opened my status and showed Abby.

Her eyes went wide.

"That new skill... that's a really rare inspect type you know!!!"

"It is? I haven't tried it yet, I didn't know it wa-"

"Try it right now!! I want to see if its what I think it is!!"

I was a bit thrown off guard. I closed my status and shook my head a bit to concentrate. I repeated the words "inspect" over and over in my head.

I looked up and saw glowing blue letters and numbers above Abby's head.

[Lv. 231]

I raised an eyebrow.

"Level 231? Is that your level??? How can I see it, I'm ju-"

Abby interjected. She talks so fast it's sometimes hard to keep up.

"Haha! I knew it!! That's a neat skill Jay! We should go hunting tomorrow. There's a few more things we can try outtt. Plus, I just had the most boringggggg meeting of my life. Some board members from the regional branch just came over, they're prepping for the C Class Exams in a few weeks. It always gets hectic around these times of the year. Let's go hunting, I haven't had any fun in a whileeeee. Come onnnn. Let's go tomorrow morning!! Come onnnnn!"

I smiled. This is the Abby I know.

"Yeah sure, I'm down to go tomorrow. I'll meet you here around 8?"

"Yeahhhh let's do ittt. Now hand me your old Hunters License."

"Okay, here."

I handed Abby my license and she ran over to the correct side of her desk. After rummaging through drawers of pens and important looking papers she found what she was looking for and jotted a few things down.

"Stay right there, I'll be back in a few minutes."

I nodded.

"Alright sure."

I waited patiently with my arms crossed and head back resting on the couch.

A few minutes later Abby returned.

"Alrightrrrrr you're all set. I did a manual Class upgrade for you so you don't have to show anyone else your status. Here ya go!"

She handed me a small card.

I took it and examined it closely. It had my name, my headshot from my previous ID, the Hunters Association logo, and a large letter D.

I started grinning ear to ear.

I'm officially a D Class Hunter!

"Thanks Abby! You're a life saver!"

She smiled and bobbed her head. Then stopped and looked at her desk with a stare of mild disgust.

"I actually have a lot of dumb work to do today. Those regional reps love paperwork wayyyy too much."

I scratched my head and let out a small smile. Abby turned her head back to me and pouted while puffing out her cheeks.

"Well Jay. At least I can look forward to tomorrow. I have a cool D Class Dungeon I want to show you. It's gonna be funnn."

She perked back up and I couldn't help but smile back.

"Alright, sounds good. I'll meet you here tomorrow morning."

I nodded at her and she nodded back in a playful but serious manner.

"See ya Jay!"

"See ya!"

I walked out of the Hunters Association grinning while staring down at my new Hunter's License.

I took the train back to Alpine Square and walked back to my apartment.

The sun was almost all the way set, but it was still a nice walk home.

Today has been one crazy day.... A lot of ups and downs... The only thing for me to do now is look forward to tomorrow.

It's time to explore my first D Class Dungeon.

## Chapter 26

I didn't sleep well last night. My mind was too caught up in all the mayhem that happened yesterday. Plus, I didn't get to go all out in the dungeons even once. I always get fidgety and have a hard time sleeping when I don't get a good workout in these days.

"Yaaaawwwwn"

I stretched and got out of bed. My floor was still covered in silver coins, I decided to clean up and count them.

102 silver coins and 24 bronze... not bad at all.

I grabbed 6 silver and 3 bronze while getting dressed for the day. I threw my sword on my back and walked out the door.

The morning sun was just coming up as I made my way towards the village market.

"How ya goin old man?"

"Hey kid, what can get for you today?"

I placed 6 silver on the counter.

"The usual, I need need 3 MP and 3 HP potions."

He rummaged through the drawers and handed me 6 small bottles. I nodded and waved goodbye.

"See ya kid, careful out there today!"

"See ya old man."

I made my way over to the station and took the first train to the Association office building.

Abby was waiting outside for me, I didn't even have to talk to that lady in the lobby. Great!

"Ready Jay?"

She was a bit more serious this morning. Still smiling, but definitely in a serious mood. I should get in a battle mood too... this will be my first day in a D Class Dungeon.

"Yep. All set. Where to?"

She nodded.

"Great, follow me! Today we're taking on the Grayson Bat Dungeon. It's a good D Class for you, I assume the regular monsters here will be much different than anything you've ever fought before."

I looked at Abby with curious excitement.

"Can't wait. I've been itching for a challenge."

The mood for this morning was set the second I saw Abby. Serious dungeon mode... even though she wanted to have "fun" today, I guess D Class dungeons are no joke. I decided to play my role and not make light of the situation.

We walked for about 10 minutes into another part of town I hadn't ventured to yet. Abby turned to me.

"It's right over here. Under this bridge."

She pointed to a dark metal colored bridge that stretched over a small river with slow moving water. On the edge of the river there was a medium sized brick building with two guards out front. There was a huge sign on the side of the bridge that read out "Grayson Bridge". I guess that's where they got the dungeon name from.

We approached the two guards and I saw Abby reaching for her ID. I went to grab mine as well. We handed them to the guards at the same time. They looked our ID's over for a few seconds and wrote something down before nodding to let us pass.

We entered the brick structure through the security checkpoint. It was an empty room with reinforced walls. At the back there was a large blue floating portal. It's time to enter the dungeon.

"Alright. Let's do it."

I drew my sword and kept walking forward. Abby nodded and stayed right next to me. We jumped through the portal together.

On the other side I couldn't help but stand there in awe of this new world. It was... a giant cave.

There was a ceiling about 100m high with giant stalactites. The dungeon itself stretched further than my eyes could see in the dim light. It felt like it was dusk, but there was no sun or any light source at all. My visibility was not great. Abby spoke up.

"We can't venture in too far yet. This dungeon gets much more difficult the closer we get to the boss room. I recommend we stay within 500m or so from this entrance portal today."

I looked at her curiously but nodded in agreement.

"Alright. You know best."

We slowly walked forward into the cave. The ground was hard and wet. The cave was filled with an eerie silence with an occasional drop of water from some unknown water source.

There were occasional small rock mounds and stalagmites that we had to navigate around. I couldn't shake the feeling we were being watched...

\*Click \*Click \*Click

"Whoooooshhhh"

I heard a series of odd clicking sounds and a dark figure soar passed me from the corner of my eye way too close for comfort.

I turned with my blade pointed in its general direction and scanned the room. I saw nothing... Abby yelled.

"Our first Bat Monster appeared!!! I'll let you fight it, I'm here if you need help."

I nodded in agreement while frantically scanning my surroundings to find this so called "Bat Monster".

\*Click \*Click \*Click

"Whooooosh"

"Aaaaghhhhh! Where did that come from!?"

The dark shadow flew passed me again, this time slashing my torso with something sharp. It wasn't a bad wound, but it sure was annoying.

A few drops of my blood hit the cave floor.

\*Drip \*Drip \*Drip

\*Click \*Click \*Click

"Whoooooosh"

"Aghhhhhh! Again!?"

Another small slash to my abdomen. Blood started dripping faster. I quickly checked my status, my HP had fell to 475/570.

I can't see my opponent. This is the first time a monster has had a significant speed and agility advantage on me. What can I do..?

\*Click \*Click \*Click

"Whoooooosh"

I fell back receiving another small slash to my ribs. This thing, whatever it is... it's not dumb. I need to find its location, and fast! It's clearly weaker than me, I just need to get a clean shot or two on it.

\*Click \*Click \*Click

"Whoooooosh"



"Agghhhhhh where are you???"

Another hit. I need to think of something fast.

\*Click \*Click \*Click

I got it... fire can fight this cave up in a second. On the third click I ignited into a fiery ball of flames.

"CRUAAAAAAAA"

I heard an odd cry but didn't see anything.

"It flew away this quickly?! To where??"

I kept my flames ignited lighting the cave up all around me about 10m in diameter. There wasn't a single enemy in sight.

This monster is smarter than I thought, it avoids me when I use magic that could hurt it. I guess D Class dungeons are on another level than what I'm used to.

I was burning through MP at an alarming rate. After about 20 seconds I let my flames die down. My MP dropped to 370/570.

The moment the cave became dark I heard that damn clicking again.

\*Click \*Click \*Click

"Whooooooosh"

"Mannn this is starting to piss me off! Come out!?!?"

I was getting frustrated. This must be how all those boss monsters felt when I would run around them in circles taking cheap shots. My HP is at 335/570 now, I started talking to myself.

"Think Jay. Think."

\*Click \*Click \*Click

"Whooooooosh"

"Think... Think..."

\*Click \*Click \*Click

"Whooooooosh"

"THINK OF SOMETHING."

\*Click \*Click \*Click

"Whooooooosh"

"Agghhhh!!!"

I ignited in flames again with a frustrating yell swinging my sword and activating every skill I had.

Then I saw a glimmer of hope.

Little blue letters and numbers appeared in the corner of my vision before disappearing behind a rock pile.

[Lv. 117]

It's the Monster's Level...

That means... not only humans have levels. Could it be? All monsters have levels too? I've just never been able to see them without my inspect skill.

I shook my head after zoning out into my moment of clarity.

I smiled and gritted my teeth as I let my flames dissipate.

\*Click \*Click

"Inspect"

After the second click I muttered my skill's name while repeating it in my head and looking around vigorously.

I caught a glimpse of the blue letters and numbers in my peripherals. I turned with my sword and blindly swung in the direction of the moving dim blue light.

"CRUUUUUAAAAA!"

"I felt a hit! I hit something! It wasn't much... but I definitely made contact! Haha! Take that!"

I couldn't help getting excited, I figured out a way to damage this creature while playing its own game.

\*Click \*Click \*Click

"Whoooooosh"

"Aghhhhh Come on!!!!"

During my victory dance the shadow came back with vengeance and slashed my back with a pretty clean blow.

I got back into battle stance and turned my inspect skill back on. I said "Inspect, Inspect, Inspect" over and over in my head.

I saw the dim glow of a blue text hovering in the air moving spastically back and forth. It would disappear every time a rock structure got in its way. Then, it'd appear again dangerously close to me in my blind spots.

\*Click \*Click \*Click \*Click \*Click \*Click

It was clicking frantically as I kept positioning myself to face it. The monster wouldn't attack unless it thought it could get a safe hit in. Makes sense.

I turned my back and let the shadowy figure position itself. Maybe it'd take the bait...

Moments later I heard exactly what I wanted to hear.

\*Click \*Click \*Cli-

"Shinnnnngggggg"

I used inspect while simultaneously swinging my sword directly into my blind spot. It was a gamble, but it paid off.

"CRUAAAAAAAA!!!"

I landed a clean hit. My sword sliced through the right wing of the Bat and tore it wide open.

It cried out in pain, and tried to change directions. To the monster's surprise its wings didn't work the same as they did moments ago.

Its left wing overpowered its right making for an odd flight path. The Bat creature hit a stalagmite at its base and let out a defeated cry.

I ignited myself and ran over to the monster to finish it off.

It was an ugly creature...

The bat stood about 1.5m tall, its wingspan was closer to 3.5m. The creature's underside was a gross wrinkly pink skin tone. It had a human sized head with bat features. Its wings were black and purple but the edges seems sharp as knives. That's what it must have been slashing me with...

I nodded and grunted a little. With a fiery slash I ended the Bat Monster without hesitation.

[Level Up]

I smiled as I heard the status system's voice ring in my head.

Then I looked down to see a happy surprise.

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Enemy Detection

[YES][NO]

I chose [YES] the second the option popped up.

I muttered to myself.

"Echo location... enemy detection... same thing I guess. Makes sense, I take it."

I was dripping blood all over the ground, I took a lot of hits. The bat creature may have been much faster than me, but I outsmarted it with my extra skills and brute strength in the end. Overall, a great battle.

I nodded again to acknowledge my opponent while opening my status.

[Status Open]

---

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 114

Hp: 115/575

Mp: 165/575

Strength: 276 [+50]

Speed: 326

Agility: 341

Defense: 249

Mental Strength: 277 [+55]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Items Equipped:

Stainless Steel Long Sword [+50 Strength]

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

---

Abby walked over to me as the Bat started to disappear.

"Good job! You did better than I expected on your first one. These guys are fun right?"

I looked up and grinned.

"You're right, this is an interesting dungeon. D Class monsters seem to be pretty intelligent, I can't wait to fight more."

I grabbed the mana crystal and put it in my pouch.

Abby smiled.

She was definitely more relaxed than when we first entered the dungeon.

That relaxed me a bit too. I chugged an MP and an HP potion to restore myself back to full health.

Abby and I nodded at each other then ventured off further into the dungeon.

Chapter 27

I was feeling pretty good about this dungeon. After that first battle I have these monsters completely figured out.

We kept walking further into the cave.

"Hey Jay, it'll only get harder from here. You sure you want to keep going?"

I smirked.

"Yeah these Bats are a piece of cake now. That first fight was a warmup, I doubt I'll even get hit once in our next fight."

I strolled along next to Abby with my sword out occasionally activating my inspect skill to scan the area.

I checked my status to see how much MP it was using up. I was at 550/570, looks like every inspect uses 3-5 MP. Not bad, but not great.

As I was closing my status the new skill I recently absorbed caught my eye. Enemy Detection.

I shrugged and activated it to see what would happen.

Bad idea....

I dropped to my knees with my hands on my head.

"CLANGGGGG"

I even dropped my sword. A horrible unexpected sensation came over me.

"Jay!! What's wrong??? Hello???"

Abby was waving her hands in front of my face frantically.

All I could do was stare forward. I could feel the presence of ever monster in this cave. There were thousands of them... all very close by...

"T-They're everywhere..."

I was slowly adjusting to this new ability. It was still very unsettling, but I stood up and closed my eyes to try and master it more.

They were scattered everywhere. Bats were behind rocks, on the ceiling, and even gliding around above our heads.

The longer I closed my eyes and concentrated the more clear the movements of each Bat Creature became. The further away they were the more I had to concentrate to feel their exact location and movements.

It seemed like they were all clustered in certain areas of the cave. They traveled in groups, maybe 20-30 in each cluster on average. Some would leave the group to scout out the cave for food while the others stayed together hanging upside down.

The deeper I concentrated, the further into the cave I could see. The clusters became bigger and bigger. Some had hundreds... the deeper parts of the cave were much more active.

Then the biggest cluster appeared in my minds eye. A cluster of too many presences to even count. A massive cluster at what seemed like the caves end... this must be what Abby meant by it getting harder the deeper we go in. I tried to get a better feel for how many there really were.

All of a sudden I lost my balance. The clear feeling of the monster's exact location in my mind faded quickly.

"Thudddd"

I fell to the ground.

"Jay!!!! What's wrong with you???"

Abby was very close to my face. Her big concerned green eyes filled my field of vision.

I checked my status in a daze, it read out 0/570 MP.

"D-Damn. Sorry, I used up all my MP. I didn't realize I'd feel so weak."

I drank an MP potion leaving me with just 1 left and sat up. I checked my status moments later and my MP rose to 500/570. For some reason it wasn't full, but I decided not to think much of it right now.

"Tell me beforehand when you're going to pull a stupid stunt like that!!"

Abby hit my right arm and pouted.

That was the first time she ever hit me.. I'm not sure how to feel about that, but there were too many things going on to give this much thought either.

"H-Hey. Sorry, I was just testing out a new skill. That bat monster let me acquire an enemy detection skill, I didn't realize it used so much MP."

Abby nodded, it seems like she'd already put two and two together on what happened.

"So, now you can see why this dungeon is more dangerous than it seems."

I nodded.

"Yup. It seems like it's a real pain getting to the boss room."

Abby looked deep into the cave.

"Usually it is... but I think we may have an easier way to get there."

"W-What do you mean?? How strong is this boss anyways??"

Abby grinned and grabbed my arm.

"Come onnnn. Maybe I'll get to have some real fun today!"

Her mood completely changed. The playful care free Abby was back. What changed her mind so quick?

"Hey! I asked you a question ya know! How strong is this boss??"

"You'll see. It's about my skill level, a little weaker though. I beat this dungeon two times before, but it was with a full party from the Association when I was around level 170. I can beat it now, I know all its moves."

My eyes went wide...

"It's almost your level?? You're over level 200 you know.. You better know what you're getting us into, I'll kill you if you get us killed!!"

She laughed.

I was half joking around with her, but half concerned as well. I know Abby is very strong, I'm sure she can handle the boss no problem. My only worry was the thousands of giant bats between us and that boss room.

After about 5 minutes of quick walking I heard a familiar sound.

\*Click \*Clic-

In the middle of the monster's second click it was skewered by a mound of rock that shot out of the side of a stalagmite.

It all happened much faster than I expected. I barely activated my inspect skill before the creature was dead on the floor.

Abby smiled and skipped forward paying no mind to the fallen corpse.

"This way! We're almost there, this cave isn't as big as it seems. The boss is less than 20 minutes away."

I just nodded and followed.

We walked for another 10 minutes or so. The bats and their annoying clicking kept becoming more and more frequent. It was a few per minute now. I was impressed by Abby's speed and precision, but also concerned about that massive cluster of bats we were walking towards.

5 more minutes passed.

Abby was glowing green attacking multiple shadowy bat projectiles at a time. Her eyes were flying back and forth scanning the dark room while rock was rippling all around us.

"Alright Jay! Your turn to help!"

"W-What do you mean???"

She turned to me with a grin.

"We're gonna make a run for it! Straight to the boss room. Activate your flames and keep them going at full force! Don't let up for even a second."

I gulped and nodded.

The next moment I erupted into flames.

"CRRRUAAAAA!!!!!"

All the surrounding bats let out horrific cries and flew out of my fiery sphere of light. Abby was close by in the light, almost touching my flames.

Then, we ran.

Both of us made a mad dash towards the cave's end. Abby had to slow herself every few steps, she was clearly much faster than me.

As we ran forward with a blinding orb of light surrounding us in the dark cave the waves of bats cried and flew away from our path. They really hated light.

"Almost there!!! Keep it up Jay!"

It had been about 30 seconds now, I was covered in flames head to toe. I could tell I was close to my limit.

I grabbed my last MP potion and chugged it mid stride. The flames did not stop, we continued to sprint forward.

"Just a little further!!!"

10 seconds later I saw a floating grey portal in the distance.

I was burning through MP and locked on my target. My brain was in full tunnel vision mode.

We sprinted even faster. More and more bats flocked around our protective ball of fire. It was getting intense, but we were so close!

Moments later we made it.

Abby's plan worked.

We jumped through the floating grey portal together and yelled out in victory.

"We made it!!!!"

We arrived at the boss room.

It was a smaller version of the cave world outside. To me it looked like a normal boss room. The room was 200m long, 100m wide, and 30m tall.

There was silence in the air...

"Hahahaha that was great!"

Abby burst out laughing, I turned to her and couldn't help chuckling a bit myself.

"That was pretty insane."

We both laughed for a few more seconds, then got very serious as the room filled with an ominous presence.

There were no bats in sight. Maybe it's only the boss, no extra monsters this time.

"Get back! It's coming."

"O-Okay."

Abby's tone was strictly serious again, I obeyed without hesitation.

I ran back to a rock pile on our left side and hid ready to watch a battle begin.

Silence still filled the room. I scanned the cave but couldn't see a thing.

"CLANGGGG"

"SCRAPEEEEEEE"

My eyes went wide. This is not what I was expecting.

A figure no more than 2.5m in height walked out. It had pale white skin and a humanoid looking body.

Its arms were a dark purple connecting to bat like wings on its back.

The most surprising feature wasn't its form, it was the huge black sword it dragged behind on the cave floor.

This was not the boss creature I was expecting...

Abby began to glow green brighter than I'd ever seen before. The monster returned the favor and pointed its sword up towards Abby in a graceful manner.



They had declared battle on each other.

Moments later the two of them sprinted towards each other with blinding speed. It was almost faster than I could see.

The bat creature moved with ease and blinding speed. It swung its sword with power and precision that I couldn't comprehend.

Abby glided along the rock floor gracefully as well. The entire cave was rippling around her about 30m in every direction. She was creating spears simultaneously attacking and defending.

There was dust clouds and movements too fast for me to contextualize. It was just like the last battle I watched Abby fight. Clearly this was fighting at a different level than anything I'd ever seen.

My curiosity was overflowing. I activated my inspect skill. Two sets of numbers appeared over their heads. Abby was still [Lv. 231], the text above the bat creature read out [Lv. 194].

My eyes went wide with awe. I wouldn't stand a chance. The moment this thought crossed my mind the room went silent.

Abby and the boss were 10m apart at a stand still. Then something unexpected happened...

The boss lifted its sword slowly and took a step back. Abby started glowing brighter. The whole cave began to shake while ripples of rock spears started forming all around their battle field. The boss took another careful step back...

Then on its last step the boss completely vanished. I activated enemy detection almost like a reflex... my heart skipped a beat.

It was GONE.

The only presence I could sense in the room was Abby. The boss just disappeared before my eyes, even my new skill couldn't locate it.

Abby was still glowing brighter and brighter creating dozens of rocky spears.

Moments later the clash resumed. Massive piles of rock and dust filled the air. I couldn't see a thing. I just stood there watching the battle as best I could with my eyes wide.

The crashing and explosions of rock went on for a couple seconds. To me it felt like hours. The green glowing light almost filled up the whole cave now as the entire boss room felt like it was rumbling.

There was a massive build up that ended in an ear piercing crash of stone on stone.

Then silence.

Moments later the dust cleared...

I let out a sigh of relief.

Abby stood there glowing dimly with mounds of rock behind her. The lifeless body of the bat creature was lying by her feet. She used a rock spear to finish it off.

I heard a familiar ringing sound.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

---

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 126

Hp: 635/635

Mp: 130/635

Strength: 304 [+50]

Speed: 360

Agility: 376

Defense: 274

Mental Strength: 304 [+61]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Items Equipped:

Stainless Steel Long Sword [+50 Strength]

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

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"Twelve Levels.. wow."

Abby laughed.

"What a good fight. That skill where it disappears is always so annoying!! I guess that's what makes it a challenging fight, other than that skill its speed stat is the only other issue. Overall, I had fun!"

"Y-Yeah. Another eye opening battle. Thanks."

"Heyyy no prob! I couldn't have even gotten here today if we didn't use your fire! This dungeon boss is hardly ever challenged because it's so hard to get to, I'm glad we came here. Who woulda thought I'd get to have a real fight today!!"

Abby was clearly pleased with today's outcome. I was too, this gave me some great insight on a D Class dungeon.

I grinned and nodded.

The boss started disappearing and it dropped a giant mana crystal.

Abby threw it to me.

"You used up more MP than me. Like I said, we couldn't have even gotten to the boss room without it. You earned it."

I caught the crystal and nodded.

"Thanks."

I was deep in thought.

The white light of transport magic was starting to fill my vision as we were transferred back to the beginning of the dungeon.

We nodded at each other again in agreement that we had enough for today and jumped through the exit portal.

As we stepped out into the home world I was trying to play that battle over in my head again but kept disappointing myself...

I hardly followed a single movement, I couldn't remember anything that actually happened during that death match.

I need to get a lot stronger.

Chapter 28

Abby and I walked out of the small brick building passing the two security guards on the way out.

I was feeling too many emotions at once.

I was happy and excited because my level just went up so much and I got to see a new dungeon.

On the other hand, I was a bit frustrated and disappointed because Abby just held my hand through another dungeon and basically gave me free pity levels. Without thinking I turned to Abby and let my emotions do the talking.

"Hey! You know I appreciate you showing me how these dungeons work and everything but I'm not getting the real battle experience a real hero would get if I went in alone!"

She grinned a little.

"A hero huh?"

I nodded in agreement without much thought to it.

"Yeah! Next time we face a dungeon together I'm going to be the one saving you! Got that?"

She didn't respond for a second and reality hit me in the face, my cheeks went a little red and I stepped back. What I said was true... but I didn't mean to say it all out loud.

"I-I didn't mean to say all that out loud."

Abby just giggled and kept walking.

I followed close behind. It was pretty much a silent walk until we got back to the Hunters Association building. She turned to me as we approached the front door.

"Well, you said it Jay. Next time we hunt together you'll be stronger than me. Let's see it."

Abby smiled and bobbed her head as she went back inside the building.

I stood outside for a while. Then decided to take the train straight home. I didn't even get anything to eat or sell my mana, I just walked straight to my apartment and flopped onto my bed.

My mind was foggy. Today's dungeon run was an eye opener... but it just didn't feel right.

I defaulted to my usual mental defense mechanism and picked up an old comic from my dresser and began to read. It was the newest volume of a series where the main character recently became the "strongest hero". He now has all these secret unimaginably difficult missions that he needs to complete to save the world. In the end, of course he saves the world. So predictable, but I can't stop reading!

A few hours later I smiled while closing the back cover. That was a pretty good one, I mumbled to myself.

"A hero... what is a hero?"

As I stared at the ceiling I pondered the word. A hero. Everyone has their own definitions for it.

Someone who saves those who can't save themselves?

Someone who stops evil from winning?

Someone who makes the world a better place?

Or is it just...

Someone who is the strongest.

That is the best type of Hero. They don't even have to save the day every time, just when they feel like it. They don't answer to anyone except for their own moral compass.

At the end of the day is that even a hero? And...Why does it even matter if that's a "hero" anyways. Why does everyone even aspire to be a "hero"?

In my drunken state of what I like to call "fantasy brain" my mind went back and forth from my bedroom ceiling to the many simulated worlds of comics I'd read about over the last few years. I came to a resounding conclusion. I mumbled it out loud.

"I don't have to be a Hero, I just have to be the strongest. That's my new goal. No matter what, I will become the strongest."

I let out a sigh and a smile as my self induced mental torture finally subsided.

"Gurrrrrgle"

I'm starving. I haven't eaten since this morning.

I grabbed a handful of silver, 3 bronze, and the 2 mana crystals from my hunt earlier and went off to the village market.

I grabbed a quick bite to eat at the corner store on the way to see my old merchant friend.

"Hey kid! How'd the auction go? Haven't seen you in a while."

"It went well, my axe sold. I appreciate the introduction, but it was a bit sketchy down in Avery District."

He nodded and chuckled.

"What can I do for you today?"

I placed the two mana crystals on the silver dish. The big black numbers read out 311.6MU.

"I'll give ya 3 silver."

"Deal."

The old man handed me my silver.

"Hey can I grab some MP and HP potions too. You have anything stronger? Last time my MP didn't fill all the way up, what's with that??"

The man raised an eyebrow.

"You're over level 100?"

I eyed him back curiously.

"Yeah. I am. Why?"

"The potions you've been buying are E Class graded. They only heal up to 500 points per use. The D Class potions are graded up to 1250 points. They are 2 silver a piece."

That makes sense. E Class items have their limits I guess.

"Hmm. Okay thanks for the info. I'm not too far over level 100 yet. I think E Class potions will be more worth my while."

I put 6 silver down on the table.

"I'll take 5 MP, and 1 HP. E Class."

The man nodded and handed me a few bottles.

We waved each other off and I headed back to my apartment. I'm all set for a hunt tomorrow.

I drifted off to sleep pretty easily.

The next morning I woke up feeling great. I slept like a baby.

I got out of bed and got dressed. I grabbed my MP and HP potions along with 3 bronze and shoved them in my leather pouch. I grabbed my sword and jumped out the door.

I headed straight towards the Pace Guild.

After grabbing breakfast I walked through the guild's front doors.

The tall blond woman greeted me.

"Hey Jay how are you tod-"

"Can I see Jack?"

"Oh. Sure thing he's in his office."

I walked to the back room and knocked before walking in.

Jack looked up from a pile of paperwork and smiled thinly.

"Morning Jay. What's up?"

"I want to go to the cyclops dungeon today."

Jack looked a bit concerned as he shuffled through a pile of papers.

"I really can't take you today, and anyway that dung-"

"That's fine. Where is it? I'll challenge it solo today."

Jack put his papers and pen down looking at me with a serious look on his face.

"Hey! Let me finish what I was saying. The cyclops dungeon has been getting reports of an unusual amount of mutants lately. It wouldn't be smart to challenge the boss, or even venture too far into the dungeon solo. I'll get you directions to the entrance building, but don't say I didn't warn you."

I grinned.

Jack shook his head slowly as he wrote an address on a notepad and handed me a small piece of paper.

"I'd come with you today if I could, that'd be much safer. These damn regional reps are giving me so much paperwork this week. They always do this the month of exams."

I just nodded. I wasn't sure what he was saying exactly, but it didn't seem to matter much.

"Well, thanks! I'll bring back some loot for you tonight."

"Great, take this. There's no guild items at the location because it's a partnered dungeon."

Jack threw me a small leather pouch, it was an item box. I tied it around my waist.

"Thanks."

Jack nodded and went back to work. I waved and walked out of the guild.

I looked down at the note and made my way towards the address he'd written down. It was about 20 minutes away by walking.

Most of the streets and buildings I passed were familiar. I'd been through this part of town a couple times.

Before I knew it, I'd made it to the dungeon entrance building. It was small park area. There were a few winding paths and large trees. In the center of the park there was a one story building that looked like it was built in a hurry. There were two security guards out front. I showed them all my necessary ID and passed in through the front door with ease.

It was just an empty room with a portal at the back. I took out my sword and walked through.

I entered a new world. It never ceases to amaze me.

This was similar to the Orc dungeon I'd been in before. It had a large mountain range, but the hills and valleys were much less steep. I couldn't see a single tree in sight, it was a barren wasteland and a bit chilly. The sky was blue and there were a few white clouds.

The air was thick. It was a completely new sensation to me. My breathing wasn't affected, but the air definitely had something in it that made me feel a little off.

I decided to venture forward into the dungeon. I made my way down into one of the large valleys. I could hear a faint sound of running water at the bottom. It caught my attention and piqued my curiosity.

I trekked down the wide valley area for about 10 minutes. I found the water source I was looking for.

There was a stream running directly through the center of two mountains creating this phenomenon. The stream was about 5m wide and flowed rather quickly. To my surprise there was small shrubbery growing by it.

I admired the natural beauty all around me for a moment until a loud sound broke my concentration.

"THUDDDD"

"THUDDDD"

"RRRRRAAAAAUUUUUUAAAA!"

Seemingly out of no where a massive creature appeared 50m or so from behind a curving section of the river bed.

The creature was about 6m tall. It's skin color was similar to all the rock around us but with a faint greenish tint. It carried a large black club with spikes on it and showed me its jagged disgusting teeth.

Its head was connected to its large body, it looked like there was no neck as all. Just body connecting to head.

Then it's eye... Yes, it's one singular eye. The beast stared me down with an enormous wandering eye that was bigger than my entire head.

So this is a Cyclops.

After the monster let out a mighty roar it charged towards me.

Its speed was impressive, it basically matched mine.

On second thought, maybe it was even faster....

This seems like it's going to be a really tough fight.

I gritted my teeth and readied my sword.

I smirked.

This is what I came here for after all, to become stronger.

Chapter 29

The giant one eyed monster came charging towards me with speed comparable to my own.

I was not prepared to trade blows with this cyclops just yet. I need to scope out its full abilities before doing anything too rash.

I activated my inspect skill and prepared to dodge the incoming behemoth. The light blue text appeared over its head in the distance.

[Lv. 129]

Pretty similar to my own level. That's good.

The rushing stream was to my left and a slight incline leading up the side of the valley was on my right.

I put my sword out in front of me and rushed towards the monster with no intention of actually making contact with it this time around.

We both sprinted towards each other getting closer and closer. Once we were less than 10m apart I could smell a foul scent, this beast smelled worse than any monster I'd ever encountered.

I instantly lunged to the right and ran up the side of the valley to avoid the monster's attack.

"RRRRUUUUAAAA!"

The cyclops kept running forward in a perfect straight line. It swung its club at me, but I was already well outside of its range. I'm mumbled to myself.

"Interesting."

I grinned and ran back towards the water and flatter ground. The cyclops turned to me and locked its eye on me again. We both charged towards each other.

At the last second I dodged it again running up the mountain as the giant club narrowly missed me. The monster kept running forward in a perfect straight line.

It looks like this monster has equal, if not greater speed than me... but it can't change directions very quickly.

That's one up side. I'll possibly be able to use my agility to outsmart this beast.

The big problem is the monster's club. Even when I dodged, the cyclops' timing was basically perfect. One second earlier and I would have been hit. It definitely has good intuition, and is VERY



strong. That club is over 2m long and looks like it's made out of a very heavy metal. It can swing it with ease like a baseball bat.

Let's see how this beast likes flames.

I ran back down to flat ground and ignited into a fire ball as we both began our charge. The cyclops didn't seem to hesitate at all. It was the same result. I had to dodge at the last minute to avoid the trajectory of its club. That weapon is a great offensive tool, but it doubles as a defensive shield.

This is going to be tougher than I thought.

I decided to change up my strategy. I charged towards the monster from up above it on the valley's incline. I fully engulfed my body in flames I jumped in the air with my sword in full swing launching an attack. The cyclops countered with a swing of its club.

"CLANGGGGGGG"

Sparks fly and flames shoot from our clash of metal. At first it felt like an even exchange, but I was so wrong.

The monster followed through with its charged and pushed me forward carrying me uphill with ease.

"RUUUUUAAAAAAAAA!"

It roared as I was thrown forward. I hit the rocky ground and looked up to see the monster's massive legs charging towards me.

With every fast twitch muscle fiber in my body I managed to jump and spin out of the way as the beast cracked the ground as it rumbled past my head less than a meter away.

I spit out a mouthful of dirt and got to my feet. In this moment of adrenaline induced clarity I saw an opening. I was right behind the cyclops as it was trying to turn around.

I pictured every encounter we had so far. The battle highlights flashed before my eyes.

There's a fraction of a second that the monster has to stop moving and adjust its positioning before charging again. This is my only chance.

I erupted into flames.

As the cyclops turned I focused all the fire magic into my blade and went for an all or nothing attack.

"Shinnnnngggg"

"RAAAAAAAAAUUUUUAAAAA!"

I made a huge fiery slash across the monster's back. It cried out in pain.

The monster was hurt, but our battle was far from over. The cyclops snarled and charged back at me with its club raised.

I waited and stared at the enormous creature bellowing towards me. It swung its massive club with a loud roar.

In that same moment I shifted my stance and aligned myself perfectly for a counterattack. I swung my blade at the club hoping to use it as a bounce pad.

I used the incoming club's momentum to throw myself to the ground. I let the monster hit me while strategically angling my sword to position my fall away from the monster's heavy feet.

"CLANGGGG"

Sparks flew and I was thrown to the ground as the cyclops stomped on by. I immediately erupted into flames and lunged towards the wide open backside of the monster.

"Shingggggg"

"RUUUUUUAAAAA!"

I landed another hit. There was a fiery "X" on the monster's back. It was bleeding heavily, and the magic fire residue was burning bright. Jack had told me these Cyclops have a minor weakness to fire, maybe the leftover magic was doing some significant extra damage.

After a series of pain filled cries the cyclops faced me with a murderous glare. It charged forward grunting and dripping blood. Its speed had changed, this charge was definitely slower than the last.

I went for the same movement. I let the monster smack me to the ground while blocking most of the attack with my blade. The beast fell for it a 3rd time.

Without hesitation I concentrated all my flames into the top of my blade and sprinted towards the monsters back. I yelled as I jumped through the air.

"THIS IS THE END FOR YOU!"

I stabbed the cyclops deep in the back of the head. It let out a cry of agony.

"RUUUUUUAAAAAAA!"

I held on tight releasing as much fire magic as I could into the creature. It struggled and cried but quickly came to its end. This was a very effective attack.

With a final burst of flames the cyclops fell to its knees.

"THUDDD."

It dropped its club and fell to the rocky ground moments later.

I gripped my sword and pointed it to the sky smiling and admiring my work.

It felt great to defeat a new monster by myself without any higher level instructors or guides around.

This is how I'll really get stronger.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

---

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 128

Hp: 390/645

Mp: 185/645

Strength: 309 [+50]

Speed: 366

Agility: 382

Defense: 278

Mental Strength: 309 [+62]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Items Equipped:

Stainless Steel Long Sword [+50 Strength]

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

---

I stood next to the monster's corpse for a few minutes catching my breath and listened to the water move in the valley below.

The air was still very thick. Maybe even thicker than when I entered this dungeon.

Moments later the cyclops completely disappeared and dropped a large mana crystal. I tossed it up and down in my left hand before placing it in the item box.

I walked back down to the flowing water and washed my face and arms in the stream. I was covered in small scratches and dirt after that fight, it got pretty brutal.

I drank a potion that restored my MP back to full. I stretched my arms and pulled my sword out as I ventured off following the steady water source deeper into the dungeon.

After about 10 minutes I could definitely sense a change in the air. It wasn't my imagination at all, something was definitely off here.

As I kept following the river more carefully through the winding canyon another cyclops appeared. It used all the same tricks. I was much more accustomed to fighting it's kind now and defeated it in a very similar manor. I landed 3 attacks to its back while letting it land non-fatal blows on me for better positioning.

I leveled up 1 more time. After the battle I drank an HP potion to restore it back to full.

[Status Open]

---

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 129

Hp: 650/650

Mp: 380/650

Strength: 311 [+50]

Speed: 369

Agility: 385

Defense: 280

Mental Strength: 311 [+62]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Items Equipped:

Stainless Steel Long Sword [+50 Strength]

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

---

I was feeling pretty good. I have 4 MP and 3 HP potions left for today, I'll be able to farm exp for a long time.

I let the monster disappear and collected its mana. I kept walking further into the dungeon.

The air was even thicker now. It felt like something was watching me through it. Again, it didn't affect my breathing but didn't feel right at all.

My training for today just started, I didn't feel like overthinking it. This might just be normal for D Class Dungeons. I pushed it to the back of my mind and trekked forward.

Another 10 minutes or so went by. I was walking along the river's edge when I heard massive footsteps.

"THUDDDDDD"

"THUDDDDDD"

"THUDDDDDD"

"RUUUUUUUUAAAAARRRRR!"

I turned a corner to see an enormous creature about 100m from me charging with its club raised.

It was definitely a cyclops... but was very different than the two I'd just faced. It stood almost 8m tall and had a pinkish red tint to its skin. Its club was much larger as well.

I stared the monster down and readied my sword.

I used inspect to see what I was dealing with and my eyes went wide.

[Lv. 144]

This is definitely a mutant. It's not the boss, it's a random mutant appearing out in the open. I've never see anything like this. This must be what Jack was warning me about this morning.

"RUUUUAAAAAAAA!!!"

The beast continued its charge with full killing intent. It looked much faster and stronger than me.

I gulped and gripped my sword even tighter.

This will be my strongest opponent yet.

### Chapter 30

The mutant cyclops was less than 50m away from me now. It had its club raised and its eye locked on me.

It was much faster than the normal monsters I faced earlier today. I definitely had to come up with a new battle plan.

"RUUUUAAAAAAAA!"

It wasn't slowing down one bit.

The monster was less than 20m away now. It's time to move. I decided to match its movements and sprinted towards the oncoming beast.

When I was about 5m away I made a sharp left turn and narrowly avoided the massive club. I could feel the strong wind against my face. It was an impressive swing.

I turned to face the monster as it charged passed me. I tried to catch it off guard but to my surprise it was already turning to face me as well. Cheap tricks are not going to work.

We glared at each other and both lunged in to make another attack. Its club was so massive, almost 3m long. I couldn't get anywhere near the beast, it had perfect defense.

I had to dodge again, there's nothing else I can do. The familiar wind of the club's swing hit my face. I was getting a bit frustrated. I can't afford to get hit by this mutant, its attack is definitely stronger than my previous opponents.

We faced each of again. Both of us were standing close by the flowing stream on flat ground. The valley's upward hill was to my left.

As we charged towards each other this time, I decided to dodge early and run up the side of the incline.

The beast skidded to a halt and changed directions to follow me up the hill. Thankfully its lack of agility gave me a small head start.

I ran up the valley's edge as the massive cyclops followed.

Once I got enough distance I turned to face it and ignited my entire body into flames. My grip tightened around the fiery sword and I took a deep breath.

I sprinted forward and jumped in the air with all my strength. The cyclops was still bellowing towards me from below with its club raised.

As I jumped down the valley I raised my sword for an attack. I was aiming to fly over the entire monster and land behind it for a chance to strike.

That was my plan anyways...

The monster let out a roar and raised its club high into the air.

"RUUUUUUAAAARRRR!"

"THUDDD."

The club hit me like a brick wall. At the last moment I did my best to block some of the spikes with the flat side of my own blade, but it didn't help much.

I was sent flying backwards behind the beast hitting the rocky ground just meters from the water's edge.

If I had just jumped 1 meter higher... or maybe just one second sooner... I could have-

"RUAAAAAARRRR!"

The monster gave me no time to think.

I spat out dirt and blood while readying my sword. I looked up to see the quickly approaching mutant cyclops.

I have to try again.

The beast kept charging, and I kept waiting.

When we were no more than 5 meters apart I used all of my speed and agility to sprint and twist away from the massive incoming club.

Without looking back I ran full force up the side of the valley. I heard water splashing behind me.

As I ran about 15m up the hill I turned to face the monster. I expected it to be close behind and starting its charge. What I saw brought a wide grin to my face.

The monster overstepped its last attack on me and ran into the stream.

It took a few extra seconds for the monster to recover and turn. It was just starting its charge up the valley now.

I smirked and ignited into flames again. This time I had an advantage. I was moving much faster, and had more time to position my airborne attack.

I waited longer to jump and focused more force on getting higher up rather than farther this time.

The cyclops let out a roar as it made its attempt to smack me down with a swing of its club.

It missed. My plan worked.

I landed directly behind the monster and planted my right foot to jump up towards its head.

The cyclops had already come to a halt and was trying to turn around.

I focused all the fire I could into the tip of my blade and pierced the back for the monster's head. I let out a cry as I released as much fire as I could into the beast.

"TAKE THISSSS!!!"

"RUAAAAAARRR!"

It thrashed around for a few seconds as I repeatedly stabbed it and released fire into the beast's body.

It couldn't shake me off.

The mutant decided to swing its own club at the back of its head aiming to crush me.

My eyes went wide and I jumped back ripping the fiery blade from its flesh. I fell to the ground as the beast bashed its own head in with its club.

I ran back towards the river. It's better that I get to flat ground now, this thing is mad.

"THUDDDD."

"THUDDDD."

"THUDDDD."

"RUUUUAAAAAARRR!"

To my surprise the mutant was still standing. It was slowly walking towards me with steady loud stomps.

Its head was caved in from the direct swing of its own club and the backside was still on fire due to the leftover magic residue.

Its eye was bleeding and cloudy, but it still stood tall ready to continue our battle to the death.

I have to give it credit, this monster is a tough one.

I was breathing heavy and bleeding all over as well. I couldn't help but to grin a little bit.

The beast ran towards me, but not in a straight line. There was something off...

It can't see...

The beast was swinging its club and blindly attacking where I was last standing.

I nodded slowly realizing the situation.

A well fought battle indeed. Without the valley's geographical advantage I would have never won. Thanks to my surroundings I've defeated this monster.

With a swift fiery maneuver I ran up the valley's incline again without the cyclops even noticing me.

I focused every last bit of fire I had into the blade and jumped at the monster's backside.

I pierced the same spot in the back of its head and let my fire burn bright.

With this silent strike the monster fell to its knees, then its head fell to the rocky floor.

"I win."

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

---

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 133

Hp: 115/670

Mp: 85/670

Strength: 321 [+50]

Speed: 380

Agility: 397

Defense: 289

Mental Strength: 321 [+64]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Items Equipped:

Stainless Steel Long Sword [+50 Strength]

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

---

I dropped to my knees next to the fallen monster as well. I was out of breath, it landed a really solid hit on me. Another one of those and I'd be a goner.

I chugged an MP and an HP potion as the monster disappeared and a large mana crystal dropped. Now I only have 3 MP and 2 HP left. That's enough for a few more fights.

I grinned as my stats were almost fully restored.

My HP rose to 615/670 and my MP to 585/670.

I decided to walk up the valley's incline to get to higher ground and scope out where I wanted to travel to next.



As I walked up I could feel the heavy air getting even worse. My body was tingling a bit. What's going on? It feels like there's magic in the air... and it doesn't feel good.

I made it to the top and stepped onto flatter ground.

"THUDDDD."

"THUDDDD."

"THUDDDD."

My eyes went wide....

Staring me down holding a massive spiked club was another mutant cyclops. It stood there menacingly.

In the near distance behind it I could see a normal cyclops approaching as well.

This is not good.

I activated my inspect skill and decided to turn on my enemy detection as well.

My heart skipped a beat.

Right in front of me I saw the two beasts.

[Lv. 146]

[Lv. 128]

I could sense many more as well. There were close to a dozen similar sized monsters within a kilometer of me.

There were too many to face at once on flat ground. I need to pick my battles wisely.

One overpowered monster is enough to handle, I can outsmart it. 12 at the same time is a completely different story, I'm not that strong.

I made a furious dash back towards the direction I'd came. If I ran full speed I could make it back to the dungeon's exit and get to safe ground outside to rethink a battle plan. This dungeon is more dangerous than I imagined.

Without another thought I ran as fast as my legs could take me.

I sprinted down into the valley and followed the river without turning my head to look back.

The winding river was a perfect place to avoid these monsters for the time being. They have impressive speed, but the tight turns in this valley limits their movements.

I ran into two normal cyclopes on the way back, but easily avoided their attacks and continued my sprint. After facing that mutant cyclops these regular ones didn't seem as threatening.

About 15 minutes later I came to a very familiar rock formation. This is right by the dungeon's start point. I ran up the valley's edge and made it to the mountain where I'd entered.

What I saw took my breath away...

There was a dark blood red spinning portal.

This is a dungeon break...

