

D. Diver 261

Chapter 261

I choose [YES].

As the fragments of white dungeon mass collapse in on themselves, being dragged into the core and a very fast rate. I activate my Temporary Minion Perk, attempting to take control of the deceased Boss.

It takes a moment to activate as I enter a lower level. Just 20% under the max will be much easier to handle.

[Level 400]

Threads of white and pink light attach the black hole of mana to my fingertips.

Just like the times before when I used this skill, I begin to gain full control of the deceased creature's body.

Even so, the swirling black core has already absorbed more than half of the floor in the dungeon.

We all float high above the ground as the swirling mass and light flash constantly below.

A few seconds pass, and I gain full control. My mind's eye can see exactly what the Metal Warrior see's as it stores dungeon mass in its core.

It seems it didn't get to fully exploit this feature when we battled... but I'm curious to see how it works in the near future.

I could stop the chaos, but decide to keep up the show. Fisher and Lydia probably have enough questions already, there's no need to give them any more.

Plus, absorbing every last white metal fragment may come in handy if I want to summon this creature again. I knew something felt off about this material, it's not normal dungeon mass, but I can't quite put my finger on what it is.

Our main mission is still to get to the top of this Labyrinth. Not much else matters right now, so it's a question for another day.

Simultaneously, the blinding white transfer magic of the Boss Room activates, bringing the 3 of us up to floor 24.

"Item Storage."

Not wanting to miss out on the potential loot of a ranked-up mutant boss like this, I place the bonded core into my item storage.

My mana threads snap and dissolve the moment it enters my pocket world. Then, the white transfer magic fades.

My black boots sink into the ground as the familiar sensation of hot sand under my feet and the glimmering rays of sunshine beat down overhead.

I take in a deep breath and the smell of salt water and fish fills my nose.

The crash of a nearby wave makes me raise my eyes to see an ocean in front of us for as far out onto the horizon as I can see.

I turn around to be surprised by the sight of an ocean off in that direction too.

To my left and right, the waves of a deep blue sea fill my vision once again.

Lush green palm trees grow high in the sky to give off a bit of shade, and smaller plant life grows below it.

We all relax knowing that the Boss Room fight is over, but I can't help but realize the new problem we're facing.

I whisper to myself.

"This is a desert island..."

Fisher replies with a laugh, pointing his blade into the deep blue water.

"Yeah, there's more too. Plenty of islands for as far as the eye can see!"

He's right.

There's dozens of them way off in the distance, similar to the one we stand on now.

Every few hundred meters, a small golden desert island with a patch of palm trees pops up.

In between each of them, there's deep blue water and calm rolling waves.

It's a beautiful sight.

The only thing that bugs me is how silent it is. With rolling waves, golden sand, and lush green trees, It's like this is a string of paradise islands.

A vacation resort even.

It's a nice thought, but I know this isn't true. We're in a labyrinth.

Lydia turns to me as I activate my All-Seeing eye and search the dungeon for a Boss Room portal.

"We've already spent nearly 3 hours climbing, there isn't any more time to waste."

I nod, locating the Boss Room's precise resting point as the white-haired mage speaks again.

"We should get moving, now."

I nod, pointing my gaze off into the distance past the countless islands.

She summons ice and jumps into the air, motioning for me to follow.

Meanwhile, much closer to us, the sea nearby begins to bubble and swell.

The water of the shoreline rises, making me snap out of my dungeon scanning process and air-step upwards to avoid the incoming flow of water.

Lydia and I float about 10 meters off the ground, but the water mage stays down below letting the crashing waves hit his ankles.

Fisher yells as he backs up toward the exit portal.

"I got this, you two keep climbing! Guard duty is up to me!"

My Appraisal and Inspect skills pick up the reading of the creature that's causing this ocean swell.

[Lv. 504]

Active Items:

[Shell Armor of The Island Crab] +2750 Defense

Active Skills:

Body Hardening [Special Grade]

The sand caves in and the water explodes into the air to come crashing down flooding the entire island as an enormous red and orange crab bursts out from the ocean floor.

It's a newly Ranked-Up Monster.

Its long clawed arms and legs grip the sandy shore of the island pulling it forward as Lydia and I float Higher into the air upon Fisher's request.

Looking the crab up and down, I can tell its deadly. The monster's defenses and shielding are much more powerful than the base-level Metal Warriors on the floor below, but it's decided to play in the water.

This is Fisher's element.

I grin as I watch the blue-haired swordsman glow bright and the water that floods the island begins to rise into the air and surround him.

It spins and blends with his glowing magic, creating a whirlpool of energy to form in the air around his body and sword.

A bright flash of light and the twang of mana on mana clashing fills the entire island as we leave the two to have their duel.

Stepping on air and Ice Lydia and I, the final duo, run off to find the Boss Room Portal.

Meanwhile, pincers fly and shells are cracked.

I sense the crab's level reading disappear on my radar before we even make it to the next island.

He took the ranked-up crab out in under 3 hits.

I smirk, turning back around, now fully confident in the water mage's abilities to see a stern look on Lydia's face.

"What's wrong?"

She pauses as we continue to run through the air on platforms of ice and wind just 30 meters or so over the open ocean. The woman doesn't respond until we pass the first island.

"Nothing. This is all just new territory for me. I haven't trained in many dungeons more powerful than this. We could be walking right into a death sentence for all I know."

I nod, sensing another massive crab break through the ocean floor below us, but ignore it.

"One dungeon at a time. We'll face the 25th Floor and see who is most capable of moving on. I just hope it's me... I'm looking forward to a good fight."

I smirk and push off the air while activating my stat-boosting skills to move even faster.

She responds, with a light blue pulse of her own as we speed up towards the back of the dungeon.

She responds.

"You're right. One dungeon at a time..."

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We island hop above the massive crab creatures that explode from the sand below devouring every bit of sandy beach one after another. The string of islands slowly sinks into the ocean floor as we move forward.

The orange and red culprits all range from level 495 to 505.

I send an occasional flaming shot down, but Lydia doesn't bother. I kill 3 in total, but unfortunately don't gain any levels.

I'm sure if I stuck around and farmed here for an hour or two I'd be able to reach level 500 in no time.

There are only 4 levels left, surely I'll make it there soon.

After another half an hour of flying passes, we make it to the final island. A lone Boss Room portal sits on the sandy shore next to a single palm tree.

The deep blue ocean gently crashes and ripples behind it.

Like clockwork, as a mutant crab erupts from the ground below, we jump through letting the creature throw a fit by itself and destroy the island.

Transfer magic flashes and brings us to a nearly identical island. The only difference is, behind us there aren't any remains of fallen sandy shores.

It's a deep ocean on all sides, a small sandy beach devoid of life is all we get. The sand stretches out on all sides of 20 meters or so and the ocean waves crash onto the shoreline.

I shift my feet in the golden ground, preparing for something to attack. While gripping my sword, my gaze moves around the island and I power up my stat-boosting skills.

It's best not to be overconfident. Like Lydia said earlier, everything beyond this point will be uncharted territory for her and myself.

The unstable ground starts to shake and churn under our feet. This is definitely the time to make some distance between us and the incoming threat.

The white-haired ice wielder and I both leap into the air as more sand crumbles away beneath our feet.

By the time we make it up 10 meters half of the small island has sunken into the ocean's depths. A dark red colored crab waves its pincers and long legs in our direction in its place.

It's a level 530 King Crab.

I glow red and Lydia glows light blue. She actually draws one of her blades this time. The hunter is finally starting to get serious.

With two downward swings, the dungeon boss doesn't even get a moment to think.

It's sliced in half with blades of ice and fire in a matter of seconds.

It does show some resilience, as its shielding and body hardening activates. White light shines bright but its hell shatters still, failing to stop either of our incoming strikes in the end.

The Boss Room of the 24th Floor is completed in under 10 seconds.

[Level Up]

We glide down to the sandy beach to collect a massive pink mana crystal and a fragment thick red glowing shell.

It's a piece of the crab's shell with an impressive +3000 Defense buff. I'd like to have it, but considering I stole the last mutant Boss' core without asking, letting Lydia keep this one doesn't bother me.

The mage holds onto it as we're transferred to the next floor.

Her voice can be heard through the bright white transfer magic.

"Floor 25... We're getting into the real dangerous territory now. The Association usually only lets teams of 3 seasoned B-Rank hunters farm on floors above this level. Prepare for the worst. Anything can happen."

My heart starts racing with both nerves and excitement.

The white light fades and my feet hit the hard Dungeon floor. It feels chalky and flat, hard to grip with my sandy boots.

Taking a deep breath in, I can feel the air is dry but the temperature is cool.

It's silent.

Way too silent...

The ground beneath our feet is grey. It feels like hard rock, but it's so artificially smooth it's eerie.

That's not the most off-putting part of this mysterious dungeon.

Looking up at the sky, it's nearly the same color as the floor, just a shade or two lighter.

The horizon line slices the land and the sky into two halves creating a perfectly even cutoff. There isn't a hill, plant, or rock in sight.

It's just a completely flat grey plane.

I gulp, taking a step forward and hearing the sandy crunch echo indefinitely.

Lydia steps forward too, with both hands on her blades fastened to her waist.

She whispers.

"I've never witnessed anything like this..."

I nod in agreement.

The Titan's Domain I was trapped in and trained in for months on end gives off a similar feel. However, there's a huge difference between them.

This Dungeon may have a flat floor of a single shade, and a sky that nearly matches, but it clearly goes on in all directions for as far as the eye can see.

From here, it almost seems like there's no end.

I activate my perception skills and stretch them out as far as they can go.

Nearly 10 kilometers in, I pinpoint the Dungeon's Boss room...

Easy enough.

The odd part is, I don't see or sense a single monster in this entire search.

Taking another step forward, the pressure in the back of my head that I'm very familiar with starts scratching at my telepathy link.

Someone or something is trying to talk to me.

I'm guessing I know exactly who it is...

Gritting my teeth, keeping all my perception skills activated, I allow the nagging voice to enter my mind.

The Arch Demon from the Dungeon in DryRock speaks loud and clear directly into my mind.

I stop mid-stride listening to the creature speak.

"You've come much faster than I expected, and have grown a lot stronger too. Maybe this won't be boring after all."

I reply instantly, turning my head in all directions unable to sense it at all.

"Where are you-"

It cuts me off.

"Our battle shall commence soon on the 26th Floor. I'll see you there."

Its voice cuts off with no link to reply...

My eyes dart around the boss room frantically, scanning every angle as far out as I can sense, but still nothing shows.

The moment these words cut off, from the corner of my eye I see black and purple magic begin to swirl around in the shape of a teleportation portal.

It's on my left side, closest to Lydia.

My eyes open wide and I turn to it with my blade raised, watching a 3-meter-tall black suit of armor walk out making the ground shake with every step.

Its entire frame gives off a black aura, similar in color to the warp portal it leaves.

Once both feet hit the grey stone floor with a thud, the portal disappears.

Surprisingly, the floor doesn't crack or fracture one bit.

The black armored Knight's status finally shows up in my mind's eye.

[Lv. 525]

Active Items:

[Armor Set of The Demonic Guard] +120% Defense

[Long Sword of The Demonic Guard] +115% Strength

[Amulet of The Demonic Guard] +110% Mental Strength

Active Skills:

Dungeon Walker

Swordsmanship

It's an impressive item and skill set, but the one thing that bugs me is how it and the Arch Demon possibly escaped my perception skills earlier.

Unless this monster came from another floor, it managed to slip under the radar and away from even my All-Seeing Eye.

Even now, as it lifts its long black sword with a matching ominous aura, the magic power coming off it is mixed with something very odd...

Something that feels like it shouldn't even exist.

It's a sensation that I've only felt a few times before.

The feeling of energy and matter being there, and not there at the same time.

Like the Titan's invisible readings on my enemy detection radar. Or possibly that ominous void of space out in the desert behind the city of Solara.

Whatever it is... It doesn't feel right.

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Something feels very wrong.

The jet-black magic circling the Knight's equally dark armor sends shivers down my spine for a fraction of a second.

The more I try to use my perception skills and figure out what it is, the more it evades my All-Seeing Eye.

This energy feels like it shouldn't even exist.

Whatever it is, It's not made of mana...

The other half of my mind can't stop thinking about the message I just received from the Arch Demon supposedly running this whole labyrinth.

Just one more floor and I'll be able to face the opponent I've been fantasizing about fighting for days.

With a smirk, I release a blade of energy at the armored Knight as it charges toward us with its blade at the ready.

Lydia unleashes both of her katanas and lets two shimmering white crescents of ice fly beside mine.

The three charged mana blades head straight at the monster's armor. The shimmering black fire attack heads straight for its chest plate, while Lydia's strike curves inwards at the weak points in its upper leg and lower torso.

Surprisingly, the black armored Knight lunges downward changing the trajectory of my attack to a non-vital spot.

My black blade collides with its right shoulder and to my amazement, sparks fly.

It almost looks like metal on metal. It's been a long time since I've seen anything like this.

On impact, the moment the shielding around my shot collides with its black energy a light show of white and yellow sparks erupts into the air.

The popping and buzzing noise of mana being released into the atmosphere fills the room.

That mana is mine.

The edges of my attacks look as if they're melting away while passing through the hard mental armor of the Knight with relative ease.

With a loud clang, its whole right arm falls to the floor and my energy blade curves upward into the sky.

There isn't anything in the armor, it's completely hollow.

My gaze follows my own attack in awe as it continues popping and buzzing while slowly melting away high up in the dungeon sky.

The black energy of this odd creature is able to erode and destroy any concentrated mana attacks.

Not very fast, but the fact that it's able to use an unknown source of energy like this is definitely alarming. There's no sign of a hidden buff or special skill in its status.

It doesn't matter right now.

As my attack damages its right arm, the Knight lunges to the opposite side right into Lydia's incoming crescents of Ice.

Just like my attack, light-colored sparks fly, but the bulk of the strike pierces all the way through its intended target.

More loud clangs of armor sound as the Black Armored Knight falls to the grey floor in pieces. Ice residue creeps over all of the armor, and a chain reaction of sparks flies as it spreads.

Both Lydia's remaining shots and the residue left behind disappear into the air in just a few seconds. The black-colored aura starts to disappear from the enemy too, leaving a dark sliced-up suit of armor on the Dungeon floor less than 10 meters away from us.

I stare at it with a blank yet curious expression, then speak up while blinking a few times.

"Did- it jump into your line of fire? Or was I seeing things just now...?"

We both slowly walk forward, still glowing in full battle mode.

She replies.

"It did..."

Our footsteps echo while we draw closer and the wisps of black aura completely vanish into thin air.

There isn't a trace of this monster's essence left, but cold slashed through armor and a sword on the floor.

Using appraisal, it all registers as non-buffed gear. It's all just normal armor now.

Lydia speaks up again.

"It negated both of our high-concentration mana attacks. I've never seen anything like that."

Her eyes are wide, showing emotion I've never seen on the white-haired mage's face before.

I turn around, scanning the entire dungeon again, but nothing shows up. According to my senses, there isn't a single other being present on this floor but us.

I highly doubt this is the truth.

We wait for over 3 minutes and finally, the armor begins to dissolve. It drops a mana crystal, but also a tiny black gem smaller than my fingernail.

It doesn't register in any of my skills and gives off no magic power. If I didn't see it with my own two eyes, I wouldn't believe there was anything here at all.

The rock doesn't glimmer or shine, and there isn't even a hint of transparency to it. It's dull and black but is cut in the shape of a factory diamond.

I lean over and pick it up, bringing the odd stone to eye level.

Looking deep into the gem it still just seems like an ordinary rock. The only odd thing about it is I can't sense inside. There's a mini pocket of space that's invisible to me no matter how hard I focus.

About 15 seconds pass and I let out a sigh, throwing the gem into my item storage.

Lydia yells out as my mesmerization with the stone finally finishes.

"There's another! Get ready!"

A swirling purple and black Dungeon Walker Portal shows up and an identical knight comes running out with its sword raised. It's on my far side, closer to the mage.

She lets two shots fly from a close range and they collide with the armored Knight's torso sending sparks of white and yellow lights flying in the air.

Her blades of mana dissolve after they slice through and the Knight falls before it can even attempt to take another step forward.

She murmurs under her breath, running over to the fallen Knight.

"So... fascinating..."

I follow, and she turns back to me as I do.

"You're eager to move to the next floor right?"

Lydia turns to the pile of metal scraps, then back to me.

"I'd like to fight as many of these Knights as possible. This... is a unique dungeon, there isn't a single one like it in that I'm aware of. If-"

I cut her off.

"No need to explain. I was planning to move to the next floor whether you liked it or not. However, I'm curious about these creatures too."

The armor starts to dissolve and it drops a mana crystal along with that tiny black gem again...

Lydia picks it up, stares at it for a moment, then activates her ice magic while tossing it up in the air.

My eyes open wide as sparks fly and a yellow and white fire burns bright for 2 seconds straight above her open palm.

It sucks in all of the ice magic she produces, then completely disappears. The stone leaves nothing at all in its place.

Both of us watch in awe. Then, Lydia speaks again.

"I'll find out everything I can, but time is not on our side. We have less than 2 hours to clear this break."

I give her a firm nod.

It was easier than I thought to convince her to let me go alone.... Although this dungeon seems rich with rare resources, the final room is the only destination on my mind.

"Understood."

She replies.

"The Director has full confidence in your squad, especially you. If we fail, hundreds of thousands die."

I smile, turning away towards the exit.

"I'll clear the final room by any means necessary. Focus on guarding this floor and collecting those gems."

Another black and purple portal forms and I air-step away leaving Lydia to farm the abnormal dungeon and guard the 25th floor from its impending break

Finally, I'm off to face the Final Floor alone.

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I leave Lydia behind as she battles the jet-black suit of armor that spawned in moments ago.

It dives for her directly, ignoring me as I air-step away in the direction of the dungeon's far side.

Oddly enough, over the next half an hour there isn't a single monster that comes onto my radar. Not a single one even spawns a portal below to try and fight me.

I just fly through the sky in silence, letting the eerie silence of the grey-colored world aid in my building anticipation for the boss that's to come.

I continuously try to re-open the link from earlier, but the Arch Demon's presence is nowhere to be found.

I'm itching to try out my new increased power. Even with these unique Knight creatures appearing a single attack slices through them like butter.

This final challenge better be worth it.

Slowly letting the grin of excitement grow on my face, the final glowing portal of the Knight's Boss room comes into view.

I let out a satisfied chuckle while gliding down to the floor and stepping through without a second thought.

"Once I defeat this room, I'll be one step away from taking on that demon."

The white transfer magic takes me in and fades all the same as I activate all my battle skills in preparation for a fight.

Once my vision returns, it feels and looks like I've been transported back to the start point of the original dungeon.

There's no difference at all.

A grey floor and grey sky surround me, plus the absence of any Boss makes me even more confused.

With a step forward I grip my blade and take a deep breath.

All I have to do is wait. It'll come.

Pushing my perception skill to its limit and absorbing the MP in the air, all I hear is my own heart beating in my ears while my eyes scan the room over and over again.

Despite its similarities to the endless dungeon I just left, this place seems to have a barrier-like cutoff around 700 meters away from me. I couldn't tell at first, the walls just looked like the sky from the 25th Floor.

I'm standing in a massive grey cube.

Staring outwards, I feel a gust of wind hit the back of my neck. Instantly, I jump high up in the air while expanding a flat rectangular shield of pink mana behind me.

Explosions of white light and sparks follow as my shielding is melted. A wavering black crescent of energy tears through it with ease...

Under close examination, the blade that cuts my shielding isn't slicing through in a conventional manner at all.

It's destroying the mana itself as it collides with my shield. The two masses of opposite matter collide, completely destroying each other in a magnificent blast.

My gaze shifts from this display as I lock onto the menace that sent this shot.

[Lv. 540]

Active Items:

[Armor Set of The Final Demonic Guard] +125% Defense

[Long Sword of The Final Demonic Guard] +122% Strength

[Amulet of The Final Demonic Guard] +119% Mental Strength

Active Skills:

Dungeon Walker

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Advanced Demonic Energy Manipulation]

This Knight is nearly a full head taller than the ones back in the dungeon, and it exudes much more of that glowing black energy. Easily 5 times as much.

Its final kill catches my eye as it lets off another shot directly my way.

"Demonic Energy...?"

A wave of undetectable black mass soars toward me, but I dungeon walk to the floor to dodge and point my sword forward erupting into dark flames of my own.

Not wanting to give it another chance to attack, I let out a destructive blow. It matches my attack with blinding speed and both of our attacks collide.

I dungeon walk up in the air above it to let out another attack while the exploration of sparks and swirling black energy fills the battlefield below.

Like a black hole, the reaction sucks in pure mana from my strike the two attacks that collide cancel each other out. It all fades into nothingness as the magical flaming debris dissipates.

Meanwhile, my second attack is on a crash course for the Knight's unguarded chest plate.

With incredible agility and reaction time faster than any beast I've faced in my life, the black helmet turns toward me and it lunges out of the way while forming a purple dungeon walker portal of its own.

Not having an upgraded skill like my ability may be its fatal flaw. The milliseconds of lag time between summoning a portal and jumping through are more than enough for me to land a shot on the Guard's left forearm.

Yellow and white sparks glint in the air as it slips through the portal and becomes completely invisible.

I grin, watching the left hand of the creature hit the solid grey floor with a clang while covered in popping magic reactions to the remaining energy surrounding it.

Seconds later it all dissolves and a cold black metal glove sits on the dungeon floor.

The room is silent once again....

Deathly silent.

I stay high up in the air, using wind magic to keep myself about 10 meters off the ground and slowly spinning to scan the room in all directions.

Over a full minute passes.

The monster doesn't show up. I grit my teeth and glide down to the floor muttering under my breath.

"I don't have time for this... "

Nothing again for the full 10 seconds I glide to the floor.

It's just silent.

"Come on out...."

The Guard only attacked me last time when it had a clear advantage and the element of surprise from behind. If that's what it needs to spawn back in again, then that's what I'll give it.

However, it won't be able to dodge my attack this time around. I'm sure of it.

I smirk.

The moment my feet tap the light-colored ground, I spin and release a shot from my charged sword.

I couldn't sense a thing, but nonetheless, my predictions are spot on.

The obsidian-colored Guard emerges from its swirling portal and releases an energy blade of its own, not waiting for a second.

As it's released from the Guardian's sword, the black energy is so close to the ground, that it begins to react with the mana in the dungeon floor.

A white and yellow light forms underneath it as a half-meter-deep hole trails the Knight's demonic attack. It's eroding mass from the Boss Room.

I Dungeon walk above it to shoot off another attack, then Dungeon Walk to its opposite side to let out a 3rd.

Over and over, before our first attacks even collide, I send 4 more flying at it from all directions.

It has no time to think, and nowhere to hide.

They all make contact at a single point.

With an explosive crackle, it looks and sounds like a house full of fireworks all ignited at once.

The violent popping sounds and expelled mana and flames are mind-boggling.

I smile ear to ear while air-stepping backward to watch the attacks hit the Knight straight on from every angle.

It attempts to portal out, but the lag time doesn't allow it to do so at this range.

Black armor flies, and the eruption of energy explodes over 15 meters in the air before quickly dying down and collapsing on itself disappearing into nothingness.

In less than 4 seconds, the entire reaction ceases to exist and not a single drop of mana or swirling black magic is left behind.

The lifeless armor falls to the floor.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

"That's level 499. Just 1 more.."

I Dungeon Walk over to the now, most definitely lifeless Knight.

The colliding shots cracked the floor and made a small crater, but it's not nearly as deep as expected. Possibly half a meter to a meter at its deepest point.

My eyes lock onto the center of the armor as I slowly walk over and it dissolves before my eyes.

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Combat Magic [Advanced Demonic Energy Manipulation]

[YES][NO]

Blue text hovers above the remains of the Knight. With a grin, I choose yes without a moment of hesitation.

The Knights from the dungeon below were covered in this energy despite not having the actual skill to wield it.

"Something isn't quite adding up here."

My thoughts are interrupted as the loot finally drops.

With a light-sounding clink, a large mana crystal, along with a black rock over 3 times the size of the previous drops are all that remain.

The black stone has flat crystal-like edges. Unlike the rocks in the Knight's dungeon, this one gives off a faint black aura. My eyes fill with curiosity as I place the crystal and stone into my item storage very carefully.

My heart pounds faster and faster with excitement as I wait for the transfer magic to take me up to the final dark hallway. I'll have to talk to Ember about this new demonic power. I'm sure he has some valuable insight. It may be of great aid while facing the final Floor.

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My vision begins to fill with the familiar white light of transfer magic bringing me to the next floor.

So many questions fill my mind as a black hallway comes into view and my feet fall onto the hard rocky ground.

I defeated that Knight with ease, but it's only because my mana control is on par with monsters much higher than my own level. With my armor buffs and an array of skills, that level gap can be raised even more.

It was using Demonic Energy, not magic... It's odd attacks were able to destroy mine completely despite the overwhelming strength difference. If it had even a moment to think and dodge, my strikes were somewhat useless.

It's time to get some answers.

"Item Storage."

The white spinning portal of my spatial magic lets Ember walk out. It's a tight fit in this narrow cave, but heading straight into the final Boss room without a plan would be far too reckless.

He takes a step forward and immediately opens our link.

"You've gained a lot of mana control. I take it those stones were all absorbed...? Our levels have risen as well. Just one more before the rank up."

Ember pauses, then looks me up and down warily.

"What trouble have you gotten yourself into now?"

He stares straight at me not moving a muscle. It seems like he's looking right through. I respond.

"What do you mean? I already told you we were headed for a labyrinth. The trouble hasn't even started yet."

I turn and point toward the end of the hallway at the swirling black portal. It's oversaturated with energy, but not nearly as bad as some of the violent eruptions of mana I've seen from some Boss Rooms.

This one is calm, and waiting patiently for the floors below to collapse before releasing its magic on the world. In the meantime, it's inviting anyone in who wants to try their hand at battle.

Ember nods slowly, looking at the portal, then back to me.

"I don't mean the Labyrinth, I mean the Demonic Energy around you... I haven't felt an aura like this in ages."

The black-scaled dragon tightens its gaze and gives me a curious glance, but I can see genuine concern in his eyes.

I reply.

"Demonic Energy? Is it that dangerous? I haven't even used that skill yet. How can you even tell It's around me? I can't sense a thing."

I stomp my foot on the ground.

"I only got it moments ago on the 25th Floor. There were huge black Knights covered in it."

A toothy grin comes my way, this time with much more excitement.

"The guardians.... So it's a skill? You're not channeling it through your core?"

A sigh of relief follows as I nod. Ember continues.

"That makes much more sense. A Demonic Energy manipulation skill. Interesting. I thought we'd at least rank up before having to deal with power like this."

I tighten my gaze too.

"Well, we are and we don't have much time to spare either. Tell me what I need to know before facing the Arch Demon. Will I be able to use this ability against it? It seems like I'm going to need to use every dirty trick I can get my hands on."

Ember pulses red, activating his plunderer skill momentarily then responds.

"You should know, Demonic Energy is the opposite of mana. If one essence touches the other in a fully active state, the two energies will cancel each other out. Demonic Energy destroys Magic at the cost of its own mass. Magic attracts Demonic Energy. The two are always bound to meet, but chaos is unleashed when they collide. Both destroy each other entirely."

I nod, thinking about every attack the Black Knight sent out. They all disappeared after a ball of sparks ate up any mana in its path.

Ember carries on.

"Most monsters are incapable of using this power, it is undetectable to them. Arch Demons and other ranked-up demonic monsters that serve directly under the King are the only beings capable of wielding it. Even so, with an advanced manipulation skill, using it incorrectly can still easily be fatal."

He stares into the portal, then turns to me. I raise an eyebrow at his mention of a King. Ember continues as I listen curiously.

"Even with your greater demon's core, it's not a safe power to use. If you have any active magic skills present while manipulating demonic energy, an unstoppable chain reaction could occur within you. Extensive training is necessary to use both in unison. I advise against trying out that skill until you comprehend what you're dealing with."

I think to myself for a moment before responding.

This is both an amazing power beyond belief and also very disappointing.

It all adds up... mostly...

There's just one thing I don't want to gloss over. Ember said it in such a nonchalant manner, but it may be even more important than this new skill.

"The King? Who's the King? Like.. a Demon King? No one at the Association has ever talked about a King. Wouldn't that be the number one priority to take this monster out?"

I stare at Ember wide-eyed, then let out a sigh after a moment of pause.

"Then again... They hardly ever leak information to the public anyway. I wouldn't be surprised if they were hiding this too."

Ember nods.

"I'm not sure what humans plan to do this time around. It's been over 50 years since I last got word of a plan. Usually, the King stays out of worldly matters. An Arch Demon serves directly under them, so if you want to find out any more information you'll have to find out from the source. A labyrinth of this size is definitely farming a considerable amount of mana resources. It being destroyed moments before a full collapse will most likely raise some questions."

He hesitates, then stares at me.

"Collapses like these are never randomly-"

Mid-sentence, the black swirling portal at the back of the room pulses with a wave of mana. It feels similar to the wave of energy I felt outside when one of the floors collapsed before we entered.

I grit my teeth and turn toward the mass of spinning darkness.

"This is it. If I want to learn more, we'll have to jump through."

With a grin, I step forward and motion for Ember to follow.

He finishes his sentence.

"Collapses like these aren't random. A Labyrinth Master of this magnitude won't go down easily, and I can tell this one is not a young one. There's no time for fun, do not let your guard down for a second."

I nod.

"You're right. There's no turning back now. We both go all out from the start, got it? No holding back. This isn't a training session, it's a mission that needs to be completed."

There are many lives on the line outside, it's all up to me.

I come face to face with the final entrance, then speak again.

"I just need the final strike, that's the only rule. It's time to rank up, and obtain another core."

We both jump through.

The swirling black portal fades to white. The further I step through, the faster the darkness fades away bringing us to the Final Boss Room.

However, once through the whiteness doesn't fade.

My lungs fill with cold air while I take my first deep breath. I activate my fire magic and feel Ember do the same as he transports in behind me.

The flames around my body melt white snow away as I take in the view.

The sky is crystal clear and bright blue without a cloud in sight.

There's a range of tall mountains off in the distance that all line up in the outer edge of a semi-circle. They're all almost entirely covered in snow and the open half of the circle faces me.

Leading up to this inviting mountain-covered landscape, there's a kilometer-long stretch of powered white snow.

The air is still, not blowing any frozen precipitation around. Ember and I release clouds of steam that slowly float high into the sky as the cold reacts with our fire magic residue.

It's completely silent...

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There isn't a single snowflake out of place in this vast whiteness.

It's a pure solid white.

I'm not even sure if I could make out that the structures in the distance as mountains unless portions of their cliff edges showed dark stone pointing up into the sky.

The sizzle of water being evaporated into steam is the only sound that reaches my ears. Everything else here is eerily silent.

Well, it's actually not that eerie, more like peaceful silence. I'm just on edge because I know what's waiting for me.

With each step forward, the snow beneath my feet continues to melt. I do find a glossy blue floor now far below to place my feet. It feels like ice but doesn't immediately sizzle away like the snow. This layer takes a few seconds to melt from my fire residue so I'm able to walk across it.

Using mana manipulation and wind magic to guide my steps, slipping around isn't an issue.

After a few seconds, I air-step into the sky and Ember follows.

My prescription skills are on full blast, but nothing is showing up on my radar yet again.

"Why do these Ranked-Up opponents always make me wait..."

I hear a reply as I hop on his back and we begin soaring toward the back of the Boss Room.

"Stay alert. It could be lurking anywhere. Even if it's been watching you this whole time, I doubt it'd show its face the moment we enter its lair."

I stay silent and follow the wise dragon's advice. We glide over the flatter portion of the landscape with ease, then arrive at a section of rolling hills.

Beyond these, there's a wide shallow crater of blue ice with little to no snow at all leading up to the base of the curved mountain range in the back.

The moment we cross over into the new section of dungeon, I feel a pulse of mana come out from the mountain.

It's pure, crisp, and cold. This is nothing at all like I'd expect from a demon.

Gritting my teeth, I stare forward and concentrate.

The top of the mountain begins to glow light blue filling the sky with its magical essence. It flashes, sending out another pulse mere seconds after the first.

Ember comes to a halt, hovering in mid-air a distance away from the mountain.

As the flash of white and blue light stops a transparent shimmering circle of energy has formed behind the mountain's peak. It's enormous and gives off a mana signature that I've never felt before.

It's mostly mana, but there's something about this ring that feels very offputting.

I can see the sky behind it, and the curved edges glimmer with silver and white light even after the flash but have become much dimmer now.

Ember's voice echoes in my mind.

"The Arch Demon's battle partner has come to greet us."

I clench my jaw and grip my sword.

"You were right."

As these words transfer over our link, we're interrupted.

A loud metallic twang and cracking noise come from the ring in the sky. It flashes silver, blue, and white again, sending out a final pulse much more bright and intense.

This is followed by a deafening screech that distorts into a vicious roar.

All I can see is snow from all the nearby mountains fall from their high points and tumble down in a mass avalanche.

Ember reflexively flaps his wings bringing us high into the air away from any future debris from the snowfall.

Simultaneously, my enemy detection, inspect, and appraisal skills finally latch onto something.

[750m]

[Lv. 608]

Active Items:

[Tier 3 Dragon Scales] +144% Mental Strength +90% Magic Resistance

[Platinum Amulet of Frost] +137% Mental Strength +90% Ice Magic

Active Skills:

Plunderer [Legendary Grade]

Combat Magic [Advanced Ice Summoning]

Bufs:

[Ice Dragon's Spawn][Hidden Ability]

[Ultimate Ice Defense][Hidden Ability]

Two enormous white wings emerge from the flash of light.

With each flap, they move large amounts of wind to push the remaining snow off the top of the furthest mountains.

Although I'm nearly a kilometer away I can tell the creature that teleports into the dungeon is monstrous in size.

Possibly over twice as large as Ember...

Its jagged white teeth glimmer brighter than the snow and its royal blue eyes glow darker than the ice bowl below.

With a twisting pointed tail and dark underbelly a similar hue to its eyes, the white-scaled dragon comes into full view and lets out another roar while hovering above the mountain.

I whisper under my breath.

"It looks like we get a warmup round..."

Ember replies to my mumbles through the link in a calm voice but with an undertone of anger.

"An Ice Dragon... It sent its partner to test our strength. Their souls are linked just like ours, so don't think for a second that monster will go down easy."

The monster in question stretches its wings after the second roar, then finally locks eyes on us.

It begins to flap its wings and fly toward us with impressive speed.

I switch into full battle mode, thinking about its status for possible strengths and weaknesses.

There are a few things that differ from theirs and Ember's.

Firstly, its plunderer skill is a rank lower. It's still higher than mine at a Legendary Grade, but one under Ember's who has a Mythic Grade skill.

Its combat magic skill is straightforward. A clear difference. Ice and Fire are clear opposites. Luckily, Fire-based attacks are very effective against Ice. Although both dragons generally have high magic resistance, there is still a clear advantage here.

Next, this dragon doesn't have a telepathy skill. I'm positive the body double for its master had one, so it can communicate, but only if directly talked to... Interesting.

Lastly, its buffs. These must be an innate hidden ability or a gifted one after the rank-up process... We'll find out soon enough.

Either way, the fight is getting started.

I reply.

"Let's do this."

I activate all my stat-boosting skills to their fullest capacity while reaching into my item storage to pull out my dagger.

Ember glows beneath me and I feel the heat of his flames growing hotter as dark flames build up inside of him.

[500m]

The enormous white-scaled dragon swoops downward, gaining speed while soaring less than 30 meters from the side of the mountain before hitting our eye level. It begins to glow light blue. The closer it travels, the brighter it shines.

[300m]

Dark flames surround my right side carrying a sword, and the same colored aura leaks from Ember's mouth ready to release a wave of high-powered fire magic at a moment's notice.

My left side is surrounded by wind magic aided by my mana manipulation skill, giving it a sharper and more concise edge.

[150m]

I'm not just looking at the Dragon through my perception skills anymore, its features are crystal clear and even more menacing than I expected up close. With glossy white scales, and claws bigger than my entire torso, this Ranked-Up Dragon is quite possibly the largest monster I've ever seen.

Definitely the strongest.

My entire body glows in a golden white light as it's surrounded by flames and dark red swirling magic. A long trail of fire and steam falls behind us.

I stand on Ember's back with my eyes locked forward, preparing to let out a devastating blow then Dungeon Walk us away to fire another or find cover... depending on how this attack lands.

The incoming Ice Dragon's eyes tighten as particles of Ice leave its mouth waiting to be let out in a violent explosion as well.

[50m]

"It's time."

I swing my sword and dagger across my body while Ember opens his mouth wide.

Two supercharged crescents of white and black mana-imbued light twist together and head straight toward the glowing White Dragon. Beneath these mana blades, a thick dark crimson cylinder of flames erupts from the Black-Scaled dragon and follows the same path toward our enemy.

The air around us ripples with intensity. The buzzing sound of mana, and hissing sound of steam are all drowned out by what I hear next.

The Frost Dragon's screech returns as it releases its counterattack of blinding white and blue light.

The intensity of its blast is overwhelming. So much mana in such a small space...

[0m]

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The attacks of fire and mana-imbued Ice collide, shaking the entire Boss Room. Shockwaves of pure mana pulse from the collision as a wall of ice is summoned many times larger than the dragon I shot at.

An adjacent wall of flames is produced as Embers fire spreads over the blast radius.

My wind and fire attacks hit straight on and ring out in an ear-shattering collision.

They pause in mid-air letting out the head-spinning reverberations followed by the sound of a loud crack.

We swoop upwards to avoid the blast, but I watch with my All-Seeing Eye in anticipation while the thick sheet of ice fractures at its contact point.

Splintering ice, fire, wind, mana, and intense plumes of steam fill the air in all directions for at least 100 meters as the thick wall of ice splits in two.

Ember and I aim for the sky charging up another attack as the summoned blue and white shield falls to the floor in pieces. Following very close behind is the uninjured Frost Dragon grinning wide with its teeth leaking ice magic. The creature's royal blue eyes are locked on us and it's shortening the distance gap fast.

Our first attack may have broken through its first layer of defenses, but the fiery blades were completely destroyed before they managed to even hit its scales and mana shielding.

It's a 2v1 and our combined mana control seems to be about the equivalent of our opponent even with an elemental advantage.

We're facing a superior monster. Finally.

I smirk and speak through our link.

"We'll have to outsmart it and land a heavy hit early in this battle. To the sky, don't slow down even for a second. Prepare to release an attack on my cue."

Still moving upward, Ember responds.

"Understood."

Another flap of his wings increases our upward velocity and the crackling dark red aura around us grows.

We break through the clouds of debris and begin soaring into the sky, only going faster and not looking back.

A screech sounds from beneath us and I grip my weapons even tighter channeling mana from the surrounding air into them preparing for an attack of equal power to the one we just released.

The fast-approaching dragon breaks through the cloudline less than a second later with its claws reaching up at us. Its mouth is glowing brighter blue ready to fire an offensive attack this time around.

We fly higher and higher.

With each flap of the White Dragon's wings, it gets closer and closer to us. Ember may be more agile, but out in the open air his wingspan is less than half of the Boss Dragon's so we're losing ground fast.

The air is getting thinner and the sky is turning into a blue void of cool calm air. It's silent up here, just like when we first entered this Boss Room.

Not even our enemy is making a sound. It's just keeping its eyes locked on us like it's stalking prey.

Every fraction of a second that passes, meters of distance between us are being lost. The monster will inevitably catch us soon.

However, this is exactly what I hoped for.

"It's almost time..."

We rocket up into the air so fast that the mountains below start to disappear. The glowing beast is less than 3 wingspans away now.

"Just a little longer..."

Then, I feel it release an icy blast pointed right at us. This one is much more concentrated than its last display by far. With the mana density less spread out, I believe an attack like this would be very close to fatal if it hit us.

I'll make sure that doesn't happen.

"Dungeon Walker."

I teleport both of us below the Frost Dragon to the point in space where we were flying upward just moments ago.

Ember flaps his wings, and we keep rocketing forward. Now instead of being chased, we're the chasers.

An eruption of deep blue glowing ice in the shape of a deadly spear shoots into the air, lighting up the sky and slicing through the empty space we just left. I open my link while swinging my sword and dagger across my body.

"Now. Let's take this monster out of the sky!"

Ember breaths a dark crimson wave of flames while my blades of mana circle around it making for a devastating attack.

It collides with the underbelly of the Boss Monster and tears through its mana shielding just like it did the barrier of ice earlier. Not easily, but still does a considerable amount of damage.

My blades dig deep into its exposed scales and its entire body is engulfed in Embers flames.

Its upward momentum doesn't allow the creature to stop, turn, or dodge.

It doesn't have more than a fraction of a second to do so in the first place, but by the sound of its murderous roar, I can tell it probably won't fall from just one attack.

I let out a laugh as Embr swoops down outside of the blast radius. Any sound I make is drowned out by screeches and metallic ringing noises that continue to echo in my ears and through the entire floor around us.

"That did some serious damage..."

Glowing blue eyes shine through the swirling debris of magic and matter thrown around from the blast. Then, the entire white-scaled dragon erupts from the clouds of residue.

Two large gashes are visible on its underside and burn marks are apparent on its wings from Ember's fire magic. Using ice and mana control of its own, our opponent has managed to put the flames out and temporarily cover its wounds with Ice.

It barely lost any blood, but it is definitely injured. This is a good start.

The anger on its face is clear as day, and as it flaps its wings and shoots toward us, I can tell exactly what it's thinking without telepathy. "No more messing around, you're dead now."

I concentrate on the fight ahead. One solid attack landed, now it's time to keep this momentum.

"Dungeon Walker."

We teleport to the White Dragon's back and let out another attack.

"Dungeon Walker."

Then, as it's hit from the sky, we release another from below.

"Dungeon Walker."

Again, a dual attack hits the dragon and tears through its shielding and mana-resistant scales leaving gashes and burns all over.

It just roars and follows our lead. The Dragon gets quicker to react every time. It's studying our fighting style but is hit with a devastating blow before it can counter.

"Dungeon Walker."

We teleport to its opposite side again and release a wave of fire and wind magic just the last few.

However... this time is different.

Instead of flailing in pain or trying to helplessly dodge the Dragon stays still and begins to glow white and silver.

A layer of shimmering metallic-colored Ice covers its entire body in an instant. If my All-Seeing Eye wasn't activated, it'd be near impossible to comprehend what just happened.

Our flames collide with its white scales covered in glimmering silver icy armor, then explode on impact into a black and red ball of flames.

I Dungeon Walk backward as the glimmering silver and white dragon turns around to look at us with a new lighter colored more refined aura.

There isn't a single new scratch on it after that attack.

I whisper under my breath.

"That's one of Its hidden abilities. Ultimate Ice Defense."

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My blades summoned from fire and wind explode into magnificent balls of man-imbued flames. The white and black blades intertwine with Ember's magic and cover the Silver Dragon, outer shell completely.

It stays silent, unharmed by the blast and waiting for us my make another move. My best guess is it's plotting to finally counter when we do. The Dragon studied our movements, flight patterns, and attack styles while taking damage just to get the upper hand.

"I knew it wasn't going to be easy. Bring it on!"

Yelling out into the magic clouds of debris as we soar upward, the shimmering dragon follows closing the distance just like before.

Our full-powered attacks can't even make a scratch on its new armor, so I'll have to try a much more unconventional way to bring down more of its health.

The moment it erupts from the clouds below, I expand my perception range and activate one of my newest abilities.

"Life Steal."

A pulse of mana with a green hue comes emanating from my body and I feel the life force of the approaching Dragon grow stronger and stronger the closer it gets.

The shimmering green energy of my mana collides with the monster's white aura. I instantly feel the hint of a refreshing sensation come over my full body. From this range, it's hardly taking in 5 HP a second at most, but that's still something.

I smirk as the approaching creature roars and sends a wave of offensive ice magic my way in the shape of a long spear.

"Dungeon Walker."

We teleport away from its clutches and I do the same thing again. By allowing the enemy to come just within range, I suck a small portion of its HP away from it each time. It's growing weaker for every teleportation we use up, but not by much.

Ember and I both send off attacks to counter its fury. This gives me a fraction of a second more time to drain HP before teleporting away.

The only way to do a considerable amount of damage would be to get up closer, but every time I try to teleport a little further into range, the faster an Ice attack blasts at me or we narrowly avoid the massive claws of the enraged beast.

The Boss Monster is getting very frustrated, but its eyes never leave our position. Despite its roars of anger, it stays in full battle mode, only improving with each and every one of my teleports.

By the time another dozen more attacks pass, it's guessing over half of my transport points before I even move there. Despite this, I've drained another hundred or so of its HP.

All I need is time and this battle is as good as won. As long as we stay out of range and keep up this pace, the fight will be over before the collapse gets anywhere close to the final floor.

I charge up my blades and Ember flaps his wings preparing another dual strike to distract it. We blip to the opposite side of the shimmering beast, but the voice that enters my mind catches me completely off guard.

"No more playing around. It's time to get serious."

In an instant, the sky turns dark and a shadowy figure teleports in between me and the Frost Dragon using a purple and black portal to do so.

Before I can even think to teleport away or stop swinging my blades, the wave of flames already flies forward.

I watch the figure raise its hand and block my two shots and Embers fire with ease.

Through the explosion of flames and excess mana, a pair of long red horns emerge on top of the dark-skinned Arch Demon's body.

It's no more than 3 meters tall, but there's so much power emanating from its small frame the creature seems even larger than the dragon glaring at me from behind it.

The Demon stares forward with a wide smile, bulging muscles, and a dreadful dark aura. It looks identical to the body double it sent to me back in DryRock. The only difference is, that this real body seems as though it's leaking with power just begging to be used.

The air around its exposed chest and legs wavers and the loud hum of mana fills the area even though its mana shielding isn't active yet.

The blindingly white eyes with tiny black pupils look more cold and ruthless than any creature I've ever witnessed or imagined.

This is the result of harnessing mana from the Solaran Labyrinth for years.

This is a real Arch Demon.

[Lv. 608]

Active Items:

[Arch Demon's Amulet of Protection] +140% Defense +110 Strength

[Crimson Ring of Truth] +135% Mental Strength +120% Perception

[Obsidian Ring of Deception] +120% Speed +100% Agility

[Arch Demon's Core] +100% All Stats

Active Skills:

Telepathy [Legendary Grade]

Body Double [Special Grade]

Dungeon Walker

Bufs:

Enrage[Hidden ability]

The silver Frost Dragon begins to glow brightly again behind the Demon and lights up the sky.

Our chances of victory in this fight just fell from 'within possibilities' down into the 'slim to none' range. The overwhelming power before us is over double our own combined mana control and the growing white light is only increasing that gap.

Three portals of white spatial magic appear over the Dragon's head as it lets out a roar. Out of each one, smaller white-scaled lizard creatures with wings materialize from thin air. They're over 5 meters long and have the same royal blue eyes and dark underbelly to match their summoner.

I comment to Ember through our link.

"It's the second buff. A summoning spell just like the Blue Ogre King we faced...."

Using inspect, I see [Lv. 550] above each of their heads while they flap their wings and begin to glow blue with their own ice magic.

This may have been a plan to deter us from trying, or a way to move me away from its source with this Life Steal skill. Or... they're just summoning backup for fun to crush us into the ground with a single attack.

We're outmatched and out of time, but I can't help but smile with wide eyes.

It may seem like all hope is lost, and it's time to run, but that's far from the case. Without realizing it, our opponent just gave us the perfect opportunity to get on equal ground.

I eye the three winged lizards as they slither out from their portals and the white light fades

The 5 of them stare across a 50-meter gap in the air at the 2 of us. All the debris from our explosions has drifted down to the ground and we're left in a standstill, waiting for the other to make their move first.

The Arch Demon summons a purple portal and lands on top of the silver dragon's head, motioning for the underlings to move forward.

They do, and I hear the monster's voice in my inner ear again.

"You have a few more skills than I gave you credit for. It seems I'll actually have to join to show you our true power."

The Demon's toothy grin matches its bonded dragon. The cold demonic eyes of both creatures stare into our souls, knowing we don't stand a chance now.

I take a deep breath and continue charging my blades with a straight face.

The underlings fly closer, and I calmly wait.

It feels like hours go by in these last few seconds before the final dual.

My heart rate speeds up and my grip on both weapons tightens.

"Finally, it's time."

I shift my gaze to the sky as the first Ice Lizard Spawn comes diving in to attack us head-on.

Both Ember and I let out a full-powered blow, slicing the creature in two and showering the battlefield with remains to announce the Labyrinth's Boss Room fight has begun.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Rank Up]

[YES][NO]

Chapter 269

"It's time to Rank Up."

A glowing blue text floats in front of my eyes after 3 level-up notifications bring me well past the level 500 threshold.

[Rank Up]

[YES][NO]

I choose [YES].

Time feels as if it temporarily stops around me the moment I make this decision.

The two other ice lizards still come at us from above on both sides, but so much slower than before.

My breathing is loud in my ears and my perception of magic around me only gets more heightened the longer I'm exposed to this odd flow state.

As my gaze shifts over my surroundings, a white glow starts to shine below me and I feel Ember's scales begin to shift and vibrate.

Looking down, the black-scaled dragon glows white too, and my body begins to react.

The base of his back I'm standing on begins to expand, the scales grow larger.

The white light feels warm.

It's pure energy expands in my chest distributing itself evenly throughout my entire body.

I take a deep breath in and my eyes open wide. It feels like the first real breath I've ever taken. The air tastes sweet and the world around me looks even more crystal clear than I already thought it was...

It's like my All-Seeing Eye is activated at all times, not just the hint of passive control I had before.

The efficiency of my mana usage just drastically increased, and I didn't absorb a single MP.

This explains how Lydia kept up with me earlier. She didn't absorb the same amount of MP as me, she was just ranked up. Odds are, the ice mage probably hasn't absorbed much more than Fisher...

My mana control easily doubled in a matter of seconds. I check my status and see a single change under the buffs section.

Buffs:

Rising Emperor's Domain[Hidden Ability]

I take a closer look.

Rising Emperors Domain[Hidden Ability]

Info:

This is a hidden passive ability for a spell caster with the traits of an Emperor in the making. The Rising Emperor's Domain allows the caster to share skills in their status with any party member who has sworn their loyalty. A copy of the exact skill shared will appear in the party member's status. If this member betrays the caster or leaves the Domain's range, the skills will be deleted from their status.

An invisible domain expands around my body. I have no control over how far it pushes out, but my reach seems to be just over 10 meters.

This has the potential to be an incredibly powerful skill...

The grin on my face starts to grow wider as I activate appraisal to see the new buffs Ember has received in addition to his mana control increase.

Buffs:

Ultimate Fire Defense[Hidden Ability]

Crimson Aura of Attack[Hidden Ability]

I skim the details as I steady myself on his moving back. The black-scaled dragon has grown in size by almost 100%. Ember is over 15 meters and his scales have become even darker. The crimson shine in his eyes is more radiant and the blood-red underbelly emanates strength.

His new buffs add to the significance of this change. He's just received a similar ability to the Frost Dragon we're facing, but one more compatible with his flames. The Crimson Arua buff seems to be a perk like my berserker skill, just a ranked-up version.

The glowing sensation in my chest starts to fade and the one around the growing dragon stops too.

Reality speeds up and the incoming Ice lizards shriek as they're blinded by the white flash of light followed by two slashes from my blades and an eruption of dense black flames from Ember's mouth.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

They're incinerated in seconds and we reach level 506.

A shock wave of energy from our rank up bursts out like the pulse of a Floor breaking and I can't help but let out a laugh while pointing my sword forward at the Demon and Dragon in front of us.

We hover nearly a kilometer over the highest mountain in the boss room and radiate with energy that rattles these collapsing labyrinth walls.

The Arch Demon Stares forward, and it's the first time I get the sense of any true emotion on its face. It's surprised... no, it's in fear.

No... it's excited.

A shimmering silver sword materializes into its hands and the red-tinted dark-skinned menace jumps off of the dragon's back heading straight for us.

In response, I do the same.

It pushes itself forward by creating small mana-shielding layers under its feet and using them as footholds to walk through the sky in a similar fashion to my wind-powered air-steps.

As the two of us run up at each other, both dragons swoop down.

Ember's black scales start to glow red, orange, and yellow as he activates his defensive buff, looking like a bubbling pit of lava. His entire body is covered in a thick coat of armor glowing even brighter than the silver dragon diving his way.

Then, I watch the fire dragon's crimson eyes pulse and his claws shine with the same dark red aura. His attack buff has been activated too. Ember is a much more cautious fighter than I am, he clearly has a strength and defense advantage if he's facing his opponent straight on.

I won't have to worry about him one bit, I'll focus on the real danger in front of me.

With all my stat-boosting skills on full blast, my vision tunnels and all I see is the demonic presence glaring back at me with its sword raised.

Just moments ago, I was completely outmatched. Now, this is an opponent for me to finally use all my new skills and strengths to their full potential.

I swing both my dagger and sword across my body while the Arch Demon brings down its silver sword.

Coated in layers of aura and shielding, the three blades let out an echoing twang as they come to a halt over a meter away from each other. Both release white explosions of energy and attempt to break through the other's thick defenses.

The corners of the Demon's mouth curl and so do mine.

It speaks through our link as the shockwaves of energy fill the Room.

"So, you really are the one they've all been talking about, aren't you?"

I grit my teeth and push my blades further toward the buzzing energy and light.

Then, reply.

"The one who's been talking about?"

The Arch Demon tightens its gaze and follows my lead pushing its own sword closer in tearing through a portion of the pink mana shielding letting elemental magic leak out.

It replies.

"It doesn't matter who. Word is.. a stray Demon and Dragon have been challenging Labyrinths and stealing the abilities of those within. However, you're a human... bonded with a... Fire Dragon..."

I erupt into black flames, pushing my weapons in even more. They're less than half a meter away from touching now. The energy pulsing out from in between is on a magnitude greater than anything I've ever experienced before.

It seems rumors of our existence somehow made it out here... If I want more information, I'll have to rile up this Boss and keep him talking.

I reply with a smirk.

"So what if it is?! After I'm done with you, I'll face the King!"

I let out a wave of intimidation and push my blades even closer.

The Demon's eyes open wide, horrified by my statement and momentarily caught off guard.

I thrust my dagger and sword forward again and they collide with its long silver sword to create a clang that distorts the air around us.

The final battle in the Labyrinth has begun.

Chapter 270

After our blades collide, we're both sent flying back as energy is expelled. A series of attacks follow at blindingly fast speeds.

Air-stepping through the sky, all that can be seen from a distance are flashes of red, black, and white light colliding as pulses of energy come out from the impossibly loud metallic clangs.

We both go into full battle mode. Each of us is solely focused on destroying the other completely at any moment of weakness.

Every time I gain a tiny bit of ground, the Arch Demon slips through on a side where I'm unprotected. The same goes for it. Each attack it throws leaves fractions of a second of leeway for me to Dungeon Walk in and block it. One slip-up will be the end for either of us.

The monster's senses are on par if not greater than mine.

It's able to manipulate its mana shielding faster than I can swing, while I'm able to blip away faster than it can attack.

The only way for either of us to land a hit is to get in close and risk getting hit ourselves. It's a perfectly even match-up.

Our battle styles are very similar too. Rigid and rational movements driven by hunger and greed for any room to strike.

The Arch Demon speaks up again as our endless clash of metal on metal continues.

"If you're unable to land a scratch on me, you have no hope of stopping the great collapse."

It grins, letting out a pulse of new red magic that covers its body.

Without teleporting, the monster moves over to me with blinding speed and eyes that seem to stare straight through my soul.

After just 20 seconds of numerous blocks, it seems like its activating a trump card and already going in for the kill.

The devious creature's silver sword comes down at me with nearly untraceable speed.

I block it with both my weapons at the last second but am pushed downward under the pressure of its attack.

It speaks again as I realize it activated its [Enrage] hidden ability. This is where this new power is coming from.

"A human has never challenged this labyrinth's top floor since it was created. I've had to travel to the nearby linked dungeons for my fun."

It grins while pushing me down toward the mountain below.

I'm clearly overpowered but can teleport away if I wish. However, it's spilling good information now that I'd rather not miss out on. I let the Arch Demon push my blades back as we fall through the sky.

It continues to speak through our link in a deep echoing voice.

"As my first and only challenger, I have to say your power is commendable. Unfortunately, a human can never truly surpass a demon in its element."

It pulses darker red, showing off even more power.

We fall past the two dragons as they clash. Fire and Ice explosions fill the sky lighting up the face of the Demon that angrily stares into my eyes.

A full second passes and I feel it activate another skill.

It pushes its sword forward with a powerful thrust, sending me down toward the base of the mountain and slicing into my side drawing blood. At this rate, It'll take less than 3 seconds to hit the center of the shallow area-like floor Ember and I flew over earlier.

I smirk, activating my self regeneration and life steal skills as we both fall.

The Demon continues as I watch two exact copies of itself emerge from the monster's back.

"I'll show you the full power of an Arch Demon and make you pay for your foolish remark against the King. You have no right to challenge the creator. The one true Demonic Emperor that will conquer this world like it has many others."

The beings that emerge from its back separate and I watch two body doubles at level 575 each detaching from its main body carrying the exact same long silver sword.

The two of them dive forward in front of the Arch Demon's main body and swing their swords down at me as the ground gets closer and closer. I finally reply, content with the information I've gathered.

"Bring it on."

My feet collide with the icy floor beside the mountain's base creating an impact crater tens of meters wide while blocking the two silver swords with my own weapons. The main Demon's body comes plummeting through and I Dungeon Walk backward to avoid its deadly red glowing strike.

Breathing heavily, I stare down the 3 crimson demons now 30 meters away as the ice chunks from our impact settles. Their 6 glowing white eyes lock onto me, and I stare back.

I can easily take out its doubles if I have a second or two alone, but focusing on one of them now would leave me wide open for a fatal blow.

Activating my item storage, I let the golem core from the dungeon break and the metal warrior core from the floor 23 boss room fall to the ground. I re-active my mana manipulation perk on both of them and allow both to respawn at level 500.

I clench my jaw as thousands of MP leave my body, but regain it instantly with my plunderer skill.

The black core of the Metal Warrior starts to pour shards of white metal from its abyss and form the monstrosity I fought earlier.

The shimmering clear core of the stone golem lies on the ground vibrating violently. The floor shatters and rock from deep underground forms around it to build up into a grey stone golem the same color as the exposed stone of the bare mountain in front of us.

Dense pink strings of mana are visible coming off my fingertips as I manipulate my minions to move forward. They're covered in shielding and are constantly being replenished from the source.

The two Demon body doubles run forward at them and leave the middle of the battlefield open for the main fighters to clash.

The Arch Demon snarls and lunges forward at me with blinding speed.

I smirk and push myself forward to match it.

All 6 of us clash at once, while both dragons collide in the sky.

A series of Dungeon Walker portals and teleportations follow as we chase each other around the battlefield. One slip-up from either of us will result in a fatal blow that finishes this battle.

Clash after clash only leads to minor arm, leg, and flesh wounds that I heal with self-regeneration and life steal. My mana sources are nearly unlimited, so I never need to worry about this.

The Demon is faster and stronger than me by about 30% with its new hidden ability activated, but the lag time between our teleports gives me just enough time to block and counter while landing quite a few hits of my own.

The Rock Golem and Metal Warrior are putting up a good match against their opponents. Even when their cores are shattered, the influx of MP heals them back to 100%. A distraction is all they need to be right now, so it's perfect.

Just 30 seconds pass, but it feels like hours. In such a short time, I've received over 30 small wounds and landed 10 of my own back on the menace.

I heal my HP and MP every time, but this doesn't help my mental and physical fatigue. I've never moved this fast and exerted this much power in my life.

Multiple times a second my MP bar's full capacity is used on the golems, my shielding, as well as full power attacks and healing spells.

It's invigorating and exciting... but the physical damage done to the Arch Demon is nowhere near enough to continue this battle style and have any hope of winning.

I push through and continue to wrack my brain for ideas...

The base of the mountain becomes a complete and total war zone.

All of the blue ice that covered it previously has melted away due to the enormous blasts and residue of my hot flames.

A full minute of endless clashing continues.

I heal over 60 more non-fatal wounds and land almost 2 dozen of my own back on the Arch Demon's arms and legs along with about 1000 HP from life steal. It's still at over half health, and the tingling sensation of overusing mana is starting to spread to every point on my body.

I won't be able to keep this up for much longer...

All of my stat-boosting skills are raging like a furnace and any sneaky tricks will take far too long to activate. A risky tactic would be to allow this monster to get me to under 10% health and activate [Final Breath], but I'd be putting myself in a vulnerable position with a limited amount of time to complete the task.

The last time I activated that move, I was asleep and out of commission for many days after.

I'll just have to endure...

Another 30 seconds pass and my body feels like it is being torn apart from the inside. I've burned through millions of MP in just a few minutes. I can't go on much further.

Dungeon Walking away isn't an option right now either. Even if I try to find Abby on another floor for a quick full restore, I imagine this Arch Demon would follow. It'd lead to me having to protect much more than just myself.

Every one of my teammates would be in danger then.

There's only one other option I can think of. It may be even riskier than the others but my intuition is telling me this may be the only way. Plus, when else will I get to try an ability like this one out...?

I stop in the center of the shallow arena as the golems clash by my sides and the dragons let out another magnificent ball of flames and ice high up in the sky above the mountain.

The Arch Demon flies my way with increasing velocity. It grins wider and wider as I stand still and take a deep breath while deactivating all of my active and passive skills.

Its voice echoes through my inner ear.

"A valiant battle for a human, but you see the result will only end in your failure. I have won."

It swings its sword, enjoying every moment that passes as it comes closer. The Demon believes in its heart that it's the winner.

I stare back with a confident grin and activate my newest skill.

"Demonic Energy Manipulation."