

## **D. Diver 31**

### Chapter 31

Dungeon breaks happen when too much magical energy builds and is released all at once.

Mutants spawn in at much higher rates and the boss is guaranteed to be a mutant sucking up all the leftover magical energy.

The exit portal turns red and allows both humans and monsters to enter and leave as they wish.

An increase in mutant monsters means an increase in potential rare loot. Strong hunters and guilds see dungeon breaks as top priority events.

Of course, this is to save the public from the dangerous monsters that can escape and harm those in the town nearby. There's a thin line between protection and profit I guess.

Anyways, I'm the first one to realize this is a dungeon break. There are over a dozen monsters in the general vicinity. There's no way I can take them all on by myself...

If they all escape into the city there will be some serious casualties. The nearest guild is way too far away to warn anyone in time. I'm sure the two guards out front will catch on soon, but many monsters will escape into the city before the proper team can arrive.

The only way to stop all of this is to defeat the boss. The dungeon will collapse in on itself after the boss room is cleared. That's common knowledge on how dungeon breaks work. I've just never seen one with my own two eyes.

This is my best bet. I'm going to face that boss. It may be a mutant, but I have a better chance of defeating it than trying to fight all of the dungeon's monsters at once.

I wanted to get stronger right? I can't back down from a challenge.

I took a deep breath and gripped my sword.

The air was getting thicker and thicker. I could sense that the source was coming from a very tall mountain about 2km away. That must be the boss room.

I headed off towards it in full sprint. I used the winding valleys to avoid as many monsters as I could.

For 20 minutes I ran and dodged every cyclops in sight. There were about 6 normal monsters and 3 mutants that crossed my path. I could sense over 3 dozen in my close vicinity, they were headed in the direction of the dungeon exit gate.

All the more reason for me to hurry and defeat this boss.

The closer I got to the mountain the more monsters I saw.

The ground was rumbling. A stampede of mutants appeared. 7 of them were lined up and charging in the direction of the dungeon's main gate. There was a large group of normal cyclopes following close behind.

A couple may have already breached into the home world, but the bulk of them were about 20 minutes away from the portal. If this wave makes it to the city, it may be leveled before the Hunters Association or Pace can get here to stop them.



The ground breaking steps of the mutant drew closer. I followed its lead and sprinted towards it as well.

Its speed was similar to the other mutant I battled previously. Maybe slightly faster than me, but not impossible to use my agility to weave around it.

The real problem here was its overwhelming strength.

This cave has completely flat ground, it would be close to impossible to use that airborne tactic from my last fight.

As we sprinted towards each other I prepared myself to dodge.

Once we were about 10m apart I made a sharp turn to the right and narrowly missed its club's wide swing.

There was nothing else I could do right now, I just have to dodge and weave until I find an opening.

The monster rumbled on passed me. Like clockwork, It turned and started its charge towards me again.

We basically just played chicken over and over.

It charges at me, I follow its lead. Then I narrowly dodged a heavy swing... and we repeat.

We did this over and over for about 2 minutes straight.

I couldn't get an opening. It pretty much had perfect defense. The only way I could get in its blind spot would be to take a hit from its club. It would do a lot of damage... but I think it's my only hope right now.

We faced each other once more. The mutant boss started running towards me.

I gritted my teeth and charged in as well. I readied myself for a brutal attack. This is going to hurt.

It swung its club in a predictable fashion, the monster was expecting me to dodge.

I ran straight forward and swung my sword at the beast's weapon this time. The force of the club was overwhelming. My blade was pushed down instantly. The club hit the whole left side of my body with a bone crushing blow.

I was thrown to the ground and I coughed up a pool of blood.

I knew this would happen, I just didn't expect it to hurt this bad.

The moment I hit the ground I ignited my flames and planted my right foot.

The left side of my body was pretty much useless right now, but I had to work with what I had.

The cyclops was continuing its charge forward as I lunged in at its backside.

I let out a yell.

"TAKEEEE THISSSS!!!"

With a powerful swing of my fiery sword I attacked the center of the monsters spine.

"CLANGGGGGGG"

My eyes went wide with fear and confusion.

My sword bounced off the monster's back without a scratch.

The moment my blade came close to contacting its body, the skin near my sword hardened into a thick black crystal like substance.

This must be some kind of advanced body hardening....

This is bad.

Very bad.

I opened my status to see my HP at 45/670. I chugged a potion and ran away as fast as I could.

As I ran for my life I quickly regained feeling in my left side. My HP had risen back up to 545/670.

"RWWWWUUUUUAAAAAARR!"

The enormous monster still had me in its sights.

It charged towards me again and I dodged with all my might. We continued this over and over. There was nothing else I could do.

We were drifting closer and closer to the back wall of the dungeon.

Every dodge I made was bringing us closer together. Each time we charged in, the cyclops got more and more used to my movements. The longer we keep this up, the worse off i'll be.

I was starting to get out of breath. I can only keep this up for a few more minutes. I need to think of something fast.

I was going through every potential battle scenario I could in my head. Basically every situation ended in an unfavorable outcome for me. Only one option came to mind... It's the only thing that worked for me before.

There was a curved cave wall about 20m behind me. If I ran at it fast enough I could definitely climb it and attempt to attack from higher ground.

It's risky, but right now I have no other choice. I can't keep dodging forever. I have to do something.

Without thinking much more of it I turned and ran. This was my Hail Marry.

I sprinted with all my might at the cave wall. I could hear the ground crushing footsteps close behind but didn't dare to look back.

I jumped up onto the wall and ran as far as I could fighting gravity all the way up. Once I felt myself start to slow down I pushed off the wall with both my legs and ignited my entire body into flames.

I spun around to face the beast below me and held my sword straight ahead.

I had managed to climb the cave wall high enough. Its club was not within range. This could really work.

I pushed out even more flames as I flew high over the monster's glaring eye.

"RWWWWUUUUUAAAAAARR!"

The cyclops let out a cry as I temporarily blinded it with the fire's bright light.

This is my chance.

I flew over the beast's head and locked my eyes on its upper back.

The cyclops was still flailing around trying to locate me in its blinded state. I took this opportunity to make my final move.

I touched down on the ground right behind the beast and planted my right leg to jump back up. I had the perfect angle.

"FINALLY!!! I'VE GOT YOU NOW!!!"

I focused all my magic into the sword's tip and swung with all my strength.

"CLANGGGGGGGGGGGG"

\*Clink \*Clink \*Clink \*Clink \*Clink

My eyes went wide.

My heart stopped and time slowed down.

My sword shattered into a million tiny pieces right in front of my eyes...

Chapter 32

I fell to the rocky floor and watched the metal fragments of my broken sword hit the ground beside me.

I was alone in the boss room without a weapon.

This couldn't have gone any worse.

I'm so stupid. I have to think before I act...

I got so caught up in the hype of the moment. Why did I believe I could be the hero?

The mutant turned to me with its massive bloodshot eye.

I could feel the bloodlust as it stared down its prey.

I left like a deer in headlights, I couldn't move a muscle.

My mind was racing but my body couldn't move.

I had one last chance.

"Think Jay..."

The beast came rumbling towards me.

"THINK JAY... THINK!"

The rocky ground flew to the sides of its body as the monster came closer and closer.

"THINK!!!"

"THWACKKK."

The beast's massive club hit me again. It felt like every one of my ribs had been shattered.

I went flying backwards over 30m skidding along the ground. In my feeble state I checked my status to see 10/670 HP remaining.

I coughed up blood while reaching for my last HP potion.

"RUUUUUAAAAAARRRR!!!"

All I could hear was sound of my impending doom.

As I chugged my last HP potion I yelled back at the creature with all my frustration and rage.

"AGGGGGHHHHGGG!"

I couldn't help but to let out flames, they surrounded my body.

All this talk about being a "hero" and becoming the "strongest". I may have gone in too deep, this is a truly superior opponent.... how can I defeat it?

I could hear my yells echo back at me in the cave. The fire around me created interesting shadows all over the ceiling and walls. The dancing flames and my tired state reminded me of the "hero's journey" in all of my favorite comics... this is where the the main character becomes stronger because he breaks through and wins even with unbeatable odds.

The dancing flames and eerie echoing silence brought me back to reality. I shook my head and erupted into flames even brighter.

"I CAN'T GIVE UP! NOT NOW!"

My fire is the key.

It's all I had left in my arsenal. My true last resort, I have to fight with fire alone.

Every battle with these cyclops creatures has been harder than the last. In the end, they all have fallen to my fire.

That's it....

A distinct scene from every battle played clear in my mind. The cyclops' weakness is always its eye.

We stared each other down. This was the moment of truth.

Without further hesitation we both charged forward.

I swerved to the left with all my strength and managed to dodge the beast's attack.

I didn't look back for a second, I sprinted straight for the cave wall to repeat my last attack. This time I would change my aim.

I could hear the heavy footsteps approaching close behind as I ran up the cave wall. I bend my knees and push off it with all my strength. This cyclops wasn't totally stupid, I was betting on that fact.

The beast recognized my wall climb and positioned its club high up into the air where I'd jumped previously. Smart move... that is, if I was going for the same attack.

This time I aimed lower and burst into a bright ball of flames. I let out every bit of MP I was storing up.

I jumped off the cave wall directly at the monster's face.

I closed my eyes and imagined my sword. It felt like battle instinct, this is what I had to do.

I have been fighting with that blade for as long as I can remember. I'm a swordsman after all, I need a sword.

The flames around my body crawled towards my hands. They all concentrated together in my palms creating a dark crimson fireball. I yelled out a battle cry as I opened my eyes and attacked.

"TAKE THIS!!!!"

The fireball in my hands formed into the exact shape of my old sword.

I flew towards the cyclops' massive eye with my blade of fire.

It pierced through the soft tissue like butter.

"RWWWWUUUUUAAAAARRRRRRR!"

An ear shattering cry erupted throughout the cave.

I let my sword explode releasing a concentrated fire magic blast. It threw both me and the cyclops back over 10m in each direction.

I hit the cave wall with a loud thud. The cyclops fell backwards crying out in agony.

I grinned and chugged an MP potion as I stood to me feet. I'd depleted every last bit of magic left in my body with that attack.

"THUDDDD."

"THUDDDD."

"THUDDDD."

The mutant rose to its feet and raised its massive club.

There was a dark red fire burning from its eye. There was no way this beast could see a thing.

I finally have an advantage! Plus, I've found a new way to use my skill. Although this fire sword form uses up a lot of MP, it's very powerful.

The beast roared and charged towards me. This is where I attacked from, it's only natural it thinks I'm here. I ran to my right as quickly as possible and avoided its club.

The beast was roaring in pain, but was clearly no where near death's door. I need to do some more serious damage to take this thing out.

I ran towards the opposite side of the cave.

"HEYYYY! YOU!!! OVER HEREEE!! COME AND GET ME!!!"

I waited about 30 meters to get a head start and yelled out to get its attention.

Worked like a charm. The mutant followed after with an angry cry.

I sprinted towards the opposite cave wall occasionally letting out a yell to keep the monster on track.

About 10 seconds later I erupted into flames and scaled the cave wall again. It'd fallen right into my trap.

The beast kept running forward swinging its club at the ground where it heard my voice.

I did a picture perfect maneuver to copy my previous successful attack. I jumped off the cave wall and focused all my fire into a dark red ball.

Moments before impact I formed a fiery sword and dove into the already flaming eye.

I let my blade dive deeper this time, half way into the mutant's head. With another explosion of fire we were both thrown backwards again.

"RWWWWWUUUUUUAAAAARRRRRRR!"

The cave shook from the murderous cry of the mutant.

It was thrown on its back, and half of its head flew off to its right side.

I was blown back against the cave wall again as well. I chugged another MP potion.

"THUDDDD."

"THUDDDD."

"THUDDDD."

The cyclops rose again.

Its eye was melting in the heat of my fire and half of its head resting 10m beside it.

How could this beast still be alive....?

It slowly stomped towards me. All its battle reflexes were on full auto pilot now. This wasn't a battle anymore, this was a last stitch attempt at survival.

I nodded.

"This is it. You were my toughest opponent yet. I thank you for the battle."

I ran up the wall and kicked off with a graceful leap.

I used every last bit of MP left in my body to create a final sword.

It sunk deep into what was left of the monster's head.

With a final explosion I was thrown back at the cave wall.

"THUDDDDDDDDDDDD."

The cyclops fell to its back.

I heard a familiar ringing and sighed with relief.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]



[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

I was about to open my status but a glowing blue light hovering over the monster's corpse caught my eye.

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Body Hardening[Special Grade]

[YES][NO]

I chose yes without hesitation as the beast quickly disappeared in front of me.

\*CLINK \*CLINK

A large mana crystal and a small golden pendant in the shape of an eye attached to a loop of black string fell from its body.

I picked them both up and placed the necklace around my neck. It magically tightened to fit. I grinned and opened my status.

[Status Open]

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Name: Jay Soju

Level: 141

Hp: 220/710

Mp: 40/710

Strength: 339

Speed: 403

Agility: 421

Defense: 306 [+122]

Mental Strength: 339 [+68]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

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I grinned and stared at my new stats as the white transport light appeared.

I heard a rumbling sound, the white light was lasting much longer than it usually did.

The entire dungeon was collapsing, this is not a normal transport. Moments later I was back to the home world...

As I came back to reality I couldn't believe my eyes.

The entire dungeon building was in shambles crushed to bits on the ground. Most of the surrounding city for 500m or so was also in horrible shape.

There were almost 2 dozen hunters and businessmen standing around talking to each other and writing things down.

I appeared in front of all of them as the portal disappeared behind me.

They all stared.

I gulped and scanned the crowd to try and find a familiar face.

Well, this is awkward.

Chapter 33

There were a few distinct groups of hunters that I could make out. 2 were standing nearby and another 2 or 3 were walking over to the crowd in front of the recently collapsed portal.

They were all wearing professional gear. Some carried long swords, others had daggers, and a few had massive shields.

Each group was accompanied by 1 or 2 people in suits. These must be the teams sent out by each of the guilds nearby. It seems like some of them brought representatives as well.

I looked further ahead. I couldn't help but stare with my mouth wide open.

There were fallen buildings and flattened sections of city. It was still a horrible sight to behold.

I guess there were some monsters that escaped. These guilds were the ones who attempted to stop them. It looks like they contained them in a fairly tight area, but they all disappeared when the dungeon collapsed so I couldn't tell for sure.

"Hey kid! Was it you?"

I looked up to see a man in a suit yelling and waving at me.

Then another voice rang out from the crowd.

"Yeahh! Was it you?? Who took out the boss?"

I nodded slowly.

The first man ran up to me with a card.

"Hey come by the Arcane Guild if you're looking for some extra work!"

"No come visit us at the Cora Guild, I'm sure we could help you reach even higher levels!"

All of the suited men came towards me. Some of the hunters looked interested as well.

"I- uh...."

I was getting a bit flustered and honestly somewhat annoyed.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, come by our Sentano Guild anyti-"

They all started crowding around me asking me questions and handing me cards.

I squeezed my way through the crowd answering politely until I heard my name get called out... this caught my attention.

"Hey! Jay right? You okay??"

Who knows me here?

I looked up to see a group of 3 women. There was a tall brown haired girl waving at me.

I was puzzled for a moment.. then it hit me.

Those are the mages from Pace.

This is a perfect.

"Hey! It's you!"

Once I replied the swarm of people slowly backed off. It seems they realized I was already associated with one of the teams that showed up.

I put on a professional smile and walked over to the group of mages and whispered under my breath.

"Thanks. Let's get outta here!"

The tall girl looked straight at me with confidence.

"No problem, my name's Rei by the way. I didn't get to introduce myself yet, I've seen you around the guild every once in a while. Maria talks about sometimes too, nice to officially meet you."

"Oh! You're one of the mages training Maria? Nice to meet you too!"

She nodded and smiled.

Rei was wearing a light weight combat outfit. It was a dark black color that contrasted her olive skin nicely. I've never stopped to actually look at her before, she is beautiful.

"Helllooo??"

One of the other mages started waving their hands close in front of my face. I must have been zoning out.

"S-Sorry. It was a hard fight, I'm a bit tired."

They all giggled a bit and we walked off. I was pretty beat up from my fight, that wasn't a lie.

We took the main road back into town.

Once we got through the front doors the team of mages brought me to a training room and let me recover in the resting area.

I'd never seriously checked out these training rooms. My main focus has always been to dungeon dive and level up...

They seem to be isolated rooms with mana conductors in the walls and flooring. It'd be pretty difficult to damage it, that's why guild members spar here.

It's expensive magic tech. I'm pretty sure only guilds and government buildings can afford equipment like these.

Maybe it would be worth my time to actually train in here and learn some new moves.

I finished examining all their equipment and went to go rest on a soft mat near the resting zone. The second I got comfortable I heard a few light knocks at the door.

"You're crazy, ya know that?"

Jack walked through the door with a smile on his face while shaking his head slowly.

I couldn't tell if he was disappointed or impressed. I sat up a bit to hear what he had to say.

"I have to thank you though. The team I sent out just filled me in on the whole situation. Without you defeating that boss on your own we would've had to deal with mutants rampaging through the city for another half an hour or so. It would have gotten pretty bad out there.

I nodded and put my head back on the mat. I was exhausted.

"No prob, just doing my job."

"Here, catch. A thank you from the guild!"

He threw me two small bottles.

"They're D Class MP and HP potions. Drink up!"

I drank them and felt rejuvenated the instant they touched my lips. The muscle fatigue didn't fade though, I was still physically tired.

"Keep the item box too, plus whatever's inside. You earned it! My gift to you."

I stood to my feet feeling a lot better than I had moments ago. We shook hands.

"Thanks Jack. I appreciate the warning you gave me this morning, I guess it's just good luck I didn't take it into consideration."

We both laughed loudly and walked out of the training room together.

Once we got into the lobby Jack spoke up.

"I couldn't help but notice your sword is missing. Feel free to use any guild equipment when you're in the dungeons, but I assume you'd like to buy your own."

I nodded. He was right, I didn't like the idea of a borrowed sword to fight my battles. I needed a new one.

Then I saw a familiar face.

One of training room doors flew open and Maria came running down the hall followed by a few of the mages that helped me get back to the guild. They must have told her what was going on.

"JAYY! I was worried?!?! Are you okay???"

"Haha yes Maria, I'm okay. Thank you for being so concerned."

Jack raised an eyebrow.

"Oh yeah! This would be perfect."

I looked over at him with a confused look on my face.

"What would be perfect?"

He grinned.

"Maria is going off to the capital tomorrow with Rei. They're going to get some new equipment for our guild and some personal items as well."

Maria looked over to Jack and me curiously.

"Uh yeah we are. What about it?"

"Why don't you bring Jay along? He needs a new sword after all."

Maria's eyes lit up.

"You want to come to the capital with us tomorrow? It would be really fun!"

I was thrown off a bit by the sudden forced invitation. It seemed like a good idea though.

I need to take a breather, a day off shopping in the capital may not be such a bad idea.

"Sure, I'm in."

She smiled.

"Awesome! It's settled. I'll see you here first thing tomorrow Jay. Right when the sun comes up, don't be late!"

I nodded in agreement.

"Perfect, see you then!"

Jack and I continued walking towards the front door. I was exhausted, just by looking at me it was very clear.

Jack opened the exit door.

"See ya. I have a few things I want to talk about, but they can wait for another time. Looks like you need some rest."

"Yes, thank you. I'll see ya."

I walked home quickly. It was really only mid day, but I needed a nap. This is the most battle fatigued I've ever been.

I felt horrible, but oddly satisfied with today's results.

I walked up my apartment steps about 10 minutes later. With a twist of the key I walked in and threw all my clothes on the floor.

After a long hot shower I crawled into bed and fell into a blissful sleep. I drifted off into dreamland with a lot to think about.

I wonder what the capital is like now? The last time I've been there was in my childhood.

It'll be a peaceful day off... I hope.

## Chapter 34

I woke up very early the next morning. It wasn't even light out yet. I checked my clock.

"Half past 4, just great."

With a sigh, I hopped out of bed and decided to go for a morning walk. I have the energy for it, hopefully there's a store open for some food. I'm beyond starving.

I grabbed a handful of bronze and almost half my silver. All the coins fit in my item box as I tied it around my waist. Then, reflexively I tried to grab my sword.

"Ahh. That's right. It's gone."

Walking out through the front door felt off without my sword, It made me feel pretty vulnerable. That'll all be fixed today though.

I took a stroll down the center of town towards the village market. Most of the lights were out. People should be asleep around this time, it makes sense.

I went to a less residential area in search for a bite to eat.

Finally, I found a 24/7 corner shop. This'll do.

I went inside and purchased a big bottle of water along with a bacon egg and cheese bagel. A breakfast of champions.

As my walk continued I made my way towards a park area as the sun began to rise. I couldn't help thinking about my adventure yesterday.

Was it catastrophically idiotic? Or was this the type of thing I had to do to get stronger?

I wouldn't have unlocked the new capabilities of my fire magic without that fight. Plus, my combat experience has gone through the roof. I'm much more confident fighting stronger monsters now.

I also obtained a very valuable new magical item. My defense stat is finally not a major weakness, It'll be fun to test that out. Best of all, I absorbed a new skill.

Body hardening. It's a special grade skill as well. A rare class of skill like my inspect skill, not many people have this type of body hardening. It will be very beneficial.

I've definitely become stronger. I need to be more strategic about my battles in the future. I need to level up a lot more, but I also have to start farming valuable skills as well.

The sun started to rise and I decided to make my way over to the Pace Guild.

"Morning Jay! You're up early."

The tall blond woman greeted me in the lobby. Does she never sleep?? They must work her like a horse.

"You are too. Anyone here yet? I'm meeting Maria and Rei today."

She shook her head.

I nodded and continued walking forward.

"Alright. When they come by, tell them I'm in the training room."

I walked back into the white walled training room. I was too tired yesterday to get a good look at everything in here.

I felt the walls and the flooring with my fingers. They were smooth to the touch and I could hear a light hum when I put my ear next to it.

Odd. It must be some kind of magic barrier. I've read about advanced magic training tech in some news articles but hadn't paid it much mind. I never thought I'd be able to use it myself.

About 30 more minutes passed as I sifted through old swords and shields. Nothing else too special in here. Most of the gear is pretty messed up. I guess that's why they're sending Rei off to restock.

\*Knock \*Knock \*Knock

"Jay!! Ready to go to the capital today??"

Maria came running in the room with a smile on her face.

"Yeah! I haven't been since I was really young. It should be cool."

Moments later Rei walked in.

She was much taller and proportionately built than I recollected from yesterday's meeting.

Her dark brown hair fell down to her waist and she stood around 180cm. It was kind of intimidating, she was basically my height.

"Ready to go? The train to the capital leaves in 30!"

Maria and I nodded and followed her out of the guild towards the train station.

"Hey, uh Rei. You're a C Class Hunter right?"

"Yeah."

"How long have you been with Pace Guild?"

"It's been about 4 years now. I've been with them ever since I graduated college."

"Hm. Okay. I was just curious."

She nodded.

"What about you? Jack seems to have grown a liking to you. I looked at your file, but he hasn't written down much of anything. What's your deal? Why'd you join Pace?"

"I'm just here to get stronger. Jack is letting me use the Pace dungeons in exchange for the resources I gather."

She nodded but held eye contact with me for a little too long...

"Alright. If that's it for now I won't pry."

We made it to the train station and waited by the platform.

"Screeeeech."

A train arrived and we all got in through the closest door.

Rei motioned us to follow her when we got inside.

"This way. Pace has a private area, this ride will take 2 hours or so. It'll be much more comfortable there."

We followed and watched Rei scan her Guild pass after talking to an employee.

We walked through 3 train sections and made our way to a private room with two couches.

Maria and I sat on one side, Rei sat on the other with her legs crossed.

The train started moving and I looked out the window watching the buildings fly by.

I zoned out into deep thought. Trains always put me into a daze, sometimes even straight to sleep.

There are 8 main regions in our country.

We live in a region located at the south east portion of the country.

Our region is called the "Vice Region". We are considered average. There's nothing too special about us. We have a great economy and a medium sized guild system. Most smaller towns and cities have their own smaller guilds and populations that trickle down from the capital's booming economy.

Our direct trade partners are located in the southern center part of the country. This region is called the "Bedrock Region". We work well together because we are similar in economic and military power. Overall we are both still in the bottom 4 regions of our country.

Although all 8 regions in our country work together to build a strong nation, there is still friendly competition between us.

Today we will be venturing into Vice City, the capital of the Vice Region. I'm excited to see what kind of gear and facilities they have here.

While watching the sun fully rise and the buildings get bigger and bigger the closer we came to the capital our train eventually made it to the station.

"Screeeeech"

"Last stop! Vice City. We have arrived at the capital."

I heard the announcement come through some kind of loud speaker in our train car.

I shook my heart and started to get up but my right shoulder felt heavy.

To my surprise Maria had fallen asleep on me. I guess it was a pretty long ride, and rather early in the morning.

"Hey. Time to wake up we're here."



I poked her and chuckled a little bit. Rei had already gotten up, she watched with an amused look on her face.

"Huh? We made it here already- oh!"

Maria went red in the face and got to her feet.

"I fell asleep, oops! We're here already!"

I just smiled. I didn't even notice, I wonder how long she was sleeping for.

"Haha it's fine. We're here let's check this place out. Time for some shopping."

We all nodded in agreement and stepped out of the train.

I stood there in awe on the platform outside.

This is nothing like the village market.

A huge trading center was right in front of the station.

There were tall silver buildings as far as the eye could see. At their bases were all kinds of white walled shops and neon signs.

Bikes and cars were everywhere moving in all directions. Many hunters were buying and selling large mana crystals and handling weapons in the streets.

I could see groups of businessmen in suits going up to the higher floors in the sky scrapers as well as talking to hunters on the streets.

It was pretty overstimulating for me. I couldn't keep track of everything in front of me. I just stared in disbelief.

Maria was the same. She was taking in the view of the busy city with wide open eyes.

We both stood there for a solid 30 seconds.

"Come on!!! Let's get a move on."

Rei was unfazed. I guess she came here often, at least she let us enjoy the view for a little while.

"We need to get a few things for the guild, then we can do whatever you two want. This won't take long. Follow me."

All three of us walked into the busy town center together.

## Chapter 35

The main road was filled with independent street vendors.

We walked for about 10 minutes in the direction of the city's center.

It became very clear to me that most of the shops around the train station were mostly for tourists and small time hunters.

It was filled with scammers and con men. What can you really expect? Business is business. That's the way the world works.

As we walked further in, there were less people out on the streets. The buildings became much taller, it looked like they were mostly allocated for office space.

We turned a street corner and I saw a massive mall. There were escalators that connected at least 10 floors of shopping areas. The floors were a smooth white color and the walls connecting each new floor were made of a thick clear glass. The curved silver steel beams that held everything together were incorporated into the building design. It looked very futuristic.

We took an escalator up to the 6th floor. Maria and I were fascinated by the scenery.

The shops sold mana crystals, swords, armor, shields, and much more.

People here were a lot more civilized and dressed much nicer than the town market. This must be the designer district. Higher class items are sold here. Makes sense.

As we arrived to the 6th floor Rei motioned for us to get off the moving stairs and to follow her.

We walked along a balcony with a clear glass barrier. There was an open hole in the center of the mall, it was doughnut shaped. Looking up there was a blue sky, looking downwards we could see the bottom floor. It's an incredible building.

We kept walking along the balcony until a large storefront came into view. It seemed to be a separate shopping area closed off by a white wall, I couldn't see inside.

Rei talked to a security guard outside and showed him a card. The guard nodded and opened the door.

We walked in.

It was a large shopping center with organized gear on each wall and display tables. Rei spoke up.

"Alright, give me about 30 minutes. Im going to stock up on gear for the guild."

Maria and I nodded.

I overheard a few employees and some of Rei's previous conversation.

This seems to be a high end magical item store, but its customer base is exclusively bulk buyers from guilds.

They must offer good deals.

Maria and I wandered around the store looking at all the equipment.

There were display tables full of potions and interesting looking stones and items.

I saw a wall completely covered in glistening silver swords.

There was even an accessory table that had all kinds of rings, bracelets, and necklaces with a variety of attributes.

There is nothing like this back home. The capital is amazing!

Maria's was mesmerized as well.

It all seemed to be high grade E and D Class gear. There wasn't much here that was mind blowing. It was just the fact that there was so much of it in one place. I assume there are other shops with higher grade gear, but it wouldn't be worth the guild's money to buy those in bulk.

"Alright. That didn't take too long did it?"

Rei came over to us while tightening a large leather pouch around her waist.

I raised an eyebrow.

"That's an item box right? It looks a lot bigger than mine? How much can it carry?"

She grinned.

"You're right. It's a lower grade C Class item box. Holds up to 100 items. I filled it to the brim. We have enough swords and potions to last a few months."

I nodded.

"Wow. Good to know."

Maria interrupted.

"Hey! Now that we got the guild's shopping out of the way where can we go to that shop? I want to get that sword you told me about. It's here right??"

Rei nodded.

I looked to Maria with a bit of confusion.

"A Sword? You're able to handle a sword now? I remember the last time you tried to carry mine, the floor nearly broke!"

Maria went a bit red in the face.

"I can actually! Rei said there are light weight swords here, they will be perfect with my ice magic."

"Oh yeah? A special sword shop? Let's go check it out. I need to find something new as well."

Rei interjected.

"Okay. Follow me, its on the 8th floor."

We followed.

After 2 escalator rides that took about 5 minutes we made it to floor 8.

There were quite a few people on this floor. All the shops were open to the public and many items were out on display.

We walked over to a shop with tall glass doors and were greeted by a woman in a suit and tie. An odd sight, but it wasn't too out of place here I guess.

"Welcome to Apollo's Sword Shop. May I see your Hunter's Licenses."

We handed her our cards and she escorted us to a counter with dozens of silver swords behind it.

"We have an E, D, and a C Class here. Get them what they need."

She spoke to a man behind the counter wearing a suit identical to hers. His eyes perked up.

"Who needs a sword? What can I do for you?"

Maria and I both raised a hand. I spoke up.

"Both of us, but take care of her first. I'll look around the shop."

He nodded and started asking Maria a ton of questions. I zoned out of the conversation and started eyeing a few swords in the nearby display cases.

I needed a good replacement sword, but I don't have the money to get anything too crazy. I reached in my item box and counted what I had, the total was 43 silver. I left a good amount at home, I didn't want to blow my whole savings.

This can get me a good sword. I remembered back to the auction, I can probably get something with a 100-150 strength stat. That's all I'm looking for. It'll be a good upgrade from my last sword, but its better that I don't get too attached to my weapons. They do break...

There were clear markings on the walls showing what the range of stats on different items in display cases held. I could tell there were private rooms in the back too, that must be where their VIP customers make expensive deals. Interesting.

I came upon a D Rank Long Sword display case.

A shining silver sword with a black handle caught my eye.

A younger man caught me eyeing it.

"Hey! My name's Marco! That's a nice sword you're looking at. It has a 125 strength boost, I can sell it to you for 30 silver.

"Can I hold it?"

"Yeah sure. Just know, if ya break it ya buy it."

I chuckled.

"Yeah, yeah."

The man handed me the sword off the wall and I gave it a good feel.

It was heavier than my last sword, but I could instantly feel the strength upgrade surging through me. This sword has some strong magic. I like it.

"Give me it for 25, it's a decent sword."

The man grinned. He knew I was hooked.

"Ahhh so you're the bartering type. You from out of town or what?"

"Yeah, came in this morning. It's my first time in the city. Well, at least first time in a while. So, 25?"

The man shook his head.

"28. I can bring it down 2 sliver that's it."

"Come on, i need it closer to 25. How about 26? That's all I have on me. I need to get lunch later ya know."

Clearly a lie, but that's how you barter. He knows it too.

"27. That's the lowest I can go. With a sword like this you can kill your own lunch."

"Fine. 27, but I want a nice sheath with it too. Black to match the handle."

"Deal."

"Great."

We shook on it and the man went over to a nearby display case to find a sheath. I counted out 27 silver and had it out on the table before he got back.

We completed the deal just like that. I nodded to the man again and put my new sword on my back.

That was easy, didn't need to search around too much. I got what I needed.

I walked back over to where I left Maria. There were about half a dozen sword laid out on the tabled.

Maria had a look of concentration on her face. She was clearly having trouble deciding which one to get.

This is the difference between men and women shopping. It makes me go crazy sometimes.

I watched Maria pick up each of the 6 swords at least 10 more times and swing them around.

Almost 20 minutes went by. I was just happy to be out and about, it didn't bug me too much today. She can take all the take she wants.

"Alright. I think I like this one. I'll take it!"

Maria finally picked out a sword. She stood holding a long and thin silver sword. When she swung it, there wasn't even the slightest sound. It seems to be a custom made sword.

"That will be 10 silver."

The salesman looked at her and smiled. Maria reached into her small bag and pulled out a few silver coins.

"There you go! Thanks!"

She purchased a white sheath as well. With an agile movement she slung the sword over her back. The three of us started walking out of the store.

She didn't even try to haggle the price down. Whatever works for her I guess. There was one thing I was curious about.

"Hey Maria! Where do you make your money? That's an expensive sword for an E Class."

She smiled.

"Pace has been paying me for dungeon diving lately. I've been saving up!"

"Pace pays you???"

She looked confused.

"Y-Yeah. I have an exclusive student contract. They're obligated to pay me."

I thought for a moment. I guess exclusive contracts with a salary would make sense. I don't get paid because I never even asked to...

"Ahhh okay. Makes sense."

We walked out the front door of the store and Rei stopped in front of us.

"Do you two want to test out those new weapons?"

Maria and I looked at each other. We shrugged and nodded eagerly.

Rei grinned.

"Follow me. I know just the place to put those blades to use. This is going to be fun."

I looked at her with curiosity.

"Are there dungeons nearby?"

Rei kept a smug grin on her face.

"There are, but that's not exactly where we're going. Trust me, you'll like this place."

She hopped on an escalator moving downwards and we followed.

I wonder where we're going to test out our new weapons in the capital?

Wherever it is, I'm looking forward to it. I'll get to see Maria in action for the first time too. This day is about to get even more exciting!

## Chapter 36

We made our way down all 8 floors. I watched all the shops go by as we glided down on the moving stairs.

On the bottom floor there was a large crowd around a storefront that took up almost a quarter of the floorspace. Rei motioned us towards it.

"This way. It'll be a few silver, but trust me it's worth it. I've been in here a few times."

We walked through the crowd of people and got into a small line forming right outside the entrance.

There was a large sign over the glass door.

"Vice City Mall Training Center"

The line moved forward slowly for about 10 minutes until a middle aged man greeted us at the door.

"Just the 3 of you? What level training room, and how long are you going to need?"

Rei spoke up.

"30 minutes in a D Class Room. We'll rent 3 pairs of Sim gear too."

"That'll be 10 silver for the room, 3 extra for the sim gear."

My eye brow raised. That's pretty pricey. What kind of training room is this?

I reached into my item box to grab some silver for my cut, but Rei immediately gave me a look.

"Don't worry about it. Pace Guild will cover this one, it's for training."

She winked at me and handed the man 13 silver.

He nodded and let us through.

"4th room on the left. Timer starts once ya open the door."

We walked through a narrow hallway and towards the room.

Rei opened the door and we walked in.

She shut the door and a large clock on the wall started counting down 30 minutes.

It was a large room with high ceilings. The walls, floor, and ceiling were all white and I could hear the hum of a mana shield.

There was a small rack with combat suits on it. Rei picked one up and started putting it on over her clothing, it magically tightened to fit her body.

"You guys too, put em' on."

Maria and I followed her lead and put on the suits.

All of a sudden I saw blue text hovering over Rei and Maria's heads.

[100/100]

[100/100]

I saw Maria staring over my head as well. There must be numbers above mine too. I looked at Rei.

"What is this?"

She grinned.

"It's Vice City training gear. Pricey tech, let's use it while we have the time. Don't hold back, this gear is graded up to high B Class attacks. You couldn't kill someone in one if you tried."

I looked at her in confusion.

"W-What do you mean?"

She smirked. Then her whole body started to glow with a yellow light.

"This is what I mean."

Her body glowed so bright I could hardly see anything else in the room. It was blinding me.

The room started to fill with static and my eyes went wide as I saw large thunderbolts protruding from Rei's body.

\*ZAPPPPPPPPP\*

A huge bolt of electricity came flying towards me faster than my eyes could see.

"AAAAAGHHHH"

It hit me with a direct hit. It was more painful than I was expecting it to be. I dropped to my knees and Maria shrieked.

"He's at 0! 0 out of 100!! Rei how could you do tha-"

"Just give it a second Maria, watch."

A small red text appeared at the lower left corner of my vision.

[1 death logged]

Restart? [YES][NO]

I chose [YES] and an animation of my health bar rose from 0/100 to 100/100 in front of my eyes.

"T-This is a simulation?"

Rei laughed.

"Yes, but also no."

Maria and I both looked at her with confused looks on our faces.

"The suits absorb the magic energy from attacks. It will simulate the damage and show you what percentage of your health would have been taken. They're a great tool for training. It allows higher ranked hunters to go all out and not worry about hurting their training partners."

Maria and I both looked down at our suits in awe.

It is pretty cool. I knew the capital was going to have some cool new tech, but I didn't know stuff like this was so available to the public.

Maria spoke up.

"Alright Jay. Let's Spar!"

She started to glow a light blue color and took out her sword.

I returned the favor with a grin and took out my own sword. I decided not to use my fire just yet, I don't think it would be fair against Maria.

She engulfed her sword in a blue and white crystalizing mist. I was impressed, her ability to handle her ice skill has definitely improved.

Maria's level is much lower than mine so her movements were easy to track.

"CLANGGG"

I blocked her sword's hits with simple defense tactics. She handled her sword well, and her swordplay looked cool but she couldn't land a hit due to the huge difference in our stats.

After 10 or so attacks Maria looked up at me with a grin.

"Come on Jay!!! You're a D Class! I know you can do more than that, don't you want to test out your new sword??"

Maria glowed even brighter now and her sword started to grow in size.

"CLANGGGG"

We struck blades again, this time the ice from her sword crept towards my own. As I backed away the ice on my blade kept expanding.

It was slowly making its way down the blade towards my hand.

Maria looked proud of herself and gave me a smirk.

The ice touched my right hand and it was much colder than I expected it to be.

Moments later I saw the simulated bar in the bottom left of my vision start to change.

[97/100]



The ice kept moving up my right arm, it was starting to hurt a bit. I couldn't move my hand at all.

[93/100]

Maria's skill is very neat. It probably works extremely well on lower level monsters. If I was fighting her seriously she would never have managed to get a hit on me.

"What are ya gonna do now Jay? I think you got a little too cocky!"

I grinned.

"Oh yeah?"

I decided it was time to get a little serious, I activated my fire magic. It started as a slow crackle, but erupted into a dark red fire ball surrounding my body.

Her ice melted off my hand and I immediately regained mobility.

I smirked as I saw Maria's eyes go wide.

I sprinted towards her with my blade pointing straight ahead.

I was moving much faster than she could react to at her current level.

Moments later I ran behind her and started to swing my sword. I stopped my flaming blade millimeters from her neck.

"I think it's you that got a little too cocky."

I could see Rei in the corner of my vision. She watched us with her arms crossed. She was just enjoying the show.

Maria finally spoke up.

"Y-You win. You're right."

I took my blade away from her and we both stood at ease.

"I think we're all at differing skill levels, it'd be hard to train with each other."

Rei walked over to us.

"You're right, I just wanted to try on this gear again. We can't do much actual training in here. It's more for the experience, I just thou-"

Maria Interrupted her abruptly.

"Hey Jay! You never told me you had a magic skill too!?!? I thought you were just a swordsman, when were you going to tell me? Huhhh?"

I laughed.

"Well you know now."

"Hmmm. I guess so."

Maria pouted and puffed out her cheeks. I could tell she wasn't actually mad.

Rei chimed in.

"I knew, it was the only thing written in your file. I was curious if you were going to show us or not."

I gave Rei a side eye, but in a friendly way.

"Lets make use of our time in here. We only have 20 minutes left. Lets 2v1. Maria and me vs. you."

Rei grinned.

"Sure, you asked for it."

Maria smiled. She liked the idea.

\*ZAPPPPPP\*

"AGGGGHHHH"

"....."

"....."

[0/100]

[2 deaths logged]

Restart? [YES][NO]

I chose [YES] and got to my feet.

"Okay.... Go a little easy on us. We're trying to have some fun here."

Maria nodded as she stood up as well.

"Yaah come onnnnn."

Rei just nodded in agreement.

She was enjoying this a little too much.

We spent the next 20 minutes getting zapped to death over and over not landing a single hit on Rei.

[16 deaths logged]

Restart? [YES][NO]

[YES].

We got to test out our new gear, and simulated deaths weren't as bad as they sound.

I heard a loud beeping sound and looked up to see where it was coming from.

[00:00]

The clock on the wall had counted down to zero and the door swung open.

Our time was up. We took our Sim suits off and walked out the door with smiles across all of our faces. I turned to Rei.

"That was actually really fun. I'm glad you brought us in there, despite fake killing me 16 times..."

She laughed.

"No problem, I'm glad you liked it. How about you Maria?"

She nodded.

"Yeah. It was a bit scary at first, but I liked it."

We walked out of the storefront and Rei thanked the guard that let us in.

We stood in the center of the mall. I looked up through the structure straight at the sky and watched the white clouds pass by for a while.

"Gurgleeee"

My stomach made a loud sound.

"All that dying made me hungry."

Maria giggled and Rei smiled while pointing towards the direction we came from.

"There are some really good food shops by the main trading center next to the train station. Let's go check it out, I'm pretty hungry too."

We all nodded in agreement and started walking off towards the main market area.

Rei took us off in a direction we hadn't walked through before.

The smell of spices filled my nose. As we walked deeper into the food vendor portion of the market I saw hundreds of booths and thousands of people eating all kinds of food.

It was filled with every type of food I could imagine. The aromas were hypnotizing. Rei led the way, I followed.

"I know a really good place, we're almost there."

Moments later we approached a small restaurant and were seated almost immediately. The three of us sat around a circular table with a fire in the center part.

The smell of meats and spices filled the air.

A waitress came by and we ordered almost half the menu to share, it all looked so good.

Less than 10 minutes later our food started coming.

The restaurant brought out many types of exotic meats and let us cook it ourselves on the grill area in front of us.

There were all types of appetizers and side dishes available too. Bowls of soup, noodle dishes, all kinds of bread, exotic fruits and vegetables, and dishes I couldn't even name.

We dug in.

It was the best meal I've had in a long time, maybe the best meal I've ever had...

After 20 minutes went by and the initial dopamine rush died down I started to settle back into reality.

For a moment it was just me and my food.

Rei spoke up.

"I knew you would like this place. I come by every time I'm in the capital."

Maria and I both nodded with our mouths full.

"When we're done and take the time to digest, maybe we can check out some of the capital's public dungeons."

I raised an eyebrow.

"Are there a lot of dungeons around here?"

Rei smiled.

"More than you could imagine. The more populated a city is, the more often dungeons spawn. The Capital is covered with them."

"Let's do it. I'd love to check them out."

"Cool, we'll check some out later today."

I nodded and went back to searing a large piece of meat.

My mind started wandering though.

It's odd that more dungeons spawn where there are large populations of people. I wonder why that is?

I'll find out sooner or later. I can't wait to see what kind of monsters there are in the capital.

I thought this would be a calm day off, but it seems like a hunter's life always falls back to diving into dungeons.

Chapter 37

We ate as much as we could but there was still a good amount of food left on the table.

After lounging around for another 30 minutes or so we finally got up and paid the bill.

Rei motioned us towards the city center again.

"Let's go check out the Dungeon Hub. We don't have too much time before we have to catch the last train back home. One or two hours should be enough to get a feel for how the capital's dungeons work."

I got up and looked at her.

"Makes sense, I can't do a serious raid on a full stomach like this anyways. I'm curious how it works here, I haven't seen a single dungeon. I thought they'd be more out in the open, how do hunters even find places to raid around here? What's this Dungeon Hub place?"

Rei smiled.

"You'll see, it's where most of the public dungeons in Vice City are located."

I nodded accepting the fact she wouldn't tell me yet and started following her through the crowds of people in the busy market.

It was still mind blowing how many people were in a single area. I'm not used to this big city life just yet.

About 20 minutes later we walked past the mall area and made our way even further into the city's center.

The large silver towers were getting taller and the streets were getting narrower.

We eventually came across a large black tower.

It stood out from the buildings surrounding it and there were many people entering and exiting from the large open front doors.

Rei started walking towards the entrance. Maria and I followed without saying a word.

The inside of the tower was black as well, there were no windows or lights but oddly enough it was very bright inside. I could see perfectly.

There were 4 sets of escalators in front of us that lead down to a lower level. I assumed the tower went up at first, but I guess there's more underground.

Each escalator had black stairs and grey glass walls that went up to about waist height on other side.

The 4 sets of moving stairways were labeled:

[E Class Dungeons]

[D Class Dungeons]

[C Class Dungeons]

[B Class Dungeons]

Each of them had a security guard that scanned IDs in front of them before anyone could go down.

There was an escalator in the distance near the back of the building as well. It went upwards and had 4 guards in front of it. No one was approaching that stairway, I couldn't make out the writing on the sign above it.

Rei continued to walk towards the far left stairway.

"Alright, let's take the E Class escalator so we can all check it out."

Maria and I nodded, this is what I was thinking too.

The crowds of people were mostly all going to the same place as us.

Over 75% were headed down to the E Class Dungeons.

20% were scanning their IDs to enter the D Class dungeons.

The remaining 5% were headed towards the C class dungeons.

I didn't see a single person go down the B class escalator.

We scanned our licenses and boarded the moving stairs. I looked downwards and couldn't even see the end. There were just hundreds of heads bobbing up and down.

After a full 3 minutes or so we finally got to the bottom. We must have gone 100m underground.

I couldn't believe my eyes at first.

"So this is the Vice City Dungeon Hub."

I grinned.

There was a wide open area that looked like a stretched out subway system.

I could see a large digital sign that had dozens of dungeon names with estimates on how long it would take to get to each of them.

Another large sign had a map of Vice City with exact locations pin pointing each dungeon entrance.

"Schreeeech"

On either side of the large platform area a train took hunters to and from all of the E Class dungeons in Vice City.

It's a pretty well thought out system. I'm impressed.

At the center of the platform there were a couple hunters buying and selling E Class gear and mana crystals.

They were also pairing up and getting into groups to go raid dungeons.

There were all kinds of people down here, I was in awe.

We all walked over to the giant map and Rei pointed to a spot on it.

"We're right here. These two trains will only bring us to E Class dungeons. You need to scan for clearance to get onto the D, C, and B Class trains. Pretty cool right?"

Maria and I nodded with excitement.

"Yeah I never knew the capital was this advanced. There's so many dungeons. I could level up so much faster here."

Red laughed.

"Yeah, city folk tend to level up a bit faster. They also tend to die more often. Close to 30% of hunters get seriously injured or killed within the first 5 years of hunting here in the city. It's a dangerous game."

I nodded.

HP potions are usually enough to heal any hunter's wounds, but there are some cases where they don't work.

If a hunter loses a limb or gets an injury that couldn't naturally heal over time most HP potions can't heal them. It would take A class healing magic or potions to work those miracles, the average person could never afford it.

A serious injury is sometimes worse than death for hunters these days.

"You're right. Risk vs. Reward. I would still like to give some of these dungeons a try. There's so much potential in this city."

Rei grinned.

"It seems you've really been enjoying your time here in the city. Maybe you should stay a while. I'm sure the guild won't mind."

"Really? Hmmm. Maybe I will."

Maria popped into our conversation.

"Hey lets go here!"

She pointed to a dot on the map. It was labeled "Ogre Dungeon - Medium".

Rei nodded.

"That'll be perfect. It's a medium grade dungeon, that just means it's in the middle range of difficulty for E Class Hunters. A perfect one to give your new gear some actual experience out in the field."

Maria nodded.

"Screeeeeh"

A train pulled up the moment Rei stopped talking. She pointed to it.

"That's our train."

We boarded and held on to the handles above our heads. The train was packed.

It started to move and I looked out the window to see the blank cement walls moving by.

It was oddly calming.

About 10 minutes later we arrived.

There were 2 escalators. One of them brought us up to the surface into a room with no doors, the other was for when we wanted to go back down to the train.

There was just a glowing blue portal at the back of this room. We could either go into the dungeon or back to the train, there was no way to access this room without using the Dungeon Hub system.

We all nodded at each other and jumped through.

I could see mountains and large trees all around me.

It felt and looked like a pretty standard forest dungeon.

I stepped back to let Maria do the fighting. I won't be able to get any experience in an E Class dungeon anyways.

We walked for about 10 minutes before finally coming across a monster.

It stood at about 2.5m tall with light green skin. The beast smelled horrible and only wore a small piece of cloth around its waist.

It carried a large axe and starred us down. It's a standard E Class monster.

"I got this guys!"

Maria began to glow blue and charged towards the Orge.

She was clearly faster than it.

"GRRRUAARRR!"

The beast let out a roar and swung at her but it was way too slow to get anywhere near Maria.

She got behind the Ogre and I saw the light blue mist glow bright from behind the beast.

"Shinnnnnggg"

Moments later the monster stopped moving.

Maria came running out from behind it. I couldn't quite see the whole attack, but it seems like she landed a clean hit on its back.

As she came around the front side, the Ogre let out a cry as the blue mist engulfed its body. It turned completely to ice in front of my eyes.

Maria grinned and took another slash at the monster from the front this time. It shattered into tiny ice fragments.

It was an impressive feat. She really does have some strong ice magic.

\*Clap \*Clap \*Clap

I slowly clapped and walked over to her.

"You've improved a lot! That was an impressive take down."

Maria blushed and smiled.

"Thanks! These Ogres aren't too hard for me anyways. I am level 63 now!"

I raised an eyebrow.

"You're level 63? Moving up in the world I see. You'll catch up to me soon at this rate."

We both laughed.

Maria collected a mana crystal from the disappearing fragments of Ogre that were left by our feet.

We roamed around the dungeon for another hour or so. Maria showed me some of her new moves and I showed off a bit too.

Rei followed, but I could tell she was getting bored. Eventually she spoke up.

"Hey I don't want to kill your fun, but we've already done a lot today. I wanted to show you the dungeons before it got too late, we don't have much time to actually hunt."

Maria and I nodded taking the hint.

"We have to catch the train back soon or we'll be stuck in Vice City tonight."

We made our way back to the exit and took the train back to the main Dungeon Hub. It was short, but sweet. I'm glad we got to check it out.

"Thanks for taking us out today Rei, I appreciate you showing us around!"

She nodded.

"My pleasure. I had a relaxing day off. I'm glad you got to see the city."

We made our way back up the escalator and headed to the main train station that would bring us back home.



"Hey, uh. Rei. If I wanted to stay in the city for a little while where could I go? Is there a hotel or something you know of?"

Rei grinned.

"So the city really has you hooked?"

"Well, I just think it'd be a waste to leave now. There's so many dungeons here. I'd like to stay for a few days and really check this place out. It may seem spontaneous, but I think it's the right move."

Maria looked up at me.

"I think that's a great idea! You don't have school or anything holding you back right now. Stay in the city!"

Maria's immediate support made me happy. Rei nodded and pointed.

"If you head in that direction for about 1km you'll get to a more residential area. There are many hotels you can stay in."

I nodded.

"Thanks!"

Rei nodded back.

"No problem. Some time in the city will make you much stronger, maybe we can spar for real when you come back."

"Haha, I'd hope so. Let Jack know I'll be back in a week or two max. I know he wanted to talk to me about something before I left. It's just going to have to wait a little longer I guess."

"Okay, I'll let him know."

"Great."

I waved off Maria and Rei. They had to catch the next train very soon.

That was out of the blue, but this feels right.

There's so much opportunity here... I can't leave yet.

Chapter 38

I headed off in the direction Rei pointed.

I was alone in the city now.

It feels so nice to be alone in places where no one knows who I am. I love the feeling of being anonymous until I decide not to be.

Anything I do or say in public will be forgotten in the wind moments later. I'll never see anyone here again unless I make the conscious effort to do so.

This city makes me feel free.

I walked for about 10 minutes with a wide grin on my face, then I arrived at the residential district.

It was definitely a tourist filled area, but that's what I am too. Most of the buildings were 5-10 stories tall. Some were older looking, others were newly built and higher class.

I walked towards one that seemed to be in the middle range of affordability. I want to stay somewhere nice, but not too pricey.

The building was tall and grey with bluish white windows. I walked through the front door and was immediately greeted by a short man with a button up vest and a long black gelled mustache that protruded from his face on either side.

He was sitting behind a long wooden check-in desk.

"Welcome to the Element Inn, how can I help you today Sir?"

"I'd like to get a room. A single, nothing special."

The man nodded and looked at a pile of papers.

"Our going rate is 1 silver a night, how long would you like to stay?"

"1 silver a night?? I-Uhm, could I get a discount for staying a full week? I'm new to the city."

He nodded and sifted through his papers again. This is clearly tourist pricing, they're making a killing. It wouldn't hurt to ask for a little discount.

"A single bed and bath, I can do 5 silver for a 7 night stay. You'll be on the top floor."

"Great."

I smiled and counted out 5 silver on the table in front of me. This hotel is pricey... Honestly this whole city is pricey. I need to start making some money, I'm almost out of the reserves i brought with me.

The Inn keeper took my silver and handed me a key. It had dark black letters printed on it "1011".

"Tenth floor, room 11. There's an elevator around that corner. Maids will come to clean your room everyday at noon, checkout is 7 days from now at 11am. Got it?"

"Yes. Thank you."

I walked away from the man waving as I got in the elevator.

He didn't even ask for my ID. That was odd.

\*DING\*

The elevator stopped at the 10th floor and I stepped out to walk down the hall towards my room.

I twisted the key and walked inside.

It was actually a bit nicer than I expected. There's a large bed in the center of the room and a bathroom with a shower included.

The linen on the bed is white and a lamp stood on the bedside table next to a large glass window that filled up the entire back wall of the room.

The window had a slight bluish tint. I guess that was just the hotel's aesthetic, It looks pretty modern.

The view outside the window is a pretty amazing. The sun is setting, I can see all the neon signs and outlines of people walking around in the residential district.

Off in the distance I can see the train station and the huge market center. Every direction I looked is eventually blocked by massive silver skyscrapers in all directions, but overall its a really nice view.

I placed my new sword up against the wall and undressed to get in a nice hot shower.

The water pressure at this Inn was amazing. The hot water never ended, I haven't felt this relaxed in a while.

Afterwards, I flopped into bed and watched the sun set completely behind the city's skyline.

What a day.

As I fell into a peaceful sleep I thought about a few things.

Tomorrow I'm going to start slow. A medium grade D Class Dungeon will be a perfect warm up for this week.

I need to find a good merchant at the market to start buying and selling Mana crystals and potions too.

Once I get the hang of things here I have 3 main goals.

The first and most urgent goal is to start making money. I'm sure it won't be too hard to farm loot.

The second goal is to level up. I had a nice day off today, but I feel stagnant when I'm not getting stronger.

Lastly, I need to start farming skills. I finally have the option to dive into many dungeons all in the same place. This is where my absorption skill will start to show its true potential.

After a nice long rest I woke up to the rising sun.

I was out the door and ready for an exciting day minutes later.

My first stop was the market. It took me about 10 minutes to make my way over. It's even more crowded than yesterday, all the early morning hunters are here to stock up on gear.

I strolled around for a few minutes until one shop caught my eye.

It looked a bit run down, but that's what I'm used to. The gear on the shelves looked perfectly new, it was just the shop itself that showed some wear and tear.

"How ya doin kid."

The old store owner approached me while I was looking at his merchandise.

I couldn't help myself from smiling. He reminded me of the old merchant back home, I like this place more already.

"Hey, you have any E Class potions? I need an MP and an HP."

This is almost the last of my money, I hope I can get some D class potions after a few successful dungeon raids.

"Sure thing kid, 2 silver."

I placed 2 silver on the counter and nodded.

The old merchant handed me my potions and I placed them in my item box.

"The name's Roger by the way. Good luck out there today."

"Thanks! Im Jay. Nice meeting you!"

I waved and walked away. That seems like the shop I was looking for. I'll come back there later today to sell my loot.

Now it's time to make my way towards the Dungeon Hub.

The large black building was swarming with hunters today. I made it inside and showed the guard by the D Class Dungeon escalator my ID.

Just like that I was through. Minutes later I made it down to the subway platform and was very surprised to see so many people at the station.

There were a ton of groups in the center platform yelling out all kinds of things.

"2 Tanks needed, we're raiding the golem boss for exp today!"

"Loot focused raid! Healing Mage needed as soon as possible!"

"Any combat magic users?? We're raiding for exp today! Will pay for boss kills if you can carry!"

There were all types of teams forming. Many jobs were being advertised and filled. This is much more organized than the E Class platform.

I walked further in to check out the list of dungeons. There were over two dozen middle grade D Class ones available nearby. I scanned the list and tried to pick something out. It was hard to choose.

I stood there with my hand on my chin for a moment until I heard a girl's voice behind me.

"Hey Swordsman! We're raiding the troll dungeon today. Loot focused, exp isn't the priority. We average 5 silver each for an 8 hour raid, interested?"

I turned around to see a light skinned girl that looked a bit older than me. She had dirty blond hair and wore dark clothing. She was no more than 160cm tall and had a long silver sword on her back.

A man stood beside her. He had the same colored hair and wore very similar battle gear. His facial features were very feminine and his frame didn't carry much muscle. His skin was very pale and he stood 170cm or so. He didn't carry any weapons.

They were an odd pair. I used inspect out of curiosity.

The man had a [Lv. 136] over his head, and the woman's blue text read [Lv. 151].

They're about my level, and they probably know a lot more than I do about this city's dungeon system. If all the need is my strength, it'll be a good deal for me. 5 silver a day is solid as well.

"Sure. The Troll Dungeon is a medium grade rating right?"

She nodded.

"Yep. You're quite quick to agree, very trusting. Not from around here are ya?"

I shook my head.

"Nope. You got me."

She smiled.

The man beside her still didn't say a word.

"Well, the train is about to arrive. A team of 3 will do the trick. Let's make some money. No boss fights, we're just farming regular trolls today. We split the mana and special drops 3 ways, no exceptions. Sound good?"

I nodded in agreement and walked with them over to the platform's edge as a train arrived.

"Screeeeeeech"

We boarded and were off to the troll dungeon just like that.

Maybe I am a bit too trusting...

For some reason I had a good feeling about these two. I don't think they're here to do me any harm.

I wonder what this raid will be like? I've never seen a troll before.

### Chapter 39

The train left the platform and we were off.

"Hey uhh. What's your name? I'm Jay by the way."

The light skinned girl looked at me and smiled.

"Nice to meet ya Jay. I thought you'd never ask. My name is Talia, this is Cori."

She pointed to the man. He nodded at me with a small grin.

I nodded back.

"Well, nice to meet both of you. Do you live in the city?"

Talia rolled her eyes.

"For the moment, yeah. We've been traveling through a few regions these last few months. The goal is to see the whole country and making good money while we're at it."

Cori looked at the ground. He was an odd guy.

"Ahh okay. So you two have been to many other places... If you don't mind sharing some knowledge with me, what are the guilds like in the big cities?"

Talia's eyes perked up.

"So you want to join a guild? You're a D Class Hunter. Pretty much any small guild will pick you up and give you a decent contract, there's hundreds of them in the city."

"Yeah, I assumed so. What about the bigger guilds? Do you know anything about them?"

"Well, there's a couple pretty big guilds in Vice city. The 3 main ones are invite only, you probably wouldn't ever even be able to walk through their doors without being at least a C Class hunter with some kind of crazy skill."

I looked at her with curiosity now. It's not just small talk anymore, this is interesting.

"What are their names?"

"Uhhh let me think. There's the Viridian Guild, that's the biggest one in Vice City right now. The Luna Guild and Fury Guild are definitely tied for a close 2nd."

I grinned and nodded. I turned to look at the cement walls flying by out the window.

"Interesting. I bet they have access to some really neat dungeons"

I could see Talia's reflection in the window like a mirror, she made eye contact with me and continued talking.

"Yeah but we're just a couple of D Class Hunters. Even if they have scouts everywhere in this city there's no way they'd reach out to us."

"Yeah, yeah. I can dream."

She grinned.

"Screeeeech."

We made it to the troll dungeon.

The escalator up was exactly the same as the dungeon I visited yesterday. At the top there was a very similar room with a floating blue portal at the back.

Talia and I drew our swords, Cori stretched his arms and got into a readied state as well.

We all jumped through.

This is definitely a new dungeon environment for me.

The ground is moist and the air is very humid. There are small swamp patches everywhere I look.

The moss smells weird and pond grass rose up to my knees everywhere I stepped. Thankfully there are no bugs in sight, that's a relief. I hate bugs.

When I look out far into the dungeon I can see thousands of trees. Most of them are pretty short and have long green vines hanging off their sagging branches.

This is honestly a pretty gross dungeon, I should have done a bit of research before I agreed to come. I'm definitely going to have to do a deep wash my boots, or just buy a whole new set of clothes after this raid...

When I squint my eyes I can make out the shadowy outline of what looks like a large tree in the back of the dungeon.

"Hey, have you guys been here before? What are these troll monster like, and is that a tree back there?"

Talia spoke up.

"Yeah we've been here a few times this week with teams of 3 to 5. Trolls drop good mana. They're pretty tricky to kill, but with the 3 of us it shouldn't be a problem. We have two sword users."

"What about that tree?"

"Oh yeah, that's where the boss room is. I've never gone that far in, just heard the stories. Apparently it's a pretty tough boss, powerful magic."

I nodded.

"Okay. So we'll just stick around these parts for now and farm trolls. Got it."

She nodded.

Cori spoke up. This was the first time I heard his voice. It was light and quiet.

"One enemy. 100m ahead."

He must have some kind of enemy detection skill. I activated mine as well to see what he was sensing.

A large creature was moving towards us at a consistent speed right in front of us like he said.

I readied my sword and started walking cautiously in the direction of the incoming opponent.

Cori backed up and Talia took the lead in front of him.

"It's just us fighting. Cori is our support type. He'll find enemies, then help with finishing them off. The actual combat will be handled by us. Okay?"

I nodded while keeping my eyes locked straight ahead. The creature was moving much faster now. It was less than 50m away.

The soft swampland makes it much harder to move around with ease. I'm going to have to focus on my footing a lot more during this battle.

Moments later I heard heavy footsteps splashing around in the muddy water less than 10m away.

Talia yelled.

"Its here! Immobilize the enemy and don't let your guard down for one second. Even if it looks dead keep your weapon ready for battle."

"Got it!"

Talia was in a very serious battle mode right now. These trolls must really be no joke...

Moments later it finally came into my view.

\*GRUNT\* \*GRUNT\* \*GRUNT\*

A nasty looking green creature came out from behind a wet sagging tree. Its arms were very long, they were almost touching the ground. The smell coming off this beast was similar to rotting flesh.

It had a wide nose and its bottom teeth grew out like small tusks.

The monster stood around 3m tall, each of its fingers had long claws that looked as sharp as knives. It was a menacing creature, but I've faced much scarier looking opponents before.

I used inspect to see what I was really dealing with here.

[Lv. 148]

This monster is a few levels higher than me, but I'm sure with Talia's help it won't be too difficult to defeat.

"Alright it's game time Jay. Let's do this!"

We both stood in front of the disgusting creature as it charged forward.

"CRRRUUAAARR!"

The troll made a shrieking sound as it started to swing its arms and charged towards us.

It had a very irregular and awkward movement style. This worked in its favor I guess. It was harder to tell which way it'd swing its arms at any given moment.

The troll was quick, but I was definitely quicker.

It looked strong... but just by the way it moved I could tell I was much stronger as well.

How could this thing be a higher level than me? This seems way too easy.

I out ran the monster and made a quick doge to its right. Its clawed hand flew passed me as I maneuvered myself behind it.

This creature isn't the smartest tool in the shed either...

Talia dodged to the left and the beast started eyeing her.

It made an odd jerking motion and started sprinting towards her and away from me.

Talia could definitely handle this mindless beast herself, but I wanted to show her that I can pull my own weight.

First impressions are everything.

I readied my sword and followed the monster as it hobbled away.

I planted my right leg on a hard bit of ground making sure not to get stuck in the mud and jumped forward straight at the troll's backside.

"Shinnnggg"

"THUDDDD."

I landed a picture perfect slash directly to the back of the monster's neck. Its head came clean off and landed in a patch of moss.

I stared down at its disgusting head and its body fell into a shallow swamp behind me.

I looked over to Talia with a satisfied smile on my face.

"Well, that was easy. Clean hit right?"

For some reason she didn't look happy for me... I spoke up and tried to lighten the mood.

"Come on!! You're upset I took the first kill or something?"

She still didn't even crack a smile. Talia just stood there holding her sword straight ahead looking off in the distance behind me.

"Stay alert Jay! I told you. Don't underestimate these things."

I stared back at her with a confused look.

Then I heard movements of another troll.

They must travel in pairs... or even groups..? Is this what Talia meant?



I turned around and my eyes went wide.

This is not what I was expecting at all.

The body of a troll was climbing out of the shallow swamp... yes, just the body.

I gripped my sword tightly and stared at the abomination before my eyes.

The troll I had just killed... seemingly came back to life and its ready to fight me again!

Chapter 40

"Trolls can regenerate! Just cutting off their heads isn't going to kill them!"

I looked over my shoulder at Talia as she yelled at me and rolled my eyes in return.

"You know you could have briefed me on what kind of magic they actually had. That would've been pretty helpful."

She nodded her head but I could tell she was focused straight ahead at the troll.

Cori finally arrived too, he stayed back 10m or so just like the first time we encountered this monster.

Talia grinned and nodded at him.

"Alright Jay. Let's attack the same as last time. Immobilize the troll, and do not get hit. Cori will finish it off once we've done our job."

I nodded and gripped my sword tight.

"CRRRUUAAARR!"

The troll already grew back the lower portion of its head. It was starting to shriek and crawl towards us.

Talia took the lead this time, I could tell she wanted to show off a little bit too.

She's very agile and quick, her sword looks light weight. She must have high speed and agility stats just like mine.

Talia hopped around the swamp and got closer to the regenerating troll. I followed close behind positioning myself to land a secondary attack.

We were less than 5m away now. The troll's head was almost fully reformed, it's amazing how fast its magic works.

With a swift movement of her blade, Talia attacked the monster. It shrieked and tried to claw her as she made a deep gash in its mid section before dodging to the left.

I was close behind and landed a powerful yet agile attack of my own. I dove in landed a clean slice on its left arm. My sword cut through it like butter, the arm fell in the swamp with a splash. I dodged to the right as the beast desperately tried to claw me with its remaining hand.

I looked at Talia, she was on the opposite side of the monster and there were trees blocking its escape to the left or right. We both grinned at each other as we walked in closer cornering the troll from escaping.

I lunged in and aimed for the troll's left leg. Talia went for the right arm.

Both were sliced clean off after our dual attack. We charged in over and over until the beast was a pile of parts on the swarm floor.

It was a bit gruesome, but what else can we do right now? I looked up at Talia.

"It's immobilized. Now what? How do we kill this thing?"

Talia grinned.

"Cori you're up!"

The pale man sprinted in glowing with a faint white light.

He placed his hands in front of his body and opened up a light colored portal in the air.

The moment he opened the portal a dark red light started to leak out. It looked and felt exactly like my fire magic.

He drew closer to the troll's mangled body and opened the portal wider. Flames poured out and began to burn the beast to ashes.

In a matter of seconds the troll was burned to a pile of ash.

I heard a familiar sound ringing in my head.

[Level Up]

[Status Open]

---

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 142

Hp: 715/715

Mp: 655/715

Strength: 342 [+125]

Speed: 406

Agility: 424

Defense: 308 [+123]

Mental Strength: 342 [+68]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Stainless Steel Sword [+125 Strength]

---

"Nice, a level up."

I turned to Cori and Talia.

"Anything else you two want to tell me?"

Talia looked at me with a concerning look and grabbed her sword. Cori stood on guard and his white light started to glow brighter.

My eyes went wide.

"Hey, hey! Sorry! I just meant it would be nice if you told me how to kill these things before we entered the dungeon ya know!"

Talia looked at Cori and shook her head as she put her sword down, he stopped glowing as well.

That was kind of scary... why'd they freak out on me.

Talia spoke up.

"You didn't know how to kill a troll? For real?"

I shook my head.

"I didn't even know trolls existed in real life dungeons before today, I've only read about them in comics."

Cori grinned a bit. Talia laughed out loud.

"Wow. I though you were just playing dumb. With your battle technique I thought you were a more experienced hunter. My bad. Really."

I nodded slowly. I guess it is pretty unheard of to randomly jump into D class dungeons without any research or knowledge of the monsters inside.

"My bad, you're right. It's not your job to educate me. It would be nice to know a thing or two about these monsters though, if you don't mind."

She nodded politely.

"Sure, sure. For starters this is a troll dungeon, it's a middle grade rating. You should definitely already know that. The regular trolls are around level 140 to 160. Their combat skill and stats are about 20% lower than their perceived level."

"Yeah, I could tell. They were an easy fight."

"Their skill is the tricky part. Trolls have a special kind of magic called regeneration. Even if you cut off its head they can still regenerate and survive to keep battling. If you cut it into pieces enough

times you could technically wear down its magic power and HP, but I think that would take hours. The only way to nullify its magic instantly is with a strong acid or fire attack."

I put a hand to my chin and thought to myself. I assumed it was something like that, I underestimated them and didn't even use my own fire magic. This battle could have been over even quicker.

"Makes sense. Cori, what was that skill you used? Do you possess a fire magic combat skill?"

He shook his head and started to glow with that same white light again.

A small rectangular portal opened up in front of us and I looked inside.

There was a dark red floating stone inside. The magic flames were coming out at an alarming rate, they felt much more powerful than my own the closer I got to the source. He closed the portal the moment I got a good look. Talia spoke up.

"Cori has a rare special magic skill. We obtained that fire stone from a boss in the bedrock region a few months back. It was a high level D Class boss, we were on a 5 person raid team. It's a very rare item, it comes in handy."

I eyed her curiously.

"It doesn't run out? Or need to be charged? Is it just unlimited fire magic? How's that even work? I've never seen or heard of a so called fire stone."

"It would normally burn to ashes in a few hours. Cori's special magic works like an item box to store items. It can contain magic items and they won't be affected by the outside world, it's like time stops inside of his mini pocket world. We've been able to use it many times while traveling. Neat skill right?"

"Yeah. That is a good skill, along with an enemy detection skill as well?"

Cori shook his head and pointed.

He glowed white and a portal opened up 20m away from us. Cori spoke quietly.

"I can sense magic in a large area surrounding my portals."

I looked at him and he stopped glowing.

"Ahh. Okay, makes sense again. Well, now that you've shown me your skill maybe this will help us out a bit too."

I grinned and pointed one pointer finger up in the air igniting it into flames like a candle.

They both stopped and stared. Talia spoke up.

"You had a fire skill and kept quiet?? This would have been a whole lot easier ya know"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm an idiot I get it. Now that we've actually made a proper introduction, let's do some hunting. I think we can make a whole lot more than 5 silver each today."

I smiled. It was pretty funny. We all just kind of jumped into this dungeon without knowing a thing about each other.

Talia sighed.

"Agreed. All I have is a swordsmanship skill by the way. I'm not hiding anything else."

Her voice quivered a bit when she spoke her last sentence. Not much, but enough for me to notice... I decided not to bring it up just yet.

The troll's body disappeared and Talia picked up the large mana crystal.

"One down. We'll count them all up and spit the crystals evenly after we exit the dungeon."

We all nodded and started walking through the shallow swamp to look for more trolls.

It was a rocky start, but I think it's going well.

The only major thing that irks me is the fact that I couldn't absorb the troll's skill. Maybe I'm missing a condition? Or is it not even a skill? I'll find out by the end of today for sure.