

## D. Diver 41

Chapter 41

We walked further into the dungeon and the swamp just got deeper and deeper.

Cori spoke up.

"Troll, 50m to our left."

I turned and ran towards it immediately. 10 seconds later I was face to face with the creature. It was pretty much identical to the last troll we encountered.

I erupted into flames and turned on my inspect skill.

[Lv. 152]

I smirked and sprinted towards the troll. It awkwardly moved its long arms around and charged at me as well.

In one flaming strike I sliced the troll's head clean off. This time I made sure to leave fire residue behind.

The body of the troll fell to its knees and the flames of my attack burned brightly along the area where I cut. Just to be sure I lunged in for a final blow and sliced its body in two while releasing a large amount of fire magic inside the corpse.

Moments later the beast was burning to ash. I heard the ringing that confirmed this troll's demise.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

I could see Cori and Talia running up behind me about 10m away. I did sprint off alone, maybe I should have waited.

The ashy corpse of the troll started to glow blue, I stepped back and saw that it was just a text box...

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Self Regeneration

[YES][NO]

I chose [YES] and stood there curiously over the ashy body as it disappeared. It let me use my skill this time?

The only explanation I can think of is that I landed the final hit. Maybe that's a hidden condition for my absorption skill. It makes sense.

I opened my status to check it out.

[Status Open]

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Name: Jay Soju

Level: 144

Hp: 725/725

Mp: 530/725

Strength: 347 [+125]

Speed: 412

Agility: 430

Defense: 310 [+124]

Mental Strength: 347 [+69]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Self Regeneration

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Stainless Steel Sword [+125 Strength]

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Cori and Talia arrived seconds later. I'm glad they didn't see me kill that troll, its a blessing in disguise that I'm so rash sometimes. I don't know if anyone else can see my absorption text. I've never tested it out, and today isn't the day to do so.

Talia looked at me with a proud look on her face.

"Good job. I'm happy for ya. Looks like you can handle these guys yourself. That's good to know, but we should still stick close together. Mutants aren't too uncommon in the capital dungeons. There's a lot of concentrated magic here, 1 in ever 20 or so monsters is a mutant. I've personally never seen one in the troll dungeon, but you never know. Just a heads up."

My eyes lit up.

"I had no idea... Does that mean there are a lot of dungeon breaks in the capital? No one seems to be too worried at all. How does it work here?"

"There's dungeon breaks pretty often actually. Most of the E, D, and C Class dungeons are pretty packed in the city though. If there's ever a break, usually many competent teams are already inside and deal with the matter."

"Hmm makes sense."

"Even if monsters were to get out they would have a very hard time getting anywhere. Each dungeon portal is separated from the outside world. They're only connected to the dungeon Hub. The Hunter's Association has many guards on duty that can take care of any potential leaks as well."

I nodded as the troll disappeared, I picked up its mana crystal. It was pretty heavy.

"Wait. What about the B class dungeons? Or even A class dungeons? I've never even heard of those to be honest."

Talia smirked. We started walking deeper into the dungeon as Cori opened up portals around us occasionally.

"You're funny. You really have no idea about anything in the capital. Did you grow up on a farm or something?"

"No, well... Pretty much I guess. My home town is pretty small, who cares though! What happens if a B or A Class dungeon breaks?"

"Well, there hasn't been a B Class break in years. It takes a lot of stored up magic for something like that to happen. One of the top 3 guilds would probably take care of it if that happened. I assume it would cause a lot of damage to the city, but they could handle it."

"And an A Class?"

Talia raised an eyebrow and grinned.

"Well, we'd all be screwed."

I looked at her with concern.

"What do you mean we'd all be screwed? The top 3 guilds can't handle an A class break? What about the Hunters Association?"

Talia laughed and just looked straight ahead.

"There won't be an A Class Dungeon break. Those are unheard of, not since the Great War at least."

"Really?"

"Yeah, we only have like 4 A class hunters in this whole country. You think they'd hang around in the Vice Region?"

"Hmm. I guess you're right."

"There's barely any high rated B class dungeons for hunters to train at you know. If you want to get stronger as a B rank, you have to do so by other means."

"I don't need to think about that right now, I was just curious about the breaks. Thanks."

Talia smiled.

"Haha no you're fine. You kind of remind me of Cori when we met back in the the Bedrock region."

Cori put on a light grin.

"Troll, 70m to our right."

Talia nodded and her face tightened up into battle mode.

"Let's head out. Jay, you had the last fight. I can handle this one, be my close backup."

"Got it."

A minute or so later the troll was dead on the ground after Talia attacked it ruthlessly and Cori finished it off with the fire stone in his storage system.

We hunted down trolls and alternated between killing them for another 6 hours. We faced off against 18 more monsters. I personally fought 9 of them. The last 5 I decided to stop using my fire magic to preserve MP. I had to drink my E class potion and was running low. After all these fights and a +500 reset I was at 295 MP remaining.

Overall I gained a lot of exp as well. I leveled up 8 more times. The last couple trolls didn't boost my exp much, it was nice while it lasted though. My experience rose a lot, I'm level 152 now!

"Hey, do you have any MP potions on you? I'm fresh out. It's not urgent, but a couple more fights and I'll be at 0."

She lifted her shirt on right side to reveal a small belt with a glowing pink potion.

"Yeah just one, you can have it if you need it. I think it might be better to just call it a day instead."

Talia made the call.

"I think we're solid. Pack it in and divide the loot?"

We all nodded at each other. I replied.

"Yeah, time to call it. Great hunt today, we made a killing. Way more than your average 5 each day i assume, I'm glad i met you two!"

Talia smirked and gave Cori a quick glance.

"Yeah, our 5 each is from a 5 person crew. We didn't do that much better than usual. It's just a better split."

"Ahh cool. The Exp today was great! I went up a ton of levels."

"Yeah, the exp split was pretty good too. I gained a few today as well. Sadly Cori probably didn't gain a single one. We'll have to farm a bit in a lower dungeon soon to even out."

Cori nodded and smiled thinly at Talia.

I was a bit confused, she could see it on my face.

"The fire stone kills don't count as Cori's kill. He didn't get the exp share all day, it was just us."

"Oh that's rough. Well, at least we all made some good profit. Let's head back."

We all started walking back in the direction of the dungeon exit.

The ground was getting a bit less wet and the swamp land was clearing up. We were less than 1km away, I could tell.

There was just an odd feeling I couldn't shake. We were definitely being watched...

I activated my enemy detection and scanned the area. There was nothing close by.

As I lengthened the range I could feel my MP being drained, I turned it off just in case.

"Cori, do you feel that? Is there anything nearby?"

"I feel it, but I cannot find anything nearby."

We continued walking towards the dungeon exit. I gripped my sword tight and was ready for a battle at any moment.

Talia and I walked up front, Cori stayed behind scanning the area.

About 30 very tense seconds later Cori spoke up.

"Something Big. 150m Straight ahead."

I turned back to him.

"How big? What do you mean?"

"100m now, It's coming"

I turned back and readied my blade. No more time for talking, it's time to fight.

Moments later the trees ahead started to shake and the water in the shallow swap rippled violently.

Then I saw a massive creature burst out from the trees and let out a shriek as it stared us all down with bloodshot eyes.

"CRUUUUUAAAARRRR!"

It's a Mutant Troll...

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The mutant troll stood in front of us with its long arms reaching close to the ground.

The monster's right hand held a large axe and its left was glistening with sharp claws.

It stood almost 5m tall and was a much darker shade of green than our previous opponents.

I used my inspect skill.

[Lv. 172]

It doesn't seem too bad. The level 150s were a piece of cake. This one might be a bit stronger, but Talia and I can handle it.

The monster roared as we ran towards it. The massive troll swung its axe erratically and hit nearby trees while charging towards us.

I broke off to the right side and Talia moved to the left.

We were both much faster than this beast. It'll definitely be an easy fight.

Moments later we weaved in and out of the trees avoiding the monster's random attacks and each of us sliced clean through its legs.

"THUDDDDDD."

The troll fell flat on its face. I grinned and made eye contact with Talia as we turned to finish it off.

The instant I turned back my eyes went wide.

The two legs we cut were moving around on their own... and they were mutating rapidly.

Seconds later the two legs had formed into normal sized trolls.

This can't be normal.

"We need fire!"

I yelled and scanned the battlefield for Cori.

I could burn them to a crisp, but I wouldn't have much MP left for the boss.

I finally found him 30m away standing back behind a tree.

"Cori! Come help Talia with these two. Let me handle the big guy!"

He nodded and started to sprint around the outside of the battleground.

I looked at Talia, she understood.

"I'll handle them. You take out the mutant."

I gritted my teeth and tightened the grip on my sword as I charged in towards the massive troll.

Its legs were growing back at a rapid rate. It had much faster regeneration than the prior trolls.

I erupted into flames and focused everything I had into my sword. I jumped directly at the beast's face.

"CLANNNNGGGG"

The troll made an erratic movement with its right arm and somehow blocked my swing with its axe. I landed back on the ground about 5m in front of the troll.

"Ahh so you're a crafty mother f-"

"CRUUUUAARRR!"

I grinned and looked up at the beast. Looks like I'll have to try plan B.

I charged towards its right side in a full sprint. It countered by swinging its axe around in circles like a maniac.

I dodged across its body to its left and didn't even try to attack. It awkwardly swung its claws at me but missed. This monster clearly relied on its axe for attacks and defense.

I made my way to its backside and planted my left leg to jump up without hesitating for a second.

I concentrated every last bit of MP into a swing of fire.

"SHINGGGG"

"THUDDD"

A clean hit. I managed to cut its head off.

I landed and fell to one knee. I hate the feeling of being fresh out of MP, It makes me feel lazy and in a bit of a daze.

I'll be fine, it's just not the optimal mood to be in mid battle.

I scanned the battlefield for my teammates.

I could see Cori and Talia running towards me with two flaming corpses behind them. I yelled towards Cori.

"Finish it."

He nodded and started glowing white.

Cori used the fire stone to burn the rest of this beast to ash.

It's not the most effective combat item or skill in my opinion. It leaves him wide open for attacks, but when Cori catches an enemy off guard that thing is pretty dangerous. It still leaves me in awe to be honest.

"It's done."

I heard the system ringing in my head again. He's right, It is done. I smiled.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

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Name: Jay Soju

Level: 155

Hp: 780/780

Mp: 0/780

Strength: 373 [+125]

Speed: 443

Agility: 463

Defense: 334 [+134]

Mental Strength: 373 [+75]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Self Regeneration

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Stainless Steel Sword [+125 Strength]

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"CLANGGGGG"

I heard the sound of metal hitting rock and turned my head quickly.

The large axe from the mutant fell to the swamp bed, it hit a small patch of rocks on the way down.

Talia looked over at the two leg corpses that dissolved but didn't find any mana in them.

The mutant dropped a huge crystal.

We all took turns holding it for a second, then I spoke up.

"Let's get out of here right now, my MP is drained. I couldn't fight another one of those if I wanted to."

Talia's eyes perked up the moment I said that. She turned to Cori and gave him a light nod, he returned it. Talia spoke up.

"You're out of MP huh?"

They both turned to me with grins on their faces.

Talia took out her sword and Cori started glowing. Reflexively I lifted my own sword but it felt awkward in my hands. I have 0 MP left, my sword is basically useless right now.

I gulped.

"H-Hey. Why are you two looking at me like that? What's wrong?"

Talia's eyes were wide open and her grin looked creepy.

"Oh nothing's wrong. I have to thank you for your work today. Newbies in the city usually aren't as skilled as you, we made a whole lot today. Split between the two of us I reckon we have over 15 silver each, and that's not even including the axe or your sword!"

I gripped my sword and sweat started forming on my forehead.

"The two of us? T-There's 3 people here...and my sword?"

Talia's deadly stare didn't waver for a second.

"You really are a piece of work aren't ya Jay. It's a shame."

"....."

"We kill fresh meat that walks into the city and take the loot for ourselves. Don't you get it? You're going to die here!"

Talia started to lunge towards me with her sword pointed at my neck.



She's really trying to kill me, and at this rate she might actually succeed. I have to think of something fast...

I immediately ran to my left to dodge her sword and get on some more stable ground.

If we fight one on one right now it will only end badly for me. I have to run. That's my only option.

I turned around and started sprinting towards the direction of the exit portal. A bright glowing white light started to flood my field of vision, then it turned dark red.

Cori stood in front of me now with a portal wide open full of flames blocking my only path. Everywhere else was deep swamp water, if I took the time to swim through it Talia would catch up for sure.

I lifted my sword and stared him down. It just felt like a hunk of metal in my hands. Without my passive swordsmanship skill I'm really naked on the battlefield.

"You can't run forever!!!"

I turned to see Talia close behind full of killing intent.

Why me? What did I do wrong to deserve this?

I guess.. It really is entirely my own fault.

If I make it out of this alive I'll never trust a new face ever again. This is what the world is really like. I've been so naive, they've been hinting their true intentions this whole time... I've just been trying to see the good in people. Is that so wrong?

Cori slowly advances blocking my path forward even more, Talia's blade is less than 5m away from my torso now.

I need to think...

I turn to Talia and give it everything I've got. It's better to be cut than burned alive.

"CLANGGGGG"

"SHINGGGGG"

I managed to block her first strike with a reflexive and simple block. Before she could counter with a second hit I tried to land a counter.

I lunged in towards her right side. With blinding speed she managed to twist her body away from the sword. It still tore her shirt and ripped the belt off her waist. The cloth and belt fell to the ground.

During my attempt for an attack Talia launched her own.

All I could see was a slash of blood and a sharp pain in my shoulder that carried my sword.

She ran passed me continuing her trajectory. I tried to swing my sword towards her but my body wasn't responding. The moment I turned to face her I saw my own arm falling to the ground with the sword in hand.

She sliced off my arm.... what a clean hit.... i barely felt it.

We locked eyes, and she grinned at me. I could feel her evil soul emanating from within. She enjoys this, I'm definitely not her first kill.

The next moment I felt two more sharp pains. One on my right leg, and the other in my abdomen.

I fell to the floor next to my sword in a pool of my own blood.

I saw a hand grab my sword and felt the item box on my waist get untied and lifted off my body.

My vision was getting blurry.

This is the end I guess...

I was really killed by a human, it wasn't even a dragon or something cool like that.

I didn't even get to save the world while dying... what a sad excuse for a hero's journey.

As I heard two sets of footsteps in the damp ground fade away behind me I saw a glimmer of hope.

My eyes went wide. This isn't the end, I have to stop thinking like that!

My own severed arm was covering a piece of cloth that looked like Talia's ripped shirt.

Underneath it all was a small glass bottle filled with a glowing pink liquid attached to a belt.

I used my left arm to pull myself towards it with all the strength left in my body.

I inched closer and closer to Talia's fallen MP potion as my body grew weaker and weaker.

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I dragged my body along the wet swamp floor towards the faint glow of a pink potion.

My arm and leg had been sliced off, and my stomach has a large hole in it. There are 3 smeared trails of blood behind.

I finally made it to the pile of cloth on the ground covering the portion of Talia's belt I managed to cut off during our short battle.

I grabbed the bottle with my left hand and ripped the cork off with my teeth. I drank the potion and closed my eyes. Magic flowed back into my body.

There's only one way I'll make it out of here alive. I have to try my new skill.

"Self Regeneration."

"Self Regeneration...."

"SELF REGENERATION!"

I kept repeating those words over and over in my head while concentrating on my wounds.

I could feel the MP being consumed, but also a relaxing warmth came over my whole body.

I opened my eyes and looked down to see my arm and leg slowly growing back. I focused even harder and the re-growth started to speed up.

This skill is incredible.

I can feel my bones and skin re-growing at a rapid rate. Seconds later I stood to my feet. My shirt sleeve and pant leg were gone along with one of my boots. That didn't matter to me one bit. I stared straight ahead towards the direction my attackers just left.

They made the first move and failed to eliminate me... their lives are fair game.

I darted forward making sure not to make too much noise. My MP was somewhat drained, but I have more than enough in me to plot my revenge.

A state of rage came over me. I've never felt this way before... No one has ever deceived me quite like this, I will not forgive them.

After a few moments I heard a voice and slipped behind a tree.

"Another successful day in Vice City. I think it's about time we head off somewhere else, we might be getting a bit too hot here. One night to celebrate then let's checkout the Nurean Region next. I think a top 4 region might be a good change of pace befo-"

"Enemy 20m behind us."

I held my breath.

They know an enemy is nearby, but there's no reason to ever guess it's me. I can't believe them! They're just talking casually like this is an everyday thing! How disgusting.

I circled around their back and ducked behind the trees. I'm waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

I watched them like my prey. I feel true hatred. They tried to kill me and took everything I own. All I did was help them out today... The world really is a cruel place. Now they'll get a taste of their own medicine. Karma always comes back around.

There was an opening in the trees. I could see Cori scanning frantically and Talia holding her sword tight eyeing the trees and turning in circles slowly.

Cori was staring directly in my direction, but my tree cover was too dense. I moved closer and closer making sure not to be seen until I needed to.

"10m straight ahead"

Talia nodded.

"I don't hear it at all, where is this troll?"

"I'm not sure its a troll. It feels like a human."

Talia was inching closer and closer every second. Cori stood close behind her.

We were less than 5m apart now, I was knee deep in swamp water gripping the backside of a tree.

It's time.

I focused on my fire magic into my palm to create an orb of glowing red light. This is going to be everything I've got, I only have one shot here.

I jumped out from behind the tree onto dry land and lunged forward with all my strength. The look on Talia's face was pure fear, astonishment, and disgust. There was no time for her to even think.

I let my orb of fire expand into the image of my lost sword. The flames erupted and devoured my enemy.

"SHINGGGGG"

I sliced through Talia's torso and followed through by stabbing Cori in the chest as he stood in awe close behind her. I let my flames expand further and with a fiery explosion I let out my anger with a blast of flames that depleted my MP back to 0 again. They were both burned to a crisp before i could blink.

"CLANNGGGGG"

I heard multiple items hit the ground along with a familiar ringing sound.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

"I... leveled up?"

I couldn't help but to mumble those words out loud. How absurd. I didn't know humans had exp too....

I looked at the ground to see a pile of swords and mana crystals beside Talia's body. The item box must have burned and released all of the gear, that's annoying.

When I turned to Cori's body I grinned with delight.

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Spacial Magic[Item Storage]

[YES][NO]

I chose [YES] Immediately.

Two skills in one day, not bad.

I grinned and started to pick up all the gear and loot on the floor. The small items fit fine in my pockets but the swords and axe sat awkwardly on my back. This'll do for now though.

The bodies started to disappear into the dungeon floor. Cori's started glowing red....

As he disappeared a pile of items fell to the floor. Tons of MP and HP potions along with a few shiny silver coins hit the floor. My eyes went wide.

This is everything that was in his dimensional storage compartment, even the fire stone.

It was boiling the swamp water all around it. This stone is the real deal... Their story about how they got this thing must have been a lie... it's definitely not a D Class Item.

I picked up an HP and MP potion and chugged both of them. Next I checked my status.

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Name: Jay Soju

Level: 157

Hp: 790/790

Mp: 790/790

Strength: 378 [+125]

Speed: 449

Agility: 469

Defense: 336 [+134]

Mental Strength: 378 [+76]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Self Regeneration

Spacial Magic[Item Storage]

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Stainless Steel Sword [+125 Strength]

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"Item Storage Huh?"

I focused on my new skill and started glowing a faint white light. A rectangular tear in space opened up in front of me. I ignited my right hand in flames to reach down to grab the stone.

It was burning much hotter than my own flames. I managed to drop it into my mini pocket of space and closed it up. I quickly used self regeneration to grow the skin back on my hand that had been burned to a crisp. That is one dangerous stone...

I could sense it in my pocket world. I'm not sure how to describe it, but this space is now an extension of myself. If I were to open it anywhere I could definitely sense everything around it. Cori's claims made sense now.

I started walking towards the dungeon exit again but stopped to test one more thing out. I opened up my pocket dimension and concentrated hard on the space within. It was pretty simple to move the the stone around within the space. I decide to throw a mana crystal in with it.

Looks like it works. I can move things around within this space without them interfering with each other. This means all my new loot and gear will be safe in this pocket world right next to the fire

stone. I placed everything inside my item storage. I don't even have to buy an item box now, this is great!

With a big grin across my face I continued my trek back to the dungeon exit.

I made it to the floating blue portal and jumped through.

When I stepped to the other side I was not alone in the dungeon room....

There were two tall men in nice suits and well built frames. One was blond and clean shaven, the other had black hair and a beard. They did not look like the types of guys I should be messing with right now.

I gave them a nod and tried to walk passed to the escalator. One of them moved in front of the moving stairs and spoke up.

"Stop right there. We need to have a word with you."

They both stared directly at me without wavering an inch.

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I froze and looked up at the two men in suits.

"You need to talk with me? Why's that?"

The blond haired man in front of the stairs reached into his pocket and pulled out an ID.

In big black letters next to his photo I could read "Hunters Association Representative" and beside that, a large letter C. This guy is the real deal.

I gulped.

"I- uhm. Of course. What would you like to talk about?"

He grinned and put the card back in his pocket.

"Come on walk with us, I'd rather speak in private."

I agreed and followed the men down the escalator. What else could I do right now?

I probably did look pretty suspicious. All my items are in my item storage, it looks like I came out of that dungeon with nothing on me. Half my clothes are ripped off too... That can't help.

After boarding the train we made it back to the main dungeon hub pretty quickly. I just stood next to them in awkward silence as the cement walls flew by.

We walked through the crowds of people in the main hub back up to the surface and they lead me down the street a few blocks. It was still awkward and silent, my heart was starting to beat out of my chest. My foot hurts too, i didn't even think about how uncomfortable it'd be to walk around with no shoe on....

We made it to a large silver tower with the Association's logo on the entrance. This must be one of their main buildings in the capital. It's so much bigger than the one I go to back home!

The men opened the front door and we were immediately greeted by a tall dark featured woman in the lobby.

"Welcome back Sirs."

The blond man nodded and walked straight towards and elevator at the back of the room. The other man motioned me to follow.

I complied and we rode the elevator up to the 17th floor. They lead me to an office room.

It was just us now.

My heart continued to pound loudly, I could feel it in my ears.

The walls were white and the room hummed with the faint sound of a mana shield. This is a magic interrogation room... There were a few comfortable looking seats in a triangle all facing each other. We sat down. The man spoke up.

"We've been tailing you since this morning. There's no point in lying to us."

I stared straight ahead at both of them.

"W-Why? What did I do wrong?"

"You're not in the wrong here, we'd just like to hear the full story without any outside interference."

"The whole story? I- what do you mean?"

I'm not sure exactly what they know... and what they're trying to make me admit. I doubt they're really on my side In this whole situation...

"What're your names anyway? If I'm not in the wrong here, this is no way to treat a guest."

"I'm Daniel. This is Kenji."

He pointed to the man with black hair. He smiled at me.

"Okay. Cool. I'm Jay."

I took a deep breath and tried to relax a bit. I am in the Hunters Association building after all... I didn't really do anything wrong. I should calm down and act like it.

Daniel spoke up.

"The two hunters that recruited you to go dungeon diving with them this morning."

I eyed him carefully.

"What about them?"

"Well, I can't help but notice they did not come out of the dungeon with you today. I'd like you to give us a full report on the incident."

"W-Well I. I'm not sure I can say exac-"

"They're wanted criminals you know."

My eyes perked up a bit.

"W-Wanted criminals? For what?"

"Well... They're some of the suspected collaborators in a large scale robbery that took place about a month ago in the Bedrock Region. There's a jurisdiction issue when crossing regional borders. The

old reports had to be filed and sent to us here in the Vice Region before we could formally go after the two of them."

I nodded while looking down at the floor.

"Why would they be dungeon diving then? There's no logical reason."

"Well it seems recently they've been on a streak of killing rookies and taking their loot. Old habits die hard. There's been an increased amount of alerts from the troll dungeon reporting casualties. Most people aren't stupid enough to go in there without the proper gear or preparation. We sent D Class scouts to investigate this week and found a common link between these two and the missing hunters. I guess it's just your lucky day we were called in to confront them. Although, It seems as if you've already done the confronting for us. We need a full report. I can assure you, this matter will be kept private and you will not be punished."

Well that story clears a few things up. They have been tailing me since this morning too. I really got involved with some horrible people, lesson learned. They pretty much know everything aside from the fact of how exactly I killed them... It's better I decide the details, rather than them investigating any further.

"Sure.. This all makes a bit more sense now. I'll tell you what happened."

The two man sat back with satisfied looks on their faces while I explained the situation from my point of view.

The only minor changes I made to the story were that it was me that killed all the trolls with my fire skill. I did not mention any word of the fire stone or Cori's skill.

I said the they tried to corner me when we were finished hunting but I managed to beat them by a hair in battle. Just by looking at me in my rugged state, this is very believable.

They wrote everything down in their notebooks and listened quietly.

Once I finished I let out a long sigh and sunk back into my seat.

"Hey uhh. Do you think you guys could hook me up with a pair of boots or something? I can pay for them, I just don't feel right hanging around like this..."

Daniel laughed.

"Sure. Let's go to a C Class training room. I think it's time we celebrate a mission complete, I'll get you some gear. Gotta hand it to you Jay, you made our job a whole lot easier today.

I let out a thin smile and followed him out the door.

We took the elevator down to floor 10 and walked down the hall. It was a very symmetrical floor. There were large reinforced doors on either side of the long white hallway.

After a bit of walking Daniel turned and scanned his card at a door. It clicked and slid open.

"Take a look inside. This is a C Class Hunters Association training room. Not too many like it."

The walls were all white, they hummed much louder than the room we were in moments ago. It felt like the training room from yesterday, this would hold up against some powerful attacks.



"Take anything you want from that room over there. It's all brand new don't worry, a thank you from me to you."

"Really? Thanks!"

I walked over to a small rectangle on the wall and pushed it in. That's where Daniel had pointed. It opened up a door that showed me a closet like compartment in the wall. It was filled with black combat clothing folded perfectly.

I took a shirt, new pants, a pair of socks, and some boots. I didn't think twice and just changed there on the spot.

Daniel spoke up as I was changing.

"Hey what level are you? If you can handle those trolls on your own, you must be a decently high rated D Class. Plus you're young, only 20 right?"

I nodded.

"Yeah, I'm around level 150. Why?"

He looked a little disappointed when when I said that.

"Ahhh you're at 150. I guess you'll have to wait for another one."

I looked at him with a confused look.

"Another one of what? What do you mean?"

He smirked.

"The C Class exams start in just under 3 weeks. Kenji is participating. You need to be level 250 to apply. They only hold C Class exams every 3 or 4 months in the capital, so it's a pretty big deal every time it comes around."

Daniel pointed at Kenji and he spoke up.

"Yeah, I've been level grinding in these Capital dungeons on weekends off of work for almost 4 years now. I took the safe route like most and only challenged bosses with parties so its been a slow and steady journey. The Association pays C Class Reps a ton more though, that's what I'm looking forward to the most."

He looked at Daniel and they both grinned.

I fell deep into thought.

The C Class examines huh? I had no idea they were so soon. If I can gain around 100 more levels in 3 weeks I could participate too. If I don't.... I'll have to wait another 3-4 months to apply.

I'll add this to my list of urgent goals, I need to reach level 250... Fast.

Chapter 45

Daniel spoke up.

"You ever think about joining up with the Association?"

I shook myself out of a day dream.

"U-Uh no not really. What are the benefits? It just seems like a lot of work."

Daniel and Kenji both started laughing.

"Yeah, yeah. I guess maybe you're right. It is a lot of responsibility, especially here in the city. The upside is we get access to the private dungeons and rare gear to fight with. It's basically everything you'd expect."

"Hmm, understood. I think I'll stick with the public dungeons for now."

Daniel nodded slowly, he clearly wanted to ask me something.

"I looked at your file earlier, for some reason there's a lock on some of your data. Someone must have done it manually at the Association building you applied for your D Class rank. I was a bit curious, all the file shows is your rank and that you have 2 skills. They're Swordsmanship and some kind of Combat Fire Magic I assume?"

"There's a lock on my data? Hmmm, I-uh yeah those are my skills. Why?"

"You'd definitely get a great position if you want to join us. Two skill members tend to get special treatment. Feel free to stop by this building anytime. Here take a card."

Daniel handed me a card and I thanked him. The three of us continued a bit more small talk for 30 minutes or so. With nothing left to say I decided it was time to go.

They walked with me down to the elevator and out the front door. We shook hands and agreed to see each other in the future some time. I don't know if it'll really happen, it's just the polite thing to say.

The sun was setting now, I made my way towards the market center.

It's time to see how much all this loot is worth. I think it'll be a significant amount.

After a solid 20 minutes of walking through the crowded streets under the setting sun I finally made it to the market.

"Hey kid! Good to see ya, what can I get for you?"

I grinned.

"Good to see you too Roger. I have a ton of mana and a few items I'm looking to sell. You buying?"

"Of course let me see what you have."

He took out a mana scale and I reached into my item storage. I pulled out a pile of mana and placed it on the counter next to the scale. Most of it was from today's hunt but there was some extra from my old pouch and Cori's old storage system. Next, I took out a pile of potions. There were 4 MP and 3 HP. Lastly, I pulled out the large axe and Talia's old sword."

"Let's start with the mana."

The old merchant's eyes went wide. He pushed all the mana onto the scale. Moments later the large black numbers read out 3176.60MU.

"Now that's a haul. I gotta make some money off it too ya know, I'll give you 30 silver for the whole stack."

"Yeah, understood. Works for me. How about these potions, can you tell me what grade they are?"

The man took a close look at the potions and raised an eyebrow.

"These are just your average D Class MP and HP potions. You want to sell these?"

"No, I keep those. I was just curious what exactly they were."

He nodded and started examining the axe and sword on the counter.

"Hmmm alright. This is a 150 strength boost axe. A really good item for auction, you'll make much more there. It'll easily go for over 40 or 50 silver, maybe even more if you find the right buyer."

I thought back to my last auction experience and shuttered a bit.

"How much for it right now?"

The merchant looked down at the axe again.

"You'd really get a better price at auction, I don't want to rip ya off. I can give you 30 silver for it today."

"Hmmm maybe. How much for the sword?"

"Its a 125+ strength sword, and its lightweight too. Not a bad item. Again, it'd go for much more at auction but I can give you 20 for it right now."

"Lets do 90 silver for everything. I'm sure those two items will make you a profit, you know it too."

"90? I guess the axe will sell sooner or later for a good price. I can do that, deal."

"Great."

We shook on it and both walked away happy. I made 90 silver profit in a day, the merchant definitely got some good items for a price well below the market. I don't mind that I could have sold them for more, I'd rather have more time to dive back in the dungeons.

The merchant counted out 90 silver and I placed them in my item storage.

"Thanks old man! By the way, what are the best dungeons around here for leveling? Are there any monsters with unique abilities? Mid to Upper D class preferably."

"Hmmm. The best D Class dungeons huh? Well, if you're looking for a basic fight for levels you can check out the Minotaur or Lizard-Men Dungeon."

"The Minotaur sound cool, what are they like?"

"They have no specific skills, they're just big humanoid bull creatures. The normal monsters are around level 150 to 200. They're one of the go to leveling dungeons for people trying to rank up to C Class. The monsters travel In groups and have a wide range of level possibilities so teaming with a party is recommended."

"Okay. Interesting. Anything else? I'm looking for monsters with interesting skills. Stuff I've never seen before ya know? Plus, I hunt solo."

I'm trying to get the old man to give me some info so I can search for some useful skills.

"Ahh, you're a solo hunter huh? Lets see.. There's a slime dungeon, they have some odd abilities. The snake dungeon's monsters have a poison skill. Hmm... uhh There's the advanced ogre dungeons, they have all kinds of magic skills. Definitely stay clear of the advanced ogre dungeons for now if you're all alone though. Trust me."

"Alright.. noted. No advanced ogres right now. What about the slimes?? Aren't those weak starter monsters? How hard could a slime really be?"

"You'd be pretty surprised. They may be in the lower levels of D Class Dungeons but they're tricky to kill. Unless you have some kind of long range magic its hard to attack them without being sucked in."

"What would happen if you were sucked in?"

"Well, you definitely don't want to find out. I've heard stories of the slime boss sucking hunter's dry of MP in seconds."

My eyes lit up at the sound of that. A skill that absorbs MP? This could be exactly what I'm looking for.

"I like the sound of that. Thanks a lot! I'll see ya soon, you've been really helpful!"

I waved the old man off and left with a wide grin on my face.

"Gurrglleeee"

I'm starving....

Did I even eat this morning??

I walked quickly towards the food district area Rei brought me yesterday. I need a good meal and a drink right about now.

After a few minutes of walking I could smell the sweet scent of meat and spices in the air.

I searched around for a few minutes and found a nice looking open bar. I ordered two of the large meals my bar tender recommended and a tall cold beer.

There was music playing and people laughing and talking all around me.

I was content to drink, eat, and let my mind wander on its own.

I have some good insight on where to get a very valuable skill. I'll be heading to the slime dungeon first thing in the morning to check things out.

If I can potentially absorb MP from my opponents, I'll basically have an endless supply. This would solve the majority of my fighting and money problems.

Things are about to get very interesting.

I finished my meal in peace and paid the bill. I had to break a silver coin, now I'm carrying around an extra 80 or so bronze in my item storage.

I spent around half of the leftover bronze buying a few pairs of clothes on my way back to the Inn. Just a few standard black jeans, shirts, underwear, and socks. I needed to wear something this week, I didn't exactly pack for a long trip.

After my leisurely walk I finally made it back. The Inn keeper nodded at me and I remembered there was a key to my room.

I walked passed him into the elevator and frantically sifting through the miscellaneous junk In my item storage. With a sigh I found my key, I was scared I lost it out in the dungeon. The elevator dinged at floor 10 and I twisted the key to my door moments later.

After a nice hot shower I crawled into bed.

I survived another day.

## Chapter 46

The morning sun woke me up. I feel great.

After a quick arm and leg stretch I got dressed and readied myself for another eventful day. The slime dungeon stood out to me the most. The old man said they were a relatively low level, and long range magic attacks should be more than enough to handle them. I'm more curious about the abilities he said they had... the boss can steal its opponents MP...

I made my way downstairs and walked out the door towards the Dungeon Hub. I grabbed a quick bite to eat on the way.

The hub was swarming with hunters again this morning. I scanned the area, it'll be good to make a habit of being much more cautious. I'm going in solo from now on. No more teaming, it never seems to go well for me.

I walk up to the D Class guard and hand him my ID. Moments later I make my way down the large escalator to the platform below. On the list of dungeons it says the slime dungeon is right on the edge of the city. It's a lower grade D Class, as expected

I waited patiently, then boarded the train heading off in that direction. Around 20 minutes later I arrived and made my way up the escalator to find the floating blue portal.

I reach into my item storage and pull out my sword while running forward into the dungeon. It's time to kill some slimes.

The dungeon is surprisingly bright. I was expecting a dark cave, or some kind of mountain range. That's been the common theme lately.

I'm standing in a wide open meadow. The grass is short and there are small patches of flowers everywhere. The sky is blue and there are beautiful white clouds floating by. There's no sun, but it feels like a nice hot summer day.

I make my way forward into the dungeon with my sword drawn. I can see some weird looking circular objects in the distance.

After a 5 minute walk through the meadow I came across what I spotted earlier. This is... a slime?

A huge blue glob of gel just stood in front of me, maybe 2m in diameter. It was slowly gliding along the ground towards me.

I used inspect to check it out.

[Lv. 99]

Okay... its a much lower level than me. This shouldn't be much of a problem.

I ran towards the monster and sliced its body clean in half to see how it would react.

The body of gel separated then reattached. It continued its slow glide in my direction.

Right... the old merchant said long range magic would be best against these slime.

I'll try out my fire magic, but in a longer range form. I've never really tested it like this before.

While putting my sword into my item storage I stepped back and stood about 10m away from the slime. I concentrated on focusing my fire magic into the space between both my palms. Instead of shaping it into a sword, I'll just keep it as an orb. I took a deep breath and threw the fire orb like a baseball. It wasn't the coolest looking move, but I'm not sure how else to get the orb moving in that direction... I can't control where my fire travels once it leaves my body.

"Take this!"

The orb of fire made impact with the slow moving slime and it blew up into a huge ball of fire and goo.

The slime was mostly incinerated. There was leftover puddles all over the ground. I walked over to check it out.

No blue text... I can't use absorption for some reason.

Moments later the goo dissolved into the ground and it left behind a tiny mana crystal.

"Really? This is it?"

I threw it in my item storage and kept walking deeper into the dungeon. That crystal is the size of a mid grade E Class at best. I guess these slimes are difficult to kill because they don't take damage from regular physical attacks, but I understand why not many hunters want to come out here. There's basically no loot in this dungeon, its a total waste of MP.

A few minutes later I came across another slime, I used inspect.

[Lv. 94]

I sighed and moved in towards it. I wonder what would happen if I touched it. I have plenty of MP potions on me, if it drains me there's nothing to worry about.

I crept closer to the slime and put out a hand. I shoved it through the side of the slime's body and waited.

.....

Nothing happened...

I ignited my hand with flames and blew the slime to bits. It was still moving around somehow, I guess it separated in time. I made a couple fire orbs and burned the rest of it with ease. It did use up a good amount of MP though.

This is kind of irritating. How are these monsters even classified as a D Class dungeon? The boss must be pretty tough or something.

I used enemy detection and found a large concentration of monsters on one end of the dungeon. This must be where the boss is located. I trekked through over for a little less than an hour. Every slime that came near me was an easy victory, after 16 slimes my MP was drained to about half way. Not too bad.

I finally made it to the boss room. This has to be the easiest dungeon I've ever raided, let's see what this boss has in store. The spinning light grey portal invited me to enter.

The boss room is oddly similar to the outside dungeon. There's green grass, a blue sky, and it's well lit in here. The only difference is the large walls enclosing the room.

After scanning the area a large glob of blue slime emerged from the back of the room. It looked about 3m tall, and a bit darker shade than the normal slimes. I used inspect.

[Lv. 141]

Now that's an upgrade from the other slimes here, but it's still just a slime. With a bored look on my face I walked over to the monster, it moved towards me quickly as well.

Interesting. Looks like this boss has some actual combat ability.

I jumped to the right and dodged its forward movement. This thing is pretty quick.

I started concentrating a ball of fire in my palm as we stared each other down... Well I stared at it, the slime didn't exactly have eyes to look back at me. It just felt like it was staring right at me.

A moment later the slime started gliding towards me at a rapid speed. I continued charging a ball of fire and ran towards it as well. I let out my attack straight at the monster and blew a massive hole clean through it. Over 50% of its mass was incinerated on the spot.

I continued my charge passed the slime with a smirk on my face.

As I ran by some of the slime's innards landed on my left arm and back. Instantly I knew something was wrong. That smirk turned serious really quick.

"This is the skill.... My MP..."

The partial fragments of the slime body were draining my MP fast. Within seconds I could feel all the magic drain from my body. The rest of the slime crawled closer to me.

It was impossible to wipe off, like living sticky water all over my body. The rest of the slime started connecting with it and my body was covered in the goo before I could think of anything. It sucked be up and complete reformed into a large blob in seconds.

While suspended in the slimes stomach, my MP is getting sucked dry. I can't breathe inside this monster either, what a predicament...

I dropped my guard for a second. I can't underestimate any opponent, not even a slime.

I wasn't taking any HP damage, but in less than 5 seconds I could tell my MP has almost hit 0.

If I ignite my flames right now I may do more damage than good. It'll get the slime off me for a moment, but my MP will definitely hit 0. Then I'll be screwed seconds later if it attaches before i have time to act.

There's only one thing I can think of that'll work right now.

I open up my item storage while floating inside the mass of slime and pull out the fire stone.

Instantly, the slime starts bubbling and melting all around me. A huge hole in the slime opens up and I crawl out to make my escape. I reach into my item storage again to grab an MP potion and chug it on the spot while erupting into flames burning every last bit of slime residue off my body.

I turned to face the slime boss again with newfound respect for the creature.

"Good try, but that's not going to work on me again."

With a slow nod I formed a fireball with almost all of the MP from a full recovery potion into a massive orb in front of my body. I used both my hands to hurl the attack at the slime boss. A huge explosion completely incinerates the remaining slimes mass. I've won now.

I walk over and throw my fire stone back into item storage. It burned my hand again, I had to use self regeneration to fix my skin. Maybe my body hardening will work next time? I have to figure out a way to actually use this thing properly, it's a really powerful stone.

The blue text I've been waiting for finally popped up over the remaining goo on the ground.

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Plunderer

[YES][NO]

"Ahh so it's called plunderer huh?"

With a grin I chose [YES] and collected the mana as the slime disappeared.

That makes sense, the skill user is forcefully taking MP from their opponent during battle. Maybe it has other hidden abilities too... I can't wait to see how it works!

The white light came and transported me back to the dungeon's start point. I stepped out back into the room connected to the Dungeon Hub.

It isn't even mid day yet, but I'm totally done with these slimes....

It's time to search for another dungeon and test out this new skill.

Chapter 47

I made it back to the main D Class platform and checked out the list of dungeons.

The Minotaur Dungeon caught my eye. The old merchant said it would be better to challenge this one with a group as a D Class hunter, but I think it'll be fine. He doesn't know how many skills I have, they're more valuable than levels anyways.

I won't even be challenging the boss either, the normal dungeon monsters will be the perfect specimens to test out my new skill.

I walked through the crowded station towards the correct train platform.

"We need a combat magic user for a loot based raid, we pay well!"

"Two tanks looking for a team, 5 silver each for an 8 hour raid. Anybody need us?"

"Support types listen up! Buffs or healings, anything to help. Exp focused raid, anyone interested?"



Some of these parties are probably good and honest hardworking people. I'm just not interested after yesterdays disaster. I'll be hunting solo again for a while, it suits me better anyways.

I walked passed them all without batting an eye and stood by the platform that would take me to the Minotaur Dungeon.

There was 1 other full party standing and waiting for the train next to me. It was a team of 5, I wonder if they're all going to this dungeon too? I used inspect.

[Lv. 161]

[Lv. 168]

[Lv. 172]

[Lv. 174]

[Lv. 265]

A Level 265? That's a C Class.

He's a tall and strong looking member of their party with a huge sword on his back. If I had to guess I'd say he's about 30 years old. He must be the team leader... maybe its a guild raid and he's helping them level? Or they paid him to power level the 4 of them? Who knows...

The other team members were standing behind their leader talking amongst themselves. One of them was a short red haired girl, we made eye contact for a split second but were interrupted by the sound of an incoming train.

"Screeeeech"

The train arrived and I boarded through the closest door right behind them.

The team leader took a look at me and smiled.

"You headed off to the Minotaur Dungeon too?"

I didn't look directly at him.

"Yeah. Solo, not interested if you're going to invite me to your group."

"Haha, I got it. I just haven't see you around this dungeon yet. The Tara Guild basically runs this Minotaur Dungeon. I'm leveling up our fresh D Class recruits."

The Tara guild huh? It's not one of the Big 3, they must be one of the smaller guilds in the city.

"Nice. Good luck in there, I'll let you guys go in first. I don't want to get in your way."

He nodded and handed me a card.

"Sure thing. You must be at least level 200. I don't see many people challenge this dungeon solo. I assume you're here for a loot run?"

"Yeah something like that."

I took the card and threw it in my back pocket. It's just a guild info card, that's the least of my interest right now.

"Screeeeech"

The train slowly came to a halt.

We all took the escalator ride upwards to the dungeon portal.

"Well kid, swing by our guild if you're looking for a job. We're always looking for up and coming D Class hunters. My name's Hudson by the way. Nice to meet you!"

"I'm Jay, nice meeting you. Best of luck in there."

The team of 5 entered the dungeon and I waited outside. They all seemed nice, especially the leader.... but thats not important right now.

During this time I played with my item storage skill. I opened and closed it many times in many differing sizes and distances from my body. My MP doesn't go down at all when I use my item storage. It's either such a low amount that it doesn't show on my status, or it doesn't use any MP at all. It's odd... but a good discovery.

After about 20 minutes went by finally decided to jump through the blue spinning portal.

The dungeon has a lot of pretty familiar features. It's a mountain range dungeon, but the mountains aren't too big. They look more like rocky hills. There's a lot of green grass and shrubbery along with large green trees every 10m or so. It's not heavily wooded so there are some planes of open grassland.

I reached into my item storage and pulled out my sword while walking straight ahead deeper into the dungeon.

After about 10 minutes of walking around I came across a wide open grass patch. To my surprise there were 3 Minotaurs just standing in the middle of it. They haven't noticed me at all...

They're all around 4 meters tall and look like massive buff humans, except for their heads. The monster's bodies are dark brown, covered in hair and have rippling muscles head to toe.

The Minotaur's heads are large and look like a Bull. They have horns coming off each side of their head almost a meter long. Each of these monsters is also carrying a massive silver axe with a long wooden handle. They're wearing shining silver wrist guards and a brown cloth around their waists.

I used inspect.

[Lv. 155]

[Lv. 157]

[Lv. 158]

These monsters are going to be a piece of cake. I've faced off against level 170s before. Come on, why is everyone so worried about these minotaurs? Of course I'll still keep my guard up and fight strategically, but I cant see them being too much of an issue.

Plus, I'm not going to try and test anything new out on my first fight. This match will be purely to see what these monster's abilities are.

I slowly walked towards them with my sword out in front of me. I'm about 50m away now.

30m....

20m....

The Minotaur on the right turned its head and spotted me. It let out a few grunts then turned its full body towards me. I gripped my blade tighter and kept walking forward.

The beast started to charge, the other two monsters turned to look at me but stayed back and watched.

This Minotaur's aura is strong, this will be a serious battle. I ignite my sword into flames and start running towards the beast as well.

"CLANGGG"

Sparks fly as we clash sword and axe. It's a strong opponent, but like most of these larger monsters I have it completely beat with my speed and agility.

I jump back to face the beast again. It grunts and pushes large amounts of air from its nose. We charge towards each other again.

"CLANGGGG"

My sword and its axe collide. After this attack I twist around the monster's left side continuing the momentum of my strike as flames and sparks fly through the air.

The monster's eyes track me and it attempts to turn with me. The beast lifts its heavy axe up after our clash to go for another strike, but it's too late. The minotaur's torso is wide open, I focus my fire magic into the tip of my blade and land a fiery gash across the monster's abdomen up to its chest. I land and sprint backwards to admire my work.

"RUUUUUAAAARRRR!"

The Minotaur lets out a roar as the fire residue in its gash burns bright. It's in pain, but the battle is definitely not over yet. The two monsters behind it are watching maliciously, but haven't moved from their spots in the background.

The beast on fire looks me in the eyes and readies its axe again. We charge at each other.

"CLANGGGG"

Sparks fly high and the monster raises its axe immediately after impact this time. It learns quick, these monsters definitely have higher intelligence than I had assumed.

We stood 10m apart. I'm starting to break into a sweat. It's not a life threatening battle at all, but this monster is putting up a good fight.

We charge at each other once again. I decide to completely dodge the axe's swing and weave around the Minotaur. It wasn't expecting this, I have a perfect opening.

I plant my right foot and make a full U turn facing the monster's back. It's turning as well, but again... Too slow.

Another hit!

I make a fiery gash across the monster's back from shoulder to hip. It cries out in pain, but still doesn't drop to the floor. I can see why these guys would be a problem if they were to attack a lower level hunter in a group.

"RWWUUUUAAAARRRR!"

The Minotaur lets out a mighty roar. It's definitely very injured now, one more good hit and its done for. The only downside is I really pissed it off.

The beast turned to me with fire residue burning intensely on its front and backside.

The two Minotaurs that were staying out of the fight previously turned towards me as well.

I gripped my sword tighter and grinned as the 3 monsters started their charge straight at me.

## Chapter 48

I stood in front of 3 charging Minotaurs with my burning blade and prepared for an attack.

The monster up front is the most wounded, its about 30m ahead of the other two. The smartest thing to do right now would be to take it out first. I charged in at the wounded beast and let my flames burn bright trailing behind me on the ground.

I have a pretty good feel on these monster's abilities. They're tough and crafty with their weapons, but with my magic gear, recent battle experience, and arsenal of abilities they're no match. It's time to test a few of my new skills out.

As the Minotaur up front approached I came up with the perfect plan. It raised its axe and I raised my sword to match it.

As the beast let out a battle cry and brought its axe down towards me I lifted my left arm in the air to shield myself. Its a gamble, but I'm fairly sure this will work out in my favor.

"Body Hardening"

I concentrated my body hardening skill to make layer around my arm. Instantly, hard black crystals started forming all over the areas I was visualizing.

"CLANGGGGGGG"

The massive axe came down on my arm and it bounced off like it was hitting a sword. Some crystal fragmented, but the attack didn't make contact with my physical body. This gave me enough time to slip under the monster in its confusion and let out a fiery uppercut with my sword.

A final clean hit!

The beast fell to the floor with a grunt and a whimper covered in a blanket of flames.

[Level Up]

"One down, two to go."

I looked up to see the two minotaurs in hot pursuit. They seemed angry that I defeated their friend.

I got into a battle stance and checked my status. 450/795 MP remaining. The total decline is not bad, but definitely not efficient enough for my liking. It's about time I try out my new "plunderer" skill.

There are two beasts running at me this time, it'll be be a bit harder than my first fight. I ignited my blade into flames and grinned. My blood is rushing, these battles make me feel alive.

I decided to run towards the one to my right. It raised its axe and I raised my arm while hardening and bracing for impact.

"CLANGGGGG"

It took the bait. I swerved around the right side and slashed the beast's torso. While making contact with my blade I concentrated on my skill to take in mana. I repeated "Plunderer" over and over in my head as I cut deep into the Minotaur. I could feel my MP raising for a split second while my blade was touching the monster.

The moment my blade left its flesh, the flow of mana stopped instantly. The beast let out grunts as it turned to face me again. Its partner in battle was close by as well.

I checked my MP, it read out 585/795. I grinned ear to ear. Even while using swordsmanship, fire magic, and body hardening my MP went up after that exchange.

The Minotaur came back for more.

"CLANGGGGG"

I blocked the beast again with my left arm and landed a devastating fiery attack with my right while taking in MP. The second monster followed close behind and I blocked its attack with my body hardening and managed to counter it easily as well.

I've completely figured out their fighting style. They may be pretty strong and able to take a lot of hits, but this battle is basically already over. It's just going to take time.

After a few more charges I blocked all of their axe hits, absorbed MP basically up to full, and brought them both to their knees.

All 3 Minotaur I encountered on this plane have been defeated and reduced to flaming piles of ash.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

---

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 160

Hp: 805/805

Mp: 805/805

Strength: 385 [+125]

Speed: 458

Agility: 478

Defense: 342 [+137]

Mental Strength: 385 [+77]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Self Regeneration

Spacial Magic[Item Storage]

Plunderer

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Stainless Steel Sword [+125 Strength]

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"Level 160, nice. Still a long way to go until 250..."

I stood around for a few minutes and collected the mana that each of the disappearing Minotaurs dropped and placed them in my item storage.

I continued walking further into the dungeon.

It sounds weird to say, but this is a beautiful dungeon. The blue sky and the warm air make me feel at peace. The post-fight adrenaline also gives me a nice high to ride while I search for my next opponents.

I walked through a few empty fields looking for more monsters to fight. They traveled in groups, so the spawn rate must be much farther apart or something... I've been walking for 20 minutes and haven't found a single sign of any new minotaurs.

There was a large tree in the middle of one of the large planes I came across. I sat up against it and took a little break to admire the blue sky for a bit.

Like clockwork, the moment I got comfortable I sensed a presence nearby.

"Finally, some more monsters."

I grinned and stood up with my sword ready.

There's a clump of trees in the distance, its a small forest area. The leaves started shaking so I activated my enemy detection and inspect skills.

Three of them again... and it looks like one of them is going to be trouble. Great.

[Lv. 156]

[Lv. 157]

[Lv. 191]

Three large Minotaurs came out from the tree line. The strongest stood up front, and the two lower levels followed close behind.

They all looked exactly the same. Without my inspect skill I could never have seen a difference. This is what the old merchant meant when he said their levels may vary. Interesting.

The leader of the monsters grunted and motioned its axe towards me while slowing its strides. The other two grunted back and charged ahead of it straight at me.

They just communicated an attack.... I've never seen monsters with intelligence like this before. It's a good thing just the two of them are up first. I'll have to take these weaker ones out, then focus on the leader.

They charged towards me grunting while raising their axes. I surrounded my sword in a coat of flames and ran towards them as well.

They both brought their axes down at the same time. It raised my left arm in a bent fashion while hardening it to make a shield for my usual attack.

"CLANGGGGG"

Both axes came down at once and were repealed without a problem. I managed to get underneath both of them to land a double hit on their abdomens while they were distracted by their axes' recoil.

They burst out in roars as I drained enough MP to recover and leave a good amount of fire residue on them.

I ran passed with a satisfied grin on my face. Two at a time, not bad...

"RWUUUUUUAAAARRRR!"

To my surprise the leader was towering over me with its axe in full swing.

I didn't even see it coming....

This monster hid behind its subordinates and launched a surprise attack knowing I'd make it passed these two. I underestimated it.

At the last second I put my arm up again to harden it and block the attack. My sword was pointed at the floor on the opposite side of my body, I didn't have the time or positioning to counter.

"ARGGGGGHHHH!"

Blood splashed up into the air as I felt my arm breaking under the pressure of this monster's axe.

My body hardening worked for a moment... but was shattered along with my arm in the next. Black crystals flew everywhere as my hardening was completely destroyed.

I guess there is a limit to how much this skill can defend against.

The beast followed through and let its axe smash into the ground. Luckily, I was able to somewhat move my arm out of the way and save it from being sliced off.

I jumped back and regenerated my broken limb while getting as much distance as I could from the vicious beast.

I checked my status. It read 615/805 HP, 705/805 MP.

Interesting... My physical body is repaired with self regeneration, but I feel much more tired. The attacks from an opponent will affect my HP stat no matter what. When I regenerate it's healing my

physical wound and converting the damage to more overall fatigue. This skill is not full healing magic, it's just accelerated physical recovery with a trade off...

I'll have to keep this in mind.

I turned to see the two flaming monsters charging at me while the leader followed close behind.

Our battle is far from over.

Chapter 49

The injured flaming Minotaurs came charging at me in a fit of rage. These two aren't the problem though. I can doge their attacks all day and kill them whenever I please. Their leader is the real issue. I haven't gauged its full strength yet, but its definitely higher than mine.

My best course of action is to take these two out first. I have a few healing potions, I can handle another hit or two... I'll use the same strategy as before.

We all charged in towards each other.

I blocked the two axe hits with my hardened arm and landed another double strike on the two weaker monsters while absorbing some MP in the process.

The leader was close behind and attacked immediately just like before. I braced myself and tried to concentrate even more hardening on my arm to see if I could block the attack if I had full focus.

The leaders large axe came down and made contact with my ultra hardened arm.

"Agggghhh bad idea..."

The second it made impact I heard a crack and saw black crystal fragments fly out in all directions while a sharp pain traveled through my arm and into my shoulder.

It worked a little bit... but my arm is definitely still fractured in multiple places. I need to get better positioning and try blocking with my sword next time if I get the chance.

I jumped back and distanced myself to check my stats and regenerate. It read 485/805 HP, and 680/805 MP.

Not bad.... Just one more time should open things up.

I charged back in and did a picture perfect attack. The two front Minotaurs fell to the ground in a pool of their own blood and my flames. Three good attacks seems to be just enough for me to defeat normal monsters here.

[Level Up]

I blocked another attack while sacrificing my hardened arm one last time before running back about 20m to recuperate and plan for the actual battle at hand here.

My stats read out 355/810 HP, 685/810 MP. As the lone leader eyed me down I took the time to chug an HP potion back up to full health. I could have waited a bit longer, but it's a common sense safety precaution here.

We both charged forward. I ignited my blade in fire and the beast raised its axe.

"CLANGGGGGG"



We met weapons with a clash of flames, sparks, and grunts from both sides. In the end, I was totally overpowered...

The monster's axe came crushing down. I held my own in the test of strength for a few milliseconds, but in the end it was a one sided match up. The Minotaurs axe completely trumped my sword's power and it came crashing down towards me with little resistance. I was forced to retreat and jump backwards.

This feels like some of my old battles... I haven't faced a truly superior opponent in a while. I grinned and stared down the beast as it grunted and started charging towards me again.

I'll have to use my speed to defeat this one, brute strength isn't going to cut it.

I ran forward with my sword ablaze. The monster swung its axe downward and I dodged without attempting to counter it at all. With a swift fiery strike I sliced open its leg as I ran by.

This is a pretty nostalgic feeling. It's almost like I'm fighting that wolf boss from my home town again. Good times.

I smirked and faced the beast once more. We charged forward and I dodged to the opposite side to land a hit on its other leg. The beast cried out. This wasn't much damage to a monster like this, but it was definitely getting very annoyed.

I continued my assault, switching up my movements and styles to land safe cheap hits every time. It's a pretty boring way to fight, but fighting this thing head on would not be the smart thing to do. I have a very clear speed and agility advantage, there's no point in not using this to my full capacity.

Every time I made a slice in the monster's legs I absorbed a small amount of MP. It's much harder to drain than its weaker counterparts. The monster's level must have something to do with it. An opponent with a much higher experience level takes longer to suck MP from. Another good thing to note. I have to leave a large amount of fire residue in every attack I land, I'd be out of MP fast if I didn't have this new skill.

After around 10 attacks the Minotaur became visibly slower. I started aiming for its abdomen, then upper chest, and lastly the back of its neck. It took a total of 16 hits before I pierced my fiery blade into its head and watched the beast fall to the ground.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

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Name: Jay Soju

Level: 167

Hp: 840/840

Mp: 705/840

Strength: 401 [+125]

Speed: 478

Agility: 499

Defense: 357 [+143]

Mental Strength: 401 [+80]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Self Regeneration

Spacial Magic[Item Storage]

Plunderer

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Stainless Steel Sword [+125 Strength]

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"Nice, 6 levels from the leader and 1 from the two subordinates."

It relied too heavily on the two weaker fighters. When I had a speed advantage and we were all alone the only thing that beast could do was lay down and die. Unfortunate fate.

I've definitely got a handle on this dungeon. That was a level 191. It's probably one of the highest rated I'll find here, and it was taken out with ease.

With a satisfied grin on my face I walked over to the two weaker Minotaurs that burned to ash and put their mana crystals in my item storage. As I turned around to collect the leader's mana my eyes lit up.

Looks like its my lucky day. After only 6 monsters I already got an item drop! The huge axe sat on the ground next to a large mana crystal. I picked each of them up to place in my item storage.

I started walking back in the direction of the dungeon start point. I'm not leaving yet, I'd just rather be nearby for when I decide to leave and not wander too far off into the dungeon. It's not like I'll be fighting the boss today.

On my way back I came across a pair of Minotaurs level 157 and 154. They were very easy opponents, with my recent level increases I was able to take them down in 2 hits each. I didn't level up, but collected two mana crystals.

As I strolled around the dungeon I got to thinking about what my purpose here in the city really is. After these recent events I have a clear idea of what I have to do.

The C Class exams are in less than 3 weeks. I need to get really serious ... This dungeon is the perfect training ground for my preparation. I'll power level here and make a ton of money from the loot drops to buy some new higher grade gear.

I spent the next 4 hours roaming around the dungeon's start point. This seemed to be the perfect spot for now. I came across 6 more groups of Minotaur.

The first was an easy group of 3. They consisted of a level 157, 158, and 162. They dropped 3 mana stones. I didn't level up.

The second group was a bit more of a challenge. There was a leader at level 183 and two underlings at level 155 and 157. It was a similar battle to the previous trio with a leader. Long, but not that difficult. They only dropped mana as well. I gained 3 levels from this fight.

The third and fourth groups were fairly similar to the first. All of them were between level 155 and 165. Good mana, but no more levels.

After these two fights I got a bit antsy and decided to venture a bit deeper into the dungeon again. Apparently the further I traveled in the stronger the monsters are. I guess it makes sense.

My fifth fight was with two strong Minotaurs. They were level 177 and 179. I had to use my bobbing and weaving tactics to the extreme. My body hardening worked well enough, but hits still hurt and dealt a tiny bit of damage. All in all, it was a manageable fight. I gained 2 levels and collected only mana as loot.

After this fight I was getting a bit tired and hungry. It was time to pack it in. I trekked back to the dungeon start point and faced off against a final group of 3 that weren't much of a challenge.

They were between level 155 and 165. All three dropped large mana stones, and one of them dropped their axe as well. I didn't level up in this battle, but couldn't have asked for a better parting gift.

As I stepped out of the blue portal back into the Dungeon Hub transit area I smirked to myself.

That was a good first day of grinding to get my feet wet. I'm level 172 now, tomorrow I'll venture much deeper into this Minotaur Dungeon.

## Chapter 50

I boarded the escalator down to the train station and made my way back to the main Dungeon Hub.

It's really crowded this time of day. Most hunters are finishing up their raids and heading off to the market to sell all kinds of loot.

I walked outside and started to head towards the market center as well, I am one of those hunters after all. It took me about 10 minutes to make my way over, I walked pretty quickly.

"Hey kid! Welcome back!"

The merchant smiled and looked me in the eyes curiously.

"Which dungeon did you end up going to? Any of the ones I recommended?"

"A couple of them actually. The Minotaur Dungeon is pretty cool."

He eyed me closer while narrowing his stare.

"You said you hunt solo though...right?"

"Yeah, I can handle it. Don't worry about me old man."

With a grin I emptied my mana onto the table. It's almost 3 dozen crystals. The merchant raised an eyebrow and stared placing all of them on the measuring plate.

"Looks like you can handle yourself pretty well after all, not bad."

The scale read out 3881.66MU in big black text.

"Hmmm, I'll give ya-"

"Wait hold on I have more."

I pulled out the two large axes and the merchant's eyes lit up.

"Let me take a look at those."

I handed him the axes and he examined them closely.

"A 150 and a 200 strength boost axe. Not bad at all. Just like last time you sold me gear, I told you it'd be a better price at auction but I'm still happy to buy these from you today."

"Yeah, I'm looking to get rid of them quick. Still, I hope you give me a decent price."

"I can do 30 for the 150 strength axe and 45 for the 200. You could easily get double in auction, but that's my price here."

They are low prices, but I understand how the business works. Going to the auction would take up a full day potentially, its really not worth my time right now.

"How about 120 silver for the mana and the axes all together?"

He looked over everything and nodded slowly.

"Yeah. That works. You want it in all silver?"

I thought to myself for a moment. 100 silver is equal to 1 gold, I've never had a gold coin before... why not? It'll be easier to store anyways.

"One gold, 20 silver."

The merchant nodded and counted out my coins. I took them and placed the silver in my item storage as the old man took the mana and axes to the back of his shop. He did a small double take the moment I opened up my storage skill but didn't say a word. I didn't think much of it either, I was a bit distracted. The gold coin in my hand glimmered in the setting sun, my eyes were locked on it. I flipped it around in my fingers with a large grin on my face from ear to ear.

With a wave goodbye I left the market and got a nice big meal at a family restaurant and strolled down the street with a full belly.

I stopped by a convenience store to purchase one of the latest additions of a comic book I enjoy reading about hunters and Heroes.

The sun had completely set now. After walking all the way back to the Inn I was greeted by the attendant at front desk before making my way up to my room.

I took my usual long hot shower and went straight into bed. Today wore me out, but it also has me excited for the future.

Once I got comfortable under the covers I opened up the comic and started reading. I'm starting to feel more and more like one of these characters I read about, but there's one difference between me and them. They all have some kind of deep trauma or mission to save the world that really drives them.

Me? I just want to get stronger. Every new adventure I go on makes me want to dive even deeper into the dungeons. I'm starting to get more and more hooked on the thrill of making it out of dangerous situations by the skin of my teeth.

Maybe that's just what they call an adrenaline junky? Every intense battle gives me a rush that pushes me to progress further every time. I have my eyes set on immediate goals, and I'll do anything to get there.

I know my short term ambitions could be my downfall. The risks of my accelerated growth may not outweigh the rewards, but this is what I have to do while I still can.

I've never felt more alive in my whole life.

I guess it's a bit of a selfish reason to get stronger, but who cares... It's not like anyone is watching. I'm living for myself. This is what I enjoy doing everyday. I will become stronger.

With an open comic magazine over my face I fell into a deep peaceful sleep.

The next morning I woke up refreshed and ready to dive back into the dungeons. I hopped out of bed and went downstairs.

The Inn Keeper smiled at me on the way out.

"Off hunting?"

I nodded and reached for the door.

"Yep. Have a good day."

"Ya know kid, there was a pretty big C Class dungeon break last night. It might be the beginning of a surge. Just be careful out there."

"Alright, got it. Thanks."

I left the Inn not thinking much of his comment. Dungeon breaks happen all the time in the city right? It's normal.

After grabbing a small breakfast I made my way towards the Dungeon Hub. It was crowded this morning like usual all the way down to the main D Class platform.

To my surprise I saw a team from the Tara Guild waiting for a train. It looked like there were some different members, but there was one face I recognized for sure. Their leader Hudson saw me and

waved at me I peeked at the dungeon list and sure enough, that was the train for the Minotaur dungeon. He spoke up as I walked over.

"Hey! Looks like we meet again! This is my morning shift, you off loot farming today?"

I stood there with my arms crossed waiting for the train.

"Yeah, I'm In the city for a little while. This dungeon seems to be perfect for me."

"Screeeeech"

The train pulled up and we boarded. Hudson leaned up against the inside wall and looked at me.

"Ya know, there's rumors we might get hit by a surge soon. This dungeon is very stable, so I doubt anything will happen. Just be careful about farming in any of the new dungeons until we get more news on the situation. Joining a party is probably a safer move as well."

"I appreciate the warning, but I hunt solo."

"Alright. I'm just looking out for a fellow hunter, that's all."

I raised an eyebrow. I wasn't fully listening to what he was saying, I assumed it was just small talk or guild recruitment nonsense. He mentioned a surge too... just like the Inn keeper did earlier.

"Hey, uh- one other thing. This surge? What is it anyways?"

He looked at me with a smirk. The underlings in his party looked at me with a concerned look.

"What?? Is it bad that I don't know?"

Hudson replied.

"You really haven't heard about it at all? There's been a few surges lately, about 3 big ones this year. The news is always trying to predict the next one haha."

"Okay... but what exactly is it? Why is it happening in the first place?"

"Well, we don't know exactly. It seems to be a large concentration of magic that surges through all the dungeons in the area. For a few days, some of the dungeons will start to break randomly. Elite teams from the Hunters Association and some large guilds have been put on guard to make sure the city and its civilians are protected . A few months ago during the last surge we had a high level C Class dungeon break. It breached the pre-built confinement and leaked some pretty large monsters into the capital. Luckily the Viridian Guild had a team nearby, they cleared it up hastily once they got to the scene."

I nodded as I looked out the train window watching the cement walls pass by.

"Interesting... You said this dungeon is very stable though?"

Hudson nodded.

"Yeah, this is one of the oldest D class dungeons in the area. It gets a lot of raiding traffic. The more magic items and mana that are taken out of the dungeon, the more stable it becomes. Even if the surge gets bad, the worst it'll do is spawn in a few mutants at most. That's my professional opinion at least."

"Hmmm. Interesting. This is good insight, thanks a lot."

"No prob, just helping out. I don't want to sound like a broken record, but come by our guild any time!"

"Sure, sure. Maybe I will."

Hudson doesn't seem like a bad guy at all. Maybe I actually will stop by and check the place out once I finish farming this week.

The train came to a stop and a lot of other teams got off at the Minotaur Dungeon platform. Seems like its pretty common knowledge that this is one of the safer dungeons to dive into today. I can't wait to get started.