

## D. Diver 451

### Chapter 451

I decide to wait to see how long the respawn rate on this floor is.

Based on what I've experienced in labyrinths before, every 20 floors there's a major boss room fight, separating the floors and protecting the Dragon and Demon up top and limiting the number of hunters that can travel in.

If this guess is correct, and another Guardian is placed there, defeating the 39th floor boss may trigger a cooldown clock just like the Lower Floor Boss does.

So, just to be safe, I won't challenge the boss room here until I'm certain I'll be going up much further. I'm pretty sure whatever is on that next floor is going to be above level 1000, so I'd like to get as close as I can to that level too beforehand, and farming these minotaurs will do just that.

I start dungeon walking to other floors and clearing them out in the meantime to farm MCP and extra MP crystals to find that it takes just under half an hour for the 11 mobs to spawn back in.

Out of the 11, 10 are normal base-level mobs and 1 is a mutant with extreme fire magic again at level 985.

I go through the same procedure, taking out the base mobs with pure mana based attacks, and using a Qi-infused strike to subjugate the final mutant. The fact that I'm not having to send slashes out of my blade leaves most of the Qi in my possession, so I'm barely using any, but still, it is some.

The small % of my Qi base being used up each time is worth it as far as I'm concerned even if my level gains are slow, the mutant drops another fire stone, making me wonder if I am just extra lucky today, or if its drop rate is seriously 100%.

My level hits 959, and I continue to farm on floors 31-38, collecting loot, elemental stones, mana crystals, and continuing to gain MCP while I wait for the 30-minute-long respawn timer to reset.

I even check on Arie a few times, letting him use my absorption skill to farm MCP from the 30th Floor boss room. He's been farming there for high-level kills and has reached level 790. To my surprise, each time I come back, the Wyvern Boss is a different kind of mutant, dropping many unique Element stones such as red Earth Stones, and a greyish-brown tinted Water Stone.

Once I go back, 9 mobs spawn on the 39th floor this time. 8 of them are base level while one is a mutant at level 992.

It seems the levels and number of them vary. The fewer there are, the higher the mutant's level will be, but overall, it is pretty consistent.

I clear the floor again, reaching level 963, and the mutant drops a 3rd element stone. I come to the conclusion that I've really hit a gold mine here...

A nearly A-ranked unique element stone drop every 30 minutes. These stones are priceless treasures, and I'll be able to farm a nearly endless amount of them.

I repeat this process 7 more times, boosting Arie's mana control by over 100 million MCP, and raising my level to 988 while collecting even more rare element stones. I hold 9 in total in my item storage.

Even so, it's been a little over 6 hours since I left the town back in Sector 2. If it was worth the time spent, I would continue farming for levels, but even the strongest mutants hardly pass level 991-993 while the weaker ones range from 985-987. It's not guaranteed that I'll even gain a single level if I come back to farm after waiting upward of 30 minutes and the mutants are a lower level than I am.

I should be wrapping things up soon, and the fact that I haven't heard any word back from my body doubles about the situation in Valor city, retrieving my teammates before they face off in the arena doesn't settle well for me.

They're either taking their sweet time coming back, or something is not going exactly to plan. My body double would have killed itself if there was anything urgent, so whatever is happening, it's being handled just fine.

My best course of action now is to just challenge a higher floor and reach level 1000 before another Dark Guard shows up. So, that's exactly what I decide to do. Trying to grind out more levels on this 39th Floor will take far too long for my liking, a little push is exactly what I need.

I dungeon walk down to meet Arie one more time to let him know my plans, and we both agree this is a good time for him to end his training session and go back to the Town in Sector 2.

My body double transfers the millions of MP worth of crystals and loot it's farmed over the last few hours to me, and I place it in my item storage for safekeeping. Then, it brings Arie back to the dungeons in the Canyon to wait for my return after I finish with this final floor.

Minutes after they leave, I feel the memories of my double flood back into me. My other two are busy, so I'd still like to have one as backup.

This makes me think. Although I could ask Ember for assistance moving forward, and we'd most likely wipe the floor with any opponent using his Soul Energy cleansing flames, I'm determined to reach level 1000 on my own. Relying on my allies is a great backup plan if needed, but ensuring that my own strength is enough is more important to me.

With this in mind, I dungeon walk back up to floor 39 and jump through the boss room portal.

Wasting no time at all, I imbue my sword with Qi and slice the level 996 Minotaur Boss in half before it's even able to activate its Ranked Up buff.

[Level Up]

I hit level 989.

"The mutants on the actual floor put up more of a fight."

I chuckle to myself and store its massive mana crystal along with two shimmering silver axes with +170% Strength buffs on them into my item storage and wait for the transfer magic to bring me up to the next floor.

Once the white flash fills my vision and ceases, leaving me in an endless dirt pit with no exit portal in sight, I activate my perception skills and confirm that this is a Boss Room just like the 20th Floor...

The sky above me is dark, almost black, and the dirt pit I'm stood in slants upward at a very slight incline for about 500 meters on all sides around me. It's a very plain and simple Boss room, but it

tells me whatever monster guards it relies on its own strength and battle strategies rather than any environmental advantages.

A single Status pops up in my mind's eye as the figure of a human walks toward me with his arms crossed. He seems to be a bit taller than a normal human, roughly 2 meters, but the proportions are not oversized like the human form of the Colossal I faced before.

He has black boots, blue jeans, a worn-out white T-shirt, and bulging muscles that look like they're tearing these pieces of clothing at the seams.

His skin is light brown, his hair is dark black, and his sideburns are trimmed up almost as sharp as his stare.

Static electricity ripples around him with every footstep he takes closer to me, and I see a shimmering gold collar made of Soul Energy wrapped around his neck.

The arcs of electricity grow larger and larger the closer he gets, and the golden collar gives off an eerie glow similar to an item I've only seen one time before.

It feels just like the golden ring I saw around the Vice Region Director's Finger.

The depths of this power are evil and seemingly limitless.

I do a full inspect and appraisal scan.

---

[Lv. 1101]

Active Items:

[NONE]

Active Skills:

Combat Magic [Extreme Lightning Summoning]

Intimidation [Legendary Grade]

Bloodlust [Special Grade]

Bufs:

Domain Of Terror [Hidden Ability]

The Sun God's Curse Mark

---

A middle-aged man's confident and arrogant voice echoes through the boss room as the figure walks closer at a slow and steady rate.

"Well, well, well... It's been ages since I got a challenger. Who are you? A rogue hunter, an Association plant testing to see if I haven't gotten rusty, or..."

The energy collar around his neck glows bright golden yellow, and Soul Energy flows off of it, covering the man's eyes as a red aura of the bloodlust skill he has activates and turns a shade of orange when it reacts with the golden aura that leaks from the collar.

"A Demon...? With two cores?"

He smiles and starts to laugh, letting the golden energy from the collar envelop his whole body to create a veil of shielding around him.

The shape of the energy deforms around his hands and feet, shaping what look to be claws and paws of soul energy.

"Whoever, or whatever you are, it doesn't matter to me. I am the Guardian of the 40th Floor. You will not defeat me, I guarantee it."

He continues to walk forward at a slow and steady rate, then finally stops about 10 meters in front of me.

The golden glow around him gets denser and charged up with more and more Soul energy, until its shielding becomes difficult to see through.

His aura increases to shine brightly, and the manifestation of sharp wolf-like claws grow more defined on his hands as he points them at me in a fighting stance with intent to strike.

I stare back at him, boosting up all my Buffs to their full potential to match his intensity, imbue my sword full with hot Qi, and prepare for the being to make a move.

A bright wave of golden light bursts outward, increasing the size of his aura by many times, showing the activation of his intimidation skill erupt and run rampant through the entire Boss room.

The arcs of yellow and white electricity grow larger and larger as well, expanding with this display and searing black holes into the dirt ground every time they hit a concentrated point.

I clash back with an intimidation and confusion skill barrage of my own, igniting my body in flames that burn dark crimson, making a wall of heat surround me.

The instant I do, the man lunges forward and I match his movements.

I swing my Qi-infused sword across my body but don't hold back or test my limits and go all out from the start.

There's only so many times I'll be able to confuse and surprise my opponent, so I activate stealth and disappear before my opponent's eyes.

Then use earth and water magic along with advanced mana manipulation to their highest potential to make the ground below the golden man running toward me turn to a pool of liquid mud.

As he falls downward, I solidify the pool of liquid into hard stone, locking him in place.

At the same instance, I waste no time and go in for the kill. I dungeon walk behind him with extreme speed and all my agility and stat-boosting buffs burning through MP at a rapid rate while following through with my Qi-infused sword's strike, aiming for his heart through his back.

As soon as my blade touches his golden aura, arcs of electricity begin to climb up my sword, and even while in full stealth mode, the man's head and body turn with ferocious speed. He breaks free from my stone trap with ease, and blocks my sword with one of his hands covered in golden aura making it look like sharp claws are gripping my blade.

Despite this, I grit my teeth and continue to follow through with the strike, watching my Qi slowly burn through the golden aura the more I push into my sword. The man's eyes widen at this fact as the blade makes contact with the actual skin of his palm and draws bright red blood.

Another eruption of his bloodlust and intimidation aura follows, and I'm hit with a point-blank brute force blow in the chest with his other free clawed Soul Energy manifested hand.

I feel it rip through my Qi barrier and mana shielding, tearing my chestplate armor to shreds and leaving 3 deep gashes on my chest and throwing me backward.

My body lights up with electricity, and I feel every cell of my being begin to heat up faster and faster.

Chapter 452

Luckily, from the pure force of the brute's attack, I'm thrown flying backward through the air, and the intensity of the lightning shocks lessens the further away from the golden glowing man I get.

I quickly increase my momentum away from him even faster using airsteps, then activate stealth while simultaneously creating a body double to send back down at him.

While my copy plummets back toward the golden ball of electricity and soul energy, I dungeon walk even further away, activating my new extreme stamina skill to heal some of my lost HP instantly. Then, use self-regeneration to heal up all minor wounds like the slashes across my chest and fix up the holes in my blood-bonded armor.

However, the tingling sensation of electricity buzzing through my entire body stays longer than expected. I have to push my self-regeneration skill to its limits to mend the burnt flesh and shocked organs from head to toe.

Meanwhile, my senses are severely dulled. Getting hit by one of its lightning strikes again in a more compromising position could easily have ended much worse. I cannot let that happen a second time.

Even when carefully going for the kill shot, I severely underestimated my opponent.

A loud explosion of white light erupts from below me as the self-destruction skill of my body double creates a shockwave of mana over 40 meters wide in diameter.

I hear the man's loud yell from within.

Even if there was no Qi imbued in that attack, it must have hurt a bit. These new body doubles of mine equal my mana control exactly, and letting out a full force attack with no regard for my life would be a devastating move.

However, the aura of golden light continues to glow from within the white shockwave of energy from my fallen double. I feel the size of the man in the center of the blast begin to expand and expel more energy.

His form begins to shift and grow, similar to when I watched the Ranked-Up Dark Guard shift from his human body to one of a massive monster.

"He's transforming already...?"

Huge arcs of lightning begin to shoot out, reaching further and further away from the man's position in the middle of the boss room.

They begin to reach out over 100 meters away from him, arcing toward me.

I go into full battle mode again, boosting my perception skills to their limit and watching the electric arcs come my way.

The first instinct that comes to mind when I see this electricity is that there's no way for me to dodge them. I've encountered a lightning user one time before, back in the C-Class exams, and the only way I could get away from the attacks was to not be seen.

The other was to take them head-on and tough it out.

Based on the near paralysis-inducing feeling I got after just one split-second hit from this monster's extreme version of the skill, I'm sure muscling through isn't an option...

It also saw straight through my stealth skill the instant I made it within its inner aura's range, so I'm fairly certain sneaking away from its attacks isn't going to work either.

I summon another body double and send it at the growing ball of golden light again to act as a distraction while I rack my brain for more answers to my predicament. My All-Seeing Eye is doing full scans of the boss room, watching arcs of electricity move closer and closer to me as they somehow get stronger the more the Soul Energy Ball grows.

Another pulse of golden light erupts from the center of the boss room as my double explodes using a kamikaze style attack again, and this sparks the beginning of an epiphany.

My eyes track the fast-moving, nearly invisible shockwave of soul energy as it fills the air, and following it at the exact same speed are multiple arcing lines of electricity.

This phenomenon captures my interest, and I push all of my mana control into my perception skills, leaving my attack and defenses limited while another body double is produced to make for a distraction and catalyst to run this test again.

As the next pulse of mana and soul energy comes out, lightning follows.

My eyes adjust to the small fluctuations in mana, and every rogue lightning strike I see arcing through the boss room is traveling on waves of mana.

"It is just a skill after all..." I whisper under my breath.

The lightning strikes aren't just a natural occurrence, they are summoned from mana, so they have to follow the natural rules of the system and dungeons. The arcs of energy can only flow as fast as the waves of mana a caster pushes them.

These invisible waves of mana, just like the simple mana arrays sent out into the air when I use skills like enemy detection or my all-seeing eye; are usually mana readings I neglect to watch closely during battles, because they never directly affect me or have any offensive abilities.

Now that I see them, however, there's no going back.

I stop sending in body doubles as distractions, and allow the dust and energy to settle, revealing what is underneath.

A massive black wolf, with glowing golden eyes, a gold collar, shimmering claws, and sharp teeth all dripping with dense soul energy, stares at me from across the dungeon.

Taken from Royal Road, this narrative should be reported if found on Amazon.

Its hair stands up with static as arcs of electricity come off of it, and it bolts my way instantly.

From nose to tail, the beast is almost 7 meters long and covered in a Barrier of Soul Energy equal to if not greater than the density of the Ranked-Up Colossal's shielding that I was unable to pierce through even using all my Qi. Its muscular legs rip up the hard dirt ground with every step, and its increasing static waves leave a 10 meters wide trail of blackened soil behind it.

I'm outmatched in every aspect.

It's faster than me, stronger than me, has far more Soul Energy and Mana stores; and worst of all it has nothing to lose. The monster's footsteps are rhythmic and nearly silent, all I can hear is the buzz of electricity in the air and the low growl building up in its throat.

If I want to beat this creature, I'll have to do it right now, and with a well planned out attack where I have a technical advantage.

I take a deep breath in and out, pushing all my buffs to their limits while plundering mana from the air, activating my swordsmanship skill, and focusing my Qi into just 3 points.

The first is my eyes to aid my perception.

I dungeon walk around the Boss room and continuously track the waves of mana and soul energy that pulse in waves of varying strengths. The closer it is to the ravenous wolf, the denser the energy is and the stronger and faster the lightning that flows along it becomes. These are the most visible waves to me, and even a single shock could put me completely out of commission.

Based on their strength, one hit wouldn't kill me, but it would freeze my body and dull my mind for possibly a full second or longer. I'd be put in a compromised position that could lead to something far worse.

The further away from the wolf the waves get, the weaker they become. These waves of dispersing energy are much harder to see without total concentration, but also the lightning that follows them is less dense with mana and in turn will give a less deadly strike.

The waves come in set patterns and intervals, easy for me to track and predict now that I know where to look.

So, the second place where my Qi aids me is in the soles of my feet.

Whether it's to push off the ground with greater force or to give myself an edge in the sky when airstepping out of the way, boosting my movement speed with Qi is essential to carrying out my plan.

Lastly, the remainder of my Qi is channeled into my sword.

The first attack I threw at this floor boss's base form was a strong one, but I didn't put everything I had into it.

I still left most of my Qi in my shielding to protect from a counterblow.

This turned out to be the smartest decision at the time, as it blocked some of the blunt force attack on my chest, but at the same time it limited my pure force that could have been used to finish the battle before it started.

I allow enough concentrated Qi into my sword to the point where it begins to drip from my blade. If not used soon, I'll be wasting its full potential and an attack like this won't be possible for me to do again without more backup Qi pills.

Once all of the variables are set in place exactly how I want them to be, I let my instincts and Legendary Swordsmanship skill take over.

The thuds of the wolf's footsteps fade away, and the dirt arena around us begins to disappear too. I'm left in a void of darkness.

The only thing I see and feel is my opponent coming toward me and the now slow-moving waves of energy and yellow static electricity that arcs around it, sizzling and moving through the air slower and slower relative to my perception.

I dungeon walk forward, watching an arc of electricity move past me on my right side so slow I watch it make shifting sharp angled changes in direction, following the paths of least resistance, and I'm able to predict exactly where it'll flow to next by watching the mana fluctuations with my Qi-infused All-Seeing Eye.

A bright crimson thread of certainty protrudes from the tip of my blade, twisting and curving around the black empty space in front of me. Its path becomes more erratic and jumbled the closer to the wolf it gets. At some stages, the thread disappears, stopping short and reappearing tens of meters away. I understand this just means I'll have to dungeon walk to dodge many more lightning attacks and teleport with perfect accuracy to follow the plan to its exact point landing right between the eyes of the wolf.

Every square centimeter of this creature is protected with shielding denser than I can possibly dream of breaking through in my current form. However, that doesn't mean I can't pierce through the one point where it is weakest.

As soul energy is used to boost the monster's vision, and a majority is used to send out lethal lightning attacks, the rest of the Soul Energy at its disposal covers its vitals. The most dense shielding is over its heart, next around its neck, and lastly its brain.

Every time another pulse of lightning is released, there's a small fluctuation between these points, leaving openings of weaker shielding for a fraction of a second. It feels like the sea pulling back water to reveal fresh sand that doesn't see the light of day right before an enormous wave.

I allow my subconscious to take over and I begin weaving through the waves of lightning in a predetermined path, airstepping and dungeon walking through the ever-increasing storm of electricity.

It feels like a dance that I've been practicing for years, but finally get to perform for the first time.

Every time I disappear and reappear, sections of the boss room's mana get sucked away by my plunderer skill that is pushed to its limit, burning through MP like a furnace to keep the graceful display of precision and timing alive.

Arcs of electricity brush by my legs, back, arms, and face as the crimson thread gets shorter and shorter, bringing me closer to the deadly wolf.

Once I'm close enough to be within its inner aura filled with bloodlust and dense arcs of electricity. It's ranked up buff sends waves of intense intimidation deep into my psyche, but I don't let it slow me down.

If anything, the increasing pressure makes me move even faster, relying more on my subconscious battle instincts. I begin dungeon walking multiple times a second, shortening the thread further until my blade glowing with Qi lands its sharpest point dead center between the wolf's eyes.

In this exact moment, one of the creature's Soul Energy pulses is triggered right on cue. It's shielding fluctuates and my opening is made available for less than a tenth of a second. I release a wave of Qi from my sword's tip dense enough to melt through the weakened golden aura and pierce right through the wolf's skull, cooking its brains with a violent release of every drop of energy I have to wager.

The Qi in my core is drained by over 75% in a single strike, then the wave of Soul Energy and electricity that produced the fluctuation allowing me to land this attack hits me like a tsunami.

I feel the full power of its concentrated extreme lightning summoning attack flow through my veins.

The last thing I see is the flowing white Qi burst from its eyes and the golden collar around its neck begins to disintegrate and fade away. An explosion of energy sends me flying into the air, ripping the outer layers of my shielding, armor, and skin to shreds, but the ringing in my inner ear and the fading sensation of electricity going away tells me that everything worked out.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Combat Magic [Extreme Lightning Summoning]

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

MCP: 77,801,424

[YES][NO]

[Rank Up]

[YES][NO]

Chapter 453

I choose yes on both options, then use self-regeneration, extreme stamina, and drink a full HP potion while slowly air-stepping toward the boss room floor.

My vision is hazy, and my body is tingling all over.

I can feel the life coming back to me, but with over 80% of my Qi core also depleted, I begin to feel lightheaded and weak as well.

Both hands start to glow white, and the sensation begins to climb up my arms to cover my chest and creeps up my neck to cover my head as well.

I've felt this sensation once before, and it was when I ranked up last time.

Right below me, the corpse of the fallen lightning wolf is yet to dissolve, but with the intensity of the energy that's flowing through my mana pathways right now, I get the feeling my rank up isn't going to be a quick and pleasant procedure.

The more the energy takes over my conscious mind, the closer it feels like I'm about to transfer up to the next floor and be in serious danger.

I make the split-second decision before my vision goes white to open up a spatial magic portal, letting the undissolved corpse of the lightning wolf fall inside. Then, allow Ember to fly out.

The instant he hits the air, his entire body begins to shine bright white as well, and I place a hand on his back, dungeon walking us to the outer edge of a dungeon that is ingrained in my mind as a default teleport point.

I see the glimpse of the empty great plains, right where the rift of the Void Creeper's used to stand, but now is just an empty wide-stretching meadow with rolling hills and mountains far off in the distance.

The hot white energy envelops my entire body, and I lose consciousness.

---

[+1000 Strength]

[+1000 Mental Strength]

[+1000 Speed]

[+1000 Agility]

[+1000 Defense]

[New Buff!]

[Rising Emperor's Greater Form][Hidden Ability][Active]

A rejuvenating rush of energy washes over me while I open my eyes and take in a fresh breath of air cooler and more refreshing than any breath I've ever felt.

I sit up and slowly look around to my left and right, taking in the view of the great plains with a newfound appreciation for the dungeon's intricate design.

My eyes are sharp, cutting through the imagery of what looks to be a grassy plane, and I see the manifestations of mana for what they really are. Realistic holograms of energy, producing lifelike designs to lure in hunters to expel mana while searching for treasures.

Every breath I take brings in more mana in the air, converting it into usable energy, and every second that passes, my body expels mana of its own at an extremely fast rate as it is constantly running on passive buffs and active bodily functions.

I can feel every mana particle in this dungeon down to its core, and I even sense the monsters in this dungeon cowering at the sense of my aura, not getting within a kilometer away from me.

My mana control has easily increased by over 2.5x, and my Rising Emperor's Domain now reaches out just over 100 meters.

Less than 20% of my Qi stores remain after that battle, but it feels as if I could use this small amount to easily perform the attack I just threw with 75% of my previous core.

Every aspect of my being has been upgraded. My mind feels sharper, my energy control is leagues above what it used to be, and my natural base level strength feels far greater. My skin is smoother, and my movements are more graceful.

My armor and wounds from battle are completely healed. I don't feel a hint of fatigue in my body at all, and my new and improved form already feels natural.

"Ember..." I whisper under my breath, as he's the second thing on my mind after myself.

My head turns as I perceive the reading of a level 1002 Dragon in my mind's eye, but the visual I see is far from what I expected.

A young man with fair skin and long silky crimson hair sits in a patch of grass less than 15 meters away from me, admiring the dungeon's glory in the same manner that I did just moments ago.

He wears an elegant outfit, similar to the apparel seen on high ranking nobles I passed in my travels through Valor City or expensive auctions.

The man wears a black vest over a white dress shirt, and a silky red overcoat that matches his bright hair. His matte black shoes match his silky gloves, and a powerful invisible aura surrounds his being.

The man turns his head toward me. Fierce, yet calm, crimson eyes lock with mine.

He speaks aloud in a voice I know very well.

"Glad to see you're finally awake, Master. It's great to see you decided to take my advice and rank up again."

The corner of his lip curves upward, and I see a striking resemblance to the toothy grin Ember always shows when he's enjoying himself.

"Maybe we won't be killed so easily by The Lich King after all." He mutters to himself.

It takes me a moment to register my thoughts, but I reply.

"You've... changed quite a bit too..."

He stands to his feet, letting his long hair and thin red overcoat flutter in the light breeze of the dungeon.

"I have, indeed. It's always been much easier getting around in these human forms. Not the greatest for combat, but I get a lot less screams when I walk into rooms."

He looks down at his hands, moving his fingers and breathing in the mana dense air through his nose.

A red glow starts to manifest around his body too, showing his Mythic Grade Plunderer Skill activate for a fraction of a second and all of the mana in the surrounding area gravitates toward him. He turns it off and his base aura glows even brighter than it did before.

"It's been a while since I've ranked up a second time, this body is probably my favorite one so far."

Another pulse of red aura surrounds him for a moment, then the extremely strong mana control completely vanishes into thin air. It's like he's using a mana suppression technique that masks his strength, but I can't see a drop of Qi surrounding his body at all. It must be an even more advanced technique.

He continues to admire himself, while tons of thoughts race through my mind.

I should have come to this conclusion earlier. Both of the double-ranked-up monsters I've faced so far have started their battles in human forms. Of course, Ember would be the same...

This changes quite a few things. Like he said, there will be far less terror from normal humans when entering a room. Meaning Ember can walk around with humans, and his safely guarded identity will not be so easily figured out.

Secondly, a more concerning thought comes to my mind as I look down at my status and see my new buff [Rising Emperor's Greater Form].

I point a question toward Ember, hesitant to activate my buff and see for myself.

"So monsters receive the ability to turn into humanoid forms when they reach level 1000. Does this mean... I'll have the ability to turn into a monster...?"

---

Updated Status Sheet:

---

[Status Open]

---

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 1002

Hp: 5015/5015

Mp: 5015/5015

Strength: 4039 [+3999][+5049][+11188][+4847][+2020][+4039][+7714][+5049][+5049][+10098]  
Speed: 3900 [+4329][+5928][+4875][+5616][+1950][+3900][+5187][+4875][+4875][+9750]  
Agility: 4008 [+4008][+4409][+5010][+5932][+6212][+2004][+4008][+6974][+5010][+10020]  
Defense: 4205 [+3112][+5929][+4626][+5845][+8074][+6938][+2103][+4205][+5551][+10513]  
Mental Strength: 4566 [+4568][+5708][+5981][+9726][+8173][+2283][+4566][+7854][+5708]  
[+5708][+11415]

---

#### Skills:

Absorption [Legendary Grade]

Swordsmanship [Legendary Grade]

Combat Magic [Advanced Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection [Legendary Grade]

Body Hardening [Legendary Grade]

Self Regeneration [Legendary Grade]

Spatial Magic [Item Storage]

Plunderer [Legendary Grade]

Telekinesis

Appraisal [Special Grade]

Conceal [Special Grade]

Berserker [Legendary Grade]

Dungeon Walker [Legendary Grade]

Intimidation [Legendary Grade]

Dagger Mastery [Legendary Grade]

Stealth [Legendary Grade]

Bloodlust [Legendary Grade]

Equivalent Exchange

Combat Magic [Advanced Wind Summoning]

All-Seeing Eye

Extreme Strength [Legendary Grade]

Dual Wielding [Legendary Grade]

Telepathy [Legendary Grade]

Final Breath [Legendary Grade]  
Combat Magic [Advanced Earth Summoning]  
Combat Magic [Advanced Mana Manipulation]  
Life Steal [Legendary Grade]  
Hibernation [Special Grade]  
Combat Magic [Advanced Demonic Energy Manipulation]  
Combat Magic [Advanced Ice Summoning]  
Body Double [Legendary Grade]  
Lie Detector [Legendary Grade]  
Hush [Legendary Grade]  
Craftsmanship [Mythic Grade]  
Extreme Speed [Legendary Grade]  
Combat Magic [Advanced Water Summoning]  
Screech [Legendary Grade]  
Phantom Step [Legendary Grade]  
Flare [Legendary Grade]  
Confusion [Legendary Grade]  
Blast [Legendary Grade]  
Bind [Legendary Grade]  
Iron Fist [Legendary Grade]  
Extreme Stamina [Legendary Grade]  
Combat Magic [Extreme Lightning Summoning]

---

Items Equipped: [15 Slots Available Post 2nd Rank Up][Current Items Equipped]

Platinum Ring of Visual Manipulation [+151% Mental Strength][+111% Speed][+100% Agility]  
[+99% Strength][+74% Defense][Illusion Attribute]

The Behemoth's Platinum Amulet [+141% Defense][+125% Strength][+125% Mental Strength]

Enchanted Boots of Extreme Speed [+152% Speed]

Enchanted Ice Serpent's Pendant [+110% Agility] [+75% Magic Resistance] [+95% Ice Magic  
Resistance]

Platinum Ring of The Blue Ogre King [+131% Mental Strength] [+125% Speed][+125% Agility]  
[+110% Defense]

The Flame Emperor's Sword [Advanced Fire Aspect][+277% Strength][+213% Mental Strength]  
[+139% Defense][+144% Speed][+148% Agility]

Berserker King's Armor Set [Blood Bonded] [+192% Defense]

Cloak of Total Darkness[+179% Mental Strength][+155% Agility][+75% Perception][Hidden  
Passive Ability][Concealment Attribute]

[Enchanted Lightweight Gauntlets][+165% Defense][+120% Strength][Hardening Attribute]

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

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

[EMPTY SLOT]

[EMPTY SLOT]

[EMPTY SLOT]

Final Slot[15th]:[Interchangeable]

The Wind Tyrant's Dagger Set [Advanced Wind Aspect][+191% Strength][+174% Agility][+172%  
Mental Strength][+133% Speed][+132% Defense]

Midnight Dagger

---

Skill Buffs:

[Berserker] +125% Strength + Mental Strength

[BloodLust] +125% Speed + Agility + Mental Strength , +50% Perception

[Extreme Strength] +125% Strength

[Extreme Speed] +125% Speed

[Final Breath] ~ +250% All Stats (Exact % will vary, conditions & circumstances apply)

---

Permanent Buffs:

Rising Emperor's Domain[Hidden Ability][Passive]

Rising Emperor's Greater Form[Hidden Ability][Active]

Red Hydra's Rage[Soul Bond Attribute][Active]

Chapter 454

"It's usually not that simple. Humans are far less likely to awaken a monster form than monsters are to awaken a human form. After all, ranked-up abilities manifest what the user desires or needs most. Whether that's skill upgrades for those who cannot do it naturally, a new human form to fit in with society, a massive increase in mana control, or maybe a buff that fits their fighting style. Every rank-up procedure is different. You won't know how it works until you try it."

I continue to stare down at the [Rising Emperor's Greater Form] tag on my buffs portion of my status, then let out a sigh and reply.

"You're right, I might as well try it and see what this new ability does."

I step back and stand in a steady stance, then activate the buff. A surge of energy instantly pulses through me. It's definitely mana-powered, but there's a unique air to the energy that makes it feel like there's more to it than I can comprehend.

I feel my feet being lifted off the ground, and my aura begins to expand and materialize into an outer layer of energy in the exact shape of my body.

It starts off as a pure white glow but fluctuates and shifts in color from grey to dark shadowy black the larger it grows around me.

Thick plumes of dense mana, more powerful than any shielding I've ever summoned in my life, wrap around my arms, legs, torso, and even my head.

I can see through it without a problem.

Even though the energy surrounds me, if anything, my perception of the dungeon only becomes greater.

A swirling shadowy form grows larger and larger, pulling me off of the dungeon floor higher into the air.

I stare down at myself, as I'm floating in the center of this form over 2 meters off the ground and still growing. I move my hands in front of me, and the energy moves in perfect sync without missing a beat.

I take a step forward, and the growing mana imbued creation does the same.

As my feet now hover over 4 meters off the ground, I begin to activate skills; The first is my fire magic.

My main inner body does not ignite into flames as I expected, but the outer layer of darkness mimics the flickering illusion of fire. To push my tests further, I turn to a desolate portion of the dungeon and summon a ball of fire, letting it blast off into the distance toward a far-off rolling hill.

Unexpectedly, the shadowy mana-imbued mass around me manifests black flames of mana at the same time, and a black ball of fire over 4 times larger than what I was expecting to throw rockets toward the grassy hills.

An explosion of mana, and destruction of a large portion of the dungeon ensues, letting the potential scale and possibilities of this power sink in.

I stare down at the ground again, as the form doesn't stop expanding, and take out my sword.

A perfect copy is manifested in the energy form's hand as well.

I swing it across my body, producing slashes of fire that carve up the dungeon for hundreds of meters and leave trails of black flames.

At the same moment, I feel an absurd amount of mana leave my body.

Every slash I throw uses up over 4 times as much mana as it normally would, and the larger my form grows, the more it's starting to use.

I activate plunderer, and energy from all around seeps into my new form to fuel its growth even further. Even more mana is needed the larger I grow. Once my form grows to roughly 7 times my normal human size, the expansion stops.

A flickering shadowy images of myself is stood in the middle of the great plains dungeon. My intricate facial features are exactly the same, my armor and gear are all replicated without any errors, and advanced fire magic flames flicker producing overwhelming heat.

It feels like I'm unstoppable in this new form.

I continue to practice for a few minutes, trying out other elements and basic skills to get used to this new power. I'm about to try imbuing Qi into my blade, but before I do, a major concern hits me.

Most buffs and instant power-ups like this don't come without a cost... It would be best not to push it too far without testing if there are any side effects. So, I make the decision to revert to my normal form before I get too deep into the unknown.

Like a flip of a switch, the moment I think about turning off my [Rising Emperor's Greater Form], the energy around my body churns and seeps back into me, lowering me to the floor far faster than it expanded.

I brace myself for a wave of fatigue like the Red Hydra's Buff, or the tingling feeling I get from overusing my mana, but as my feet touch the dungeon floor, nothing of the sort comes.

"I feel... normal..."

I try to activate self-regeneration and even scan my own body with my All-Seeing Eye, but nothing is wrong.

Ember walks over with a satisfied smile.

"Looks like you received a greater energy form. Those are even more rare than monster forms for humans, but honestly, I don't know what else I'd expect from you. With your overuse of that Hydra's power, and the constant buffs and aura training, an energy form is the only upgrade worth giving. The system knows best."

He shrugs.

I turn around, placing my sword back into my item storage, and raise a question back.

"A greater energy form? So... what do I need to know about it? What can it do? It felt like my full body grew for a moment there... It's like it's a part of me."

Ember walks closer, examining the damage done to the dungeon landscape and nodding with approval.

"Well, it seems to me you received an enhancement-style greater form. Usually, these forms are only useful for short spurts of battle because of their overexertion of mana. However, with the plunderer skill, this will be less of a problem. It can increase the user's size, speed, strength, and overall total capabilities many times over for a limited period of time. Think of it like an enormous overcharged body double that you control from the inside."

I'd already come to a similar conclusion, but Ember continues with information that I wasn't expecting to hear.

"However, there are some downsides too. Physical attacks on your energy form will transfer to your main body as well. Just because it's a souped-up version of yourself that surrounds your real body doesn't mean it's invincible. You saw how when you activated skills they didn't manifest on your inner body, they only were visible in your energy form?"

I nod.

"Yeah."

"Well, that's because this energy form is a part of you. It's your being. It is you."

There's a silence between us as I let that sink in, and Ember continues.

"This is the best-case scenario we could be in for your second rank-up. Now, we just need to trigger your Soul Energy awakening and maybe we'll actually have a chance against the The Lich King if you're still fixated on killing that thing. For that, you're still going to need a lot more Qi."

"Right...More Qi... and more time in isolated cultivation too..."

My train of thought over my new rank-up and abilities switches back to where I left off before all of this.

"How long were we ranking up for? I still have a lot of work to do. My teammates will be coming to meet with us shortly, and I need to prepare a welcoming present for them."

I check my memories, and see there's still no sign of either of my two remaining body doubles' deaths yet. I'm unsure if this is a good or bad sign, so soon I'll have to check things out for myself.

Ember replies, finally making his way next to me stepping around all of the burned portions of the dungeon around us.

"I was unconscious for the same amount of time as you, form transformation rank-ups usually take far longer than simple buffs. But, I don't believe it was more than a few hours at most."

I place a hand on his shoulder, and bring us both back into the canyon of dungeons in Sector 2.

Ember speaks up from behind me as I begin to walk toward the exit portal.

"Oh, so I'll finally be meeting your human friends? This will be quite interesting."

Chapter 455

As soon as I walk out of the dungeon and look up at the sky from a thin path on the edge of the canyon, I see the orange setting sun above.

Instantly, the geopoints of my Rising Emperor's Domain [Find My Friend] feature manifest in my mind's eye, showing me that Arie is nearby, but Abby and Maria are still far off in Valor City.

My doubles sent off to find them and the one taking care of the town of thugs and recovering slave workers are still active, so I have no updates to work with. I'll have to assume my double is delaying for good reason.

For now, I'll continue with the task at hand.

I airstep up out of the canyon, and Ember follows by my side, using near-invisible platforms of dense red energy to step off of and gracefully fly through the air.

We head off to the edge of the Abyss, and to my surprise, I see Arie at its edge spewing refined demonic energy from his fingertips in thin but steady streams to attack a provoked Demonic Wolf.

At very close range, the energy rips through the wolf's hide, injuring its flesh all over, and bringing it to its knees in a matter of seconds after a barrage of jet black attacks.

These are the weakest of the Demonic creatures, but they are great target practice, and Arie's improvement is quite fast. Along with that, his confidence to practice without me in his main body is remarkable as well.

As he finishes absorbing the remaining unrefined energy from the fallen wolf, I finally step into range and wave him down.

At the sight of me, his eyes perk up, but he doesn't react quickly or move a muscle; he just breathes slowly and allows the energy within him to trickle out from his core and into the sand escaping his fingertips for almost a full minute as both Ember and I approach.

My best guess is, he still needs very high levels of concentration to keep the energy stable, so if he's not going to be in immediate battle or training for short spurts of time, his safest course of action is to drain his core. It makes sense, so I don't disturb him while he does his due diligence.

However, once his core is drained and I stand before him with a brand-new face beside me, he finally speaks up.

"You took your sweet time. So, I take it you won your fight and managed to rank up again."

I nod.

"Yes, I managed to rank up. I'm much more confident I can fend off another attack if the Dark One sends any more guards our way, but I still have to get much stronger. We all do."

Arie's gaze turns to Ember in his human form beside me.

"And who might this be? A strong ally?"

Arie looks at Ember curiously and cautiously. It's clear he's very intrigued by the confusing energy readings coming off of him, but concerned as well.

I reply.

"Yes, a very powerful ally. He's been assisting all of us from the background for a while, but I believe its time you all finally met."

Arie reads the situation perfectly and replies in a calm manner.

"A strong ally with a backstory that I shouldn't pry into just yet, it seems."

He chuckles, then looks Ember in the eyes.

"Well, a friend of Jay's is a friend of mine. Nice to meet you, I'm Arie."

Ember smiles, tightening his gaze and doing full scans of his own on Arie before replying and putting out a friendly hand to shake.

Stolen from its original source, this story is not meant to be on Amazon; report any sightings.

"I'm Ember, it's nice to finally meet. I look forward to getting stronger with you."

They shake hands, but as soon as they release their grip, Ember does something unexpected.

He points his hand toward the abyss and a thick stream of Demonic Energy comes swirling toward him, compacting and hovering right above his hand in a dense ball. He shapes it into a fluctuating long sharp crescent and sends it flying back into the darkness where it came.

The powerful and dense attack of Demonic Energy slices through the abyss, leaving a wide open gash in the black mist.

He turns to Arie.

"I see you've recently obtained a Demon's core and need some assistance in mastering your Demonic Energy. I'm sure I can help you reach the next level."

Ember's methods for manipulating Demonic energy are fairly different than mine. He does not have a core, so he manipulates the energy outside of his body using some unknown force. However, he was the one that taught me how to use Demonic Energy in the first place, so I see no better fit for a teacher.

I have a lot of work to do, and guiding Arie through the next phases of training would take quite a while. I could use a body double to assist him, but Ember's insight will speed up his progress even faster.

So, I interject.

"Ember was the one that taught me most of my Demonic Energy techniques, so I trust that you'll be able to progress much faster with him watching over. Plus, this will be a good way for you two to get to know each other."

In the same moment, I share my body double skill with Arie, and he immediately feels the rush of energy and creates three doubles that spawn behind him. His main body speaks.

"It would be a pleasure. If you have anything to add, I'm all ears. I can tell I'm on the verge of another breakthrough."

They both turn toward the abyss, and I sit back beside the same small rock formation as last time and open up my item storage to take out piles of mana crystals and the Isolation pods to begin running a few more tests.

"That was easier than I thought it'd be. Now... back to these pods."

I start up right where I left off, staring down at the [Current Dilation: 1.2040x] reading that glows above the control panel.

After roughly another 100k MP worth of crystals, the number ticks up again showing [Current Dilation: 1.2041x].

I continue feeding the machine more and more crystals, after an additional 1 Million MP, the reading shows [Current Dilation: 1.2051x], further proving that my hypothesis that it would take nearly 1 Billion MP to make it up to a 2x dilation.

Seeing that in all the hours I farmed in the labyrinth, I only came back with a few million MP, I begin to rack my brain for more ideas.

Although an average rate of 1 million MP farmed per hour is enough to sustain the economy of a small country, it still isn't enough to fund my science experiments here, so I'm going to have to think outside the box.

There must have been some other way that the old Sector 2 Leader charged these machines up with so much MP.

I sift through my inventory and find crates of over a hundred C-Grade MP potions that I took from the warehouse earlier today and feed them into the machine to see the rating rise again to [Current Dilation: 1.2054x] and realize even magic items can be put into this machine as fuel too.

I dump junk gear from my farming that I'll never use or sell like swords and axes from D to C grade monsters until I see the number tick up again [Current Dilation: 1.2055x].

Then, I sift through a portion of my storage where many element stones from my time in the labyrinth sit. There's a few ice stones from the Elite Yeti floor, two earth stones that dropped from the giant worms on the 38th, a handful of unique stones from the Wyvern Boss on the 30th. Then lastly, the 9 black fire stones from the 39th floor mutants sit untouched, waiting to be unleashed.

Beside all of these is the corpse of the massive lightning wolf in suspended animation inside my item storage. I'm curious what kind of items it will drop, but am unsure if taking its body from the Boss Room will trigger any unique reactions. So, I'm holding off on letting its body fully dissolve until I can get back to the Labyrinth and see the current state of the 40th floor.

I make the decision to play things safe and use one of the less rare stones first, feeding an ice element stone into the machine.

It disappears the moment I take it out and press the [Input Mana] feature, but the dilation does not increase.

Confused at this reaction, I try a few more of these lower powered Element stones, and it takes over half a dozen more to trigger the counter to rise [Current Dilation: 1.2056x].

"They are just element stones after all..."

This machine doesn't care how rare or powerful an item is, it only cares about how much mana it possesses.

I let out a sigh, but then remember the time I crafted a cursed overcharged wind element stone to drain all of the available mana from a dungeon.

"Maybe something like that could work..."

I look up from my tests and see Ember and Arie about 20 meters away getting along nicely.

The streaks of Demonic Energy are flying out from Arie's double's palms much faster, and the energy is far more condensed and deadly than before.

I put the isolation pod away into my storage and walk over to them.

"Ember, I'm going to need some assistance from you to run another test."

I expand my All-Seeing Eye's range to do a quick deep scan of the desert and pinpoint a weak rogue dungeon far in the distance, about 50km away from where we currently stand.

Then, I point in its general direction.

"This will only take a moment, we'll know if it works or not pretty quickly."

Chapter 456

I turn to Arie.

"You should come too. As long as you stay within 100 meters of me, your body doubles won't deactivate. They can continue to train here by the Abyss while we go into the desert."

Then, I turn back in the direction of the rogue dungeon.

"Sure, I'll come along!" Arie replies.

The three of us head off into the desert, flying with various magic techniques to increase our speed and fly over 50 km in just a few minutes.

It reminds me of my flight over here from Sector 1 on Ember's back. During it, I felt quite a few other rogue dungeons out in the wilderness.

There's far less in these deserts than the crowded forest areas back in the Vice Region, but near every town out here there are rogue dungeons scattered about, the same as Sector 4.

The canyon that houses over a hundred of them is quite the mystery to me, honestly.

Dungeons of that magnitude and quantity are usually only found near massive cities where thousands or even millions of hunters excrete excess mana every day to fuel and grow them. There is hardly any activity way out here in Sector 2, and there couldn't have been more than 500 people living in the small town.

They must have been created or maintained artificially, but now isn't the time for me to ponder this.

I'm just glad there's a rogue dungeon not too far away, but not too close. If anything goes wrong in my test, the working dungeons won't be affected, and the town is far away from any potential blast radius.

"Here we are."

The three of us touch down in a desolate portion of the desert with the remains of what looks like it used to be a small trading station and check-in hut, but is now just scrap wood that has fallen apart and sunk into the desert sand.

Next to it is a small spinning blue dungeon portal, that gives off the mana reading of a middle-ranked E-Grade or possibly low-ranked D-grade at the highest.

Someone must have regulated this dungeon or farmed it pretty often in the past, but it has been long abandoned.

Even Arie, without a specific perception skill activated, can tell that this is an odd place to trek out to.

He speaks up as we all walk inside and take in the lush green scenery.

"What kinds of tests do you plan on doing with a dungeon this weak...?"

The rustling of jungle trees, long colorful flowery vines, and thick underbrush fills our vision.

"Here, I'll show you."

I place a hand on both Ember and Arie's shoulder, dungeon walking us to the center of the dungeon right beside two wild boar mobs at level 53 and 54 just to get a closer look.

We take the pair of monsters by surprise, but they hardly let out a squeal before the overwhelming aura of our trio suffocates them to death and they fall to the floor.

I activate enemy detection to find a few hundred other boars between level 50 and 60 filling the dungeon, but they're all running far away from us in fear.

With a sigh, I reach into my item storage to pull out one of the jet black firestones and place a hand on Ember's shoulder.

"Arie, you should probably place a hand on my back. I'm about 50% sure this will work, but to be safe, I'll be dungeon walking us out of here pretty quickly."

His eyes widen at the intense rippling black flames of the stone that I let hover over my right hand using telekinesis, and its fire burns so strong and bright that trees above in the jungle regions begin to erupt into flames.

He places a hand on my back, and I take this as a cue to activate my mythic grade craftsmanship skill.

I take a deep breath in and out before my gaze hovers over the [Imbue] tab next to Ember's [Plunderer][Mythic Grade] skill.

Beforehand, I thought this through very carefully.

The element stones and various items that became cursed or unstable the last time I performed this test were items made from material far inferior to the power of a Mythic Grade skill.

However, this element stone is a borderline A-Grade material. The pure mana and fierce power it gives off is higher than anything I've ever tried to merge in a craft before.

Even the leftover ice, earth, and unique wyvern stones in my inventory pale in comparison to the pure power these black fire stones produce.

My plan is to activate the craft, then leave this dungeon the instant I do.

The air goes still, and the jungle becomes silent. My vision burns through the [Imbue] tab in my mind's eye... then, I press it and watch the white light of my craftsmanship skill envelop the entire stone.

The instant I feel the craft complete, the mana in our surroundings begin to collapse in toward the stone.

My MP is dropped to half in a fraction of a second and I catch a glimpse of the new item's information with my all-seeing eye. I blip all three of us away to a dungeon back in the canyon 50km away to safety before I can conceptualize what I've seen.

---

### Elite Minotaurs Firestone [Containment Item]

Info: An element stone left behind by an Elite Grade Minotaur with a fire magic variant. It has been imbued with the Mythic Grade Plunderer Skill to create a one-time use Containment item. This stone will plunder mana from its surroundings until the mana control limit of its previous monster owner is met. Once its limit is reached, the plunderer aspect will cease to function.

Class: A+

Type: Containment Item

[Current MP Containment]: 0.0001B/7.8901B

---

We all materialize in a random D-Grade grassland dungeon in the canyon, and I speak out loud with a grin.

"I think it worked..."

I create a body double and it immediately teleports back to the dungeon to do reconnaissance.

Less than half a second after I do, the double dies, but I see what is happening inside that Wild Boar dungeon as clear as day.

In just a few seconds, a massive twister of fire has begun engulfing the jungle.

A crater of disappearing dungeon mass is forming in the center where I dropped the black stone, and it is expanding outward and downward at a quickly increasing rate.

My double gets too close to the blast, attempting to use all of its perception skills to visualize what's going on at the item's core, but is sucked dry of MP and pulled into the black fiery core before it can do anything.

Over the next half a minute, I continuously send in body doubles to watch the increasingly large ball of flames destroy the dungeon I dropped it in.

Enormous jungle trees, dozens of boars, and tall rock formations are burned away by the black flames and consumed as energy for the growing ball of dungeon mass.

However, once the stone's fireball diameter reaches a point of about 300 meters wide, for some reason it stops expanding.

My double watches the flames begin to flicker and die down.

The raging ball of violent MP-hungry energy stops completely, and I finally get a clear visual on a black stone glowing with energy at its center.

I manage to get a reading on the stone by flying closer as the flames fizzle out.

---

### Elite Minotaurs Firestone [Containment Item]

Info: An element stone left behind by an Elite Grade Minotaur with a fire magic variant. It has been imbued with the Mythic Grade Plunderer Skill to create a one-time use Containment item. This

stone will plunder mana from its surroundings until the mana control limit of its previous monster owner is met. Once its limit is reached, the plunderer aspect will cease to function.

Class: A+

Type: Containment Item

[Current MP Containment]: 7.8901B/7.8901B

---

Using water magic and wind magic, my double carves a path through the leftover flames and floats down into the dirt-filled crater to stand right next to the large black stone I left before.

It still flickers with black flames, but they are not nearly as violent. Its mass looks like it's grown a few times larger, almost half a meter wide now.

The most fascinating thing is the immense amount of mana it contains. It feels as if one wrong move could set off a massive explosion. However, my double opens up its item storage and drops the fully saturated stone inside.

It dungeon walks back with the package contained, then speaks to my main body with an outstretched hand.

"The test was a success. Let me see one of the isolation pods, I'll try to feed the result of this experiment to the machine."

Chapter 457

I take the Isolation Pod I've been working on all this time out of my storage and allow my double to place it inside its own.

It blips away, back to the Wild Boar dungeon to perform its test.

I wait patiently for about a minute, then the memories of my body double successfully inputting the stone into the machine just like a mana crystal, then killing itself to quickly relay the information come rushing back to me.

"It worked."

I teleport the three of us back into the Wild Boar Dungeon, and sitting in the center of the 300-meter-wide dirt crater that's destroyed the jungle is a lightly humming isolation pod. At the sight of the massive hole, and the mana content in the air dropping by a noticeable amount, this test was a great success.

The Pod's door is left wide open, and the containment cell at the top is now magnitudes denser with mana than it was before.

White plumes of pure mana charge the shielding barriers, and it now looks a lot more like the Isolation Pods that we used back in the Galeheart Tower.

The glowing blue text only visible to my all-seeing eye hovering over the control panel now says [Current Dilution: 9.0957x].

I let the machine fall into my item storage then turn to Ember and place a hand on his shoulder while pulling another stone out into the open air.

"We'll do it again."

I imbue a nearly identical black flaming stone with Ember's Mythic grade Plunderer skill and dungeon walk us out of there before the reaction can fully begin.

A few minutes later, I dungeon walk back in to find the crater has grown far larger, the dungeon is less dense with pure mana, and another saturated stone sits at the crater's center.

The contained mana inside is similar to the last stone.

[Current MP Containment]: 7.4255B/7.4255B

I let it drop into my inventory and pull out another, wanting to saturate all the stones I can as fast as possible while it's working so well.

Another 5 tests go by, taking less than 20 minutes in total, and each of them saturates another stone with varying potencies between 7 and 8 billion MP.

Every time I return to the dungeon, the affected area grows less and less dense with mana.

Using my high level of perception, even the areas of the dungeon that are not directly affected by the plunder radius are weakening and becoming less dense with mana every time I return.

Even the levels of newly spawned in monsters are lowering.

What used to be a flourishing jungle region with level 50-60 boars quickly fell below level 30s for new spawns halfway through; on the test before this one, some of the mobs even spawned in at lower than level 10.

The dungeon is in bad shape. Its artificial landscape is ripped to shreds, and most of its mana completely absorbed.

As I walk down the crater to fetch the stone, I do a deep scan of my surroundings and find that there's more mana trapped in this single stone than there is remaining in the entire dungeon.

Stolen from Royal Road, this story should be reported if encountered on Amazon.

The newest group of spawned-in mobs I detect are between level 2 and 3.

As I let the saturated stone fall into my inventory, I think about taking out one of the two stones remaining but turn to Ember before I do.

"There isn't enough mana to fully saturate another stone. Our best course of action will probably be to find another rogue dungeon to drain."

He nods, smiling with his arms crossed.

"Sure, it may be unwise to drop another stone and not allow it to fully saturate. Would you like me to collapse this dungeon for safekeeping? There's less than 3 billion mana left in here at the most; It'll only take a few minutes."

I shrug.

"Go for it; you've been wanting to do this for a long time, so have at it."

Ember's aura immediately pulses red, and a wave of strong mana erupts from him.

"Very well, I recommend the two of you wait outside. I'll be draining every last drop, so it's best you don't get caught in the crossfire. The natural dungeon mechanism will teleport me back into the desert once I'm finished."

Ember's cloud of red aura begins to grow, just like the times I witnessed it in the Titan's domain, however, now he's many times stronger than back then.

I dungeon walk with Arie back to the exit portal, and we hop out into the desert next to the dilapidated wooden hut.

The sun has almost fully set, making the fading orange glow the last bit of warmth in the air.

The small blue dungeon portal slowly spins, but it's barely producing any mana readings and is becoming smaller and weaker at a rapid rate as Ember plunders it from the inside.

While the portal shrinks and we sit and wait, I decide to take out the isolation pod again to begin placing the 6 additional stones inside.

The moment I place a new stone inside, the text changes again, showing [Current Dilation: 13.2606x]. At first, the number throws me off, because it didn't rise the expected 7.4255x amount. However, once I drop another stone with 7.9304B MP inside and the number changes to [Current Dilation: 17.2258x], things begin to make more sense.

I input another, and the rating reaches [Current Dilation: 20.4461x].

After the final three additional stones, it reaches [Current Dilation: 26.1005x].

After seeing the numbers rise in such odd intervals, I begin to do some math.

It took 1 billion MP for every additional 1x dilation interval for the first 10 levels. However, once the counter passed 10.0000x, each additional 1x in dilation cost twice as much. It took 20 billion MP to go from 10x to 20x.

Then, just to make it halfway from 20 to 30x, it took over 20 billion MP again, meaning it will take 40 billion MP in total to raise the scale from 20 to 30x if this process is repeated.

If this pattern continues, every 10 additional levels of dilation will cost twice as much MP to fuel.

"Now the old craftsman's note about higher levels of dilation not being profitable for selling to consumers makes sense," I mutter under my breath.

Content with how high I managed to get the machine already, I place the pod back into my item storage and begin to strategize in my mind how I'll be able to farm more of these fire stones at a steady rate.

At the same time, the dungeon portal that Ember is dissolving is beginning to waver and pulse before our eyes.

Less than another minute passes before it becomes so thin and transparent I believe an E-rank hunter without any perception skills could even see what's happening without enhanced vision.

Still, I keep all of my senses at the ready, because a rumor about what is left behind from collapsing dungeons continues to stir in the back of my mind. I'm hoping right here and now I'll get to see if it's true.

The portal gets smaller, spinning even less, and dissipating into thin air before our eyes.

Then, we're left in silence as the final remnants of it implode on itself and the portal completely vanishes.

A few seconds pass, and my gaze stays locked on the point where it disappeared with every bit of mana control pushing my All-Seeing Eye to its limit.

Then, a flash of light teleports all foreign dungeon matter back to the desert.

Ember materializes in front of me, still putting off an immense red aura, and brimming with newly plundered mana.

My heart skips a beat, and my eyes widen as I see a tiny shimmering fragment of a bright white glowing crystal falling to the desert floor.

It looks no larger than a fingernail, but sends out a unique aura that captures my interest. I watch it gracefully fall through the air for a fraction of a second, and see sparkling trailing mist dissolve off of it.

It looks as if the mere contact with the air is eroding it away at a rapid rate, and if I don't act now, whatever this material is will completely disappear before it even touches the sand.

I open a spatial magic portal right below the odd glowing mass, and it falls inside my storage.

#### Chapter 458

The visual of the white crystal dissolving into the air plays over and over in my mind. I wouldn't have managed to catch it, or even sense it, if I wasn't specifically looking for it.

I'm almost positive I just managed to finally obtain one of the most valuable magic items in the world.

However, I'm going to need to replicate this process again and bring it back to a safe place for some test crafts before I can be 100% sure. Considering this, I don't bother to mention my find to the others until I'm certain of this discovery's legitimacy. For now, I'll stay focused on the main task at hand.

We fly back to the abyss where Aries' doubles are still training, and I create a double of my own to send off to the canyon to go and farm the 39th floor for more stones.

After that recent rank up, my mana control has drastically increased again, so I'm confident I'll be able to defeat the Mutant Elite Minotaurs even without using Qi.

Once my double is off, Arie gets back to training with his doubles and practicing concentrated Demonic Energy control in his main body. I lay back on the side of a desert sand dune and watch the sunset with Ember standing close by, admiring the final golden glow before the desert turns to night.

The only visible light on the horizon is the town full of workers, grunts, and one of my body doubles standing in as me, The Flame Emperor, keeping everyone in line.

After almost half an hour of calm silence staring off into the open desert, my next plan of action comes together. I finally speak up to Ember and point toward the town.

"Want to see another project I'm working on? I'm curious to see the progress myself."

"I sense almost 400 humans in that village. If that's what you're talking about, then yes I'm very interested."

I get to my feet and look over to Arie still hard at work training with his doubles, but he senses we're up to something so he drains his core temporarily to speak.

"Go off to the town if you want, don't let me hold you back. I just need a few more hours and I think I'll be able to break past this next plateau. I just need more practice. I'm confident enough to train in my main body, so leave me here and I'll meet you guys there once I'm too tired to train on. I know my limits."

I give him a nod, and look back toward the canyon.

"Keep an eye on the dungeons too, there's still 6 active breaks in there. If any monster overflow occurs, it'd be helpful if you could get rid of them before they escape too far. Also, my double should be getting back from Valor City in the near future with all our teammates, bring them to the town if they arrive."

"You got it."

Ember and I head off toward the town while Arie continues to train by the Abyss.

The closer we get, the more the bright lights of the town below begin to shine, and structures that were not previously in such good shape begin to come into my field of view.

I use conceal to create the Elegant Flame Emperor Appearance I left with, and put up my Qi barrier, increasing the density considering the low amount I have left to use. Even with 20% of my base left, it is still more than enough to shield my aura. Ember suppresses his mana control as well, and we both touch down in the middle of town.

We find ourselves standing in the middle of the main square. An enormous octagonal stone structure has been built around the fountain in the middle of the town with 8 doors and large windows that all lead into it from any side one approaches.

It towers 3 stories high, is almost 25 meters in diameter, and looks to be built from very sturdy stone summoned and molded by earth magic. It's decorated and brightly lit up with orbs of light on its outsides and entrances.

Upon closer inspection, I appraise that they're mana crystals imbued with my [Flash] skill inside large glass containment casings. It's an interesting idea I was thinking of trying, but it seems my double already tested this theory and it works quite well.

I make the motion to step inside the building because there is a very familiar mana reading waiting for me there. Once the door is opened, I'm greeted immediately by my body double rippling with black flames and wearing a mask.

He looks at me, then holds his gaze on Ember for much longer before speaking.

"I thought I'd be the one to show you a surprise, but it seems like we're both been very busy. I take it this is a perk of ranking up."

I nod, and my double turns to let us inside for a short tour.

Inside of the building, there's an even smaller octagon with 7 glass windows with slots to pay for goods and receive money for sold items, on the 8th wall there's a sturdy locked door. Each of the

stations is unmanned at the moment, but looks as if this place is being set up to run a large operation.

The rest of the room is completely empty. Ember and my footsteps echo in the wide-open well-lit halls, but I can picture its potential. I can see a future public gathering place filled with hunters, villagers, businessmen, tables, and bulletin boards with quests as we walk through.

I speak up to my double once we make it to the center room.

"The beginning of a Guild Hall, and one that will be very busy it seems. I like it."

My double unlocks the door into the center room. It's large and spacious enough for a team of up to 10 workers to work inside it without getting too cramped, but my attention turns to the spiral staircase leading upward.

My double looks up too.

"Those floors are empty for now, the middle floor was planned to be sectioned off for offices while the top floor is left for you as a working study."

The double's flames die down for a moment and he reaches into his item storage to pull out the small silver tablet that controls the underground lair, then hands it to me.

"I think doing this will explain things a lot faster than showing you around the place."

As I take the tablet from my double, it points a finger at its forehead and instantly falls to the floor and begins to dissolve into pure mana.

A rush of memories come back to me, and I relive the past few hours in an instant.

From my double's point of view earlier today, I see the awestruck looks of the 20 grunts in the middle of the square as they see my body double descend from the sky after killing their leaders and taking on the 6 dark entities of unknown power.

Next, the memories of my double forcing each of the higher-level grunts to drink the same [Elixir of Suggestion] that they fed to these slave workers. It's only right to give them a taste of their own medicine.

Some of them resisted at first, but I gave them the option of death or taking another dose.

All of them fell in line shortly after. It doesn't matter if they praised me for taking down their leaders and opening their eyes to the charade. They may have followed orders from me regardless, but each and every one of them participated in forcing innocents to work until their hands bled and minds broke.

So, they will face the same fate.

Over the next few hours, I watched and ordered all of the grunts to collect and sort the valuable materials and goods and bring them to the center of town.

Meanwhile, I managed to create a weaker version of the [Full Restore] potions using high-quality C-Grade HP potions and imbuing them with my self-regeneration skill. The result of this craft is called a [Regeneration Potion]. It heals all minor wounds instantly and nullifies any toxic substances in the bloodstream.

Many of the workers were restless and craving more of the original elixir when I found them due to its addictive nature, but after a single [Regeneration Potion] every last one of them broke free from the curse.

However, this doesn't mean they're fully healed. Many are mentally and physically exhausted from many weeks or even months of nonstop work and torture. I have no idea the extent of madness they've been through, so I just make it top priority to give them all stable food and shelter, then figure out their futures once they've recovered.

One by one, I brought all of the groups ranging from 10-30 workers each into the town square.

Many of the shops and structures near the center of the square have residential housing above them or nearby.

I used access to the dungeons in the canyon to stack up on mattresses, pillows, blankets, necessary sanitary products, clean clothing, and higher quality food and water supplies.

All in all, it only took about an hour to shop, and cost under a hundred gold total at the supermarkets back in Solara, Vice City, and even one back in my small hometown to get enough materials and not take too much from any one store. Considering the stash of gold and high-grade items left behind in the underground bunker, this is a small price to pay.

I used my earth magic and crafting skills to make lighting fixtures throughout the center of the city and fixed all structural damages caused by my fights or the past dealings in the city before I came.

Minor fixes, supplies, and item sorting, along with miscellaneous grunt work are done by the 20 strong C-Class rated slave drivers turned slaves themselves under my command. They are to report back to the middle of the town every 4 hours to give written reports and consume more elixir until I'm satisfied they've paid their price.

Once this process started to reach its end, and many of the rescued workers found a place to call home for the night, I began working on constructing a base in the center of the town where all can come for information, hired work, and purchasing goods.

The guildhall's outer-layer of construction came to a stable point of my liking just as the sun began to set.

Then, my real body and Ember arrived.

My past memories stop here once my double kills itself in front of me.

I let out a light gasp as I take in all this new knowledge rushing into me, then click the silver tablet to open a hatch in the floor leading down into the mana shielded bunker below.

"It seems I've been very busy... but there is a lot more to do. Come on, let's begin the preparations."

Chapter 459

I walk down the narrow spiral stairs into the mana-shielded basement but decide not to close the hatch above me.

With my most recent boost in mana control, I'm able to get a better reading of this A-Grade Mana Shielding. With all of my skills and mana control on full blast, I'm sure I could see through it now, but it's not worth the trouble.

Leaving an opening allows me to use enemy detection and my all-seeing eye on a vast area around the town without having to stress my senses.

Once I make it down to the bottom, the middle wall is up, making it feel like an empty white-walled room. I press the tablet setting to open the wall to reveal what's on the other side.

The center table where the green and red armored gang leaders used to sit lies empty in the center of the rectangular half of the room. On the far wall, there are dozens of High C-Grade and some B-Grade items and materials lined up, and their stats noted down on sheets of paper.

Beside these, I see piles of gold, silver, and bronze coins are sorted in large crates.

Then lastly, in a pile of its own is the fractured black armor of the Dark Guards I fought earlier today, none of them give off any mana readings, they just look like black shattered junk metal. However, in a neat pile in front of the shredded up armor is a small bowl with 5 glowing orbs inside that show up with [Wraith's Essence Stone][Hidden Passive Ability] reading with various Mental strength buffs between 170 and 210% on each of them.

Next to the damaged goods and black cores from the hearts of the wraiths, there's a suit fully intact, and it's the one that was worn by the 7th ranked Dark Guard. Even after death, the only readings I manage to see on this armor set say [??? Access Denied].

Ember peruses the other items and closely inspects the mana shielding walls while I walk over to these artifacts.

The closer I examine the armor set that's still intact, the more curious I get. Even using my craftsmanship skill to try and examine portions of the armor, or imbue it with skills of my own, the set doesn't give any extra readings other than [??? Access Denied].

I try to push my perception skill further, but all it shows me once maxed out is that it's a normal piece of metal.

My best guess is the armor is similar to a blood-bonded weapon with a concealment perk. Once crafted and bonded with a user, it's worthless to everyone else that tries to manipulate it or put it on.

However, I'm still optimistic that I can get some kind of data from it at a later date. So, I open up my item storage portal and let the entire armor set fall inside. For the sake of it, I let the trashed sets of the lower level wraiths fall into my storage too but leave their cores for further use.

I use telekinesis to lift the 5 dark orbs into the air above my hand, and activate my craftsmanship skill to get a better look at my options.

The last Wraith Essence I merged with my cloak significantly raised its stats and added a hidden ability to it, so I see no better place to put the remainder of these cores as well. As I ponder this fact, the 5 cores that slowly spin around each other push me toward a new option on my craftsmanship window called [Merge].

Usually, items have maxed out in receiving new merging ingredients and imbued skills at around 3 to 4 power-up imbuements per craft. Some with higher material ratings can take more, and some with lower ratings take less.

I already gave my cloak a few upgrades, and I'm not sure how many more it can take before it hits its max. However, with this [Merge] setting and the fact that they're all the same or similar base item gives me the idea that I may be able to bypass this limit.

I press [Merge] and the 5 orbs of energy fall toward each other in a flash of white light. The result floats in my hand and looks like a massive dark orb of mana but gives off an impressive reading that makes me grin.

[Greater Wraith's Essence Stone][+260% Mental Strength][Hidden Passive Ability]

"Might as well blood bond it while I'm at it." I whisper under my breath while opening up a gash in my wrist and pouring out blood into an empty glass bottle from one of the nearby piles of C-Grade items.

Then, I merge the new Essence stone along with 8oz of my blood with my cloak to give it another massive upgrade.

---

Cloak of Total Darkness[+179% Mental Strength][+155% Agility][+75% Perception][Hidden Passive Ability][Concealment Attribute]

If you spot this narrative on Amazon, know that it has been stolen. Report the violation.

>

Cloak of Total Darkness[+270% Mental Strength][+198% Agility][+130% Perception][Blood Bonded][Hidden Passive Ability][Concealment Attribute]

---

While instantly regenerating and healing the lost blood, I scroll through my newly upgraded status and see that in ranking up, I've gained access to 3 more item slots.

I join Ember in appraising and sifting through the newly looted gear, but nothing strikes my fancy just yet.

What comes to mind is the Colossal clear stone in my inventory and the potential loot that may fall from the lightning wolf in my storage once I let it fully dissolve. These are two legitimate A-Grade items that will make for worthy new gear to fill these slots. I just need to find sturdy enough A-Grade materials that can handle the imbuelement.

I'm sure I'll discover some soon.

With the interesting loot out of the way, and Ember beginning to lose interest in the bunker, I create a body double and turn to the crimson-haired form of the fire dragon.

"Getting bored already?"

He smiles and nods in response.

"Yes, meeting your friend Arie was quite entertaining. However right now, I feel my time is better spent sleeping, training, or fighting. I know you enjoy playing with these trinkets but it doesn't give me the same rush."

My double walks over to him, and I open my storage to transfer over my remaining black fire stones as well as the isolation pod I've been charging up all this time. Then, I speak up.

"Well, how about you and this double go check on my other double farming in the labyrinth. Take the fire stones it farms and search out another rogue dungeon in the desert to store more energy into this pod and collapse the dungeon when you're done."

Ember's grin and interest return, so I continue and motion for them to exit together and have their fun.

"I need a few more hours to work on a special crafting and construction project here, so get your fill of mana and dungeon destruction all you want. Even test your new skills out on the 39th floor if you please. Just be sure to come back in less than 4 or 5 hours. That's when the arena event should be finishing up in Valor City. If my double and teammates aren't back by then, we're going to have to go and get them ourselves."

The two of them agree to my point and walk toward the exit. Ember conceals his mana presence entirely, and my double uses stealth to cover its overwhelming mana control aura.

Then a moment later, I'm left in the empty silence of the underground bunker.

My vision turns to the piles of gold, silver, and bronze coins. I get to work and begin counting them with my all-seeing eye and mana manipulation. By letting raw mana seep into each of the crates and imbuing each coin with a small amount of energy, I can feel each individual one and get an instant tally.

I find 318 gold coins, 2,905 silver coins, and 13,449 bronze coins.

All in all, it's a hidden fortune, but after my haul of over 65 platinum bars from the arena back in Valor City, I've become quite desensitized to these riches. All of the crates of coins here don't even amount to a fraction of what I managed to earn in just a few days of fighting.

However, it's more than enough to begin my plan.

I pull out a massive pile of mana crystals from my farming earlier today to use as fuel for these crafts and one by one use small amounts of fire magic, earth magic, and mana manipulation to reshape the front and back marking on many of these coins.

On one side, I craft the simple emblem of fire, and on the other side, the silhouette of a dragon.

After each molten craft is complete, I imbue each coin with my body hardening skill, making the coins as unbreakable as my legendary grade body hardening backed by the mana control of a level 1000 hunter. They look exactly the same, gold, silver, or bronze, but cannot be broken, damaged, or manipulated unless whoever is doing so has higher mana control than my own.

To make sure no replicas can be made, I add a special item name to each one: [Bronze Flame Emperor's Coin], [Silver Flame Emperor's Coin], and [Gold Flame Emperor's Coin].

In the hidden crafter's notes of each coin, I leave a simple two-letter signature: "FE".

Unless a hunter with the mythic grade craftsmanship skill goes in and edits my notes, I'll be the only one able to see this.

So, if by chance someone manages to create a similar coin with a similar name, it still has a hidden level of security beneath it.

The process of imbuing and marking each coin goes by faster than I'd first planned. With careful precision and accuracy of my perception and movement speed skills, I'm capable of doing many coins at a time, and many crafts per second.

It takes just over 3 hours to finish up making 300 gold coins, 2,500 silver coins, and 10,000 bronze coins. There are 3,872 miscellaneous leftover coins remaining, but I place them aside in an unused pile. I want a clean number to start with to make sure I can keep track of things easier in the future.

Once this task is complete, I sit back on one of the chairs at the table looking at my work with a satisfied sigh, carefully placing piles of the shimmering newly branded coins all into my item storage for safekeeping, along with the old miscellaneous coins too.

My gaze hovers over all the C and B-grade gear for a few moments, then, I sense the presence of 20 grunts approaching the guildhall.

"Looks like it's time for their re-up."

I grab a small crate of Mind Control Elixir and activate my concealment disguise to cover my body in black flames in the shape of a suit, then walk up the spiral stairs to meet with my new unpaid workers.

As I close the hatch to the bunker and walk out the front door to see all 20 men mindlessly stare forward at me in a single file line, yet another odd feeling comes over me.

The sensation of being watched hits my subconscious.

Immediately I use my enemy detection skill along with a large burst of my all-seeing eye throughout the entire town to pinpoint where it's coming from.

In my mind's eye, I get the picture of bright light blue glowing eyes staring at me from over half a kilometer away from the rooftop of one of the safehouses crafted to house the recovering innocent workers.

I see the face of the young woman that was being controlled by Finn, the grunt with the [Bind] ability.

Her level and skill pop up from my appraisal skill showing [Lv. 267] and [Moonlight's Gaze], confirming she's definitely the same woman as before when I first showed up in this town.

Then, just as I finish my scan and turn to the direction she's watching me from, her eyes stop glowing blue and she ducks down behind a pile of building materials on the rooftop.

Chapter 460

I expand my all-seeing eye's visual range and watch the woman with the unique skill slip away back into one of the houses, quickly moving away from my gaze.

The thought of flying over there and confronting her about her skill and why she was watching me crosses my mind, but it would make sense why she would be curious and want to see what the mysterious man in the flaming suit that took over their captor's operation is doing.

That's what perception skills are for; she might as well use it if she can. It's not like I'm doing anything I don't want her or any of the others to see. So, I'll leave her be.

I do a quick scan of all the rescued workers in the surrounding safe houses and find that half are asleep, many are restless, and others are huddled together and talking to each other in small groups.

Most of them have average basic skills like swordsmanship, dagger arts, and various speed or strength buffs, but a few have interesting unique skills, and even 3% or so have some kind of elemental ability.

Everyone is very low level and won't be useful to me in the immediate future, but I'm looking forward to talking to each and every one of them once the sun rises tomorrow.

Letting out a sigh, I deactivate my scanning senses and turn my attention back to the grunts.

"Now for you 20, I have some labor for you to do. Drink up, then follow me. We're building a road."

I use telekinesis to give each of them very small vials of a highly potent bottle of elixir to drink, and they gulp them down without batting an eye and follow just as I ask. As we walk, I ask a few of them to search the looted warehouses we pass on the way to get 20 empty wooden carts because they'll be carrying a few things for me.

Once we get to the edge of town where the stone road stops, we face in the direction of the canyon.

There's a long and winding narrow pathway, only visible to my advanced eyesight in the dark of night. Even in daylight, it's not much of a path, so if I want this to be better for high volume travel, I need to make it myself.

I begin replicating the technique my body double used earlier to make the dimly glowing orbs of light that are fixed on every corner of the inner city.

It's a combination of many kinds of magic. I use earth magic to lift small balls of sand up into the air, fire magic to turn them all into molten material, then a combination of wind and water magic to blow the molten sand into glass and cool it into a sphere shape that stays solid.

Once this process is complete, I take a single high-grade mana crystal and place it inside. Then, imbue both the materials with my [Flash] skill to make the mana crystal glow dimly.

With the small output of light compared to my actual flash skill, the mana usage isn't immense, but the makeshift mana bulbs will run out of energy eventually. All I have to do to recharge them is feed the item another mana crystal, or imbue some of my own mana inside.

It's a design in progress. I may come up with better lighting ideas in the future, but these are perfect for now.

Once I make about 100 glowing orbs of light and set them neatly in the sand nearby, I turn to the 20 men behind me and give them another order.

"Follow behind me as I make this road."

I pause, using my earth summoning skill again, and placing hundreds of kilograms worth of stone in the back of every one of the grunts' wooden carts.

"As I make the road, I need all of you to stress test it for me. There is going to be a lot of traffic on this path. I want to make sure it's ready."

With a smirk, I float up into the air, carrying all 100 orbs of light around me using telekinesis.

I activate my earth summoning skill again and begin creating a 5 meter wide stone pathway through the desert.

Every 20 meters or so, I sculpt a stone pillar and place a glowing orb on top of it, using liquid stone to glue the bottom of each orb in place. The pillars are crafted on alternating sides and stand about 4 meters high.

Behind me, I hear the heavy carts of the grunts creaking as they follow behind me all the way to the canyon's edge.

I look down into the darkness and another idea sparks up in my mind.

The same glass blowing process is used to craft many more orbs of light while the grunts continue to make their way toward me.

Once over 100 more orbs are created, the grunts finally make it to me and I give them another order.

"Turn around and walk the road again. Once you get to the town, turn around and come back. I want you to walk back and forth on this roadway until I tell you to stop."

The moment they hear me, the group of mindless grunts turns around and begins their trek back with carts full of heavy stone.

I lift the many orbs up in the air and begin building more winding pathways down into the canyon full of dungeons.

This tale has been unlawfully lifted from Royal Road; report any instances of this story if found elsewhere.

Each one of the dungeons has a stone tablet crafted beside it by my double showing the loot drops, approximate level, and monster type beside every dungeon.

I build pathways that end right before the entrance portal of each one, and light the way with more and more of the white orbs, illuminating the canyon.

I'm sure these paths will be a little less traveled, but I still want to make them sturdy.

They are roughly 2 meters wide, and orbs are placed on shorter stone pillars every 40 meters or so. The natural blue glow of the portals lights up the regions close to the dungeons themselves, so I don't need to use quite as many lights as I first thought.

The only 7 dungeons I decide not to connect the pathway to are the 6 breaks for safety reasons, and the single B-Grade dungeon that is very deep down in the canyon because I want to keep that one for myself away from prying eyes.

Once finished connecting every single one, I contemplate telling the grunts to stop their mindless stress test so I can assess the damage, but decide against it because I have one more thing I'd like to check on.

I slip inside one of the closest blue portals nearby, then dungeon walk back into the Vice City Labyrinth's 40th floor.

Coming in on full alert with all my buffs activated, sword drawn, and Qi flowing through it, I'm ready for anything. However, my worst-case scenario theories don't come true.

I'm left in an empty dirt pit.

All of the burn marks and holes blasted in the ground from my battle against the lightning wolf have completely disappeared and have automatically regenerated. However, the room feels unusually stagnant and cold, as if time has stopped and it's waiting for a trigger to be pulled.

The odd sensation of transport magic lingers in the air, like it's about to activate, but something is stopping it from occurring.

I scan the boss room and slowly walk around in circles trying to see if there's anything new I can find, then let out a sigh and open my item storage.

"It's about time I got this loot. I knew something was up with this floor... I'd like to find out what's going on here."

I let the deceased wolf's body fall onto the dirt floor, and less than half a minute later, its mana begins to disperse into the boss room and dissolve.

Four objects are left behind in the creature's place: a large pink mana crystal about the size of my head is one of them, and a half-transparent yellow stone with large arcs of electricity coming off of it drops next to it of similar size.

I open up a storage portal on the ground beneath the items and get a reading on the small black stone and large white tooth that fall inside next to the crystals.

[40th-Floor Boss Identification Core 0248]

[Wolf Guardian's Fang][+265% Mental Strength][+258% Speed][Lightning Attribute]

As soon as they fall inside, the lingering feeling of transport magic in the air resumes, and I feel my body become enveloped in white light.

Once the flash subsides, my vision goes black.

My non-visual perception skills pick up a deep winding cave system with narrow tunnels, dripping water, and even large caverns, but I don't sense a single living being.

My objective here isn't to stick around long; I just wanted to get the 40th-floor trial completed and get access to teleport to the 41st floor whenever I wish.

The instant I begin to activate my dungeon walker skill to leave, I feel something strong and sharp piercing through every layer of my mana shielding, Qi barrier, and armored defenses to sink deep into my stomach with no warning at all.

Even as the weapon comes out the other side of my body, I can't sense or see at all where it's come from.

It doesn't matter; I dungeon walk back to the 40th floor less than a tenth of a second later.

I cough up blood while regenerating my wound and armor, trying to figure out what that was and where it came from. My appraisal and enemy detection skills were active, yet I didn't see the attack coming nor did I even get a glimpse of who sent it.

I stand to my feet once fully healed, then look to the sky of the empty dirt pit. A huge countdown timer can be seen floating in the sky.

[29:23:59:41]

"A 30-day cooldown timer, huh? Well, at least I have access to the higher floors..."

I dungeon walk back to the 39th, then 38th, then all the way through each layer between here and the 30th until I find my double farming away at mana crystals while it waits for the minotaurs to respawn.

It transfers its inventory into my storage, and I kill it on the spot, creating another copy to go check out the 41st floor for me and see what it can find.

Less than a second later, the memory of it teleporting into the darkness and being stabbed multiple times in the stomach then decapitated comes rushing back to me.

I send another double, and the same thing happens.

I perform well over a dozen more tests, and no matter where I send the double into that boss room, I can never sense the enemy, and can never survive longer than a second to survey the landscape.

"Seems like I'm just not strong enough for whatever is up there... the 41st floor will have to wait for another day..."

Another copy is formed, and it goes back to farming mana crystals and waiting for the minotaurs to continue feeding my other double and Ember stones for the isolation pod.

Meanwhile, I dungeon walk back to the dungeon nearest to the canyon's exit and make my way back to the stone road to meet up with the grunts that continue their stress test on my stonework.

I slowly hover above the grunts and watch them work for another hour.

The eeriness of the 41st floor leaves the front of my mind as I become very satisfied with my new project's results.

Mid-way through my process of assessing the grunts, I get the feeling of being watched by the same woman in the town, even from nearly 2 kilometers away. It's a far weaker feeling, but I'm impressed that at below level 300 she's able to sense me out this far.

I don't mind that she's watching and let the tests continue.

No cracks have formed in the roads, and the carts are able to be pulled very smoothly. The lighting fixtures are far enough to the sides of the roads that they don't impede travel, and they are bright enough that even in the dead of night the entire pathway is lit up completely.

Eventually, Arie comes walking over from the Abyss covered in sweat and grinning ear to ear.

He waves me down and shouts out.

"I did it. I mastered the Demonic Energy crescent. Just like the one you showed me this morning."

I can tell he's very happy with his new power, but also he looks exhausted. I let down my flaming disguise to look more natural to show him my unconcealed face and reply.

"That's good, I'm glad you achieved it without any major setbacks. I'll be waiting here conducting some tests throughout the night and staying on watch duty. Feel free to take a rest and look around the town until my double gets back with-"

Once these words leave my mouth, I sense 6 figures appear out of thin air deep below the canyon.

One of them is my double, and two of them show up as clear as day on my Rising Emperor's Domain perk.

I point downward into the dimly lit canyon as they all begin to make their way up.

"Never mind. Perfect timing... It seems our long awaited guests have finally arrived."

Abby, Maria, Fisher, Lydia, and Monk all walk up the stone pathway with confusing expressions on their faces.

The emotions that pour off them are mixtures of fear, excitement, confusion, and anger.

The first words I hear any of them say come from Maria's lips.

"We barely got away... Jay, we need to prepare for battle. The Dark One knows we're here, and its Guards are coming to declare war."