

D. Diver 491

Chapter 491

The massive arachnid monster falls into the ravine with its two severed limbs by its side.

Both Abby and Arie follow it downward with their weapons poised to kill.

The tendrils of purple Soul Energy still violently pierce through Abby's vital points, but they phase through her heart, head, and stomach as if nothing is hitting her at all.

The bright light green glow of her [Form of the Immortal Healer] ensures her physical body cannot take any damage at all.

Everything the spider throws at her feels like nothing but a passing breeze as Abby gets closer and closer with her glowing green spear of manifested rock raised above her head. She is in the perfect striking range but hasn't released any attacks just yet.

Behind her, less than 20 meters away, Arie charges up another one of his golden arrows.

This is the attack that severed two of its limbs before and left a large gaping hole in the monster's side.

He yells out as all three of them fall into the darkness of the ravine and approach the depths of the desert floor deep below.

"I have another attack ready! Abby! Give me some room to let it fly!"

She continues taking hits from the spider and forcing it to retreat downward. The monster is only moving away to avoid being stabbed through with the enormous glowing spear. However, Abby yells back with an unexpected reply.

"Shoot it now if you have the shot. Right through me!"

Arie's eyes widen at these words, but he doesn't hesitate to release the tension of the shimmering string holding the golden arrow.

The only thing between Arie and the spider's main body is the 6 Soul Energy threads and Abby.

The shimmering arrow rips through the air, then makes a direct hit with Abby's back, just as she asked.

Like all of the Soul Energy attacks from the monster, this too phases through her without shifting her form at all.

The golden arrow comes out of Abby's green glowing chest and shatters all of the purple tendrils that attack her without even breaking the golden outer shell.

It rockets down toward the spider's main body, and it reacts by directing its remaining limbs and energy threads to block just as it did before.

Abby takes this moment free from the arachnid's merciless attacks to jump to the opposite side of its body and her bright green energy form begins to flicker and pulse.

She deactivates the [Form of the Immortal Healer] and throws the stone spear covered in her offensive Soul Energy directly at the other side of the spider's body.

The golden arrow's outer shell begins to melt away and tear through two more of the creature's remaining arms before leaving another enormous hole in its side.

The creature begins to screech and cry while blood gushes out from it, then is speared all the way through with a green glowing weapon. Another two of its remaining limbs are sliced away in this attack, leaving only one limb remaining on each side.

It directs one of its last purple threads of Soul Energy at the woman who floats right above her head, pulling enchanted daggers from her sides.

As Abby releases two slashes of pure Soul Energy directed at the spider's head, a final two threads of purple energy with all of the 3rd ranked Dark Guard's remaining strength are thrust forward. One is aimed at her chest. It breaks through the soul energy shielding and creates an explosion of energy that pushes the spider down further into the ravine and Abby back up into the air.

The other purple thread aims for Arie, but it is further away so he has time to react, sending spirit and demonic arrows its way to slow it down.

The collision of Abby's two full-powered Soul Energy slashes makes contact with the creature's head and slices its brain into four even pieces in an X pattern, then rips through its main body as well, melting through its organs and piercing its heart.

The moment this attack makes contact and finishes slicing through, Abby reactivates her [Form of the Immortal Healer] buff and her body glows bright green again, unable to be injured by the aftereffects of the purple tendril of Soul Energy thread following her upward through the sky.

Arie, on the other hand, has shot over 3 of each of his arrows at the last remaining thread, yet it hasn't even shrunk to half of its size.

He fends it off as much as he can, but at the rate of its upward momentum, it is aimed to hit his heart before he'll be able to fully take it out.

A loud echoing thud can be heard at the bottom of the ravine, at the same time, Arie manages to release a partially formed golden arrow that shifts the trajectory of the final thread. It shifts away from his heart and pierces through his stomach instead.

He coughs up blood while level-up notifications ring in Abby's inner ear. The purple Soul Energy thread begins to fade entirely as the life of the 3rd Ranked Dark Guard fades away.

At the same time, Abby activates her first-ranked-up buff, [Area of Total Restoration] to spread a green aura around her over 100m in diameter, engulfing Arie inside it as they're both blasted upward by the violent explosion of purple energy from the bottom of the ravine.

The calming warm veil of Abby's healing magic washes over him as the hole in his stomach is restored almost instantaneously, and a wave of satisfaction washes over him.

He smiles and looks above to see Abby's bright green form.

"We did it..."

She replies as the upward momentum begins to slow.

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"We did. That was quite the impressive shot. I wouldn't have had the opening to take it out so easily without the help of those golden arrows. I can't use any offensive attacks while in this Immortal Form, that went perfectly..."

Arie nods, then lets out a sigh and closes his eyes, allowing the green healing magic to completely take over his body. The enormous arm manifestations carrying the three bows on his back shrink back into his core and he lets her heal the rest of his fatigue as they continue to fly upward out of the dark ravine.

—

Above the mountain range on the other side of the battlefield another deadly exchange is taking place.

Monk is surrounded in a pure white Qi energy form, while his master has turned almost entirely orange.

Every exchange that they throw back and forth destroys more of the desert landscape, and releases more and more of each other's power.

The shockwaves they send off after each collision are enough to send cracks through the desert ground for over a kilometer away from each of their strikes.

Not to mention, when one of them lands a solid attack, the other is sent flying into the rock ground to create craters over 200 meters wide and nearly 30-50 meters deep.

The scale of their battle is only growing by the second. Both of them are breathing heavily, and have landed over 10 solid hits each.

It's clear they're both at their limit, and any new blow the other throws could be their last.

They are truly evenly matched.

Monk speaks up as the last remaining visible essence of white Qi energy is sucked away and taken over by the orange borrowed Soul energy of the Lich King.

"Again, I am honored I have had the chance to show you my true strength that I have gained from your teachings master. It is a shame I could not get to fight you when you are using your true power as well."

He clasps his hands together, and the white aura around him glows far brighter.

Two enormous white hands manifest in front of him. They seem to be over twenty times the size of the energy form they are both using to fight.

With blinding speed, the two hands, each larger than entire buildings, come together and clasp around the orange form of the Soul Energy infected Qi-master. It creates an ear-shattering crack that sends a shockwave so powerful through the air that it ripples through everyone floating in the sky and spreads out over 5 km in every direction.

All of the remaining mountains are leveled in an instant, and it seems near impossible for anything to survive a devastating blow like that.

On impact, the white hands hold steady for a few seconds, then begin to fade away.

The body of an old man falls through the sky, an unnoticeable gentle smile forms across his face while he falls into the rubble below, trailing a weak aura of orange soul energy and remnants of white Qi behind it.

A single tear falls down Monk's cheek as he bows in the air and returns to his base form.

After the death of the 3rd Ranked Dark Guard, and the desert-shifting crack that followed Monk's final attack, the remaining members of the 1st Dark Guard begin to step up their game.

The Guard with laser artifacts built into its arms turns to its side, watching the bright glowing form of their boss transform, then yells out to the one-armed club wielder.

"The Boss is already using his final form! And we just lost the Spider Queen. It's time to step things up. We cannot disappoint the Dark One any more than we already have!"

It shoots more high-powered laser beams down to distract Maria, making her dodge them all in the air unable to attack precisely at these high speeds.

The club user grunts and replies.

"Fine! I wanted to at least have some fun with this battle, but if you want me to finish things now I'll do it. Cover me."

The club user's body starts to glow just like the Boss. Its muscles shift and grow, and even the spiked club in its hands starts to vibrate and expand.

Maria sees this happening, but has no way to stop it as she is fully absorbed in dodging the barrage of lasers coming her way.

This spike club holder grows at a far faster rate than their boss, expanding over 5x in size in less than 5 seconds.

The white glow ceases and it towers over everything, still floating in the sky, but now over 15 meters tall.

Its arm is still missing, but the dark grey Soul Energy that covered its body before is now manifesting the image of an arm in its place so it can easily hold its club with both of its hands.

The enormous muscular humanoid cyclops lets out a murderous roar and charges toward the action.

The laser wielder lets out a laugh and retreats.

"That's it! Let her have it! Show this girl how strong the 1st ranked guard really is! If you can kill her before I level up to my final attack form I'll even give you some of my mass to make up for losing that damn arm of yours. Come on you brute, let me see what you can do!"

It roars again, not letting out any understandable words, but its speed and agility seem to have improved drastically as it zips through the air toward Maria.

It swings its spiked club like a bat and Maria has no time at all to dodge.

She activates her ranked-up buff [Ice Age] and swings her Soul Energy imbued sword back to block the deadly incoming strike, but to her utter surprise, the massive structure of ice is shattered in an instant.

The upgraded mental strength and immense dark grey Soul Energy that has been released in this final form is on a level far higher than it was moments ago.

The ice attack Maria threw could have easily taken off its other arm if it was launched just a few seconds earlier, however, now it is shattered and destroyed in an instant.

Maria's reaction time, agility, and speed were her primary advantage moments ago too, but now they are hardly even equal. This brute's speed outranks hers by almost twice as much as it lunges forward and swings its heavy club.

Her physical strength does not even stand a chance against competing either.

It was already at a lower state than this Guard before it upped itself to its final form, as Maria is hit by an unstoppable brick wall of force and rocketed backward over a full kilometer in the sky, she realizes she is going to need to bring her full power to the table as well to take on this mutated monster.

She coughs up blood while catching herself in the air and holding her sword steady, still looking 100% confident even after taking that brutal attack head-on.

As the club user speeds forward through the air, she whispers the name of her second ranked-up buff.

"Awakened Form of The Ice Goddess..."

The instant these words leave her lips, the entire battlefield shifts in temperature.

The troops far below on the battlefield shiver, and the entire sky looks as if it's been tinted in a veil of dark Royal Blue light.

Enormous amounts of swirling blue Soul Energy manifest from deep within Maria and begin to erupt outward to form the manifestation of a Goddess holding a long blue sword.

The manifestation of her goddess-like form grows just over 20 meters tall, towering above the approaching Dark Guard.

Her aura erupts outward like a semi-transparent blue sphere and collides with the aura of the approaching club user that roars in fury.

It swings its club at her, letting more of its dark aura seep from its body to strengthen the blow, while letting more orange soul energy cover the weapon itself to harden the metal.

Maria calmly stares forward with a cool icy gaze and swings her sword forward in a striking motion too.

As they collide, another shockwave multiple times stronger than the hands clasp of Monk's attack ripples through the sky, this travels tens of kilometers in every direction as the blue and grey soul energies show their incredible power.

However, this even clash does not last for long.

The cracking sound of metal breaking follows the shockwave, and the crackling sound of ice forming seeps its way down the club and onto the Dark Guard's body.

Not only is the creature's flesh frozen this time, but even the Soul Energy that swirls around it is frozen in place.

The enormous blue sword of the Ice Goddess's form breaks through the frozen club and shatters it to pieces while stabbing the monster in the chest, freezing its heart in an instant.

Blue ice takes over its entire body, moving quickly, and freezing all of the Soul Energy left along with any flesh that dares to move.

The massive green eye with a [1] labeled in its center turns to pure blue ice.

Maria twists her blade inside the monster's chest and its entire body shatters into shimmering icy glitter that falls down onto the desert battle below.

The sound of ringing level-up notifications echoes in her inner ear as she turns to face the other glowing and expanding creature to her side. It is manifesting a far more intelligent and dangerous aura than the club user she just killed in a single blow.

Chapter 492

Just over 200km away, back underneath the town, the dark red energy that seeps out from the final isolation pod begins to flow out at a much faster rate.

It is equal parts Qi and Mana, and they are so finely intertwined, they have almost become Soul Energy, but there is still a vital catalyst or energy level that is yet to be reached before the two combine.

However, this blood red energy does not just seep out of the pod and dissolve into the air and through the mana shielding in the room.

It stays surrounding the isolation pod, and slowly swirls around it in a circle as more energy seeps out to add to its mass.

Every second that passes, almost a full minute goes by inside, yet my main body is manipulating the energy that has seeped out of the pod and portions of it are coming back into the small cracks.

It is happening very slowly, but the released Qi and mana that is slipping out from the pod is being circulated back inside.

—

High in the sky above the battlefield, Maria turns to see the Dark Guard with silver laser fixtures on his arms grow many times in size.

Its muscles bulge and ripple beneath the veil of white light that surrounds it.

The armor on its chest and circular metallic cannons on its wrists glow bright orange and expand in size as well to match its new form.

The massive eye on its forehead grows to be the size of a normal human being, and its height reaches nearly 20 meters tall.

It stops glowing white and its true form is revealed.

It's thinner and far more agile-looking than its old form, and as it kicks off the air and zips around Maria in circles, it's clear that its speed and agility have received a major boost.

The heavy silver cannons on its wrists are vibrating and glowing bright orange.

It yells out at the same time both of them shoot out bright lasers of immensely strong Soul Energy in straight lines directly at the Ice Goddess's form.

"I am the fastest of all of the 1st Ranked Guards' forms. On top of that, my firepower is the greatest when I concentrate it in a single beam. Your advantages are gone. You may have killed my ally, but it is only a matter of time before I get my revenge and receive another gift from the Dark One after killing a specimen like you."

He lets out a manic laugh while the energy beams collide with Maria's long Royal Blue Manifested sword.

Her awakened form pulses with Soul Energy being channeled through it, and the majority of its concentration focuses on her blade to block these incoming beams. This lessens her defenses everywhere else, but releases a magnificent wave of blue and orange energy as she blocks the incoming attacks.

The beams are dispersed and flood out to the sides of her blade like hot lava as shockwaves ripple through the air.

The Dark Guard takes this opportunity to shift its position and send in two more fully charged beams at her opposite side.

Maria's awakened form shifts its body and uses the same sword motions to block the two new attacks coming in as well with everything she's got.

Another two attacks come from above the moment she blocks these too.

A game of endurance ensues.

The Laser user witnessed Maria's raw power when it killed the club user with a single blow. It is far too intelligent and agile to be caught up in a trap like that after seeing the aftermath of its first victim.

However, their Soul Energy Strength when concentrated into a single point seems to be nearly even.

After just over a dozen separate attacks from a safe distance away, every single one of them is reflected away by Maria's blade and her icy gaze doesn't leave the Dark Guard for a moment.

She hasn't had a chance to attack back herself yet, but is waiting for the perfect time to strike.

The Laser user is waiting in just the same manner.

Her deflections and guarding tactics are flawless, the only way for it to possibly get a more powerful shot off now would be to charge up for longer or get in closer.

Both options would give Maria enough time to send the attack off when she wants to.

They are both very aware of this, but neither wants to test the waters and get hit by the other's attack.

That is, until a metallic roar fills the air and sends impossibly strong waves of intimidation rippling through the sky.

Out of the corner of Maria's eye, she spots the bright white light starting to fade away from the other remaining Dark Guard with its long silver sword facing Ember in the distance.

It has almost reached its final form as well.

This completely changes the mood of the battle, the laser user even speaks up full of confidence while sending its last attack.

"I may be the fastest, and I may have the most precise pinpoint accuracy with my energy attacks, but I assure you, my raw strength and battle intelligence are unmatched by the Boss. Once I'm done with you, I'll pick up the scraps of whatever is left of your friend—"

Maria's blue sword clashes with these energy attacks, but this time because of the Guard's overconfidence taking a moment to speak, she has enough time to move her awakened form out of the way from one of the beams of energy.

It buzzes loudly while it barely misses her left leg and her blade blocks the remaining attack.

However, she has enough energy remaining after only blocking one beam to send a crescent of her own Soul Energy flying back this time.

The monster's eye widens as it doesn't have enough time to charge its own lasers back up to full power or dodge completely.

The icy blue crescent collides with its right foot, crystallizing it and the grey soul energy around it instantly. The blue aura starts to creep up its leg until a bright blast of orange lasers fill the sky.

It lunges forward, pointing one cannon at its leg and other pointed at the open portion of Maria's side below where her sword just swung.

Two lower powered laser beams shot on short notice are fired off.

One blows off the Dark Guard's own leg, preventing the Icy Soul Energy from spreading while the other cuts a semicircle hole in the side of Maria's Goddess's lower stomach.

Her main body controlling the energy manifestation is damaged, and a chunk of flesh is ripped from her side while she coughs up blood.

However, her opponent just moved in far too close for comfort, panicking, and left itself wide open, not to mention crippling itself by slowing down its only advantage.

Blowing off its leg to save it from the spreading ice may have saved its life in the short term, but now it can't run away quite as fast.

Maria brings her sword down to create another slashing motion while the Dark Guard tries to backpedal.

It manifests a grey Soul Energy leg to replace its lost flesh, but during this process, it has to charge up its orange energy cannons to attempt blocking one of Maria's incoming slashes.

In a fraction of a second mishap, she's turned this entire battle around putting this Dark Guard on the defensive and takes control.

It uses the full power of its beams to disperse the incoming wave of energy, but isn't prepared for the second crescent coming from its blind spot.

It fires off two more hopeless attacks, aimed at the blurry blue figure that has guaranteed its demise.

One of the final lasers hits the Goddess's leg, making a small semicircle hole in Maria's flesh again, while the other beam goes flying off into the open air.

She doesn't even bat an eye, because the crescent that is rocketing at the Dark Guard now cannot be stopped, blocked, or avoided.

She whispers. "It's over."

The creature with the most precise attacks, and greatest speed in the entire Dark One's army, has lost.

It has never had to run.

It has never had to defend from attacks it cannot perceive.

It has never met anyone or anything other than the Dark One itself with enough power to overcome its overwhelming battle strategies.

"A single mistake... and I lost. I was not perfect... No... I was not strong enough. I guess that is what it takes to win. Undeniable strength, or, Perfection."

The second blade hits it from behind and the icy darkness takes over.

The energy in its laser ceases to charge as its arms become stiff.

Its heart stops beating as the blood in its veins becomes as hard as rock.

Its vision fades to blue, then to black as its eye freezes over.

All of the Soul Energy in its being fights to stop the freeze, but it feels like bringing a candle into a raging blizzard.

No matter how much it tries to melt away, the depthless icy force of nature takes over and plunges this Dark Guard into the Abyss of death.

The Soul Energy slash cuts right through its armor and body, turning it completely to ice and shattering into glitter on the spot.

Blood gushes from Maria's leg and side where she was hit with the monster's beams, but a smile stays on her face as the level-up notifications ring in her inner ear.

She covers the wounds with dense Soul Energy to stop the bleeding, and turns to the final battle that is about to take place far away in the sky.

The final Dark Guard that carries a long silver sword continues to grow in size beneath the white glow.

It hits 10 meters in height, but doesn't stop there.

Even reaching 20 meters. This is when the white glow fades away, and the creature beneath it lets out a roar.

However, this isn't where the monster stops growing.

It reaches over 30 meters in height, towering high in the sky, covered in a dense layer of grey Soul Energy so dark it almost looks black.

The silver sword it carried before has expanded in size to fit its new form that is over 10 times as large as the original. An aura of orange soul energy vibrates around this sword so dense and strong, it feels as if the entire blade is wrapped in the laser beams that erupted from the guard that was just killed moments ago.

It finally stops growing and points its sword down at Ember who calmly watches it take its final form.

He stands with the same emotionless expression, and has even put his red energy sword down by his side, but the Soul Energy coming from his being has doubled in density since the battle started, almost like the faucet of power is opening inside him.

An echoing voice comes from the monstrous 1st ranked guard's mouth as it declares battle against Ember below him.

"Do you dare to defy the orders of the Up and coming Demon Lord's strongest Subordinate? Whatever you are, you cannot match my final form in battle. Show me your true form, Dragon. I want to show the Dark One that even creatures of legend can fall to my sword."

Ember crosses his arms and looks up at the orange-coated silver blade, that is over 10 times his human form's size.

"You want to see my true form?"

He pauses for a moment, then shrugs, putting his red energy sword up in the air to match the giant cyclops.

"No. I don't think I will. A mere servant of the Lich King isn't worthy of seeing my final battle form."

His aura pulses Dark Red, letting even more Soul Energy flow out from an invisible core. Then he speaks in a nonchalant manner while his body starts to grow.

"However, you aren't too weak. I'll give you props for the power you've managed to gain on your own. I'll use a new battle form I've been meaning to test out. You'll be a good punching bag."

The final Dark Guard yells in rage, making the dark soul energy around him twist and swirl. The orange light on the silver sword looks almost as bright as a sun, and the monster pulls the blade back to ready a swing.

"You dare mock me! You are arrogant enough to face me without using your full dragon form? How dare you even try!"

Energy surges off the enormous giant in the sky as it lunges forward with speed that doesn't seem physically possible in such an enormous frame.

Its silver blade leaves a dense trail of Soul Energy behind as it rockets down toward Ember.

Once it makes contact, there is a bright white glow and an eruption of Red and Orange that collide.

The sound of energy colliding this time sounds like space itself is tearing apart with their clash.

The bright white light fades away, and Ember holds his bright red energy manifested sword against the silver and orange blade coming down on him.

However, he looks very different.

Ember has grown almost 3x in size.

Part of his body is covered in black glossy scales, while other portions are shielded in blood red manifested Soul Energy Armor.

A long pointed tail comes from his back, and so do a set of dark wings proportional to his larger body.

It is a human-dragon hybrid form, and the energy being released from his Soul Energy core has grown magnitudes in power.

He still has arms, legs, a human body, and a human face, but many features have shifted to be dragonoid in nature. I wasn't aware of this form at all. It must be a perk he's kept hidden from one of his rank ups, or had been capable of doing all along. Every time he's been in his dragon form in the past, anyone that has seen it has been killed on the spot. If this is a step down from his true dragon form, I'm incredibly curious to see what he looks like now that he's ranked up a second time. Ember has awakened a tier of energy level beyond anything I've ever seen.

In a fraction of a second, he transformed and stopped the enormous monster's incoming blade with nothing but a Soul Energy manifested sword of his own.

Ember shows a toothy grin, flaps his wings, then swings his sword upward to release a bright red slash of Soul Energy that sends the silver sword upward and pushes the Dark Guard back with a look of fear in its eyes.

Ember flies forward without hesitating at all, swinging his manifested blade across his body and letting it clash over and over with the enormous silver sword.

The Dark Guard is pushed back over and over, and it looks like Ember is just toying with it.

Every slash he throws seems to be pulling from a deeper pool of power.

It's impossible to tell if Ember has been holding back this whole time, or if this is a direct cause of my main body absorbing energy and having an awakening while Ember fights.

The Guard yells out while being pushed back further away from the battlefield.

"Impossible. How- How are you getting stronger? I can see one's true strength with a single gaze. At the start of our battle, I was guaranteed to win. Yet, this power... Where is it coming from? Who are you, really?"

Ember continues to mercilessly attack the giant, pushing him far off into a desolate portion of the desert while staring through its soul with his crimson eyes, then finally responds.

"I thought you were the Strongest in the Dark Continent. Mr. Number 1? You're going to kill us all? The Lich King will save you, won't he?"

Ember swings his blade with another surge of new power.

This time as it collides with the silver sword, the metal cracks and shatters into pieces, sending the Dark Guard flying back again, this time rocketing toward the empty desert floor.

Ember dives down to follow the Guard's descent, his crimson blade grows larger and larger, glowing so bright red that it fills the sky.

The Dark Guard fights back with everything he has, creating an orange blade in one hand to replace the shattered silver sword, then a dark grey blade in the other made from its own Soul Energy.

Then, Ember speaks up in a low tone that only they can hear.

"You were pretty strong, it's a shame you had to work for the Lich King. You would have been a great Labyrinth Guardian."

Ember pauses, staring the monster in the eyes.

"You want to know who I really am? You're going to die right now, so I might as well humor myself and see if anyone still remembers."

Ember whispers a few words to the creature, and its pupil shrinks to the size of a pea in an instant.

It shudders and all of the Soul Energy surrounding its body vanishes as it loses the will to fight.

Ember swings his blade across his body and slices the defenseless monster in half right down the middle, splitting its head and heart in one shot.

The red crescent follows through and hits the desert floor, making an enormous slit in the ground, followed by the earth-shaking thuds of the monster's corpse.

This is followed by level up notifications ringing in Ember's inner ear as he floats back toward the battlefield and whispers to himself.

"I guess he did remember."

Ember arrives above the endless army of Ghouls that continues to fight with the Flame Emperor's Elites down below, then looks out into the empty desert facing Sector 1.

"I know you're watching, you have been this whole time. When will you show your face, Lich King...?"

—

Back underground in the bunker below the town, the red swirling energy around the final isolation pod swirls much faster, and the bright light coming from inside the pod only grows more as the level-up notifications ring inside my main body's inner ear.

[Level Up] x177

There is another pulse of light from inside the pod as my main body opens up its status and upgrades a single skill.

The dense red energy that comes out from the pod begins to change its consistency.

More and more of it flows out, and the rate at which it spins around the humming and vibrating machine increases.

It gets to a point where wind is blowing through the room because of the energy's rotational speed.

Then, once it seems to have hit a dangerous level to the point where it could damage the shielding of the bunker, the red energy starts to shrink.

It all comes back into the pod and disappears inside in a matter of seconds.

The room goes silent, and even the humming and buzzing of the isolation pod halts.

There are hours left on the timer above it, however, it appears there isn't any Qi or Mana remaining in the pod.

The door clicks open, and the first thing to touch the white floor is a boot covered in a Dark Red, almost Black, Soul Energy Aura.

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A deep voice echoes back to Ember's challenge as the desert ground behind the marching Ghouls turns pitch black.

"It seems I haven't hidden myself enough to get past the eyes of a fellow Divine Beast."

An enormous black shadow has been cast across the sand, and it begins to ripple and vibrate while something emerges from within.

The top of a dark cloak becomes visible, surrounded by a dark black aura.

It comes out of the ground to reveal a massive skull beneath the cloak.

My double's inspect and appraisal skill picks up a reading that doesn't even seem real at first glance.

[Lv. 3642]

Active Items:

Lich King's Scythe [+519% Strength][+444% Mental Strength][Hidden Ability]

Lich King's Cloak [+604% Agility][+399% Speed][Hidden Ability][Dark Attribute]

Ring of the Divine [Hidden Ability]

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

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

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

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

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

Active Skills:

Combat Magic [Superior Dark Summoning]

Bufs:

[Curse of The Lich King][1733/2500]

[Greater Form of The Dark God]

Its eyes glow dark orange, and it resembles the Wraiths that were in the arena and on the battlefield earlier.

However, comparing those weak monsters to the sheer size and power of the creature that emerges from the abyss below is nearly impossible.

The monster's head is almost 5 or 6 meters tall alone, and the Soul Energy that radiates from its eyes is the source of the power that allows every one of the thousands of moving creatures on this battlefield to continue fighting.

If all of them were put together and had their power stripped away, it wouldn't even be close to what this being contains.

As it continues to emerge from the ground, a long silver Scythe follows it upward, being held in its right bony hand.

Jet black energy surrounds its weapon just like its wavering cloak.

It towers over its troops, 20 meters high in the air, and it hasn't even managed to come out of the ground more than halfway yet.

Ember replies by letting his bright red aura cover his whole body while still in his upgraded second form and float down to talk to the being at eye level with a tone as if they're old friends.

"Looks like someone got stronger since the war..."

The Lich King's glowing orange eyes shift upward to see Ember floating down, then replies.

"A lot happened while you were asleep for 50 years. I've begun to build my army to finally take control of this world. I have become unstoppable while the strong kill each other and those that remain become weaker. Very few remember the strength of those that ruled the old world. You know that better than anyone."

Ember and the Lich King stare at each other as it continues to rise from the darkness.

"It makes sense that you were behind all of this. I must say, the appearance of so many Soul Energy users at once was surprising. Especially that flame user, where is he...?"

It scans the battlefield, but only lands its gaze on my body doubles. It doesn't even stop on either, knowing they aren't a threat.

"That one's growth was fascinating, but it seems as though my 2nd Ranked Guard took care of him as instructed. He surely would have been on the battlefield today if that wasn't the case."

Ember inwardly grins, but doesn't show any expression, listening to the Lich King continue to speak.

"I could not place my finger on how they were all advancing so fast, but seeing you in the flesh makes everything clear. Plus, to find you in such a feeble state makes my victory even more satisfying. At least you brought me an early congratulatory gift, a new line up of Dark Guards will suit me well. I'm sure you're aware, the seat for a new Demon Lord is making itself known."

The Lich fully emerges from the ground, standing over 40 meters tall, floating just over the ground with the bottomless black pit of shadows below it. It points its gaze off in the direction of Sector 2, but shifted slightly, aimed at the Abyss filled with Demonic Energy.

Ember nods and responds.

"I'm fully aware. That is one of the reasons we've come to stop you."

The Lich King pauses.

"We? Who is we? Since when do you work with humans?"

Then, it lets out a long and slow laugh.

"Anyway, your army is mine. This is the natural order of the world. The weak will die and the strong will live on forever. Come back in another 50 years and try again."

It looks down at its army, and the bright orange gaze pinpoints every human below it that hasn't been taken by its curse. It lifts its bony hand in the air out from its cloak, holding the silver curved blade that is even longer than its wielder. The dark black dreadful energy around it pulses and starts to send eerie waves out at a constant rate.

Ember responds by manifesting two long red blades in his hands and flying forward.

The enormous silver scythe comes rocketing downward as Ember swings both of his blades upward and there's a shockwave of Soul Energy that vibrates throughout the desert so far, even 20km+ away, the sand vibrates and rolling golden dunes collapse.

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

Hundreds of troops from the Lich King's army are blown backward by the blast, and even some of the Elite mana wielders are caught up in the blast over 2km away despite both Lydia and Fisher putting up walls of Qi and denser mana from their ranked up buffs to block the mental attacks.

Monk, Maria, Arie, and Abby all feel the vibrations of that blow ripple through their bodies as well even though they're scattered throughout the outskirts of the battlefield. They all immediately start to move from their positions and gravitate toward the epicenter of the blast to help.

Ember and the Lich King are at a standstill with energy radiating from their attack, but neither of them let up.

The black energy around the Lich grows darker and the orange in its eyes pulse. The scythe begins to move downward, pushing through the red barrier of energy that Ember's blades are making.

More and more dark red energy comes out from Ember's invisible core and his blades become stronger as well. He begins to push the enormous mountain-sized blade up again, and vibrations of energy fill the desert.

There's a reaction between the two energies and both Ember and the Black-cloaked skeleton are pushed back from the blast.

The Lich King stays floating just a few meters above the desert, and Ember is rocketed backward through the Hordes of Ghouls, killing another hundred of them just from his aura touching them as he flies backward.

Nearby, Monk, Maria, Arie, and Abby come to Ember's aid, and even my double high in the sky helps by opening a telepathy link between them all. However, the only voice heard in it is Ember's voice yelling at everyone.

"Run, now! This battle is about to get serious. You've done your duty. The Dark Guards are defeated, the Dark Army is crippled, and you have given Jay enough time to finally awaken. The Lich King is a monster far out of your league. The stakes of mortals losing to it are far too high, worse than death. I will hold it off alone!"

In a flash of bright red light Ember takes off toward the Lich King again, growing in size and releasing exponentially more Soul Energy by the second.

Black waves of energy come off of the Lich King's body as well, its aura grows in power as it raises its Scythe high above its head again, channeling darkness into its blade while placing its other bony hand on the desert floor that is covered in its shadow magic.

Then, its eyes pulse from orange to jet black for a fraction of a second, and another figure emerges from the mysterious abyss below the Lich King.

A figure that looks exactly like an oversized Dark Guard emerges.

However, it looks like it is made of the Black Energy that it was born from. There are rippling dark energy swirls all around it, and as it walks forward, it looks just like a walking shadow.

My body double catches a glimpse of the shadow soldier's status, and it reads [Lv. 3002].

An enormous glowing orange [0] is visible on its chest, and the Knight walks forward out from the shadows while holding a bright orange gem the size of its head. Then, starts to speed up its footsteps, turning its strides into a run.

It looks just like the gems that were used to turn the people in the surrounding towns into ghouls with the power of the [Curse of the Lich King].

Ember sees this, and mid-transformation, aims his next attack directly at this newly formed creature.

There's another shockwave that vibrates through the entire desert.

It isn't from Ember's collision with the shadow knight, it is his growing red blades that are stopped by the silver scythe of the Lich King right before he can stop it.

Ember's wings grow larger, and the black scale and draconic features that only covered parts of his body before begin to expand.

His red aura pulses more and more, pumping Soul Energy into his true form as he flies back around to attempt letting out a wave of red Soul Energy flames down at the shadow knight.

There's another explosion of power as a Dark Energy slash comes out from the Lich King's Scythe from a distance to cancel out Ember's flames. The shadow knight continues its increasingly fast paced march forward into the hordes of Ghouls, and in the direction of the Elites of the Flame Emperor's army that Fisher and Lydia lead away to safety.

The black energy that grows around the Lich King is expanding at the same rate as the red energy around Ember.

The dragon expands to nearly match the Lich King in size.

From nose to tail, he's over 40 meters long.

His eyes burn bright crimson in color, and flames erupt all over his body as he expands his red Soul Energy Aura outward to release his full power.

A crater of molten rock and sand is instantly formed beneath him, and in the same moment the Lich King lets its black aura clash with Ember's, raising its Scythe above its head again, and letting it pulse with dark energy.

The shadowy circle below it expands while Ember lets a tsunami of Soul Energy Flames down on the Lich King.

The entire ground that is covered in darkness erupts upward, making a cylinder of Dark Energy shoot up toward the sky to meet the violent wave of fire that rains down on it.

As these attacks clash, the Shadow Soldier that was able to escape makes it to the middle of the V-shaped battlefield and presses the orange gem into the [0] on its chest. Its black form turns into a burning orange light.

Then, a wave of orange Soul Energy ripples off of it and through the battlefield. The energy begins to flow outward in every direction and toward the remaining troops that have just begun to retreat after Ember's orders.

The orange light moves quickly, far too quickly for any of them to outrun on such short notice.

The entire battlefield of fallen Ghouls is soaked in this orange light, and the fallen Lich King's soldiers become rejuvenated by the influx of new Orange energy that creeps into their dead cores.

Every fallen Ghoul and Wraith that lies dead on the ground begins to move again, regenerate, and stand to its feet.

New roars, screeches, and movement fills the battlefield with life of the undead.

The enormous pillar of black energy collides with Ember's dense Red Flames. This wave of red fire disintegrates parts of the black veil, but the amount of energy that emerges from the shadows below feels as if it's endless. The dark energy surges up into the sky.

It expands outward, then disperses. The being beneath the darkness reaches its Final battle form; [Greater Form of The Dark God].

A 100m long Jet Black Scythe emerges from the darkness, and the white skeletal form beneath the dark cloak is now covered in swirling black energy with the faint light of orange eyes below it. The shockwave of energy from this final form's evolution process ripples over 50km deep into the desert, knocking out the Elite troops of the Flame Emperor's army over 5km away, leaving them on the desert floor foaming at the mouths.

My body double that helps the troops escape with Fisher and Lydia is hit by the blast, and barely stays on its feet after the mental pressure of that blow.

However, the body double that stayed behind in the center of the newly rejuvenated Ghouls has no Qi to protect itself from this shockwave at less than 1km away, and its killed on the spot by the overwhelming pressure sending memories back to my main body.

Monk, Maria, Arie, and Abby who are the last to remain on the battlefield after making sure the weaker troops had a way to escape are capable of putting up Qi and Soul Energy shields to protect themselves from this violent mental attack, but the energy that hits them is still baffling.

This sudden surge of energy slows their travel speed momentarily, but Abby releases pulses of restoration magic to help everyone heal and attempt run faster from the orange wave.

However, it's no use. The Curse of The Lich King stretches up high into the sky to create an orange wall of energy that seems impossible to run away from. It moves at the same pace that the shadow night approaches.

Each of them turns to the wall of light and activates their ranked-up buffs along with their Soul energy, but in the face of the overwhelming power that was just unleashed on them all out of nowhere, these fighters seem like ants in the grand scheme of this battle.

They stand in a line, using each other's Qi and Soul Energy to attempt blocking the massive orange wave, but the moment it touches their shielding, the Orange energy overpowers it entirely.

Their defenses are breached instantly.

The orange wave of death begins to fall upon them.

The Lich King raises its impossibly large Black Scythe into the sky, and prepares to bring it down on Ember.

Ember lets more red energy flood out from his core, about to forcefully release a level of power from within him that is certain to block this attack, but has a high chance of causing irreversible damage to his Soul Energy core in this life.

However, he stops once he senses something approaching at high speeds from far off in the desert.

The Lich King sees its facial expression, and yells out in a mocking tone.

"You still dare to smile in the face of certain demise? You really have changed, haven't you! I will be the first divine beast ever to defeat the Black Dragon. This is the beginning of my new legacy, I will show the world my power!"

It starts to swing the Scythe downward, and Ember erupts into flames, getting ready to block, but replies while continuing to watch the being approach in his senses.

"I believe you're right, a new Legacy will begin today."

The Scythe swings downward, and at the same moment the Orange light starts to engulf the members of the Flame Emperor's party in the desert below.

When all hope feels lost, the sky turns red.

A wave of Soul Energy approaches from Sector 2. The temperature in the desert increases by hundreds of degrees in mere fractions of a second as a figure rockets through the sky at unfathomable speeds. It is covered in a Dark Crimson Aura, holding a black sword, leaving trails of flames behind.

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"Pledge your loyalty, or burn to ash!"

My voice echoes through the desert, using my screech perk to make my entrance known.

Just moments ago, memories of the entire battle flooded into my mind from a body double that was killed in the shockwave following the Lich King's transformation.

Even while traveling over a kilometer above the desert, my dark blood-red soul energy aura melts the desert sand below.

It looks as if an enormous ball of fire is rocketing through the desert and burning everything in its path.

I'm fully armored up, using my ranked-up buff to create the manifestation of my dark black greater form while an even larger layer of Soul Energy surrounds it and manifests an enormous black flaming sword.

My eyes are locked on a wave of orange light that is fractions of a second away from engulfing my teammates and turning them into pawns for the Lich King's army.

My eyes pulse, and my aura grows as the desert turns to a sea of liquid glass below me.

Everything and everyone is engulfed in my Soul Energy's Flames.

I position my trajectory downward to aim my blade at the enormous shadow knight with a [0] on its chest stained in an orange light.

Then, my wave of fire collides with the overwhelming wall of energy that is the [Curse of The Lich King].

The collision makes another devastating shockwave of energy almost equivalent to the collisions of Ember and the Lich King just moments ago.

The orange wall of energy tries to eat away my blood-red flames, but it does not tear them apart with ease like every other roadblock it manages to instantly phase through.

A unique trait of these flames starts to absorb the energy that eats away at it, and just milliseconds after the collision, the massive ball of fire begins dismantling and pushing back the orange cursed energy.

It spreads throughout the impossibly wide and tall wall, like a colony of fire ants attacking its prey and consuming it faster than it can move forward.

My teammates who were moments away from certain doom are consumed by my flames, but the link through my Rising Emperor's Domain treats their mass as a part of my own body and passes through them like a warm breeze.

The thousands of newly awakened Ghouls and Wraiths on the other hand are incinerated and absorbed into the dark red flames.

All of their weapons, broken cores, and charred remains fall into my fire and end up inside my item storage once they're killed.

The swirling orange Soul Energy left behind in the atmosphere does not dissipate, it is eaten up and absorbed by my flames as well.

I swing my blade from a downward position, starting at the ground and up to the sky to release a Soul Energy attack straight at the Dark Guard with a [0] on its chest.

The liquid glass of the desert is parted as my energy slash rips through it, hundreds of kilometers into the earth, tearing through the shadow knight's armor without any resistance at all.

I fly right over its head as it's sliced in two, then incinerated by my flames.

[Level Up] x226

Level-up notifications ring in my ear, alerting me that I've hit level 1785, but this upward slash that took out the Dark Guard wasn't even the main purpose of my attack.

My gaze is still held steady on the Lich King that is wielding an impossibly large scythe, and the instant stat increases from this kill only powers my movements forward even faster.

It swings it downward, and across its body at a 45-degree angle pointed straight at Ember in his newly ranked-up true dragon form.

My Red Soul Energy Sword collides with this dreadful black scythe less than 10 meters away from Ember, and the earth-shattering collision that ensues can be felt vibrating in the sandy desert over 100 km away.

Red and Black energy radiates off both of our weapons, as they're not even touching, but their Soul Energy's fight for dominance at a standstill over 5 meters apart between them.

The Lich King is holding its scythe with two bony hands swinging downward, engulfed in dark magic and eyes glowing orange.

I swing my sword up, using every ounce of new power I've managed to absorb and obtain while awakening.

It feels like all of my bones are breaking, and every muscle fiber is tearing, but I don't let up.

I continue to push upward and let my flames burn brighter.

Red arcs of electricity start to erupt from my flames, as well as enormous tornadoes of wind that keep the fires growing and raging on.

Every element in my status is being pushed to its limits and imbued into my Soul Energy to add to this slash.

We hold this position in place for just over half a second, but it feels as if hours are going by in my mind.

The explosion that follows pushes both of us backward.

The Lich King is sent flying upward and back into the desert while I'm thrown down to create a deep crater in the ground.

This doesn't hold either of us back from charging up our weapons and immediately going back in at the other for the kill.

I jump into the air, holding my enormous manifestation of a dark red flaming sword.

Even in my greater form, being over doubled in size again by the Soul Energy surrounding it, my form is just about the size of the Lich King's final form.

Ember swoops in as I jump up, allowing me to land on his back to gain more speed while concentrating my power into my blade rather than my footsteps through the air this time.

There's another reality-shaking clash of energy, sending ripples of heat, light, and Soul Energy vibrating through everything nearby.

We're both sent flying backward again, however this time I have Ember to guide my movements and don't have to steady myself, instead I charge up another attack without thinking about stabilizing in the air.

Ember speaks through our telepathy link while our Dark Red Soul Energy begins to merge together.

"Fashionably late, aren't you? Time to kill this monster."

Ember releases a concentrated wave of flames forward at the same time I swing my blade and both of our attacks collide with the black aura of the incoming scythe.

This time, after vibrations rattle the desert, the Lich King's long curved blade is actually pushed backward a few meters before the release of power.

With our combined attack, we've got it beat on pure strength, just slightly.

However, our opponent notices this too and more black aura starts to surround its blade and flood from its inner Dark form.

The monster's voice echoes throughout the desolate flame-covered battlefield as it raises its scythe again.

"Impossible. A mere mortal and a weak dragon have stood up to me in the form of a Dark God. This act shall never be remembered, I shall erase it from history. With you two as my servants, the world shall only know of the Immortal Lich King. The Dark One. No- The Dark God."

It swings its scythe downward again, but I get an eerie feeling from it once the black aura around it starts to swirl and shift.

Halfway through its downward slash, the tip of the scythe disappears into thin air.

Or, more like, it falls away into the dark aura of shadows.

From behind me, a massive black portal opens, and the pointed tip of the monster's blade comes rocketing out.

The rest of the curved weapon follows, and I turn my body to block it with my blade at the last moment.

Without my full attention being captivated in the charge up, and a switch in momentum, it overpowers me and I'm sent flying off of Ember's back while blocking the scythe.

My Soul Energy Sword still keeps a direct hit, so it never manages to cut through my body, but I'm shot flying past the Lich King at close proximity just in time for it to create another jet black portal and swing its scythe through this one too.

I twist my body again, and this time, with enough momentum to clash with it using equal power, my Soul Energy blade collides with a small portion of the Lich King's scythe that sticks out of a black portal that floats in the air.

At the same time, Ember lets out a concentrated beam of fire at the Lich King's main body, and manages to burn away a portion of its black cloak, and swirling black energy of its greater form underneath to reveal the bright white bone of the monster's lower ribcage.

I spot a shimmering orange light inside it, and make the split-second deduction that it must have some kind of core or power source.

As soon as I come to this conclusion, however, the energy and cloak that Ember burned away reforms and covers up the orange glow again, and I have to block another incoming scythe from the black portals that form all around me.

I don't have the momentum to fully protect myself this time, and am sent rocketing into the desert floor to create another deep new canyon in the molten sand below.

As I shoot back up to the surface, I watch Ember narrowly avoid the swing of a scythe that appears from behind him, then sends off another fire attack to melt away a small portion of soul Energy and reveal that orange light again. I come to the conclusion that I need to switch things up.

I activate the perk of my Rising Emperor's domain, [Power Holder], and feel 44 geopoints with stats I'm able to steal right now. 6 of them are my ranked-up teammates, 37 of them are all the unconscious elites over 5km away, and 1 is an unknown new link of loyalty at a very high level.

The natural range of my Domain has risen exponentially from the level-ups and increase in energy control.

Without even thinking for more than a fraction of a second, like turning on a passive buff, I take 10% of everything they have and notifications ring in my inner ear while I fly back up at the Lich King.

[+5,584 Strength]

[+4,950 Defense]

[+5,888 Agility]

[+6,292 Speed]

[+7,220 Mental Strength]

[+14,087,516,777 Mana Control]

A surge of power flows through me. All of my base stats are nearly doubled and the increase in mana control increases my overall energy control and significantly buffs my Soul Energy. I sense Ember's Soul Energy capacity rocket upward too.

It feels as if a dam has broken and energy pours out to cover his true form in a layer of fire at a whole new level than it was moments ago.

The black scythe from the Lich King appears from Ember's blind spot out of a black portal, and the moment he detects it, there's no time to dodge.

He can only turn his talons in the way to block.

As he does, the two forces collide with even power, and the glowing orange eyes of the Lich King widen in confusion.

His claws wrap around the monster's black scythe, and at the same moment I swing my Soul Energy blade upward and aim right for its chest where I witnessed the orange glow pouring out just moments prior.

With its blade stuck in the grasp of a flaming dragon, and my crimson energy sword pointed at the creature's heart, the Lich King knows exactly what is about to happen.

It lets out a blood-curdling scream, and a declaration that echoes through everyone's ears.

"I am the Dark One. The Undead King! I will become the next Demon Lord. You mortals cannot stop me, impossible! If you dare to defy the natural order of my new world, I will take you down with me!"

As my energy sword rips through its black cloak, incinerating the Dark Shielding around its chest area, I dive deep into its rib cage while swinging my sword.

An enormous orange gem rests inside it, flowing with Soul Energy, and pumping power all throughout its body.

Before I can even bring my sword down on it, it begins to glow brighter and brighter as if it's about to explode.

I make tight shielding of Soul Energy around my head, heart, and vital organs, but leave everything else nearly defenseless, and charge my blade with all of the remaining Soul Energy I have.

A cracking sound ripples through the air as the monster tries to take its blade back from Ember's grasp, but he holds on with bloodied talons, tightening more onto the sharp blade.

The Lich King sacrifices over 20 meters of its scythe, severing the end part by closing its dark portal.

Ember still holds onto the creature's broken portion of blade while releasing a full-powered highly concentrated beam of fire at its head.

At the same time, a new portal is formed right behind me, and the cracked and broken scythe comes through it, pointed right at my back.

With the expanding core about to explode in front of me, and the enormous black fractured scythe coming at me from behind, the only possible way I could dodge either of these would be to give up on my attack and run.

However, that's not at all what I plan to do.

I follow through, pushing my Soul Energy Blade deep into the orange gem at a diagonal angle.

Predicting that it will explode the moment I break through it, I position my body in the way of its blast to be violently propelled in the direction it does.

The scythe swings down right where I was, and slices through my left shoulder and left leg.

Without the violent orange blast that pushes me to the right side, it would have been a direct hit.

However, my main body is propelled far away while the broken gem erupts from a slit that my sword managed to produce and expels its energy at a constant rate from inside.

The orange blast melts away my skin at close proximity, but isn't able to breach any of my denser Soul Energy shielding.

While flying backward through the air, I use self-regeneration to grow back my lost limbs and melted flesh, then concentrate on the new black portals that appear to my sides while I plummet toward the liquid glassy ground.

I block every one of the blows with my energy sword, watching black shards of the scythe's metal get chipped away with every collision it makes.

By the time I hit the ground, less than half of its weapon remains.

At this point, I'm fully regenerated, and I jump back into the violent explosion of orange energy from its core.

The Lich King continues to let out a death screech as it tries to obliterate everything in its vicinity, but the Aura that comes off of Ember and myself is far too strong to be eaten by its orange Soul Energy.

I grasp my blade tightly, jumping directly through the violent orange aura eruption, while bashing away its final attempts to block me with its shrinking scythe.

With my gaze locked onto the orange core gem that is still floating in its chest and releasing power, I swing my blade at it again, this time with no external threats left to stop me from releasing everything I have into a final attack.

My sword plunges into the crack that my previous attack produced, and I allow all of my Soul Energy to erupt from my blade and engulf what is left of the stone while shattering it to pieces from the inside.

My flames stretch outward, engulfing more and more with boundless hunger.

The more it absorbs, the stronger my flames become. As I get stronger, the Lich King's energy that attempts to slip away becomes weaker.

All of the energy from this orange blast falls into my dark flames, and they engulf the Lich King's entire body.

There is no hope for it to escape.

The crystal disintegrates, and every drop of the Orange Soul Energy in the surrounding area disappears in an instant to leave nothing but a skeleton in a black cloak holding a shattered scythe.

The screeches stop, and the waves of energy that threaten to tear the desert in two cease entirely.

Ringling notifications sound in my ear, and the remains of the Lich King fall to the molten desert below.

[Level Up] x414

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Combat Magic [Superior Dark Summoning]

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

Buff: Curse of The Lich King

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

Stat: 3188 Mental Strength

[YES][NO]

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As I scan the battlefield to ensure there are no other enemies nearby, I slowly let my buffs and Soul Energy Aura deactivate and flow back inside my core.

I instantly absorb the new skill; Combat Magic [Superior Dark Summoning] and an additional 3188 Mental Strength points, but pause before accepting this new buff.

[Curse of The Lich King] stares at me in bright orange status text just as it did as a stain on every Dark Guard's status I saw it on. It hovers above the pile of bones that falls closer to molten sand below me.

I tighten my gaze, then decide not to accept this buff. I open my item storage and let out a sigh to let the remains of this monster fall inside.

The black metal shards of its scythe, remains of its dark cloak, the skull of the Lich King that still is covered with swirling black energy labeled [Superior Dark Element Stone], 5 dark orbs labeled [Arch Demon's Core], and a silver ring with a clear gem on it labeled [Ring of the Divine [Hidden Ability]] fall into my storage.

"If I have second thoughts, I can decide later..." I whisper under my breath.

Something doesn't feel quite right about that buff. I don't want to add it to my status without thinking it over and getting a second opinion from Ember as well. Its corpse will stay in suspended animation inside my storage for as long as I'd like.

My gaze hovers over the rest of my status, and I see my level has reached 2199.

In addition to this, I take a moment to look at my new skill Combat Magic [Superior Dark Summoning].

Combat Magic [Superior Dark Summoning]

Info: Dark Magic allows the caster to summon darkness. It is the absence of light. Or, the absence of magic itself. If Dark Magic clashes with any pure mana-based attack, it will negate the opponent's attack proportional to the amount of MP the enemy is exerting.

An [Advanced Grade] hidden ability: The MP necessary to negate attacks thrown by elemental skills by the opponent need to only exert 25% of the attack's MP to negate it.

An [Extreme Grade] hidden ability: Portals of shadows can be created within the caster's mana control aura and can allow items or portions of the caster's body to phase through it as long as they stay touching the caster.

A [Superior Grade] hidden ability: A single opponent killed by the caster may be resurrected in the form of shadows. The remains of this opponent must be sacrificed to the shadows, and only 1 contract may be created at a time. Once a new contract is created, the old one will disappear. The shadow soldier will be reborn at the level it was killed, but may gain exp to level up, and increase its mana control naturally. Its experience points will be split evenly with the caster while it is walking in the world of the living. This resurrected form is capable of expressing free will, but their link to the world of the living can be severed by the caster at any time. If the shadow summon is killed, its level and mana control will decrease by 10% once it is summoned again.

Grade: Superior

[Upgrade]

My eyes skim through these notes, and I get very excited about the potential of this new power. I'll be able to negate mana-based attacks without using Demonic Energy, use a new kind of spatial magic, and the appearance of the Dark Guard with a [0] on its chest makes much more sense to me now. That was the Lich King's resurrected Summon.

After analyzing this new Dark Magic skill, I re-read my newest skill upgrade I was able to do right while my Soul Energy was awakening. This is the reason I was able to use absorption to have the option to accept a buff in the first place. However, only one of the Lich King's buffs showed up, and after reading it I soon understand why.

[Absorption] [Mythic Grade]

Info: This is a unique skill. Upon dealing the final killing blow to any creature, the caster has the capability to absorb its skills. Absorbed skills will be adapted to fit the caster's biology.

A [Special Grade] hidden ability: After defeating opponents of considerable strength, there is a chance the caster will be able to absorb 5% of their opponent's highest stat points. This will permanently increase the caster's status. For every 5 levels that the opponent surpasses the caster's own, the probability of triggering this passive ability increases by 1%.

A [Legendary Grade] hidden ability: Skills acquired using absorption will now increase in grade class up to the current grade of this Absorption Skill.

Therefore; Skills acquired using absorption will now increase in grade class up to [Mythic Grade] upon casting. Old skills already obtained by the caster can now be upgraded to [Mythic Grade] after defeating an opponent with the same skill.

After an opponent is defeated, their Mana Control Proficiency (MCP) may be absorbed. For all opponents below 80% of the caster's level, 0.1% of MCP will be absorbed. For all opponents between 80% of the caster's level and the caster's level, 0.25% of MCP will be absorbed. For all opponents between the caster's level and 120% of the caster's level, 0.5% of MCP will be absorbed. For all opponents above 120% of the caster's level, 1% of MCP will be absorbed.

There is a 5% chance that any opponent above the caster's current level will allow 1 Proficiency Point (PP) to be absorbed.

A [Mythic Grade] hidden ability: If the defeated opponent is above 10% the caster's level, there is a 10% chance the caster can absorb 1 of the opponent's permanent buffs. Every additional 10% the opponent's level is higher than the caster's level, an additional 10% probability of their permanent buff being absorbed will apply. If the opponent has more than 1 permanent buff, the most compatible ability will be chosen. Unique Buff's latent abilities may change based on the caster's biology.

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A [Mythic Grade] hidden ability: If an opponent's HP is brought down below 5% the caster has the capability to absorb a single skill without killing them. Activation time may vary depending on the total mana control difference between opponents. The opponent will permanently lose this skill from their status after it is absorbed. If the enemy has more than 1 skill on their status, it may still be stolen after killing them.

Grade: Mythic Grade

[Upgrade]

Two interesting new Mythic Grade hidden abilities catch my eye at the bottom of this description sheet.

The first is the ability to have a chance of absorbing an enemy's permanent buff, this is what allowed the [Curse of The Lich King] to show up in my possible absorption options.

The last ability stands out to me the most.

"Now... It is possible for me to steal skills without killing my enemies..."

I close my status, then take a look at my surroundings.

The sun is high in the sky, reflecting off the molten desert around me as far as the naked eye can see.

Ember floats downward, shrinking, and turning back into his dragon-hybrid form, then eventually back into his full human form, with his arms crossed and a smile on his face.

The moment I look him in his eyes, I stare deep into a Crimson Void of Soul Energy and immediately see the manifestation of an enormous black flaming dragon many times larger than the form I just witnessed in this battle.

Even though he's not using any Soul Energy, I can sense exactly how much his core will allow him to output if he chooses to go all out, along with the eerie feeling that this well of power is nearly limitless and is just held back by a seal.

I murmur to myself as he floats over closer to me.

"So this is what Abby and Maria saw... I get why they reacted like that now."

Ember grins and responds.

"Yes, I have to say, your Soul Energy awakening debut was rather impressive too. It's unclear which one of us is the true monster, wouldn't you say?"

He looks off into the distance too, and the molten sand sloshes around, radiating immense heat.

The edges of the 10km wide sea of glass I created start to crystallize now that my Soul Energy flames have died down. I ask Ember a question.

"So, what exactly is the Curse of The Lich King? I'm able to absorb its buff now, but I haven't yet. It's still floating in my storage undecided. A majority of its Soul Energy Essence is floating inside suspended animation as well."

Ember exhales through his nose, chuckling for a moment, then gets serious and shakes his head.

"It's similar to a lesser version of your Rising Emperors Domain. However, only you're able to give your army power, you cannot take it for yourself. You'll have to strip their status clean of everything if you want them to comply. However, the upside is, it doesn't have to be an agreement between two parties, the buff holder will be the one in control. You can forcibly create contracts"

I think about it for a moment, but Ember speaks up again before I do.

"If it were up to me, I'd say let that Buff and the Lich King's remains rot away in your storage for eternity. You don't want any part of that disgrace of a Divine Beast's legacy stained on your Soul. As long as you keep its Soul Energy Essence from dissolving back into the world, it can never begin the rebirth process."

He shrugs.

"But, it's up to you."

I nod.

"That was my initial thought as well... I'll pass on absorbing its buff for now, and keep its Soul Energy locked away for safekeeping."

Ember chuckles again, but is interrupted by the cracking and hardening of the glassy pool below us.

Ice spreads our way, and a bright flash of blue and green light does too.

Abby flies through the air with Arie by his side and all 37 of the fully restored Elite fighters. Maria is below them, using her Ice imbued Soul Energy to freeze and harden the desert floor so it's capable of being walked on again and not just a molten pit of death.

Five people trail at the rear. Fisher, Lydia, and my one remaining body double are behind the fighters to the right. Then, Monk, and an old man in torn white robes with a [Lv. 1602] tag and a link of loyalty to my Rising Emperor's domain floats next to him in the sky.

Things begin to click in my mind, vaguely remembering the feeling of a weak lifeforce deep beneath the mountains become engulfed in my flames during my initial attack.

They heard my words "Pledge your loyalty, or burn to ash!" as I flew over, and as the orange soul energy burned away from their body, they submitted to the flames and joined my ranks by their own volition.

After a quick appraisal, I find that his status is completely wiped clean. There are no items, no skills, and not even the [Curse of The Lich King] buff leftover.

My mind races for a proper explanation, but can only conclude that it is a unique trait of my Soul Energy using my buffs and skills in unison to create this effect. It seems I can burn away curses like this under special conditions. To know more, I'll need to conduct further tests in the future.

Ember and I float down to greet the rest of the army. I deliberately do not put up a disguise this time, allowing everyone here to see my true appearance. They put their life on the line to give me time and fight an army that numbered nearly 2000 troops while I was awakening, getting a bit personal is the least I can do for them in return.

Once we all touch down on the icy glass that Maria has summoned, I speak up.

"We've won. All of us that stand here today make up the strongest force in the entire Dark Continent. I thank you for your service today, and hope that this great battle against the Dark One's Army marks the beginning of our reign."

Everyone looks up at me, and I scan the crowd, looking at everyone in the eyes individually.

"This is just the beginning. A great battle has been won to declare dominance over the Dark Continent, but this is far from the true powers that rule this world. We will celebrate our victory, and we will strive to grow stronger."

The moving image of a burning flag with a Hunter's Association Logo on it flashes in my mind as I visualize my next target, slowly formulating a new long term plan of action.

I float back up in the air and begin sifting through my item storage to let many of the items that were absorbed into my Soul Energy flames fall out.

I use telekinesis to let them all float down slowly to everyone below.

"Your spoils of war. I managed to pick these up before destroying the battlefield."

I let about a hundred of the highest grade weapons fall out of my storage.

These are silver swords, shields, daggers, and unique artifacts that some of the higher-grade level 400-700 ghouls had on them.

The Elites take them with thanks, and I move onto the even better loot.

Over a dozen Wraith cores fall from my storage next into the hands of Lydia and Fisher.

Then, 8 purple gems in the shape of spiders' eyes fall toward Arie and Abby. They hum with energy, and each have mental strength and agility buffs that breach 300%.

The remains of a shattered silver sword, being what is leftover from the 1st ranked Dark Guard falls toward Maria. Its shards each have 450% Strength buffs, and can surely be used in future crafts. None of the other items from the 1st Guard remain, they were all shattered to dust or burned to ash. Ember doesn't care for magic items like these, so Maria is happy to take them for a future craft.

Then lastly, I float down to see Monk and the old man by his side.

He turns to look me in the eyes, and both of them bow.

I nod back, and speak to the old man first.

"Considering our link of loyalty is already created, you have my trust. However, I still have many questions to ask you once we've all recovered from battle."

He gives me a weak nod back, replying in a raspy tone.

"Of course."

It's clear he has built up immense fatigue and is having a tough time even standing in front of me now, but is doing so out of respect.

I smile, then turn to Monk.

"Great. This must be even more of a surprise to you than it is to me. It is a pleasure to finally meet your master."

Chapter 496

I look off into the distance toward Sector 2, then speak up to Monk again.

"Let's get back safely and rest. After that, we can talk."

Everyone around us divides their loot and begins to chatter amongst themselves. I decide to wrap up my talk before I lose everyone's focus, so I float back up in the air and put on my Flame Emperor's disguise.

"Now let's go back to town and bring the good news."

I float upward with Ember next to me, and my ranked-up teammates follow close by.

We leave the enormous sea of hardened glass behind.

The mountain range is completely leveled and melted away.

The ravine is filled in, and the entire landscape is forever changed.

The sun continues to shine overhead as we return home.

—

A few minutes into the flight back, I decide to eliminate the body double that is with me now and replace it with a new double at my current level 2199. I create a second as well, to replace the one that was killed in battle.

I have them both fly much faster off ahead of the returning troops to go to the canyon of dungeons. One of them is given some gold to head to Vice City and Solara to get more food and water for the town while the other one heads off to start upgrading my skills.

As it vanishes off into the desert, I start sifting through my item storage to look at my own gear again, and I begin hearing dozens of notifications in my inner ear. Skills are being upgraded to Mythic Grade and elements are all rising to Extreme Grade one by one.

A grin comes across my face as I take the time in the air while traveling back to begin sifting through my storage and planning out what kind of new gear I'll craft with my new high-grade materials from defeating the Lich King.

The first thing I try to do is remove my greater demon's core from my inventory slot.

With all of the new high-ranking gear now, its 50% buff to all of my stats is becoming near obsolete. It is still a great boost, but I'm sure in the near future I'll have items that can fit that space better.

I attempt merging it with my Arch Demon's core using my crafting skill, but it doesn't show up in the interface. Neither do any of the 5 Arch Demon Cores that float in my storage. They can be equipped, but cannot be taken off my item list nor modified by any other outside items using crafts.

It makes sense that a Demon would never unequip or alter its core, but feels unreasonable for a human to be locked into the same mechanism if I'm not dependent on it to live. I continue to tinker around with it for a while, but come to the conclusion I'll need to do some tests with Soul Energy and some new Mythic grade skills another time. I'll find a way to remove it eventually. I really only need one core to properly use Demonic Energy.

Once I come to that conclusion, I come up with two other crafts that I'd like to try out. The first is a simple one, so I activate it while soaring through the air, taking the remains of the shredded Dark One's cloak, and imbue them into my [Cloak of Total Darkness].

Adding all of the remaining ripped fragments of The Lich King's Cloak [+604% Agility][+399% Speed][Hidden Ability][Dark Attribute] to my blood-bonded cloak does not create a new visual appearance, but it significantly upgrades the cloak's stats and adds a dark attribute to its abilities.

Cloak of Total Darkness [+680% Mental Strength][+595% Agility][+498% Speed][+200% Perception][Blood Bonded][Hidden Passive Ability][Concealment Attribute][Dark Attribute]

I feel a surge of power as it's upgraded while I'm wearing it. The cloak feels as if it can shift and change with more ease, and my magic power as well as natural perception and movement speed feel a noticeable change.

I do a few twists and spins in the air while continuing to lead everyone forward, so Ember comments on it.

"Already putting the Lich King's gear to good use huh? Anything else interesting?"

I nod, thinking about a few other items I'd like to wait until I'm back in the town to craft, but pull out the silver ring with the clear gem on it labeled: Ring of the Divine [Hidden Ability].

"I did get this, but no matter how many times I try to appraise it, nothing more than its name comes back. I'm not exactly sure what it is..."

This catches Ember's attention, so he floats closer to me and I hand him the ring to examine.

Ember lets it float in the air in front of him, using an invisible energy that I'm unable to sense to make the artifact float in front of his eyes.

The longer he looks at it, the more intense his stare gets.

Then, he finally looks up at me.

"Yes, this is definitely a Divine Key."

I raise an eyebrow, and respond.

"A what? Divine Key...? What does it do?"

Ember shrugs, pulling a silver ring with a red gem on it out from thin air, it appears on his finger, and I see the same exact appraisal reading on it too.

Ring of the Divine [Hidden Ability]

Now, I'm even more confused, it's clear to see on my face, so Ember speaks up again. He hands the silver and clear stone ring back to me while making the silver and red ring disappear back to wherever it came from.

"Sometimes, the Divine Beasts are called upon, this is the ring that each one carries to answer that call. You shouldn't be able to hold the ring, nor should it even be manifested in this physical world

in the hands of a mortal. The conditions in which you killed and sealed away the Lich King's Soul Energy inside you must have altered with the wish of the Divine."

Ember smiles and thinks to himself for a few more seconds.

"Put it on. It won't do anything for you now, but it may bring opportunity if the Divine ever care to call."

He thinks to himself again, then speaks up in a more nonchalant tone.

"It's been tens of lifetimes since anything like that has happened, so I really doubt you'll ever need it. However, there's always a chance.."

I hold the ring in my hand for a while longer as we soar back to the town.

As the construction projects and day-to-day lives of townspeople come into view, I decide to take Ember's advice and place the ring on.

We all float down to the nearest entrance of the new apartment building and my double has already returned with fresh supplies for everyone to go back to their rooms and decompress from the long, hard battle. It's agreed upon that everyone meets back up before the sunset to celebrate and talk with the town.

I plan on doing an official announcement, but feel it is more necessary for people to relax, and spread what happens by word of mouth for now if they wish.

After handing these out, my double gives additional supplies to the man, Dan Striker, that has set up a small mercenary guild bar right outside the apartment complex on the small street leading the center of town.

I give him cooking supplies, high-end drinks, and miscellaneous gear and supplies to throw a celebration for the Army volunteers once they've finished washing up and resting.

Many of my teammates want to do exactly the same thing. Arie meets back up with Luna. Monk helps his master find a room with a comfortable bed and good food to rest. Lydia and Fisher decompress on their own and socialize with the army recruits, rehashing moments of battle together.

Then, Abby, Maria, Ember, and I all go back to the guildhall in the center of the city.

Instead of going inside, we all float up onto the roof and overlook the town as word of what happened today slowly spreads amongst the villagers by word of mouth.

None of us speak a word to each other, we just enjoy the view as people live their lives and the sun slowly moves over the horizon.

Soon, Arie and Luna meet us up on top of the roof as well.

Then, Monk, Lydia, and Fisher all make their way here too.

I share my craftsmanship skill with everyone, and we even sift through all of the B Grade Materials down in the bunker to find more gear to maximize their crafting possibilities. Everyone gets major upgrades.

Fisher and Lydia both make many concealment cloaks similar to mine by merging the Wraiths' cores and imbuing my conceal skill. They hand them out to everyone here on the roof. Ember and Monk are the only one's that prefer not to take the gift. The other's that do will now be able to alter

their appearance to whatever they can imagine even when I'm not sharing my concealment skill with them.

Arie and Abby make pendants and rings out of the purple spider eyes.

Maria uses the core of the 5th Ranked Dark Guard to create a set of blood-bonded armor with over 350% Defense buffs and high magic resistance to all of the elements. Then, she merges all of the large fragments of the 1st ranked dark guard's sword to create a brand-new blood-bonded sword with over 500% Strength enhancements. She doesn't imbue the sword with any skills or weaker element stones, hoping that she'll get to fight a strong ice monster in the future for its element stone.

While they do this, I make my own new weapon in the same fashion that Maria did, but I have both the weapons base material, as well as the element I want to imbue.

The potential of the craft I'm attempting here excites me.

I take all of the broken pieces of the Lich King's Scythe and stack them on top of each other, using telekinesis to keep them floating in the air. The only reason this blade broke was because the Lich King sacrificed it to pull it from Ember's grasp. Before its base was shattered by its dark portals and structural integrity began to fall apart, this blade withstood attacks directly from my fully powered Soul Energy attacks.

Its fragments all read [Lich King's Scythe] [+519% Strength][+444% Mental Strength][Hidden Ability].

It still vibrates and longs to be imbued with Dark Magic again.

So much so, that when I take the Lich King's Dark Skull from my inventory, the Dark Element Stone that has merged itself inside this creature's remains still tries to seep its way back into the floating pile of shattered blade.

I activate my newest skill, Superior Dark summoning, and allow black tendrils of energy seep from my hands to meld with the energies that loom around, even imbuing Soul Energy into this magic to increase its strength and simulate the kind of magic I'd use during battle.

It creeps into the fragments of the blade, and mixes with the pure Dark Elemental energy coming out of the skull.

I cut open my wrist to allow far more blood than necessary to pour out, soaking the blades and regenerating my blood to create a foolproof secure bond. I remember Bri saying the more blood the crafter uses, the more control over the blood bonded craft the wielder will have.

Just 8 ounces has always been enough in the past, but from the sheer size of materials I'm using, and the power that seeps out from this Dark Element Skull-shaped stone, I get the feeling using far more is safer.

I activate my Mythic Grade craftsmanship skill, and the enormous pile of materials begins to glow bright white.

First, it expands and flashes, then, it begins to compact and fuse together while floating in the air.

It gets smaller and smaller, but the energy density inside of the craft reaches levels even more intense than I imagined.

Once the bright white light finally ceases, a long black sword is left in my right hand that is nearly as tall and wide as I am.

It immediately calls to be imbued with Dark Soul Energy Imbued magic, and I do exactly that because it feels so right.

The blade pulses with Dark Magic, and a jet black aura forms around it.

Right at the base of the blade, a black crystal skull channels the power from my hand into the impossibly dense metal.

Over 100m of Scythe has been compacted into a 2m long sword.

It the same weight as that scythe and is capable of wielding even more power... Yet, it is all compacted and focused on a very small concentrated point. This is a weapon incapable of holding back; I could never use it in a friendly sparring match. It is a tool built solely for war.

The Dark Emperor's Blade [+729% Strength][+666% Mental Strength][+512% Speed][+478% Agility][+401% Defense][Blood Bonded][Dark Attribute][Hidden Ability]

I stare at the rotating masterpiece as I channel more and more power into it, and it never hits its cap; it continues to charge further and further with no end in sight.

I hold it high above my head, then open a spatial magic portal behind me to let all of the remaining hundreds of silver swords that I managed to absorb from the fallen ghouls on the battlefield earlier fall out.

The silver blades of my slain enemies come together, and I use a small amount of fire-imbued soul energy to heat them up enough that they are moldable.

As I bring the massive black sword down to my side, and sit back, I mold all of these blades into the shape of a throne.

Using ice, water, and wind magic, the throne consolidates and shimmers silver from the sun's rays. I sit back against the cool metal made of the weapons of the enemy forces we just utterly destroyed, and rest the jet black sword beside me.

"We've won."

All of my teammates that fought in this war stand behind me and appreciate the view for a few minutes.

Lights begin to shine in the city below, and the party looks like it's starting all along the street leading from the mercenary pub to the apartments hosting villagers and Elite fighters.

I stand up from my throne and place my new sword back into my inventory, and point down to the crowd forming in the streets.

"Please, all of you celebrate your hearts out tonight; let me worry about tomorrow. Just be ready to leave by noon, we'll visit Sector 1 together and bring the Good News."

[Status Open]

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 2199

Hp: 11000/11000

Mp: 11000/11000

Strength: 8594 [+10743] [+36181] [+10313] [+37728] [+62650] [+4297] [+8594] [+21485]
[+21485] [+21485] [+34376] = 277,931 Total Strength

Speed: 7452 [+8272] [+11327] [+9315] [+19003] [+37111] [+25784] [+38154] [+3726] [+7452]
[+23250] [+18630] [+18630] [+29808] = 257,914 Total Speed

Agility: 7596 [+7596] [+8356] [+9495] [+19826] [+45196] [+26130] [+36309] [+3798] [+7596]
[+20965] [+18990] [+30384] = 242,237 Total Agility

Defense: 6245 [+4621] [+8805] [+6870] [+14613] [+19484] [+10304] [+24918] [+25042] [+3123]
[+6245] [+15613] [+24980] = 170,863 Total Defense

Mental Strength: 10406 [+15713] [+13008] [+13632] [+36421] [+70761] [+39023] [+69304]
[+5203] [+10406] [+31114] [+26015] [+26015] [+41624] = 408,645 Total Mental Strength

Skills:

Absorption [Mythic Grade]

Swordsmanship [Mythic Grade]

Combat Magic [Extreme Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection [Mythic Grade]

Body Hardening [Mythic Grade]

Self Regeneration [Mythic Grade]

Spatial Magic [Item Storage]

Plunderer [Mythic Grade]

Telekinesis

Appraisal [Special Grade]

Conceal [Special Grade]

Berserker [Mythic Grade]

Dungeon Walker [Legendary Grade]

Intimidation [Mythic Grade]

Dagger Mastery [Mythic Grade]
Stealth [Mythic Grade]
Bloodlust [Mythic Grade]
Equivalent Exchange
Combat Magic [Extreme Wind Summoning]
All-Seeing Eye
Extreme Strength [Mythic Grade]
Dual Wielding [Mythic Grade]
Telepathy [Legendary Grade]
Final Breath [Mythic Grade]
Combat Magic [Extreme Earth Summoning]
Combat Magic [Extreme Mana Manipulation]
Life Steal [Mythic Grade]
Hibernation [Special Grade]
Combat Magic [Advanced Demonic Energy Manipulation]
Combat Magic [Extreme Ice Summoning]
Body Double [Legendary Grade]
Lie Detector [Legendary Grade]
Hush [Legendary Grade]
Craftsmanship [Mythic Grade]
Extreme Speed [Mythic Grade]
Combat Magic [Extreme Water Summoning]
Screech [Mythic Grade]
Phantom Step [Mythic Grade]
Flare [Mythic Grade]
Confusion [Mythic Grade]
Blast [Mythic Grade]
Bind [Legendary Grade]
Bloodweaver [Legendary Grade]
Poison Mist [Legendary Grade]
Iron Fist [Mythic Grade]
Extreme Stamina [Mythic Grade]

Combat Magic [Extreme Lightning Summoning]

Combat Magic [Superior Dark 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][+421% Strength][+350% Mental Strength]
[+234% Defense][+255% Speed][+261% Agility]

Berserker King's Armor Set [Blood Bonded] [+312% Defense]

Cloak of Total Darkness[+680% Mental Strength][+595% Agility][+498% Speed][+200%
Perception][Blood Bonded][Hidden Passive Ability][Concealment Attribute][Dark Attribute]

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

Infinite Essence of Regeneration[Blood Bonded][+439% Strength][+399% Defense][+375% Mental
Strength][+346% Speed][+344% Agility][Hidden Ability]

The Dark Emperor's Blade [+729% Strength][+666% Mental Strength][+512% Speed][+478%
Agility][+401% Defense][Blood Bonded][Dark Attribute][Hidden Ability]

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

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

Ring of the Divine [Hidden Ability]

Final Slot[15th]:[Interchangeable]

[Storm King's Dagger Set][Blood Bonded][+312% Speed][+299% Mental Strength][+276%
Agility][+250% Strength][+250% Defense][Lightning Attribute][Wind Attribute]

Midnight Dagger

Skill Buffs:

[Berserker] +250% Strength + Mental Strength

[BloodLust] +250% Speed + Agility + Mental Strength , +100% Perception

[Extreme Strength] +250% Strength

[Extreme Speed] +250% Speed

[Final Breath] ~ +400% 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 497

As the sun sets, more people join the festivities.

Many Elite fighters are fully rested, and the construction team under Maurice takes a load off from their hard day.

This is both the debut opening of the first large bar in town on the main street and a symbol of the beginning of a new civilization that will grow from nothing into a force to be known by the world.

I give a short speech and a simplified version of today's events once everyone has shown up but leave them all on a simple note.

"We are no longer under attack from any nations within the Dark Continent. We shall grow and prosper from the ground up moving forward. Enjoy yourselves tonight. Consider this the beginning of a new Era!"

There are clanks of drinks, cheers, and people go off and enjoy their night.

I share a drink with my team, but the passive poison resistance perks of my self-regeneration skill negate its effects instantly.

It's clear that the advancement of everyone's mana and Qi control lessens the intensity of mind altering toxins as well, but we do it more as a tradition to celebrate.

The night goes on, but all of my main teammates end up right back on that rooftop once the main events calm down. We bring food, drinks, chairs, blankets and lights up and surround the silver throne I created earlier to have our own private party and talk candidly amongst ourselves.

It makes me happy to see the villagers enjoying themselves, and I entertain the fun conversations taking place here on the roof, but there are really only a few things left on my mind.

The events of the battle replay in my head, the feeling of awakening and absorbing mana and Qi in a trance like state for months feels like a blur, and the fact that I've achieved the goal I set out to do is still flooding my body with endorphins. However, I want more.

The chatter calms down, and we listen to the music that plays from below us in the town while staring up at the night sky and finally taking a moment to relax.

Once the golden sun comes up over the desert horizon, I raise a question to Ember who calmly watches the city lights get drowned out by the rising sun too.

"What is a Demon Lord?"

Ember turns to me with a curious gaze. No one has said a word for nearly an hour, enjoying the view, and this is the first thing that comes out of my mouth.

Based on his expression, and the perked-up expressions of everyone else around me, I follow up this question with a statement.

"Well, I heard the Lich King mention he would be the next Demon Lord."

Then, I pull out the 5 Arch Demon Cores from my storage, letting them hover over my left palm while pointing to the dark abyss that is barely visible in the morning light.

"It seems a lot of people get obsessed with this Demonic Energy. The Association tried to kill all of us just to get a hold of the remains of Demonic Energy after a labyrinth was destroyed. The old Sector 4 and Sector 2 leaders were clearly colluding to take the resources of the Abyss for themselves and had no problem trying to kill me to take my core.... Now even the Lich King, the most powerful creature here on the Dark Continent, the underground leader of Sector 1. It carried 5 of these cores around too, and claimed it will be the Next Demon Lord. So, what does it mean? What is a Demon Lord? What is Demonic Energy? What are Demons?"

Ember lets out a sigh, staring off at the dark clouds of the Abyss that are far away from the town near the canyon of dungeons.

"Well, if you really would like to know, I'll tell you. It won't make sense to a lot of your teammates. I can only explain it in terms that you and I have experienced together."

"That's fine. We can fill them in on the missing details as you explain. It's just been eating away at the back of my mind, I need to know why people want this power so badly."

I let the cores fall back into my storage, then listen closely as Ember continues.

"Well, the reason people want power is an impossible question to answer in itself. Every individual seeks power for their own needs, but to be more specific, why do people want Demonic Power? There could be a number of answers to this question too. Ancient texts are hard to translate correctly. Sometimes Demonic Energy, Mana, and what some call the god particle; Qi, are hard to separate as the powers always shift as new eras come and go. There are always fights over powers that are unknown. If it is not the majority power source on planets, it will always be more valuable even if it is weaker than the main planet's power source. Sometimes, even the power of the divine is mixed into this misinformation. It is hard to know anyone's true motivation without knowing where they came from and what they know."

He pauses.

"However, to stay on topic here, I can tell you why the Lich King in particular wanted to harness this Demonic Power. Great power comes from claiming the throne of the Demon Lord."

Ember eyes the Abyss one more time, then focuses his attention back on us.

"For any of you that have dealt with Demonic monsters before, you know they do not exactly use the same energy as humans. The majority of power users on this planet use mana-based magic, and a mana-based system. Mana is the most abundant in this environment over every other power source. It has seeped into all life on this planet and naturally found a balance, adapting to the human

world. If there was not any mana in your body to begin with, and no mana on this planet to manifest dungeons, the system would not be here to allow you to absorb the power around you and grow in the first place."

This tale has been unlawfully obtained from Royal Road. If you discover it on Amazon, kindly report it.

Everyone nods along as Ember continues.

"Demons come from the Demonic Realm. You walked through a rift to challenge one of their trials with a rift key once. Their world is mostly abundant with Demonic Energy, not mana. Their system and progression patterns to grow stronger do not work the same way as you humans."

I nod, pulling out the purple-white glowing rift key that I still have that unlocks the next trial for everyone to see, and respond.

"That's right... but I can sometimes see Demonic Energy in my system text... I have a skill for it, and even Demonic Artifacts show up in my appraisal skill."

I pause and think to myself before speaking again.

"What about Demons that run labyrinths here? They have levels. Most of them don't even use Demonic Energy at all, they use mana. What's with that?"

Ember turns to me and grins.

"That is true, but imagine you were born without an ounce of mana in your body in the Demonic Realm. You wouldn't awaken the same system you have, your body and magic would adapt to the environment you're placed in. Once in contact with certain energies, the system will adapt to it too. A great example is Soul Energy. Its power is not always visible on the system either, but sometimes buffs and skills can be visible on it once mixed with mana or altered to fit an unmodified mana-based system."

Ember points to Monk.

"My case and point here. Even without leveling up, or using the mana-based system, you grew stronger using an external energy source for many years before we met, Qi."

Monk nods, and Ember keeps talking.

"Sure, you were born with mana, but living creatures adapt to their environments. There are many energy sources and ways to control the world around you. Far more than you can comprehend right now."

He pauses, then speaks in a more serious tone to all of us.

"The progression of a Demon is simple. It goes from a weak basic hatchling Demon, to a Greater Demon that guards a labyrinth. This is considered a very strong form in their race, like humans would look up to an Elite fighter, or a B-Class ranked up hunter. Once it grows strong enough absorbing enough Demonic Energy, or if placed in a mana-based environment, enough mana, it may have the chance to evolve into an Arch Demon. It gains more skills, awakens a new core, and has the capacity to grow stronger far faster. This is considered a peak level soldier in the Demonic Realm. An Arch Demon's growth rate and possibilities are endless."

Ember lets out another sigh.

"Just like any powerful being, the greed for more power is never satisfied. There is a final progression for a Demon, but it requires an enormous amount of energy, physical ability, and time. It isn't exactly a feat one can just unlock from leveling up or absorbing more energy, they have to pass trials and claim the Demon Lord's throne. In doing that, they're able to finally reach their true peak form."

He turns to me and looks me in the eyes.

"Whenever a Demon Lord's throne begins to show itself, it is a sign that there will be a great war during that era. It's really only called the Demon Lord's throne because the highest concentration of energy is usually in the Demonic Realm, it's not very often one forms on other worlds. Another species is capable of claiming it, reaching their final forms too, but something like this basically never happens. The Demons always win. This is why the name of this special rank up process has been written into history as the ascension to Demon Lord."

Everyone sits in silence, but Ember keeps going on.

"It isn't uncommon for a new throne to emerge after a past Demon Lord is defeated, or a cataclysmic event triggers energy stores to create a rift. Most of the time, these great challenges happen within the Demonic Realm, but I've seen them emerge on other worlds too."

He turns back to the abyss for a final time.

"So, when the Lich King said he was on the path to becoming the next Demon Lord, he meant he was building an army, and becoming stronger to one day challenge all of the Demons and other beings that may show up to claim the throne."

I turn to him with wide eyes, and a fast-moving heart full of excitement.

"So, what you're saying is the Lich King wasn't even strong enough yet to take that throne?"

Ember shakes his head.

"Not even close. What I'm saying is, there are other beings watching this throne awaken too. Demons, Demonic monsters, and creatures from other worlds are always watching. I'm sure you've seen for yourself, many lurk in the abyss, waiting for it to awaken so they can challenge it themselves. It is a once in a lifetime opportunity. The fight for the throne has already begun. If the Association is really that strict about Demonic Energy, odds are, there are members in that organization that hope to reach this throne too."

My mind races at all of these possibilities, reshaping potential plans for the future based on what Ember has told me, but not setting anything in stone before I know exactly what I'd be getting myself into.

"So... How strong do I have to be to take this throne... and how far away is it from awakening?"

Ember shrugs.

"Who knows. A week? Six Months? Ten Years? The progression could speed up or slow down at any time. Throne awakenings are unpredictable. The trials are never the same either. Whenever it does happen, it isn't up to you. Your best bet is to keep training and getting stronger as usual for now. You may feel like you are on top of the world right now, but I assure you, if you want to find true power, you've just scratched the surface of what is possible."

The sun fully rises, and no more questions are asked.

Ember's words sounded like they were initially meant as a warning to all of us, but the more we listened and think about his words now, they feel more like a wake-up call, or even a motivational speech.

It is great to celebrate, but this is not the end, there is still far more work to do to reach the top.

This sentiment sinks into everyone, and the town below finally falls asleep and stops partying as the morning comes.

I make sure to give my doubles plans for the day while everyone goes and rests for a few hours, and I tell them to meet me back here at noon. Even I do the same, checking out a luxury suite at the top of the apartment complex that was specifically built for me. Many of my teammates have their own suites all made on the same floor. Monk goes to check on his master, but he has fallen into a deep sleep after making it back here and has not woken up since.

The suites have large beds, nice views, and basic needs all figured out, but they aren't as classy as some of the Vice, Solaran, or Valor city high rises I've been to. However, they're very nice for such short notice and limited building materials.

I take a hot shower and get ready for the day ahead.

A few hours pass and we all meet back up on the rooftop, feeling refreshed and ready to face the world.

Fisher, Lydia, Monk, Arie, Abby, Maria, Ember, and I all stand in a circle.

I hand out transportation crystals to those who don't have any, while those that do pull them out from their item boxes.

"It's time to get back to business. Let's break the news to Lith, and see how things are going in Sector 1."

In a flash of white light, crushing the crystals in our hands, we're all transported into the white-walled lobby of the Galeheart Tower.

Chapter 498

We materialize inside the lobby of the Galeheart Tower, and I immediately ask the two lobby men to tell me where Lith is even though I already know the answer.

"He should be in his office."

The elevator dings, and opens, but no one is inside it.

I turn and walk inside. All of my teammates follow, then the fast-moving elevator moves us up dozens of floors in a matter of seconds before letting out a ding and opening up to show the visual of Lith's high-rise office.

The moment I lay eyes on him, the man's appraisal-blocking artifacts are meaningless to me now. I see his [Lv. 824] rating clear as day now, his extreme wind element too, even all of the high-grade mental strength boosting artifacts cannot be hidden from the Soul Energy coursing through my eyes.

Even the mana shielding in this building that I assumed to be impenetrable before, can easily be looked through like glass windows. My conceptions about this being a completely secure building were completely wrong, the Dark One was most likely spying on us this entire time.

I sense many other buildings nearby, but 3 other large towers stand out the most to me in the center of the city previously protected by the Dark One's Royal Guards. The shielding on them is nearly identical in thickness to the Galeheart Tower. However, they're almost twice as tall.

While smaller office buildings surround these towers and have workers similar to the setup Lith has here just on a smaller scale, there is a clear distinction between those buildings and the 3 that are completely abandoned without a single guard or living soul inside them.

One of them seems to be filled to the brim with many unique magic items, possibly replacement gear for soldiers in its army.

Another has dozens of sectioned-off containment rooms, and it's hard to visualize exactly what's inside because of the many denser layers of shielding inside masking these very odd energy readings.

Then lastly, there's a building that feels entirely empty, other than a small opening at the lobby base that seems to go underground.

As my perception skills go wild, trying to pick up all of the readings in my environment, Lith stands up from his desk and interrupts my scans by speaking loudly with an annoyed expression on his face.

"Five of my isolation pods? You took them a few days ago, didn't you? I saw it all on the surveillance footage once I was done with my session, yet haven't heard back from you since. Those were rare gifts from the old Sector 2 leader, you know, they aren't easy to come by. You could have just used them here. I'd like a good explanation on why you've—"

"The Dark One is dead, I killed it. We destroyed its entire army. Every Dark Guard, Ghoul, Wraith, and follower under its spell."

As these words leave my lips, I grin and walk over to Lith while placing out a hand.

"I've finished my portion of our agreement a little ahead of schedule, we had to take some of your resources when we were in a pinch for time."

He stares at my outreached hand, and the look of annoyance on his face turns to one of shock.

"You... really did...?"

I smile and nod, staring him in the eyes with a serious look. There is only silence in the room for a moment before he places a hand over his desk and stands up to shake mine.

"Well... In that case... I did say I would give you whatever resources were necessary to become strong enough. I just never imagined you'd act so soon."

We release our handshake, and I smile.

"What's done is done. However, I have a few more conditions I'd like to add moving forward, because with the Dark One's army taken care of, the people standing before you right now make up the top fighters of the strongest army in the entire Dark Continent."

There's a pause of silence in the room as the reality of the situation sinks in, then I say it out loud.

"We're taking over."

Lith's face turns pale, but he doesn't move a muscle, speaking back in a steady tone, masking his fear.

"My connections— My resources— I'm far more powerful than just physical strength, I think you should reconsider your—"

The story has been stolen; if detected on Amazon, report the violation.

I interject before he completely misunderstands my point.

"Hey, I never said we're getting rid of you, nothing like that at all."

Color floods back into his face as I continue.

"I want you to be the face of Valor City. I need you to take over the arena, continue all of the high-end trade deals, and retake over the lost Royal Guards to make sure this place is secure."

I look in his eyes and speak up again.

"Consider my team the new Dark One's Army overlooking this city as a final measure of security, but with a far less strict agenda, and more perks. I want things to prosper here as much as you. Our trade deals shall run just as normal, you will keep your discount for items bought for Sector 1. Plus, I wish to see your promise to continue linking me with all of the other Sectors and regions on the mainland stay the same."

Lith nods, thinking over my words, then replies.

"That is fair. It's really all I asked for initially, and I assumed if you ever became strong enough to defeat the Dark One, there would be no reason to keep me in power, or even alive for that matter. However, negotiating with a human is far easier than a monster."

He lets out a sigh and sits back in his chair. Then, I reply again.

"Well, probably, but don't be so sure about that. I have one last condition, and there is no negotiating on this point."

Lith's eyebrows raise.

"What is it?"

"I need you to pledge your loyalty to me. You may run this city how you wish, and independently organize trade deals within Sector 1 or in private auctions if you wish, but my word is final. I need you to trust me and follow me as your leader as I establish dominance over the entire Dark Continent."

He clasps his hands, thinking about this for almost a full 30 seconds, then I feel a link of loyalty being created and a notification on my Rising Emperor's Domain interface adding Lith to the list while he speaks.

"Alright. If that is all, I pledge my loyalty to you as the new leader of The Dark Continent."

He nods and places out his hand, and we shake on it. I acknowledge his words and actions.

"Great, it's settled. We're back in business."

I completely change my tone from one of seriousness to one of more nonchalance.

"Now, I assume you've had enough time to reach out and send associates to the neighboring lands to get initial orders for the trade deals. Let me see what you've got."

Lith looks a bit startled at my sudden shift in composure. Then, he speaks up again in a relieved yet confused tone while reaching beneath his desk to pull out a stack of papers and an item box.

"Well, yes, I have a few order confirmations actually, they're uh—hold on. First, is there some soul pact or signature or contract you want me to sign? Just verbally agreeing to your terms seems a bit too easy, how do you even believe me?"

I shrug.

"It's one of my buffs, I trust you, you're part of the team now. Just don't change your mind about me and we'll be fine, I'll know if you do."

I eye the papers on his desk.

"Let me see the terms. Who agreed for the initial orders, are they similar to the estimates you gave out to me a few weeks back?"

Lith nods and pushes the papers forward while handing me the item box too.

"Pretty similar, but there are some differences. If you look there, I managed to secure preorders from 6 separate buyers. Well, 4 buyers that aren't including my initial basic item order here for Sector 1 and Chester's order from Sector 4."

I nod, sifting through the papers as Lith continues.

"There was a large order from Sector 3, mostly E and D class gear for their hunters in smaller cities and enhancement potions for the workers on the vast farmland. It is nearly identical to their past orders with the old Sector 2 leader. It seems they don't mind at all who is selling gear, they just want materials to continue business as usual."

Lith points to another stack of pages.

"This one is the Vice Region's order. It's a fraction of what they used to buy, so it seems they're testing the waters of a new supplier here, but getting our foot in the door is always better than nothing."

Then, he shakes his head.

"No one from the Apex region wanted anything to do with a new unknown source from the Dark Continent, so there were no takers there. However, both the Bedrock and Talton region placed in orders at similar sizes as the Vice Region. Out of the 8 great regions, they hardly ever partake in trade with foreign countries. It seems a new seat of power in Sector 2 has opened up more opportunities."

Lith points to the item box, and I look inside.

About 45 Platinum in miscellaneous currencies fill the small spatial magic box. There's some platinum bars, mostly gold coins, piles of silver, and even bronze inside too.

Lith speaks up, and pushes all of the order forms over as I count it.

"That's 25% of the final amount, its what I charged for pre-orders. Fulfill all of the orders on this list within 30 days and another 135 Platinum Bars are coming your way."

I eye over the lists, then place them into my item storage, along with the item box full of money he just handed me.

"It'll be doable. I'll have a team ready to fulfill these. Where do I fulfill them to exactly, can I set up some personal contacts here?"

Lith nods, placing a few transport crystals with labels of dates, times, and locations on them onto his desk.

"Meeting points have already been assigned for each pickup. If you would like to come along with me once we make the deliveries on the first order, I believe that would be a great way to introduce you. However, I'm happy to maintain these contacts and have my people conduct the deliveries for you. It is a fair exchange for the discount on goods you're selling to me. I'll make a great profit by reselling them in Valor City and the surrounding trade cities."

I nod again, allowing Lith to securely place each of the delivery-dated and marked crystals back into his desk.

"Possibly, I'd still like to meet with the people I'm directly trading with at least once. We'll talk over these details again after the 30 days are up. I'll have my craftsmen begin work after we leave Valor City today. I'm impressed with your connections and ability to make these deals happen, Lith, good job."

I turn around and point to the elevator.

"Anyway, now that the technical business is out of the way, let's go do something fun. I want to go check out the 3 newly abandoned towers in this Royal Coin District. I wonder what the Dark One was hiding here."

Chapter 499

Ember speaks up after my final words to Lith.

"Yes, that's a good idea."

He points directly at one of the white mana-shielded walls of the penthouse suite. To me, however, it looks as if he's pointing to the building with the multiple layers of denser shielding and compartments inside it.

"That building in particular, I think we should check it out."

He opens a telepathy link between us and continues.

"I sense leftover residue of the Lich King's Soul Energy."

Both Abby and Maria look in the same direction with Soul Energy Circulating inside their eyes, invisible to everyone else in the room that has not awakened this level of energy cultivation.

Abby is more fixated on another tower, the one filled with weapons and gear, while Maria stares down at the empty tower with a single hole in its lobby leading underground.

After a moment of silence, Lith answers my initial claim by walking over to the elevator and opening its door with a ding.

"I don't see why not... This will be the first time in months I've been outside in the center of the city. I'm interested to see how things are too."

We all get into the elevator and take it down to one floor above the lobby.

The door slides open with a ding, and a very similar-looking rectangular door is visible on the other side of the room.

Lith presses a small silver device and it opens up, revealing a containment room about twice the size of the elevator we just left. Once we're all inside, the door shuts us out of the building and puts up a dense layer of mana shielding. A final door opens on the other side of this room and it leads to the outside world.

The midday sun shines in as we all walk outside into the Royal Coin District of Valor City.

Our footsteps on the smooth black stone streets echo throughout the silent city.

Not a single soul is outside with us.

There are just under 20 office buildings with similar blocked off mana shielding setups like the Galeheart tower, but none of them are as large or as well maintained.

They're all business owners or trade associates that work in reselling goods and services in this city or Sector 1, or even other regions but have set up their base of operations here for tax purposes. Each and every one has a transport platform in their building, meaning all of these businesses are either monitored or working in conjunction with the Association in some way.

Even Lith in the Galeheart tower, at one point had to make a deal to get a transport platform installed.

However, the 3 largest buildings in this city, the ones that look newly built, and have the highest graded mana shielding on them, surprisingly do not have a single teleport platform inside.

The Association was not in control of the Dark One's actions at all, and this makes me even more curious about this scene.

We all walk out into the street, and the white door shuts behind us.

While walking through the streets, the emptiness and silence is pretty eerie.

It makes things especially strange with my advanced perception abilities. I can hear and sense people in the Platinum, Gold, and Silver district not so far away, going about their daily lives, shopping, and having fun in the city.

We walk past buildings full of workers that have no idea the entity they're hiding from indoors is dead and gone.

Everyone looks around this area in awe, before we make it to the front of the first large building previously owned by the Dark One.

The outside of the building is tinted a dark shade of grey, nearly black, but the humming coming off of it shows that this is just the outer layer of metals that hold that mana shielding in place.

There are no control panels or simple ways I see to get in, so I just raise my right hand and allow dark red Soul Energy to seep out and form a large rectangle on the building's wall where the single door to enter is locked.

Then, melt through the A-Grade mana shielding with ease, incinerating that portion of the wall and letting the remains fall into my item storage.

There is a burst of energy where the shielding is broken off, but my Soul Energy absorbs all of that excess blast automatically so none of my party is even close to being caught in the crossfire.

Once the reactions die down I deactivate my Soul Energy and we walk through the rectangular opening in the base of the building like nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

My teammates all follow without reacting much either but Lith walks through the makeshift doors with wide eyes as he didn't know it was even possible to break through shielding this thick with such ease.

The lobby we walk into is dark, but once I step into the center of the room, a series of automatic lighting fixtures begin to turn on.

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

Starting at the bottom floor that we stand on, then moving upward one by one up over 100 individual stories.

The walls are all dark grey, similar to the outer layer of shielding that surrounds the outside of the building, however, the floors are made of what looks like clear glass. Even the spiraling staircase upward that only follows the outer walls is clear glass as well.

Standing at the bottom of the building here, I can see up to the top floor just by looking up, and on display, mounted on every wall, there are thousands of weapons, shields, potions, artifacts, and even full suits of armor.

Everyone looks around at the gear in awe, and we even begin climbing the stairs up, however, all I'm doing is conducting detailed scans of all these items.

The majority of gear here is really only C and B grade items, while the a few pieces of gear near the top of the tower nears A Grade, but none of it is even close to the drops I managed to get after killing the Ranked up Dark Guards.

There are about 20 suits of full appraisal blocking armor at the top of the tower, and these are really the only items that fully pique my interest.

As we walk up, I use telekinesis to grab a few interesting items that catch my eye. They're mostly high-grade B-Class items and unique looking gems, but nothing that I can confidently merge with A-Grade material or Mythic Grade skills without something going horribly wrong like creating a cursed item.

I don't bother to take 99% of the gear into my item storage because it's just more common grade gear, making a comment under my breath.

"You would think someone like the Lich King would have some A-Grade weapons or even higher, right...? It must be hiding the good stuff somewhere else."

Lith responds to my murmurs.

"Do you know how rare it is to find monsters, or even hunters at that level?"

I turn back to him with a shrug.

"I don't know, it's pretty common in big labyrinths. Plus, we're talking about the criminal overlord of an entire continent, not just some random guy."

Lith laughs.

"You really are an interesting one, aren't you? You're aware that the Association only has 4 registered A-Ranked hunters in the entirety of the 8 great regions. There are less than 100 registered A-Rankers in the entire world. This is the pinnacle of power we're talking about. High-Grade items above C and B grade don't exist in great numbers. There isn't enough mana in this world to even maintain the mass creation of items like the ones you're after."

He points to all of the gear on the walls as we continue climbing upward with near 100% stat boosting perks and elements imbued into them, along with essence stones and range gems and potions.

"Each one of these treasures is enough to be the main prize at the end of a grand scale auction. The winnings would be enough to set a normal family up for the rest of their lives."

I cross my arms, turning to everyone and nod as we get up to the top floor.

"Well, I took everything I want. Once we make our way back down, if you want any of this gear for personal use, feel free to take it."

I turn to Lydia and Fisher.

"You two gather up enough gear to give everyone in the Recruits army enough solid weapons and armor for 10 battles like the one we just fought. Plus, let's plan for enough gear for the army to grow as well.... So 10x that number again."

They both nod and I watch Abby, Ember, Arie, Monk, and Maria as they act pretty uninterested about most of the gear in this tower too.

I turn to Lith.

"Once they've stripped this place of everything of value to us, travel to some of these high-end auctions and slowly sell off the remaining gear. Keep 50% of the sales and reinvest it into higher security for Valor City, the other 50% I want for myself."

He agrees to my terms happily as we make it to the top floor and the two rows of black suits of armor come into full view; 20 in total.

[Full Appraisal Blocking Armor Set][Un-Bonded]

Is the label on all of them.

I immediately open my item storage and allow 10 full armor sets to fall inside.

None of the other gear I've ever seen has had this [Un-bonded] rating on them, it's the first clue I'll have toward recreating or at least understanding gear like this in the future.

Then, I speak up to Lith again.

"Those other 10, I need you to put your elite troops in them to guard this inner portion of Valor City as well as the arena. We need to keep up appearances. We will be the only ones to know the Dark One is dead."

The corner of Lith's mouth turns up.

"Very well, I'll make sure it's done."

He walks around the sets of armor and examines them further while my teammates all make the slow walk downstairs, placing about half of the gear on the walls into their item storages for personal use or for the future army of recruits to use.

Soon after, Lith places the black armor and leftover gear on the walls into his own item box and we leave the stripped tower just as quickly as we entered through the small hole in its lobby.

The shell of a fortress is left behind as we walk through the silent streets again, approaching the second tower. This is the one that even at this up-close range I'm unable to completely scan what is inside.

Ember warned me while in the Galeheart tower that he sensed dormant Soul energy from the Lich King here, and now that I'm this close to it, I sense its presence too.

However, all that it is is dormant. I feel no threat, just the afterimage of energy. So, I break through the front door in the same manner, slicing a rectangular hole through its dense mana-shielded walls.

Once we enter this building, an automatic light turns on in the empty black lobby just like the last, however, there is a black ceiling above us and an elevator at the back of the room that leads upward to bring us into the incredibly high-grade shielded floors above.

Now that I can scan the full building from inside, I'm starting to piece together what's here using my Soul Energy senses, but it still doesn't seem real...

The elevator door opens at the back of the room by pressing a small button on the wall next to it, and the panel inside leads us to any floor we wish.

I click on [Floor 59] as it's the highest floor in this building that has extra shielding on it. Every floor above this one is empty, just like a normal building, but with only one layer of mana shielding like every other office building in this district.

As the elevator door dings open, a second wall of shielding automatically opens to reveal the true nature of this floor and the final veil of disguise is lifted.

I immediately activate my Soul Energy Aura to counteract the Orange wave of light that flows toward us.

The energy is captured, incinerated, and its remains are locked away in the depths of my item storage the moment it is absorbed by my Aura. This energy that flows out is nowhere near the strength of the aura that was used directly from the Lich King itself when it was fighting me.

The sight before me as the mist clears confirms exactly what I saw in my mind's eye when I entered this building. It's the reason I chose to come to this floor in particular, but still doesn't make what I'm seeing any less shocking.

There are 3 large glass tanks of orange liquid with a single human floating inside each of them.

They are fighters from the Valor City fight arena who I recognize very well.

The visual from a few days ago of them being consumed by the [Curse of The Lich King] carried out by the 5th ranked Dark Guard beneath the fight arena is still very fresh in my mind.

Max, Sia, and Ace float before us in a state of suspended animation with their status sheets wiped completely blank, soaked to the bone with remnants of the Lich King's orange Soul Energy.

Below me on the other floors floating in orange pools of Soul Energy just like them, there are hundreds of other high level hunters and fighters held captive by the Dark One.

Chapter 500

The three legacy fighters who introduced me to the rules of the arena when I first entered Valor City float before me now, unmoving while dark orange soul energy courses through their bodies.

Maria points at them and speaks up.

"Hey, it's them! We had dinner with them together that one night. The legacy fighters at the arena... They were underground the first time we ran from the 5th ranked Dark Guard! Is this where they were taken? What's... going on here...?"

Abby, Monk, and Lith stare at the pod with surprised expressions as they are very familiar with these three individuals as well.

My Soul Energy expands to start filling the room and trapping away more of the Soul Energy that lingers and pours out of the pods. I continue to step forward until I'm faced right up against the glass of the middle tank of liquid with Ace, the swordsman, floating with his eyes closed wearing the exact same gear as he did on the day of their capture.

However, all of the magic power has been drained from them, and it seems as if it is just a plain metal sword by his side and clothing and armor with no enchantments at all.

I speak up.

"They're alive... but not for long..."

I can feel that their vitality is directly linked with the remaining Soul Energy in the room.

The moment we opened this door the seal to the outside world was broken. As I began absorbing their remaining borrowed lifeline, the timer for their elimination sped up very quickly.

With no orders to follow, and their commander deceased, the only thing they can do is wait for the Soul Energy around them to naturally disperse. There's no telling how long a process like this would take, and I'm not entirely sure it's possible. Their bones and organs are soaked with Dense Orange Soul Energy.

We stand in silence as my red Aura creeps around the back of the room too, soaking up every bit of orange mist, only leaving the dense stores that are left inside the three fighters remaining.

Monk speaks up next.

"What if you attempt to wash away their curse, like you did with my master?"

I nod, allowing the red energy to creep up over the tops of the tanks and down into the water.

"That's exactly my plan. I'll give them the same choice."

The red energy fills the entire room now, devouring the surrounding orange energy that is inside the tubs now, creeping closer to the three bodies inside. I let a wave of telepathy hit the fighters while the dark red flames ignite underwater and surround their bodies entirely.

The same statement that echoed throughout the heads of all of the Dark One's troops echoes through their minds.

"Pledge your loyalty, or burn to ash."

My Soul Energy seeps into their bodies and dense red flames fill the entire room as the highest amount of Soul Energy that needs to be dispersed is directly attacked.

Everyone here attached to my link is unaffected by my flames.

It takes a full 10 seconds for my fire to die down, and all of the water and glass from the tubs to shatter and disintegrate as well.

Every drop of orange Soul Energy that infected these fighters' vitals, bones, and inner parts of their soul are burned away.

I feel three brand new links of loyalty connect with me, and when the red Soul energy flames dissipate, the only thing left behind is the three fighters looking up at all of us in awe, like they just woke up from a long slumber.

Max, the shield, makes eye contact with me and smiles with light lips before collapsing onto the ground.

Sia, the earth user who now has had this power stripped away from her manages to let out a faint whisper.

"It's you... The Flame Emperor..."

Then collapses as well.

Ace falls to one knee, keeping himself awake longer than any of the others.

"You saved us. Whoever you people really are... We are indebted to you."

If you discover this tale on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen. Please report the violation.

His eyes scan the room, recognizing Monk, Maria, and Abby after me, then bows his head.

He falls forward and passes out onto the floor after this too and the room falls silent once again.

I nod with a satisfied look on my face.

"It worked."

Lith speaks up, staring at the sight before him in awe.

"W-What worked? What did you just do? I definitely recognize those three..."

I speak up again..

"I need you to get some rooms ready. Whether that's in the Galeheart tower or in the Gold district of Valor City. I don't have enough infrastructure for this many new people back in Sector 2 just yet..."

I think to myself while nodding, and Lith agrees to sort out the arrangements.

Lith uses a teleport crystal to quickly get back to his tower and get some of his Royal Guards on payroll to come and help.

At the same time, I use the elevator to go down to the 58th floor to find 2 more tubs of orange liquid and 2 more fighters that I've never seen before.

Without wasting time, I use the same method of focusing a telepathy wave into their heads to give them an ultimatum, then purge the orange soul energy from their bodies.

To my surprise, it works again.

Both fighters fall to the floor and have a brief moment of consciousness before falling asleep on the floor.

I move down floors again, repeating the process with the three more tubs on the 57th.

A little overconfident in my abilities, I assume this test will go just like all of the others, but once given a choice, only 2 of the 3 captured fighters create links of loyalty with me. The final member is burned to ash along with the Lich King's Soul Energy that courses through his body.

As we travel downward floor to floor, this becomes a more common occurrence.

About 20% of the unconscious fighters when given a chance to live under my rule, or die with the Soul Energy they are bonded with, choose the latter.

To me, if they do not accept my terms, they are nothing more than pawns of the Lich King's army.

Everyone in these pods is between level 400 and 750. They are clearly a special group chosen by the Dark One for experiments.

Possibly to be turned into Wraiths, or even to be trained up to level 1000 and turned into Dark Guards. The Lich King's true motives with this tower are unknown to me.

They are all very strong, but have nothing on their status sheets.

Once we make it all the way down to the bottom of the tower on floor 1, 93 new links of loyalty have been added to my Rising Emperor's domain, and they are all at a similar level as the three squad leaders in my army, and at a similar mana control as the Elite soldiers.

As we do, Lith and some of his hired guards come in and out of the past floors and bring the passed out fighters back to the Galeheart tower to rest in their private facilities. The extras are brought to various smaller hotels in the Gold District with close connections to the Galeheart Mercenary Guild.

Lith recognizes almost every one of the fighters on the top 30 floors or so as past arena contestants that mysteriously stopped showing up over the last few months. Some are from the midday events, while others were even top-ranked legacy fighters before Ace, Max, Sia, and Monk took the stage.

Many people on the lower floors are unrecognizable to both of us, and are most likely just random adventurers and hunters that were kidnapped in the Dark Continent as the Lich King has been expanding his domain over the years.

I've managed to save over 80% of them from rotting away inside this tower for eternity. If they choose to join my ranks when they wake up, the size of my army just grew a significant amount in both strength and numbers. However, based on how long Monk's master has been sleeping, there is no estimate on how long this slumber will actually last.

Once they're all taken care of, we leave this tower and walk through the empty streets again to enter the 3rd and final tower.

After I cut open the wall at its base, just like the past two, we walk inside and the sight we see is very interesting.

The lights flicker on automatically like all of the other buildings. There are many many floors above, just like the building we just left. However, there is no elevator in the lobby that leads up to them, and using all of my perception senses, I'm positive that none of these higher floors have anything stored on them.

Other than the ground level floor we stand on, this massive tower is an empty mana shielded shell.

At the back of the lobby, there is a large metal box with blue holograms hovering over it connected to intricate-looking interfaces.

It is split into three sections, Silver, Gold, and Platinum, with numbers ticking away on each of them.

Lith's eyes open wide at the sight of this machinery, but my vision is more focused on the single square opening in the center of the room that has a ladder leading hundreds of meters down into the ground.

Lith speaks out while walking over to the machine.

"This is the machine that tracks all of the wristbands in the city. It may seem like a small device, but this small box controls and keeps the balance of power in this city. It tracks all transactions between wristbands, collects the midnight tax, and is linked to the city-wide surveillance network."

As he says this, my focus is swayed quite a bit, but the faint pure white Qi reading that comes from down below us captures most of my attention.

I reply.

"Well- There's no use in ruining a good thing. Make sure that control box stays safe. We'll keep the midnight tax ongoing and continue blocking off areas of the city to monetary tiered restrictions. It may even be safer to bring this device into the GaleHeart Tower for more protection. Leaving it out in the open here could be risky."

My gaze turns back to the enormous hole in the ground.

Everyone else on my team senses there is something down in the darkness as well.

Fisher and Lydia even peer over the edge.

Monk speaks up.

"I think I know exactly what is down there... We have one beneath the monastery, but it isn't nearly as massive."

His words linger, and I begin to build a visual in my mind of the cave system below the City that is connected to this long open entrance using my Soul Energy senses.

The silence is broken by Ember's comment next.

"I think I know too. This explains how the Dark One and all of its guards managed to get so much stronger while it was here in the city."

Everyone is mesmerized by the faint waves of Qi flowing up from the darkness and very curious about Monk and Ember's words.

I jump into the small square hole and begin floating down, deep underground to see for myself what exactly is below this final tower.