

D. Diver 51

Chapter 51

I let the crowd of hunters go into the dungeon first. I'll take my time and venture a bit deeper today to find some harder opponents. I'm probably not ready for the boss yet, it'll take a few days before I can handle that solo.

There's a large sense of tension from the other parties. This whole dungeon surge thing is a pretty big deal.

Once it was my turn to enter I pulled out my sword and jumped through the glowing blue portal.

I wandered around the Minotaur Dungeon without any problems. The monsters became stronger and stronger as the day went on.

In 6 hours I faced off against 7 groups in total. There were a few other teams in the dungeon, so whenever I got nearby, I turned the other way to keep my distance. It was a little annoying at first, but overall it didn't really matter.

The first 3 groups I fought were pretty easy. They were all level 155-165. It was just mana drops, no level gains at all.

The next two groups were a bit harder. They were both lead by a boss with a pretty high level. One was Lv. 188, the other was Lv. 191. The Lv. 188 dropped an axe, the other 5 Minotaurs dropped only mana. I gained 4 levels from these battles.

It's much easier to level grind now that I can use my opponents MP. I'm getting hit while blocking occasionally, but with every increasing level the damage is becoming less and less.

The next group I fought had a surprising twist. It consisted of 4 total minotaurs. Their levels were 176, 177, 180, and 182. At first the monsters actually gave me a run for my money. They attacked in charges of two and had similar strength to my own. My only advantage was speed. I dragged the battle out for a long time while hardening for defense and absorbing their MP simultaneously landing cheap shots whenever I could. After this battle I had to drink an HP potion to recover fully.

The more I fight in this dungeon the more I understand why guilds love to come here. These beasts are good fighters, but they don't have any mind-blowing moves. As long as a team has proper gear and teamwork, power leveling is a breeze.

After this battle I gained 3 more levels and collected 4 huge mana crystals.

My final group was even more of a challenge. It was a group of 2 minotaur. One was a level 161 and the other stood at a staggering level 202.

The lower level monster was defeated very quickly at the beginning of the fight.

The Level 202 was definitely a challenge though. It was very strong and very fast. My small frame and agility were my only upside when it came to basic stats. I had to play it very safe and slowly chip away at the beast while blocking its attacks with a hardened left arm.

It chipped me down to about half of my HP before the battle was over. Both of these monsters just dropped mana crystals, no extra loot. I gained 3 levels from this battle.

After this fight I took a small break to sit by a tree and check my status.

[Status Open]

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 182

Hp: 465/915

Mp: 880/915

Strength: 437 [+125]

Speed: 521

Agility: 544

Defense: 389 [+156]

Mental Strength: 437 [+87]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Self Regeneration

Spacial Magic[Item Storage]

Plunderer

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Stainless Steel Sword [+125 Strength]

After a quick rest I got up with a grin on my face and started heading back to the dungeon entrance. I need to stock up on HP portions, I didn't realize how tough some of these higher level minotaurs are. Plus, a bite to eat wouldn't hurt. I'll come back right after and continue this level grinding.

It took about an hour, but I made it back to the floating blue portal and left the dungeon. I heard one team fighting a nearby group of monsters on the way back but didn't encounter any myself.

I exited the dungeon and took the train back to the main Hub. When I made it up to the surface I could see a pretty big commotion going on by the E Class escalator. There were two extra guards in

front preventing people from passing. One of them was speaking to a group, I couldn't help but listen in.

"We're sorry to delay all of your hunting. There's been 2 large E Class breaks. It shouldn't be much of a problem, the bosses will be cleared soon. We have temporarily raised the entrance standard to a D Class minimum for 1 hour. Please bare with us, this is for your safety."

I raised an eyebrow. A couple E class dungeon breaks huh? Maybe it wouldn't hurt if I checked it out. I took out my ID and showed the guard while asking him a question.

"Hey, uh. Which dungeons were the ones that had a break?"

He nodded to let me pass.

"There's a pretty bad goblin dungeon break, its lower level and should be cleared within the hour. The other seems to be a rat dungeon, it should be cleared much sooner. We just got news to shut off the area to newbies just in case."

"Alright. Understood."

I headed down to the E Class platform to check things out. They have a goblin dungeon here too? I wonder what it's like? The rat dungeon sounds disgusting, I don't mind missing out on that. The only break I've ever seen was that previous cyclops dungeon break... and I was very under prepared. This one should be fairly easy, some rare loot may drop if I have enough time to farm.

It looks like there's a lot of people with the same idea as me. As I got down to the platform it was pretty chaotic. I read the info board and sure enough the train with all the parties surrounding it was the goblin dungeon. I could see about 20 other hunters in 6 separate groups ranging from 2-5 members. It looks like I'm the only solo hunter here.

We all boarded the train and were off shortly after. It was a quick ride, no more than 3 minutes. Everyone on the train was getting anxious. They were either scared of what was in that dungeon or were just inching to fight. I for one, was itching to fight.

Once the stop arrived we all piled out and went up the escalator to be met with a floating red portal. I could feel the dense magic in the air. This is definitely a dungeon break.

I let a few people jump through first, but I followed soon after. We all dispersed once entering.

It's actually pretty similar to the old goblin dungeon I used to hunt at. That brings back memories. There's thick tall grass everywhere and occasional trees. It's basically an open plane dungeon.

No more than 2 minutes in I already encountered a monster. It was just a goblin, I used inspect.

[Lv. 13]

I chuckled a little and cut it in half with a lazy swing of my sword. It is definitely stronger than your average goblin, but at this level I can't tell the difference. I walked further into the dungeon. A few more goblins ran at me, but they were defeated in seconds. I didn't even bother to collect the mana.

After 10 minutes or so I was starting to get a bit discouraged. Did I really come down here for this?

I was about to turn back, but then I heard a familiar roar.

I used enemy detection and inspect.

[Lv. 41]

Something bigger is here.. I'm intrigued. I ran towards it with my sword ready. To my surprise it was a mutant hobgoblin! This is a pretty bad break, I didn't even know these guys could spawn outside the boss room.

The monster charged towards me with its sword pointed straight ahead while grunting and hissing. It was an easy kill, I defeated it in seconds. This gave me hope though, there might be more unusual spawns around here.

The air started getting denser and denser. This is a good sign, the magic is getting more concentrated. I kept using enemy detection and inspect with a very wide range to look for mutants.

[Lv. 14]

[Lv. 31]

[Lv. 11]

{Lv. 42]

[Lv. 38]

There were a variety of goblins and hobgoblins all over the place the further I went inside. I ran into a few other hunters, but it was nothing more than a short head nod and us running off in opposite directions.

[Lv. 17]

[Lv. 44]

[Lv. 19]

[Lv. 46]

[Lv. 51]

The levels were slowly increasing more and more. I kept walking further in towards the dense pocket of magic.

[Lv. 124]

It's 100m away...

Now this is what I was looking for. The air is heavy and my sword is drawn. There's a calm silence as I walk slowly towards my future opponent.

50m....

I'm getting closer. Soon it'll be within range. There's a small patch of trees up ahead, it must be in there.

20m....

My face lit up when I saw the creature pop out of the tree-line.

It's an old looking goblin dressed in a dark cloak and a leather hat. The monster is carrying a long wooden staff and has a large brown satchel that looks full to the brim. It let off a faint grey glow, it must be a magic user.

This is my first time coming face to face with a Shaman. I can barely hold in my excitement as I tighten the grip on my sword and get ready to fight.

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The Shaman looked me up and down with bloodshot eyes. There's a peculiar magic aura surrounding it.

I stared it down as well with my sword pointed straight ahead. I'm sure I could defeat this monster in seconds if I went all out, but I want to see what it can do. I've only read about shamans in comics, this is the first one I've actually seen out in a dungeon.

The monster raised its staff and let out a grunt. Its leather pouch opened up and an assortment of silver orbs came flying out.

They were all moving in a circle around the monster, I couldn't quite make out what they were. If I had to guess, they looked like small balls of metal, rocks, or maybe crystals. Again, I've never seen anything like this.

The shaman hissed and pointed its staff right at me. Two of the floating orbs moved out of formation and came rocketing my way.

"CLANNGGGG"

I blocked them with my sword without much of a problem. The objects were quick, the two that hit my sword were circular metal balls. If I was closer to this shaman's level these orbs would be deadly. I could feel the power behind each of its attacks, its very strong for a level 124.

The monster stared at me while backing up and raised its staff again. Four of the orbs came hurdling towards me.

"CLANGGGGG"

I easy blocked all of the projectiles again. The shaman shrieked and turned.

"Oh, you're not getting away that easy!"

It was running away from me. What a joke. Some monster this is...

I ignited my sword into flames and followed it into the small cluster of trees.

"THUDDDD"

"AGHHH what th-"

As I followed the monster I was struck in the center of my back with one of those metal orbs. It didn't do any serious damage, but it definitely didn't feel good.

I turned to see half a dozen orbs floating behind me while I chased the shaman into the woods. It's a crafty little monster. It knows it can't beat me straight on, so it's going to do what it can to survive.

I fought off most of the metal orbs, but they kept coming back no matter how many times I hit them. My back is getting bruised up. I wonder what kind of magic this shaman is using...? Whatever it is, this would be a good skill to have.

I could see the monster right in front of me less than 10m away but it keeps diving behind trees and scurrying around while I defend myself from its floating orbs.

I'm getting a bit frustrated. It keeps twisting and turning through this small patch of forest because it knows the layout like the back of its hand. Unlike me, this is the first time I've seen any of this scenery. The monster is hissing and making sound similar to laughter. I think it's enjoying this... I can see the end of the tree patch in sight, it looks like the shaman is heading out soon. Finally, a fight in a wide open field will be much easier for me.

As we neared the edge of the trees I came within 3m of the slimy little creature. I was seconds away from slicing it to pieces. Then, I felt my footing give out.

My vision went blurry and I felt weightless for a moment...

"THUDDDD"

I hit the ground moments later and heard faint footsteps and hissing moving away from me.

It's dark in here... did I really fall for the oldest trick in the book... This Shaman lead me straight into a pitfall and I fell for it. There are a few large wooden spikes at the bottom, but they were poorly constructed. I broke most of them with the impact of my fall, I'm bleeding a little but it's nothing serious.

I looked up to see the bright blue sky, and proceeded to use the wooden spikes to climb out of the trap like a make shift ladder.

"No more playing around... come on out!"

I used my enemy detection and located it 100m ahead of me. This coward really put me in a hole and made a run for it.

I sprinted out of the trees with my blade on fire and a smirk across my face.

It's wide open in the field and running quickly even deeper into the dungeon. I followed the monster in a straight line closing the distance as fast as I could.

Its metal orbs were no where in sight, I could focus on running at full speed. Less than 30 seconds later we were face to face again.

The monster hissed and summoned its orbs from the pouch. Without hesitation I went in for a strike, I'm not letting this opportunity pass again.

I swung my fiery blade at the shaman's neck while being pelted by its orbs. I could feel a few make contact breaking a few of my ribs, but I had my eye on the prize.

"Shingggggggg"

"THUDDDD"

I sliced through the shamans neck like butter and the battle was over just like that. I looked down to see my favorite floating blue letters.

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Telekinesis

[YES][NO]

With a grin I chose [YES] and used self regeneration to heal my minor injuries.

The body of the shaman started to disappear pretty quickly and to my surprise it didn't only drop mana. There was a small silver key next to the crystal on the ground.

I picked the loot up and examined the key for a moment before throwing them both in my item storage.

I guess I'll have to ask around, I've never seen anything like this for an item drop before... I think I've had enough fun here, its about time I head back. Somebody is bound to beat the boss soon anyways.

I headed back towards the dungeon start point, but sure enough a team beat the boss before I could make it back. I came just in time, 10 more minutes and I would have missed my chance to find that shaman.

A white light appeared, It felt odd not being in a boss room and seeing this light. Everyone in the dungeon was transported back into that small room at the top of the escalator. It was very crowded, there were easily 40 people crammed into this tight space.

They all seemed to be beginner D Class hunters and some E Class that managed to get in before they closed off the platform. I didn't talk to anyone, I just minded my own business and tried to sift through the crowd towards the escalator.

"Hey! It's Jay right?"

I turned my head. Who knows my name in this city?

"H-Hi Uhh... who are you?"

Standing in front of me was a short red haired girl with a black combat suit on similar to the ones I saw at the Hunters Association, but definitely not exactly same.

She smiled and reached out her hand.

"The name's Nessa. I Saw you taking with my captain Hundson yesterday. Nice to formally meet you!"

"I- uhh. Really? I just saw him this morning."

"Yeah it's my day off. Hundson trains a lot of us D Class at the Tara Guild. I'm pretty new to the city, they let me join the day I asked!"

I took a closer look at Nessa. She was on the shorter side, maybe 160cm. Bright orange/red hair, and bright blue eyes with light freckles on her cheeks. If I had to guess she was no more than 19 years old. A D Class and new to the city huh? She must be a pretty good fighter... and have some kind of unique or useful combat skill.

I boarded the escalator and continued the small talk as she followed.

"What are you doing at an E Class break?"

She smiled.

"Well, its my first time hearing about one of these so called surges. I wanted to see what they were all about for myself."

I nodded.

"Yup, me too."

"Disappointing huh?"

"Uhh, I guess. It was interesting."

It was actually not disappointing at all, it couldn't have gone any better for me. I decided not to say anything about the rare monster I faced though. It's just becoming a habit to keep my experiences to myself.. There's no point in keeping secrets, it's just more simple if I do.

"Well, I'm going out on a raid with my team tomorrow to the Minotaur dungeon again. Maybe I'll see you there?"

"Hmm, maybe. I'll be farming there tomorrow as well, but I really only hunt solo."

She pouted a bit, but I don't think she was actually upset. I can't help but to stare a bit, she's such a pretty girl. It's literally been one day since the last girl I trusted tried to kill me... Am I really going to fall for these charms again?

The train came and we rode it back to the main hub. When we walked upstairs there seemed to be a big commotion going on by the D Class escalator. There was a guard speaking up.

"Only parties of 3 and above or C Class hunters are allowed down to the D Class Dungeon platform for the next hour. There's been a large break in the Kobold dungeon, this is for your own safety!"

Looks like there's another large break. Think I'll pack it in for today though, I've had a good day of hunting. I turned to Nessa.

"I'm done for the day. It was a pleasure meeting you, maybe I'll see you out hunting again one of these days."

She smiled at me.

"Like I said before, I'm in the morning slot tomorrow. The whole team will be here right when the sun comes up."

I waved as I turned to leave.

"Alright. Maybe I'll see ya."

I'm just trying to be polite, I hope I didn't come off as rude. Yes, I wouldn't mind seeing her again but meeting a whole new team of hunters isn't on my immediate to do list.

I walked off into the city as the sun set heading towards the market to sell my loot.

Chapter 53

I arrived to the market less than 20 minutes later and waved to the old merchant.

"Hey kid, how are ya today?"

"Great."

I took my axe and mana out of my item storage to place them on counter between us.

"Ya know, that's a neat skill. I don't think you were using it when we first met, but I gotta say item storage must be useful!"

I froze in place... how could I be so careless? I've been using my item storage skill in front of the merchant this whole time like it's not a big deal. Anyone could have seen me using it here...

I looked around cautiously, not that it would matter. The damage is already done.

"U-Uh thanks, yeah. It's a good thing to have. Just uhm, could you keep it between us? I don't use this skill often."

The merchant could sense the tension in my voice and nodded slowly.

"Sure, sure. I won't pry."

He took my mana and placed them on the measuring scale. The big black numbers read out 3976.43MU. He took a look at the axe and smirked.

"This is a 175 strength boost axe, nice. I can do 80 silver for the whole haul."

I thought to myself for a moment.

"How about 40 silver, an item box, and 2 D class HP potions."

The old man eyed me for a moment then started shuffling through a cabinet.

"Sure, work for me."

He started counting out my silver and placed a small magic pouch with 2 HP potions on the counter.

"Oh, one other thing."

I pulled out the silver key and handed it to the merchant. His eyes lit up.

"Where'd you get this? I've only seen a handful of shaman keys in my lifetime."

"I got it from a dungeon break today. How much is it worth?"

"Ohh, good find. I'm sure you could get a few gold at auction for a key like this."

"Really? So... what's it do?"

"I'm not too sure... I've heard rumors about certain keys being used in the Capital Labyrinth, but I've never been there myself. If you're looking to sell it, I can give you an address for a good auction house. Here."

The old man scribbled something down on a small piece of paper and handed it to me. I took it and threw it in my item storage along with the key. It sounds enticing, but I'm not really interested in an auction right now, I'd rather capitalize on these increased dungeon breaks while I still can.

"Thanks. Appreciate it. Hey, how long to these surges tend to last anyways?"

I remembered the Inn keeper telling me about them, but I wasn't paying much attention to him when he was explaining.

"The last one we had lasted just a few days. I'm sure it'll be over by the end of this weekend."

I nodded and took the rest of my new items and silver off the table. The silver and potions were placed in my item storage but I tied the item box around my waist. The old man made a great observation... If I'm going to be using my item storage skill, I should at least be a bit stealthier about it. I'll keep some items in this magic pouch for when I'm out in public.

"Got it. Thanks again, pleasure doing business with you!"

"Of course, stay safe kid."

With a wave I left the market and grabbed a quick meal before heading back to the Inn. I was greeted by the attendant and quickly made my way upstairs. After my signature hot shower I fell asleep in bed almost immediately.

The next morning I woke up full of energy.

Once I hopped out of bed and got dressed, I made sure to put my sword and a handful of coins and potions into the new item box I purchased yesterday. Just in case I see anyone out hunting today its better that I use this as cover for my item storage skill.

After making my way downstairs I was greeted by the Inn keeper in the lobby.

"Another Day of Hunting?"

I nodded and smiled.

"Yup."

"It seems like today will be the peak of the surge, there were two C Class breaks last night. Be careful out there young man."

"Of course, thanks for looking out for me! I'll be okay."

I walked out the door with a grin across my face and grabbed a bite to eat before making my way towards the Dungeon Hub.

There's a huge crowd today, especially around the E Class line. The two guards in front of it are talking to the groups of passing hunters.

Now that I get a closer look... there's at least two guards at every station entrance now. Is the surge that bad today? Looks like they are tightening security.

I got in line for the D Class Dungeons and crossed my arms waiting patiently. Time passed and the line moved along slowly until I came face to face with the two guards. One of them spoke up.

"Hunter's License"

I handed the man my ID and he started shaking his head.

"Can't let you In today, sorry."

I looked at him with confusion.

"W-Why?? What do you mean?"

"All dungeons are only open to parties of 3 or more. The only exception is if you're one rank above the dungeon minimum. In this case, you'll need to be C Class minimum to enter the D Class

platform if you're hunting solo today. It's for your safety. I assure you, it will be back to normal within a day or two."

"I- Uhm."

"I'm going to have to ask you to step out of line. The E Class dungeons are open for you today if you'd like."

"Okay I... I'll just wait for my team then."

"Sounds good. Come back with them and I'll let you in then. Please step out of line."

I stepped out of line while looking at the floor. That was disappointing... I just blurted out that nonsense about a team so I could get back in line later and it wouldn't look weird.

I started walking back towards the E class line while scanning the area. Maybe I can hitch a ride in someone else's party. I won't actually fight with them, I'll just get down to the platform with them. That'll work. I grinned.

I walked around for a few minutes but no one looked approachable. Usually other people do the approaching to me... I'm still a bit socially awkward, I haven't thought about it much lately. Even though everyone around me seems to be out to get me in my own mind, is that really a good excuse to never try and make a new friends?

Then i remembered... Nessa and Hudson's group! They're hunting this morning, I could get in with them. I wasn't planning on it initially, but if I have to go with anyone I'd rather go with them than some randoms.

I started wandering around a bit more confidently because now I'm looking for a party that I've already met before. This shouldn't be too hard, unless they've already entered the dungeon.

The sun did just recently rise... I waited around watching groups of hunters funnel into the dungeons for about 20 minutes. Most people swarmed around the E and D Class Dungeons. There were a few that entered the C Class, and not one person entered the B Class dungeons. I did see a few parties go to the escalator in the back that went upwards, I completely forgot about that one. The gear those hunters had on were very expensive looking, it must be some kind of guild run entrance. I'll check it out later If I have the time. It was kind of calming to watch the crowds of people go by, but at the same time I was getting a bit anxious in the back of my mind wondering if they'd ever show up.

Then finally I saw a familiar face.

My eyes lit up as a party emerged from the crowd getting in line at the D Class escalator. It's Hudson... and Nessa! I couldn't forget that red hair. What a relief.

I walked over with a wide smile on my face.

Hudson was the first to notice me. He looked up and waved. Then Nessa looked up and noticed me as well as I came within talking range.

"So you decided to actually come and see me? Huh Jay!"

"I-Well yeah I did."

"Are you hunting solo in the D Class dungeons today? I heard it may be really dangerous with the recent surge reports."

I scratched the back of my head nervously and nodded slowly.

"Yeah, I was going to... but ahh I kind of need to be in a party to enter. It's a temporary rule apparently."

Hudson leaned in and winked at me.

"Come on in with us. No problem."

I smiled. He knows exactly what I need, perfect. No explanation needed.

"Thanks! You're the best."

Nessa chimed in again. She could clearly sense what was going on.

"Ahhh come on, fight with us for a little. I wanna see what you've got!"

"I-uhm. I... yeah sure."

I can't say no to her.

Hudson interjected.

"So you'll be joining us today?."

I looked at him.

"It won't be the full time if you had special training planned, I don't want to disrupt your session."

He grinned.

"Of course you can fight a few monsters with us today. I'd love to see what you can do. I've been trying to recruit you since the moment we met. It's no problem at all!"

We both chuckled a bit and I got in line between Nessa and Hudson.

There were 3 other team members close behind. I didn't get a good look at them yet, the line started moving forward before I could introduce myself.

Looks like I'm on another team... so much for my vow of solitude. At least I'll get to farm for another day in the D Class Dungeons.

Chapter 54

We all moved forward in line and approached the two guards. One of them recognized me.

"Hey, welcome back. Looks like you do have a party."

I nodded.

"Yep."

We all handed our IDs over and made it down the escalator to the D Class platform. It's a mess down here today. There are very large groups waiting by the train platforms but not boarding. Some of them have up to 10 hunters in a single party.

I don't even know how that would be profitable. I guess everyone just wants a crack at some potential rare loot from dungeon breaks. They are all camping out waiting for an announcement of a new break.

We walked through the crowd to the train platform that would bring us to the minotaur dungeon. Less than 5 minutes later our train arrived and we boarded. Hudson spoke up.

"Another day in the dungeons, what a life huh? The minotaur dungeon should still be fairly safe today. There is a guild order to clear the boss room if we get close. Plus to do maintenance where we see fit.."

I replied.

"Maintenance? What do you mean by that?"

He grinned.

"It just means we will have to defeat any mutants we come across to relieve some magic pressure. A routine check of the boss room wouldn't be a bad idea either, can't let too much energy build up. Especially on the peak day of the surge.

"Okay. Good to know. I didn't know dungeons worked exactly like that. I haven't seen a mutant in this dungeon yet though, only a few abnormally high levels. Have you?"

"Yeah, there's an occasional mutant. Should be no problem, our team can handle it. We're all high enough level and have some good skills to combat tough opponents. I'm hoping to submit one or two guild members for the C Class exams coming up in 2 weekends from now. They're holding them here in the city."

Nessa's eyes lit up.

"Ohh you're talking about the C Class exams? Hopefully I'll be able to apply, I'm less than 50 levels away."

I raised an eyebrow.

"Oh yeah? Hopefully I can make it in too."

She smiled. Hudson spoke up.

"These will be your last easy levels. Trust me, I've only been in a few C Class dungeons. I don't level up much anymore. I'd much rather train recruits than face off against those monstrosities."

I can only imagine the type of monsters in the higher level dungeons. It's making me excited thinking about it. I spoke up.

"Hey, if the dungeon doesn't show any signs of irregularities I'd rather go off and hunt on my own. No offense, I just would like to have the levels and loot to myself."

Hudson nodded slowly.

"Makes sense. Sure."

Nessa looked at me with a disappointed look on her face. I met her eyes and replied.

"Hey, don't look at me like that. I'll stick around for a little while, we'll fight together for the first few monster sightings."

Her face lit up again.

"Screeech"

The train stopped by our platform and we all got off to make our way up the escalator.

Soon after we all jumped through the floating blue portal.

There are 6 members to our team. I used inspect on everyone.

There's me. I'm level 182, but clearly that's not a perfect representation of my strength.

Hudson is level 265. Other than his physical strength and long sword I don't know anything about him yet... he's definitely strong though.

Nessa is Lv. 206. She seems quick, but doesn't doesn't carry any weapons. There could be something in her item box, or maybe she has some kind of interesting skill that doesn't require a weapon.

There are two other girls on the team. One of them has long black hair, pale white skin, wears a black raid suit, and carries two daggers. She is level 178. The other girl is dark skinned and very tall, she's slim with curly brown hair and carries a thin silver long sword. She is level 184. The two of them seem to stick together.

There's one last team member, he seems to be a tank. He's short, but very thick. When we entered the dungeon I saw him pull out a massive shield, nothing else. Maybe he focuses on only defense? I'm not sure yet. He's level 198.

We all walked together into the dungeon. Hudson led the party while Nessa and I walked closely. The other 3 members walked right behind us.

The dungeon didn't feel much different at all today. Dungeon breaks usually have dense magic concentration in the air. At least we don't have to worry about that.

After about 20 minutes of walking we came across our first pair of monsters. I used inspect.

[Lv. 158]

[Lv. 161]

Two Minotaurs were standing around in an empty field. They didn't notice us yet. Hudson spoke up.

"You're the guest, why don't you take the first hit. Nessa, be his backup"

We both nodded.

I pointed my sword at the monsters and made my way towards them. Nessa followed close behind. She didn't take out a weapon or activate any skills.

As we drew closer to the Minotaurs I decided to ignite my blade. This is the only skill I'll be using in front of this party today, I might as well give them a little show before I go off and hunt solo.

As my blade erupted into flames the closest monster turned its head to look at me. We were about 20m away and the one up front started to charge with its axe held high.

"CLANGGGG"

Sparks flew as our weapons collided and I pushed the beast backwards. My recent level ups have upgraded my strength considerably. In the monster's confusion I darted underneath it and swung at its abdomen with a fiery uppercut. The monster let out a roar as I ran behind it and finished the job with a final attack to the back of its neck.

I let out a burst of flames to make sure the deed was done and looked at my work with a satisfied grin. That was easy.

Nessa was watching from about 10m back. She looked at me with a grin on her face ear to ear.

"Fire huh?"

I nodded while pointing at the other minotaur with my blade.

"Yeah. One down, one to go. I'll leave it to you."

She nodded and reached into her item box to pull out a long sword.

My eyes widened a bit. A sword? Why didn't she pull that out earlier?

The other Minotaur realized its partner had been slain and didn't look happy about it. Nessa started running towards the beast, and it locked its eyes on her.

Then something unexpected happened...

Right in front of my eyes I watched Nessa's blade turn dark red and become covered in a blanket of flames. It's definitely fire magic, I couldn't mistake it for anything else.

"CLANGGGG"

Sparks flew and flames shot up in the air as Nessa overpowered the monster in front of me. She left huge gashes in the Minotaur and left fire residue identical to mine after every hit.

I stood there in awe as she brought the monster to its knees, then to a pile of ash beside the one I defeated.

She walked over to me with a smile on her face while putting out the flames on her blade. She placed it back into the item box on her waist and spoke up.

"That's a pretty good skill, thanks for letting me borrow it."

Nessa winked and walked right past me with a smile. I stood there facing the two identical flaming corpses with a blank stare across my face.

What did she just do....?

Chapter 55

"Hey! What do you mean you're borrowing my skill?"

She giggled and turned back towards me.

"It's my skill called Mimic."

I squinted at her with a confused look on my face.

"Okay? What exactly does it do? How's it work?"

"Well, I can mimic any skill I see. I chose to mimic your fire magic, so its now my skill as well."

I froze for a moment... This could be even more powerful than my skill. She can just copy any skill she sees???

"Y-You can do this as much as you want? How many skills do you have?"

Nessa shook her head.

"No, no. It's not like that. If I choose to mimic another skill I'll lose the ability to use my previously obtained skills. I can only hold one at a time, I need to see a specific skill again to switch it back."

"Okay. So you can just keep this fire magic skill until you decide to change it?"

"Kind of. If I sleep or lose consciousness my saved skill disappears. I have to find something new to mimic everyday. It's a blessing and a curse. Does that make sense?"

"Well... Yeah, it does. That's interesting. I've never seen a skill like that."

Nessa nodded at me with a satisfied look on her face.

"I haven't gotten to use fire magic in a while. I think I'll keep it for today."

Hudson walked over to us.

"Nice work, these were low levels but it's good to see you in action. Neat ability."

We waited for the monsters to disappear and took one mana crystal each.

It would be entertaining to tag along with this party today.. but is it really a good use of my time? I'll get a fraction of the exp... and barely any loot. I decided to speak up.

"Hey, thanks for getting me into the dungeon today. I think it would be more efficient if we split up though. I am more of a solo hunter after all."

Hudson nodded slowly.

"Sure, sure. Like I said before, we'll be doing a maintenance run of the boss room in about 4 hours. If you'd like to meet us there, I'd love to have you on the raid team and see you fight seriously."

I smirked and thought about it for a moment.

The boss room huh? I was going to wait a few days to challenge it, but with a full team of 6 I'm sure we could defeat it easily. I'd get some good levels and insight on the boss room for when I fight it alone too. I replied.

"Sure, that would be a pleasure. I'll do my daily farming and meet you all at the boss room in exactly 4 hours."

Hudson grinned and put out his hand, I shook it.

"Great."

Nessa bobbed her head a bit and smiled at me as she spoke.

"See you soon Jay!"

I smiled and waved as I turned and made a quick departure deeper into the dungeon.

"See ya!"

I'm always awkward at goodbyes... at least we'll see each other in a few hours. The dungeon is calm today, there's no sense of any excess magic in the air. One thing did keep coming up in the back of my mind though. Nessa's skill is really similar to mine, no wonder she's leveled up so fast. Is it a unique? I'll ask her more about it later today.

Over the next 3 hours or so I roamed around getting deeper and deeper in the dungeon closing in on the boss room portal.

There were 6 major battles that took place during this time.

The first 3 groups of Minotaur were all between level 155 and 165. Some of them were defeated in one hit. They dropped 9 large mana in total and a single axe. No levels were gained during these matches.

The fourth group consisted of a level 167 and 188. This is a good sign that I was getting deeper into the dungeon. They both dropped mana, but no extra loot. I gained 1 level during this battle.

The fifth matchup was 3 monsters in total. Their levels were 172, 177, and 192. The two lower levels charged in first and the leader used them as a decoy. Every group like this always uses the same strategy. It gets easier each time. They all dropped mana, and one of the lower level beasts dropped an axe. I gained 2 levels during this battle.

I could tell I was nearing the end of the dungeon as my sixth battle started. There was a slight feeling of magic in the air as I approached this group. It consisted of a level 175, 199, and a 203. The lower level was easy, and the two higher levels seemed to be fighting for a chance attack me the whole time. I weaved, dodged, and blocked with body hardening over and over until I wore them down to piles of ash. It's a good thing I'm still faster and more agile than these monsters. They dropped 3 mana, and surprisingly another axe. I gained 4 levels from this fight.

It's pretty easy to navigate most dungeons. The general landscape is the same for all of them. Once you spawn in through the start point all you have to do is trek 3 to 7km max straight forward to find the boss room. Some terrains are just harder to navigate than others.

I've been doing a bit of a zig zag pattern to farm monsters, but I'm definitely less than a kilometer away now. The air is kind of dense, but it's nothing new. Whenever a mutant or strong monster is nearby it feels like this. It may just be what getting close to a strong D Class boss room feel like.

I walked forward for another 10 minutes or so and finally got to the large hill at the back of the dungeon. It should be right around here somewhere.

"Looks like you made it here early too! How'd your farming go?"

I saw Hudson stand up and wave to me as the rest of the team sat under a tree eating lunch.

I waved back and replied.

"Not bad, the loot drops are pretty good today."

Hudson nodded.

"Same for us!"

Nessa threw me a bottle of water.

"Drink up. We're fighting the boss today. Hudson says it's no joke."

I grinned with excitement and drank a good amount before putting it in my item box.

"Thanks. When are we heading in?"

Hudson interrupted.

"It's right around this hill. About a 5 minute walk at most. We just finished fighting a pair of mutants, we're definitely close to the boss room."

I turned to him with my eyes wide.

"Mutants? I didn't even see one today..."

"Yeah, we ran into two groups so far. They seem to be staying close by the boss room. You feel that magic in the air?"

I nodded.

"I do. I didn't want to mention it... you think there's going to be a break?"

Hudson smirked.

"Nah, there isn't nearly enough for a break. Maybe a mutant boss if we're lucky, that'll be some good levels for all of you. Once we beat it, the dungeon will calm down a bit. Nothing out of the ordinary."

"Alright. You know best."

Hudson turned to the rest of the team.

"Ready to fight the boss? I think we've rested for long enough."

They all got up and readied their combat gear. Nessa shouted.

"Okay, let's go!"

I drew my sword and we were off. The closer we got to the back of the dungeon the more and more eerie it felt. Hudson seemed to be calm about the situation so I didn't worry much about it either.

After 5 minutes of walking there were still no monsters in sight. Hudson is about 10m ahead of us leading the way up a small section of hill. He yelled down to us.

"I see it, looks like we have a mutant to deal with."

I ran up to see what he was talking about with my sword ready and a grin across my face... but it turned into more shock than excitement when I took in the view.

Right in front of us on a small patch of flat ground stood a dark black portal. I spoke up as the other team members climbed the hill behind me.

"This is no ordinary mutant boss. You've dealt with a portal like this before right?"

Hudson turned to all of us.

"Anyone that would like to leave is free to go. This will not be an easy fight."

We all started looking at each other with a bit of confusion. Nessa chimed in.

"I'm in. I trust you as my captain."

Hudson replied.

"I can't guarantee your safety with a portal like this. Black portal mutants can be very unpredictable."

Nessa didn't bat an eye.

"But your skill! We can all do this together!"

"Yes, my skill will aid us in this battle. I'd just like to give you all the option to leave. There will be a borderline C Class Monster in there. You all signed up for basic training, not this."

Nessa nodded.

"I know the risks. I'm in."

The other 3 team members talked quietly with each other, then the tank stepped forward.

"We're in. The levels will be worth it."

Then they all turned to me.

I couldn't hold back my excitement. This is exactly the type of situation I was secretly hoping for. Finally, another strong opponent.

"I'm In."

Hudson smirked as he turned to all of us.

"Well, everyone ready? I'll stay up front. Nessa and Jay will lead the main attack. You 3 stay back for support, there's usually a wave of monsters before the boss. Take care of those for us."

Everyone nodded in agreement and faced the spinning black portal. Without much hesitation we all jumped through.

Chapter 56

Once transferred into the boss room I looked around in awe. This is much different than I expected it to be.

We all stood in a wide open plane with short grass and no trees. There were tall rocky hills blocking off the area acting as walls in all directions around us. It was about 500m long and 500m wide if I had to guess.

The sky is a light grey color, similar to when it's about to rain. The air visibility is fine up close, but it is a little misty when looking far off into the boss room. There are no monsters in sight, but I hear a rumbling in the distance.

I used inspect and enemy detection.

[Lv. 224]

[Lv. 227]

[Lv. 228]

[Lv. 230]

[Lv. 231]

[Lv. 231]

[Lv. 256]

My jaw dropped.... I yelled.

"Incoming! There's 7 of them... 7 Bosses!"

Hudson yelled back to all us.

"Nessa and Jay, follow me. You 3, take on the stampede. Those aren't bosses, we're going to be dealing with a real boss soon though.

The team of 3 including the tank and two women nodded and charged towards the monsters.

Hudson lead us away from the soon to be battlefield. I followed close behind but yelled at him.

"They can't handle it! Those monsters are much stronger than anything I faced out in the dungeon. Are you trying to kill your team???"

He grinned at me.

"One moment."

We stopped running and turned around to face the action. Nessa and Hudson both stood there smiling watching their team members charge towards impending doom... They're all barely level 200, I don't know how they could possibly win. Are these people crazy???

Hudson clasped his hands together, and started squatting down slowly while closing his eyes. A warm yellow light started to glow all around him and spread out rapidly.

As the light hit me I could feel an immense amount of warm energy fill my body.

It shot up through my legs into my back and all throughout my arms. I felt energized and ready for battle. Even... stronger maybe?

I watched the team of 3 run towards the group of monsters as they came into view. The yellow light reached them seconds after it hit me. The moment it did, they all began running significantly faster than before.

The 7 Minotaur that appeared were very intimidating. The monsters in the normal dungeon were nothing in comparison. These ones are all about 5m tall, and they're packed head to toe with muscle mass. Every step crushes the ground, I can feel the rumble from hundreds of meters away.

Their skin is a very dark red color with some black fur spots in certain areas. They all carry massive silver axes and looker angry as can be. The highest level monster is up front, and the other 6 are in 2 lines of 3 behind it.

The tank was up front facing them off. After the wave of energy from Hudson, I'm feeling much more confident in them despite the obvious level disadvantage.

Moments later the battle really began.

The tank charged onward with his heavy shield facing forward and used some type of body hardening magic. His entire body turned a silver color that matched his gear and took on the Minotaur's axe.

"CLANGGGGGG"

He... blocked it. The tank even managed to push that level 256 monster backwards as the rogue and sword wielder attacked the beast from both sides.

They both landed a clean hit, and actually did a little of damage. It's almost like they're fighting opponents of similar level. How could this be? I spoke to myself out loud.

"How.... How did they get so much stronger?"

Hudson grinned at me with a look of satisfaction.

"It's my skill. I can buff the surrounding hunters stats for about 1 minute. It'll use up all my MP, but that's what we're here for. To train you guys, not me."

He smiled, I replied.

"That's a useful skill. How much is the buff?"

"Well, right now it'll raise every stat by about 25 percent. Comes in handy for boss rooms like this. Unfortunately, I can only buff my team members, It doesn't work on myself."

"Makes sense. That's really good."

I nodded and looked back at the battle at hand while thinking to myself.

So if a hunter is around level 200, that means with this buff in place their stats are equivalent to a level 250. It may only last for a minute, but that may be all the time we need. You could grind some serious levels with a skill like that! No wonder he trains D Class Hunters for his guild.

The rogue and sword wielder were incredibly fast compared to the 6 minotaur in the back. The one up front could track their movements and block attacks pretty easily though. It's overall defense is also incredibly high, at this rate they need to land 30-50+ more of those hits to take it down.

The tank kept the level 256 busy by letting it hit him over and over again while he used his hardening skill. The other two weaved in and out of the other 6 minotaur slowly chipping away at their HP. About a minute later, half of them were on the ground.

Hudson drank an MP potion and let out another surge of energy. It began to flow through my body again and I felt all my stats increase simultaneously. The second time was still just as cool as the first.

As the two women finished off the other 3 weaker opponents I watched the beast bash away at the tank's shield. He is definitely getting tired, but his teammates are now on the way to help.

The team of 3 faced off against their final opponent. I watched with jealous eyes. They must be having such a good time with that beast. They'll need to chip away at it slowly and be very careful with every move they take. I watched in awe for a few more seconds wishing I could also be out on the battlefield.

Then I felt an ominous presence.. like it answered my thoughts...

The air felt dense and everyone turned to the back of the cave, even the remaining Minotaur paused its attacks for a moment. Something evil is lurking at the back of this dungeon... The real boss is finally here.

I could almost visibly see a dark fog coming from the distance, but I think its just my imagination. The heavy magic in the air and light mist are playing tricks on me.

I used inspect and enemy detection.

My heart skipped a beat.

[Lv. 312]

It's over level 300... how is this possible? Even with Hudson's buff, no one here even gets close to its level.

The 3 occupied team members continued their battle. I could see Nessa was visibly concerned, she could also tell whatever just appeared is incredibly strong.. Hudson looked confident still, I guess he has a plan. That made me feel a bit better.

I'm shaking. With some nerves, but mostly excitement. I can't control it.

I stared out into the distance as a large shadowy figure emerged from the horizon coming at us with unbelievable speed.

Hudson shouted.

"I have 2 more full MP potions. Nessa and Jay, take it from here. You have just under 3 minutes to take this thing out!"

I looked at Nessa and she looked back at me. We both ignited our swords and sprinted forward towards the creature in the distance.

As we got closer It came into view and let out a mighty roar. I couldn't believe my eyes at first. This is truly a demon....

The monster's skin is jet black and it stands over 7m tall. The beast's muscles and veins are somehow even more impressive than its underlings with very visible striations and oversized limbs. The horns coming off of its head are a different color than any other minotaur I've seen before as well. They seem to be black, but they shine a deep crimson color when light hits them from an angle.

It wears huge silver wrist guards and wields a massive battle axe to match them.

The energy emanating off it gets stronger and stronger with every step closer I get.

This is definitely going to be my hardest battle yet, and I can't wait.

Chapter 57

Nessa and I continued charging forward with flaming blades straight at the mutant boss. The closer we get the denser the air fills up with magic.

The beast is cracking the ground with every step and letting out large amounts of air from its nose while grunting.

The speed of the Minotaur is astounding. I've never seen anything move this fast. Even with my stat buff from Hudson, this beast still has me beat on speed. It's clearly much stronger, and from prior experience with its kind I can assume its defense is much better than mine too. That just leaves agility... hopefully I have it beat there.

We're less than 50m away now.

40m...

30m...

20m...

It's time to fight. Nessa and I nodded at each other and broke off to opposite sides of the monster to launch a dual attack. I ran right, she ran left.

The Minotaur reacted instantly by swinging its axe towards Nessa and its massive silver plated arm at me. I attacked it with a blade full of fire. It's giving me a free shot to the arm right above the wrist guards, I might as well take it while I have the chance.

As I made contact my eyes went wide and my whole demeanor changed...

I swung with all my might and used a lot of fire magic, but my attack barely pierced its skin. The Minotaur followed through with its swing and smacked me like an annoying bug at point blank. This sent me flying in the air 15m backwards. I blocked some of the impact with my sword, but I could feel a few bones break from its overwhelming strength.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw a streak of fire fly off in the other direction. Nessa's attack was futile as well... The boss overpowered both of us like it was swatting flies.

I used my sword to bring myself back up to my feet. I used regenerate to heal a few broken ribs from the impact and checked my status. It read out 595/950 HP, and 865/950 MP. I looked around to get a feel for the entire situation.

The team of 3 are still fighting their Minotaur, it seems like they're doing alright. That battle will just take time, I trust them to finish it off. Hudson is about 100m behind us, he's still sending out a stat buff signal. At this rate, we only have 2 minutes left at most...

I watched Nessa stand to her feet chugging an HP potion while dripping blood. Looks like she's okay, but took a brutal hit from that axe.

I'm going to have to use my other skills if I want to have any chance fighting this creature. It's the only way... I'll deal with the consequences after I make it out of this alive.

We both charged back in at the beast with our swords ablaze. I went in aiming for its weak spots this time. I thought maybe with increased agility I could maneuver under its arms and get a slice in behind the knee.

I was mistaken. Even with two sword wielding hunters coming at it from both sides the Minotaur managed to time its hits on both of us perfectly. This time I was the one on the side with its axe.

As it came down I tried to dodge and maneuver around the blade and run under its body to take advantage of a blind spot. The beast's eyes tracked me with laser focus until I was out of sight, then it relied on instincts alone to cut me down instantly.

It turned the axe blade mid swing and landed a hit to my unguarded torso. The moment I registered what was happening I hardened my entire frontside. It lightened the blow, but black crystals shattered everywhere as I was blown backwards sliding across the ground a solid 10m.

I watched Nessa land a small hit on its arm as she was thrown across the field opposite to me again.

I stood up spitting out a mouthful of blood. That was a serious hit. I tried to regenerate my torn open chest the best I could and checked my status. It read out 40/950 HP and 765/950 MP. I grabbed an HP potion and chugged it as fast as I could. I need a new plan, this mindless charging is not going to work. I rely too much on my physical strength and speed sometimes. I need to use my brain if I want to beat this behemoth.

I shook my head back and forth for a few seconds trying to think of anything worth trying. Then something really dumb.... or maybe genius came to mind. Either way, it'll look cool.

It's all I can think of right now, it's worth a shot.

I yelled to Nessa.

"Hey! Listen! Do you have any loot from today's raids?"

She turned to me with a confused and half horrified look.

"What? Yes. Why? This is not the time for that!"

"Take it out of your item box. Trust me!"

She looked at me with bewilderment and decided to go along with my plan. Nessa pulled 3 large axes out of her item box and placed them on the ground in front of her.

"That's all I have. Where do you want them?"

"Right there. Perfect."

I took the 3 axes from my own farming out of item storage and placed them on the ground in front of me as well.

The Minotaur watched us curiously for a moment, but began to charge at us again. I dropped my sword and closed my eyes.

"Telekinesis"

I repeated my new skill's name over and over in my head. I haven't used it before today, this better work. I focused on the 6 axes in front of me and they all lifted up into the air above my head in a circle formation. I tried to replicate the Shaman's design as best I could. It seemed to work well for it.

The monster shifted directions and charged at me, It paid no attention to Nessa. I ignited each axe into flames and prepared my attack.

I ran forward at the beast and motioned my arms at the monster's head. The axes flew through the air leaving trails of fire behind them like shooting stars.

I sent the 6 flaming projectiles rocketing towards the Minotaur's face. The monster let out a mighty roar as it tried to block them with its own axe.

I twisted my hands around in the air and changed the axes' trajectory mid flight. They all narrowly swerved around the monster's axe and continued towards its face.

"CLANGGGGGG"

I watched 3 of the axes shatter instantly as they collided with the Minotaur's dark crimson horns. The other 3 axes actually made it through for a few direct hits. 2 struck its nose and 1 landed very close to its left eye. The fire burned bright, and the Minotaur let out a roar of pain.

Not a total failure after all... That actually did some damage, but not nearly enough to slow this beast down. Enough to buy me some time to think of something else though.

I concentrated and pulled the remaining 3 axes from the Minotaur's flesh while leaving small amounts of flame residue behind. It's face seems to be a bit weaker than the rest of its body, the problem is those horns...

I brought the axes back towards me and let them hover above my head. Nessa stared at me with a serious look on her face.

"I'll leave the questioning for later, that can buy us some time. Have anything else up your sleeve?"

"Land as many hits as you can while I distract it. I'll come up with something else once these axes are done."

We both nodded at each other and ran in opposite directions. The monster followed me with my flaming axes and ignored Nessa again.

I motioned my arms at the Minotaur's face again and the 3 remaining axes flew straight ahead. It swung at them with its own axe and I successfully swerved around it again.

"CLANGGGGGG"

2 of the axes shattered into pieces as they made contact with the beast's horns. The remaining axe made it through and landed right next to its left eye again where I'd hit the monster previously. It let out a roar and managed to grab the axe with its other hand and pull it out before I could get a hold of it myself. The beast slammed the axe against its own horn and shattered it to pieces.

During all of this confusion Nessa had enough time to land a few clean fiery hits on the monster's legs and retreat back towards me without taking any damage. The Minotaur hardly seemed to notice it at all... its defenses are insane.

I heard Hudson shout something from behind us as he chugged an MP potion.

"This is the last one, you all have about a minute left. Make it count!"

I gritted my teeth and grinned at the monstrosity in front of me. With all odds stacked against me, I'm really starting to enjoy this battle.

I'll find a way to win. I have to.

Chapter 58

I look around to see all my new team members fighting for their lives in battle.

The team of 3 has done some pretty good work on their Minotaur, with a little more time they'll be able to finish it off.

Nessa is visibly exhausted, but she's landed a few good hits on the boss with me so far. If I had to guess, I'd say it still has 90% of its HP left. There's no way we'll be able to beat it with the strategy we're working with now.

I'm out of axes to throw, I left my sword on the ground about 20m away, and we're running out of time. Hudson has 30 seconds left of his stat buff at best.

The boss begins to sprint towards me grunting and cracking the earth beneath its massive legs.

I have to think.... This is the moment in every battle where I feel the most alive. I'm calm, but on the edge of my breaking point as well. My brain is working on overdrive, flashing every past battle experience over and over in my head trying to use instinctive pattern recognition to solve my current predicament. It's the most stressful, yet best feeling in the world.

The boss is less than 10m away from me now, it's seconds away from a brutal attack. At this moment an idea finally popped into my head. I yelled to Nessa and positioned my arm backward in the direction of my fallen sword.

"Hey! How many MP potions do you have on you?"

She yelled back.

"Just one left!"

I smirked as I used telekinesis to make my sword fly back into my right hand.

"CLANGGGGGGG"

The moment I gripped my sword the Minotaurs axe came down. I created a thick wall of crystal hardening on the front side of my body and took on the majority of the blow with my sword.

"CRACKKKK"

I watched my sword begin to splinter in front of my eyes as the axe pushed me backward. This beast overpowered me again. It followed through with its strike and broke my sword in two. The axe slammed into my torso and shattered my black crystal armor throwing me backward sliding a solid 15m across the rocky ground.

While coughing up blood I checked my status. It read out 275/950 HP and 540/950 MP. I have to put my final plan into action now if we want to have any chance of surviving this. I chugged my last HP potion and watched the boss quickly turn towards Nessa.

I stood out in the open with half a sword and a malicious grin across my face while igniting into flames. I threw my broken sword at the Minotaur's head and used telekinesis to ensure a direct hit.

"HEYYYYY!!! YOU'RE FIGHTING ME, BIG GUY!!!"

The dull piece of metal hit the back of its head and the beast shifted its focus back to me. I yelled to Nessa.

"Take that MP potion to Hudson right now! I'll distract it! Use Mimic on Hudson's skill and give me a double buff. This is our only chance!"

Her eyes went wide and nodded. Nessa ran towards Hudson while the boss stared me down getting ready for another attack.

We're almost 100m away from Hudson. I have to stall for as long as I can.

The boss charged. I just ran away. There's no point in fighting for these next 10 seconds. All I have to do is distract it for a little bit longer.

I sprinted far away from everyone. With the Minotaur inching closer and closer every second all I'm focusing on is how fast I can move my feet.

5 seconds later...

The boss is right on my tail. It's less than 10m away from me, but I don't dare look back.

5 more seconds go by, my lungs are burning and my legs have never moved this fast. I feel the ground cracking under every step I take. The beast's breath is hitting my back. I've run out of time...

"CLANGGGGGG"

I hear the swing of the axe behind me and harden my back the best I can while bracing for impact.

Black crystal fragments fly everywhere as my defenses are shattered along with a few bones in my lower spine and I'm thrown 20m forward in the air even further from the battlefield.

I immediately regenerate my broken back and climb to my feet with a groan. I check my status to see 135/950 HP and 410/950 MP.

The monster is charging towards me for its final fatal blow. I ignite my entire body into flames and prepare for whatever it'll throw at me next.

Then I see a ripple of yellow light coming my way across the ground. She made it just in time. Nessa really pulled through.

I run forward to match the charge of the boss and concentrate my fire magic into the palms of my hands. We're less than 10m apart as I plunge into the fast-approaching yellow light.

I feel even more energy surge into my body. My steps speed up, my magic feels stronger, and I looked at the monster with a very new perspective.

As we were about to collide I narrowly dodge the axe flying towards me and swerved around its right side. The monster is still very quick and definitely much stronger than me, but the battle I'm fighting in now seems like a slow-motion version of before.

With the element of surprise, I dodged its blade and managed to get behind it. I planted my right leg and turned, carrying a fist full of fire. I shaped the fire magic into a sword and plunged it deep into the Minotaur's back while letting out a yell.

I released as much of my fire as I could into the monster while absorbing MP at the same time. This may be the only time I can catch it off guard, I'll take advantage of this situation as much as I can.

The monster let out a vicious roar and twisted its body to shake me off for a full 4 seconds. I managed to do some serious damage. It was not happy about it.

The beast jumped in the air and leaned back. At this moment I knew I overstayed my welcome and darted off as fast as I could.

"THUDDDD"

The boss fell on its back attempting to crush me, but also succeeding in putting out some of the flames.

It got to its feet immediately and stared me down. I made the first move and started running at it, I need to keep the pressure hot while the advantage is mine.

The double buff will wear out in less than a minute. I'll have to get it done just like every other battle of this nature; dodge, weave, and only take guaranteed hits. It's still stronger than me, but I finally have a speed and agility advantage. This is what I'm used to.

I sprinted forward and spun around its axe. The boss learned from its last failure and turned its body when the axe swing missed, I wasn't able to get behind it this time.

I assumed this would be the case. Mid-turn I focused a large amount of fire magic into my palms and created a dense orb of flames. I let the orb fly out of my hands and used telekinesis to direct its path. The monster's axe was down on the ground, and its attention was focused on not letting me behind it.

The orb of fire flew towards the monster's face and made an impact right in the center of its forehead. It exploded letting out a massive amount of energy and flames.

The boss let out a roar and put its arms in the air flailing in pain. I took this opportunity to summon my fire sword and jumped up to make a deep gash across its chest. On the way down I sliced open its right leg deep to the bone letting my fire burn bright and absorbing MP in the process.

It shrieked and flailed but soon set its focus on me again. The monster was getting tired. It began moving slower, but its deadly stare never changed. This beast will not give up until the end.

The boss initiated a charge this time and I matched it. I easily dodged its axe swing and ran around its backside. The beast attempted to turn with me, but it has become too slow to keep up with me. That gash on the right leg must have really done a number on it.

I concentrated every last bit of MP I had into a final blow. My sword of fire burned bright as I jumped up and sunk it deep into the back of its neck. I let out a yell while releasing a blast of energy that brought the beast to its knees.

A well-fought battle. Without my team members, I couldn't have won this one.

I absorbed as much of the dying monster's MP as I could while continuously releasing fire magic into its body. The boss let out a final grunt, then I heard a ringing in my head that confirmed my victory.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

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[Level Up]

[Level Up]

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 211

Hp: 280/1060

Mp: 205/1060

Strength: 512 [+128][+128]

Speed: 606 [+152][+152]

Agility: 630 [+156][+156]

Defense: 451 [+180][+113][+113]

Mental Strength: 512 [+102][+128][+128]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Self Regeneration

Spacial Magic[Item Storage]

Plunderer

Telekinesis

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Bufs:

[25%+ All Base Stats]

[25%+ All Base Stats]

"I gained... 22 levels..."

Even while sharing the exp with 5 other team members, that is some serious level gains. My stats are significantly buffed temporarily too. I feel great...

The body of the Minotaur disappeared in front of me and two large items fell from the corpse. A massive mana crystal rolled to my feet, but beside it lay an item that made me grin ear to ear.

The massive dark horn of the Minotaur glimmered a deep dark crimson color in the faint light of the dungeon. It was left as a reward for my battle. I could feel the boss emitting a strange aura of dominance even after its death. With a smirk, I placed it in my item storage.

Moments later I looked up to see a few members of the team running towards me in the distance. Then, after a few seconds, the rest of them followed close behind.

It looks like we all made it out of here alive. What a relief. This could have totally gone another way.

Chapter 59

I lifted the large mana crystal up in the air to show them the boss's loot, but the white transfer light already started.

We were all sent back to the dungeon's starting point. I heard Hudson's voice a moment later.

"That was much harder than I predicted it would be. Usually, one buff is more than enough. I'm glad we all made it out unharmed."

I looked at him with mixed emotions. I'm a bit frustrated with him for letting us all go into this potential death trap with him. On the other hand, he did warn us beforehand... and I'm really glad I got to fight an opponent of this magnitude. It'll prepare me for when I have to fight C Class monsters like this without aid from teammates in the future.

I replied and tossed the mana crystal up and down in my hand.

"Ehh it's fine, I had fun."

Nessa jumped in.

"Hey! It's kind of not fine! We almost all died!"

I nodded and shrugged.

"Yeah, but we didn't."

This post-fight adrenaline makes up for everything. I don't really care much about anything but riding this high as long as I can. Nessa was visibly annoyed but in a half-playful way.

Hudson laughed a little.

"Well, I think that's more than enough for today. Jay, would you like to come back to the guild with us?"

Nessa nodded at me.

"Yeah, you should come and check the guild out! I'd say we have a few things to talk about."

She winked.

"You're right. I'll come."

Nessa definitely saw me use a few skills at once. I don't think it matters though, as long as she doesn't go telling everyone in town about it.

You can tell a lot about someone when you're in a life-or-death situation with them. Even with my past issues, and the fact that we just recently met... I'm going to put my trust in Nessa, just like she put her trust in me during our battle with the boss.

We all stepped out of the dungeon and took the train back to the main Dungeon Hub.

The area is packed with hunters. Apparently, there's been a record-high amount of breaks and mutants today. I overheard the guards speaking to a crowd on our way out.

"All platform clearance ranks have been raised by 1 full class. It does not matter if you're in a party. You must be a C Class hunter to enter any of the D Class dungeons until further notice. Please bear with us, this is for your own safety."

That makes sense. This really must be the peak of the surge...

Hudson spoke up.

"Follow me."

He leads us through the crowd and out into the open street. We walked for less than 10 minutes and came across a tall silver building. It looked like every other office building in the city.

We walked through the front door and were greeted by two men in formal wear. One of them spoke to Hudson.

"Welcome back so soon, how'd the raid go today?"

He replied.

"We had some issues, but everyone made it out unharmed. I brought in a new potential recruit, I'd like to talk to the guild master if he's free."

"Glad to hear it, I'll put in a request for you. Heal up in the training rooms, someone will come to get you once you've all fully recovered."

Hudson nodded and shook the man's hand while motioning us to follow.

We took the elevator up a few floors and made it to a long symmetrical hallway that looked just like the training rooms at the Hunters Association. There were just fewer doors in this hallway. Hudson opened the first door on the left and we all walked in.

It is a white-walled room with the low hum of mana shields. There are a few racks full of armor, weapons, and potions on the back wall. Everyone walks over and starts healing up. Hudson spoke.

"Go ahead, take what you need to heal yourself."

I nodded and walked over to drink an HP and an MP potion to restore myself completely. Then I heard Hudson's voice again.

"Nessa and Jay, stay with me here. Could the rest of you bring the leftover loot to the trade-in center, then take the rest of the day off? We've been through enough."

Nessa and Hudson dropped handfuls of mana onto the ground. The Tank and two women took them all and left the room. Hudson turned to me.

"Now let's address the elephant in the room. You're a multi-skill user. I saw you use at least 3, Nessa did as well. Is this known by anyone else? Are you affiliated with any guilds?"

I took a deep breath in and out before replying. This feels more like an interrogation than a conversation now, but at least he asked the team members who didn't see my other skills to leave the room

"Yes. I have one non-exclusive contract with a small guild in my hometown. I do have a few very promising skills, I appreciate the privacy. It seems you already understand my situation. I only used them to save our lives, I wouldn't have shown off if I didn't have to."

They both nodded. Hudson spoke up.

"Would you like to join our guild with a non-exclusive as well?"

"What benefits would I gain? There are already tons of dungeons in the city. Are there any private ones? What's in it for me?"

"Well, the only benefit at your current class we could offer would be a salary and access to gear to train with."

"Hmm. Okay. If I were to join I'd like non-disclosure contracts made. Anyone I party with cannot leak information about my skills. You two included. I'd rather not party with anyone new... or honestly with anyone at all if that's possible."

"Understood. that could be arranged."

"What about special dungeons not available to the public? That's what I'm interested in, I don't care much about a salary."

"We don't have access to any unique dungeons yet. The only thing I can think of that could benefit you would be to access the labyrinth when you reach C Class."

I raised an eyebrow.

"The labyrinth?"

Hudson looked a bit puzzled at my response.

"The labyrinth. You've never heard of it?"

I shook my head.

"No... tell me. What is this place?"

He grinned.

"It's a multistage dungeon at the center of the capital. It's been there since the Great War. The strongest hunters flock to it from all over the Vice region to raid for riches and experience."

I scratched my head.

"A multistage dungeon? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, it's easier to explain it in terms of floors. When you enter you'll be on the level known as floor 1. In the Vice labyrinth, it's just a goblin dungeon. You have to defeat the boss of each floor to advance to the next. Floor 10 is a dungeon similar in strength to the one we just raided. Every floor increases in difficulty, it is rumored that the Vice Labyrinth is over 50 floors. The more hunters that enter, the bigger the labyrinth grows. The magic energy from hunters that enter is taken in and used to spawn more floors. The one in the city's center has been growing for around 50 years. No one has made it to the last floor yet."

I stared at him with my eyes wide.

"So.. what happens if someone defeats the boss on the last floor?"

Hudson smiled.

"Well, the labyrinth disappears. Every once in a while smaller labyrinths spawn in towns or even out in the mountains where there is excess magic build-up. Smaller ones are defeated quickly around here, they can be as small as 10 to 20 floors. The loot is usually very rare and drops a much higher percentage of the time in labyrinths."

"Wow... I need to try one of those..."

"They aren't too well known out in the countryside. It's mostly government-run, and occasionally elite guild members enter. If you're not from around here, I guess it would make sense for you not to know much about it. I personally have never entered the capital labyrinth."

I nodded.

"Well. In that case, I think I'll pass on joining the guild for the time being. Maybe when there are some good benefits for me, I rea-"

*Knock *Knock *Knock

A woman with long blond hair, black glasses, and carrying a large notepad walked in.

"Sorry to interrupt. Hudson, your request to see the guild master has been delayed. He's out of town for a few days."

Hudson nodded slowly and motioned her to leave.

"It's okay. Thank you for letting me know."

The woman left and we all stood in silence for a few seconds.

Nessa chimed in.

"Well. That went completely off-topic. We didn't agree on anything final, but I'm glad we cleared a few things up. I just wanted to thank you for today, Jay. Just know, the fact that you're a multi-skill user is safe with me. I won't say a word if you don't want me to."

She smiled at me.

Hudson spoke up too.

"Same with me, I don't think it's that big a deal though. This is a big world you know. Eventually, word will have to get out if you want to keep climbing the ranks as a hunter."

I nodded.

"You're right. I appreciate it. I-uh. I think it's about time I get going."

"So soon? I could show you around the training facility If you'd like!"

"Uhhh. I'll have to pass for now. I'd like to head out before it gets too late in the day. I have a few things to do. I will come by again soon though."

"Sure, come by anytime you want. We can get some good training in! Nessa, could you show him out to the lobby?"

I shook Hudson's hand and followed Nessa out the door and into the elevator. She looked at me curiously. We reached the bottom floor pretty quickly. Nessa smiled and waved.

"I hope we can party up again. I'd like to get to know you more, ya know."

I smiled back and waved back.

"I agree. Maybe I'll see you in the D Class dungeons later this week. I'll be back."

She nodded and the sliding doors closed behind me as I walked away.

Moments later I made it out into the busy street.

Labyrinths huh? I vaguely remember reading about them but had no idea there was one here in the city. That's something to look forward to!

I started walking towards the market to sell my mana and get this Minotaur Horn checked out. After that, I need to get another new sword! It'll have to be a lot stronger this time around, I can't believe I broke another one.

Chapter 60

I made my way back to the market with a smile on my face.

The guild took the 7 mana from those other monsters, so I think it's fair that I get to keep the big mana from the boss. It ended up being a pretty even split. The Minotaur Horn, on the other hand... I'll just take it as compensation for dealing the final blow to the boss. They didn't even see me place it in my item storage, so it's fair game in my mind.

About 15 minutes later I walked into the square and waved to the old merchant.

"Hey kid! How's it going? What do ya have for me today?"

I dumped my mana out onto the silver scale. It read out 3104.53MU.

"I have one more thing for you as well."

I looked over my shoulder to make sure no one was looking and reached into my item storage to pull out the large Minotaur Horn.

THUDDD

I set the huge item on the table and looked at the merchant with a satisfied smile on my face.

"What can you give me for this? I need to buy a new sword today too, so give me your best price."

The merchant raised an eyebrow and his eyes went wide as he examined the horn. I watched him scratch his head and feel every inch of it for a solid 30 seconds straight. He finally looked up.

"This is some rare C Grade material we're working with here. I'm sure people would pay 5 gold.. No, even 10 gold if you found the right buyer for this."

I smirked.

"What is it even used for?"

"Well, if you can find a good blacksmith, horns like these can be turned into incredible blades. I personally have never seen one of this size, you could make an incredible sword out of it."

I grinned while thinking back to my battle with the Minotaur. It shattered 6 axes and my main sword like they were made of glass.

"Where can I find a blacksmith?"

"If you go to the main shopping center, there's a pretty good sword shop on the 8th floor. It's called Apollo's Sword shop I can give you an addre-"

"Oh! I've been there before. They do custom work?"

The merchant nodded.

"That's great. Yeah, bring that horn in. I'm sure they'll have a blacksmith available."

"Thanks! Oh, and for the mana. How about 30 silver?"

The old man nodded once.

"Works for me. As always, pleasure doing business."

I shook the merchant's hand and placed the silver coins along with the Minotaur's horn into my item box.

"You too. Thanks again, old man!"

With a wave goodbye, I turned and headed off to the shopping center.

When I arrived I walked into the building to look up and see the sky. This building has some beautiful architecture. The glass walls and open-view ceiling still amaze me. I came here with Rei and Maria not too long ago to buy weapons and test out the sim training rooms.

The sun is starting to set, the orange light is shining through the building's open roof as I started to go upstairs. Moments later, I made it to the 8th floor and walked over to the familiar shop.

A woman wearing a suit greeted me with a small bow.

"Welcome to Apollo's Sword Shop. Will it just be you today?"

"Yes, just me."

"Are you buying, selling, or crafting? Please show me your Hunter's License."

I handed her my ID.

"I-uh I guess I'll be crafting. I'd like to see a blacksmith if that's possible."

She nodded and gave me back my ID.

"Alright, follow me."

She motioned for me to follow her inside. Once we entered the store she spoke to a man wearing an identical suit to her own.

"I need a blacksmith for a D Class Hunter."

The man nodded and looked me in the eyes.

"Please come with me, sir."

I followed him to the back of the room and we went through a red curtain on the wall with a sign above it reading "VIP" in black letters and a gold frame.

"Please enter the third room on your left. Your blacksmith is ready for you."

I opened the door after walking down the empty hallway.

A short bald man sat at the end of a long brown table in a well-lit room with black walls.

"Welcome, welcome! The name's Frederik. What can I do for you today?"

"Nice to meet you. I'm Jay. I'd like to have a sword made."

I took the Minotaur horn out of my item box and set it down on the table. The bald man's eyes lit up and he started examining the item.

"This is no ordinary item. You're looking to make yourself a one-of-a-kind C Class weapon today aren't you?"

"Well, yes. I was hoping you could craft something worth my while."

He continued examining the item and began writing a few things down on a notepad, then looked up at me.

"You know, we may get some C-grade element stones after this surge is over. It would be a shame to craft such a fine piece of material without bringing out its full potential."

I looked at him in confusion.

"Element stones? What are those?"

"Sometimes rare drops trickle down into the public market from higher-ranking dungeons. The only dungeon I know of that produces element stones in the Vice region is the C Class Advanced Ogre dungeon. The only other possible place would be the Labyrinth, and no one is crazy enough to go in there these days."

I nodded and let him babble on. This is the type of guy that just loves the sound of his own voice. He's a talker.

"Every once in a while we get a shipment of element stones sent in from the Hunters Association on special order. I've seen a few dozen of them come through here in the last couple of years. They are definitely becoming a bit less rare with the recent surges, but still pretty hard to get your hands on."

"Okay.. that's nice, but what are they?"

"They're stones that give off the energy of a certain element. If you defeat a very strong magic user there's a small chance they'll drop a stone that correlates with the type of magic they possessed. It will give off massive amounts of magic energy and slowly dissipate into the air unless stored correctly or fused with another magic item that can contain it. I've seen a few water, fire, and earth stones in my day. Those are the most common in my personal experience."

I raised an eyebrow, If that's what he's describing... I have an element stone... A fire stone to be exact.

"Uhh say I brought in an element stone. Could you fuse it with this horn to make me a sword?"

The man shook his head.

"Unfortunately no, I can't. We're only permitted to fuse stones authorized by the Association. Secondly, I'm not high enough level to fuse stones of that magnitude."

I used inspect.

[Lv. 134]

My eyes went dull and I sighed a bit. Of course, they paired me with this guy. I'm a D Class solo hunter, they wouldn't expect me to come in her with C Class materials.

"Do you think there's any place in town that could fuse an element stone without an authorization?"

He scratched his head and thought for a moment.

"I can't help you there. I'm sure there's a black market for this kind of thing, but I don't recommend you get involved in that kind of thing. People go missing all the time in those parts of the city.

I nodded and placed the Minotaur Horn back into my item box.

"Hey, thanks for the help and the information. I think I'm going to wait a little while before crafting this sword. You're right, an element stone would be a great addition."

He nodded and smiled, the man didn't seem too disappointed that he'd just lost a customer by running his mouth. This must happen often.

"It's okay. Come back in after the surge finishes up. There's a chance we may have what you're looking for in stock!"

I thanked the man again and walked out the door to make my way down to the ground level.

That wasn't a total waste of time, I did learn some pretty good info.

"Gurrrgllleeee"

My stomach curled up into a ball and threatened to come up my throat. I haven't eaten all day, I need something now!

I walked all the way back toward the food market and found a busy local bar. I sat next to an older-looking man and gave him a head nod as I got the bartender's attention.

"Could I get your special, and whatever beer you have on draft."

"Sure thing, coming right up."

I nodded and sat back with a sigh and looked at the sky.

The old man turned to me, I took a good look at him. He wore a very sturdy leather jacket, worn-out jeans, and big black heavy boots. His hands were rough and covered in a substance that looks like it's been caked on for decades. A true working man. I wonder what he does here in the city....

"Hey, what do you do for work old man?"

He chuckled.

"Oh, you don't wanna know kid."

Then gulped down the rest of his beer while motioning for the bartender to get him another glass.

I used inspect out of curiosity.

[Lv. 368]

My eyes went wide.

"Are you a hunter?"

He laughed at me again. The bartender came back with my food and two drinks. One for me, and one for the old man. He looked at me with his tired eyes and raised his glass. I raised mine as well.

Clink

We both took a long swig, then he replied.

"I used to be a hunter. The association banned me from dungeons long ago though."

I could tell by the tone of his voice that it'd be better if I don't ask too many more questions about his past. At the same time, this encounter couldn't have gone any better. Who better to ask for a black market smith?

"Ahhh enough said."

He nodded. I began to eat my food.

After a few minutes, the old man finished his new drink, and I was nearing the end of my own. He waved the bartender over and asked for another.

I interrupted and threw a silver coin on the counter.

"Drinks on me tonight old man."

He grinned.

"Now you're speaking my language."

The bartender brought over a few more rounds and we drank as the sun set. Eventually, the old man spoke up.

"All right kid, I've been around the block a few more times than days you've been alive. I appreciate the drinks, but what is it? What do ya want?"

I raised an eyebrow and gulped down the last of my drink to calm my nerves.

"I'm new to town. I need an introduction to a good blacksmith. Someone off the books."

He smirked and finished his own drink.

"Ahhh that's it? I thought this was going to be a lot more serious. Kids these days crack me up."

He took a pen off the bar's register and scribbled something down on a napkin.

"Here. Show up early in the morning and ask for Briana. She can make whatever you need, just be ready to pay the price."

I took the paper with a wide grin across my face.

"Thanks a lot! Maybe I'll see you around, drinks on you next time?"

He laughed.

"Yeah right, kid!"

With a smile and a wave, I left the bar and started walking towards the Inn.

What a successful day! I can't wait to get this sword crafted tomorrow.