

## **D. Diver 511**

### Chapter 511

Over the next 8 hours, as the night slowly returns to day, I farm billions of MCP, hundreds of skill orbs, and an additional 15 firestones from the 39th floor to imbue with my mythic-grade plunderer skill and collapse rogue dungeons out in the desert.

An interesting thing I find when absorbing skill orbs is that they stay at the exact grade they are labeled on the monsters I take them from. I'm unable to change basic, special, or legendary skills farmed from lower grade monsters into Mythic just from absorbing them. Whatever they are farmed at is their current grade. This makes the Mythic Grade orbs I farmed from the 41st, 42nd, and 43rd floor even more valuable than I thought.

Another rare priceless resource I continue to farm is luminite.

The low D-Grade dungeon I was working on farming before the war eventually collapses, and in addition to that, I find two more E-Grade dungeons to fully plunder and collapse as well.

Three more fragments of luminite, and just about 150 billion MP in containment stones float inside my storage now.

I still have the unstable isolation pods of my teammates floating in suspended animation too, there's just about 100 billion MP in each of these pods. I try to think of ways to use up this extra mana and a safe way to actually extract it from the unstable pods, but there is no where to preserve it all or use it properly yet.

"There are more important things to do right now."

I crush a teleport crystal after collapsing the last dungeon of the day and find myself back in the underground bunker while the sun begins to rise above the Crimson City.

Everyone begins to wake up and go about their new routines and normal daily lives as I walk outside.

I sense two high-level ranked-up Qi wielding individuals on the roof of the guildhall, standing next to the silver throne that I created after the battle, and float up to see Luna and Arie watching the sunrise.

I speak up as they see me.

"Ready to head off to Sector 4? You have quite the adventure ahead of you."

They both have serious expressions on their faces, but lighten up when I smile, reaching into my item storage.

"I have some last minute gifts for you that I managed to farm last night."

The first thing I do is give them both handfuls of teleport crystals and explain briefly how I managed to make them and that they can come back here in an instant whenever they wish.

Next, I reach into my storage and pull out the Mythic Grade Stealth Skill Orb I managed to get from the 41st floor in my right hand, and an assortment of extreme grade element skill orbs in my left.

I motion for Arie to take the stealth orb, and he does, holding it in his hand and examining it closely while I let an earth, wind, fire, water, and ice skill orb float above my left hand in front of Luna.

Each of them has a slight color tint, indicating which one they are, but I point out each of them individually.

"These are skill orbs. A product of my new soul energy awakening mixed with my upgraded absorption skill. It allows me to give you each a single skill, adding it to your status permanently."

I turn to Arie, using my own mythic-grade stealth skill for him to see for himself, completely vanishing from his radar, then reappearing.

"The one I've presented to you is Mythic Grade Stealth, and it's the highest grade I could get my hands on. You would need to level up 1300 times to normally achieve a skill of that caliber. Considering you already use spirit arrows as your main attack and energy control trainer, and have dagger mastery for close-range combat, I think this would be the best option for you, It is very convenient to be invisible to your enemies."

He smiles and throws the orb up and down in his hand.

"Thanks. I agree with you, this is a good option."

I turn to Luna next.

"For you, I thought about giving you a combat skill, like swordsmanship or dual wielding, but I think an elemental combat power would be more useful. You could improve your natural mana control and manipulate dungeon mass far easier with a skill like this. Take your pick."

The blue orbs float around above my hand for about a full minute before Luna picks one with only white energy inside it.

"Wind magic? Good choice."

We make our way to the canyon of dungeons as the sun rises, and both of them continue to examine the small blue marbles curiously the whole way until we enter one of the nearest dungeons.

I read out all of the details of these skills' perks, along with showing them a few other options of skill orbs I farmed, then finally share the exact skills that I offered to them through my rising emperor's domain so they can test them out to see how they like them before committing to anything. After about twenty minutes of playing around with many skills, both of them agree with my initial reasoning and decide these are their best options.

This content has been misappropriated from Royal Road; report any instances of this story if found elsewhere.

They each swallow their blue orb, and I watch blue system energy spread throughout each of their bodies in an instant, then disperse into thin air moments later.

Both Mythic Grade Stealth and Extreme Grade Wind Summoning now appear on their status windows without me having to share the skills.

Luna flies through the sky on gusts of wind, and Arie disappears and reappears in and out of thin air all over the dungeon, even trying out his ranked-up buffs with this skill too, and finding that he can shoot arrows and keep them invisible up until they make contact with their target.

Both of them come down to thank me again, then I place a hand on both of their shoulders, and bring us to the Solaran Dungeon Hub in Sector 4.

The morning sun fully rises, and they walk out into the busy streets, off to the Abyss outside of the city. I wave them off.

"I wish you two the best of luck again. I hope to see you soon after you've found what you're looking for."

Once I get back to Sector 2, I have a similar conversation with all of my other teammates, giving them teleport crystals and showing them skill orbs, presenting the option to gain a single permanent new ability if they wish.

Monk refuses to add any skills to his status while Abby and Maria don't find anything they particularly like. As soul energy users, their fighting style and battle strategies are honed to their current skills, and the only mythic-grade options I have left right now are swordsmanship and body hardening.

They feel as though I'll most likely find something better in the future, and don't need to use their one chance at acquiring a new skill right now.

I feel the same but thought I might as well give them the option.

Fisher and Lydia, on the other hand, may already be element and Qi users, but additional skills added to their arsenal would be very helpful.

I go down my list and let them try out each skill I have available for them to try over the next 30 minutes before they come to their conclusions. Fisher wants a legendary intimidation skill, as he's a very head-on battle-oriented fighter, while Lydia is more of a technical fighter and wants the lifesteal skill to give her an edge in longer battles where she may not be able to outclass her opponent in some fronts.

I picture my battle against the 43rd floor boss last night and decide Lydia has made a very good choice.

Fisher's need for a scare factor using intimidation may be a very useful trait when leading troops into battle, or overwhelming similarly strengthened opponents to give a mental edge.

I give him a few other personal recommendations for other skills but he stays fixated on intimidation, his stubbornness on this point may actually be for the better. From an army's standpoint, this is probably the best thing he could pick to target opponents and work as a leader of a team. It's a powerful tool, especially when paired with Lydia's skill, so I nod with approval.

I take out the two legendary grade skill orbs and they both swallow them on the spot, erupting with blue system energy, and having these new skills added to their status instantly.

We all talk for a while longer about the future, and I bring them in the loop about the upcoming B-Class exams and the investigation I have planned in the Apex region. We all come to conclusions about what we should be doing in the meantime.

Monk wants to bring his sleeping master back to the monastery and see if he can use some old Qi techniques to wake him up or speed up the recovery process.

I believe this is a good idea, as maybe it will give us more clues on how to wake everyone else up in the Galeheart Tower too.

Fisher and Lydia still have yet to awaken their Soul Energy, so during Monk's off time, they want to train with him to improve their hand to hand combat and absorb more Qi in an isolated environment inside the monastery.

Maria and Abby want to work on their Soul Energy too; they've decided to go into closed-door cultivation beneath the 3rd tower where the high-density Qi crystals are growing.

This will not only stimulate their Soul Energy cores, but will also be a much-needed extra layer of security.

I inform everyone that I will continue overseeing the construction process here, and use my MCP sharing perk to make the Flame Emperor's army far stronger than before. I invite them to come back to Sector 2 and join me to farm MCP whenever they wish.

The monsters in the labyrinth on floors 30-39 aren't a higher level than us anymore, so the mana control gains are lower % wise than when we first farmed there, but even so, it's still much more efficient than learning mana control the old-fashioned way.

They agree, and I see them off to Sector 1, carefully transporting Monk's sleeping master with them to the monastery and ensuring that the security protocols for the final Tower in the Royal Coin district are being held true.

Once they have all been situated, I get back to the Crimson City and receive the new order form from Maurice's construction team and take a trip back to Vice City in order to place a 25 platinum order.

It's almost 5 times the volume as the last one we placed, but I saw the many sheets of plans that he has outlined, and this is exactly the direction I'd like this growing city to head toward.

The Unity Building Supply Co promises that my order will be fulfilled and ready in a warehouse in under 3 days. There are many unique materials and an extremely high quantity this time around, so a little longer response time is within expectations.

I pay in full and leave immediately, thanking them with an extra platinum bar just like last time to ensure they keep our dealings a secret between us. I can tell the father and son duo are still in disbelief at my order volume. Their wide eyes and shocked expressions at the pile of precious metal on the table make me chuckle a bit as I walk out the front door.

"This has been a very productive morning. Now, there's only a few more things to do."

I finally make it back to the Crimson City in Sector 2, and head over to the portion of the apartment complex where most of the Army Recruits that fought alongside me in the War against the Dark One reside.

There is a lounge area where many of them hang out and socialize in the morning.

Unlike the common villagers I walk by in the town, the Elite members of the army recognize my face the moment I enter their lounge, and many stand at attention with respect, stop the conversations they were having, and await orders.

I reach into my item storage and pull out five elemental skill orbs, letting them spin around slowly in a circle while I speak up.

"Alright, I hope you all had a good celebration and a nice time off after the war. I'm going to need all of you that fought by my side to meet me here by noon. Be geared up and ready to fight some monsters. Spread the word to those who aren't here in the lounge. I have a special gift for everyone and a decision I need you all to individually make. Then, we'll be heading back to the dungeons to train."

## Chapter 512

Over the next hour or so, more recruits make their way to the small lounge area filled with couches, chairs, tables, and random food and magic items leftover from whatever leisure activities they were doing before I came.

The three elemental squad leaders are here, and naturally, the others split into the three groups they were training and fighting in together.

I pull the skill orbs out from my item storage again and let them slowly rotate around my open palm.

"Today, I'll be giving each of you a chance to permanently add an elemental skill to your status."

I look at each of the squad leaders too.

"-And for those of you that already have elements, I'm going to give you an assortment of skills to choose from, but I have a recommendation I believe would be optimal for each of you."

I explain how the orbs work, and we all set off to the dungeons so each of them can test out the various elements I have available through my temporary skill share.

After about an hour of flying through the air, summoning elements, and destroying large areas of dungeon mass, everyone comes to their conclusions rather quickly.

The majority of fighters are split between earth, wind, and fire. Earth is far more common in the defensive types that already have body hardening or similar skills. Air magic is common for long-range attackers and speed types; it also makes air travel much faster. Lastly, fire is a common choice for those that use close-range combat and want more destructive blows.

The three original elemental squad leaders choose the skill that I recommended to them, self-regeneration. They test out many of the ones I have available, but my reasoning for them being on the front lines and leading attacks and training sessions sticks with them.

If they have the ability to lose limbs or take blows that would normally incapacitate them and get up to keep fighting like nothing happened, it will be a very valuable skill as leaders.

They agree and accept graciously.

All at once, the 37 army recruits swallow the blue orbs and erupt with system energy, adding new skills to their statuses in an instant.

"Perfect. Now, let's get to work."

I bring them all back to the 19th floor of the Vice City Labyrinth where we left off last before the war and share absorption with them so they can collect MCP from every kill.

Bursts of elemental magic light up the dungeon as they head off following their three team leaders in search of Berserker Giants to continue their training.

My Rising Emperor's Domain fills nearly the entire dungeon's volume, so I don't have to stay close to each individual party. As long as I'm in the same dungeon as them, they're still able to farm.

At the rate they're each killing monsters now, they'll be able to gain a few million MCP an hour each.

Once they're a little stronger, I'll bring them to higher floors and their rate of MCP absorption will exponentially increase.

Meanwhile, back in the Crimson City, I've tasked one of my body doubles to begin making detailed signs inside of the guildhall with pricing amounts I'm willing to pay for every kind of loot inside of the canyon of dungeons.

Each item is outlined with the maximum amount needed this month in order to satisfy Bri's crafts, and I split the remaining 12.5% of the total order's revenue, 22.5 Platinum, into reasonable payouts aligning with the rarity and difficulty of farming each item.

Stolen content alert: this content belongs on Royal Road. Report any occurrences.

The bulk of the items needed are E and D grade dungeon drops, and thousands of them are necessary, so it's easy to price these out at a few silver per item drop. Most beginner hunters will be able to farm a few of these and make quite a good living.

The C-Grade items are priced far higher, up to a few gold per drop. I don't believe anyone in this town that isn't a part of the army can farm these just yet, but I'll still leave them up for people to try. Most likely, some of the army recruits will go off and fulfill these orders once they have some free time. I'm not worried about it.

This is most importantly to get people used to the system, and stimulate the economy a bit.

Right now, it's technically losing me money, I could just farm everything myself, but it will be far more convenient for me once my trading deals expand and I can't physically farm enough materials myself.

Once all of the signs with pricing are made, I show up to Dan Striker's mercenary bar and tell him to break the news about extra work being available at the guildhall if anyone wants it.

I have my double that is guarding the isolation pod with Ember inside do some extra work, having it wait just above the bunker entrance inside the center room and answer all questions from passersby once a few people come by interested in the details of farming and payouts.

By the end of the night, over 2 dozen people have come by in total.

My second double stays high above the town to do general surveillance, while my third and final double watches over the dungeons to make sure that everyone entering them is able to handle the monsters inside. Some may challenge higher grade dungeons than they're ready for, so I'll lightly regulate the canyon for now to make sure they don't kill themselves just for an extra silver coin or two.

For those that come by, I offer high-grade gear that fits their needs for free as a one-time deal. After the first, they will have to buy it in a basic marketplace I'll be setting up in the guildhall in the

upcoming days. Not only will people be able to hand in item drops for profit, I'll be selling crafted gear, mana crystals, and various magic items so they can buy what they wish for personal use as well.

---

Three days pass.

---

As expected, the farming operation starts off slow, but word of mouth spreads, and I even have to go to Vice City to exchange some of the platinum I'm sitting on for gold and silver coins to craft them into the Flame Emperor's coins to keep up with the expected volume in the future.

In just these past three days, almost 10% of the E and D grade items necessary have been farmed. On day one, it was less than 1%, and every day the volume is rising as I give them regen potions to heal their fatigue and more word of mouth spreads.

I'm looking forward to further growth to meet this deadline that now has 27 days remaining, we're right on track.

The members of the army that have been training in the labyrinth all have grown very quickly too.

In just two days, all of them have blown past level 500 and ranked up, making it to the 30th floor, gaining a few hundred million MCP each.

By the end of the third day, all of them managed to clear the 30th floor boss solo, surpassing level 750, and as a congratulatory gift for making it this far, I craft a special blood-bonded piece of gear with the extreme grade element stones they've managed to farm themselves matching with their elements.

As we move on to the final stretch of floors, 31 and onward, I see this team of elemental elites becoming an unstoppable army. My goal over the next few weeks is to get every one of them to level 1000 with the mana control and combat ability to match it.

After another long hard day of training, they all go back to the residential area and relax and have their off time while I get more work done.

They all may be rising in mana control drastically, but none of them are near my level where they basically don't have to sleep at all anymore.

Every 30 minutes or so while we were training in the labyrinth, I went up to the 39th floor to collect more firestones. At night while everyone slept, I continued to farm.

After these sessions, I've managed to farm 136 more containment stones and have collapsed 14 more dungeons with them ranging from E to D far out in the solitude of the desert. I have more than enough luminite now to create multiple teleport platforms, so my plan is to see Bri and craft hers while I deliver the first installment of her raw farmed dungeon materials.

Along with this, the construction materials needed to begin phase two for the Crimson City's expansion are ready for pickup.

This order will be enough to build over five times the housing that's available in the city now. It will also expand and fortify the guildhall to look more professional and efficient. More streets and buildings in the outer areas of the town will be made to produce another 20-30 shops around the

new apartments, and most importantly, enough materials are being purchased to begin making a road as a proper trade route connecting the nearby sectors and smaller isolated villages.

So, as the sun sets, I hop into a dungeon and teleport to Vice City to get things in motion.

## Chapter 513

The first thing I do once I get back to Vice City is visit Bri.

I deliver the first 10% of supplies necessary for crafts, and she places them into item boxes so that her craftsmen can begin sorting and making them into magic items starting tomorrow.

After this, we brainstorm for a while and come up with a few ways to build her teleportation platform, rehashing old ideas and coming up with new ones too.

I propose my stealth bunker idea to her and pull out a sheet of A-Grade shielding to test my theory for the concept I'd like to try.

Using my mythic grade craftsmanship and imbuing my mythic grade stealth, I give the shielding a new attribute that makes it completely invisible to mana senses below my mana control.

The sheet of material creates what looks like an invisible wall that I stand behind in the middle of her study. I'm completely invisible to her senses. It's a new version of mana shielding protection, and I've now named it Stealth Shielding.

Both of us walk down to the lower floor of her workshop, the small cellar area right below the ground-level floor.

I use earth magic to manipulate the concrete and begin easily carving out another room below this one.

It is about 10x10 meters, with a high 4-meter ceiling. There is only one small square opening that leads upward. I coat the walls with new A-Grade Stealth shielding everywhere else.

Looking in from the outside, it's as if it isn't even here.

I pull out the same containment jar I used before, full of luminite, a 5x5 sheet of shielding to use as a crafting base, and a mountain of newly farmed mana crystals from my nightly labyrinth raids.

Then, I share my mythic grade craftsmanship skill with Bri and speak up while motioning her forward.

"It's your platform, so please, you do the honors."

After a few flashes of bright white light, Bri uses up about a third of what is inside the luminite reserves and makes herself a fully usable platform along with over 400 teleport crystals from the leftover mana.

She even attempts a craft without using the mythic grade interface and is able to craft more transport crystals with her legendary grade skill because there are no extremely complex crafts happening that need the mythic grade interface; she is already the owner of the platform.

I take a handful of crystals and place them into my item storage along with the leftover luminite, along with creating a special two-layer hatch. The top is made of ordinary concrete that blends in with the floor, and the bottom half is stealth imbued shielding to complete the seal to the secret room.



We plan to meet again in a few days once her contacts in the Bedrock Region get her some real scannable Association IDs sourced for Ember and me.

I leave with a smile and head off to the industrial sector of Vice City to pick up the rest of the construction supplies.

Once I arrive, the older woman assistant leads me to three separate warehouses full of building materials just like before. Two of them are similar in size to the last warehouse I picked up supplies from, and the third is at least ten times as large. The goods I ordered stretch over a full kilometer in length, and it still only fills up a quarter of this megawarehouse space.

As we strike up a conversation from location to location, she explains that years ago in the old era, they used to fill orders of this size regularly, but with earth magic users and dungeon material becoming more abundant in construction, they don't get newer customers like me anymore.

She even offers me trucks again to ship everything out, but I politely refuse and ask to be alone in the warehouses as I cover the cameras and let the enormous amount of materials fall into my item storage.

I make sure to thank her for the privacy and tell her I'll be back at some point for an even bigger order in the future.

The sky is jet black with only dim starlight once I get back to Sector 2, but I work on crafting another five warehouses far away from the Crimson City next to the one I made before so I can store all these items here for the construction workers when they start their shift tomorrow.

---

4 days pass.

---

Life in the Crimson City goes on as usual.

I meet with the craftsmen team before they start phase 2 of construction and bring them to the labyrinth to power level them, making sure all of their skills are legendary and gifting those who want them extreme strength and others extreme earth magic to help with their day-to-day tasks.

They begin making two more large residential areas, along with streets filled with empty storefronts to prepare for expansion.

A special team gets tasked with building the guildhall up, making offices and specific rooms inside, and my body double that works there helps with making sure everything is made exactly how I'd like it.

Another team gets to work on the small prison rehabilitation system, and all of the slaves that I've been forcing labor upon get formal sentences drawn up.

I use my lie detector skill to find out how long they worked for their gang leaders and multiply this time by the number of slaves they personally kidnapped and forced to do labor. I've added additional years depending on how many innocents they've killed.

Some are new to the trade and only have 6-12 months of time to serve, while others are long-time grunts, right-hand men to their old leaders. Their sentences are many, many years.

The reactions are mixed.

Some are thankful that I'm giving them a second chance at life, while others are resentful and still look at me with the eyes of killers. It doesn't matter to me; these are the rules I've put in place, and they must follow. I dose them with the elixir of suggestion again and give them back to the construction team under Maurice to get them back to work.

Meanwhile, over these 4 days, the MCP farming with the Elemental Elites progresses very quickly. Although their raw talent isn't as impressive as my teammates, they all still manage to make it up to floor 38 and 39 by the end of this cycle.

Each individual has managed to absorb over a billion MP, and some groups of them can take out the massive sand worms on the 38th floor, while only a single team of 12 lead by the fire elemental squad leader, Rachel, is able to take down the base level Elite Minotaurs.

No one is capable of defeating the mutant on the 39th floor yet, but it's a work in progress.

They still need more raw power and technical training.

Another bottleneck is the pure amount of monsters we're able to fight at these higher floors.

The respawn rate is relatively slow for 37 hunters looking to all gain power quickly. So, we stay in the floor 33-35 range for the most efficient MCP farming most of the days. However, when everyone is fresh at the beginning of every session, we go up to the higher floors to test their combat abilities with high intensity battles and to farm pure level gains.

I hope to see them all be able to take on the 39th floor boss alone by the time we finish another week of training. It seems like a reasonable goal. Then, I'll actually be on track to ranking them all up a second time before this month is over.

During my downtime, I continue to farm element stones and collapse dungeons out in the desert.

Over 4 more days, I manage to farm 188 more, collapsing 20 E-Grade dungeons.

I've found that it takes fewer containment stones worth of MP to collapse an E-Grade dungeon, but the mass of luminite that falls out is exactly the same as the mass that comes from D-Grade dungeons.

It's far more time and energy efficient to target E-Grade dungeons when farming luminite.

However, I'm not sure if this is entirely true. I may be inefficiently farming luminite altogether. Every D-Grade dungeon that I've collapsed, I've shrunk down to an E-Grade dungeon before fully destroying it. So, I haven't found a way to tell if this affects the total luminite mass that falls out yet.

Considering this, I begin to change things up during my nightly tests, and I come across quite an interesting phenomenon.

It's gotten to the point where I have to travel further than 400 km out into the desert sometimes to find new rogue dungeons.

Now, with over 300 full containment stones with roughly 7 billion MP stored inside each one, I've been constantly thinking up ways to use this energy.

At 4:30 in the morning, roughly 470 km away from the Crimson City, so far away that the terrain has changed from desert to grasslands, hinting that I'm nearing the border of Sector 3, I finally decide to do another test with a fresh E-Grade dungeon.

It's a standard mountain terrain dungeon, and there are wolves inside, ranging from level 40-50. These are the most common dungeons I find out here in the low mana density areas of the empty space between civilizations.

Instead of using a newly crafted empty containment stone in this dungeon, I pull out one of the full containment stones and set it down in the center of the dungeon.

It slowly gives off mana radiation, but overall, the stone is fairly stable. A few hundred MP leaks out every minute. It'd take forever to naturally decay and release all of its energy.

So, I fly far away, over 2 km in distance to the edge of the dungeon near the exit portal and aim a high-powered mana slash back in the direction I came. Using my new mythic grade telekinesis skill upgrade, I'm able to easily aim this shot with pinpoint accuracy onto the target.

The moment the slash hits the containment stone, it shatters and releases its energy. I jump out of the exit portal and let chaos ensue.

In the darkness of the open flatlands, I watch the blue glowing portal slowly shift from blue to red and a grin comes across my face.

"A dungeon break...."

I wait a few more minutes before jumping back inside the portal to find a massive hole torn through the center of the mountainous dungeon, and billions of MP being absorbed into the natural dungeon mass..

The wolves that respawn after this blast are surprisingly all level 50-55, and some have odd mutant traits like fire magic or intimidation, unlike the normal level 40-50 monsters in this dungeon.

I've seen the levels of monsters go down every time I steal mana from a dungeon, and now I see there is potential to make them go up as well.

It gets me curious about many things...

Is there a limit to how high a certain dungeon's monster levels can go? Is that why there are breaks? Can this process of decreasing and increasing monster levels work in labyrinths too...?

As these ideas rush through my head, the only conclusion is that I just need to test things out and see.

I let another full containment stone fall from my inventory and repeat the process, firing a high-density mana slash at it and hopping out the dungeon exit.

My eyes widen once I get outside and watch the bright red portal slowly shift back to blue.

"It stabilized the dungeon..."

I jump inside again, and the entire terrain inside begins to shift and change before my eyes.

The mountainous environment becomes more of a thicker forest area, and a new variant of high E-Grade Orc Monsters level 60-70 start to spawn in.

The wolves dissolve back into the dungeon along with the rocky terrain like they were never even here, and everything starts to click into place as I come up with plausible theories for what I've just witnessed.

Dungeons break when too much mana is brought inside them.

The most common procedure hunters use to stop these breaks is to kill the final boss and collapse the entire dungeon. A precaution many guilds and the association itself use to keep dungeons at bay is to constantly farm them, taking resources away to balance out the mana brought in by hunters and the natural mana in the air that flows in.

I've just found another way to stop a break.

Instead of bringing it back down to its old stable level, it's possible to push the dungeon to evolve and grow to hit a stable level at a higher level rank.

Just like a labyrinth adds floors over many years of farming mana from hunters, it seems it's possible to increase the strength of a singular dungeon in the same way.

My mind races with more questions, but I decide to just do a few more tests, adding about 10 more containment stones to this dungeon and bringing the level of monsters inside above level 100 in just over an hour and roughly 70 billion additional MP.

Still left in my storage, there is over 2 trillion MP worth of containment stones, and I decide if I'm going to be using this resource on anything to raise its value, it should be in the dungeons back by the Crimson City.

My mind fixates specifically on the high B-Grade dungeon far below the others that I have sectioned off for personal use. It could be an incredibly valuable resource if I could make the monsters inside it even stronger.

The sun is starting to rise, and I have another full day of training to get back to today with the army. In addition to this, Bri should be coming by today for a check-in too.

I'll be letting this brand new D-Grade dungeon sit for a while. If it is still stable with no adverse effects of foreign mana being injected into it after a full day passes, that will be a good sign that it is safe to begin tests on dungeons closer to home.

## Chapter 514

I use a teleport crystal to transport back to the Crimson City, then collect the loot that has been farmed by all of the townspeople over the last four days from my body double in the guildhall. It's an additional 20% of the total necessary.

Most of the C-Grade items have been handed in by the army recruits after training hours.

Adding this to the 10% farmed earlier in the week, that's 30% of the total. At this rate, I'll have everything I need well before the deadline.

I stop by the residential area where most of the army recruits stay and send a message to the three squad leaders that training will be delayed a few hours this morning. If they'd like to train in the dungeons while I'm out, my double is there to help them, but MCP farming and supervised high floor labyrinth training won't start until I'm done with some business.

Once the word begins to spread, I crush another transport crystal and make it to the stealth bunker beneath Bri's workshop in Vice City to deliver the goods.

I give her a telepathy greeting that I've arrived, then walk up through the floors as all of her workers stay focused on their morning tasks.

She collects the raw farmed item drops, then reaches under her desk with a smile and shows me something I've been waiting for.

"Your IDs, I sourced these both from two registered hunters in the Bedrock region that went missing during a series of dangerous high C-Grade dungeon breaks a while back, one that got out of hand and monsters actually escaped to the city. Some call it the Bedrock Catastrophe. There were over a hundred casualties, and thousands injured. A few black market contacts managed to retrieve many IDs from the rubble of the break once everything was over."

She places two C-Class Hunter's Association IDs onto her desk.

"Gotta make money out of whatever you can sometimes."

One is labeled [Ray Anderson][C-Class][Grade 2 Lightning] and the other [Emrie Carter][C-Class][Grade 1 Fire].

"It's been over a year with no sightings of either of them. They had no families, no friends, and no work relationships other than a handful of merchants in the heart of Bedrock City. They were never pronounced dead or even reported missing. I have guaranteed confirmation they are dead, but looking from the outside it's a plausible story that the two of them went off grid and trained up above level 500 and have now finally resurfaced to try and take the B-Class exams. So, if anyone asks, that's where you've been."

I nod and look down at the cards again to see the pictures of two young men, both around 25 years old if I had to guess. Ray has black hair and tan skin while Emrie is more fair-skinned with bright red hair.

My gaze turns up to Bri, and I chuckle.

"Is this what you think we look like? It is pretty similar... And even the names sound like ours. Ray and Emrie? Like Jay and Ember? How'd you—"

Bri shrugs, then pushes the cards forward on the desk.

"I have quite the selection to choose from. There's a large network of identity theft in the black market beneath the eight great regions. The Dark Continent isn't the only place shady business thrives. If you gave me enough time, a few months, I could have even had perfect matches made for you. Name, face, skills, class, and even scannable to The Association, but considering you're dead to them and well known as one of the former Vice Region's Elites, I assumed some names that don't match exactly were a better fit for you two."

I nod and take the cards off the table.

"You're right. That was a good decision. Now, what's with the grading next to their names? A grade 2 lightning? And a grade 1 fire? I've never seen that before."

"Every region has their own unique grading system at their association branch. The only thing every regions shares in common is the letter grade. The Bedrock IDs have a second signature on them,

showing your element type if you have one and the power level on it. Grade 1 just means basic grade, grade 2 is advanced."

I place the IDs into my item storage and nod.

"Got it. So it looks like I'll be a lightning wielder during the exams."

"That's right. I'll be submitting your new names to Rodrigo this week to have him get you two registered."

"Great."

Bri nods, satisfied that I'm happy with her work in securing these IDs and begins sorting through the piles of raw item drops I've managed to get for her.

I help out with the sorting too for a few minutes, using telekinesis from a distance and thinking about a new large craft I want built in the city.

Over the last few days the construction teams have been moving very quickly, especially thanks to the new skills I granted some of them and the power leveling to bring all their current skills up to legendary grade.

At this rate, they'll be moving on to the next phase of the projects soon, which is building out a trade route through the desert from the Crimson City through many small self-sustaining villages out in the desert. Plus, connecting the city itself to major networks like Valor City, and eventually even Solara.

With this in mind, the possibility of new people coming by for trade or even wanting the option to stay in the Crimson City will be a reality.

I want to have a place where outsiders can trade freely and interact with those that want the interactions, but I also want a secluded area within the city where only members of my Rising Emperor's Domain can interact.

So, I ask Bri a question.

"Do you know any way to make long-lasting force fields? Like mana shielding, but invisible, and only harmful to certain people—"

As these words leave my mouth I remember how when I was first challenging the Dark One, flying over the desert and releasing deadly waves of fire imbued with soul energy, those under my protection were not burned by my flames.

I want to create something like this to protect the town, but I'm not sure how to even start going about it.

Bri thinks for a moment to herself, and shakes her head.

"I'm not sure."

She walks over to her hidden bookcase, turning the dagger on the shelf by the wall to open it up again and reveal a few old books, pointing at them.

"Feel free to look through these if you wish, you might find something. I haven't memorized them all."

I walk over and do as she says, using telekinesis to gently pick up each old crafting book and sift through them.

Some are printed, others are hand-written, and some aren't even books, they're just papers stacked together with old crafting recipes inside.

While I flip through the pages, Bri continues to sort the raw items I brought for her today.

Despite the look of many of these books, most of the crafting recipes are common knowledge to someone like me that has a mythic grade crafting skill. However, they do give interesting insight to certain crafts even though they aren't exactly what I'm looking for.

I find that there are certain ways to imbue elements and skills into items using large amounts of people's blood even at the special grade or legendary grade rating of a craftsmanship skill.

As long as the blood is being drawn while the skill is activated, and the craftsman uses enough mana as a catalyst, there is a non-zero chance that mythic grade crafts like imbuing skills into items are plausible.

There are even rare cases where makeshift skill orbs were created by chance with long sessions of blood draining to craft special items and even infusions to swap the blood of the skill holder to a person that wants that skill. A lot of these trials seem highly illegal and there are even notes of a number of casualties during some trials, but they have notations here that the experiments have worked.

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

Although no skill transfers or consumable orbs in these trials seem to be permanent, some of them do last up to 3-6 months in some cases. Others have reported certain aspects of skills staying in their systems longer, but to a far less potent degree than even a basic no-grade skill.

I've heard of people buying skills in the past before, and even seen some association workers with over two skills in their status. I can only assume they've managed to find a replicable way to do the same, but from what I've gathered here, it is nowhere near as safe, seamless, and permanent as my version of skill orbs.

I scan the books more and more, looking for keywords like shielding, barrier, or force field, but nothing other than recipes for mana shielding come up in my searches.

There's only one single paper that shows something remotely similar to what I'm attempting to make.

It's a self-recorded study done by one craftsman that managed to reach level 500 many years back. Despite being a craftsman by day, he also fought in dungeons by night, and mostly used defensive gear and spawn camping tactics to power level himself higher in search of new levels of crafting.

His ranked-up buff reflected his battle tactics, and he awakened a force field buff just like the one I'm trying to make. It allowed objects to come in that he wanted and pushed objects away that were perceived as dangerous to him.

After many tests, his detailed notes show him using a similar method to the crude blood draining rituals of skill imbuement, but while having his buff activated the whole time.

He managed to imbue this buff into many objects over his years of testing. These include shields, swords, and even mana shielding itself to make barriers that would let certain objects in and out according to the parameters he sets.

Once I get to the end of the page, I flip it around to read more, but there's nothing left.

I search through all of the other notes and books a second time, trying to find his name in any other papers or books, but it never shows up.

The floating papers all drift back to the bookshelf, and I hold only the one in my hand, then turn to Bri who has finished her item sorting.

"I think I found what I'm looking for... well, at least something close to it."

She smiles.

"Good. Now I have a busy day of meetings and crafting to get to with these new items."

I look up at a clock on the wall and see that over an hour and a half has gone by while I was immersed in the papers.

"Oh—yes, I have a long day ahead of me too. Thanks, Bri, for the IDs, and this paper. I'll see you soon."

I crush a teleport crystal and come back to the Crimson City with about an hour left to kill before the time I said I'd be back to train the recruits again.

In this time, I have a few new crafting methods to try out.

I make my way out to the open desert right outside of the city about 1 km away and begin merging high B-Grade items from the labyrinth with large amounts of blood imbued with the same fiery soul energy that I used to burn my enemies but protect my allies.

Many of the item drops just burn up on the spot, or turn into various unstable and cursed items.

However, after using self-regeneration to regrow all the blood in my body over five times, I finally get a stable reading once I try imbuing this energy into a sheet of A-Grade shielding.

It shifts to become blood red, but doesn't instantly decay or show any difference on its appraisal reading.

However, I'm positive it's different. There is soul energy inside the shielding now, and it's continuously radiating its energy in place.

I want to see if it has the same properties as I'd wished for, so I fly back to the City and ask for one of the prisoners to take a few minutes off of his shift as well as a random townspeople.

They both stand out in the desert with clueless looks on their faces as I point to the red glowing square of shielding on the ground while I myself am flickering with black fire in my Flame Emperor's disguise.

"Both of you touch it, then step back. If it harms you I'll repay you the damages and more."

Both of them hesitantly walk forward, and lean down to touch the red glowing metal.



The man who shares a link of loyalty with me pushes his hand right through the energy easily and touches the pure metal backing like nothing is there. His confusion turns to a smile as he lifts his hand out from the red aura and it appears nothing at all has happened to him.

The prisoner pushes his hand through just like this man, and the opposite happens.

He does not share the same link of loyalty that the other man does through my buff, and the fiery soul energy reacts much differently with him.

The instant his hand touches the energy of the red aura, it begins to melt away. His fingers to forearm disintegrate to nothing before he yells and pulls his hand back and the place that last made contact continues to burn with dark red flames.

Even as he falls back the fire continues to burn him, creeping down his arm before I use a dense mana blade to cut it off right above the flames.

Still, now he's dripping blood into the sand, but I throw him a mythic grade regeneration potion and he drinks it without question with eyes filled with fear.

I stare forward at the red glowing square of shielding while the man's arm starts to slowly regrow and come up with another idea.

"I'll take a month off your sentence for every test you continue to do with me. Well... You have no choice, but that's the offer I'm giving you."

I turn to the man that already has a link of loyalty with me and nod.

"Thank you for trusting me. You don't have to proceed if you don't want to, but your help would be appreciated. I'll give you a gold for every test you do with me if you want. If all goes well, you should never have to worry as long as we're still connected through the link made when you first entered this city."

He takes a deep breath, and I go into further detail about what I'm trying to make. After clarification, he agrees to help understanding that he's not the one in danger here.

The tests go on for another full 30 minutes as I manage to imbue more soul energy infused blood into more shielding, and exactly the same result comes back.

I even create a ring of shielding about 15m wide, and when imbuing soul energy infused blood into the entirety of the outside, it makes a small red-tinted dome.

"This is exactly what I'm looking for."

I try to do the math, thinking about how large this city will grow to be. It's already a few kilometers in distance from the far area of warehouses to the guild and residential areas. The canyon of dungeons needs to be protected from outsiders too, and that's another few kilometers away as well. I need to make a dome at least 10km wide to fit everything I want in the inner city, and I don't have anywhere near enough shielding to produce something that large right now.

Even if I asked for every last piece of scrapped A-Grade shielding from the Valor City Towers, that wouldn't be enough.

I need to get creative.

As the time ticks down before my training session with the Elemental Elites, I rack my brain for more options, then an idea comes to mind.

My blood-bonded Infinite Essence of Regeneration. It is the product of the 7th ranked Dark Guard's clear energy crystal and silver metallic arrowhead left behind from the 2nd ranked Dark Guard. It's malleable and can form into whatever shape I desire.

It's also high enough grade that I believe it won't become a cursed item when I try to craft with it.

I think about it a little longer, then decide to go for it, making the silver substance float in front of me and expand in the air.

I stare forward, concentrating, and form the liquid into the shape of a large dome, twice the size of the one I made with the mana shielding moments ago.

I use the same amount of blood and soul energy, and the same reaction follows.

The outside of the silver dome tints bright red instantly.

My eyes widen at the sight, and I decide to expand the metallic dome.

As I do, the red barrier around it grows in size but lessens in density. The same amount of energy as I started with spreads out to create a larger dome.

I make the base of the dome 100m in diameter before I stop, then place a hand on the outer silver layer.

I can feel every bit of it.

The item is blood-bonded with me, and the soul energy surrounding it feels as if it's still connected to me, yet there is now more room in my core to recharge it with mana and Qi later.

I hold the soul energy in place just how it is for a few minutes straight, then take a deep breath and begin to let the metallic dome disappear starting at the top.

The thin silver metal disappears, but the large red dome stays in place exactly the same form.

Once the silver metal hits the sand near the bottom, I stop making it shrink and all that's left is a massive silver ring, keeping the huge red dome formation steady in the air.

I motion for my two test subjects to do as I say.

The one connected through my link walks through the red wall of energy like there isn't anything there but open air.

The grunt hesitantly touches the wall again and jumps back once it starts to burn him.

I stare up at my creation with awe, and picture it at a much larger scale covering the entire city as a final line of defense.

I let the prisoner heal and thank the villager again, making sure to repay them both with what I promised and have them go back to their daily lives.

The villager is escorted back to the bar and I bring the worker back to the construction crew, asking Maurice for an updated map of the city so I can plan out how exactly I'll make this happen once I need to do it at a larger scale.

As I place the map into my storage, I see the Infinite Essence of Regeneration is not on my status at all anymore, it is an independent object out in the distance holding up the red dome in the desert.

I come back alone and it's still standing perfectly. Placing my hand on the edge of the barrier, I let soul energy leak out from my palm, and the coloring gets much denser as the barrier itself gets stronger.

Satisfied with the results here, I swallow three full Qi pills and plunder a few mana crystals to restore the soul energy lost during these tests.

Unlike Qi and mana separately, the perfect mixture between the two that is soul energy doesn't regenerate instantly. I hardly used up 10% of my core for the tests done today, but recovering this much will still take about two hours to come back to its 100% natural fully usable state.

I float down to the desert ground level and touch the metallic circle that keeps this dome steady. Once I do, it re-equips to my status, and I instantly reform its malleable state back into a small ring that fits around my finger. Instead of just being silver like it was before, it now glows red, but the soul energy is leaking out of it at a fairly steady rate. I can tell it's not permanently imbued.

The large part of this structure that kept it stable has now disappeared, and I watch the dome of red energy begin to drift away into the atmosphere like residue from an attack.

I make sure to take notes of everything that's happened today, adding my own experiments to the pool of data that craftsmen have collected, then place it all into my item storage before heading to the residential area to meet the elemental army.

I have a long day of MCP farming to do, then, I need to make a visit to Monk at the monastery in Valor City to pick up some more Qi pills if I want to attempt creating a stable barrier that covers this entire settlement.

## Chapter 515

The day goes on, and I continue training the elites in the Labyrinth.

Over the last week, while bringing them all from the lower level 400s to now mid-level 900s, I've gained a fair share of MCP myself, especially while training alone at night. My focus right now is mainly training my troops and expanding the city, but I still want to find a way to get stronger and climb higher floors of the Labyrinth too if I can. The billions of MCP gains that add to my energy control are slightly noticeable, but there are no overwhelming increases in strength.

My best gauge of power is to think back to the creature I battled on the 43rd floor atop that mountain, and I'm sure even with the strength gains I have now, that fight wouldn't have been any easier.

To improve, and have a chance against the 44th floor, I need a drastic change in the style of training or find a way to create an isolation pod myself.

Even throughout all the notes I read through this morning, there was no mention of anything like it at all. It seems the one Ember is in now is the only one left, and possibly my only reference to try to recreate one in the future.

For now, I stick to the tasks at hand and make my way to Valor City once the training session for today is over.

Once I arrive, I'm greeted by Lith in his lobby, and he takes me on a quick tour to explain what I've missed out on while I was busy.

We make our way through the rooms of fighters that were rescued, and they're all in comas with life support and feeding tubes attached to them.

Lith comments on the situation.

"Not a single one has died. They have no life-threatening illness or anything; they just won't wake up. It's as if their bodies are using all of their energy to heal a wound that isn't there."

I do full body scans of every one of the 93 fighters, over half of which are over level 500. None of them have gained any of their status features back; they're wiped completely clean. There doesn't seem to be any major disruptions in their natural mana flow either. Every single one of them seems to be able to move energy around their bodies at a normal rate.

However, Lith is right, the way they are moving this mana is interesting. It's as if they're all subconsciously attempting the same thing. It looks exactly the same as the mana flow within me when the perk of my self-regeneration skill detoxifies alcohol or poison in my system. High levels of mana control can create a similar effect to a lesser degree, healing people faster than the average unawakened human. The only problem is, there is nothing for their systems to heal.

The same useless cycle is going on repeat, even after we leave the building and make our way into the streets of the inner city, this phenomenon irks me.

"I'll find a way to fix them. Please, keep them in a stable state until I find a cure."

Lith nods and promises to do so as we walk past the two sites of the old Dark One's towers that have been stripped from the kilometer-high skyscrapers down to open plots of land in the center of the city.

The third tower has eight guards outside. There are two black nights on each side of the tower, and I can sense that the shielding is doubled up just as I requested, and there's now an elevator and multiple empty floors that lead up to each of them.

Lith waves for his guards to step aside and we enter the lobby.

I see the floor in the center of the room is still sealed off to the public, but it isn't my earth magic from before. It's a combination of Maria and Abby's earth and ice; I sense blue and green soul energy within the mass created to cover the underground entrance.

Not a drop of Qi comes out and I nod with approval.

"I assume they haven't come out since they went in?"

Lith shakes his head.

"Yes, but- Well- no. The man from the monastery did come by with a few devices a few times, but the two women that went down never came back up."

I nod, picturing Monk bringing down supplies to farm Qi pills while Abby and Maria are cultivating in the high Qi density environment.

"Makes sense. We better not disturb them then, I'll go check on Monk in the platinum district—"

I pause.

"I guess I don't really need a wristband anymore or have to use the main entrances to go into the actual city."

Lith shrugs.

"The only person that can punish you for breaking the rules is the leader of this city. So, are you going to tell on yourself?"

I roll my eyes and chuckle.

"I guess not."

We walk out of the tower and make our way to the black gate inside the Royal coin section of the city and walk through it to the platinum district. On the way over, I update him on the volume of orders being crafted and guesstimate how much longer it'll be until I have all the crafted materials ready. Lith stays within the center of the city and waves me off.

"Very good, you're right on schedule. Just about 3 more weeks before they need to be all ready to ship, I look forward to introducing you to the Sector 3 and Regional Leaders on the mainland once we deliver the goods. See you soon."

The gate shuts behind me and I make my way through the platinum district's streets as night falls, reaching the black pyramid, and passing the two guards in the narrow hallway that leads inside without them batting an eye.

I assume Monk told them I would eventually come by.

Once I make contact with the black material that makes this fortress, my system begins to fade in and out like usual, but my Soul Energy feels completely intact. The mana that has successfully merged with Qi isn't negated at all by this stone.

Just to be safe, I use only pure Qi to open the doors and make my way down into the monastery.

I walk through the main hall to try and find the training rooms where Monk usually resides, and let my senses seep through the walls before I pinpoint him in one of the rooms far away.

It is just him and his sleeping master in a room alone.

I can sense his palms on the old man's chest, and he's releasing high-density waves of Qi into his body over and over again as I continue to walk down the hall.

Once I get to the black stone door, I wonder if I should disturb the ritual that's going on here, but before I decide, Monk stops and walks over to the door and opens it himself.

The story has been illicitly taken; should you find it on Amazon, report the infringement.

"Long time no see, I've made some progress, your timing is excellent."

As I shake Monk's hand to greet him, I see his master's eyes open in the bed at the back of the room.

They look around for a few moments, and Monk leads me over to the side of the bed.

A faint whisper comes out of the old man's lips as he makes eye contact with me.

"I will repay your kindness. You have given me a chance to live again, I will beat this curse."

A smile crosses his face and his eyes close while the excess Qi that Monk pushed into his body begins to flow out at a natural rate.

The old man falls back into his coma-like state, and Monk turns to me.

"See, I'm on the right path here. Last week when I started this treatment I couldn't get more than an eye twitch out of him, now he's able to resume consciousness for a few seconds every time I complete a cycle. There's a chance."

I nod and stare down at the man, watching how his natural Qi flows around his body at a very slow rate. It almost looks normal... there aren't the odd fluctuations and subconscious forced healing cycles that happen with the other lower-level fighters' mana.

"Interesting... So there is a way to treat them with Qi..."

I turn to Monk.

"So with enough Qi, everyone in that tower could be healed."

He nods.

"Theoretically yes, but that would be a large use of resources without any proper results yet—"

"Yes, I'm not saying to start trials immediately, I'm just thinking of ideas. Lith said he's able to keep them healthy in their suspended state for a while. Take all the time you need to heal your master."

Monk bows.

"Of course."

Then I respond with the main reason I came here.

"How has the farming operation on the new crystals been going? I have an unrelated side project that needs a large amount of Qi to be completed."

Monk smiles and turns to the door.

"It's been going very well actually, right this way."

We walk down the hall deeper into the monastery and when we pass one of the training rooms two incredibly dense forces of Qi are colliding at high speeds inside.

The flow of Qi feels just like Fisher and Lydia's. It is about the same raw strength as when I last saw them use it, but it is far more refined and precise. They've been working on their fighting styles in here with no mana at all for a week straight. I can tell their movements and striking accuracy is improving at fast rates.

Monk even comments on them as we pass.

"They're talented fighters. That man has an ego that powers him on the battlefield, and that woman is sharp. Fisher may have more raw talent than her, but Lydia hasn't lost a single battle. It's always by a hair, but she finds a way to win. Something is driving her to improve everyday, but she's never mentioned what it is."

I smile, happy to see the two of them are improving while I work, but think about Monk's comments deeper as we continue to walk.

Fisher was my mentor for a short period of time when I first joined the association. Monk is right in his assessment; he wants to get stronger and his ego leads him to believe he can best any opponent. It is fairly simple looking from the outside why he fights.

Lydia, on the other hand, I've never delved into her mindset or true nature. She carries a unique curved blade, has an unknown background other than the fact that she was partnered with Maria to teach her Ice magic before the Association cut us off. Her intellect is very high, but she doesn't talk much at all since she was kidnapped by the Sector 4 leader. Her focus has been the same as everyone's; trying to stay alive and get stronger.

I am curious what is really on her mind sometimes, and why she fights, but now isn't the time to find out.

There's a series of loud cracks of Qi that vibrate throughout that training room as they continue to spar, and Monk points to a door at the end of the hall.

Once the door opens I find that it's a storage room full of silver containment cases.

One of them has over 200 Qi pills inside of it which are the total Qi pills collected over just the last week alone.

He says there are more than enough to conduct whatever tests are necessary, and I'm free to take them all, but I just take 100, and tell him to store the rest securely. With great resource abundance like this, it is a perfect time to start making a stockpile rather than use them up unnecessarily.

He agrees to continue saving half of the supply, and keep half available for treatment testing, training, and miscellaneous tests and missions that come up in the future.

After that, he promises to continue treating his master and farming Qi and report the findings once I return.

I leave the monastery and crush a teleport crystal to come back to the Crimson City to continue my tests with the Essence of Infinite Regeneration.

The metallic item is already bonded with my blood and soul energy, so the only thing I have to do to progress further is expand the silver mass out to whatever shape I desire and imbue it with the raw soul energy that resides deep inside me.

Far out in the desert where I do my tests, I push the dome of red Soul Energy to over a full three kilometers in diameter, and it takes my full core of remaining soul energy to power it all.

The barrier is mostly transparent, but shimmers light red, and I can tell it's strong enough to keep out large portions of enemies that would try to attack.

The fact that it's my soul energy and it's fully concentrated on a single point means a monster equal to my power would have the possibility of breaking through it if they concentrated all of their power in a single point and tried to rip a hole through it.

However, if there's really a creature or person of that strength trying to get into this barrier, I probably have bigger issues to worry about.

Once my Soul Energy base is completely depleted for the night and I swallow a handful of Qi pills along with plundering some mana crystals, the gradual Soul Energy restoration process begins.

I relax for the rest of the night, watching the red dome and find that less than 0.01% of it dissolved into the atmosphere overnight. This means I will have to charge it at some point, but if left alone it will stay very strong for quite a while.

It isn't until midday, during the elemental elites training session the next day that my natural pool of Soul Energy reaches full again.

To my surprise, it surpasses what it was yesterday by a noticeable amount.

It's far more dense and potent.

The act of depleting my Soul Energy stores down to nearly nothing, then recombining Qi and Mana floods my body with a new surge of power that gives me an idea.

"This is how I'll get stronger..."

—

6 days pass.

—

I continue to train the Elites and their MCP growth has reached multiple billions at this point. Teams of 12-14 are led by their squad leaders and they're now capable of defeating the 39th-floor boss room by themselves. Every single elemental elite has surpassed level 990, the final stretch is here.

I've also managed to farm another 341 containment stones this week and collapsed 32 rogue dungeons out in the desert making my luminite total in my storage even larger.

The dungeon out in the desert that I artificially increased in level was still stable when I went back to check on it, giving me the green light to begin releasing the containment stones I've farmed into the high B-Grade dungeon in the bottom of the canyon.

It starts off with monsters between level 710-730. After using all of the leftover stones from the week before on it, along with the new 341 stones from this week, the total mana released into the dungeon reaches close to 5 trillion MP. The level of monsters inside it now has hit 880-900. It takes more and more stones to bring the levels up higher at these stages. It definitely takes less MP to raise the levels of an E-Grade dungeon, but my goal here isn't efficiency, it's to get this dungeon to spawn double ranked up monsters... I've never been in a dungeon that reached heights this high, but I can tell I'm getting close to achieving this creation.

Over 30% more loot is farmed by the village hunters and off-duty Elites as well, bringing the total of the amount needed to complete all orders to 60%. There are 2 weeks left to farm the remaining 40%.

—

In addition to this over these 6 days, I repeat a similar process with the Soul Energy Barrier too.

By day, I continue to train the elites, and by night, I work on expanding the dome of soul energy by depleting my base almost entirely.

The dome grows over three times in size, reaching about 10km just like I set out to do and the density of the shielding is twice as strong as it was on day 1.



I make an announcement to the villagers that I'll be placing a protective barrier around the outer edges of the City, and use my telekinesis to move the entire structure from out in the desert where I was testing it to place it down on top of the warehouse, city, and even the canyon of dungeons.

Once it hits the sand, I replicate one of the tests I tried on shielding and other objects earlier this week, and shape the Essence of Infinite Regeneration into a mirror image of itself to form a second upside-down facing dome underground. The density of the shielding is diluted to half its strength to form this second inverted dome.

With a silver ring around its center point, a massive Red Sphere protects this entire city from the air, and underground.

The only people capable of walking through its transparent Crimson tinted walls are those that have sworn loyalty to me and have a link of loyalty through the Rising Emperor's Domain.

As the morning sun rises, the red dome glimmers in the golden light.

From the outside, all of the newly built streets and residential complexes look as if they're a light shade of red. Anyone visiting in the future will now know exactly why this settlement is called the Crimson City.

## Chapter 516

The craftsmen teams have used up nearly half of the materials I delivered to them last week, and the impressive new apartment complexes rising up 5-10 stories for future residents are completed. There's enough room to increase the population of this city tenfold if needed.

The new streets are built, and dozens of new storefronts line the roads, ready for businesses to move in.

Two small grocery stores are built, and I task a body double to buy supplies from large chains in Vice City and Solara. This will have to do until I can barter some deals with Sector 3 to buy fresh produce in large quantities directly from them.

Some of the villagers take positions as managers, and the teens and villagers in their early 20s take jobs to stock the shelves and work registers.

Many of the small shops and businesses that were set up during the first construction wave hire people to work in them too, and with the influx of new money to villagers from my weekly aid packages and the increase in coin supply from the guildhall's farming requests, the economy begins to move along on its own.

Less than 10% of people are now unemployed. Many don't fully rely on my aid packages, but the reassurance that they will be taken care of gives them trust to take risks in their business and have fun in their personal lives too.

Dan Striker's mercenary bar mostly sells drinks and food, but there have been a few private trading requests for materials in the dungeons that can be farmed that the guildhall isn't offering to buy.

I'm sure my requests for goods will fluctuate every month; it won't always be the same items. So it's great to see if people have usual dungeons they like to farm or special requests, there will always be other places to sell that loot if it's not on the guildhall list.

Back in the guildhall itself, the entirety of the structure has been renovated.

The base that is open to the public at ground level has a new glossy floor, imported tables and comfortable furniture for people to relax in, professional signs with pricing for goods being sold that can be controlled by a device from inside the octagonal center room, and even a new board on the wall that shows the pricing for basic gear and potions for hunters to buy at cheap prices so they can be fully protected and prepared to hunt in the dungeons.

I hire a few people to work inside the room. One woman buys loot from the hunters that bring it in. Another young man sells the basic E to C grade crafted gear like health and mana potions, swords and daggers, as well as amulets and armor that I've crafted to fit the hunters' needs based on the level scans I've been doing these past days. Then, another woman greets people at the door and answers questions in the lobby.

An extra floor is built to make the guildhall four stories high. It has been renovated to be my personal office with a large glass wall at the back in front of the same throne I built after the war overlooking the city.

The growing community gets into quite the rhythm.

With two weeks left until Ember's pod opens up, I head back to the mainland to check out the B-Class exams. I call the construction team to have a meeting with me right near the barrier of the Crimson Soul energy shield far outside the city, facing in the direction of Sector 1.

It's early in the morning, and I've given the elemental elites the morning off again before we train.

The team of construction workers look up at me with wide smiles while the prisoners eye the red barrier with a dazed look in their eyes due to the elixir they're under the influence of.

I speak up.

"Alright. Today, we'll be starting phase 3 of the building project. We'll be expanding this city outward to begin making connections with other settlements in this Sector and connect The Crimson City with many major trade and travel routes all over the Dark Continent."

While making contact with the outer barrier of the red Soul Energy forcefield, I'm able to manipulate it by connecting the red energy to my own supplies.

The construction workers all walk through without any resistance. Their gear and building supplies are all in item boxes around their waists.

The prisoners all carefully walk through a small hole that I create in the Soul energy shielding. Once the last one makes it through, I release my contact from the barrier. The hole shrinks until it's gone, converting right back into its natural solid barrier state and we get to work.

I use earth magic to begin the base structure of a trail out into the desert.

Earlier last week, I surveyed the lands and found nearby towns that I see as great routes to make the road near. I won't be making the main trade route within 10km of any settlement, because I don't want to bring any unwanted foot traffic to them. However, once we're out there, I'll be greeting every town with my Flame Emperor's appearance and give them options.

They can come and live in the Crimson City while listing the benefits, or for those that aren't interested in staying in my settlement, I'm giving them the option to come and be trade partners

with us instead. If no one in the villages that we make contact with wants anything to do with us, we just won't make connecting roads to their town from the main trade route.

If they want their privacy and isolation, they can keep it. It's as simple as that.

While I head off into the empty desert, slowly forming a long winding path, a small group of workers follow to add fine details, lighting fixtures for nighttime, and signs that show the distance to the surrounding landmarks in place.

A larger group stays behind and works on building up another village outside of the Crimson Barrier.

This consists of many trading posts that will be filled with workers who want to sell and trade their personal gear to outsiders, along with another guildhall that will accept trades buying and selling my crafts and gear directly.

Nearby, outside the barrier, there are also plans to have inns, bars, and even a small short-term stay residential area for people to spend the night if they've traveled a long way.

It is another large-scale project to work on, and we have two weeks to get everything in motion and automated before I leave out of town to attend the B-Class exams.

We get to work.

—

7 days pass.

—

I make two roads, about 200km each in two directions spreading throughout Sector 2.

One of them stretches toward Sector 3 and the other goes off in the direction of Sector 1.

The trading posts and visitors inns have been completed, and the infrastructure is almost as large as the residential area inside the Crimson Barrier.

It's definitely going to be necessary too.

Making my search diameter over 400km, I've made contact with 7 villages ranging from populations of 25-200. Not a single one declines my offer to connect them to the main trade route via smaller off-shooting roads.

There are 117 new links of loyalty created through my Rising Emperor's Domain, and I've given these individuals transport back to the Crimson City as promised along with weekly aid and a free place to live in the newest residential housing areas.

Most of these new citizens are hunters that are looking for work.

The remaining 40% of the guildhall's orders are filled before these 7 days are even up.

I deliver them to Bri and she tells me she'll have everything ready for me days before the final deadline. She also received word back from Rodrigo and managed to get our two false identities registered for the B-Class exams.

There will be a pickup point assigned in the Bedrock Region one day before the exams start.

Bri says she can source transport crystals linked to a public hub in the Bedrock Region for me to use before then, so i let her work out the logistics.

The start date of the exams is exactly 3 days after the 30-day deadline for these trade deals. That means once Ember awakes and I've delivered the goods, I have 2 days to get all of my affairs in order before then.

It's all working out perfectly.

Actually, everything has fallen into place even better than my expectations, but I'm happy to see the orders will be fulfilled now with time to spare.

I post new guild offers for the most common items that will most likely be needed for next month's orders, and always accept buying mana crystals, but leave out a lot of the obscure item drops.

The mercenary bars order quantity rises drastically once the guildhall stops accepting certain goods because thanks to my ventures out in the desert, there have been over 500 visitors from the surrounding towns to trade new items.

For now, I accept any coin, marked with the Flame Emperor's emblem or not. However, once its processed through the guildhall, I keep any unmarked currency for myself and always payout hunters with my own marked coins.

Traders from other towns accept that these coins are still made of bronze, silver, and gold. Many return back to their villages with the mark of the Flame Emperor in hand after selling their goods to villagers here.

However, far more wealth is being brought into the town than the amount of coins that are leaving.

It's not only magical gear, lots of items from the grocery stores that are only found in Solara and the Vice region are being resold to travelers that come by at high prices because of their rarity in this portion of the Dark Continent.

The inns outside the barrier need maintenance and attendance, so I appoint managers and workers from the new arrivals that aren't hunters and they find their place in the city very quickly.

A few of the empty storefronts are contracted out to new businesses like pawn shops and cafes, but a majority of them are still empty. There is still far more room to grow.

—

As these days go on, I keep training the elemental elites for about 8-10 hours every day.

They've gotten to the point where they're able to defeat the 39th floor boss in teams of 3-4, and everyone has made it to level 998-999.

Some talented fighters are even capable of defeating the boss monster solo, but I still don't permit this without my direct supervision.

They're all extremely close to ranking up again.

—

Every night after training I continue to farm the containment stones to collapse dungeons, and fill my inventory with another 29 luminite fragments.

Using over 2 trillion more MP from the leftover containment stones, I bring the B-Grade dungeon's monsters up to level 915-930. The boss monster reaches level 945. It feels like I'm getting closer to the double-ranked-up monster goal for this experiment, but the rate at which the dungeons levels increase is slowing down even more.

In addition to this, I drain my Soul Energy Core down to near zero every single day, making the Crimson Barrier far stronger.

The reformation of Soul Energy gets faster every time, and the volume and potency of energy within me continues to rise.

Since the first day I started doing this 2 weeks ago, it feels as if my capacity to wield Soul energy has risen in strength by over 50%. My flames are burning hotter, denser, and more deadly than ever. I haven't had any opponents to test it out on yet, but it feels as if I would have probably stood a chance against the 43rd floor boss in a one on one fight without even using my lifesteal or equivalent exchange. My strength is rising at a steady rate.

I stop by Valor City to pick up another 100 Qi pills once I've burned through the entire supply Monk gave me before.

He's surprised at the rate I'm using them, but doesn't question it and gives me another 100, showing that his rate of farming is still faster than the rate at which I'm using them; but I don't think that will be the case for long.

The mine is producing between 350-400 Qi pills per week. 200 is going straight to isolated storage, while the remaining is being used to find a cure for the Lich King's aftermath, and training materials for myself and others within the monastery.

It is sufficient for now.

Every time my Soul Energy capacity rises, I need more Qi and more Mana to reform the entirety of the newly grown base. This shouldn't be an issue in the near future, but at some point, I will need even more Qi than this if I want to get stronger.

To attain exponential growth, this rate of production will not be enough.

That aside, I get to witness Monk's treatment of his master again today, and when his eyes open, he manages to sit up and turn his head toward us.

The old man is awake for almost a full minute, but doesn't speak more than a few words to preserve his energy.

As he rests his head back down and closes his eyes, I nod and turn to Monk.

"That is definitely progress... Maybe he'll be up and walking on his own in a few weeks."

He smiles.

"I believe so too. When this works, I can have my students in the monastery perform the treatment on the fighters you rescued too."

I nod.

"Perfect."

—

Once back in the Crimson City, I make my way down to the Bunker beneath the guildhall to check on Ember in the isolation pod.

It's been 3 weeks since he entered that pod. Meaning over 240 days have passed inside. Less than 9 days remain on the timer at the top of the pod, meaning about 100 more days are left inside.

It hums very lightly, and no excess or unique energy signatures come off of it at all.

I expected something odd to happen, but no clues at all are shown to the outside.

His status shows in my Rising Emperor's Domain interface, and even it is unmoving.

There aren't even irregular mana, Qi, or soul energy fluctuations inside the pod.

Whatever Ember is doing in there is a complete mystery to me, and undetectable to all of my senses.

With just 9 days left until the trade deals meetings start, and 12 before the B-Class exams begin, I still have a lot of work to do to get the Crimson City in a stable position before I go.

## Chapter 517

Over the next few days, the trade routes continue to expand further into the desert in both directions.

The trading posts, inns, shops, and restaurants outside of the Crimson barrier grow as the construction teams use up all of the remaining supplies available.

An outer ring of the city is built for those that do not wish to stay and be under the Flame Emperor's protection.

Sixteen more small villages are connected to the trade route, and over 300 more links of loyalty are created through my rising emperor's domain, bringing the total in my interface beyond 500 now. They are all integrated into the town and fit into place exactly where they fit best.

Some open shops with foreign goods that they'd like to sell, others farm in the dungeons to collect materials for the guildhall, and some just want a change of pace and reassurance that they're safe.

Villages out in the middle of nowhere get raided and pillaged often, so they migrate and seek safer lands frequently. Many come to a larger city when given the option to seek a more stable lifestyle.

However, many like the traveling trader's life and just see the Crimson City as another stop on their journey through the Dark Continent.

There are an additional 2000 individual travelers that come by from the surrounding villages to trade.

The number of individuals farming the dungeons to make their own stands in the outer village to sell loot increases dramatically. Anything people can sell to the guildhall, they do. My prices to buy loot are far higher than anything any smart buyer would be looking to pay.

This is because I am directly crafting it into select items; the raw materials could be bought from traders out of the city for far cheaper and sold to the guildhall for profit. I don't care if residents game the system this way; everyone makes money, so it's a win-win.

The only hunters that have access to the canyon of dungeons are those that have sworn their loyalty to me; the entire canyon is inside the crimson barrier. So, any overflow being sold in the ring of shops outside the city is mostly money that is coming back into the city to cycle through the economy in many ways in the future.

There is still room inside the inner city's residential district for at least three times as many people to come, and empty land where more housing can be built.

The trade routes haven't even stretched outside of Sector 2 yet, so I foresee even more growth in the future.

I place a new 100 platinum order for materials in Vice City to make room for a population that could be 10-20 times what I have now.

This is the cost of nearly all the 135 platinum profit from the trade deals I'm about to receive. However, it will be worth it. There's no need to hold back in investing in myself.

Just from the growth numbers I've seen in the city so far, this will be even more profitable than I first predicted.

As more people flow into the village, and my order for materials is processed, I continue farming containment stones and training the Elemental Elites.

With less than five days left on the countdown timer on Ember's isolation pod remaining, meaning four more days have passed, during a training session, one of the squad leaders finally hits level 1000 and gets the opportunity to rank up.

Throughout this day, more and more people hit the level 1000 threshold, and by the end of the day, everyone faces the final boss on the 39th floor enough times to rank up.

Dozens of white flashing lights fill the air on this day, and many unique ranked-up buffs come out of it.

Many of them are spirit animal energy manifestations and ultimate attack or defense techniques. A few awaken energy forms, but it isn't nearly as common as I thought it would be.

I give them all a speech on this night, telling them that they have reached the peak of power that this labyrinth can grant them for now. I've given them this strength and ability so that they can protect themselves and fight on par with monsters from any dungeons or enemies they come across.

I want to awaken each of them with Qi cores of their own, but the supply is being used up entirely by myself to strengthen the Crimson barrier and continue the growth of my Soul Energy while Monk uses the remains to come up with a treatment for the Lich King's aftermath and continue my teammates' training.

"We will continue training together, but now you must get used to your new forms. You've all grown far quicker than is naturally possible for most hunters. The state you've reached in just over a month of training is one that only a handful of hunters ever achieve in their lifetimes. There will be another level to reach after this, but for now, I want you to hone your skills, spar, find your unique styles, and learn from each other. You are the Elemental Elites of the Flame Emperor's Army. The strongest fighting force in the entire Dark Continent. I'm sure you all witnessed me fight the Lich King, and my teammates fight the Dark Guards just one month ago. That is the level you'll need to get to next. So make sure you're ready when your time has come."

We continue to train as usual over the next two days, collecting MCP, and I watch them spar with each other to master their new ranked-up forms and abilities.

I keep adding mana to the B-Grade dungeon, bringing it to level 940-950, making the boss room monsters reach up to level 980 sometimes. It's so close... yet so far...

It eats up over a hundred full containment stones per new rank now.

This dungeon is stronger than the 38th floor in the labyrinth.

It has enormous white birds that soar through high mountain peaks and wide open blue skies. It is similar to the 39th floor; one out of every 15 spawns has a bird with extreme wind magic, and the element stone it drops is strong enough to withstand a mythic-grade plunderer imbument.

This discovery lets me double my speed of containment stone and luminite farming, bringing the amount of fragments in my item storage above 100, but also clears out almost every rogue dungeon within a 600km radius of the Crimson City.

The only ones I leave be are those very close to villages, as it seems some rely on them for resources, and any of them that are above middle D-Grade, because it takes way too many stones to collapse them to be worth my time.

I've been stuck on this same B-Grade mountain dungeon for a while.

After dozens of stones, it hasn't even become unstable to hint that it'll reach the next stage, so I just start saving up containment stones instead of letting them loose in the dungeon. I want to do it all at once and not risk creating a break that would need more stones than I have available to satisfy and push to the next stage.

It isn't until two days later, exactly one day before Ember's pod will open, and the trade deals are due, that something very unexpected happens.

I feel memories of the surveillance body double that watches over the Crimson City send me an instant message.

—

It's midday, with the sun high in the sky, with over 1100 people below me. About 200 are in the Crimson City Inner village, 200 are outside around the outer barrier selling to the 600 travelers from nearby cities doing trade, while roughly 100 people are in the dungeons farming loot.

My double senses a very intense energy wave rippling out from the center of the Dark Continent.

It feels familiar, and it isn't until I see the light grey shockwave coming out from the abyss that I realize exactly what it is.

"It's been a while. That's... Another surge..."

Without my All-Seeing Eye, this wave is invisible, but the sheer size of the wave is impossible to stop; there's nothing I can do but watch.

The black wall of fog that is the abyss expands, moving forward about a full 2 kilometers before my eyes, then coming to a halt as the shockwave continues to travel toward the outer edges of the settlement.



The Abyss is nearby, but luckily far enough away that this kilometer of movement doesn't bring it too close to the city itself, but it is now fairly visible from the canyon of dungeons, when before it was just a black speck on the horizon.

My double watches the invisible grey wave move through hundreds of unsuspecting people surrounding the city, but it doesn't affect them at all.

No one notices it, even as it collides with the Crimson Barrier.

I watch the red dome ripple, and my eyes widen as the grey shockwave moves through it, not slowing down at all.

It flows out the other side almost like nothing at all was in its way.

The surge travels far off way into the desert. I'm sure this same exact grey shockwave is headed toward the 8 great nations.

I wonder to myself if this is what happened in the past surges, and if whatever this is can possibly cause dungeons to break and so much panic to ensue.

However, before I can fully formulate this thought, my gaze falls down onto the Canyon of Dungeons, and I sense many irregular mana readings down below me.

Even my science experiment, the B-Grade dungeon is starting to fluctuate and show very odd readings after the grey pulse of energy passes through it.

My double dives down through the Crimson Barrier and into the dungeons to watch my other double that is usually standing watch in this canyon jump into a glowing red portal.

It scans through all of the dungeons in the area, and over 20 of them have started to break.

At this, the memories stop; this is when my double kills itself to send me the message.

---

I speak up, talking to all of the Elemental Elites that I'm training using my telepathy throughout the entire dungeon.

"We have a new mission to deal with. There is trouble in the city. I'm going to separate all of you into groups to make sure no monsters get out of the dungeons I leave you in. Whatever you do, do not kill the boss monster, and protect any hunters inside the dungeons if these monsters are out of their league. If they can handle them, let them fight; I don't want anyone to miss out on unique loot that is only available during breaks. This is a surge, usually a catastrophe, but we'll make it into a profitable and enjoyable event for all. Keep killing mutants, protecting the boss rooms from anyone trying to challenge them, and keep the public safe until I come by your selected dungeon with the means to stop the break, we do not have to destroy these dungeons just neutralize the threat."

They all understand the assignment, and I dungeon walk groups of 1-2 into the canyon. They all fill their roles instantly, and get to work protecting the E-C grade dungeons that are breaking all throughout the canyon.

Many hunters are farming inside these already, and the Elemental Elites explain to them what is going on. Offering escorts to lower level breaks if they wish, or offer a hand in fighting these monsters if the hunters present have the skills to defeat them.

This is a chance for them to use the teachings I've given them and apply them to help others directly.

Once I teleport all of them out of the labyrinth and into dungeons, I dungeon walk to the B-Grade break down at the deepest point in the canyon.

Once I get inside, what I see is far more dangerous than I expected, but at the same time, very exciting.

Over double the normal amount of monsters are in this dungeon.

I instantly sense 31 pure white birds flying through the air.

They're all boss level rated or higher. The creatures range from level 980 to 990, and the best part is that every single one of them has extreme wind magic that ripples off them.

I grin and grip my Flame Emperor's blade while dungeon walking to each of them and slicing them in half.

Each time I do, an element stone drops into my storage, and almost instantly, another one spawns in its place on the far edge of the dungeon.

This surge has supercharged many dungeons, and has given me the opportunity to farm the exact resource that I need.

It takes time for the birds to dissolve, but hardly takes any for me to continuously dungeon walk to their new places and farm more stones from these near A-Grade mutants.

Roughly 30 stones can be farmed every 5 minutes, and it feels as if there's an endless stream.

I constantly check on the other dungeon breaks that are nearby being protected by the Elites, and find they're carrying out my orders perfectly.

Hunters have been moved to dungeons that are too powerful for them, and word has spread even outside that a surge is here but it is somehow under control. All off-duty hunters selling loot in the outer city that are able to cross the Crimson Barrier do so, and my body double vets them to enter certain dungeons.

These dungeons are breaking because of excess mana injected into them from the surge. My theory to turn them back to normal would be to take that excess energy out. An easy way would be to allow a plunderer imbued element stone loose inside one. The higher-grade dungeons may need more than one to do the trick.

However, I want to give the hunters in the surrounding area some time to capitalize on this gold mine. I even create another double to replace my surveillance double to go and farm some of the mutant monsters to get some of the unique loot for myself.

I'll let everyone get their fair share before doing my first test on a dungeon to neutralize it.

This gives me even more time to farm in the B-Grade break.

About an hour and a half passes, and I've farmed over 500 extreme grade wind magic stones, my double even manages to kill a mutant with a skill I don't have yet, transferring it to my main body and upgrading it too.

[Blink][Mythic Grade]

It's a very odd skill, similar to my stealth ability but with a twist. To activate, the monster has to make eye contact with their opponent, and from then on, it will be invisible to its enemy every time it closes its eyes.

There are some obvious limitations, like having to be a higher mana control than the opponent for it to work properly, however, it is an intriguing power of deception.

Many hunters have found the dungeons with the most unique loot, and gotten what they need while fighting to their limit and leaving the dungeons already to be the first to sell them to traders that aren't able to enter the Crimson Barrier.

During all of this, there were even 14 more links of loyalty formed. These were rogue hunters that on the spot declared their loyalty while looking at the opportunity in front of them and decided to join the inner city and put their trust in me just to get through the Crimson Barrier.

They reap the rewards, and are able to farm in the dungeons.

Others see this and think they can try it themselves. Those without pure intentions or full trust in me as their leader do not form a link with my ranked up buff, and are unable to pass through.

I have guildhall workers on standby at booths in the outer city ring that supply mythic grade regeneration potions to those that accidentally injure themselves trying to go through the barrier.

Once the traffic starts to settle down, I imbue a few of my new element stones with plunderer and create new containment stones with roughly the same 7-8 billion MP allowances. My double brings them to the E-Grade breaks first, and makes sure everyone clears out before letting the stones out of my storage.

In the emptied breaks, these stones drain the excess mana away, and bring them back down to their natural state in a single stone.

Many hunters go back in after the neutralizing is complete to witness the massive hole in the dungeon's center, but I make sure to tell the Elemental Elites what to say, and they reassure regular hunters that the dungeons will naturally regenerate given enough time.

My double continues to neutralize the dungeons one by one with the containment stones as my main body continues to farm for more in the B-Grade break over the next hour and a half straight.

I leave the most popular breaks for last, so that hunters can get all the resources they want.

The D-Grade dungeons take up to 5-10 stones to neutralize, and some of the mid-level and high-grade C-Grade dungeons even take 30-50.

I've farmed over a thousand windstones, so this is perfect.

By the time every break is neutralized, and all of the dungeons are back to their normal state, I have 600 new full containment stones in my inventory, and just under 500 raw element stones still waiting to be imbued.

The massive wind element birds in the B-Grade dungeon divebomb toward the glowing red exit portal every time they respawn.

If I was not in here constantly farming them, they would escape out into the real world and cause havoc.

The stones in this dungeon are a valuable resource, but this is a dangerous dungeon to keep so close to the city at this unstable state.

I need to stabilize it before something unpredictable happens.

Outside, the crowds of traders and hunters celebrate their loot and harvest while my double tells the Elemental Elites they've earned a night off after all the hard work.

My main body stays in the B-Grade dungeon break for another six hours until I'm satisfied with the number of stones I've farmed.

Over 2500 fresh element stones are farmed, while 600 are still full to the brim with 7-8 billion MP each.

I task my body double to go out to C-Grade dungeons in the desert that I passed on collapsing in the past and give them newly crafted containment stones from these 2500 to fill with mana.

As the sun goes down on the final day before Ember is scheduled to wake up in the morning, my doubles fill almost every single stone they can.

About 700 are left uncrafted in their natural element state, while 1800 more are turned into full containment stones, adding to the 600 total and making 2400 full stones ready to release over 18 trillion MP.

I whisper to myself.

"I guess it's now or never... This should be enough."

Once I have these ready, I begin releasing their mana into the B-Grade dungeon.

After about 300 stones, the monster type changes again, making the birds disappear and a new level Elite scorpion-like monster form in a new dungeon. Some are level 950-965 in their base state, but others reach up to level 995 in their mutant form.

I use the exit portal to walk outside, expecting for it to be stable after the new rank up, but to my surprise, the spinning portal is still bright red. I jump back in and start defending the exit from dozens of massive creatures that are programmed to leave this dungeon by any means necessary.

"Not good..."

I decide to release even more full containment stones into the dungeon to try and bring it up in rank again to stabilize it further.

Over 2 hours pass.

I set off chain reactions of dozens of stones at a time, protecting myself within a soul energy shielding barrier at the far edges of the dungeon near the exit to release more mana inside.

It takes another 500 stones to make the dungeon move up in rank again.

The creatures are all aquatic, with long bodies and sharp teeth, with their base forms ranging from level 970-985. Some mutants hit level 999.

However, they're all aggressively hard wired to leave the dungeon too. The portal is still bright red.

I don't dare challenge the boss room because I'm almost positive it would destroy the whole dungeon once defeated.

My plan is to continue charging this dungeon higher. I'm so close to my goal of level 1000 monsters, I might as well use the rest of the stones to try and reach it.

If this dungeon actually stays unstable forever, I'll have a double stand by and farm it while standing guard. However, if it is really a lost cause and seems too dangerous to keep in the canyon, I'll take out the boss and end things here.

I have a feeling there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and I'm almost there.

It takes another 4 hours and 1100 stones before the dungeon finally hits its new rank.

As I watch the mutant sea creatures fade away and a new dungeon begin to form, the outer edges of my perception begin to shrink in toward me.

The dungeon itself feels like it's getting smaller, and the coloring and artificial sky and floor start to fade away until I'm only left floating in a small sphere of white and blue pure system energy.

A single blue text box hovers in front of my eyes.

[Create a Labyrinth]

[YES][NO]

Chapter 518

"So this is why I've never seen an A-Grade dungeon..."

The same system text floats in front of my eyes.

[Create a Labyrinth]

[YES][NO]

The possibility of a whole new type of farming comes into my mind.

If the creation of a labyrinth spawns demons and dragons, and this process is possible to replicate, I could find a place to farm demon cores with minimal effort.

All it would take is a few hundred containment stones worth of mana to bring dungeons up to a high B-Grade rating. Then, between rank up stages, the dungeons produce their own high-grade element stones that I can craft into containment items.

The only issue would be finding more dungeons to drain mana from, but I haven't even traveled outside of Sector 2 for rogue dungeons yet, so I'm sure there's more than enough to go around.

I stare at the blue text that floats in the air, attempting to scan the rest of the dungeon I'm in, but no other defining factors show up in my mind's eye.

There are no other options than yes or no, so after a few minutes of thinking and waiting, I decide to choose [YES] and see what happens.

The text box pulses and disappears, then another one comes into view right where it left.

[Choose Labyrinth Type]

There is a list of options below it with detailed descriptions and 3d holographic scans.

The top option is one I'm very familiar with, showing stacked dungeons with boss room floors every 20 stages. After the 40th floor, there are only boss rooms on every floor and it stops on floor 60.

The next option below it has no boss rooms at all; it's 100 floors with only one final boss room at the top.

The third option is a 30-floor labyrinth with boss rooms on every floor starting from floor one.

As I scroll down the list further, more variations of these show up. Some with 40 floors and a boss room every 10, others with 15 and 2 bosses guarding each floor.

Once I get to the bottom of the list, I've seen every possible variation that I can get, but there still isn't any explanation for what kind of monsters will be on each floor or how strong they'll be.

From what I've seen in labyrinths in the past, every one of them has a floor boss every 20 floors. The only labyrinth large enough for me to reach past the 40th floor has been the Vice City Labyrinth. It is either a major coincidence, or these labyrinths that spawn naturally always end up choosing the first default option.

It would be the safe bet to choose the first, and I would know exactly what I'm getting myself into, but the 2nd option, a 100-floor labyrinth, looks like the most profitable option for me.

The potential for new monsters with unique skills to farm, and possibly higher A-Grade floors with infinite respawning monsters, is more so what I'm after rather than having cool boss rooms that lock up and don't let me rechallenge them.

After scrolling through the list for a few more minutes, I let out a sigh and choose it, whispering to myself.

"If I don't like this option, I can always collapse it and make another one..."

Then, more text boxes appear in front of my eyes.

[Input Floor Creation Catalyst][1/100]

[Go Back to Labyrinth Options]

It wants me to input items to create the floors and even gives me the option to go back to the main list.

That must be for the off chance that I don't have enough material to create what it needs.

I choose [Go Back to Labyrinth Options] out of curiosity and sift through a few of the other options.

The other options with fewer floors take exactly the amount of this "Creation Catalyst" relative to their number of floors; the labyrinth I've set my sights on has the most floors so it is the most expensive one on the entire list.

I scroll back to the 100-floor option and stare at [Input Floor Creation Catalyst][1/100] in bright blue text.

I have a pretty good idea what this mystery creation catalyst is, so I plunge a hand into my item storage and pull out a single fragment of luminite.

"This better not go to waste..."

I move my hand forward with the delicate white crystal in hand, and to my surprise in this unique environment, it doesn't dissolve or crack at all.

The crystal holds its form until it disappears into the blue text.

[Input Floor Creation Catalyst][2/100]

"Knew it..."

I smile, as this makes sense. To create dungeons within this system, they can't just spawn out of thin air. There needs to be enough mana in a confined space, and the right ingredients to craft them.

One by one, I shovel more luminite into the system text, leaving only a handful left in my item storage, but I feel as though this is worth it to see what happens in the end.

The tale has been illicitly lifted; should you spot it on Amazon, report the violation.

Once the text hits [100/100], it disappears again and another blue box appears.

[Labyrinth Creator: Jay Soju]

[Type: 100 Floor Tower]

[Floors Available: 26/100]

[!] More Mana Necessary To Unlock Higher Floors [!]

[!] Invite Humans to your Labyrinth and Grow in Power [!]

More text flashes across my vision, then disappears, leaving me with another two options.

[Become Labyrinth Guardian]

[Spawn Random Guardian]

Again, I think over the options carefully, but decide to pick [Spawn Random Guardian].

The thought of being stuck inside a labyrinth as its guardian doesn't seem like something I'd want to do. Seeing what kind of random selection this system gives me is a better option.

Once I click it, I expect another random text box to show up in my face, but it doesn't.

The text disappears and I'm left floating in the blue and white sphere of pure mana for a full minute before anything happens.

The room starts to expand outward, and a grassland dungeon with level 5-10 goblins starts to materialize in front of me.

As soon as it's complete, white light flashes in front of my eyes and I'm brought to another small blue and white sphere-shaped room. It expands outward after a full minute as well, eventually creating a swamp-like dungeon with level 20-30 frog creatures.

I'm teleported back to the blue and white sphere shaped room once the dungeon is complete.

Again and again, the floors are created before my eyes and I'm brought to the next one with magic that feels just like a teleportation crystal.

This process takes over a full hour before I get to the final monster spawning dungeon, floor 25. The lava-filled volcanic landscape filled with level 560-580 Ranked Up Lizardmen with Fire magic, wielding swords and axes, disappear to bring me to the 26th.

This floor is completely empty.

A blue system textbox hovers in the air at the top of this dungeon written in system text I'm sure only the labyrinth owner is able to see.

[Mana Necessary to create next Floor [2.453T/3T]]

"So this is how it works..."

As the labyrinth grows, absorbing more mana, it will build more floors below this boss room. All of the mana from a single A-Grade dungeon was dispersed to create the lower floors. However, the higher grade the floors become, the more mana is necessary to make them.

It appears that low to middle B-Grade floors will be about 3 trillion MP each to create.

My assumption is the stronger floors will require significantly more energy the higher I go up.

"So interesting..."

I walk forward and take in the sight of the final boss room that will be the final line of defense in this dungeon.

It's large and looks like a rocky cave.

In the back of this dungeon, I feel two living beings.

One of them is hibernating in a small brown egg-shaped stone and the other is 3 meters tall, muscular with dark red skin, white eyes, and dark black horns jutting from its forehead.

A level 623 demon with an Arch Demon's core and two skills makes eye contact with me from the back of the room and teleports in front of me as I look at his skills.

[Body Double][Legendary Grade]

[Dungeon Walker][Legendary Grade]

It pulls a long enchanted silver sword from its back and swings it down on me without saying a word.

I wait until the very last second to smile and turn to look the demon in the eyes and stop its blade with the tip of my index finger, sending it flying backward hundreds of meters from the impact.

I dungeon walk over to it and tap it with my index finger again, stopping its momentum to push it down into the rocky ground before it can even hit the back wall of the dungeon.

As it slams into the hard rock ground, it dungeon walks away again, and I follow it, not missing a beat.

I could easily kill this monster and take its core without breaking a sweat, but I'm impressed with the way it fights and if I'm going to be the owner of a labyrinth, this would be exactly the kind of security guard I want on hand.



Having mythic grade body double and dungeon walker would be very beneficial too, but I see a longer-term goal here that could be far more profitable than destroying my month long project right now.

A demon that fights and aims to kill an intruder without question. That's who I want on my side. However, I want to test it a bit more and give myself assurances this creature can't turn on me.

No matter how many times I beat it down, the demon continues to come at me with everything it has.

I start moving my attacks closer to its vital areas, aiming for the heart and head. Of course, I'm just testing it, and not even using Soul Energy, but I'm increasing my intensity and could actually kill this creature if it doesn't keep up with my movements.

A full minute goes by, and the boss room is decimated with rock holes and the demon itself is bleeding all over and torn to shreds from the impact.

It hasn't said a word, and continues to fight for its life, protecting this labyrinth with everything it has.

Once I slam it down on the ground again, my absorption skill's special perk notification rings, telling me the monster has fallen below 5% HP.

I choose dungeon walker and the process of stealing and creating a skill orb follows.

Once the system lights and soul energy clear, the demon still tries to fight back even as its skill falls into my item storage.

I finally speak up and reach into my storage to throw the defeated demon a bright green regeneration potion.

"Catch. You fought well. If we were the same strength, maybe you would have given me a bit of trouble, but there's only so much you can do against an opponent almost four times your level."

Its eyes widen and it catches the potion.

"Drink it. If I wanted to kill you, you would be dead. I'm the creator of this labyrinth after all; it wouldn't be wise for me to waste all this time and mana for nothing."

The demon tries to activate a skill, but nothing happens.

It looks around to see its sword 10 meters away on the rocky floor, then back to me.

"I took your Dungeon Walker skill, it's just a safety precaution of mine. I don't want you moving around to other nearby dungeons. I don't know how you'd manage it, but I've met some very annoying demons that have left their labyrinths before."

It still doesn't say a word, so I activate my intimidation skill just slightly and stare into its gaze, showing that I too have the white eyes of a demon.

"Drink it, or I kill you and your dragon right now."

I stare over to the stone-colored egg at the back of the room, then back to the demon, and it finally drinks the green liquid.

The slashes, bruises, and scars all over its body heal, and it stands to its feet with a confused expression.

I use telekinesis to give the demon its silver sword back, then speak again.

"I'm going to be doing some experiments in this labyrinth for a while, so it would be best if we get along. You pledge your loyalty to me, and in return, I grow this labyrinth to 100 floors and I'll even give you any skill you want back except for the one I just stole to make sure you stay put."

The demon's eyes widen, and I finally hear its voice.

"You have the ability to take away and grant skills... I thought that power was only a myth."

It points its sword forward at me again and takes a step back, then opens its status with its other hand.

My eyes lock onto it, and instead of blue text like mine, all of the lettering is black with hints of purple and dark blue flickering in it.

I've never seen a demon open its status before, but that coloring wasn't what I was expecting.

Before I can look at it for long, the creature closes it and looks back at me.

"It seems you can take away skills... You're telling the truth. What nation are you from back in the Demonic Realm? Which Lord do you serve that lets demons freely roam in the human world to gain enough power to summon their own labyrinth? This makes no sense, it shouldn't be possible. Please tell me, who are you?"

We're left in silence for a moment.

My words and actions may not make sense to him, but his words make even less sense to me.

I respond with a curious look on my face.

"Your assumptions aren't all correct. However, who I am doesn't matter right now. I have some questions for you, where you've come from and this so-called myth about my ability are more important..."

## Chapter 519

The Demon stares straight ahead at me with a confused look.

"I'm from the central kingdom. More specifically, the Realm Capital, now run by the lords of the five remaining nations. I'm serving my sentence by being contracted out as a labyrinth guardian in the human world. If I grow my Labyrinth to its maximum potential, and bring its stored mana back to the Demonic Realm, I'll be free. I'm not sure where else I'd come from, or why else I'd agree to become the guardian of this place, isn't it obvious?"

I nod slowly and step forward with my arms crossed.

"Right... Obviously..."

I stop and pause for a moment, thinking about how this demon, and even other demonic creatures and monsters, have all mistaken me for a demon before too. It's very odd. Even though I have demon cores, I've seen monsters and humans have cores before too, and it's not like I easily mistake

them for demons. I'm still not sure why, but I'll take advantage of this if it puts the creature in front of me more at ease.

"So this Myth, the one about a power that allows someone to steal and grant skills. What do you know about it?"

The Demon eyes me curiously, then shrugs.

"I don't know much. It's not like I was alive during ancient times. I know just as much as any other demon in the capital. It's a story, well, more like a myth told between fledgling and even greater demons that seek more skills and more power when they're just starting out. Some Demons say there was once a Demon Lord that could manipulate the system as easily as breathing. He could just look at you and increase your power from that of a newly born demon to a peak arch demon in the blink of an eye. He could grant you any skill you wish and take it away too. It's not a real Demonic Ability, just an ancient rumor."

The red-skinned demon lets out a sigh and looks at me with his white glowing eyes.

"See? Just a child's fantasy. As a peak tier Arch Demon yourself, someone who has conquered their own labyrinth and lives free with your dragon, you know what power is. Whatever trick you've used to lock my teleportation skill is very convincing, but it will come back in time.

The Demon laughs.

"I'm not gullible enough to fall for your tricks even if you are leagues above me in strength. You know the rules of the system cannot be changed."

I stare back into its eyes.

"Well, then I guess we just disagree. I believe there's much more to the system than meets the eye."

It's not that I blindly believe this. It's that I've seen it happen, and I'm the one that makes these feats come true. Ever since Qi was introduced into the mix, the capabilities of the system have been changing. I'm able to move in and outside of the lines of pure mana-powered reason to use my skills to a capacity that shouldn't be possible by normal means.

The Demon laughs again, stepping back and shaking its head.

"You really are from outside the capital aren't you? I heard that some rebels in the outer nations were acting up because of some phenomenon happening in the human world. There must be a lot of mana up for grabs lately, what's going on out there?"

I shrug and reply, seeing no reason not to tell him the truth.

"Maybe it's because of the new throne awakening. Most of the large scale mana fluctuations have been because of that. It's the main reason I was able to create this labyrinth on such short notice actually."

Once I turn back to the demon, its expression completely changes.

Instead of the nonchalant, easy-going, curious, and almost bored attitude it was showing me before; the creature's eyes widen in shock.

"You mean— The next Demon Lord— Will be chosen here on the human world...?"

I smile.

"Looks like it. Why is that so shocking?"

"Well— It's not- Or at least it shouldn't be. Sometimes the thrones do spawn off-world, but it's just not very common... Usually they appear near the capital, at least all of the ones logged in history books I've read have been nearby. I had just hoped that I would get to see one form in my lifetime once my time building a labyrinth was up. It looks like that won't be the case, unless I live long enough to see the next one. I've always wanted to witness the true pinnacle of power... but I've never seen a demon lord with my own two eyes."

He sighs, but I reply quickly.

"Well, that brings us full circle. If you will truly be free once this labyrinth has hit its maximum floor, then we both have a common goal. Pledge your loyalty to me, and I will help you grow this labyrinth to 100 floors. Work with me, and one day you'll see a demon lord in the flesh. I guarantee it."

I put out a hand for the red-skinned creature to shake, but it takes a step back.

"I- Can't. If you're really a rebel from an outer nation, just being in contact with you could get me banished from living in the capital once I return. Submitting loyalty to you before completing my duty is a whole new level of disobedience to my superiors. My entire bloodline could be wiped clean from the Demonic Realm for committing a deed like that."

I tighten my gaze, then put my hand back down to my side.

This demon knows I have the power to kill it on the spot, and we both have the same goals in mind. It even witnessed me take a skill from its status like a myth it heard from its younger years, yet there is someone or something it fears disobeying over me.

I move forward to it and place a hand on its shoulder, then point to the ceiling of this boss room where the labyrinth's system details are visible to me.

"You can see that right?"

[Floors Available: 26/100]

[Mana Necessary to create next Floor [2.453T/3T]]

As it nods, I dungeon walk us to the volcanic floor filled with lizardmen below us, and let about 75 containment stones filled with 7-8 billion MP inside each of them out and place them in the center of the dungeon.

"Watch closely."

I send a mana blade into the center of the glowing pile and dungeon walk us to the far side of this dungeon while putting up a dense red Soul energy barrier to protect us from the high-powered blast of energy worth over half a trillion MP.

Rock, lava, loud noises, and violent swirling energy fill the entire dungeon, but both of us watch from within my Soul Energy barrier unharmed while the energy settles and dissolves into the dungeon.

Over half of the dungeon mass is decimated, but that doesn't stop the labyrinth from marking that energy has been added to it and brings us into the blue and white sphere-shaped room to transition into creating another floor.

A few minutes pass and a new floor with level 590-610 tortoise monsters in a hot desert forms. I can sense about 60 of them, most have body hardening skills, but every 30 or so have an extreme earth summoning ability and are 10-15 levels higher than the others.

I dungeon walk us back into the cold and dark cave-like boss room that now sits on the floor above this one.

We look at the ceiling again.

[Floors Available: 27/100]

[Mana Necessary to create next Floor [0.058T/3.5T]]

The demon stares at the reading for a moment, then back at me.

"So you do have the means to grow this labyrinth."

I nod.

"I can give you any skill you desire as well... I'm not lying about this. However, there's a good chance I'll kill you if you decline."

It stares at me with a puzzled look on its face for over ten seconds before responding.

"Your words confuse me. I can't submit to you. You of all Demons should know why... Forming a new loyalty contract would nullify the one I have activated now. Meaning this labyrinth's guardian would cease to be. Once it has reached its peak, I'll be able to fulfill my duty back in the Demonic Realm and leave to form a contract with you if you can truly follow through with your promise to grow this labyrinth."

I'm thrown off by its response, but my lie detector skill only senses truth coming off of the demon before me. It really cannot break whatever labyrinth contract it created in the demon world, and for the sake of keeping my human identity hidden, I put out a hand to shake and decide to leave while I'm still ahead.

"Fine. I bring this labyrinth to 100 floors, and in return you submit your loyalty once it's hit its peak."

The Demon grabs my hand and responds in a sarcastic tone.

"Don't forget my skill and that meeting with a Demon Lord you promised too."

I nod and shake his hand.

"Of course, I assumed that was already part of our agreement."

We both step back from each other and he speaks.

"Well... good. You are quite the odd one. Usually a peak form Arch Demon wouldn't ever talk with an unawakened like me. I'm Pluto by the way, what's your name?"

I respond.

"If you really care to find my real name, I'm sure you can see it digging through the Labyrinth information. However, you can call me The Flame Emperor."

I ignite my body in fire, heating up the entire boss room instantly and leaving him with a final goodbye.

"Protect this place with your life. I'll be back to add more floors after I attend some business in the human world. Nice meeting you, I'll have more questions once I return."

The Demon's confusion about the entire situation only grows as it sees this fire magic being used.

I don't wait around to hear its response, I just dungeon walk to the first floor of the labyrinth and step out into the canyon of dungeons.

I look back at the spinning green labyrinth portal, then immediately cover up any entrances to this portion of the cave with earth magic and leave my body double that watches over the canyon with a quick recap of what happened via telepathy.

I take the slow and old-fashioned way of travel back to the town, walking on the stone pathway as the early morning sun rises.

Today, I'll be attending a few meetings with some Regional and Sector leaders to fulfill their item orders. I'm excited to meet some new powerful people and get paid the remaining 75% of the order value.

Before that, I need to make a stop at the guildhall.

According to the energy readings I'm sensing right now, the isolation pod in the underground bunker is already open, and Ember is wide awake.

## Chapter 520

Once I walk through the guildhall doors, I see Ember and my body double both sitting down on the new furniture, talking to each other.

My double has a concealment disguise on and looks like a random citizen, while Ember just looks like his normal self.

There are hardly any other hunters in the guildhall yet. Only a few are here, buying some gear and potions early in the morning before their farming expeditions begin, but the two are off in a portion of the lobby isolated by themselves.

Ember looks up at me as I approach and sit down in the seating area they're relaxing in, and he speaks up first.

"I can feel our soul energy capacity and potency have increased by almost double what it was... Emptying and regenerating your core must have taken an immense amount of Qi, but from the barrier I feel around us, it seems that expelled energy didn't go to waste. The population of this city has grown almost five times since I went under. It seems those young warriors you were training have managed to hit their second rank up too... Overall, very impressive."

I nod, but he adds on before I reply.

"There was also a labyrinth created... The high-grade dungeon below the others in that canyon is no more, so I assume you overcharged it, and well—"

He thinks to himself for a moment.

"Actually, I'm not sure how exactly it happened based on the rate of containment stones farmed from those Minotaurs. That wouldn't be nearly enough to...wait..."

More gears are turning behind Ember's eyes, and he figures out exactly what happened.

"It must have been another surge from the throne. That's what triggered this."

I smile and nod.

"Very perceptive as usual. I plan to work with the Demon inside and grow it to 100 floors."

Ember shrugs.

"Good trade. All demons want is to grow their labyrinths. As long as you make it easier for them to do so, there shouldn't be anything to worry about. Well, that is until they're free, then they can be a pain."

Ember looks up to the ceiling like he's remembering something while speaking that last sentence, but I change the topic.

"So, a year inside the Isolation Pod. I assume because of your positive attitude this means it was a success? You managed to create the concealment item we need to suppress Soul Energy?"

Ember nods.

"Oh, yeah. We're set. Creating the items was the easy part. It took me less than an hour to get them both done."

I raise an eyebrow.

"What—what do you mean? What was that year of time inside all for then?"

Ember stands up from the white couch he's sitting on, stretches his arms, and looks around before replying in a low tone.

"Well, just because it only took an hour doesn't mean it wasn't one of the hardest things I've ever pulled off. A mere level 2000 channeling Divine Energy. Maybe you'll understand how impressive it was one day. I had to go into full hibernation for a year to recover from that."

He keeps stretching, then stares at me as I stand up from the couch across from him and grins.

"But damn, I do feel pretty good now after that nap."

He lets out a satisfied sigh while putting his arms down and continues.

"So, your double filled me in on everything we have to do now. Meetings with the Regional Directors and Sector Leaders today, then head off to the meeting point to get into the B-Class exams in two days. Then, a day later, they begin."

I nod.

"Exactly."

"In that case, I think we should activate the items now. It's going to take a bit of practice to get fully used to them. The longer it's on, the better. Might as well take them for a test run now."

Ember lifts a finger, and the air around it ripples like something is coming out of it, then stops moving.

He looks at the top of his finger like there's something there, but I can't see or sense a thing.

Next, he brings his finger to his forehead, and before my eyes, all traces of his Soul Energy and even mana control disappear entirely.

I boost my perception skills to the max, confused at the sight I'm seeing, but no matter how hard I try, nothing happens.

He looks like an ordinary human. Not even a drop of mana in him. He doesn't even look like he's awakened...

My inspect and appraisal skills don't show any readings. His status is gone. It's like he's become a ghost.

The only thing that breaks this illusion for me is the fact that his name and geopoint in my Rising Emperor's Domain still show him to be the same level as me with all his stats and skills intact.

"What... just happened...?"

Ember smirks.

"Watch, it gets better."

Unlawfully taken from Royal Road, this story should be reported if seen on Amazon.

His eyes glow red, and I witness the mana control grow in his body. In a matter of seconds, he begins to give off the energy readings of a level 250 hunter, then a level 500 hunter, to a 1000, then fully reveals his full mana control before my eyes for a split second.

My inspect and appraisal readings of him return, and I can see his full stats once he shows me them.

No Soul Energy at all was visible to me when he did this, then he brings himself back down to the levels of an average level 500 hunter.

Flickers of pure Qi start to form in his hand that rests by his side, then it shifts and changes into pure Soul Energy but is only visible outside of his body. I can't see anything that is happening on the inside. It's like there is an impenetrable facade that makes him look like he is just a mana wielder that has recently ranked up for the first time.

He watches my surprised expression and replies with an explanation.

"It's a Divine limiter. Temporary, maybe 30 days at most before the barrier begins to naturally decay, but it is close to impossible to perceive for mortals in the human world. To even dream of seeing through it, you'll have to get Soul Energy a hundred times stronger, or have Divine Energy of your own. Believe it or not, the Lich King could have seen through this disguise."

He chuckles.

"Not because that monster is stronger than you or anything, it is merely because of its past as a wielder of Divine Energy. It's not exactly something you can lose once you die."

Ember lifts the same finger and points it toward me.

"That's beside the point. If we're going to spy on this so-called Sun God in these exams, we have nothing to worry about. There is no divine beast with that title or ability. If it is Soul Energy we're



trying to conceal, this will be the perfect cloak. Shall I activate yours? We need to start getting to those trade meetings soon, don't we?"

I nod, still not sure what this item is, but trust that whatever Ember has created is safe to try.

"Do it."

He pushes his finger forward, with seemingly nothing on it, toward my forehead, but it stops less than a millimeter from my skin.

Ember brings his finger back, and the instant it does, I feel absolutely nothing.

I look around in the early morning silence of the guildhall but feel no different.

I look down at my body, and I feel exactly the same.

However, from the wide grin on Ember's face and the shocked expression of my body double, I know something has drastically changed.

Ember speaks.

"Use your All-Seeing Eye. Look at yourself from the outside in. It may feel like nothing has changed for you, but the energy you're radiating out into the world has now been altered."

Confused, I do as he says and scan my surroundings, attempting to feel my own energy, but the only energy I feel is the energy beneath the invisible infinitely small layer above my skin.

From an outside perspective, I really do just look and feel like an ordinary unawakened human.

"This is... so odd..."

Ember and my double sit in silence and watch me continue to look at myself all over for almost a full minute.

"No... this is so awesome..."

A wide smile forms across my face as I realize that this kind of concealment is leagues above anything I can naturally create. While it doesn't change any physical features or numbers on my status, I can just fix that with my concealment skills and items.

Even the magic gear that I hold stays under this Divine limiter. However, I still can't figure out how to shift the perceived mana control like Ember did moments ago.

I'm able to summon mana and Soul Energy into existence like normal, even create shielding too; nothing has changed in my actual power, but anyone with any level of perception looking in can tell that something is seriously off. It looks like an unawakened is summoning extremely high-level magic out of thin air.

The difference in power is concerning, and doesn't look like it should be physically possible.

"I need to learn how to shift the mana control output like you did. Right now, this looks even more suspicious than going in and trying to hide my true power naturally."

Ember laughs to himself and points to the door.

"You're right, it doesn't look good at all yet. I told you it would take some getting used to. Two days should be enough to teach you how it works. Come on, let's head off to the trade deals, we don't have time to waste."

I let out a sigh.

"Couldn't this have waited until after?"

Ember shakes his head.

"We're visiting a lot of unknown regions today, it's best we prepare for the worst. Never know who will be waiting to meet us. Plus, like I told you before, it takes time to control this limiter. The longer you have it activated before actually having to use it, the better."

I nod and walk out the door with Ember after waving my double goodbye.

"Yeah, good point..."

I think to myself for a moment, and come up with an idea as to how I'll cover my lack of mana control once I get to the Galeheart Tower.

"Alright, I have a plan. Let's go pick up the rest of the finished orders from Bri."

I crush a transport crystal to Bri's bunker with my hand on Ember's shoulder and we go up to meet her in her office setting up shop for the day.

She doesn't perceive us coming, and is startled at first, but deduces it is the new concealment item that Ember mentioned last month when we were all together and is very impressed.

Ember shows her how it changes the perceived mana control, but does not explain any of the details on how it actually works. She approves.

"Fools me, I have quite the keen eye and I can't see through it at all."

She hands me the remainder of the goods that she's been crafting this week that settles all of the orders, and I leave telling her to prepare for more because I'll be working on getting next month's orders processed and automated before I leave for the B-Class exams.

Next, I use another teleportation crystal and it brings us to the Galeheart Tower.

Standing in the lobby, Lith is waiting for us in a new grey and blue suit with his blond hair combed back and a bright white smile on his face.

I walk over to him while pulling an assortment of labeled item boxes out of my item storage and setting them down on the lobby's desk beside him.

"There's Sector 1's order delivered right on time."

Lith motions for one of the guards at the back of the room to sort, count, and distribute the delivered orders.

He then nods and gives me an item box back in return.

"Good to see you're on time and have delivered without fail. I trust that everything is there. Here is the payment for the remaining 75%, plus the 25% down payment for next month's orders and a new list of goods I'd like to have crafted for Sector 1. It's over double the volume of last month. I predict many clients will be doing the same, so prepare your team for more."

I accept the item box and put it into my storage for later, then pull out a large black suit of armor from my storage.

It's one from the top of the loot tower from the Lich King earlier this month.

"The old Sector 2 leader always wore one of these. Even though they know I'm a new business connect, I might as well keep up appearances."

In reality, I want to wear this concealment armor so it doesn't look overly suspicious that my mana control is not perceivable. I know I wouldn't trust an unawakened to deal with magic items, so I don't expect anyone else to.

Even if someone has the capability to see through the black armor, the lack of mana control will look more like a second layer of security that they can't crack and will only add to my prestige rather than if they just tried to appraise me without the armor on.

However, even if no one can see through the concealment armor, I think it looks very professional to meet them in a recognizable Dark Continent disguise like this.

I use a small portion of my blood and imbue the set with it to create a bond, then step inside and the black armor fits around all of my gear very comfortably and naturally.

Ember nods.

"Good idea."

Lith replies too.

"You're right. Meeting the Directors like that is probably best."

They agree, but for entirely different reasons.

He thinks to himself for a moment, then pulls out five teleport crystals.

"Well, let's get to it. We have Sector 3 and 4 on the list first. Then we'll head over to the Bedrock and Talton Regions. Finally, our last stop will be the Vice Region. Ready to go?"