

D. Diver 111

Chapter 111

I'm hit with an extreme wave of humidity and heat. The air is overwhelmingly thick with mana and steam, it's hard to breathe or see clearly further than 10-15m ahead of me. I grit my teeth and attempt to take a deep breath in through my nose.

The dank stench of sulfur fills my lungs as I look around to take in the view with squinted eyes while gripping both of my daggers tightly.

This is the boss room...

Hard red rock stretches out underneath us in all directions for about 100m on every side. There are cracks in the floor gushing lava with plumes of smoke rising high up into the jet-black sky.

The ground is very flat but there are many obstacles in our way. Complementing the occasional pools of lava, there are pillars of jagged stone and massive boulders strewn about.

I immediately activate enemy detection and inspect to locate any incoming threats.

The low hissing sound of the slow-flowing lava fills my ears as I focus on the numbers popping up in my mind's eye.

[100m]

[Lv. 356]

[50m]

[Lv. 334]

[Lv. 332]

[20m]

[Lv. 320]

[Lv. 320]

[Lv. 320]

[Lv. 320]

The ground starts to rumble and I yell out to my team.

"Everyone! We've got four monsters incoming! They won't be hard, but we need to get rid of them fast!"

I watch Rodrigo jump backward on top of a high pillar of stone. It appears he'll be surveying us from above.

Bruce springs into action the moment words leave my mouth.

"Nessa and Maria, I'll defend with my hammer. You two concentrate on landing hits. Abby, be our support from behind."

He gives me a firm nod, then the girls follow him close behind. I reply.

“You take out two of them, Arie and I can handle the others.”

With that, we were off.

The 6 of us sprint forward into the white cloud of smoke gripping our weapons and getting ready for war. The faint sounds of grunts and shrieks slowly become louder and louder until four 3m tall red-skinned Ogres come into view.

They charge at us with their shields steady and swords held high.

I grit my teeth and look over to Arie, then turn to the two Ogres nearest to us. We both jump into action, readying our blades and sprinting off to the right side to face our opponents.

I use my wind magic to give myself a boost, kicking off the air every step of the way. As I approach my selected charging red-skinned beast I go to activate my stat-boosting skills but hesitate for a moment.

I take a look at the monster I’m about to fight, then weigh the pros and cons of using my previously hidden abilities.

Most people in this boss room already know I’m a multi-skill user. When it comes to Maria, Nessa, Abby, or even Bruce I’d be happy to let them in on my secret if they asked. I don’t mind Arie knowing I have a few extra tricks up my sleeve either, but I’d still like to get to know him better...

The only one I’m truly worried about is Rodrigo, and well, the Association as a whole.

I let out a frustrated grunt as I come within 5m of the charging High Ogre in front of me. I can smell its breath and see the monstrous rage built up in its eyes.

My frustration grows into a yell as we collide.

CLANGGGG

My left dagger meets its long blade, and my right bounces off its shield.

I struggle against the beast in front of me... It totally catches me off guard. My heart drops for a moment, fully realizing my old sword’s buff added 89% strength. My daggers only add 300 strength, that may not be enough. I’m used to fighting with much more, plus my berserker skill gives me an additional 50% on top of everything else.

The long silver sword pushing down on my dagger begins to inch closer and closer to me as the beast overpowers me in my weakened state.

The scraping sound of metal on metal fills my ears as I watch my grip begin to slip on its sword creating sparks.

The beast lets out a roar, and I copy it letting out a yell of my own.

There’s no way I’ll be able to defeat any stronger opponents ahead of me without going all out.

I’ve made my decision, I’ll use all my skills...

I stare the High Ogre in the eyes and activate my berserker, bloodlust, and newly acquired extreme strength skills.

A dark red aura emanates from my body, followed by a golden glow. The three abilities begin to mix as I’m filled with immense strength and other various magic buffs.

The red-skinned beast's eyes widen as I lift my dagger throwing its blade backward instantly overpowering the vile creature. In this moment, it attempts to dart away, but I lock eyes on my prey and follow it ruthlessly aiming to kill.

I concentrate and cover both my blades with an invisible layer of dense wind magic, then let out a wave of intimidation to stop it in its tracks.

The monster before me is helpless. The confident angry stare in its eyes disappears as I run circles around it. A shining black blade pierces its neck as well as one in the abdomen through a gap in its armor.

I jump back using telekinesis to ensure deep cuts, then retrieve my blades by summoning them back to me from over 4m away.

Blood gushes from its vital areas, but it still stands tall. Breathing heavily, with a look of defeat plastered across its face, the monster charges in again.

I have to give it to these High Ogres, they don't give up easily.

I smirk and air-step above the now rugged-looking beast. With a swift toss of my blades, using telekinesis to ensure a perfect shot, the disoriented Ogre receives two knives to the neck and falls to its knees as my wind magic decapitates it on the spot.

THUDDD

I turn around to see Arie finishing off his monster with great speed and precision as well. It takes him about 6 hits in total, I guess he is quite a lot weaker when he doesn't use that legendary skill.

The other four members are in a tough battle of their own. I would jump in and help, but it seems greater trouble is nearby.

Stomping sounds ring out as the next wave appears right on schedule. I yell out to my team.

"Arie, let's fight these new ones together! The boss will be here soon!"

We lock eyes, then turn to the large clouds of steam as two towering High Ogres emerge.

They have much darker skin, stand close to 4m tall, and seem to have slightly upgraded swords and shields. I grit my teeth.

"Mutants."

The dark red monster to our right side begins charging at Arie. Its partner plants its sword into the solid rock ground letting out a grunt and crossing its arms to watch the battle play out.

It seems rather confident.

The charging Ogre approaches quickly, so I dart over to Arie's side to assist. I take the beast's left, while Arie takes the right.

Metal on metal rings throughout the boss room as the mutant surprisingly blocks both of our attacks with abnormally agile movements. I use Appraisal, but nothing seems to be any different than the normal High Ogres.

The only logical explanation here is a mutated increase in agility or speed. Its eyes are calm and track both of our movements with ease. This monster seems to be highly intelligent as well.

My blades slide down the monster's sword. I air step and spin around its backside at neck level while Arie drops to the floor distracting it from the front.

With a swift double overhand throw, I release both my daggers with wind magic and telekinesis increasing their velocity as they travel toward the back of the creature's neck.

CLANGGGG

My blades hit the flat side of this monster's blade... It managed to toss its own sword from an underhanded position upwards spinning perfectly in the air to deflect my attack.

I stare wide-eyed in surprise, then smirk and let out a laugh while bringing my blades back to my hands.

"Now that was a neat trick, not bad for a"

It cuts me off with a roar, turning to me showing eyes filled with fury.

It seems it's time to get serious...

I land on the ground on both feet with a thud. Arie and I stand on opposite sides of the mutant searching for an opening. The monster catches its sword by the handle and begins sprinting forward to get us away from its blind spots.

Arie darts in, and I do the same. It got lucky at first, but I won't be caught off guard so easily this time around.

With a few air steps, I manage to make it up to eye level with the beast once again. With another swift double-overhand throw, I toss my two blades at the monster's neck from two separate directions.

The sharp black daggers curve through the air on both sides of the monster as Arie attacks from below.

It lets out an overwhelming roar while lowering its shield to block Arie's incoming lunge and raising its sword to deflect one of my blades. That's right... one of them.

The massive red-skinned beast lets out another ear-piercing fit of rage as one of my wind-covered blades slides through its neck leaving a nasty wound. Blood spurts out as it turns to me showing all of its sharp jagged teeth.

I air-step back with a grin as it mindlessly follows me with rage-filled eyes. I guess the previous guess that these mutants were highly intelligent wasn't wrong, but definitely an overestimation on my part. They succumb to their emotions very easily.

They are tough though. My daggers fly back into my hands and I stare at the wound I just dealt. Maybe 15% of its health at best. This beast is going to take at least 6 or 7 hits to fully subjugate.

The monster lets out another roar as Arie leaves two deep cuts across its left leg with both daggers. Red crimson liquid pours out of the deep wounds and he darts off to let me go in for another attack. I grip both my blades and air-step forward to face the mutant again.

Its sword collides with both my daggers and we stand perfectly still as sparks fly up in the air.

Bruce, Abby, Nessa, and Maria finish handling their two High Ogres and begin running over to help. The mutant that was standing by before lifts its sword in the air and points it at the four of them.

I concentrate on my battle, but I believe in my team, they can handle it.

THUDDDD

THUDDDD

THUDDDD

I stare forward at the mutant clashing metal with me, but can't help but notice the fog change color behind it... The white steam turns blood red.

Plus, the approaching heavy ominous footsteps... that's never a good sign.

I grit my teeth and use a dense pocket of wind beneath my feet and around my blades to push the monster's sword upwards with immense force. In doing so, this leaves an opening for Arie to land a double-dagger strike to its right leg.

I fall back to the ground as the mutant steadies itself as well while roaring in pain.

THUDDDD

THUDDDD

THUDDDD

I look up at my opponent with Arie no more than 5m to my side.

The thudding footsteps keep approaching, and the plumes of steam shine redder and redder.

I gulp.

The outline of an enormous towering Ogre appears directly behind the one we're fighting. It's easily 6m tall.

THUDDDD

THUDDDD

THUDDDD

It emerges from the back of the dungeon and announces its arrival with a roar that could shatter ear drums.

The giant monster before us has dark red skin that almost appears to be black. Two massive white horns emerge from the sides of its head, and two more even longer curl out of its back upwards to create natural armor.

It wears a golden chest plate, wrist guards, codpiece, and boots that match.

To top it all off... This monster wields two long swords. Each of them shimmers in the light showing off its pure silver color with golden accents down each of the sides.

The boss lets out another roar, then bursts its blades into a fiery display....

I gasp and stare, a wide grin appears across my face as I activate appraisal.

[Lv. 356]

Active Items:

[High Ogre King's Sword] +50% Strength

[High Ogre King's Sword] +50% Strength

[High Ogre King's Armor Set] +700 Defense +300 Speed +300 Agility

[High Ogre King's Ring] +60% Mental Strength

[High Ogre King's Pendant] +60% Mental Strength

Active Skills:

Dual Wielding [Special Grade]

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Bufs:

[High Ogre King's Resistance] +70% Magic Resistance

[King's Body Raised in Fire] +70% Extra Fire Resistance

Our final boss battle has really begun...

Chapter 112

I lock eyes with the gigantic High Ogre King.

The monster's silver and gold blades shine bright as the monster erupts its entire body into a ball of flames.

This beast is using all my tricks... and I can't even use fire to fight back.

Arie's voice calls out from beside me.

"Jay! Focus!"

CLANGGGG

Upon hearing my teammates yell, I lift my daggers above my head to block the incoming blade of the mutant we'd previously been fighting.

I'm still glowing with a radiant golden crimson aura. I reply to Arie while letting out a grunt and slashing upwards with wind magic to deflect the monster's sword.

"Let's take out this mutant quickly so we can focus on the boss!"

He nods firmly and darts in as our immediate enemy loses its balance from my powerful thrust.

I take aim and whip both my daggers at its head while the beast regains its balance. With a rude snarl, the red-skinned mutant blocks one of my daggers with a swift movement of its blade. Arie runs in from below as my second shining dagger narrowly curves around the sharp edge of its sword.

I smirk while sinking a lone dagger into its neck ripping through flesh and drawing blood using telekinesis from a distance.

The monster is getting double-teamed. Its cool and calm facade from earlier begins to break down the more attacks we land. The monster lets out a painful roar leaning backward giving Arie just enough room to sink both of his own daggers deep in its back.

Blood spurts all around us as the ominous thudding noises of the enormous boss approach. It's less than 10m away and charging in quickly with two blades ready to kill.

I twist my head back and forth to make sure I won't be ambushed, then yell at the top of my lungs.

"Arie! Cover me and stall the boss for 10 seconds. I'll end this mutant!"

Again, he firmly nods and plants his feet changing directions to face the boss without hesitation.

I reach into my item box and replace one of my daggers with an HP potion, then stare down the mutant as it readies its sword and adjusts its shield.

The monster is dripping blood from head to toe, covered in deep wounds, but still standing proudly. It won't give up until its HP hits zero. Luckily, I know just how to make that happen.

"Stealth."

In an instant, I disappear from the mutant's sight. It blinks rapidly, then begins turning its head back and forth while glowing with its golden strength buff.

The moment I turn invisible, I dart around it making virtually no noise at all. In the confusion, I devise a perfect plan.

It begins swinging its sword and roaring loudly while stomping its feet trying to find me by any means. The King is quickly approaching and it needs to complete its job as a boss room guard.

I grin as I make my way to its backside and jump in the air piercing its spine with one of my daggers deep enough that my entire fist makes contact with its skin.

"Equivalent Exchange."

I input 1500 damage, and brace for impact. The white light appears all around my body along with the sensation of a thousand tiny swords piercing me over and over.

I grit my teeth and immediately bring the HP portion to my lips rejuvenating most of my health. The monster before me shrieks out in agony as the life force gets stripped away from it by force.

THUDDD

It falls to its knees in front of me and I immediately take out my dagger from its back to cover it in a thick layer of wind magic striking its neck.

[Level Up]

Decapitation may be overkill, but I want to make sure the job is completely done.

I stand over my defeated opponent breathing heavily while retrieving my second dagger and deactivating stealth. It's time to fight the actual boss now...

CLANGGGG

I look up to see Arie jumping at the massive High Ogre King with no fear. His daggers collide with one of the monster's swords and he's pushed backward like a rag doll...

Although the beast is overpowering him, he's swiftly maneuvering his body to avoid the long shining blades, distracting it just like I asked. I begin to run over and call out to him as he eyes down the behemoth.

"Finished, let's do this!"

My eyes track the shining silver long swords as the boss elegantly swings them both at us. Its left hand is about a meter above its right, swinging the twin swords horizontally across its body leaving trails of fire in their wake.

I watch Arie dart to its right side, so I sprint to the left. We have to divide and conquer...

The enormous monster lets out another roar, stepping backward and pointing its blades to both of its sides. With the fiery swords, its wingspan is close to 10m and the heat coming off it is very intense. It's going to be hard to get in close...

We go in for an attack anyways, it's now or ever.

I grit my teeth and air-step forward throwing myself at the monster while covering my blades with sharp layers of wind.

The monster's swords elegantly glide in the air. The control and precision of this hideous monster's blades is oddly... beautiful...

I get serious and begin zig-zagging in the air narrowly avoiding its fire-covered sword. Time seems like it's slowing down as I rocket through the air aiming my daggers at the monster's open neck.

I let out a yell as its blade whistles through the air back at me again. I manage to twist my body while pushing upwards with a large gust of wind to miss getting sliced by mere centimeters.

I smirk and keep launching myself forward inching closer and closer to the beast's wide open neck.

By the time its blade comes back to attack me a third time, I'm less than a meter away.

"This is it..."

I tighten the grip on both my blades as I see Arie occupying the monster from below. Both of its blades are completely out of range, this is a definite hit.

My grin continues to widen as I fall closer to its neck concentrating more and more magic around my blades for a deadly attack.

I see its right eye turn to me, then its entire body bursts into much hotter flames.

I'm used to the heat, a few burns don't bother me. I continue falling in without hesitation.

The monster makes a sharp turn, twisting the bone-white meter-long horns protruding from its back straight at me. As soon as I realize what's happening I activate a layer of body hardening, but too late, and my defenses are too weak.

My eyes open wide and I cough out a mouthful of blood while black crystals fragments shatter into the air. One of the sharp bones on its back pierces the right side of my chest ripping through flesh and sending me flying towards the ground at a ridiculous speed.

I let out an angry yell, watching my HP drop close to 1000 points in a single blow...

Moments before hitting the ground I create a pocket of wind to soften my fall, but still hit the hard red rock with a thud.

I look up at the beast with a furious stare, letting out a wave of intimidation. It doesn't do much...

The boss continues toying with Arie, sending him flying back with a swing of its left hand's blade. Arie's only advantage is speed and agility. That's how he's able to avoid its sword swings from a distance. I wonder if he'd be as helpless as I was up close.

I dart around the monster's backside for a moment, looking at the blood-stained mass of bone sticking out from right below its neck. It was way too reckless of me to jump in without accounting for those... A monster this strong wouldn't leave itself wide open like that on the first attack.

While reaching into my item box to drink an HP potion, I use self-regeneration to heal my chest and re-think my entire battle plan.

"Stealth."

I shake my head and get back into battle mode while completely disappearing from the monster's view. I'm able to sense stealth users at lower levels than myself, so I'll have to assume it can sense me a little bit too.

I take a deep breath in and out, then charge forward again. Once in range, I jump up simulating my last attack.

Arie clashes daggers with its long blade as I soar in at its neck with an identical trajectory to my last failure of an attack.

The High Ogre King naturally thrusts its blade upwards, but I avoid it with ease. With another subtle air-step to get back on course, I throw myself at the beast's open neck once again.

The monster's right eye shifts to meet my exact flight path as it ignites its body into flames. I continue falling into its trap... but it doesn't realize it's falling into mine.

I grin watching its shoulder begin to twist, then activate my skill.

"Dungeon Walker."

A dark portal appears in front of me as the beast spins its body attempting to skewer me straight through. With milliseconds to spare, I fall through my warp portal, and its sharp mass of bone whistles through the air without making contact.

Instantly, I force a portal open on the other side of its head about a meter above and come flying out with my blades ready to kill.

The beast lets out the most horrendous noise as I plant both my daggers into its neck reinforced by wind magic ripping its tough flesh to shreds. Its crimson liquid covers me as I dig deeper and deeper until it whips me off with a violent twist of its body.

I air-step away before hitting the ground and avoiding its flailing blades as it continues to cry out in pain. Two bloody gashes remain on its neck. It's nowhere close to a fatal wound, but it's a damn good start.

Arie is less than 10m away from me. I deactivate my stealth skill and let out a laugh.

“That worked, that actually worked! Haha, it’s mad now.... but we can beat this thing! It’s not invincible.”

Arie smirks at me while breathing heavily whipping sweat from his forehead.

“You continue to surprise me, Jay. I’ll keep it busy as best I can, you’ll be our damage dealer. There’s no way I can get in that close with its-”

Arie is cut off by the murderous roar and heavy stomping charge of the bloodied High Ogre King.

Both of us grip our daggers and ready ourselves without another thought. This is going to be a battle to remember.

Jay's Status:

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 312

Hp: 1360/1565

Mp: 1035/1565

Strength: 757 [+300]

Speed: 901 [+541][+270]

Agility: 931 [+419][+300]

Defense: 675 [+270][+236]

Mental Strength: 757 [+151][+302][+341]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Self Regeneration

Spacial Magic[Item Storage]

Plunderer

Telekinesis

Appraisal[Special Grade]

Conceal

Berserker

Dungeon Walker

Intimidation

Dagger Mastery

Stealth

Bloodlust

Equivalent Exchange

Combat Magic [Wind Summoning]

All-Seeing Eye

Extreme Strength

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Dark Elf Boots [+60% Speed]

Ring of Protection [+35% Defense]

Griffin's Talon [+40% Mental Strength]

Enchanted Silver Ring [+30% Speed]

Serpent King's Scale [+45% Agility] [+45% Magic Resistance]

Desert Troll's Charm [+45% Mental Strength]

[Enchanted Dagger Set] +300 Strength +300 Agility

[Rodrigo's Silver Bracelet]

Chapter 113

A deep red fire grows hotter and hotter around the High Ogre King's body. Its dual blades glimmer off the light of its crackling flames, twisting them around in the air.

The monster lets out a bellowing roar and charges at us again. My last successful attack has definitely made it mad.

I dart off to the left side and Arie veers off to the right.

Using a few of my skills to land that combination attack felt pretty good. Usually, I rely on my brute strength and fire-based attacks to take out my opponents.

That won't work on this boss for a number of reasons...

I smirk, realizing this is a good opportunity to utilize some of my new abilities. The cat's out of the bag on most of my skills for the people in this boss room, there's no point in holding back anymore.

“All-Seeing Eye.”

I activate my perception-boosting ability and the entire battlefield seems to slow down in front of my eyes. This is the first time I’ve used it with so many moving variables... it’s incredible.

The boss looks like a fireworks show of various complex mana patterns. Its inner body shines with a dense light pink core of energy leaking out into its arms, then swords to control them with the dual-wielding skill.

I watch the mana continuously flow through the blades as they fly through the air. My enhanced senses allow me to see exactly where they’re headed seconds before they arrive.

There’s much darker pink mana, closer to red, permeating out of its body creating the dense flames. It becomes very clear where the small gaps of fire magic are present, I’ve never really thought of magic powers like this... It’s very technical...

My mind is shocked by the sudden input of immense amounts of information, but I grit my teeth and continue running forward trying to stay focused.

As I get closer, I air-step upwards to face the menace as it swings one of its swords at me. Last time, it took most of my strength and energy to twist out of the way to avoid its attack, this time around I have a different plan.

With a sly grin, I watch the flow of mana force its sword toward me in an almost lackadaisical manner. What seemed to be elegant highly concentrated attacks before, now look like nothing more than careless random swings.

I air-step towards it tracking the simple trajectory as it draws near.

With a few light directional corrections in mid-air, I step onto the flat side of its long blade to propel myself upwards even higher. In the moment, I look down to see and feel all of the mana within myself with much greater understanding.

“Wind Summoning.”

As I jump off the monster’s blade I concentrate on forming sharp layers of wind around my own, then release two invisible dense crescents of wind similar to the fire attack I tend to use often.

The boss shifts its eye towards me as it comes to the realization I’ve somehow completely outwitted it.

SHINGGGG

The invisible wind blades cut through the weak points in its fire magic and hit the monster’s open neck as I activate stealth and dungeon walker. A dark portal forms in front of me and I fall through while the Ogre cries out in pain.

Moments later, I come out of the warp portal next to Arie deactivating stealth as he fends off the monster’s second sword. It lifts it up in the air reflexively to protect its neck, but this leaves its abdomen open for another attack.

Without saying a word, I give a firm nod to my fellow dagger wielder, and we both charge in. With a gust of wind magic, I separate its veil of flames.

SHINGGGG

We land four slashes to its exposed mid-section. As soon as both of us land our hits, I activate dungeon walker and drag Arie through the portal to narrowly avoid the angry monster's incoming double-sword attack. Its fire magic engulfs the area he previously stood burning even brighter than before.

We exit my warp portal about 10m away, right behind the bloodied angry mess of a boss. I let out another laugh as Arie feels his face, then chest to make sure he's still in one piece... he yells at me.

"Thanks- but what was that?! You have a teleportation skill? And you can bring people with you?"

I breathe heavily and reach into my item storage to take out a few mana crystals. Then, crush them in my hand until they're dust, plundering my MP back up to full.

"I... have a lot of skills as you can see."

I smile wide-eyed watching the High Ogre King turn towards us.

"I'd love to talk about them with you, but now doesn't seem to be the right time!"

I let out a chuckle and Arie nods with a grin.

Suddenly, we're interrupted by the sound of loud yells behind us.

We both quickly turn to see Bruce barely holding off a mutant Ogre's sword with his hammer and Abby glowing green healing a large gash in his side.

Nessa and Abby attempt to land hits on the behemoth, but they seem to be having a hard time. Their swords keep clashing against its shield, and both of them look rather awkward without the use of their special abilities. Sure, they're quick and they most likely won't get hit, but no damage is being dealt.

The mutant they're fighting is overpowering and outmaneuvering them. Each member in that team of four is very competent on their own, but the lack of their best abilities is not helping one bit.... They're all out of their element, and facing an opponent stronger than anything they've trained for.

I turn to the tan-skinned dagger wielder by my side.

"Arie. If even one of us gets taken out here, we all fail-"

He cuts me off, gritting his teeth and staring down the mutant.

"Leave it to me, you handle the boss. I will pass this exam no matter what, I'm putting my trust in you Jay, don't die...."

I give him a firm nod.

"I won't."

With that, we both dart off in opposite directions. Arie is more than capable enough to take on a mutant, and I may be the only one here that can get in close enough to land hits on the boss.

There's not much time to think.

I look up at the charging 6m tall Ogre while air-stepping off the ground to start another barrage of attacks.

Every second my All-Seeing Eye ability stays active, the more clear everything around me becomes. My movements become quicker and more precise as I adapt to the patterns of mana in the air.

The monster swings both of its blades at me but I activate stealth and begin my assault. Quickly and quietly I continue air-stepping around narrowly avoiding its blades. It still senses my presence as I get closer and tries to spin its long sharp horns at me again.

I see this coming moments before it happens and let out two summoned wind-blade attacks straight ahead while making a warp portal in front of me to transport directly to the monster's opposite side near its waistline.

The dense blades of wind clash with its bone-white horns letting out an almost metallic ring as I slice at its mid-section drawing more blood.

In a rage, the beast swings its swords at my new position, but I warp out of the way as its heavy swords cut through the open air.

Underneath my stealth skill, I continue to glow with a dark crimson aura, tinted with gold and white. The grin across my face widens more and more as I become increasingly in tune with my new enhanced perception ability. It's allowing me to confidently warp around the battlefield letting out attacks of wind magic at a safe distance.

After 3 double hits to the abdomen and 1 brutal slash to its neck, I warp away to assess the damage I've dealt and plunder MP from a few mana crystals.

I'm not making direct contact with the boss, so every moment I'm fighting, I lose a considerable amount of mana.

It's bleeding all over, but even with the array of attacks its taken, it must still have over 50% of its HP left. One wrong move and I'm a goner.

I take a deep breath and run back in. I instantly spawn a dark portal in front of me to get a perfect position to attack.

SHINGGGG

I continue to gain speed and accuracy while shifting my weight in the air to narrowly but gracefully avoid its incoming swords and release mid-range air-slashes at its exposed parts.

I start letting out loud laughs as I let the Dagger Mastery skill take control of my blades. Watching the mana flow through my arms and hands, allows me to sync their movements with my wind-summoning skill much more efficiently.

Each attack I let out becomes even more precise drawing more blood from the High Ogre King. It erupts with a bellowing rage-filled battle cry, struggling to get into a good defensive stance. I land another five or so consecutive hits, then warp away temporarily to restore my mana.

It raises its blades, spinning around and turning its head back and forth trying to guess where my next attack will come from.

By now, its legs, neck, and mid-section are covered in deep wounds. The monster is breathing heavily and I can sense its swings are slowing down. With a grin, I air-step back in warping around the beast letting out another ruthless wave of invisible attacks in its blind spots.

Painful cries ring throughout the boss room as its guardian gets mutilated from all sides.

I warp away from the monster one last time to restore my MP with mana crystals and plan a flashy finish. I've learned how to control a few of my skills much better, but I'm not going to give up an opportunity to end this match in style.

The hard ground cracks under my right foot as I boost myself forward with a gust of wind. With both daggers in hand, glowing with every buff in my arsenal, I get ready for the kill shot.

The flames of the boss monster flicker as it holds its sword out in front, attempting to block my incoming strike.

Moments before impact, I use a warp portal to transport myself directly above its head. I throw my blades in front of the monster using telekinesis to send them flying at its swords.

The four weapons collide in the air creating a loud clanging sound as I land on the High Ogre King's back directly between its horns placing both hands flat against its lower neck.

“Equivalent Exchange.”

The brightest flash of white light fills my vision as I deal 1000 damage to the monstrosity below me. It roars, and I match its tone with a yell of my own. As many times as I use this skill, I don't know if I'll ever get used to the pain.

My vision clears, and I scramble into my item box grabbing an HP potion and chugging it down as I begin to feel weightless...

THUDDDD

The flames all around me flicker and die down as the massive boss falls flat on its face, and me along with it as I drop 6m to the floor. My daggers and its swords clang against the hard rock and I let out a sigh of relief.

Then.... I feel the back muscles begin to twitch and a faint grunt slips out of its mouth. I immediately summon a sharp blade of wind and concentrate all of my remaining mana into a single strike.

Without hesitation, I release my attack on the beast's open neck.

SHINGGGG

The wind sword cuts through its flesh along with the hard red rock below.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Dual Wielding [Special Grade]

[YES][NO]

An extreme feeling of satisfaction comes over my body as I choose yes and deactivate all my skills.

The boss has finally been defeated.

[Status Open]

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 315

Hp: 1580/1580

Mp: 1220/1580

Strength: 765 [+300]

Speed: 910 [+546][+273]

Agility: 940 [+423][+300]

Defense: 682 [+273][+239]

Mental Strength: 765 [+153][+306][+344]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Self Regeneration

Spacial Magic[Item Storage]

Plunderer

Telekinesis

Appraisal[Special Grade]

Conceal

Berserker

Dungeon Walker

Intimidation

Dagger Mastery

Stealth

Bloodlust

Equivalent Exchange

Combat Magic [Wind Summoning]

All-Seeing Eye

Extreme Strength

Dual Wielding [Special Grade]

Items Equipped:

Golden Wolf Ring [+20% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Dark Elf Boots [+60% Speed]

Ring of Protection [+35% Defense]

Griffin's Talon [+40% Mental Strength]

Enchanted Silver Ring [+30% Speed]

Serpent King's Scale [+45% Agility] [+45% Magic Resistance]

Desert Troll's Charm [+45% Mental Strength]

[Enchanted Dagger Set] +300 Strength +300 Agility

[Rodrigo's Silver Bracelet]

Chapter 114

I look around the boss room until my teammates come into view.

Arie is running circles around the mutant slashing its weak points as the others work in perfect unison to distract the beast.

Abby continues to heal Bruce as he takes hits from the monster's sword. Most are blocked by his hammer, but the occasional stray hit slips through.

Maria and Nessa look much more comfortable working as a team with a direct goal in mind. They keep its shield busy while Arie gets to work.

I smile and cross my arms watching the tan-skinned dagger wielder zip across the battlefield. Now that I think about it, I should ask him for a few tips later, I'm sure my blade skills would get significantly better if he helped me train.

About six precise dagger slashes later, the final mutant falls to its knees at Arie's mercy.

It's over.

The massive King's corpse begins to dissolve and I hear the faint sound of metal hitting the hard rock floor. I turn to see a massive pink mana crystal beside a golden ring with a dark red jewel embedded in its face. I use appraisal.

[High Ogre King's Ring] +60% Mental Strength

I pick up both the loot items and spin them around in my right hand as I hold both my daggers in the left.

"All yours, you earned it."

I look up to see Arie wiping his blades clean on his cloak while the other four team members follow close behind smiling wide.

With a sigh, I take off the first ring I ever got from a boss battle, the mutant werewolf's ring. It only has a 20% metal strength boost, arguably my worst percent boosting item. All my slots are full for now, so I have to make a switch if I want to try out this new drop. I throw it in my item storage along with the mana crystal and place the new High Ogre King's ring on my finger, the difference is instantly noticeable.

As I admire my new jewelry, a flash of white light appears between my group and me. Maria was about to call out but was rudely interrupted by a red-suited examiner.

Rodrigo appears and looks me in the eyes with a crooked grin, then his gaze slowly moves to the others.

"Congratulations, it looks like all 6 of you have passed the exam."

He turns back to me, staring intently with his dull white eyes.

"I'd like to offer you a position at the Hunters Association."

I gulp.

He turns to the others.

"This goes for all of you, you've passed one of the hardest C-Class exams ever given. The Association is looking for hunters with abilities just like yours."

Rodrigo turns back to me.

"This offer is optional for everyone here, except you."

I clench my jaw and stare back at him without saying another word.

Arie's voice rings out from behind the examiner.

"I accept. I'd like to join the Association."

Rodrigo slowly nods.

"Very well-"

The white light of the dungeon's transfer magic begins to activate and my vision goes blank. Moments later, we're all stood close together in a rather narrow tunnel...

It's very dark. The floor, walls, and ceiling are all made of hard black stone, and about 20m in front of us is another light grey spinning mass of energy. There's the normal return portal behind, but... there's two in such close vicinity. I whisper to myself.

“Is... that another portal...?”

Again, I hear Rodrigo's voice.

“It is. That portal leads to the final labyrinth boss. I'll get to that in a moment, I'd like to get to the point I was making before being cut off by the transfer magic.”

I stare down the hallway and take a deep breath while feeling the dense mana in the air. It's much more intense than any dungeon break I've ever experienced. Whatever is behind that portal must be incredibly strong...

Rodrigo takes out his small white note of paper from earlier and scribbles something down.

“To collect your new C-Class licenses, please stop by the Hunters Association building tomorrow morning. Each of you is on the list and has an open contract deal available if you desire to work with us.”

The room goes silent.

“Jay, I'm busy early tomorrow morning, but I'll set up a meeting with you and an Association higher-up. This will be mandatory if you'd like to receive your C-Class license. Let's meet around noon.”

My eyes open wide... I knew it would be risky to show off my skills during this exam, but I had no idea it'd be to this extent...

A mandatory meeting with an Association higher up?

What will they do to me? There's no known multi-skill user with capabilities like mine. I just showed them all off to 1 of 4 A rankers in the entire country...

My stomach drops like a rock. The adrenaline pumping through my veins from my battle earlier exits my system as I'm filled with dread and regret.

How could I be so stupid...? I blew it. From the start, I was going to train secretly until my abilities knew no limits. I needed to have no equal before exposing my powers to the world.

I got cocky and exposed myself for a good time... I'm an adrenaline junky with a power fantasy that jumped in too deep and got way out of my league... Is that really what I've come to?

Will they turn me into a weapon for the government? Do experiments on me to extract my powers?

I gulp and shiver as a million thoughts begin racing through my head. I grit my teeth and stare at him with frustration.

“Y-You can't do-”

He grins and nods.

“Yes I can, and I will. The Association has asked me to scout promising individuals, and I will provide them with what they demand. They've given me a gift in return.”

In a state of shock, my mouth hangs wide open as the reality of my crumbling future begins to set in. Rodrigo continues.

“Anyways, this is the final boss room. If you’d like to challenge it, be my guest. It’s impossible for any of you to defeat it at your current skill levels.”

He turns to Maria and puts out his left arm.

“Come here, I assume you’d like another bracelet, it’ll be a much quicker way out.”

She gulps and puts her wrist out. The examiner glows with a faint white light and she’s wearing another silver bracelet all of a sudden. He grins.

“Alright, who would like a 1-way trip back to the outside world? Those of you that wish to fight the boss, again, you may go ahead and traumatize yourselves at your own leisure.”

The narrow tunnel fell silent. I’m not the only one thoroughly shocked by this outcome....

Over 5 seconds pass and no one speaks up, I clear my throat and decided to break the silence.

“I’m going to face the boss. I need a good fight right now.”

I look Rodrigo In the eyes, then turn my head to the portal and start running.

While storing one of my daggers in storage and pulling out my sword, I light my entire body into a ball of fire while activating every stat-boosting skill in my arsenal.

The muffled yells of my teammates call out behind me, but I pay them no mind. The excitement from defeating this entire exam with such ease has turned into rage. I need a fight to the death to clear my mind.... That’s all I can think about.

Moments later, I jump through.

With a flaming dagger and long sword in hand, I take in the view of the final boss room.

The ground is completely flat, and as black as the cave I just left... but the sky above.... Is beautiful.

The outline above me is dome-shaped. It’s comprised of pink and white swirling mana. The feeling is both eerie and empowering, I stare at the slow-moving clouds above in awe activating my All-Seeing Eye for an even better view.

The moment I do so, my heart skips a beat. There’s an intense dark mass of energy rocketing toward me at an alarmingly quick speed.

I grit my teeth and ready my blades. While looking straight ahead into the darkness I activate enemy detection, inspect, and appraisal.

[100m]

[Lv. 445]

Active Items:

[Greater Demon’s Sword] +70% Strength

[Greater Demon’s Armor] +70% Defense

[Greater Demon’s Core] +50% All Stats

Active Skills:

Dungeon Walker

Telepathy [Legendary Grade]

Bufs:

[Greater Demon's Curse] Hidden Ability

An impossibly fast blur of dark matter rockets toward me. All I see is a 4m tall demonic entity with white eyes and two curling red horns.

It has a humanoid body, and the skillset seems oddly familiar to another creature I fought before this exam in the High Orc dungeon, but I have no time to make comparisons.

I activate stealth and dart away to my left to make as much distance as possible from this monster hoping to formulate a plan.

I grip my swords and glow bright increasing my buffs to their max potential while letting out a yell of frustration.

Then, a swirling black portal opens no more than 5m in front of me... It used Dungeon Walker...

I gulp as the black palm of the demon stretches outwards followed by the rest of its body. The monster's white eyes lock on mine. I see the Greater Demon in all its glory.

Rippling muscles head to toe, shining silver armor covering its vitals, long dark tribal-looking tattoos across its chest and arms. Its skin is very dark, but these mysterious tattoo-like lines are darker than any abyss.

It shows me a toothy grin while lunging at me with an outstretched palm.

There's nothing I can do... It's too fast, and caught me completely off guard....

I hear a deep voice ring out in my head.

“DEMONS CURSE!”

My eyes open wide as its huge black hand slams into my chest and I feel a horrible dark energy invade my body.

I'm thrown backward over 20m and skid across the ground for 20 more. I cough up blood and hear a ticking sound in my inner ear.

Every time it ticks I'm hit with a surge of inescapable pain, it's hot and sharp, covering my entire body and soul. It occurs every second on the second.... The breath was knocked out of me on impact. I gasp for air as I open my status. My vision is blurry and all my senses are dulled.

I have too many debuffs to count and every time I hear a tick my HP lowers by 100 points. I cough up more blood while putting away my dagger and scrambling to grab an HP potion. Finally, I find one and chug it down.

The Greater Demon slowly walks toward me as I struggle to keep my balance. My health is back to full, but it's dropping fast again as the ticks continue...

The monster keeps inching closer as my vision blurs more and more. I grab another HP potion 10 seconds later and regain my health, but it doesn't help at all.

I'm seeing stars, my vision is practically all black. The creature inches closer and closer, curiously watching me struggle.

My breathing becomes erratic and I manage to chug another HP potion down before falling to my knees. This is a horrible sensation, all the muscles in my body are contracting harder than I can bear. All my systems are shutting down and there's nothing I can do.

I can barely grasp the 4th HP potion in my hand.

As my vision turns completely black, the potion falls through my fingers down to the floor.

My HP hits 0 with a final tick as it breaks into shards of glass.

Chapter 115

The veil of darkness in my vision slowly fades to white, then reality comes into view.

The horrible pain that took over my body is gone. I'm sitting on the hard ground with my sword by my side and both hands in my lap.

The silver bracelet is gone.

I died...

I let out a long sigh, realizing I've been transported to the labyrinth's entrance.

"Jay! You're- uhm."

I look up to see Maria standing over me with Bruce, Abby, and Nessa behind her. The sky is dark and there aren't many hunters standing around anymore.

With a nod, I put my sword away while slowly getting up to my feet.

"I'm fine."

I stare at the floor for a moment, shake my head, then put a fake smile on my face before looking back at the lot of them.

"What are we waiting for? Let's celebrate, we made it. We're all C-Class hunters now!"

Maria stares me in the eyes for a few seconds, then a grin widens across her face.

"You're right!"

With a skip and a hop, she grabs me by the arm linking our elbows together.

Simultaneously, a flash of white light appears right next to me and Arie appears breathing heavily with eyes opened wide. He looks around at us in confusion, then lets out his own sigh of relief.

"That was.... Not an opponent I had any hopes of beating..."

He looks me in the eyes and I give him a firm nod.

"Yeah. Agreed."

I gulp.

Arie puts away his bow and takes another look at all of us before I speak up again.

“Hey, do you want to go get dinner with us? To celebrate.”

With a light smile, he agrees.

The six of us head off back in the city’s direction, there’s a small road that winds all the way back.

My mind continues to race thinking over the immense stupidity of my actions, but Maria’s arm grasped around my own as we walk keeps me mildly distracted from the self-deprecating thoughts.

Nessa and Bruce lead the way down the small road having a conversation about their guild and how this C-Class promotion will get them into new positions.

Arie is silent for a bit but starts asking Abby about all the fine details of life at the Association. I try to listen in but keep zoning out into my own world so none of the information actually sticks in my head.

Maria continues to squeeze my arm tight while humming softly to herself. We take up the rear, I stare straight ahead counting my breaths and focusing on the rhythmic footsteps as we travel to the town.

The lights of the city come into view and I can even hear the main train line nearby.

My stomach gurgles and Maria lets out a chuckle while turning to me.

“I’m starving too, how about we go to that place Rei took us last time we were here!”

She practically jumps up and down, I smile and let out a laugh of my own replying in a low tone.

“That would hit the spot.”

I look straight ahead as we near the city entrance and raise an eyebrow.

“What are the odds....”

Both Rei and Jack are standing by the arching city gate. It’s not a main city entrance, but it’s the only one that connects to this path from the mountains. They must have heard the news that hunters were finishing up and came to meet us.

Two other groups of hunters and businessmen from the Association and Tara Guild wave down the rest of our team. It looks like no one came to greet Arie though. He follows Maria and me as we get closer.

Rei waves us down and is the first to speak up.

“Jay! Maria! Congrats! Well- I assume you-”

Maria unlatches her arm from my own and cuts her off while jumping forward.

“Yup! We did it!”

Rei catches Maria mid-air to receive her flying hug as Jack approaches with a hand lifted up by his side.

I firmly shake it and he grins.

“Congratulations. You’re a C-Class now huh?”

“It seems I am.”

Abby comes running over to us after talking to her group. Apparently, they’re having a special celebration tomorrow for the Association’s successful applicants so she’s available to go out with us tonight without a problem.

Bruce and Nessa walk over to us moments later, it seems like their guild master is away so they’re free to celebrate too.

I turn to Arie and nudge my head toward Jack And Rei.

All four of them introduce themselves and we begin laughing and re-telling a few interesting stories from the exam as we walk into town. Our final battle and the events that followed didn’t come up in conversation.

The 8 of us get a large circular booth at a restaurant that lets us cook our own meat and vegetables on individual open grills. Each of us orders multiple entrees and enough bottles of drinks to drown a whale.

With a clink of all our glasses, the night begins. Smiles fill the room, and I slowly fade into peaceful bliss. All my worries turn into nothing but fuzzy nothingness and uncontrollable laughter. We eat great food and celebrate a huge milestone in every great hunter’s journey.

We’ve really become C-Class Hunters...

A few hours pass and the restaurant begins to die down as parties leave. Our food and drinks diminish and Jack gracefully pays the bill.

“It’s on me tonight, I’ve booked you all a few hotel rooms too. Rest up and we’ll take the train home tomorrow.”

I squint trying to concentrate on the room key he’s handing me. My vision is a bit blurry, the walls, floor, and people around me are bending and distorting at random.

Maybe I drank too much...

With a sloppy hand, I grab the key from Jack and thank him with a goofy grin. He puts his arm around my shoulder and Rei helps Maria up out of her seat.

Arie laughs and finishes the bottle in his hand before standing up.

“Jay, I had no idea you were such a lightweight!”

He slaps me on the back and I hiccup. My tan-skinned teammate gives me a toothy grin.

“Hope I see you tomorrow at the Association. I look forward to working with you in the future, you’re a good guy!”

With that, he gets up and leaves.

I'm left in a daze. His words definitely went in my right ear... but half of them basically fell out the other side. I mumble to myself as Bruce, Nessa, and Abby say their goodbyes and walk out the door.

"Working together? With Arie? Why would I?"

My heart skips a beat as my facade of happiness crumbles. The drunk bliss I'd been indulging myself in spirals into quite the opposite.

My breathing gets heavier and faster. I concentrate on my echoing footsteps as Jack helps me to the hotel.

My mind is spinning and it's even harder to form clear thoughts with these toxins running through my system. It feels like hours have gone by, but I've counted my footsteps to stay calm, we've walked 3 blocks at most....

Jack's voice rings out in my ear.

"Hey, take this, I hope you feel better by the morning. Great nights tend to end like this anyways, right Jay?"

He hands me a bottle of water and gives me a concerned smile as we enter a building. He speaks again.

"You're on the 4th floor, room 407."

I nod and lean against the hotel lobby's wall.

"I-uhhh- I- give me a minute, I think I'm going to take a walk before I sleep."

Jack lets out a sigh.

"Alright, don't wander too far."

"I won't, I won't."

Rei, Maria, and Jack all get in an elevator to their rooms as I stand with one arm holding me up against the wall drinking as much of the bottled water as I can manage.

I take a few deep breaths, then walk out the front door.

Wobbling back and forth, I take a stroll. The water did help a bit, but my mind is far from straight right now... Being out here is better than a small closed-off room.

I sigh, thinking back to that final boss fight...

"I never even stood a chance."

It was faster than me, stronger than me, and even had a Dungeon Walker ability just like mine. It's the same as that odd monster I fought before the exam too.

A Demon.

Are they the ones that run the dungeons? Demons? Do they feed off the power of mana absorbed in labyrinths? That would make sense...

As labyrinths are left without being defeated, their guardians would only grow stronger. They would add floors and gain levels...and...

My mind races with paranoia and creativity as the walls of reality and fantasy twist in my head. I hear a ringing sound, and my head begins to ache pretty badly.

With a grunt of pain, I sit down on a bus stop bench and chug the last of my water.

It helps, but it's far from solving all my current issues.

I open my status for the fun of it and let out a drunken laugh.

"All these skills and I still can't fend for myself!"

I scroll, then decide to activate my All-Seeing Eye and do some leisurely intoxicated reading.

"Let's see here... How about my fire magic, what's the description on this one?"

Combat Magic [Fire Summoning]

Info: A powerful combat magic skill with an aptitude for fire. The caster is able to summon flames from their body and even imbue them into weapons. Residue may be left behind to deal extra damage to an opponent even after the initial attack.

Grade: [Fire Summoning]

[Upgrade]

My eyes open wide and a goofy grin comes across my face as I click upgrade without hesitation, another screen pops up.

Upgrade: 100PP

[Fire Summoning] -> [Advanced Fire Summoning]

All fire magic attacks will increase in proficiency by 100%. Magic residue will burn indefinitely until put out by a magic spell of equivalent or greater proficiency.

"Woohoo! Look at that!"

Without another thought crossing my mind, my fire magic is upgraded on the spot.

I continue scrolling, thinking about that demon I had no chance of defeating... I grit my teeth and click on Dungeon Walker.

Dungeon Walker

Info: An ability solely found in demonic entities. It allows the caster to form warp portals within dungeons they have traveled to in the past. The caster may bring along passengers via physical contact.

Grade: No Grade

[Upgrade]

I click upgrade faster than I could read the skill's description.

Upgrade: 50PP

[No Grade] -> [Special Grade]

Dungeon Walker may be performed instantaneously. No warp portal lag time will be added while using the [Special Grade] option. Any dungeon the caster has seen, or stepped foot in, is available for instant teleportation without the use of warp portals. Mana requirements for non-portal travel will be double.

My eyes and mouth open wide.

“Now this one, I gotta have this!”

I click upgrade and continue the scrolling spree.

“What do I need... what else could I- oh-“

I raise an eyebrow and click on Self Regeneration.

Self Regeneration

Info: An ability that allows the caster to convert mana into physical matter. Lost limbs and broken bones can be healed in an instant, allowing the caster to continue their battle. This skill does not replenish HP and may have heavy side effects including fatigue and drowsiness.

Grade: No Grade

[Upgrade]

I let out a laugh while clicking upgrade.

Upgrade: 50PP

[No Grade] -> [Special Grade]

Self Regeneration will now heal poisons and curses up to a [Special Grade] rating. This is a passive skill. If any harmful foreign matter enters your body, it will be immediately expelled, allowing you to finish your battle.

“Poison resistance! Nice!”

I click upgrade and immediately feel mana being sucked out of me at an alarmingly quick rate....

“H-Hey What’s going on here!”

I try to deactivate all my active skills, but MP continues to leave my body. I grab a few mana crystals from my storage and plunder the energy to bring myself back to full, but my bar keeps falling...

“What is....”

The city lights around me come into clear view, they’re not blurry white and red blobs anymore. The street under my feet stops wobbling and even the bench I’m sitting on becomes an actual flat surface.

The world comes back into clear view and my sober mind returns to me.

“Did I.... Just...”

I blink a few times and look down at my hands, then jump up in the air to stretch my legs and arms.

I breathe in fresh air and stare at my status in awe... The bad news is, I just went on a drunk spending spree. The good news is, well, I guess I’ll never be able to do it again....

I gulp.

At least I upgraded a few good abilities... I feel great, and have way too many things to think about right now. Sleep is not an option. It wouldn’t hurt to try them out.

A grin slowly creeps back onto my face as I make my way toward the city’s Dungeon Hub.

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 315

Hp: 1580/1580

Mp: 1510/1580

Strength: 765

Speed: 910 [+546][+273]

Agility: 940 [+423]

Defense: 682 [+273][+239]

Mental Strength: 765 [+459][+306][+344]

Skills:

Absorption

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Advanced Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening[Special Grade]

Self Regeneration [Special Grade]

Spacial Magic[Item Storage]

Plunderer

Telekinesis

Appraisal[Special Grade]

Conceal

Berserker

Dungeon Walker [Special Grade]

Intimidation

Dagger Mastery

Stealth

Bloodlust

Equivalent Exchange

Combat Magic [Wind Summoning]

All-Seeing Eye

Extreme Strength

Dual Wielding [Special Grade]

Items Equipped:

High Ogre King's Ring [+60% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Dark Elf Boots [+60% Speed]

Ring of Protection [+35% Defense]

Griffin's Talon [+40% Mental Strength]

Enchanted Silver Ring [+30% Speed]

Serpent King's Scale [+45% Agility] [+45% Magic Resistance]

Desert Troll's Charm [+45% Mental Strength]

Chapter 116

I make my way down the dimly lit streets. The sidewalks are empty and there isn't a single person in sight. My footsteps echo through the dark alleys as I walk straight toward the Dungeon Hub.

My mental clarity is unmatched, I know exactly what I have to do.

"I need to get back into that Labyrinth."

If the association wants to force a mandatory contract on me, I'll make it as hard as possible for them. I'll train all night and sharpen my skills. If the offer they put in front of me resembles a slave contract in any way, I'll just go rogue.

I already have a pretty good reputation as "The Flame Emperor" in the black market society here. If all else fails, I guess I'll be fine...

I gulp.

"This is my decision. My unique skill is a special one. Possibly the most powerful skill there is, I need my freedom to use it to its full potential. I-"

My footsteps cease to echo into the night as I realize my error in wasted potential... I just spent 200PP... I could have upgraded my Absorption skill to legendary grade. With a sigh, I open my status and activate my All-Seeing Eye to check out my most important attribute.

Absorption

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

Grade: No Grade

[Upgrade]

I click Upgrade without hesitation.

Upgrade: 50PP

[No Grade] -> [Special Grade]

Skills acquired using absorption will increase in grade class up to [Special Grade] upon casting.

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

I click upgrade and smile with satisfaction. I have 65PP left, I'll keep the rest stockpiled for now. Legendary-grade absorption probably would have been incredibly good, but special-grade will be a neat increase for the time being. These things happen for a reason, right?

I begin walking again and make it to the dungeon hub less than 15 minutes later. This is a much more populated portion of the city. Late-night hunting isn't too popular, but some still do it. Everyone has their own schedules after all. A dungeon's environment doesn't revolve around our 24hr clock, they're always the same inside, so it's the same diving experience.

I walk to the gates and show the nightshift guard my D-Class license to travel down into the hub. There's less than half a dozen hunters down here. I get on the first train and get off at the first stop. It's some random low-grade D-Class dungeon, I don't even take the time to read what monsters spawn here.

The moment I'm inside, I draw my sword and activate Dungeon Walker.

The instant I do, my body becomes very light. A portal doesn't even form. All I see are potential destinations in my mind's eye, my physical body isn't part of the equation. I lock onto an overlook in the mountains on floor 11 of the labyrinth and transport there without another thought.

With a grin, I look down at my sword, then up at the beautiful view of the mountains as a Griffin flies overhead.

"So that's how Special Grade Dungeon Walker works. Nice."

I activate enemy detection and begin teleporting around all 5 floors, 11 through 16. Without being noticed, I count just under 30 stragglers remaining. Most of them are on the 16th floor, continuing to train for their final test.

"I have plenty of time."

I find myself a desolate area on the 16th floor with a group of High Ogres and take out a dagger to hold with my sword. Using all my stat-boosting skills along with my newest advanced fire-summoning skill. My body glows dark red with a hint of gold.

My flames crackle and twist as my sword begins to glow.

In an instant, I begin zipping around the battlefield. My strength and speed outdo these measly level 320s. Seconds later, four corpses fall to the floor in pieces, still burning bright with flames that show no sign of flickering out.

I smirk, then activate Dungeon Walker again. Without bothering to collect the loot, I find myself another group of monsters.

This continues on for about an hour. I get a feel for my new dual-wielding ability. The movements of my dagger and sword together feel much more natural. I can block with one and attack with the other.

I've been using wind magic with the dagger, and fire with my sword. The flames from my new advanced skill seem to actually not go out until the object they're burning turns to ash.

After roughly 20 High Ogres, I gain 6 more levels. I'm level 321 now, there's only two opponents in this labyrinth that are worth fighting now.

The floor 16 High Ogre King, and the Greater Demon up above...

The only problem is Rodrigo. He's standing right outside the boss room, so the only way to go in and train would be to walk past him. That's not a conversation I'm willing to have right now.

I use Dungeon Walker to teleport nearby and climb up a jagged rock ledge that looks down on the boss room portal from a distance. While sitting up against the large hard flat rock, I wait.

My breathing is slow, heart rate is steady, and mind completely clear. There's only one mission to complete, get into that boss room without the A-Class examiner noticing.

About 30 minutes go by. The heat up here is getting very uncomfortable, but I take the pain and keep staring ahead.

A team of 4 finally arrives. My eyes perk up as I see Rodrigo giving them the usual entrance speech. A few seconds later, they all enter the spinning mass of energy.

"Now's my chance."

Quickly and quietly, I get down from the ledge and run over to the unsupervised portal. I look over my shoulder a few times while waiting for the necessary 30 seconds to pass so I can fight my own boss battle.

Just like that... I make it in! I re-activate my stat-boosting skills and get to work.

With a flash of light, the battle begins. A wave of High Ogres comes running at me, but I cut them down in seconds without much issue at all.

Running forward while activating my detection skills, two mutants come at me right on cue. With extreme speed and precision, I warp around them while plundering MP with every slash of my sword.

They both fall to piles of ash moments later. While wiping sweat from my forehead, the familiar sounds of the flaming High Ogre King ring out from behind me.

I ignite myself into a ball of fire to match its energy and jump into the air toward the beast with a glowing blade.

It's a much easier fight this time around.

I know all of this Ogre's tricks, and it doesn't know a single one of my weaknesses. With a few well-timed Dungeon Walker teleportations and too many air slashes to count, I bring the King to its knees once again.

With a final swing of my blade, I defeat the boss. After all the battles in this room, my level went up another 5 times. I'm level 326 now.

The King dissolves and drops a mana crystal, nothing more. I'm transported to the long dark hallway and stop in my tracks. While staring at the spinning portal before me, I gulp and decide it's not time yet...

With a deep breath, I use Dungeon Walker to transport myself back to my hiding spot. It seems the other team has not returned though... While scanning the area carefully, I enter the room again.

I go through the exact same fights, but this time it's even easier. The King is slain and I gain 3 levels in total, bringing me to level 329. The boss did not drop any loot a second time in a row, just a mana crystal. When I transport back to my hideout up on the ledge, I see Rodrigo standing by the portal.

I let out a sigh.

"It looks like I'll get 2 chances every time a team comes along."

While waiting, I twirl my dagger and count the drips of sweat that fall from my forehead hitting the hot red ground below me as they sizzle into steam. Another full hour passes before a new team arrives.

I jump to my feet as Rodrigo gives them the talk and they all enter the portal. I get to face off another two rounds against the King.

After my inevitable double victory, I gain 6 more levels bringing me to level 335. The boss actually dropped a nice piece of armor. It's a chest plate with 400+ defense, a bit too bulky for my style, I put it in my item storage and wait on the ledge above for another team to arrive.

Dripping sweat, and losing brain cells in the horrible heat up above, a third party meets with the tan-skinned examiner. They're a party of 6, wearing copious amounts of gear giving off auras of various colors. They all look pretty nervous.

The lot of them enter normally, and I wait up above for the 30 seconds to pass.

Once they do....

I watch the spinning mass of energy turn dark grey, my face lights up with a smile and my eyes open wide.

That large team must have failed their raid.... That was quick...

This next boss is going to be a mutant.

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 335

Hp: 1680/1680

Mp: 1680/1680

Strength: 816 [+150][+751]

Speed: 968 [+581][+290]

Agility: 999 [+450][+150]

Defense: 724 [+290][+253]

Mental Strength: 816 [+490][+326][+367][+441]

Skills:

Absorption [Special Grade]

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Advanced Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening [Special Grade]

Self Regeneration [Special Grade]

Spacial Magic [Item Storage]

Plunderer

Telekinesis

Appraisal [Special Grade]

Conceal

Berserker

Dungeon Walker [Special Grade]

Intimidation

Dagger Mastery

Stealth

Bloodlust

Equivalent Exchange

Combat Magic [Wind Summoning]

All-Seeing Eye

Extreme Strength

Dual Wielding [Special Grade]

Items Equipped:

High Ogre King's Ring [+60% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Dark Elf Boots [+60% Speed]

Ring of Protection [+35% Defense]

Griffin's Talon [+40% Mental Strength]

Enchanted Silver Ring [+30% Speed]

Serpent King's Scale [+45% Agility] [+45% Magic Resistance]

Desert Troll's Charm [+45% Mental Strength]

[Enchanted Dagger Set(1/2)] +150 Strength +150 Agility

The Flame Emperor's Sword [Fire Aspect][+92% Strength][+54% Mental Strength]

Chapter 117

I grip my shiny black dagger in my left palm while igniting the flames of my sword in my right.

With a grin ear to ear, I jump through the dark swirling mass of energy in front of me. A mutant boss, this is just what I've been waiting for.

My body materializes on the other side, spawning me into the boss room.

The air is thick. Much thicker than the air outside or any of the previous boss rooms I've been in. I let out a few muffled coughs as the steam and smoke around me fills my lungs with hot fumes.

Using a constant gust of wind magic, I manage to keep the large particles of dust and ash from my mouth so I can concentrate on my surroundings.

The dense mana in the air is close to unbearable. It almost feels like it's about to materialize from the sky and fall to the floor...

Activating enemy detection, I sense the usual two waves of monsters approaching and take care of business. With a few swift air steps and the occasional use of teleportation for better positioning the High Ogres, and their mutant counterparts burn to piles of ash.

They're definitely a little stronger, but nowhere near what I expected. It's kind of a letdown...

"Have I already outgrown this labyrinth? Is it--"

My mumbling gets cut off by heavy footsteps approaching.

THUDDD

THUDDD

THUDDD

I see the familiar sight of large steam clouds instantly turning blood red as a beast emerges.

It has similar proportions to the previous boss, but the wave of even denser mana that fills the air as it approaches is rather off-putting. The beast's skin is much darker red, and its eyes glow with a fiery rage.

The huge Mutant High Ogre King lets out a roar as it readies both of its silver and gold blades staring me down with an intensity hard to match.

I use inspect and appraisal while gritting my teeth. A grin creeps through my clenched jaw.

[Lv. 387]

Active Items:

[High Ogre King's Sword] +55% Strength

[High Ogre King's Sword] +55% Strength

[High Ogre King's Armor Set] +750 Defense +350 Speed +350 Agility

[High Ogre King's Ring] +60% Mental Strength

[High Ogre King's Pendant] +60% Mental Strength

Active Skills:

Dual Wielding [Special Grade]

Combat Magic [Advanced Fire Summoning]

Bufs:

[High Ogre King's Resistance] +70% Magic Resistance

[King's Body Raised in Fire] +70% Extra Fire Resistance

[Blood of a Mutant] +25% All Stats

[Mutant King's Fit of Rage] Hidden Ability

I scan its stats and take into account the subtle changes.

Some of its armor and weapons have increased in strength by a few percent, its fire summoning skill has upgraded to advanced, and there's a brand new buff that adds 25% to all of its base stats...

I gulp but know I'm stacked with overpowered gear as well. If anything, our base stats are close to even. I have the advantage because of my abundant list of skills.

I lunge forward and the battle begins. I glow with dark golden crimson flames, and the boss burns dark red swinging its swords with cool calculated precision.

We clash blades as I air-step and teleport around the battlefield. My All-Seeing Eye picks up on its fine movements, and I stay one step ahead at all times.

Hit after hit, the mutant's flames grow hotter as I cut away at its thick flesh with wind slashes and occasional hits from my sword.

The monster stays calm and does not make this battle easy on me. I only land one out of every six or so hits. Even with my perception boost, it's quick on its feet and skilled with those shining blades.

I take a page out of its book, and stay cool and collected myself. The sound of clanging metal rings out in the boss room as both of our fire burns bright and the mutant defends its throne.

About 5 minutes pass and I've landed a number of hits on the beast. It's not slowing down, and for some reason, doesn't seem worried in the slightest. For now, I take advantage of every perk I can get and carry on filing down its defenses.

Clash after clash, blood drips from the beast and sparks fly in the air as our battle continues. Finally, I can sense its movements slowing down as my successful attacks grow in numbers.

Gashes pile on up its arms, legs, and gaps in its armor. The beast begins to breathe heavily, and I do not slow down. I drip with sweat counting to slash away at my opponent.

With a final barrage of attacks, I let out a yell, and the beast falls to its knees with a loud grunt.

CLANGGGG

“It... dropped its swords?”

I pause for a moment mid-stride in a state of confusion. The boss breathes heavily and stares me in the eyes as I cautiously inch closer to it with my weapons in hand.

It doesn't move, or even try to grab the swords by its knees. The monster just grunts and sways side to side while staring into my soul.

“Such... an odd battle...”

I gulp and continue inching toward the behemoth in from of me.

This monster fought long and hard, but my abilities were too overpowered in the end, it never stood a chance.

“So, you admit defeat? I'll end it here.”

With a smirk, I concentrate my mana into my sword storing up wind and fire magic more powerful than anything I've ever attempted. I have to make it flashy after all.

With my right foot, I launch myself forward and ready myself to release my new all-powerful attack. I soar forward at the beast while it stays still, presumably frozen in fear, or dumbfounded in defeat.

Then, less than 5m before impact, I see a shift in its eyes. A deep crimson fire burns deep within them, especially with my All-Seeing Eye active, the depths of its mana pools are beyond my wildest imagination.

The monster's HP can't be more than 10% right now, and it still has this much power.

“How could it...?”

I mutter a few words, while reflexively shielding myself with body-hardening crystals and bracing for impact as I watch its mana stores triple in size before my eyes.

I let out a gasp as its entire body begins to glow bright red, erupting into a magnificent display of fire.

I'm struck with a burning hot wave of dark red flames that are even hotter than my own. My entire right arm is engulfed in the blast before I activate Dungeon Walker and teleport to the far side of the boss room.

I blip 100m away, breathing heavily while watching a wave of flames roll towards me. There's a searing pain in my arm that was caught in the blast.

“H-How-”

Then I remember one of its unique buffs. The “Mutant King's Fit of Rage”, must be it. A failsafe when it's on its last breath, a self-destruct skill.

I grit my teeth while using my blade to break apart the rock floor below me. After I dig down 3m or so, I jump in and take cover, holding the rocks above my head with all the telekinesis I can muster.

The earth around me rumbles as the wave of flames passes over me. Fire seeps in, but I hold strong and keep the bulk of it out. About 3 seconds go by before the extreme heat clears.

Then a familiar ringing sounds in my head.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

I let out a sigh, relaxing for a moment, then feeling that sharp hot pain in my right arm.

While moving the rumble out of the way, I get back up to the surface and deactivate my skills.

My flames die down and my buffs vanish, but the fire on my right arm does not go out... It continues to burn deep into my bicep, forearm, and is creeping down to my hand.

“This is the advanced fire summoning at work..”

The flames from this skill don’t go out unless nullified by one of equal level, I would assume water magic is a viable cure...

I let out a sigh, then teleport myself over to the monster’s corpse while managing the pain.

I flinch, as the dark flames start burning my hand, and creep up to my shoulder.

The boss is in pieces and hasn’t dissolved yet, I look around hastily. The fire doesn’t hurt too much, but this could get bad...

I gulp, put my dagger into my item storage and switch my sword over to my left hand...

With a deep breath in, then out, I close my eyes and swing downwards to cut off my right arm in one swift slash.

Letting out a grunt of pain, immediately, I begin regenerating my lost limb while eyeing the fallen monster’s corpse eagerly.

“This better be worth it...”

My heart pounds in my ears as my wound fully heals and I grab a few mana crystals to regain my MP.

CLINK

Time slows down as I watch two crystals fall out of the King’s dissolving corpse.

One is a large pink mana crystal, but the other...

“Is that... an element stone?”

A palm-sized crystal, red hot with flames hits the hard rock floor echoing throughout the boss room. My gaze is glued to the flaming stone as it rolls to my feet.

It’s semi-translucent, with a dark red base color. I can see the ground right through it. The hand-sized gem gives off a flicker of intense flames, giving off a lot of heat.

For a moment, I just stare. Then, I carefully open my item storage, placing it inside with the tip of my blade. I'm not taking any chances, there's no way I'm touching those flames again.

I take the mana crystal and throw it in my storage as well. This is not what I expected when I thought I'd fight a mutant, but with a reward like this, I can't complain.

The bright white transfer magic begins to glow and I'm transported to the narrow tunnel leading to the Labyrinth's final boss.

The ominous portal spins at the end of the rock-lined hallway and my thoughts run wild. The dense mana in the air doesn't help me think straight. All it does is add more pressure to the situation at hand.

I've gotten much stronger since I challenged it last time. With my new skill upgrades, I can just teleport out in an instant if things are going downhill. There's always more time to train if I need to.

"Am I... really ready for the labyrinth's final boss?"

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 340

Hp: 1140/1705

Mp: 1705/1705

Strength: 829 [+771]

Speed: 983 [+590][+295]

Agility: 1014 [+456]

Defense: 735 [+294][+257]

Mental Strength: 829 [+498][+332][+373][+456]

Skills:

Absorption [Special Grade]

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Advanced Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening [Special Grade]

Self Regeneration [Special Grade]

Spacial Magic [Item Storage]

Plunderer

Telekinesis

Appraisal [Special Grade]

Conceal

Berserker

Dungeon Walker [Special Grade]

Intimidation

Dagger Mastery

Stealth

Bloodlust

Equivalent Exchange

Combat Magic [Wind Summoning]

All-Seeing Eye

Extreme Strength

Dual Wielding [Special Grade]

Items Equipped:

High Ogre King's Ring [+60% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Dark Elf Boots [+60% Speed]

Ring of Protection [+35% Defense]

Griffin's Talon [+40% Mental Strength]

Enchanted Silver Ring [+30% Speed]

Serpent King's Scale [+45% Agility] [+45% Magic Resistance]

Desert Troll's Charm [+45% Mental Strength]

The Flame Emperor's Sword [Fire Aspect][+93% Strength][+55% Mental Strength]

Chapter 118

I stare at the grey mass of energy spinning in front of me. My breaths slow down as I think over my current situation.

I could wait around outside the 16th-floor boss room for a few more hours. There are about 5 teams left, I'd have a few more chances to get stronger before facing the Greater Demon again.

On the other hand, it really couldn't hurt to test my luck. I can compare my new skills to the demon and teleport out instantly if I'm in any real danger.

I gulp.

"This is just a trial run..."

I take out both my blades. Sword in my right hand and dagger in my left.

Each footstep I take echoes in the narrow stone tunnel. The spinning portal gets closer and closer until I step through without a second thought.

The intensity of mana in the air rises as I'm transported into the final boss room.

My heart rate spikes as I activate all my stat-boosting skills my All-Seeing Eye.

Fast, yet light footsteps catch my attention from the back of the room. They vanish, then a dark swirling mass of energy appears no more than 20m in front of me.

I clench my jaw and lift my weapons as the Greater Demon appears.

Its eyes are a dreadful pale white contrasting its dark skin. The red-horned creature that one-shotted me last time we fought slowly walks toward me without a shred of hesitation in its movements.

My breathing speeds up and I ignite my body into a ball of fire. My eyes glance side to side trying to think of a plan. Then... I hear a deep voice ring out in my head.

"You've returned. It's not often a visitor comes back to see me a second time."

The towering demon continues its slow strut toward me as it shows me a sly toothy grin while flashing me the face of its sword.

My eyes and mouth both open wide for a moment, then I stutter a few words.

"D-Did you just talk... to me?"

The monster stares straight ahead, continuing its rhythmic strides in my direction.

"I did young one. It seems this is your first time... talking to one of my kind."

Frozen in place, I don't know how to process what's going on. I've heard of intelligent monsters, but never anything that can communicate to humans with actual words.

The demon is less than 10m away now, its voice rings out in my head again.

"It's a shame you had to come back here, I see a great potential in you, mere mortal. Unfortunately, I'll have to cut the bud before it blooms."

Drops of sweat roll down my forehead as the final boss comes closer and closer.

It's less than 5m away now.... and I'm finally coming back to my senses. A wave of urgency comes over me as I let out a thin smile.

"I'd like to see you try."

I use Dungeon Walker to teleport behind the demon and release a slash of fire from close range. It's a surprise attack, and a powerful one at that. I let out a grunt as the dark red wave of energy rockets toward the demon's exposed back.

Time seems to slow down as I watch my flames cut through the air.

My attack inches closer and closer but something doesn't feel quite right...

In the next moment, with unfathomable speed and precision, I watch the demon turn its neck to lock eyes with mine giving me a bone-chilling stare.

I watch the hard floor beneath its feet fracture as it propels itself away with both immense power and seamless ease. The deep voice rings in my head again.

“I applaud you for your efforts, but this is the end.”

The menacing Greater Demon turns toward me with a wicked grin. It flies forward obliterating the rocky floor beneath its feet, hurling stones in wave-like patterns on either side of its body.

I grit my teeth and use Dungeon Walker to distance myself from the beast again, over 40m away.

The second I appear, a black swirling mass of energy opens directly beside me. The same overpowering energy destroys the stone floor all around us as a massive black demon’s hand comes shooting out of the portal. I hear its voice one last time.

“Goodbye, it was fun playing with you. DEMON’S CURSE.”

The fast-moving palm slams into my chest. I get flashbacks from my previous time fighting this monster as the breath gets knocked out of me.

While letting out a desperate gasp for air, I activate Dungeon Walker and teleport myself as far away as I can without thinking much about where.

My HP drops 100, but my MP does too...

For some reason, it’s easiest for me to transport here of all places... The 3rd mountain in the Griffin’s dungeon, overlooking the vast hills and trees below.

My head throbs as I keep trying to inhale air through my punctured lungs. While regenerating damaged organs and a few broken ribs I finally stand to my feet.

I open my status to watch my health and MP drop lower and lower as I deactivate all my skills chugging an HP potion.

Last time I was hit with that “Demon’s Curse” it did not end well... at all...

I gulp.

My HP returns to full, but moments later drops 100 points again with my MP bar along with it. Every second, both of them drop roughly 100 points.

“Why... My MP too? Why is this-”

Then I remember my new passive perk that comes with my [Special Grade] Self Regeneration skill: Poison and Curse removal.

I stare at my status wide-eyed while taking a few mana crystals out of my storage to plunder their MP. About ten seconds go by and the rate of decreasing mana and HP slows considerably.

They’re dropping by just under 50 points each per second. After half a minute of intense breathing, HP potion drinking, and mana crystal plundering, the curse finally dissipates completely.

I let out a sigh of relief, then sit down on a rock ledge to think about the events that just took place.

This is a highly intelligent monster. Its telepathy ability even allows it to communicate with humans. My base stats are nowhere near strong enough to stand a chance in a battle of brute strength or speed.

It outpaced me in an instant even while my All-Seeing Eye and a superior teleportation skill. This Greater Demon is in a league of its own.

I scrunch my eyebrows and focus on the never-ending sea of trees in front of me.

“This is not going to be easy... Not one bit...”

I sit and stare for a while trying to formulate a plan, then one thing the monster said to me starts to poke at the back of my mind.

The moment I entered, it said: “You’ve returned. It’s not often a visitor comes back to see me a second time.”

That must mean it remembers me. The final boss’ domain has to act like a normal dungeon floor for that to be the case. It’s not like the boss rooms that reset every time a hunter defeats or leaves them.

“So, that’s its weakness.”

A small grin starts to form at the corners of my mouth.

Griffins fly high in the sky as my brain starts piecing together the perfect plan. This labyrinth has taught me a lot. Watching my teammates grow, defeating higher-level monsters with their limited abilities is pretty neat to see. Now it’s my turn.

Sometimes, being stronger than your opponent is a weakness if you can’t guess their next move.

It’s time for me to put away the checkerboard and start playing chess.

I grip my blades and double-check my status to make sure my HP and MP are at full before activating Dungeon Walker and surveying my potential warp points.

Moments later, I prepare to throw myself back into battle.

I have one objective. With the element of surprise, my plan will go off without a hitch.

I teleport in as close as possible to the resting demon., this is the first time I’ve seen it not in full battle mode. The monster sits on a large flat stone slab at the backside of its lair overlooking the dome-shaped boss room.

A meter-tall egg-shaped red object catches my eye as I’m portaling in. The Demon seems to be eyeing it, guarding it even...

I pay it no mind and stick to the plan. My sword glows red and I pre-charge it to the brim with advanced fire magic. I release my attack at point blank without hesitation.

The red-hot flames ripple through the air toward the unsuspecting demon. I assume it will dodge, so I charge up another attack to ready a countermove.

As expected, it immediately realizes the danger, but a series of unexpected events unfold.

Rather than using its own Dungeon Walker ability, the monster throws its body in front of the red odd-shaped orb on the ground. I still can't see it clearly from this distance, but the object seems to be of great value to this creature...

My fiery slash makes contact with the Greater Demon, exploding into a crimson ball of flames as it hits the monster's right shoulder. It deflects some of the less intense outer layers of the attack away from any vital points with its long blade, but takes a majority of it at point-blank range...

It lets out a muffled grunt mixed with a roar as the fire residue sinks into its thick skin, searing it from the inside out.

This is not what I intended to do, but I'll take every chance I can get.

The angry voice of the Greater Demon rings in my head again.

"Mortal Boy! You've come too close to sully the duty of a Labyrinth's Guardian."

The dark-skinned monster glances at the red item again then steps toward me with anger filling its eyes.

"This time, I will not hold back."

The ground all around me begins to rumble and fragments of black stone begin floating up into the air.

I gulp...

Then do what I promised myself I would. Use my head.

"Dungeon Walker."

In an instant, I warp away from the rage-filled Guardian's Lair back to the peaceful mountaintop.

Stage one of my plan is complete, it didn't go exactly how I wanted it to, but I got it done. The demon has been inflicted with a curse of my own, the ever-burning flames of advanced fire summoning.

Soon, I'll move to phase two. The only thing bugging me is the new information that's been revealed.

"What is that mysterious red orb...?"

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 340

Hp: 1140/1705

Mp: 1705/1705

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Speed: 983 [+590][+295]

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Dungeon Walker [Special Grade]

Intimidation

Dagger Mastery

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Desert Troll's Charm [+45% Mental Strength]

The Flame Emperor's Sword [Fire Aspect][+93% Strength][+55% Mental Strength]

[Enchanted Dagger Set(1/2)] +150 Strength +150 Agility

Chapter 119

I take a few deep breaths, remembering the pain I felt when I was burned by the mutant boss on floor 16.

I've inflicted a similar wound on the Labyrinth's Guardian. To my knowledge, it doesn't have any way of healing.

It never would have allowed itself to be hit by my attack, but threw itself in harm's way to protect that egg-shaped orb.

"Hmmm."

While twirling a dagger around in my left hand I tighten my lips and rack my brain for an answer.

"..."

"I have no idea..."

It's a puzzling situation. I guess I'll just have to defeat this monster and find out on my own. In the meantime, it'll be a very valuable resource in my battle. If that red rock is something the Greater Demon is willing to sacrifice itself to protect, then I'll take full advantage of its weakness.

My foot begins to tap against the hard rock below me. It's been about 30 seconds, but I need to wait longer to make sure its right arm is fully incapacitated.

If I couldn't put out the fire from a skill I own myself, there's no way it'll be able to easily snuff those same flames. These are my hopes at least...

Griffins continue to fly by as my foot tapping becomes faster and louder until I can't take it anymore.

"It's time."

I inhale deeply, preparing myself for the battle ahead. It's time to stay cool and calculated, no wrong moves can be made here.

I activate Dungeon Walker and scout out a good place to teleport in. The Greater Demon is still atop that long stone slab, protecting the red orb.

A smirk of satisfaction creeps onto my face as I take in the sight of its mangled right arm. The demon now holds its long sword in its left hand while its right upper limb hangs from the shoulder joint with claw marks all over its flesh.

Blood drips to the floor next to large chunks of still-burning demon flesh. The monster's white eyes are sharp and its breathing is heavy. It cut off all of the burning sections of its own body.

I've really pissed it off...

While finding the perfect positioning, putting the Demon between its precious rock and myself, I reappear while releasing an attack at full power without a second of hesitation.

The dark crescent of advanced fire magic rockets toward the Greater Demon, but it seems to be a bit more prepared this time around.

Instantly, as my fire approaches, the monster grabs its ruby-colored egg, and Dungeon Walks away. Over 100m away... The Labyrinth's Guardian is running from me now?

"Haha! You-"

My premature excitement vanishes in an instant as the deep voice of the Greater Demon rings out in my head.

"I will make you pay. For even thinking of attacking the true labyrinth's ruler, YOU SHALL PAY!"

The hard stone floor begins to rumble again as I see rock flying through the air and the monster rocketing toward me. It is a terrifying sight, but I can't help but be a little amused by its dangling right arm.

I dart off to its unguarded side, making things as difficult as possible for the demon.

It swerves mid-charge, and I process all the moving parts in front of me to make a logical decision.

"Dungeon Walker."

I teleport out of its way. Again, there's no point in facing this menace face to face.

I materialize 50m away on the other side of the dungeon. A black spinning portal appears by my side, but I teleport away again before any part of the monster can come out of it.

Over and over, we play a game of cat and mouse. I continuously charge my sword with fire and blip all over the boss room trying to position myself for another clear shot.

Even with an inferior skill, the Greater Demon follows me close behind with scary precision. There's a fraction of a second of lag time between its portal and my instant transmissions. I use this to my full advantage.

I won't be able to hit it straight on because its base speed and agility are too quick. I'll just have to force its hand, yet again.

My teleportations become more frequent, and seemingly random as I move quickly back and forth to opposite sides of the dungeon. I keep my eyes locked on the shiny red egg-shaped orb while the Demon makes sure to always stay between me and its object.

The ground shakes and the mana in the air gets denser and denser as the two of us nearly phase out of existence teleporting around the room at rapid speeds. I hear the monster's deep voice penetrate my mind mid-blip.

“You cannot run forever child.”

I snarl while teleporting far from the creature again as it emerges from a portal nearby with anger-filled eyes.

It’s right. I’ll have to change things up... I grit my teeth and layer myself with body-hardening crystals while teleporting straight into the danger zone. I aim directly above the ruby-colored egg, igniting myself into a ball of fire.

The moment I see the shiny object beneath my feet, I feel a sharp sword pierce my body hardening right through my torso. Black crystals fracture into the air as I’m face to face with the terrifying monster. It lets go of its sword and forces its palm to my chest.

I fly backward from a blast of unknown energy while losing over 1000 HP within seconds.

“DEMON’S CURSE.”

Its familiar voice rings in my head again as the air gets ejected from my lungs.

I cough up blood and almost get knocked out cold, but a smirk creeps over my face as I watch dark red flames sink into the Greater Demon’s left hand.

The first “tick” from the Demon’s Curse hits me as I teleport back to my safe space up in the mountains on the 11th floor.

I cough out more blood while drinking two HP potions and plundering MP from a few mana crystals. Grinning ear to ear, wiping blood from my mouth, I plan out my next moves as the curse slowly wears off.

Once at full health, I portal back inside to see a sorry sight...

The monster’s left arm is still covered in dark red flames. The fire has slowly risen up to its shoulder.

The Greater Demon is attempting to force them out against the flat stone at the backside of the room, but all of its efforts are in vain.

“These flames of yours, and this ability to teleport, a human could never possess this power.”

I stare at the creature cautiously gripping my weapons tight. Its white eyes are filled with fear and confused horror as it continues to put its body between me and the red object behind it.

The dark crackling flames seeping into the demon’s left shoulder start to creep down its back. The demon grits its jagged teeth as the ground shakes all around us.

Stones float into the air as another meaningless game of tag begins.

I blip back and forth around the room watching the slow-burning flames engulf the desperate creature as it swings at me aimlessly.

A little over a minute later, the Greater Demon’s entire body is completely ablaze.

Rocks are flying in the air as the monster has a full meltdown destroying its lair.

“IF ONLY.... IF ONLY I HAD MORE TIME! Is this truly my fate...?”

Every moment I blip back into existence to check on its sorry state, the beast glares at me while letting out hideous sounds.

I almost feel sorry for the monster.

It flails and cries out in pain, completely destroying its once noble warrior facade. The once fearless towering demon is reduced to a sulking child.

My heart pounds in my chest faster and faster as its movements slow and my victory draws closer. I'm about to defeat a Labyrinth boss 100 levels higher than my own...

The monster stops using Dungeon Walker and falls to its knees as the flesh starts melting from its body. I stop teleporting as well, watching in a mix of awe and horror.

Its voice rings out in my head again, this time in a softer tone.

"You've beaten me. A human boy has beaten me."

It turns to glance at the red egg-shaped object, then back to me.

"It seems he will be in your hands now. This labyrinth was never fully born, but maybe there was a reason for all of this."

The fire crackles as the monster's chest and face begin to fall apart exposing white bone.

It falls forward to hit the hard stone floor with a loud thud.

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

[Use Absorption[Special Grade]]

Skill: Telepathy [Legendary Grade]

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption[Special Grade]]

Stat: Agility

Amount: +65

[YES][NO]

My heart still pounds in my chest as I choose yes to both absorption options.

Flames crackle on the dungeon floor as I slowly walk over to the burning mutilated corpse. With a gulp, my stat-boosting skills slowly deactivate.

Breathing heavily, I tip-toe around the monster's body over to the precious ruby egg it sacrificed its life to protect. Well... tried to protect at least.

The closer I get, the more questions I have.

Clink *Clink*

I tap it with my sword two times. The sound of metal on metal rings out in the empty boss room.

It's even more egg-shaped than I realized before... The outer coating has a smooth texture, while the coloring is a deep crimson hue.

"So... odd..."

I hold my breath and open my item storage. With the tip of my blade, I roll the meter-tall egg-shaped ruby into my inventory. It disappears from sight, and I exhale with relief.

Another clanging sound comes from behind me. I turn around in full battle mode, activating my skills, but soon realize it's a false alarm.

The oddity of this whole situation is putting me on high alert.

I clench my jaw and walk over to the dissolving remains of the Greater Demon to see three item drops in its place.

There's a long red horn close to a meter in length, a small black sphere, and a pink mana crystal.

I put away my dagger and grab the fallen loot hastily while using Appraisal.

[Mana Crystal]

[Greater Demon's Horn]

[Greater Demon's Core]

I raise an eyebrow while placing the crystal into my storage, then grab the heavy horn right after. Lastly, the core... I grab it with my left hand and instantly feel it vibrate with an intense pressure.

My eyes open wide as I watch the core sink into the palm of my hand and instantly dissolve.

A thin black line appears on my wrist and travels along my arm disappearing up my sleeve to meet my shoulder.

My senses heighten. I could hear a pin drop at the far side of the boss room. My eyes twitch back and forth zooming in and out with newfound long-range perception...

I swallow hard and open my status.

[Status Open]

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 352

Hp: 1765/1765

Mp: 1525/1765

Strength: 861 [+809][+431]

Speed: 1017 [+610][+305][+509]

Agility: 1115 [+502][+558]

Defense: 762 [+305][+267][+381]

Mental Strength: 861 [+517][+344][+387][+491][+431]

Skills:

Absorption [Special Grade]

Swordsmanship

Combat Magic [Advanced Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Special Grade]

Enemy Detection

Body Hardening [Special Grade]

Self Regeneration [Special Grade]

Spacial Magic [Item Storage]

Plunderer

Telekinesis

Appraisal [Special Grade]

Conceal

Berserker

Dungeon Walker [Special Grade]

Intimidation

Dagger Mastery

Stealth

Bloodlust

Equivalent Exchange

Combat Magic [Wind Summoning]

All-Seeing Eye

Extreme Strength

Dual Wielding [Special Grade]

Telepathy [Legendary Grade]

Items Equipped:

High Ogre King's Ring [+60% Mental Strength]

Cyclops Eye Pendant [+40% Defense]

Dark Elf Boots [+60% Speed]

Ring of Protection [+35% Defense]

Griffin's Talon [+40% Mental Strength]

Enchanted Silver Ring [+30% Speed]

Serpent King's Scale [+45% Agility] [+45% Magic Resistance]

Desert Troll's Charm [+45% Mental Strength]

The Flame Emperor's Sword [Fire Aspect][+94% Strength][+57% Mental Strength]

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

Chapter 120

I stare down at my left arm for a moment, taking in the reality of my situation. The demon's core just dissolved into my body....

I swallow hard, examining the tattoo-like black line running all the way up my sleeve.

The sensation of transfer magic starts to come over my body at the same moment. A white light starts to mask my vision, just like after every boss fight finishes.

Not knowing exactly where this next transfer will take me, I activate Dungeon Walker to decide for myself. Away from here...

If this is going where I think it is, I don't want to be any part of a labyrinth's collapsed aftermath. After every dungeon break I've been in, all hunters that were stuck inside get transported to the outside world together. That would only add to my pile of problems...

I focus on a very familiar dungeon in the capital, the Minotaur Dungeon. The white light around me grows even brighter as I teleport away.

"Just in time."

Fractions of a second later, I've arrived safe and sound. A smile grows across my face as I walk over to the exit portal no more than 20m away.

I exhale abruptly, then stop right in front of the spinning mass of energy before returning to the outside world. Tightening my lips and scrunching my eyebrows, I reactivate Dungeon Walker out of curiosity.

"It's gone...."

Scanning through all the dungeon layouts in my mind's eye, not a single one from the labyrinth I just left pops up in my head. It's completely gone, every single dungeon has vanished into thin air.

Deactivating my skills and putting away my sword, I slowly walk outside without another thought.

There aren't any hunters in sight. I make my way back to the main hub on the train and exit without seeing anyone but a few nightshift guards. The city streets are quiet at night. A soft white moonlight shines alongside the occasional streetlamp as I make my way back to the hotel.

With a wave to the attendant in the lobby, I get into the elevator and ride it up to the 4th floor. With a turn of my key, I enter the room and fall into bed almost immediately.

I'm exhausted, but a million thoughts are still running wild through my head. It feels incredible to lie down and rest my sore muscles, but the looming fear of my meeting with Rodrigo and the Hunters Association Higher-Ups is fresh in my mind.

After seemingly endless tossing and turning, I finally fall asleep for a few hours.

Unfortunately, it doesn't last long. As the sun rises through my hotel window, so do I. Letting out a groan, I stretch my arms, legs, and back before rolling out of bed.

"My work is never over..."

I've decided to see Briana. It never hurts to see your friendly neighborhood black market craftswoman before a lunch meeting with the government... right?

I have a lot of new gear and items. There's no one who'd be better at appraising their value than her. I may even get a chance to fuse that new firestone with something...

I let out a sigh, shrug, and walk out the door. I'll just have to head over and see what she can offer.

After drinking some of the leftover water in my inventory and grabbing a breakfast sandwich from a local shop, I make my way toward the three-story building where Briana stays.

There are two large men standing out front, one of them seems to recognize me from a distance. I wave as he looks at his friend to mumble a few words, then turns to me with a smirk.

"I recognize you, kid. What do you want with Ms. Briana? She's busy right now."

I raise an eyebrow.

"Busy? When will she be free?"

The muscular bodyguard crosses his arms.

"A few more hours, she has a special guest visiting this morning. Come back around noon."

I stare at the two of them with an annoyed look while biting my bottom lip, then let out a reply.

"Well, can I at least see Bernard?"

The bodyguard rolls his eyes but nods slowly.

"Sure, sure. I heard you were a pretty high-paying customer last time you were here, so what is it this time? More business?"

I nod.

He turns and opens the door for me and I walk inside.

The bottom-floor sweatshop isn't as jarring as it was the first time around but is still quite out of the ordinary. There are so many workers crammed into a small space with all kinds of magical items laying out on the tables.

The workers packaging and tinkering with the potions and trinkets barely bat an eye as I walk past them and begin climbing the spiral staircase.

My footsteps echo slightly as I make my way up to the second floor. The moment I do, a tall thin man greets me with a weak smile. The two twin girls on either side of his office keep their heads down as he walks over to me.

"Jay. What a surprise it is to see you here today of all days..."

I open my mouth to speak, but he cuts me off.

"Ms. Brianna can't see you right now. She's with a client."

I nod.

"Yeah, yeah. I know, one of the guards downstairs already told me. I took my C-Class exams this past weekend, so I have all kinds of items I'd like to have properly appraised."

Bernard raises an eyebrow and shows me to his desk.

"I have a good eye for these kinds of things too you know. Let's see what you have."

"I- uh- do you have one of those containment cases? For element stones?"

His eyes open wide.

"You managed to get another one?!"

I smile, realizing this may be my chance. Bri can't pass up an element stone waiting to be crafted right?

I reply.

"Yeah, I have a lot of other loot with me as well, but the element stone and this here--"

I pull out the dark red demon's horn and set it down on his desk with a thud.

"-I was hoping Bri could make me some kind of dagger with this and the firestone I picked up."

Bernard turns to the smooth meter-long red horn on his desk. His eyes remain glued to it as he feels its surface with both hands.

"T-This is-"

He stutters while keeping his eyes fixated on the horn.

“You fought a Labyrinth’s Guardian... a-and beat it? As a new C-Class hunter... how is that possible?”

The thin man in glasses turns to me wide-eyed with his eyebrows scrunched tightly together. I reply.

“It was my lucky day. Long story. Isn’t your guys’ motto here something like: No questions, just pay the lady and leave?”

Bernard gulps, stands up straight, then lets out a sigh followed by a subtle bow.

“You’re right. How unprofessional of me... This is- an incredible find.”

He glances upstairs, then back to me continuing his statement.

“I don’t think Ms. Briana will mind a quick disturbance if this is what you have to show her.”

I grin.

He nods, then points to the stairs.

“Very well, just... be polite. There’s a VIP up there, one wrong move and you’re a dead man. I mean it.”

I nod while grabbing the demon’s horn, placing it in my inventory, and making my way toward the twisting stairs. I didn’t even show him the firestone, better yet, he doesn’t even know about the odd red egg-shaped rock. Maybe I should keep that a secret from everyone for now....

I ready myself to meet with Bri and this mysterious VIP client, then begin climbing the stairs. Halfway up, I hear a man’s voice.

“I did everything I could Bri. After almost 3 full days of farming, 2 wind stones may not sound like much, but it’s nothing to laugh at. That’s good money, even after I pay the team! Plus, look at all this other loot we got from the raid.”

Bri’s voice responds after an audible sigh.

“Brother dearest. One of my clients up north is relying on me to provide them with a Firestone-imbued blade by the end of the week. You assured me it would be possible to obtain one.”

The man grunts and the sound of feet getting kicked up onto a table echo down the stairs.

I’m already more than halfway up. The two of them seem to be in a pretty heated business deal, but... did I hear Bri just say, Brother?

The man’s low, and oddly familiar voice continues.

“I was certain I could get you one, there were just a few complications last night. Someone snuck into the final boss room and took out the guardian before my team and I had a chance to farm the top floors.”

He lets out a sigh, slamming his arm against something hard.

“The only reason I ever agreed to come out to this region was to get my hands on another core! That’s gone too! This whole trip has just been a damn waste of time!”

I near the top of the stairs as the man’s voice gets louder and angrier.

“Plus, I have this stupid meeting with this multi-skill brat later today. The Association’s probably going to turn him into their personal lab rat, but it’s better him, than me! I can’t wait to get it over with and go home! This plac-”

Mid-tantrum, I step up the final stair and can’t believe my eyes...

Bri stands at the back of the room with her hands on her hips, wearing a tight black dress with much of her olive skin exposed. She looks half-worried and half-amused at the situation in front of her.

I stare at the man by her side with my mouth wide open.

Surprisingly, he does the same. The tall man with tan skin, black hair, white eyes, and a bright red suit looks deep into my soul as I enter the room.

I gulp... then stutter out a few words.

“R-Rodrigo is... that you...?”