

D. Diver 501

Chapter 501

The further I float down into the square-shaped hole, the more prominent the upward flow of Qi becomes.

The temperature grows slowly as I continue to fall hundreds of meters underground, watching the ladder fly by on my right side, and begin seeing a faint white glow beneath me.

The black stone that makes up the walls begin to change in composition, shifting from just regular dark stone to the same jet black material the monastery in the platinum district is made of.

I allow a finger to touch the stone to my left as I float further down, and my system flickers as my touch glosses over layers of the mana-negating stone.

The interesting thing I find when I do this is, my Soul Energy is not negated at all. Even though it is technically half part mana, the fusion of this energy with Qi has created a new source of power that is not negated by the black stone.

As I fall further down, the mana-negating material grows more and more abundant until nearly 100% of the rock surrounding me consists of this stone.

My feet gently hit the bottom of the incredibly long shaft, to the point where I can't even see the surface.

My body is flooded with dense Qi.

Nearly 20x as dense as the Qi inside the monastery, but still nowhere near the levels that the Qi density reached inside the isolation pods when we saturated and destroyed them to push their limits.

Still, as I take a step forward, I can feel immense amounts of Qi flow through me. It feels as if just standing in here could fill my core up to full in a few hours with minimal effort if it were empty.

The steel ladder stops right at the ground level where my feet have landed and the thin shaft has opened up to a medium-sized cave opening.

There are jagged black rocks on the walls, floor, and ceiling, but the faint white glow that fills the cave makes my vision extra clear.

There are small areas where white flowers grow inside the rocks, and as I walk forward and turn the first corner in this cave, I see the source of all this Qi.

Dozens of long white crystals emerge from the black rock.

More and more of the delicate white flowers grow near these gems, and as I use my Soul Energy to stare deep into the crystal stones, I can sense thousands of Qi pills worth of energy inside each one.

They each slowly disperse warm energy into the air at a constant rate, but for some reason, it feels as if the source of this energy is not dwindling even though the rate at which they let the stored energy flows out is rather extreme.

I take steps closer to the nearest cluster of crystals, and at the same time, sense my teammates floating down to follow me.

I stare at the crystals in wonder, waving my hands around in the air to push the densest form of energy around that comes directly off the crystals, even bringing my fingers close enough to the point where I'm about to touch one of the white treasures.

Monk's voice rings out and his head pops around the corner before I do.

"Wait! Just wait! Do you know what you're about to do?"

I pause and pull my hand back, turning to him as Ember follows behind him, and the sound of the others falling down the narrow hole sound in my ear.

"No... I guess not. I don't know exactly what these are, but I can make a good guess."

Monk nods while walking over, and based on his tone and expression, touching the crystals isn't a good idea. I feel no danger coming off of them, if anything it feels like I'd be able to absorb its power even faster. However, listening to whatever he has to say will most likely be a better move.

"These are Qi fragments. The leftover energy source of the originators. Once fragments are touched by human hands like ours, the eternal flow of power will cease."

He turns his head to the back of the cave and points to a portion of the wall where about 6 clear crystals jut out from the stone. They look just like worthless glass, and don't have any more power coming out from them.

"That is what happens when a fragment is drained by a selfish and impatient entity. My guess is those ruined fragments are the product of the Dark One's greed."

His gaze turns to the other 30+ fragments of still glowing crystals and smiles with a glow in his eyes.

"If left untouched, it is said that one can gather the Qi radiation for an eternity. Its power is limitless if left in its natural resting place. We have 2 medium-sized crystals beneath the monastery. We have been using its power for decades without their supplies wavering at all."

Ember walks over to join the conversation.

"It's true. Disrupting a fragment will expel all of its energy at once, it would not be of any use to us now. Leaving them in their natural state and cultivating or capturing their excess energy would be a far more productive method."

I look around the open cave area as my other teammates all arrive, and Monk reexplains his points to them so they don't accidentally touch anything they shouldn't.

I take a stroll around and come to a conclusion.

"Good. This area needs to be well guarded. It will only be accessed by us for closed door cultivation as needed, as well as Qi pill manufacturing."

I turn to Monk.

"Considering there are far over 10x the amount of crystals here as there are in your fortress, does this mean you'll be able to secure 10x as much usable Qi without diminishing the source?"

He nods.

"That is exactly right."

I cross my arms and smile while breathing in even more of the dense Qi in the air.

"Perfect."

Everyone else does the same, taking in the beautiful sight, and letting the natural Qi flow through our bodies with its calming aftereffects.

The cave area isn't too large, so it's easy to search every bit of it and locate all of the crystals and log their locations before we leave.

The way back up is a bit faster, because we just use soul energy and Qi to push ourselves up, rather than limiting the fall speed on the way down.

Once we're all back in the lobby, Lith is still mesmerized by the control box at the back of the room.

I speak as I come back up and he turns.

"Alright, we have a new plan here. There's no question about it, I need that control box moved to the Galeheart tower, and this building needs to be renovated and double mana-shielded to give no one access other than the people in this room here. There are delicate resources down there that need to be dealt with by the correct parties, I don't want any of your men inside there either. No one enters this building but us. That's a very serious order."

Lith nods, and I continue.

"The other two towers, I do not care what happens to them. Strip them down from top to bottom to reuse the shielding, build more Galeheart infrastructure in them, do whatever you want. However, this tower is all mine."

As everyone comes up from below, he feels the seriousness of the matter instantly and replies.

"Of course. The shielding on those two buildings is worth a fortune. We'll make sure to secure this building to your liking and give you the only key inside. We can even make some of the floors above this one more presentable and accessible. Consider it your private fortress in Valor City."

I give a thumbs up while using earth magic bonded with red soul energy to cover the square opening in the center of the building, then respond.

"Perfect. Some extra renovations would be excellent, but no one is allowed in this lobby during construction unless you're watching to make sure no one tinkers with this sealed off underground path."

He nods.

"Understood."

"Great. My business here today is done. I'll be getting started on those 6 large foreign trade deal orders now. This was a very productive visit."

We all walk outside, and I continue seeing Lith's men start their jobs as instructed, transporting people from the second tower and start sorting loot from the first tower, then soon after begin dismantling the emptied-out towers for their raw mana-shielding materials.

Their teamwork and professionalism is impressive.

Lith has been building this team for many years, but it is still something I aspire to turn my workforce back in Sector 2 into soon.

We make it back to the Galeheart tower and give our goodbyes again before using the elevator down to the Red Ogre dungeon and using my dungeon walker skill to make it back to the canyon of dungeons.

As we're making it back to the town, Maria speaks up.

"You know, we need to get one of those teleport platforms like Lith has. It'll be a lot easier to get around... and to have guests without you having to be our personal chauffeur."

I laugh a bit, and reply.

"Totally agree. I'm going to get these trade deals sorted today, and hopefully get our transportation problem fixed too. Soon, we'll be able to travel anywhere in the world and have transport crystals to come right back here. I'll consult the person that knows how to get it done tonight."

Everyone overhears this conversation and is excited for this change.

We make it back and go our separate ways for the day.

Lydia and Fisher meet up with the army recruits and enjoy the rest of the day off together. One of my doubles stays with them, and I plan to start their new training regime tomorrow.

Monk goes back to check on his master.

Abby and Maria set off to explore the town a bit, and take the night off.

Arie speaks before he turns away from the group to meet up with Luna who has been looking over the town while we were gone.

"I hope to set out with Luna tomorrow to Sector 4. We want to begin our investigation into the abyss, to find what happened to the lost remains of our village."

I give him a handshake and a grin.

"Of course, thank you for waiting. Your help in the war was needed. I'll give you two a ride first thing in the morning if that's where you wish to go. I hope you find what you're looking for."

He shakes my hand back, then him and Luna go off to enjoy their night as well.

I'm left standing with Ember as we walk toward the construction team workers finishing up building a new street of small empty shops on the opposite side of town.

I relay my goals of creating even more housing, roads to nearby smaller villages all over Sector 2 and nearby Sectors to expand trade, a reconstruction of the center guild hall in the city to make it more presentable and professional and even a small prison system to reform people like the 21 workers that have been slaving away under the spell of a suggestion elixir.

I'd like for them in to pay for their wrongdoings and come out as regular citizens after they've faced their time rather than being branded as bad forever. This will be an important function of society once more people come to live here. No one is perfect, there will be people that make mistakes, but there will always be consequences equal to those mistakes in the form of punishments as well.

After this brief explanation of the town's future, he agrees to come up with an even larger order of materials by tomorrow to fulfill for him as soon as possible for expansion.

Ember and I float back over to the canyon of dungeons as the sun starts to set for the day.

I use my concealments skill and items to change my appearance, then we dungeon walk to the black market dungeon hub beneath Vice City.

With an item storage full of multi-nation trade deal papers, and 6 fragments of luminite ready to be used in a series of rare crafts; Ember and I walk toward the entrance of Bri's workshop.

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Once we approach the entrance underground, I'm happy to see three large men standing outside the heavy metal door that leads to the underside of her workshop.

After a quick inspection and appraisal, I can see all of them are between level 300 and 400. This is nearing Elite levels, and is surely the top of the line security one can get in a place like this.

There's no way any common thieves, or even professionals who have surpassed C Class could infiltrate this security without causing quite the commotion.

I use my telepathy skill to send a message to Bri, three floors above me to let her know I'm here, but step up to the security guards in the same instant to test them and see if they'll do their jobs.

Ember and I stand before them with zero detectable mana radiating off of our bodies, and I speak up.

"I have a meeting with Bri. I'd appreciate it if you'd let us pass."

Using my conceal skill, mixed with the hidden attributes of my cloak, and new silver essence of infinite regeneration; I have it shape shift into a perfect replica of a D-Class Association Hunter's ID with a picture of the face that I'm using to conceal myself right now.

"There's my ID, you can see I'm just a normal hunter. I have some rare items farmed from the new dungeons out in the forest."

I point to Ember and smile.

"My partner here is unregistered, but you can just consider him my security. We work as a team here—"

The guard takes a step forward and snatches the ID out of my hand while the other two guards step in front of the large locked door. He eyes us up and down, then looks over the card before shoving it back in my face.

"Move along. I don't really care what you have to sell. You're not in Ms. Briana's meeting schedule today, I suggest you don't show your face around here again unless you have official business."

I smile inwardly as I take the ID back. They're certainly up to par with my initial expectations, but I want to try one more thing before Bri gets all the way downstairs to stop my fun.

I pull out a handful of gold coins in one hand, and an earth element stone farmed from the 38th floor of the labyrinth in my other, creating mana shielding around it to make sure the excess earth magic flying off of it isn't too extreme.

"Come on, here, just a small token of my appreciation to let me pass, I want to sell this stone to your boss, there's no one else in the city that will give me a better price."

His eyes widen for a moment at the sheer amount of gold in my hand and the rarity of the stone I'm holding, but his iron will doesn't budge. He replies as the door behind him opens.

"It's still a no. There will be no customers allowed inside unless they are on Ms. Briana's invite list. This is not negotiable."

A familiar voice calls from behind them as Bri stares past the three guards straight at me with an amused look on her face.

"Let them through, boys. I can fit them in before my important meeting tonight. These two were just testing you. You passed."

She sighs and the three guards move aside with confusion while Ember and I walk through them.

I put the earth stone back in my pocket which leads to my item storage and flick three gold coins in the air behind me before placing the rest back in my storage too.

They land in the hands of the guards as the door closes behind us. Bri gives them a nod and turns with a smile.

"Keep up the good work."

The door shuts and we start walking upstairs to her office.

I allow my appearance to shift back to its normal undisguised state as we do.

"Nice to see you again so soon, Bri. This is Ember. We'll be working together from now on."

Bri turns to both of us, then shakes Ember's hand, trying to get a read on him as we walk up to the top floor.

"I don't know what is more intriguing; the fact that I can't sense even a drop of power coming off you even when you're using your magic, or this mysterious new friend you've brought to see me with the same energy readings. What happened while you were away...?"

We make it up to her office and I put up a [Hush] barrier while she illuminates the room.

"Well... Quite a lot actually, but I'll keep the summary short. We defeated the leader of Sector 1 and are actively expanding to take over the Dark Continent, I surpassed level 2000, and on top of that, secured six guaranteed trade deals with down payments that I need fulfilled in the next 30 days."

I reach into my item storage and pull out the stack of papers to place it down on her desk. Next to those papers, I give a list of all the available dungeons we have access to in the canyon in Sector 2 with their loot drops labeled next to them.

Her eyes turn to the papers and she walks around her desk to sit down and sift through them while Ember and I make ourselves comfortable on the soft seating arrangements in the room.

"Well... it seems you really have managed to get a lot done... Straight to business it is like usual. We'll have to make things quick here, like I said when you arrived, I really do have an important meeting I can't miss coming up tonight."

Bri doesn't say a word after that, flipping through the pages for almost a full minute in silence, writing things down on another paper next to the order forms, then hands me back a list of all of the item drops necessary from each dungeon down to the exact quality necessary.

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

"We can do it. The dungeons on this list can be farmed to craft exactly what you need. If you start getting us these materials by the end of this week, 21 days will be a tight schedule but we can get it done. I'll be paying my craftsmen the normal going rate, and—"

I place 22 platinum bars, and 50 gold coins down on her desk.

"Pay your workers whatever will keep them happy and working fast. Use the rest to reinforce your security even further and hire more workers out. Another workshop with extra space for expansion here might be worthwhile. I can only imagine these orders getting larger over time."

Bri stares at the bars of precious metal on her desk and nods.

"That will be more than enough..."

She writes down more notes on papers as I think to myself.

The money I've placed on her desk is half of the down payment I received from my orders. While I could easily pay Bri 10% of this amount and she'd be able to pay her workers handsomely already, I believe investing in her business savvy mind and expansion of size and speed of production in the future will be very valuable.

I plan on using the other half of the 25% down payment from the orders to put up bids for the exact amount of resources needed back in the guild hall in Sector 2.

I'll price it out perfectly so that hunters can get paid for farming materials in the dungeons based on how high the demand for the items I need are, and it will quickly fuel more growth in the economy.

I may be able to farm everything myself using my body doubles in just a few days, but building up trust with more people in the town, and building out a system that can grow more in the future is more essential to me than pure profit and saving time at the moment.

Even when it's all said and done, the payout for the remaining 75% of the goods, 135 platinum will be my profit cut.

Paying my new workers and citizens well to get the ball rolling is a perfect plan.

Considering this, I'm happy with these results and take the list of raw materials she needs with a smile.

"I'll have item boxes full of these goods being sent over to you on a daily basis starting very soon."

Placing the item list into my inventory, and allowing Bri to keep the copies of the orders that must be fulfilled, she places them in her desk with the piles of money large enough to build and pay for labor in 10 workshops just like this one right now if she needed.

I speak again.

"Now, I'd like to come up with a solution to our communication and transportation issue as well. Do you have a containment case that I could place some items in? I have a few raw materials I want to show you. They're pretty volatile and delicate, making it hard to show you what I have out in the

open without ruining the product. They're very small, so a mini containment case is fine, it just needs to be able to contain A-Grade items."

Bri nods, sifting through her desk and pulling out a small cylindrical jar that looks like it is completely glass other than the silver top and bottom.

It hums loudly like mana shielding, but gives off energy readings like an item box once she hands it over to me.

It interprets my intentions like an extension of myself once I touch it and imbue it with a tiny bit of mana. The top slides open, and I place a palm on top to open a spatial magic portal and allow a single fragment of luminite to fall out.

The instant it does, I close the silver top and hear a clink as it hits the bottom of the cylindrical containment contraption.

I stare at it for a moment, picturing the crystals disintegrating into thin air every time they were left out in the open desert when I farmed them. However, this one fragment doesn't change at all, it just sits in the containment jar and glows bright white.

With a grin, I place my hand over it again, and release the other five fragments into the containment artifact.

Some of them break apart into smaller pieces before the silver top closes, and others were already starting to shatter from falling through the air when I first caught them back in Sector 2.

Once the silver top closes, six collapsed dungeons worth of material sit inside glowing white and sparkling inside in suspended animation, lighting up an empty portion of Bri's desk once I set it down in front of her.

She whispers to herself.

"Luminite... you actually managed to find some..."

There's a moment of silence.

"You want to make your own teleport platform, don't you?"

She looks up to me and the bright stone reflects off her eyes to make them sparkle even more as I reply.

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm trying to do."

Bri picks up the containment case and looks closer at them, nodding her head and standing up to begin pacing around the room with excitement.

"I've contemplated many ways to make this work if the time ever came. I think with the amount you have here, there will be enough to make a single craft. We're going to need to construct a base platform first to imbue the materials. Then... we'll need a few million MP worth of mana crystals to support the energy needed as a catalyst for the craft."

She walks over to a small arrangement of artifacts on her back wall and turns a dagger 180 degrees. It clicks and a compartment in the wall opens up to reveal a small bookcase with less than a dozen old books inside it.

She takes one out, and the wall converts back to its original state while the dagger clicks back into place in the display.

She opens the book to a page that displays a very detailed drawing of the craft with messages sketched out that look just like my mythic grade craftsmanship interface. It is written in ink, making it clear that there is not another exact copy of this anywhere. Whoever made this book definitely had the same skill that I do, and the way to merge all of these items together becomes clear.

As the book and luminite is placed on a coffee table in the center of the room with all three of us staring at it, Ember speaks up for the first time while eyeing the book.

"There is one small problem you may want to consider before beginning the craft. Teleportation magic like this works differently than a skill or ability on one's status. It performs more like a dungeon would."

He points to a line in the book and keeps explaining.

"This kind of teleportation magic always comes back to a certain place on a map, not an object or living being. The platform we'll create is what stabilizes the luminite and mana input, but once the transport location is set, it won't be moved no matter where you position the physical platform. You're basically creating a geo-locked dungeon respawn point, like when you kill a boss in a dungeon, you're always sent back to the same place."

We all flip through the few pages that outline this craft in further detail, and Ember is completely right.

I speak up.

"Well, in that case, let's take a trip to Sector 2. I know just the place to make this craft."

I close the book while Ember sits back.

Bri looks hesitant for the first time at my words, then her gaze shifts to a clock on the opposite wall.

She walks over to her desk again before replying.

"Well, I'd love to come, but I have an important checkup meeting..."

She gulps.

"It's with the Association, I can't miss this..."

I remember back to when we first arrived and she said she had an important meeting right after ours. The fact that it is with the Association and her change in demeanor make me want to question her intentions, but I'm hit with a wave of telepathy from Ember before I speak up to ask.

"She's telling the truth. A very powerful Association worker is on their way here now."

He moves his gaze in the direction that he senses this person. I push my enemy detection skill outward to see what he's talking about; scanning the streets until I find the match about a full kilometer away walking through the lower income housing toward our exact location.

Her words begin to make much more sense.

A familiar A-Ranked hunter at [Lv.1391] with a series of confusing readings on his status rush into my mind's eye. I look Bri in the eyes and ask her a question.

"Your meeting later today, is it with your brother?"

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"It is. Why? Is he here?"

Bri looks around the room in a startled manner, spreading out her aura, but it doesn't reach as far as mine, so I reply by pointing at the wall nearest to the street.

"Not yet, we still have a few minutes before he arrives. Why is this such a big deal? I've seen him meet with you here before and it wasn't an issue to have me in the room."

She replies.

"This isn't just a casual sibling meetup. Rodrigo is coming to do the Association's monthly logged checkup. I advise you leave right now if you'd like to remain dead in their eyes. He'll be bringing a recording device with him. This meeting is meant to be unannounced, but he gives me a heads up when the dates get closer."

I open a spatial magic portal in response, letting the luminite in containment and book outlining its intended use into my item storage while standing to my feet.

"In that case, I hope you don't mind if I borrow this."

She nods and turns to her desk to begin organizing things and making sure no evidence of us meeting is left behind.

I continue to scan the A-Rank hunter walking our way and decide to examine the odd readings on his status again while I still have an opportunity to look at them.

The first thing I check are his skills, if I remember correctly he had light magic just like Bri, as well as a unique skill.

Respawn [i]

Combat Magic [Advanced Light Summoning]

At his level, he definitely has enough PP to upgrade these skills, but hasn't had the chance to do so it seems.

There are miscellaneous 100-200% stat boosting items on him, and a large blue diamond-shaped recording crystal just like the ones Lith gave me floats around him in a slow-moving circle as he walks through the streets.

At the bottom of his active item readings I see that he still is bonded with 4 demon cores just like I remember.

However, when looking at their readings, one looks a bit out of place.

[Arch Demon's Core] +150% All Stats

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

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

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

His Arch Demon's core feels slightly more dense than my own, and the stat reading on it reads like it's been combined with a Greater Demon's Core. There is no better explanation for its additional 50% stat buff and increased density.

This would be the most intriguing reading if my eye didn't catch his buff's sheet too.

[Hand of the Illusionist]

[Ultimate Attack Form of the Light Warrior]

[The Sun God's Curse Mark]

His first two buffs look like interesting ranked up buffs granted for reaching level 500 and 1000, but the 3rd buff on his status looks very familiar.

My eyes widen while reading it, so much so that I walk closer to the wall nearest to the street and expand my perceptions range further to get a perfect visual of him and my suspicions come true.

As the A-Rank hunter walks through the streets, an invisible golden collar rests around his neck.

It looks just like the collar I saw around the lightning wolf on the 40th floor of the Vice City Labyrinth.

His strength readings seem similar too. Rodrigo doesn't have any Qi or Soul Energy inside his body, but looks as if he's able to manipulate this golden energy with this buff [The Sun God's Curse Mark].

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

So many connections and theories begin to fly around in my mind, but I calmly take a deep breath and step back toward the couches and speak up.

"Actually, I think we'll stay and watch this meeting of yours."

I turn to Ember and share my stealth skill with him, and we both disappear into thin air for a few seconds and reappear on the far side of the room, leaning against the wall.

"You won't even know we're here... I just want to know what the association is up to these days. It's nothing personal."

Bri lets out a sigh and sits down at her desk, letting the room fall dark to its natural state that she leaves it in before visitors arrive, then replies.

"I sense his presence getting closer now too. Do as you wish. There may be a point in our meeting where the surveillance is cut, would you like to meet him again, for old times' sake? I'm sure Rodrigo will keep another secret for me."

I pause, thinking about this question for a moment before answering, but eventually do.

"Yes, I'd like to have a word with him. Give me a signal once it's safe to appear unmonitored. I'll decide then if I feel it is worth showing my face."

She nods, and I smile.

Ember and I disappear using stealth to watch from a back wall as another 2 minutes pass and footsteps start to echo up the stairs.

A man with olive skin just like Bri's, white eyes like a demon, dark hair, and the graceful walk of a dancer walks forward through the room.

A bright golden Soul Energy collar shines with intense light only visible to those with Qi senses.

White Light magic shines off both his and Bri's body in unison as the room lights up.

A faint blue glow illuminates from the recording crystal that circles around him and takes a moving picture and audio of everything in the room.

I can see its mana radiation seeping through everything in a 10-meter radius, but it's clear that this is just a high C grade, possibly low B Grade item. There's no possible way it can detect me and Ember where we stand.

Rodrigo takes a seat and speaks up.

"Good to see you again, Bri. I'm here for our monthly check-in."

He pulls a list out from an item box on his waist and begins to ask a series of questions in a robotic manor, not even waiting for his sister's response to his greeting.

The questions range from how her normal business is going, to if there are any reports of association members that have tried to contact her or any partners in the black market, and wanting an update on a special order for one of the Association's events in another region coming up in a few days.

Rodrigo expands on that final point.

"I picked up the goods in the lobby on my way up. The higher-ups thank you for the prompt response after the disappearance of the sector 2 leader. However, this past week the Vice region has made contact with another source that is said to produce just as much as the previous trade boss out there in the dark continent. If all goes well on that deal, I believe the Apex region will jump on next month's orders. That still doesn't give us enough time to prepare for the 8 nations coming together for the annual B-Class exams. We're going to need some help from a few trusted freelance craftsmen contractors like yourself."

Rodrigo hands a few more papers over to Bri and explains the terms, and basically doesn't allow her to say no.

"It's good money. 300 gold for a few weeks of work, that comes from the higher-ups so I need a verbal confirmation you can get it done."

Bri reluctantly nods and takes the papers.

"It's fine. I can get it done."

Rodrigo continues asking her generic questions from the list in his hand, and by the end of it, they both look tired and saddened by the situation they're both in.

I still don't know all the details of their arrangement, but from what I can assume just looking at this situation, one of the higher-ups has a tight Soul Energy leash around Rodrigo's neck and is using this as blackmail to keep everyone in line.

Someone capable of controlling an A-Rank hunter like this, but also has roots so deep that monsters in the Vice City Labyrinth are even inflicted by its curse mark must have immense power.

This is a meticulous person. There is much more to this than I can see on the surface.

Even the Vice Region's Director, Brutus, doesn't seem to be the true leader pulling the strings to all of this.

He wears a golden ring with similar Soul Energy to Rodrigo's collar, but they are both just pawns in someone else's game. I'm sure there are missing pieces to this puzzle that I have yet to see.

I stand in full stealth mode observing the rest of the conversation, trying to pick apart any extra details he will drop, and wait for Bri's signal or get a visual that the surveillance has ended, but the time doesn't come.

The interrogation continues until the sun goes down, and Rodrigo points to the blue glowing gem that slowly spins around him.

"Oh, now would you look at the time. The recording space is almost up. I need to get this meeting file back to headquarters as soon as possible."

He stands up from his seat and shakes Bri's hand.

She replies in an artificially happy tone.

"Of course, it's always nice to see you brother."

"You too, sister, I'll see you next month."

They smile and the A-Rank hunter turns to leave while the blue gem that spins around him loses altitude and stops glowing as bright with mana as before.

As soon as he makes it to the stairs, the gem falls into his palm and stops emitting waves of mana.

He grins and places the crystal into the item box then turns around to let out a long sigh that turns into a groan of distaste.

His face relaxes and he speaks.

"About damn time. I swear they keep making those recordings longer and longer. Finally, we can talk without my boss looking over my shoulder after every word."

He sprawls out on the couches in the middle of the room, and I see Bri lighten up a lot too.

"Alright, anything goes now. No more wires we can say whatever we want for about 30 minutes before I need to actually get going back."

Bri's serious business expression fades, and that of a concerned and compassionate older sister comes over her as she stands from her desk.

She walks over to sit down next to him and he speaks up again while she gets comfortable.

"You got a lot stronger since the last time I was here... Did you finally find a way to rank up as well? I heard Brutus has the labyrinth on lockdown recently. Only Elites and B-Class are allowed to enter these days."

She smiles back.

"Yes, I managed to rank up. And well- maybe you'd be interested in meeting the one that helped me do it."

Her gaze turns to the back wall where Ember and I disappeared before, and I take this as a cue to finally make my presence known.

Chapter 504

We both reappear from the back wall, and I take a few steps forward before Rodrigo turns his head to lock eyes with me.

He doesn't say a word as I walk closer and expand my [Hush] barrier throughout the room to make sure only the ears inside can listen.

His expression is one of confusion. I've changed quite a lot since the last time we met, both physically and mentally.

In his eyes, I may have just been a passerby, another random client of his sister's who happened to also be an association hunter that died in a dangerous mission to the dark continent a while back.

There's a very low chance he'd even remember who I am if I still looked and gave off the same energy readings as I did the last time we met.

Despite this, his eyes widen once I get close enough.

"It's you... was it—Jay—right? One of this year's new Elites. I was told you died. You're that hunter that collapsed the labyrinth under my nose during the last C-Class exams... I never did get a replacement core for that."

He eyes me with a stern glare, and I can't help but let out a chuckle if that's all he remembers me for.

It seems like a lifetime ago that happened, but I guess to him it hasn't been quite as long.

I reply, "Yes. It's me."

As I reply, I can't help looking at the bright golden collar around his neck, watching the soul energy swirl around him at a constant rate and occasionally crackle.

I put out a hand to shake his.

"I assume now that the recording devices are off, everything said in this room will be kept between us, right? I don't want the Association knowing I still exist."

He shifts his gaze to Bri, and she gives him a nod. He turns back to me and shakes my hand.

"Sure, it seems the secret of you being alive is connected to Bri somehow, so it's in my best interest not to say a word."

He makes a twisting motion on his lips and throws away an imaginary key.

"I won't say a word."

Green energy comes off his body only visible to my lie detector skill, telling me he's being truthful, but I still have one concern.

"What about your curse mark...? Do I have to worry about this so-called sun god learning of my existence even if you're trying to keep my presence unknown?"

He releases my hand from his grip, and I can hear his heart skip a beat, even though he keeps a calm outer demeanor.

Rodrigo squints, then starts to scan me up and down.

"How do you even know about this...?"

I feel his mana aura go right through both of us, but without soul energy, he won't be able to detect anything at all.

He speaks up again and his hands start to glow white with light magic.

"Someone must have set you up to ask that question... how do you know about that, tell me!"

Bri yells out, "Rodrigo! Stop it, these are my guests! I trust Jay. Please, answer any questions you can to help him."

He pauses in place, but keeps his fists glowing, and rightfully so.

"No- The curse mark doesn't relay any messages or truths to its owner. It works like a sharp knife to the inflicted one's neck. Either the person wearing it obeys or they die. Your words are safe... don't worry."

I reply in a calm tone while both Ember and I sit down on a couch on the opposite side of the room.

"Good. That may not have been the right way to re-introduce myself back from the dead, but it's the only way I could think of breaking the ice. Let's just say, while I was said to be dead in the dark continent, I got around and learned quite a few things."

I point to myself.

"I'm not the weak C-Class hunter you used to know... if anything, you're the weak one now."

I cross my arms and sit back, letting tendrils of dark red Soul Energy seep from my body.

In a physically manifested form, the pure mana in Soul Energy like this can be sensed, but its true power isn't able to be registered unless one has the Qi-based perception that I do.

This is clear by Rodrigo's eyes tracking the energy and his aura getting far thicker to try to make sense of this red light.

His expression shows that he doesn't believe me.

"Yeah right... I know you somehow helped my sister rank up, but there's no way you managed to get stronger than me in a month. It's physically impossible."

He chuckles to himself, thinking that my line about him being the weak one was a joke. I could release a pure mana imbued aura to show him how strong I really am, but the fact that he thinks I'm still a weakling seems to be making him a lot more at ease and talkative.

So, I decide to let him believe this and speak up again.

"I have a unique ability that can take that curse off your status, I believe you'll be free of that golden collar if you wish. I just want the name, location, and level of this Sun God in return."

Rodrigo watches the red energy float around me in a slow swirling circle, and waits a few seconds to reply.

"Whatever this cursed energy is, it is similar to the kind I'm able to wield. However, it is impossible to stack up to the Sun God's golden power. I've tried everything I can to get this curse off for years. Even millions of MP concentrated into singular attacks do not affect it at all."

He sighs.

"Even if you really could take this curse off of me, Mr. Freeman is not a man I can easily escape from. No—he's not a man any mere mortal could dream to disobey... Ridding me of this curse mark will not set me free. It will only put a target on my back and everyone I've been in contact with."

His gaze turns to Bri.

At his words, I slowly begin to retract the Red Soul Energy to think about what he's said. The name sounds just like a man Lith warned me about the last time I mentioned the Association to him.

As the energy seeps back into my body, I reply, "So then, Mr. Freeman, this is the man pulling all the strings? Who is he?"

Rodrigo doesn't reply for a few seconds.

"You really want to know...?"

I nod, leaning in closer.

"Even knowing this information could put you in far more danger. Are you sure?"

I nod again.

"I'm already dead to them, they can't possibly want to kill me more."

He sighs.

"Well—it's not really a secret... If you search through the old public records, a good amount of information can be found. Most people just don't know where to look. He is the oldest and most powerful registered A-Class Hunter across all 8 regions and throughout all 4 Sectors. Mr. Freeman is the Regional Director of the Apex Region. However, all 7 other Directors fall in line to his demands. He is the unspoken leader of the Association on this side of the world."

My thoughts go racing for a moment as I try to conceptualize what Rodrigo is saying to me right now.

"So he calls all the shots? Does this mean your orders today to come out here and do monthly check-ins are his doing?"

Rodrigo nods.

"Of course. My main orders come from the Apex Director, but I'm a bit of a special case. I report to all of the Regional Directors, actually. The Vice Region is one of many stops. I report and clean up large dungeon breaks, manage labyrinth stability, and take care of a good amount of the C-Class

exam proctoring. If it were up to me, I'd be fighting monsters and getting stronger by any means necessary, but my free time is rather limited these days."

I nod and ask another question in response.

"That means the Regional Directors get orders directly from him too?"

He nods again, and I think back to the time I saw Brutus for a split second after testing out that cursed element stone on a dungeon out in the forest.

"The Directors don't have curse marks though. They wear rings."

Rodrigo nods again, smiling, and responds.

"This is true. You're very well informed... The 7 Directors from the Vice, Bedrock, Talton, Veridian, Silca, Raya, and Phantom Region are all gifted with rings that work just like Mr. Freeman's power. They're all capable of controlling the high ranked Hunters with the curse."

I think for a moment longer, before responding.

"Why doesn't he just give them curse marks too?"

Rodrigo laughs.

"He doesn't have to. Perception of power and freedom is everything in this world. The only way to get access to resources to become even close to as strong as the Apex Region's leader would be to take the helping hand of the Association. Those that have talent and are able to gain strength are branded with a curse..."

He points to himself, implying that he is one of those few.

"Those without any hope of ever gaining enough power on their own to overthrow his rule are given the opportunity to wield his power as a loyal servant."

Rodrigo scoffs.

"None of the Regional Directors are even close to A-Rank. They are granted wealth and power by the Association, and can be replaced at the snap of a finger by another power-leveled nobleman or businessman at any time. The corruption in this organization stems far deeper than anyone knows..."

He looks at me, then at Bri, then back to me with a sigh and a saddened stare.

"I appreciate the thought. You may have survived a few weeks on your own in the dark continent and think you've learned the secrets of the world, but I've thought of ways to free myself from this organization for many years. I'm one of the strongest Registered Hunters in the entire Association. If anyone could manage a way out it would be me."

He lets out a sigh of defeat, but I respond.

"I think you still underestimate me. I may seem weak and naive to you still, but I assure you I would not run head first into a fight I don't believe I have any chance of winning."

I pause for a moment.

"Is there any way you could get me to the Apex region? I just want to get a single glance at this man. It would be enough for me to know what I'm working with."

Rodrigo laughs again.

"Impossible. The Apex Region's Director only shows his face to A-Rank Hunters and other Regional Directors in board meetings. The public hasn't seen his face in decades. This is why his name has been forgotten in time. Only those that care to look through the old records or very influential business figures remember him from his contributions in the Great War."

Rodrigo stops talking and looks up to the ceiling as if he's remembering something important, then continues.

"Well—actually—there is one way you could lay your eyes on him if you really wanted to. However, It's basically a death sentence."

More green light flows off of him from my lie detector skill as I can tell every word he's speaking to me is the full truth.

I grin and respond.

"Now we're getting somewhere. Where can I see this man for myself?"

He turns to look me in the eyes and responds.

"Well, a select few contestants that rank exceptionally on the B-Class exams are put on an accelerated progression track. Kind of like the Elites of the Elites. Only a handful are chosen out of all of the applicants from all 8 regions every year. These members have the privilege... or rather... death sentence of training under Mr. Freeman himself to get the chance of becoming an A-Rank hunter, or dying for the Association while striving to become one of these chosen few."

I turn to Ember and open a telepathy link.

"What do you think about Mr. Freeman? He said he was in the Great War. That was 50 years ago... you were alive then, right? Was there a Sun God? Do you recognize this golden Soul Energy? Are we dealing with another Divine Beast?"

Ember turns to Rodrigo and looks at his neck for a moment, but shakes his head and responds to my question through our link.

"No. None of these names are familiar to me. There isn't even a guarantee that these two are the same person. This figure must have gone by something else back in that era. Its soul energy is not one of the Divine Beasts, however, it is familiar..."

There's a long pause, but Ember speaks again.

"If this is your next target, I believe we should assess this threat for ourselves. If this is really the only chance we have of organically meeting the figure in question, I say let's do it."

I nod, and smile inwardly.

Then, I turn to Rodrigo and reply.

"Great. It's about a month away, right? That should be enough time to prepare... I'd like to apply to become a B-Class Hunter. I'm sure you can fit in a few new last minute applicants into this year's exam."

Chapter 505

"No way! Are you crazy? You want me to sign your death sentence? You already narrowly escaped it by a hair once; there's no point in going back to the Association if you don't have to."

He eyes me and Ember up and down.

"Plus, are you guys even ranked up? One of the requirements for entering that exam is hitting level 500. Based on the near non-existent mana readings I feel coming off you, I think you'd be killed off in the first combat round of the exams."

He shakes his head with disapproval, but I reply with a shrug.

"I didn't ask if you thought I was strong enough. I just want you to get me into the exams."

He looks at me again and hesitates before responding.

"No, there's still no way. Even if you have a death wish, don't drag me into it. They'd most definitely recognize you and see through any appraisal-blocking items you own. The instant they realize who you are, and I'm the one who recommended you, my head is on the line here too. There will be multiple A-Rank proctors, it's impossible—"

He stops mid-sentence as I use my conceal skill along with my cloak to change my outfit, face, and even allow a small aura of mana similar to that of a level 500 hunter to make the disguise even better.

"Nothing is impossible..."

His mouth is left open as his aura goes through me, trying to piece together what just happened and see through my disguise while Bri lets out a chuckle.

She interjects.

"I can get them new Hunter IDs this week. I'm sure there are a few C-Class Association workers that went missing over the last few weeks out in one of the other regions. It won't be too hard to borrow a few identities for the exams."

Rodrigo nods and murmurs to himself.

"You're right... It's possible."

He continues looking at Ember and me for a few seconds, sending wave after wave of mana through us, but his expression only gets more confused.

"What is this? I can't see through it. What kind of concealment item is this? It even suppressed your mana control before..."

He pauses, then shakes his head, snapping himself out of confusion.

"No way, it's still a no. Just because you've managed to block my eyes with some A-Grade item doesn't mean you'll be able to fool all the proctors."

He shakes his head again, and I believe him this time.

It's true.

I may be able to conceal myself from those at a lower level than me and those that do not use any Qi-based power, but the holder of this Sun God's Curse mark will be able to see my true form... I'm almost sure of it.

A telepathy link opens between Ember and me as I continue to ponder this point. Even more so than me, if he were to come to the exams with me, a dragon in human form would stick out far more than just a hunter with Soul Energy.

He speaks through the link.

"If you're worried about our presence being seen by other Soul Energy users, I believe I am strong enough now to make an artifact capable of hiding us from those wandering eyes... However, it will take time. A lot of it."

I raise an eyebrow, wondering what kind of artifact Ember has in mind that can block a Soul Energy user's perception.

"Will the month leading up to the exam be enough?"

"I'm not sure, but if this is the only chance we have, I will make it work."

I smirk and nod, cutting the link and speaking out loud again to Rodrigo.

"Fine. If you don't believe me, how about we spar? If I win, you'll get us a spot in the upcoming B-Class exams. If I lose, we'll get out of your hair and stop causing you any trouble."

He grins on the spot and starts to laugh out loud.

"Now we're talking. This is all it'll take to get you to give up on this? Deal. How about I take both of you on, just to give you a fighting chance? If either one of you can manage to stay upright for a full minute while fighting me, I'll get you both into the exams. How about that?"

I smirk and stand to my feet, putting out a hand for him to shake.

"Let's do it, right now. There's a dungeon right downstairs in the black market."

He shakes my hand and turns his head to the clock on the wall.

"Sounds good to me. I have to get leaving soon anyway, might as well show you what the true power of an A-Ranked Association Hunter looks like before I go."

All four of us stand from the couches and walk toward the spiral stairs, heading down into the black market to walk toward the small underground dungeon hub.

To not be recognized, Bri hands out small concealment rings and we don't talk much on the way over, but the moment we hop into one of the less crowded lower-grade dungeons and find a flat untouched area of grassland in the back of one of them, the rings come off.

On our way through the dungeon, we agree to the terms of our fight. A 60-second sparring match. If either Ember or I are still standing by the end of it, we win. If anyone surrenders, the other party wins. Either party is allowed to use any gear or weapons they wish.

Rodrigo decides not to use any, so Ember and I decide to hold off on weapons too but I mention that I'll most likely be testing out a sword later in this battle.

Bri stands far away on top of a steep hill to watch, holding a small digital stopwatch.

"The fight will begin once the first punch is thrown."

Rodrigo faces off against myself and Ember, speaking up while placing his fists in front of him.

"Don't hold back. I want you to aim to kill. I have a unique skill that allows me to respawn in the exact same form and place I last slept twice per waking cycle. Not that you'll land a finger on me, but I thought I might as well let you know because I don't want you to limit yourselves."

At these words, I do remember him sharing an item with a similar effect during the C-Class exams. He gave out a charm for everyone to wear that allowed them to respawn after death with their body and memory intact.

It is a very overpowered skill... With something like this, the fearlessness he has going into battle is exactly what an A-Ranked fighter needs. No wonder he rose the ranks in the Association so far, and it makes sense why someone would want a tight leash on him.

However, just like all mana-based skills, if a hunter does not have access to the system, or their MP is too low, it cannot be activated. So, his offer to go all out would make sense for the perception of the weak hunter I'm showing him, but if I really went all out, it wouldn't end well, I'm sure of it.

Ember looks at me, and I shrug, putting my hands up and speaking to him through our link.

"Go easy, and not just instantly send him back to his respawn. Let's win this, but at least do it by surviving the full minute to run some tests and see what kind of fighter he is."

Ember laughs out loud, severing the link and putting his fists up too.

"I'll try my best."

We both lunge forward and the clock in Bri's hand starts to count down from 60.

Rodrigo runs forward too, with bright white glowing fists and blinding speed.

I see the air ripple behind him as he doesn't wait at all to activate his first ranked-up buff [Hand of the Illusionist].

Dozens of copies of him start to trail behind his original body and spread out as we get closer to each other, creating a mirage-like effect of us being surrounded by lifelike images of him.

It would be very confusing, if I couldn't see straight through it with the Soul Energy floating through my eyes.

Both Ember and I still play along and dodge and weave through all of the punches of the illusions until we make our way close enough to his real body.

Rodrigo doesn't hold back at all.

His fully charged light magic fist comes rocketing toward me, and I move my right arm in the way to block.

An echoing crack sounds through the dungeon as my forearm stops his fist in place.

The shockwave dissipates all of his illusions and he jumps backward with wide eyes and a smile.

"You blocked my punch. Not too bad actually... I underestimated you. How about your friend?"

He runs at Ember to my right side and throws a similar punch, only to have the same echoing shockwave of rippling light magic flow through the dungeon.

He comes at us with even more speed and power next, throwing multiple punches and kicks per second while we block them effortlessly and follow his patterns while the 1-minute clock ticks down.

Bri's voice calls out from high up on the hill.

"Fifty seconds left!"

At this, Rodrigo's punches and kicks get faster and the mana imbued into them are far more extreme.

His power is impressive, and his baseline mana control is on par, if not even higher, than Fisher and Lydia's.

He's a legit fighter that could take out 39th-floor labyrinth monsters with mana alone.

The demon cores significantly increase his stats, but the items he wears could be optimized more.

Ember and I increase our own power output the further he pushes his.

"Forty Seconds!" Bri yells.

His speed and power reach heights that are nearing his max, and he starts to get agitated.

"Impossible! How are you keeping up with me still? Your speed, power, your mana control, it's rising..."

He starts activating his [Hand of the Illusionist] mid-stride, sending out dozens of copies as we're about to attack again, and we ignore them, weaving through the copies to finally land hits of our own on Rodrigo.

The punch I throw would easily have broken through the hard outer shell of the sand worms on the 38th floor and possibly even killed an Elite Minotaur on the 39th.

However, he takes it head-on and is pushed backward by the blast of his mana shielding breaking.

"Thirty More Seconds, halfway there!" Bri calls out as the dust and debris clear.

"Fine, I'll show you my ranked-up form. You two are strong, stronger than I assumed. You would actually stand a good chance in surviving the B-Class exams, but I won't risk my own life on that gamble."

His body glows white and grows about 2.5x in size into an armored warrior made of pure light magic. It holds two long white blades of light in each hand and gives off a pure white aura. It is definitely his second ranked-up buff [Ultimate Attack Form of the Light Warrior], but I don't intend for him to use this for long.

We run forward at its form and I coat my arms in far denser mana than I was using before.

Ember does the same and we begin trading blows back and forth with the enormous white knight.

Its energy blades collide with our shielded arms and we punch back, sending the light magic user backward to his utter surprise.

"Only twenty seconds remain!" Bri's voice echoes through the battlefield.

At this warning, Rodrigo gets serious and takes a moment to step back and combines the white light magic swords into one thick blade.

He holds an enormous glowing white sword in the air that hums with mana and makes everything around us ripple and wave. The air itself looks like it's about to melt.

It twists and turns and the figure is surrounded by a flash of blinding white light.

At the same time, nearly a hundred more blinding flashes of light fill the dungeon as the illusion of more knights fills my vision.

I stop in my tracks and turn to Ember while pulling my new [Dark Emperor's Blade] out from my inventory.

"Let me handle this one. I believe the fight will be over shortly. I want to test out my new weapon... There's more than enough targets to try it on here."

It feels extremely heavy in my hands. Its mass is still equal to the 100m long Lich King's scythe it was crafted from. Black waves of dark magic ooze out from the sword meant for war.

One of the most interesting traits of dark magic is its ability to negate all mana-based attacks. I imbue more dark magic into the blade using my superior dark summoning skill and it gushes more and more with the black energy.

Mana from the dungeon floor beneath my feet is being ripped away and sucked into the blade the longer I hold it.

I lunge forward as Ember steps back.

Every illusion of the Light Warrior I pass is engulfed by the darkness of my sword.

One by one, they're all swallowed away into a void of darkness as I creep closer to the real body of my attacker.

He swings his sword my way, and all I do is raise my black blade to block; I don't even attempt to swing this weapon.

The instant the light sword gets within range of mine, I feel its attack power growing weaker.

Mana is being drained from my own body to power this special effect, but it is negligible compared to the amount I can plunder from the dungeon below me.

Rodrigo is caught in my trap.

His weakening white blade against my mana-eating black sword stands no chance.

"Ten seconds! Ten seconds left!" Bri yells as the entire white manifested sword is sucked away into my blade, and the outer shell of the white armor starts to fall into it too.

My eyes widen as I feel the black blade's hunger for power and energy grow by the second.

It drains more mana from me the longer I hold it, and eats away all of the mana fueling Rodrigo's attacks the longer he's near the blade.

All I did was block his strike, and these are the catastrophic aftereffects.

Excitement grows inside me as I watch the entire white suit of armor sink into my weapon and disappear, dismantling his ranked up buff in seconds and leaving Rodrigo without a drop of MP remaining, standing right next to the black sword.

Without any magic to take, the blade turns its attention to the dungeon itself, and continues using power being channeled through my body.

The floor around me indents as dungeon mass begins to drain away from the orb of darkness that starts to surround me.

I feel the immense power growing more and more, and realize this is just the beginning. If I gave it enough energy, this entire dungeon could be negated and collapsed...

At this realization of its true power, I open my item storage and try to let go of the sword to let it fall inside.

However, my hands stay tightly grasped around the handle, like an invisible wave of gravity is holding them in place to siphon more power through me into the sword.

I don't hesitate to slice both of my hands off at the wrists right above my gauntlets using a string of dense mana and let the blade fall into my item storage.

It is an eerie power. The longer I hold that blade, I have a feeling the harder it will be to let go of it. Its sentient nature feels similar to my Flame Emperor's Sword the first time I tried to control it but wasn't strong enough to do so yet. This time it feels a bit more ominous.

The growing black aura dissipates the moment my sword disappears, and I regenerate my hands while retrieving my rings and gauntlets back from my item storage.

Rodrigo jumps backward while absorbing mana in the atmosphere while putting his shielding back up and stares at me with a dazed expression.

"W-What the hell was that?"

It's clear I legitimately caught him off guard for a moment. He knows it too. If I was really aiming to kill, that would have been the time to do so.

I shrug and a voice rings out from the hilltop, "Five more seconds!"

Before I can respond, it's as if a serious switch has been turned on and the air pressure in the battlefield changes...

Rodrigo's mana has almost fully restored itself now after that unexpected event and a golden glow shimmers in his eyes.

"You got lucky, but lost your chance. It doesn't matter. Whatever that was, no fancy enchanted items will save you from this. I didn't want to use this, but it's my only hope at taking both of you out before the time is up."

The golden Soul Energy around his neck begins to expand and his eyes glow golden as the power spreads over his whole body and he lunges forward at me.

His eyes dart back and forth from me to Ember, already calculating his next move to end the battle here and now.

I smile and let dark red tendrils of energy flood out from my core to cover my arms and block his incoming golden shimmering punch.

The impact of his fist on my forearm sends both of our Soul Energies flying through the air in an explosive collision.

I'm thoroughly surprised by the power of his blow.

Even when using a fairly dense level of Soul Energy, I'm thrown backward through the air.

However, so is he at about the same speed. Both of our faces show expressions of mild shock.

I assumed his power would be similar to the 6th or 5th ranked Dark Guards.

However, there are small fragments of golden light left behind in my Soul Energy even 30 meters away after being blown back from that blast. It eats away at my Qi and mana stores, but there isn't much residue left on me so I overpower it quickly.

The same goes for Rodrigo, dark red Soul Energy is left behind in his aura after he's hit by the blast, and even though it's strong, the overwhelming amount of golden energy that floods out from him manages to disintegrate the residue I left behind.

If I were to gauge his strength now just based on our first exchange of punches, his Soul Energy is similar to the 2nd Ranked Dark Guard. Maybe even stronger...

We both look down at the contact points in awe at the other's strength, then a final yell comes from on top of the hill watching over the battle.

"That's it. Time is up! The winners by timeout are Jay and Ember! No more fighting you three, the spar is over!"

Chapter 506

As Bri yells out that the match is over, another voice responds while a beam of golden light erupts into the sky.

"Double or nothing! Ten more seconds, what do you say, Jay? Take me on alone. I wasn't aware the power you wield is cursed energy too..."

Rodrigo turns his head toward me with sharp eyes and his whole body glowing gold.

By cursed energy, he must mean Soul Energy. It seems the Association calls it something different.

I respond with my fists raised, covering them in red Soul Energy and shielding the rest of my body with a layer thick enough to block any of his blows if needed.

"What's in it for me? I already won our bet; taking you on now would only be a risk."

Truthfully, I want to fight him to see how powerful he actually is. I'm certain I can win, but I might as well get more out of this if I can.

He responds.

"What do you want? Same rules, 10 more seconds fighting. If I win, you're not getting an invite to the exams. If you win, you'll get—"

I interject as I think of something that I desire.

"Let me make 20 respawn items using your skill as a catalyst. If I win, you let me make them."

I smirk as his expression changes to annoyance.

"I'm property of the Association. I can't be giving out their resources like that without authorization..."

I cross my arms.

"So, you're saying you'll lose?"

I shrug and start to turn away, but he calls out.

"Fine. I'll let you make 1 respawn item. It may take a few tries, but I'm confident Bri can craft one with enough of my blood. The only condition is you cannot sell it. The item has to be worn by you alone."

I continue turning and shake my head.

"Not worth it. If you're so worried about it being illegal, then 1 is just as bad as 20. I'll just take my invite to the B-Class exams, no need to fight more."

He grits his teeth, and I see the golden light around him grow even denser.

"Five. I'll give you five."

I turn around.

"Make it 15, and I want to give them to my close allies. I don't like this rule that only I can wear them."

He pauses and looks me in the eyes as red aura seeps from my fists at the same rate the golden light radiates from his body.

"10 crafts. You and your allies only. I can be killed for a stunt like this, you know."

I grin.

"Deal."

Bri starts the clock again on the top of the hill, but Rodrigo doesn't wait for her words to start; he lunges forward at me with everything he has.

Our punches and kicks fly.

The Soul Energy collisions make the physical dungeon mass vibrate and echo. All of the hunters within a few kilometers doing their normal farming can definitely sense there is something happening deep in the dungeon even without any Qi-based perception.

I block every one of Rodrigo's incoming punches and kicks.

They feel almost 50% stronger than the one he threw at me at the end of our last fight, and I can tell he's really giving this his all by his instant heavy breathing and sweat dripping down his forehead.

Tens of meters of dungeon mass are stripped away with every blow, and I have to actively use strong Soul Energy to block each of his strikes.

My base stats are many times higher than his own just because of the level gap and my high-grade gear, but I still activate my stat-boosting buffs to keep up with him and not miss hits to take any unnecessary damage.

After 42 blocks in a row in less than 5 seconds, and a massive crater in the grassland dungeon being formed, I whisper out loud while dodging his incoming golden punch with ease and hitting him back with a blow three times as powerful as the strongest one he's thrown at me so far just to give him a taste of what I can do.

"You're not a bad fighter, let's see if you can take a hit."

It makes contact with his stomach, and I see his eyes roll back in his head for a moment as his golden Soul Energy is pierced right through.

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Rodrigo is rocketed backward over 100 meters, ripping through the remaining dirt in the crater we fight in. However, before his momentum stops, he regains consciousness and activates his ranked-up buff with soul energy imbued into it as well.

A 5-meter tall golden knight digs its feet into the dungeon floor and rockets back toward me.

I use the same power from the attack I just threw and let it soak my entire body with red aura.

I take the ranked-up Soul Energy imbued Light Warrior on in my base form, just using basic Soul Energy shielding, going blow for blow with it.

Now, the vibrations and energy waves coming off of Rodrigo are of a similar caliber to the destruction brought about by one of the 1st Ranked Dark Guards in their split form. Minus the base stats and lack of high-grade items limiting his pure strength and speed, Rodrigo is among one of the strongest beings I've ever laid eyes on.

I wasn't expecting the fight to go this far, but with less than 2 seconds left on the timer that Bri holds, I'm sure he's finally reached his limit.

I jump forward and let out even more of my soul energy, doubling my power again, cloaking my fists in soul energy so dark and dense it looks black.

"I'm impressed, Rodrigo. You were right. A-Rank Hunters are strong, but I am stronger."

In a flash of red, my fist makes contact with the outer golden glow of the soul energy imbued ranked-up buff and shatters it instantly. A wave of blood-red light pushes Rodrigo back and disintegrates his armor while also obliterating a cylindrical path through the dungeon mass that he's blown back into.

Bri's voice yells out. "Time! That's time! Time is up, guys! Stop fighting!"

At her words, I instantly stop expelling aura and cease firing off my attack.

Despite this, Rodrigo is still rocketed backward a few hundred meters into a nearby rock wall, and it is obliterated into fragments of stone.

The dungeon is left in silence for a moment as I power all the way down, and Ember breaks the tension.

"Nice one, Jay. That guy was pretty strong... The curse mark he bears is far stronger than the Lich King's was."

Ember nods his head, and I agree, wiping a small bead of sweat from my own forehead.

"You're right. Rodrigo is a formidable fighter. I might have lost if I tried to challenge him before the war..."

Bri comes walking down the hill toward us, and at the same time a white glowing figure comes floating out of the rubble and floats over.

Rodrigo is beat up, covered in burns and bruises, and knows he's lost, but there's a satisfied expression on his face as he touches down in front of me.

"You win. I believe you really do know what you're getting yourself into now. You definitely won't die at the exams with power like that. Well, not to another applicant at least. Thank you for showing me I'm not just getting you into this exam to create another slave for the association to throw around. Jay, maybe you will be the one to set us free..."

He smirks, then catches a green potion I toss to him.

It's the first Mythic Grade Self Regeneration Potion I've ever made, and he drinks it without questioning it to be anything other than a standard HP potion.

Instantly, the burns and bruises all over his body disappear, his heavy breathing stops, and all of his fatigue completely fades away the moment the green liquid touches his lips.

I put out a hand to shake his after he's healed and reply.

"Glad to see you think I won't die. What a nice way to phrase things..."

I roll my eyes and chuckle.

"Now, to get what we bet for, let me get those crafts."

He nods and responds.

"Sure- I'll drop off some blood for Bri to use late this week. One thing you should know; If someone wearing one of those charms is killed with the energy of a curse mark, they don't respawn. It only works from pure mana based attacks."

I raise an eyebrow at his statement, but don't hesitate to pull 10 item drops from floor 31-39 in the labyrinth, ranging from fangs to scales to horns, and craft them all into rings, amulets, and charms while imbuing the [Respawn] skill into them while I'm still making contact with Rodrigo's hand.

It only takes an instant, and his eyes widen with shock when I let the items fall into my storage less than a second later and release my grip.

"Done. You have my word, no one from the association will ever get their hands on these. Now, you hold up your second part of the bet, get me and Ember a spot in the upcoming exams."

He stares down at the place where the 10 items disappeared into my storage and replies, but not to my statement.

"W-What do you mean done? Imbuing skills into items is a gamble. Every time Bri does it, it usually takes dozens of tries and liters of blood before she can even get one right... what kind of ability do you have..."

Bri interjects.

"Brother, that's not for you to worry about. Jay's crafting ability far surpasses my own."

I add to her remark.

"It may even surpass the old Sector 2 leader soon if you'd believe it. I heard there's new management with exceptional talent accepting new trade deals in the Dark Continent."

Gears begin turning in his head as he realizes who this new hidden contact for trade deals that many regions have just started doing trade with is, and puts together even more connections that his sister must be helping with the high order volume too.

He speaks up, in a much more professional tone now.

"Right... With the recent dungeon surges, the expansion of the abyss, and fall of leadership in the Dark Continent, it seems there may be a lot of change happening in this world. However, do not underestimate the Association just based on my performance... I may be strong, but there are stronger enemies with much deeper ties of loyalty to the Association than me."

He points to his golden glowing collar.

"This is not the only thing that keeps us in line. If you're truly going to challenge them, take your time and calculate every move you make."

He lets out a sigh, and I nod, then silence falls among us all.

Bri speaks next.

"Don't you think you should be getting back about now?"

Rodrigo nods and turns to the direction of the dungeon exit.

"Yes. It is about time. I should be off now. I'll make contact with you again next week. I assume by then you will have the fake ID names for these two. I'll have them registered as last-minute applicants."

He turns to me and Ember.

"This was fun. Thank you for opening my eyes. I still don't like any part of this... but a bet's a bet. You have my word I'll get you in. You better get even stronger than you already are. Whatever you're planning to do in the exams, don't leave any part of it to chance."

We both nod, and Rodrigo flies off toward the dungeon exit to go back to the Association and hand in the blue recording crystal of his meeting with Bri.

Ember speaks up once he's gone.

"Well then, now that that's out of the way, how about we start on making that teleport platform."

Bri nods.

"My schedule is definitely clear now."

I place a hand on both her and Ember's shoulders.

"Good to hear. I'll bring us to the craft site now. We should have everything we need to create the platform here."

I dungeon walk us into the canyon of dungeons.

"Bri, I'd like to show you the home base I'm building in Sector 2. This is where the first teleport platform will be created."

We step out of the dungeon exit and walk up the stone walkway to see the setting red-orange sun shining down rays onto a long path leading to the town being built in the distance.

"Welcome to the Crimson City."

Chapter 507

We make our way into the underground bunker, and I point to an open section of white flooring on the side of the room nearest the stairs.

The portion of the room with loot and materials can be sectioned off with the movable wall if need be.

"I'd like to build the first teleport platform right here."

I put the luminite and old book from my item storage in the center of the room, letting them float in the air with telekinesis and sift through the pages until the design we were looking at before comes up.

Bri, Ember, and I sit around the items and discuss the information while I pull out piles of mana crystals that equal millions of MP necessary for the craft.

On top of this, a very sturdy high-grade platform is needed to use as the imbue item.

Bri says she has some material back in her workshop that would be sufficient, or we could salvage some of the shielding from the room here, or even merge some of the B-Class items in the crates near the back wall to create a platform for this craft.

However, I have an even better idea for a base material that is higher grade and sturdy enough for this craft.

"How about we use some of the scrapped shielding from the two buildings in Sector 1 that are being taken apart right now? I'm sure that would be more than enough to use for this platform and many others to come."

I use telepathy to call one of my body doubles in the nearby area to come down, and in a matter of seconds, it comes walking down the stairs.

Ember replies.

"That's a good idea. It will be quite an efficient material for this craft. We won't need much, just a 5 by 5 meter solid cut should be more than enough."

I nod and turn to my double while throwing it a transport crystal to the Galeheart Tower.

"You heard him, we need some A-Grade shielding to complete this craft, and bring some extra so I have some on hand. I'm sure Lith won't mind."

Ember grins.

"There is one thing I think he will mind though, and it's something I need if we're going to make that 30-day deadline for the B-Class exams."

I raise an eyebrow as he continues.

"I need you to grab that last isolation pod for me. The concealment items I need to produce will take far longer than a month to accomplish. I've been doing the math in my head, and I'll need at least 10 times that at a bare minimum. The only way I see it being possible is with an isolation pod."

He turns to me and uses telepathy.

"Or we can go scour some far-off dungeons and search for a new void creeper rift, but finding another one nearby on this world is unlikely."

I nod and speak to my double.

"Yeah, that works. Let's try not to destroy this one. It's the only one left that I know of, and I still don't know how to craft those things. Convince Lith to let us use it, we won't charge this one up to 50x, just 10x or so at most."

My double nods and heads off in a flash of white light.

We continue to set up for the craft and double-check the instructions for a few minutes.

Then, Bri asks a simple question.

"So, how exactly did you get your hands on this luminite in the first place? I doubt it was from an auction. You must have actually found a way to mine it from a collapsing dungeon. Or... is there some other way?"

I smile.

"There's no other way I know of. I managed to create a far more stable version of the element stone bomb I set off in the forest outside Vice City with you. There's a way to gently collapse a dungeon. If you're quick enough, the raw materials that drop into thin air once it disappears are these crystals."

I point to the jar with fragments of white gems inside.

She nods and smiles.

"So, you're saying that there is the potential to make more? How much? Could I purchase some from you?"

I laugh.

"Sure, you can buy some in the future, if you'd like, but I was planning to make a platform for you free of cost in your workshop just to make it easier to travel. Plus, an office here so you can have multiple bases of operation."

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I point up to the ceiling and briefly outline the build plans and future for this guild hall to her.

Then, as soon as we're both on the same page, my body double comes back with a smile on his face and an inventory full of A-Grade shielding.

"You'll have enough for 10, no, maybe 100 of these platforms with the haul Lith gave me. Those buildings are loaded with materials."

I open my item storage and my double opens his, and he transfers all of the items over, including an isolation pod with about 6x dilation still left in it.

My double goes back outside to continue surveying the desert.

I pull out just enough shielding for the craft and place the isolation pods near the back wall of the bunker.

"Great, now let's get this craft completed."

With a carefully cut humming sheet of shielding in front of me, 3.3 million MP worth of mana crystals surrounding it, and a containment case of luminite hovering above it, I activate my mythic grade crafting skill.

I share this skill with Bri and Ember so they can watch it happen with intricate detail in real time.

The entire shielding segment is selected as the base, 2.6 million MP of the total mana is selected as a catalyst plus fuel, and just over 60% of the luminite inside the containment case is selected within the glass contraption.

I press accept on the craft option that links up exactly with the book, and a bright white light fills the entire room.

A release of energy from the millions of MP being used flows through all of our bodies, and the metal-coated mana shielding melts into a form that is close to liquid as it bends and shapes into a circular platform about 4 meters in diameter.

Over half of the mass within the containment contraption holding luminite disappears and merges with the bright lit craft.

It takes over 3 full seconds before the light fades and a raised circular platform, a small pile of leftover mana crystals, and a jar of about one third of the luminite we started with are all that remain.

The corners of my lips curve up when my appraisal and all-seeing eye skills read out what is in front of me.

[Instant Teleportation Platform]

Grade: A+

Owner: Jay Soju

Current Bonded Teleport Crystals In Circulation: 0

Info: This is a unique item that can only be modified by its owner. Using bonded teleport crystals, any living being and the direct mass they are making contact with will be instantly transported to this platform.

Crafter's Note: [NONE]

I smile while using my crafting skill again on the remaining luminite and mana crystals sitting on top of the platform and select the next option to make bonded crystals linked solely with this platform.

There's another flash of light, and all of the white and pink crystals before me merge together to make a large pile of small white gems.

I step forward and pick one up.

[Teleport Crystal]

Then, I look back at the platform's stats and see there is a change in one of its settings.

Current Bonded Teleport Crystals In Circulation: 361

"It worked...."

I pick up a handful of the white glossy gems, and toss a few to Ember, then a few to Bri as well, letting the rest all fall into my item storage.

"Come on, let's test this out."

Bri's eyes are wide with a mixture of pure excitement and disbelief.

"Yes, let's do it."

Ember nods.

"I already believe it'll work, but very well, let's test it."

We leave the underground bunker and fly a few kilometers away into the desert and all crush a crystal in our hands.

Instantly, a flash of white light brings us back to the underground bunker, and when I check the internal setting of the platform, the live bonded crystal count changes.

Current Bonded Teleport Crystals In Circulation: 358

"Interesting..."

We try it again, using the crystals inside a dungeon, then again all the way thousands of kilometers away in Vice City.

Current Bonded Teleport Crystals In Circulation: 352

No matter where we teleport from, we're always sent back here instantly.

"Well, it's a success. The first teleport platform works. Now, it's time to farm some rogue dungeons to make more..."

The three of us talk over the trade details in the bunker a little longer, and I let Bri know that it will take a bit of time to farm up more luminite to create her next platform.

However, it will be ready by the time the first shipment of raw materials for her craftsmen come in. The only concern is finding a secure place to put hers. We may need to create a secret room beneath her bottom floor.

Inspection and monthly recorded check-ins from the association cannot pick up on the fact that she has one of these.

After discussing these details, I bring her back to the black market dungeon hub and leave her with another handful of teleport crystals.

"Come back anytime. I may not always be in town, but my doubles will most likely always be here to greet you."

"Sounds good, I'll see you again very soon."

She leaves, walking through the underground market back to her workshop.

Ember and I use the underground dungeon hub as a teleport point to make our way back to the Vice City Labyrinth to collect a single fire stone from the 39th floor, then dungeon walk to a faraway dungeon over 200 km away in the desert.

It is the last D-Grade dungeon that my doubles and Ember were using to collect mana previously when we were charging up pods before the war.

This time, I use my own mythic grade plunderer skill to imbue the stone, and I'm able to create a containment item that stores just about 7 billion MP all by myself.

Ember and I stand back as the stone sucks up the dungeon's mass until it hits its fill.

"Looks like I can farm these myself."

We crush teleport crystals and make it back to the underground bunker. I use this stone to add to the semi-used isolation pod from the Galeheart Tower, bringing it to over 11x dilation, roughly the limit to where it won't cause long-term damage to the machine.

Ember looks at me with a confident smile as he steps inside.

"300 days should be enough if I push it. I will come out once my creations are complete. I wish you luck on your ventures while I work, only disturb me if it is a matter of life or death."

I nod.

"Very well. I'll make sure this civilization is unrecognizable, and we are much stronger once you emerge. Whatever it is you are creating, best of luck."

Ember types on the keypad, entering 30 days at an 11.54x dilation.

The door shuts, and I call for a body double to come and be on full-time guard duty of this pod.

After it arrives, I head off to the canyon of dungeons as the sun fully disappears and the night sky comes. I dungeon walk into the labyrinth to begin a solo farming session.

Chapter 508

I start by clearing out the rest of floor 39, dungeon walking from monster to monster to drain their MCP, and opening up spatial magic portals to store their corpses in my storage.

Instead of leaving their bodies to dissolve in random places throughout the floor, having to wait up to a full minute for some, I see it as more time-efficient to keep their corpses on me and have them all dissolve together after I'm done with farming for the day.

I clear out every floor from 38-30 next with fast strikes, dungeon walking to every new monster and killing them before they even know I've arrived. A few hundred million MP worth of mana control is absorbed, and over a thousand monsters' bodies are stored in my storage before coming back up to floor 39 to catch the one mutant minotaur that respawns right on schedule.

I repeat this routine for a few hours, piling up corpses in my storage, collecting over a billion MCP total, and holding seven near A-Grade fire stones in my item storage before I decide to change things up.

I let the massive pile of corpses dissolve before me on the 39th floor, collecting close to a million MP worth of pink mana crystals and over a thousand high B-grade crafting materials.

Then, I let them all fall into my storage while activating my Soul Energy, letting a visible red aura leak out from my core, the same output as the aura I was using while fighting Rodrigo at his maximum strength in his ranked-up form.

I pull out my Flame Emperor's Sword because the dark blade I tested earlier seems to still be very unpredictable and hard to control.

I whisper under my breath while dungeon walking up two floors. "This should be enough to fend off whatever is on the 41st floor, it'll be a good change of pace instead of just farming the lower ones all night..."

The last few times I attempted fighting the monster on this floor, I never even managed to get a look at it.

Its status never even showed up in my mind's eye.

The only thing I know about this floor is that it is a dark cave system with a fast-moving monster that uses slashing attacks and conceals its presence very well.

The instant I teleport into the darkness, I hear the sound of humming energy and barely audible fast-moving steps on the rocky ground approaching.

In less than a tenth of a second, a sharp blade-like surface comes rocketing toward my midsection.

I smile as the dark green bug-like claw collides with my Soul Energy shielding and bursts into an eruption of energy.

There's an angry hiss that echoes through the cave and I see the shadowy outline of a four-meter-tall mantis creature circling me in the dark, ducking in and out of crevices in the cave while eyeing me down and waiting to send off its next attack.

My inspect and appraisal skills finally pick up on a few of this monster's readings.

[Lv. 1522]

Active Items:

[NONE]

Active Skills:

Stealth [Mythic Grade]

Bufs:

Silent Breath

Eyes of the Night

The Sun God's Curse Mark

"A mythic grade stealth skill, huh...? Just like mine."

My eyes lock onto the barely visible golden collar around its neck, being partially blocked out by its stealth skill.

It's only visible now because of my all-seeing eye, new advanced perception, overall higher state of mana control, and of course my unique Soul Energy senses.

Despite this, the dark green mantis lunges forward again and throws a claw covered in golden light beneath its stealth veil.

It must not be used to its opponents being able to see its movements, because when I swing my sword up to block its strike covered in my own soul energy and the two masses collide, the creature immediately uses the momentum from my blow to be shot backward and scurry away into the cave again.

It boosts its stealth skill further and lurks in the darkness.

My eyes track it around the dungeon as it does.

This creature is using only its own mana control to activate its stealth skill, and it's clear to see that there is a large difference between the Sun God's warriors and the now-defeated Lich King's.

The stronger troops in the Lich King's army heavily relied on their own raw power during battles, only using the orange Soul Energy as a last resort. This is because the power being shared at those higher ranks did not make such a monumental difference than their own mana control and soul energy.

Stolen novel; please report.

When I look at this creature, and when I relate its fighting style to Rodrigo's, I see the attack power they throw is heavily reliant on the borrowed energy of the curse mark they bear.

Their curse mark's Soul Energy allowance at level 1300-1500 is rivaling to that of a level 2000-2500 in the Dark One's army.

It's an interesting sight to behold, but I'm still not sure what to think of it.

My first theory is that the Lich King spread its borrowed power among many troops so it weakened its individual power shared to each recipient.

However, I've dealt with borrowed Soul energy before, like the Red Hydra's buff. It was only shared between a handful of people and was far weaker than the Lich King's. This just goes to show that there are too many variables at play to conclude anything concrete about this discovery yet.

The mana control and base stats of this Mantis monster are still lagging behind the immense power that is held in its borrowed Soul Energy.

That's why I can easily still see its golden glow through its stealth skill, and also why it can block one of my mid-powered sword swings with its golden light despite being a far lower level than I am.

This makes the strength shown in my spar with Rodrigo's fight make a lot more sense.

However, as the mantis lunges forward at me again, I change up my stance and look the monster right in the eyes.

"I might as well end this battle now. There's no point in dragging it on. You're not much of a talker anyway."

Its dark green armored mantis claw comes rocketing toward my blind spot covered in a golden glow while I let my warning echo through the cave.

At the last minute before impact, I let my soul energy pulse and release my full power while still in my base form.

A wave of red light illuminates the entire cave system while I turn my body and sword to throw a slash against its claw.

The golden light around it burns away, and its outer green shell shatters while my Soul Energy blade cuts off the entire right third of its upper body in a single strike.

The rest of its form is covered in Soul Energy flames and it's blasted off in the opposite direction from the impact of my release.

Instead of letting it scurry off into the caves again, I follow with my eyes locked on it, releasing another attack at its other side that is charging up a last-ditch effort high-powered golden attack.

I cut its long sharp left arm off at the shoulder joint before it can even get a strike off on me, and the residue from my first attack begins to eat away at the golden collar around its neck.

A loud hiss sounds out as I get close to stop it from running any further, slicing both of its legs off at the knees.

It falls and tumbles rolling to the floor while golden energy seeps from its body, attempting to protect its remaining vitals as a survival instinct.

However, the damage is already done.

My Soul Energy that covers this monster's areas where it was hit spreads further, eating away the golden glow, and burning the bug alive as it struggles to get up off the hard rocky cave floor.

I raise my sword above my head to give it a finishing blow and put this dying floor boss out of its misery, but a notification shows up in blue text above the monster once it falls below 5% HP. Red light flows through the system notification, making the blue text look purple in some places, almost like my Soul Energy is combining with the system here.

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Stealth [Mythic Grade]

[YES][NO]

The hissing sounds coming from the creature gets louder as it knows its end is near, but I can't help but hesitate for multiple reasons looking down at this odd red and blue text mixture.

The first reason I'm confused is the fact that I already have a stealth skill on my status, and it's already mythic grade too.

This is the first time I've let an enemy get down to below 5% HP to activate my new mythic grade absorption's special perk that allows me to steal one available skill from an enemy before they die. However, it shouldn't allow me to absorb a skill I already own.

The system is never wrong, but this still doesn't make sense... If I hit [YES] nothing should happen.

"I guess there's no harm in trying..."

I select [YES] and a bright white-blue light engulfs the remains of the monster and my dark red Soul Energy creates a sphere around this flashing light. I feel multiple skills like craftsmanship, mana manipulation, spatial magic, and a variety of others activating subconsciously through my Soul Energy link while the dark red energy shifts in size and color while many Mythic grade skills work together in a fashion I didn't know was possible.

It feels similar to how I removed cursed Soul Energy from Monk's master, and the fighters being used as test subjects in the Dark One's Tower, but fairly different because instead of flat-out destroying energy, I'm trying to preserve it.

The hot mixture of Soul Energy shrinks in on itself until the blue and white flashes have ceased, at the same time, I feel something fall into my item storage through the spatial magic bonded to my soul energy.

In my mind's eye, as soon as this energy disappears into suspended animation I see the status of the monster in front of me change.

Its stealth skill vanishes from its status, and its veil of perception-blocking protection disappears.

Its green outer shell is clear as day while I bring my sword down, shattering it, and slicing its head and body in two to finish it off.

Another absorption notification rings in my ear as it allows me to take its MCP, but no levels were gained from defeating this boss.

At the same time, the cave begins to fill with natural light and my reign of fiery terror throughout the caves becomes visible.

I see the molten rock and trails of fire left behind me.

The remains of the mantis corpse dissolve after about 45 seconds, and all that is left behind is a long green claw with a +252% Agility stat boost, and a large mana crystal.

As I collect these items, my mind shifts back to the energy that fell into my status right after I activated my absorption perk, and I let it float out and hover over my hand.

The item before me is a clear orb about the size of a marble.

Inside of it, there is swirling blue and white light in threads of dense mana making grid-like system patterns so many times over, down to such a microscopic level, not even my All-Seeing Eye can see its entire intricate design.

However, it shows the item information, and my eyes are locked on this text for a full minute while the labyrinth's natural transport magic brings me up to floor 42.

[Skill Orb]

Grade: A+

Skill: Stealth [Mythic Grade]

Item Type: Consumable

Info: This [Skill Orb] is a unique item. It allows the user to permanently absorb a new skill and add it to their status. Only 1 [Skill Orb] per person can be consumed, any additional attempts will result in a failed absorption.

My vision flashes white, and I let the blue orb fall into my item storage while I respawn on the next floor.

A very odd environment spawns in front of me.

There are rolling hills, but the ground is made of a smooth white material that grips my feet like rubber.

There is no wildlife, and the sky is light grey, almost the same shade as the floor.

I hear a murderous roar echo from beyond one of the rolling synthetic-looking white hills, but my mind is still racing on the fact that I now have the ability to absorb and imbue skills from enemies into a physical consumable.

"I need to see if this is replicable... If so, I can hand-select a new skill for each of my allies. The Flame Emperor's Army could grow far stronger..."

I grip my sword and burst into dark red flames again, spreading out my perceptions and getting ready to take on whatever climbs the hill to challenge me on the 42nd floor. This farming session just got a lot more interesting.

Chapter 509

The monstrous roar that echoes from the back of the 42nd-floor boss room reveals its form soon after I hear it.

At first, when teleporting into this white-floored room, my all-seeing eye picked up the presence of a man standing just as tall as me with a golden collar around his neck.

However, it immediately evolved into its monster form when I arrived. It jumps up and over the nearest white hill to come into my vision, and its 6-meter-tall light blue-skinned muscular body contrasts greatly with the grey sky.

It has three golden glowing eyes on its forehead, with a large matching collar around its neck too. It wears silver armor on its chest and feet, and carries two longswords that shimmer the same metallic shine.

Its gaze locks with mine and it speeds forward as I scan its status.

[Lv.2091]

Active Items:

Enchanted Silver Sword Set [+411% Strength][+300 Speed][+288% Agility]

Enchanted Silver Chestplate [+391% Defense][+322% Strength]

Enchanted Silver Boots [+348% Speed][+340% Agility]

Active Skills:

Swordsmanship [Mythic Grade]

Dual Wielding [Legendary Grade]

Bufs:

Overseers Vision

Energy Enhancement of the Ultimate Swordsman

The Sun God's Curse Mark

It seems like every floor above the 40th has been raising levels by about 500 each new boss. It is a considerable amount.

I feel an aura of mana control fill the dungeon and a denser layer of blue mana covers its body and swords. Both of its ranked-up buffs activate, and the graceful movements of its steps and blade are the handiwork of this monster's mythic-grade swordsmanship at work.

A thick Golden Aura leaks from its eyes and covers its arms and two blades while it comes at me.

I activate my own mythic-grade swordsmanship skill and channel my soul energy into defenses while activating my own ranked-up buff to grow in size and create a Dark Red Greater Energy form almost twice as large as the monster before me.

I lunge forward too, and both of us follow the instinctive thread of our skill's energy attacks.

My sword collides with one of his, blocking it and sending it flying backward, then twisting my body to block his second blade coming from the opposite side.

Blue and golden energy disperse into the air as the three-eyed swordsman calculates the perfect counter to my block.

In my Greater Form, I have the edge on it in all of my stats. However, I could tell that if I fought it in my base form while it was activating its buffs, I would have had trouble fending off the attack I just blocked.

My gaze locks on the monster's weak points. I need to focus on defeating this monster, not just testing out new skills and moves like I did on the 41st floor.

Its shoulders, knees, and neck are unprotected from armor, but it holds its dual swords in a peculiar stance that blocks these weak spots while in a resting position.

It even manages to guard these points while my sword was deflecting it during our last exchange.

The focused golden soul energy in its blades was nearly as dense as mine, but it seemed like it was using the majority of it only on its weapons. My Soul Energy covered my blades as well as my entire greater energy form, spreading out its density greatly.

The blue-skinned swordsman comes running back in with trails of golden mist behind its swords, and I block both attacks individually just like before, but lunge in to counter as it is moving away this time, aiming for its upper shoulder but get to witness a fast spinning motion from his upper body to block the attack too.

What I find interesting about this exchange is that a small amount of its Soul Energy transfers from its unused blade in this block to cover its shoulder on the off chance that my attack makes it through.

It is working with a limited amount of this high level power just as I assumed.

This gives me the go-ahead to allocate my own Soul Energy accordingly on the next exchange.

I'm confident in my ability to outmaneuver this monster in my greater form, so I channel over 50% of my Soul Energy directly into my blades and send my next attack just like the last.

Upon contact, both the golden and blue light that envelops its silver swords are eaten away, and the hard silver enchanted metal begins to melt and bend as my blade pushes through them.

Instead of having graceful spins and counters each time, the creature's golden eyes pulse and it jumps backward while holding up both damaged swords in the same unique defensive stance.

I don't regroup my thoughts or step back at all, I jump in again after it, slashing away at its defenses and continuously melting and incinerating through its borrowed golden energy.

This monster isn't weak, but I've found its weakness.

I'm carefully positioning each strike using all of my perception and buffs on full capacity, I even feel my body tiring as I ruthlessly beat my opponent down.

This swordsman is not capable of stopping me.

My fiery red and black sword finally breaks one of its silver weapons into pieces, landing my first blow through its right shoulder.

Three exchanges later and its other sword is shattered to pieces and melted into nothing from my strikes and I land more hits on its shoulders, knees, and neck area where its golden collar rests.

The monster is overwhelmed as I push it back, burning large black and red marks and slashes through the floor of this boss room while imbuing more and more of my corrosive soul energy into each slash I manage to make on the three-eyed swordsman.

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

It seeps into its veins, burning it from the inside, and turning the blue mana that covers its body into red flames while the golden light in its eyes dims.

I'd go straight for a headshot right now if my only aim for this battle was to kill it.

Another 30 seconds of burning it from the inside and cheap shots in its weak spots go by. I even slice its arms and legs clean off, pinning it to the ground under my greater form's boot before I finally see purple-red notifications.

[Select 1 Option]

Swordsmanship [Mythic Grade]

Dual Wielding [Legendary Grade]

I choose swordsmanship and a more familiar window pops up.

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Swordsmanship [Mythic Grade]

[YES][NO]

Once I hit [YES], the same flash of white and blue system-colored light covers the monster's body. Then, my Soul Energy and subconscious activation of skills commences as well.

The instant I feel a Skill Orb enter my item storage, I let my flames engulf the monster entirely, and burn its flesh to ash.

A notification to absorb its MCP is presented, and a mana crystal as well as its chestplate and boots are left behind as loot.

I happily accept and place them into my inventory with the mythic-grade swordsmanship Skill Orb while being transported to the next floor while still in my greater form.

"Might as well keep going while I'm on a roll here..."

As the white transfer magic light brings me to the 43rd floor, I take in the rocky mountain landscape of brown dirt, green trees, and grey stone cliffsides.

The instant I try to gauge where I am, I have to lunge out of the way to dodge dozens of incoming rocks and trees sharpened into spears covered in dense golden soul energy.

Some of the projectiles narrowly miss me by less than a meter on each side, and as I weave through the barrage, I have to use my sword to block a few attacks that would have hit me straight on otherwise.

The Soul Energy shielding around all of these attacks is exactly even with my own. The best I can do is deflect them by changing their direction slightly, but it feels as if there is an external gravitational pull on them making them shoot toward me in a curving path.

After making my way through the bulk of the barrage, I don't manage to dodge them all. My Soul Energy shielding along with body hardening is torn through in the side of my stomach and lower left leg.

It leaves golden flakes of Soul Energy behind, but also makes immense bloody gashes on my real body as I escape into the sky.

They hit the ground where I stood moments ago and blast a massive crater in the soft ground.

I look toward where the attacks came from while flying through the air, healing my wounds with self-regeneration, and locking onto a status reading of a being far above me on a mountain peak almost a full kilometer away.

A large humanoid creature wearing armor made of stone stares down at me from up on its high cliff.

Its face looks like a rhinoceros, with a large pointed black horn coming off its nose and a smaller one above it.

Its skin is light brown, almost orange, and it carries a staff with a pointed blade at the top of it radiating golden light.

The monster's eyes are jet-black, and sharp, locked on me without wavering at all.

A curse mark forms a dense golden collar around its neck and it raises its staff, sending off over 50 massive fragments of rock, trees, and dungeon mass flying my way all covered in golden energy while my gaze scans its status.

[Lv.2699]

Active Items:

Blade of the Mountain Hermit [+589% Mental Strength][+400 Strength]

Enchanted Charm of Protection [+310% Mental Strength][+300% Defense][+250% Speed][+220% Agility][+180% Strength]

Enhanced Stone Chestplate [+367% Defense][+311% Strength]

Active Skills:

Telekinesis [Mythic Grade]

Body Hardening [Mythic Grade]

Bufs:

Rhino's Focus [Target Lock]

Mountain Hermit's Ultimate Defense

The Sun God's Curse Mark

As soon as I do, a downpour of more dungeon mass covered in soul energy comes raining on top of me.

Now as I weave through the violent attacks, the feeling of the nearby targets turning in mid-air and changing their direction to follow me make much more sense.

It must be a combination of its mythic-grade telekinesis skill and its first ranked-up buff that seems to have some kind of homing mechanism.

I let my aura of soul energy expand, and use my mythic-grade plunderer skill to take control of the dungeon around me, draining some of the mana from the soul energy that rains down on me, but there are still far too many and its borrowed golden power is too strong for me to deflect and dodge every incoming projectile.

I'm hit four more times in the legs and sides and have to heal while I travel upward to take away the high ground advantage that the beast atop the highest mountain in this dungeon stands.

Its aura radiates throughout the entire boss room, meaning as much as I run, I'll never be outside of its range.

The aura it gives off gets stronger the closer I get to it, but with its primary offensive ability being long-range, I don't have much of a choice other than attempt to close the gap between us.

I for one don't have my telekinesis skill upgraded at all, there are no natural dungeons that spawn monsters with this exact ability. Its skill is multiple ranks higher than mine. If we were to battle solely using this trait from long range, it would surely win.

If I get up close, I have many more skills in my arsenal that will be effective against it no matter how tough its mythic-grade body hardening or ultimate defensive ranked-up buff may be.

Letting my body glow with a constant state of self-regeneration, I fly forward into the danger zone.

The bulk of my soul energy covers my vitals and is imbued into my sword to directly deflect the dungeon mass that is thrown toward me with no possible way of changing its course.

I use some telekinesis of my own, but it hardly does anything to change the rigid flight pattern of sharpened trees and boulders.

Pulsing golden shockwaves come off the mountain while its natural resources are stripped away to send larger and more frequent attacks my way.

The relentless attacks are painful, and the damage it does to my body parts where I can't stop them only increases the closer I get.

I try many strategies to make my travel over more efficient. Once halfway there, less than 500 meters away, I come up with a few ways to slow its attacks.

The first is sending off waves of intimidation and confusion. My pulses don't immobilize it, as we're very close in mana control power, but they do catch the creature off guard the first few times I throw them out.

The second is using stealth. When I disappear, a large amount of the stones being sent toward me continue off in a straight line as the boss is most likely manually maneuvering them. However, a few still follow me like heat-seeking missiles, so this must be a feature of its [Target Lock] buff that I can't avoid even while invisible.

As I get within 300 meters range, the strength and frequency of attacks it throws at me become overwhelming.

While the damage done to my physical body can be healed almost instantly, and I never go below 80% of my total HP, I still have to concentrate entirely on every attack I counter and be diligent and patient while continuing to assess its skills and abilities.

This is a serious floor boss.

It is definitely the strongest and most intelligent Labyrinth monster I've ever fought.

It is tasked to protect this floor and not let any challengers pass, and it intends to do exactly that without question.

It gets straight to the point.

There are no useless flashy displays of power, arrogant speeches, or any signs of it letting up to allow me to get in closer for any reason.

It just stands high up on the mountain with its staff in hand, blocking me from getting near with minimal effort.

If I can figure out a way to defeat it, I don't think I'll be challenging the floor boss above this one before I do some more Soul Energy training. I've climbed up this Labyrinth far enough to find my limit again.

Without power and reflexes over double my own, there's no way any opponent could ever get in this close to it without high-grade regenerative abilities.

Even so, I've hardly closed the distance, and still haven't gotten to see its defensive buff or close-range battle tactics with that staff at close range yet.

I've seen everything it can do using this attack pattern, I need to switch things up and run a quick test using an entirely different strategy.

With this in mind, I activate stealth again, deflecting its homing missiles, and whisper to myself.

"Dungeon Walker."

Less than a tenth of a second goes by as I calculate and execute my surprise assault.

I spawn in less than 5 meters away from the creature's back, plunging my red soul energy-soaked blade forward.

Using mythic-grade plunderer, confusion, and intimidation on full blast, I shock the creature's system while activating lifesteal at close range to drain its health and make it my own.

I feel the soothing warm energy of HP and MP entering my body while I send a slash full of Soul Energy and murderous intent toward the beast.

As soon as it leaves my blade, the sharp eyes of the mountain hermit's beast form turn around to catch a glimpse of me in its peripherals.

It looks calm and unfazed, activating its second ranked-up buff.

A glossy diamond-textured armor shielding covers its body as my close-range Soul Energy attack collides with its back.

Chapter 510

The energy blade that leaves my sword collides with the diamond armor, and at the same moment, I dungeon walk far away, over a kilometer back to where I spawned into this boss room.

I do this for two reasons. The first is completely instinctive; there is no reason for me to stay up close any longer than I have to when I'm facing an opponent with unknown tactics at close range.

The second is that the ground beneath my feet turned into hundreds of needle-shaped spears all covered in golden light the moment the monster's eyes met mine.

It used telekinesis to shoot them upward, and if I stayed any longer, they would have all collided with my Soul Energy barrier as well.

There's an explosion of red and golden light in the distance as these attacks collide.

The concentrated slash makes it through the mountain hermit's outer layer of golden shielding and even cracks its diamond armor, but to my surprise, it doesn't make it all the way through before my attack dissipates into the air and is eaten up by the golden energy that seeps out from the monster's core.

As collateral damage, the entire top quarter of the mountain is decimated by the extreme release of power. Hundreds of meters of dungeon mass are destroyed and sent flying into the air, being melted and incinerated into pure mana.

My opponent stands on top of the rubble, reforming its diamond armor and letting the golden light around it reform as if nothing has happened at all.

I had the advantage on every front during that attack.

The element of surprise, using my full power, and even making the environment for my strike optimal.

All it managed to do was drain about 10% of its HP using lifesteal while mildly irritating it by damaging its ultimate ranked-up defense form.

Other than this, I'm back to square one.

Rocks and trees coated in golden light rain from the sky again as the horned creature raises its staff high up on the mountain and stares down at me with an unfazed expression in its dark eyes.

This doesn't stop me from dodging the incoming attacks by a hair, then activating stealth and dungeon walking in mid-swing to attack it again.

With an expanding aura of lifesteal, plunderer, intimidation, and confusion all infused with Soul Energy radiating out from my core, I send another attack off at the beast.

Its life energy is drained away, taking another 8% of its HP before I release the red slash from my sword.

Just like before, its head immediately turns to its blind spot, but this time it swings its weapon coated with golden energy back at my sword slash.

I dungeon walk away from the danger zone as the silver-bladed edge of its battle-staff takes my attack on at point-blank range.

From the bottom of the mountain, two clashing auras of energy erupt again.

I expect the remaining top of the mountain to be blown to bits, just like last time, but something different happens.

There's a loud roar and pulse of golden light through the entire boss room as the mountain hermit dispels my attack, making the two energies explode in the air with equal force.

I dungeon walk to another portion of the room to escape the incoming raining debris controlled by telekinesis, teleporting around the dungeon a few times before attempting my close-range attack again.

This time, before I can even release the entire energy attack from my sword, the monster's uniquely shaped weapon comes rocketing my way and collides with the edge of my flaming blade.

My mental attacks seem to not affect it at all anymore, and my lifesteal hardly drained away more than 5% more HP this time around.

Its reaction time is only getting faster, and I can't break through its ranked-up defenses no matter how hard I try without increasing my base mana and Qi control, or bringing allies to this boss room to borrow theirs using my ranked-up buff.

The longer I drag this battle out, the fewer chances I'll have to catch it off guard.

As our blades collide, and a murderous wave of Soul Energy ripples out from both of our bodies, I decide to attempt to use another one of my unique skills.

I dungeon walk to its left shoulder, not even attempting to win our sword exchange, and place a hand covered in a large amount of my soul energy onto its diamond-coated muscles.

Instantly, the monster turns its gaze again, swinging the sharp tip of its staff my way, but I whisper under my breath while activating a skill and feeling immense pain fill my body as I do.

"Equivalent Exchange."

Bright white light covers both of our bodies as I sacrifice 80% of my total HP in a single shared attack.

Equivalent Exchange is a skill I stole from another hunter back during the C-Class exams. I don't often use it, because to damage opponents with it, I have to severely injure myself as well. It is risky, painful, and needs skin-to-skin contact to activate.

This monster has more HP than me, but this should bring its total remaining health down very low, my hopes being close to 5% remaining, and give me enough remaining health to the point where if I'm hit with debris at an expected rate while fleeing, I'll still have health left over while I heal.

I let out a scream, and it synchronizes with the mountain hermit's roar as life energy in the form of HP on both of our statuses is drained away.

The moment I feel it happening, I activate my dungeon walker skill and teleport to the furthest point away from the source as I can.

Golden needles of dungeon mass come up from the ground and rip through my feet and legs as I do, but this is within my expectations.

The flashes of light cease as I instantly activate my self-regeneration skills to heal my wounds and drink mythic grade regen potions to bring my own HP back up to full while dungeon walking around the outer ring of the boss room, hundreds of meters away each blip every few tenths of a second.

The narrative has been taken without permission. Report any sightings.

My attack worked.

I can hear the agony, anger, and drops of fear in the mountain hermit's roars as it mercilessly attacks me all throughout the dungeon using its telekinesis skill to the absolute limit.

A golden orb of light grows on top of the mountain, and mass from the boss room dungeon is being ripped to shreds and used to fuel its attacks.

The mountain range turns to unrecognizable piles of rubble as I teleport through its violent display of raw mental strength and soul energy.

A few times I get in close enough to attempt to see if any system text shows up for me to steal its skills, but it never does.

However, there is blood gushing from its diamond body, showing signs that my equivalent exchange did severe damage. Its ultimate defense move won't regenerate the next time it's damaged and its Soul Energy is unpredictably pulsing and wavering as it reaches its output limit.

This is borrowed power after all. It is not endlessly able to regenerate. If it is used too rashly, the end of the supply will come eventually.

Even so, it isn't withering away. If anything, the candle is burning even brighter before it goes out.

I need to be even more careful now than ever, but I'm sure this is the end if I can string the fight on a little longer.

In between my dungeon walks and continuous dodges of attacks, I send out dark and dense crescents of soul energy toward the creature whenever I get close enough in range.

It doesn't hesitate to block them over and over, but the rate of its attacks slows every time it has to block.

This gives me enough time to dungeon walk even closer in and activate my lifesteal skill.

Every few attacks I throw, I manage to break through its growing golden aura and drain another 1-2% HP.

It realizes what is happening, but can do nothing to stop it other than pushing its Soul Energy limit even further.

The density of its golden aura looks and feels to me, just like the time I witnessed Maria use up all of her Red Hydra's buff before she awakened her own Soul Energy.

It's going to go all out. Whatever is about to come out of this creature is not something I want to be in the way of.

As it reaches its limit, I manage one last ranged lifesteal attack and see a series of blue text boxes pop up over its head.

[Select 1 Option]

Telekinesis [Mythic Grade]

Body Hardening [Mythic Grade]

At the same time, the golden aura that surrounds the monster in a dome shape instantly collapses in on itself and condenses entirely into its weapon, channeled into the short blade at its tip.

My eyes open wide as all of the controlled mass in the dungeon falls to the floor, and all of the power it has remaining comes out in a single golden energy slash rocketing straight toward me.

I dungeon walk away to the far side of the dungeon to escape its path, but the moment I do, the highly concentrated light changes direction and curves toward me at speeds that are only increasing.

I dodge it and teleport around the boss room multiple times, but it only gets closer and faster.

Mythic Grade telekinesis allows this monster to alter and manipulate its own energy attacks with impressive accuracy, I want this skill so I can do the same.

The thought of dungeon walking away and leaving this boss room entirely crosses my mind. That would certainly lead me to safety, but would only give this monster more time to prepare for my return.

This last resort attack would gain even more power, and even worse, the boss could find a way to heal before I steal its skills or land the final blow.

I need to figure out something here and now, so I stop in place and think of a new strategy.

"Let's end this."

I begin dungeon walking around in a less erratic, more predictable pattern, but still add in random jumps here and there. I have it get used to my slower dodging patterns, making it seem like I'm getting tired and my reaction time is slowing.

Instead of trying to fully avoid the crescent of golden light, I begin to let it gain on me each time, as if I'm the one in trouble here.

While doing so, I keep a close eye on the monster atop what's left of the mountain it stood on before, and keep my vision locked on the blue text that still hovers above its head.

I lead the golden crescent closer and closer to the mountain, allowing it to gain even more control over its movements while pretending to slow my own.

Once less than 50 meters in front of it, I set out to finish it.

I activate all of my mental attacks again, activating confusion, intimidation, flash to send bright lights in the air, blast and screech to create explosions and loud noises, then phantom step imbued with soul energy to create fake copies of my greater form appear in front of it.

At the same time, I activate stealth with my real body and dungeon walk behind it while clicking on the status notifications before me, choosing to absorb mythic grade body hardening, and watching the white, blue, and red light surround its body.

I'm less than 5 meters away from its back.

Throughout all of the confusion, the monster is caught off guard momentarily and only aims for the immediate threats in front of it, slicing through the phantom images that have jumped off in opposite directions out from the white blasts.

Meanwhile, red soul energy surrounds its diamond body while the majority of its offensive soul energy is trapped in its attack. No needles or projectiles come at me, and I have time to concentrate.

Before it realizes what has happened, it's too late.

I feel a skill orb fall into my storage, and see the golden blade of light coming straight for me.

I wait until the last second to dungeon walk away again, and the highly charged soul energy collides with the monster's own diamond armor.

It cracks, just like it did when I attacked it before, but this time shatters open, leaving a large gap in its armor as golden energy and diamond flakes explode into the air as the attack dissipates, creating an opening that I couldn't physically manage to do myself.

I quickly dungeon walk back in at this opportunity and shove my blade through the opening in its defenses, releasing a wave of soul energy imbued fire into the monster's heart from within, burning away all of its remaining golden energy. It begins to shrink back into its human form before my eyes and I hear it speak words for the first time since I entered this floor.

"After so many years... I'm free... Thank- y-you."

The golden collar around its neck fully dissolves as my red soul energy engulfs it entirely.

Dinging sounds out in my inner ear.

[Level Up] x72

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Telekinesis [Mythic Grade]

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

MCP: 577,904,310

[YES][NO]

I press [YES] accepting everything, upgrading my telekinesis skill, and watch my level rise to 2271.

Adrenaline is pumping through my veins and my aura is burning so hot that the mountain beneath my feet is melting away every second I stay powered up in my ranked-up form.

I take a few deep breaths to conceptualize this whole situation. I allow the half-human half-rhinoceros corpse that hasn't reverted fully back to its lesser form fall into my item storage before it dissolves.

It's final words are confusing.

There is even a faint smile across its face as it falls inside despite the massive bloody hole in its chest.

Just like I did with the lightning wolf on the 40th floor, I want to stall the transportation magic and activation of the 44th floor until later.

I barely got away with that victory.

It was stronger than me on all fronts. Every stat point was higher, I'm sure it had me beat on pure numbers alone.

Its ranked-up defenses were only destroyed by its own final attack.

Even its borrowed Soul Energy was basically on par with mine.

I defeated this monster with strategy, and my abundance of skills and fight knowledge.

This was only possible because I had time to prepare these moves.

Moving up a floor to fight something 500 levels higher won't be easy... Just based on what I've fought so far, it could be stronger than the Lich King I fought just the other day.

I stare out at the decimated mountain range after this battle, then teleport back to the lower floors of the dungeon to continue farming for the night and think over the fights I've been in today to assess what my next moves will be.

While these thoughts settle in my mind, I continue to farm fire stones every 30 minutes on the dot. During my downtime, I test out my new telekinesis skill upgrade too, mastering the same technique I saw on floor 43, manipulating the movement and speed of my energy blade attacks.

The image of the floor boss monster's calm smile and final words replay in my head as I train.

While getting used to this ability, I also set off to use my new absorption perk to collect skill orbs from all kinds of monsters on the various floors of the labyrinth, dungeons from Vice City, Solara, my hometown, and even the canyon of dungeons too.

It seems this process is very replicable from the fights I've had so far. There are a lot more tests I'd like to do, so once the sun comes up and I can find people that will be able to take these [Skill Orb] consumables, I believe my army will grow far stronger.