



토이카 판타지 장편소설

INTIME FANTASY STORY

Illust by 미키

최악의 대사 이노이다!

intime

Stop, Friendly Fire!

- 쏘지 마라 아군이다! -

- Volume 1 -

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- STORY -

The empire has turned into the land of the undead due to a spell gone wrong. God summoned heroes from countless worlds to purify the empire and plant new hope. Lee Shin Woo, an ordinary earthling, was also summoned. As an undead, that is.

Prologue

This Trade is a Draw

“Now, let's clear things up.”

The woman put down the tobacco pipe she had been gently biting down on, puffed out the smoke, and licked her lips. She was a beautiful woman with striking red, wavy hair, but more importantly was the fact that she was a 'god'.

“So, what you desire is... an immortal body and infinite growth potential?”

“Yes!”

“Nope, not possible. Go back.”

“Aw, don't be like that.”

The man, a 27-year-old man called Lee Shin Woo, sat opposite from the woman, separated by an antique desk. He was an ordinary office worker who liked fantasy novels and games. Well, at least until he died.

And now that he'd died, he was a hero that had been chosen by a god. Probably.

“I heard that I still had a long life ahead of me, yet I died prematurely. Shouldn't I receive at least this much from a god since I died so unfairly?”

“Jeez, the novels these days have really spoilt these kids' backbone. Before, if I told them they were getting a second chance, they would go 'yippee' or yell 'call'.”

“Well, people change as the times go by.”

Though God wanted to hit Lee Shin Woo, who had nonchalantly nodded his head and

replied to her, she restrained herself. After all, it was none other than her who had gathered the souls of those who had died unfairly, because she needed their help.

'If he was from my world, then I would've just... '

She was certainly a god, but she wasn't the god of Earth. She was the god who reigned over Heguroa, which differed in culture, history, size, and every other aspect from Earth.

Then why was she in a situation where she had to bring souls from another world? There was a truly sad, tear-jerking reason behind that.

“Anyhow, those guys sure are cold-hearted. Their god is saying that she'll get herself involved and clean up their mess, but they're just avoiding it since they don't want to die.”

“There were a lot of heroes who accepted my revelation, you know!?!... They all just died in Heita.”

Lee Shin Woo instinctively gulped and asked God.

“...Is the place that dangerous?”

“Of course, it is.”

God couldn't hide her bitterness, and responded for a second time, putting the tobacco pipe back into her mouth. If she didn't at least do that, she felt like she would've sighed in front of a human.

This was a story that happened several decades ago. Heita, a great empire that thrived in the undergrounds of Heguroa, was met with tragedy. Their emperor, Jissehanu, dreamt of immortality and researched forbidden black magic, but as a consequence of his recklessness... the entire underground empire received an undead curse.

What's worse, the curse would spread gradually, and if left unchecked, would devour

the entire world.

God, recognizing the severity of the situation, passed down a divine revelation to all humans and promised that she would grant a wish to the savior of the Empire.

There were many heroic men who came forward. But all of them failed. The curse deeply rooted in the Empire was strong, and the heroes who headed underground in order to save the Empire couldn't overcome the curse, degenerating into the undead, and becoming a part of the undead empire.

Only after did God decide to exhibit her power more extensively. She scattered and planted her power across the Empire, encouraging the heroes, but it didn't help. The influence of the Empire, which sought to lead all life to undeath, gradually increased, and devoured half of the continent...

And that's when God, unable to endure any further, decided that she had to stop the Empire, even if it meant dragging heroes from other worlds. Lee Shin Woo was also one of them.

“Still, an immortal body is impossible. Ask for something else.”

“Then please give me something similar.”

“Listen, kid.”

God raised her tobacco pipe and pointed at Lee Shin Woo's shabby soul as she explained.

“Tremendous power burdens the owner. An immortal body? Infinite growth potential? You won't be able to handle such power, and you'll just explode and die. So, go on and offer more realistic, and fitting conditions.”

“But with a realistic and fitting power, I'll probably end up like my seniors, dying without being able to do anything.”

“ .. ”

At that moment, the human's words thrust deep into the god's heart. Right now, Lee Shin Woo was practically declaring to the god that her 'struggles were meaningless'. Why should I hear this from a mere hero candidate? Should I just kill him? God momentarily felt the impulse to do just that, but... changed her mind upon seeing the human's challenging expression.

This kid would have to go through hell before he could even understand her a little.

“Alright, I'll do as you ask.”

“Yeah!”

“Of course, a perfect immortal body is impossible. You won't die ordinarily, but you'll still die in deadly situations.”

“What about the infinite growth potential?”

“That's also up to you, but I'll make it so it's theoretically possible.”

“Oh!”

“In exchange.”

God flicked her tobacco pipe, and ash flew through the air.

“You'll lose something very important. Your normal, physical body can't accept that power.”

“What exactly is that important thing? I'm not going to become impotent, or become bald, am I?”

“This is the best I can do. Now... Lee Shin Woo. Are you going to do it, or not?”

She didn't answer his question. He faced God's spiteful, cold eyes, and he briefly felt conflicted, but..... he ultimately nodded his head and spoke. Even if he were to become impotent, or become bald, there's a time when a man needs to take the risk!

“Alright, I'll do it!”

“Fine, then our contract has been established.”

God put the pipe into her mouth again, and simultaneously, Lee Shin Woo's body was enveloped in a bright light. Transmission magic that would transport his soul to the Heita Empire had been activated.

“You'll be sent to the entrance of the Empire. Once you arrive there, I won't be able to help you directly, but I'll send you quests instead. You know what quests are, right?”

“Yes.”

“Good, and when you arrive, remember to check your status first. It's really important that you know who 'you' are.”

“Ok...?”

It seemed as though God had grinned and laughed wickedly when she put the tobacco pipe into her mouth, but... he was soon shrouded by a bright light and was unable to see anything.

In the next moment, the light disappeared, and Lee Shin Woo's body was dumped onto the cold floor. The transfer was done in the blink of an eye.

“Oof! She could have let me down a little more gently... hoo.”

Lee Shin Woo grumbled softly and stood up. He had been dumped into an enormous underground cave, as expected of an underground empire.

There was a passageway on both of his sides, and it felt eerie as if mummies would

pop out at any minute from all sides. At least there weren't any enemies nearby.

“I was ready for this, but... this feels really serious... it's cold, too.”

He felt cold, perhaps because he didn't have any clothes on. He stroked his skin in order to soothe the cold, but he soon realized that something was off.

“Huh?”

His body was hard. The hand that had touched his body was also really hard. When he raised his hand to see what was going on, there were bones, rather than a human hand.

“...Huh?”

Shin Woo was so shocked that he went stiff for a while. He somehow got a hold of himself, and when he moved his hand, the bones naturally bobbed. The five fingers composed of bone truly began to dance rhythmically in the air.

“Hahaha... no way. Haha, this guy.”

It was such an unrealistic sight that he laughed automatically. For the first time, Lee Shin Woo bowed his head and observed his body, but his entire body was obviously all bone.

“...”

The moment he saw that his mind blanked.

What do I do? Is this by any chance God's mistake? Did I perhaps receive the Empire's curse as soon as I arrived, and became an undead? Then, he remembered what God had said before their sudden parting.

“That's it. Status... She told me to check my status as soon as I arrived.”

The moment Shin Woo said the word status, as though he had just grabbed onto a final

strand of hope, a strange row of text was engraved in the air in front of him. It was similar to what he had often seen in the games when he was alive. Yeah, even the contents written within...

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Normal Skeleton Blessed by God]

[Lv - 1]

[Strength - 13, Agility - 13, Health - 13, Magic - 3]

[Passive skills - Invisible Heart Lv1]

[Active skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv1]

“ ... ”

The wind passed by his smooth (bald) skull, and his empty (impotent) crotch.

It only took around... 10 minutes before Lee Shin Woo figured out that this was neither God's mistake, nor the Empire's curse.

Chapter 1.1

Reinforcement Hero (1)

After he had accepted that he would have to deal with a skeleton body (bald and impotent) from now on (even he thought it was an incredible feat of composure), Lee Shin Woo began to earnestly research his status.

If you know the enemy and you know yourself, you need not fear the results of a hundred battles. It was a basic principle to know oneself before entering the battlefield. Though he still lacked the courage to actually seek out his enemies.

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Normal Skeleton Blessed by God]

[Lv - 1]

[Strength - 13 Agility - 13 Health - 13 Magic - 3]

[Passive skills - Invisible Heart Lv1]

[Active skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv1]

'I get that I'm a skeleton, but what does this blessing thing mean?'

As expected, he was most concerned about his class. No matter how he thought about it, this wasn't a blessing, it was a curse. What exactly is the blessing? When he carefully thought about it, a series of text appeared, just like when he had called out the status window.

[You are a skeleton that was blessed and created by God. As such, you will not take any damage from holy magic, and will instead receive 1.5x the normal recovery rate.]

[You are unaffected by curses, as you were blessed by God. Your body is immune to all curses.]

“That's unexpectedly amazing!”

The ability was truly befitting of the word blessed! It felt like it wouldn't be out of place to replace the term 'skeleton' with the term 'angel' instead. But she should've just made him an angel in the first place then... He thought pointlessly, and went over the next item.

'In some ways, starting at level one is natural. And as for my physical abilities or my magic... I don't know the standard here, so it doesn't matter.'

He skipped past the level and stats and checked his skills, which were a reflection of his negotiations with God. He had one passive skill and one active skill, and Lee Shin Woo checked the passive skill first.

[Invisible Heart Lv1 (Passive)]

[Your heart cannot be seen, nor can it be grabbed. You are immune to mental status ailments, and you will revive even if your body is broken to pieces. Each revival will increase the skill level by 1. Each skill level will increase your stats by 3. However, you will be completely destroyed if the skill reaches the max level (Lv100).]

One of the secrets had been solved. He wondered why he was so composed despite being dumped into a situation like this, and it was all thanks to this skill! However, since it would help him survive in his current situation and wouldn't be detrimental, he accepted the truth quite easily.

'So, a perfect immortal body is impossible? But with this... '

Did this mean he had 99 lives? Well, it didn't seem like he would die under ordinary circumstances. Moreover, whenever he died, he would gain additional stat bonuses. Isn't this an ability that forces him to accept that he'd become a skeleton?

Of course, he didn't know what would happen if his body was broken into several pieces all at once, or if it were possible to die several times at once. He had other questions like those, but since they were questions he couldn't solve right away, he decided that he'd solve those problems later. Rather, it was actually better for it to remain unsolved forever.

[Bone Reinforcement Lv1 (Active)]

[Sacrifice a bone, or a piece of bone equipment in order to reinforce your bones or

your bone equipment. You can absorb the special experiences and memories within the bone. The higher the level, the more effective the absorption.]

The last one was the skill that would 'theoretically' allow Lee Shin Woo to grow indefinitely. But why didn't he feel inspired when he saw it?

'There's no way to find out until I get a bone and try it out myself... '

While thinking that, a series of text suddenly appeared before his eyes.

[A quest has been generated!]

“Ah, a quest.”

This was honestly a nice time for a quest since he didn't know where to go. Perhaps the quest had waited for this moment. The contents of the quest were very suitable for him as well.

[The Entrance of the Underground Empire]

[The place where you have arrived at is the Underground Empire's exterior passageway, where the effects of the curse are almost non-existent. However, the Empire's guards are always patrolling these areas. Whether you exterminate or evade the patrols is up to you, but proceed forward, and find the hideout that possesses God's power.]

[Quest Reward: Minimap.]

“A minimap, huh...”

He was curious as to what a minimap was like, and the passageway was a one-way road anyway. It wouldn't be bad to find the hideout, and he also didn't really have a reason to ignore the quest either.

He was still hostile to the God who made him like this, but since he didn't want to lose out by going astray, Lee Shin Woo decided to follow the contents of the quest for now.

But just as he was about to move his body to do so, an undead appeared from far inside the passageway.

[Patrol... ling... Are there no... heroes anywhere...]

Luckily, it was a skeleton that looked similar to Lee Shin Woo; however, unlike him, it carried a decent white bone spear, and since it was in an equipped state, it was much better off than him.

It was surprising that a skeleton composed of all bones could speak and that he could understand what it was saying, but now wasn't the time to be surprised about that.

[Skeleton Soldier - Lv1]

When he saw its appearance, its class and level appeared right before Lee Shin Woo's eyes. But wait a second. It's only level 1 when it looks like it should at least be level 5?

“How the hell is that level 1?”

[Hm... Voice... unclear...]

He had ended up talking aloud due to his shock that the skeleton was only level 1. The skeleton, which was several meters away, instantly turned its head towards him. It noticed him, even though it didn't even have eyes.

[Skeleton... I haven't seen before... A newbie?]

“...”

In that extremely short moment, Lee Shin Woo thought of countless things.

The other side is level 1, and I'm level 1 with high stats, so shouldn't I just fight it, he thought. On the other hand, the other side has a weapon. Wouldn't it be difficult for me, who doesn't know any martial arts, to beat it bare-handed? He soon came to a conclusion.

“Yeah, I'm a newbie! Nice to meet you!”

[A newbie, huh... Nice to... meet you...]

If the enemy misunderstood and considered him an ally, then there was no need to

throw away that advantage! Lee Shin Woo greeted him as brightly, and as pleasantly as he could, and slowly approached it. The Skeleton Soldier also approached him, as if there were no enemies around.

[Your bones... are really clean...]

“Your bones are also... uh... sturdy.”

[Thanks...]

The skeleton soldier seemed happy from the compliment, and with the hand that wasn't holding the spear, rubbed its head, while emitting a squeaky sound. When he saw that, Lee Shin Woo's (nonexistent) eyes gleamed. This was his best chance!

He quickly extended both of his bone arms and stole its spear. The skeleton panicked as its weapon was snatched in the blink of an eye.

[What... are you doing...!]

“It means I'm a newbie hero!”

Since he had never learned how to use a spear when he was alive, Lee Shin Woo just swung the spear like a club and attacked the skeleton. The moment it hit its bones, his own bones felt a considerable rebound force and he did his best to not let go of the spear.

[You... traitor! You're... with the goddess!]

“Who the hell is with that old hag!”

He would pay her back later for turning him into this. It just wasn't possible right now! Lee Shin Woo swung the spear, focusing all his rage towards God into it while clenching his teeth. However, the skeleton would scream whenever it was hit by the bone spear, and it surprisingly didn't back away, instead gradually getting closer.

“Isn't this too hard for someone who's level 1?”

[You traitor!]

Lee Shin Woo was shocked that the skeleton had so quickly gotten in front of him, and

swung the spear with all his might, attacking it. However, the skeleton easily evaded the obvious attack, threw its body at him, and bashed into him!

“Ugh!”

Once Lee Shin Woo was struck by his opponent's decisive blow, he pitifully dropped the spear, and it fell to the floor. Even though he was just bones, no, perhaps because he was just bones, it hurt even more.

To make matters worse, when he had somehow managed to stand up, he saw that the Skeleton Soldier had regained its spear and was pointing it at him. Though the skeleton was cracked in various places due to his attacks, its spirit was no less than that of a Death Knight.

[Executing... traitor...!]

“W-Wait a second, Paul! Remember our good old days...!”

[Executing!]

The Skeleton Soldier's spear flew towards his skull, crushing it apart. It was a clean attack, compared to Lee Shin Woo's unsightly attack. It was truly a perfect critical hit.

[Execution complete. Returning to..... patrol...]

The Skeleton Soldier confirmed that Lee Shin Woo's skull had indeed been crushed, and it seemed as though it were sure of his death, as it nodded its head and turned around. However, in the next instant, the broken pieces of Lee Shin Woo's shattered skull emitted a faint light, gathered into one piece, and was restored.

[Invisible Heart has become level 2. All stats have risen by 3.]

[98 levels remaining until the max level.]

Lee Shin Woo regained consciousness in a split second and stood up without a sound. His empty eye sockets momentarily flickered with a faint flame before disappearing. He carefully closed and opened his fist, and then attacked the defenseless and slowly moving skeleton from behind.

[You're...!?!]

“Urgh...!”

If he learned anything from his defeat, it was that a skeleton's greatest weakness was their head. Lee Shin Woo didn't even attempt to snatch away the spear this time. He rushed in real close, turned his hands into fists, and pounded on its skull like a madman.

“Die! Die!”

[Keuaaahk!?!]

The Skeleton Soldier screamed and swung its spear, but they were too close for his spear to be effective. Its spear floundered in the air a few more times, and it soon threw it away, responding with its own fists, but by then, it was already too late.

Shin Woo didn't know how many times he had struck its head, but the cracks he'd made thus far suddenly emitted a cracking sound and expanded, shattering the skull.

[You have hunted a Lv1 Skeleton Soldier.]

Even after the message appeared before his eyes, Lee Shin Woo remained on guard, but when he saw that the Skeleton Soldier was unable to maintain its body any longer, and start to break down, he barely released the tension within his body and dropped to the floor.

Though an undead body didn't feel fatigue, his mind that barely remained inside was completely groggy.

“I shouldn't have underestimated him.”

He was confident that he had done everything he could to prepare. But there had been an unbridgeable gap in skill between him and the Skeleton Soldier.

Its spear had crushed his skull in a single strike, and he had to strike him several times before he could do the same. That difference caused him to die once.

‘...I can't help that I've already died once. I just have to not die again.’

Lee Shin Woo energized his spirit, which had been exhausted by the fierce battle. A mere Skeleton Soldier was nothing more than the lowest rank monster in the Empire. If he gave up here, he would be nothing.

“Hoo.”

He somehow exerted strength into his bones and stood up. Then, he saw 3 spoils of war that remained where the skeleton had disappeared.

One of the remaining items was the white bone spear he had used, another was a black coin, and the last one was a bone that had remained without breaking down. Lee Shin Woo instinctively extended his hand and grabbed them.

[You have acquired a Lv1 Bone Spear.]

[You have acquired the Skeleton Soldier's Arm Bone.]

[You have acquired 10 Perium.]

Would there really be any need for money in an empire only comprised of the undead, he thought. That was the first question that had come to mind, but then again, he had a leather pouch on him, even though he was just bones.

Lee Shin Woo shrugged his shoulders and decided to put the coin into his pouch. Now, the only remaining things of importance were the two spoils of war.

[Bone Spear]

[Lv1]

[Durability: 93/100]

[Attack Power: 5 - 15]

The bone spear remained sturdy, despite clashing against bone several times during the battle. It had an important detail: there was a level on the item. No, there was more.

[Would you like to sacrifice the bone spear in order to reinforce your bones? You can choose one of the following to reinforce: toe bone, leg bone, arm bone, a finger bone, upper jaw bone, and the lower jaw bone.]

“No.”

It seemed as though it was possible for bone equipment to be sacrificed in order to reinforce the body, but he desperately needed a weapon right now, so he let it be. More importantly, there was still something left that could reinforce his bones.

[Would you like to sacrifice the Skeleton Soldier's Arm Bone to reinforce your bones? You can reinforce your arm bone.]

Lee Shin Woo scanned his surroundings before he nodded his head. The desolate passageway was silent, without even the sound of ants crawling by.

Well, he had already killed a patrolling guard, so it would take some time before another one came up to bat. After he confirmed his safety, he silently muttered.

“Reinforce.”

Chapter 1.2

Reinforcement Hero (2)

The moment he used his Bone Reinforcement skill, the skeleton's arm bone flickered with a weak flame and oxidized in the air, followed by a stinging feeling in his left arm.

[You have reinforced your arm bone. Strength has increased by 1. Absorbing a portion of the Skeleton Soldier's memories and experiences.]

[That spear isn't meant to be swung like that. Look. Though it may look like this, this is the spear technique that was taught to me by the strongest general of the Empire, General Leofield.]

And that was it.

“...”

Um, alright. He didn't have high expectations from the get-go. On the contrary, he should be happy that his strength permanently increased by 1. He didn't know how long it would continue to increase his stats by 1 whole point, but if he put in the effort, step by step, he should be able to at least confront a Skeleton Soldier and win easily.

Lee Shin Woo did his very best to appease his disappointment, grabbed the spear on one side, and stood up. However, at that very moment, he felt as if something had changed.

“Mm...?”

Did the spear change? No, that wasn't it. He himself had changed. Like he had done thus far, he grabbed the spear without thinking, and at that very moment, he was suddenly overcome with the thought that this wasn't the proper way of wielding a spear.

If he wielded it like this, the spear would only be as effective as a club. In order to use a spear like a spear, he would need to hold it properly. He followed his instincts and

changed his grip on the spear. Somewhere in that posture lay a similarity to the Skeleton Soldier's own.

[Passive Skill, Beginner Spearmanship Lv1 has been learned.]

“...!”

At that moment, Lee Shin Woo's (nonexistent) eyes widened. He had learned spearmanship from just absorbing the Skeleton Soldier's memories of handling a spear!

If that's the case, if he were to obtain another's bones who learned a different skill, wouldn't that mean that he'd be able to learn that skill as well? His evaluation of the Bone Reinforcement skill drastically changed for the better.

'Good, I can accept this... '

If he had a normal human body, he wouldn't even be able to dream of reinforcing his body through bones. The resurrection through his Invisible Heart was, of course, the same. These two skills were so powerful that he had no choice but to accept that he was a skeleton.

If he had, at first, been like 'even so, how could you turn me into a skeleton, you necromancer bitch!', then now he was like 'now that it's become like this, I'll become the strongest skeleton!'. Lee Shin Woo swung the spear a few times and nodded his head in satisfaction.

'My spearmanship's still lousy, but I can at least stab decently now.'

He hadn't learned any martial arts before, but he could tell whether his motions were proper, or a mess.

Since he had swung the spear in the desperate battle to his heart's content, he felt that the force behind his swing was incomparable to before.

[Over there... Newbie...?]

“Yeah, newbie here! Good morning!”

Of course, Lee Shin Woo wasn't confident that he'd be able to overpower a Skeleton Soldier in a frontal assault, so he acted like a merry skeleton when a new patrolling guard appeared, and slowly walked towards it.

The Skeleton Soldiers here seemed to really like newbies, as they all greeted him without any suspicions. He was quite thankful for that.

“Nice to meet you, Paul!”

[My name's not Paul, but... it's nice to meet you...!]

'The quest comes later. For now, let's not leave this area, and grow in strength.'

He greeted the Skeleton Soldier, and the tip of his spear flashed, falling diagonally. And thus, the Antlion of the external passageway was born.

[T-Traitor...]

“It's unfortunate that you couldn't remember your past life, Paul. We were the best of friends...”

[Keuhak!]

Lee Shin Woo stabbed the skull of the 138th Paul with his bone spear as hard as he could. The thickness and strength of his bone spear was incomparable to normal bone spears, and that bone spear cleanly smashed the skull of the 138th Paul. It left behind a bone, a bone spear, as well as 10 Perium before disappearing, just like the other Paul's.

“Oh, this time it's a leg bone.”

It wasn't like all Skeleton Soldiers left behind arm bones. After experimenting over 100 times, Lee Shin Woo was able to conclude that they dropped an arm bone, a leg bone, or mixed bones (the description explained that it was a bone of unknown origin). Amongst these, the mixed bones was a dud that didn't increase stats, nor did it contain any skills, while the arm bone increased his proficiency in spearmanship and the leg bone...

[You have reinforced your leg bone. You have acquired 5% proficiency in the skill,

Beginner Sprint.]

[No, I said now's not the time to be swinging a spear! Goodness, there's really an epidemic coming, I tell you! I'm getting out of here first! Different from you guys, faster than anyone! - A nameless soldier]

[The Beginner Sprint skill has become Lv3. Your sprinting speed has become slightly faster.]

“Nice.”

They had the effect of bestowing proficiency in the Skeleton Soldier's sole movement-type skill, Sprint.

This skill allowed for a momentary, lightning-fast sprint, and was a skill that consumed a large amount of stamina, but to the undead which possessed the race characteristic of 'never tiring', it was a great skill he'd be able to use again immediately after the skill delay.

'Anyway, my stats didn't increase again. Should I really get going now?'

Arm bones and legs bones, not mixed bones, would originally increase strength or agility by 1 each time he reinforced them, but at some point, the frequency of that growth had decreased, and now his stats wouldn't rise even after absorbing 10 bones in a row.

Though he had wanted to move after raising both his strength and agility to 100... Lee Shin Woo clicked his nonexistent tongue and checked his status.

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Normal Skeleton Blessed by God]

[Lv - 1]

[Strength - 57 Agility - 46 Health - 34 Magic - 6]

[Passive skills - Invisible Heart Lv2, Beginner Spearmanship Lv3]

[Active skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv1, Beginner Sprint Lv3]

'They're higher. They're definitely higher, but... '

There were three things he wasn't satisfied with.

First off, mixed bones weren't effective in improving his stats, which resulted in his health stat being lower than his strength or agility. He also hadn't found a way to increase his magic stat, nor did he know how to use it. Lastly, he was still level 1, despite hunting down so many Skeleton Soldiers.

'At this point, I might not be able to increase my level through normal hunting.'

Certainly, the Skeleton Soldiers he had killed up until now had been much too strong, despite being level 1, and each Skeleton Soldier was different from the last. The fact that they were all level 1 was evidence that it wasn't easy leveling up in this world.

"All the more reason to level up at least once before moving forward, but... I suppose it can't be helped. Let's move on to the next step."

Since he had moved around the passageway while hunting, he knew the approximate location of the hideout. He had felt an obviously disparate energy leaking from a crack in the corner of the passageway.

He was sure, since the skeletons unconsciously avoided it, as they could feel the divine power within.

'Ah, before that.'

He had a job to do before he got going. It was to upgrade his bone spear.

[Would you like to sacrifice the Lv1 Bone Spear to reinforce the Lv1 Bone Spear (+9)?]

"Hoo..."

When Lee Shin Woo saw the message asking yes, or no, he took a short, deep breath. His hands trembled. He couldn't help but do so when he recalled the process of creating the Bone Spear (+9), as well as the several bone spears that went into making it.

That's right. Unlike normal reinforcement, bone equipment reinforcement had a failure rate. Of course, even if the reinforcement were to fail, the performance of the

equipment wouldn't drop, nor would it be damaged, but whenever he saw the bone spears disappearing for nothing, his heart would ache. Not that he had one.

“Ugh, reinforce...!”

But what could he do about it? Even though he realized, in his heart, that it'd be more profitable to reinforce his bones rather than the spear at this point, he still couldn't give up!

Since this would be the last Skeleton Soldier he'd kill in the passageway anyway, he would let the spear cleanly oxidize for the last time and burn his own lingering attachment as well!

[The reinforcement has succeeded. The Bone Spear has become Lv2.]

...was what he was thinking when the reinforcement succeeded. Moreover, the Bone Spear had leveled up before him as a result! He might have to call it Lord Bone Spear, rather than Bone Spear now.

“Ooooooh!”

Lee Shin Woo was deeply moved, cried (he couldn't), and observed the reborn Lv2 Lord Bone Spear. The spear shaft had become around thirty centimeters longer than before, and the impressive blade gleamed with a menacing light.

[Bone Spear]

[Lv2]

[Durability: 500/500]

[Attack Power: 25 - 45]

“Oooooooh.”

The maximum attack power of the Lv 1 Bone Spear (+9) had been 30, but a single reinforcement had increased it by 1.5x all at once. Not to mention the increase in durability. As expected, his investment into his weapon had paid off.

Lee Shin Woo rubbed his skull against the Lv2 Bone Spear's sleek handle, emitting a

squeaky sound, and was satisfied. Since he had earned the Lv2 Lord Bone Spear, he had nothing to fear anymore!

[An unforeseen quest has occurred!]

At that very moment, a quest had occurred. Lee Shin Woo quickly began to resent Lord Bone Spear.

[Ambush of the Treasure Eater]

[Among the undead inhabiting the underground empire is a race called the Treasure Eaters that like to eat objects with magical energy within them. Normally, there isn't anything that piques their interest in the external passageways, but the Lv2 item that you have created ended up stimulating one of the Treasure Eaters' senses. It's much stronger than a normal Skeleton Soldier to the point that it's incomparable, but if you defeat it, you may be able to gain the treasure it has eaten.]

[Quest Reward: The Treasure Eater's treasure?]

[Guoooooooooh!]

The moment that quest notification appeared, he heard a shriek from far beyond the passageways. At the same time, he heard something collapsing. There were also a few Skeleton Soldiers' screams mixed in as well.

[Kuaooooooooh!]

The sound was coming closer by the second. A human... no, a skeleton... had just adapted to the situation, yet a new trial appeared as if to interfere with that adaptation. Perhaps that Treasure Eater didn't appear naturally, and had been sent by God herself to torment him?

All sorts of doubts momentarily rushed through his mind, but the most important thing right now was deciding his course of action. Lee Shin Woo double checked the location of the hideout and quickly moved. First, he planned to check the Treasure Eater with his own two (nonexistent) eyes, and fight if it seemed doable.

[Treasure Eater - Lv2]

[Kuwooooooh!]

“Nope, I gotta run.”

But when he saw the bug that had broken through the passageway floor, Lee Shin Woo decided to run without hesitation. That thing's the same level as Lord Bone Spear!

The moment he decided to flee, he activated his Sprint skill and ran towards the hideout. However, at that very moment, he got an announcement out of the blue.

[Quest failed! However, the minimap has been added as a reward to the unforeseen quest.]

“What...?”

The warm light that leaked between the cracks in the passageway immediately disappeared. The implication was so clear that he wanted to cry.

Hideouts could disappear!? Lee Shin Woo abruptly stopped and grit his teeth, and soon, the Treasure Eater had gotten close, greeting him by opening its mouth wide.

[Kuhaaahk...!]

“Hi, Steve...?”

[Kuheeehk!]

He did his best to greet it like a cheerful skeleton, but it seemed like it didn't like the name, Steve. Lee Shin Woo shrugged his shoulders and gripped Lord Bone Spear.

It was another fight.

Chapter 1.3

Reinforcement Hero (3)

[Kuweeeehk!]

The Treasure Eater charged at him with a shriek. Its jagged fence-like teeth within its open mouth radiated with a dull light.

“Sprint!”

[Kuhiaaaah!]

If he was chewed up by that thing, he knew it wouldn't end with him dying only once or twice, so Lee Shin Woo completely abandoned any thought of a frontal assault. He activated his Sprint skill and ran away.

Immediately after, the Treasure Eater brushed past his side and the following wind pressure felt as though a subway train had passed by him, and his bones itched. There was also the foul stench of rotting corpses.

[Kueeeeh!]

Perhaps it hadn't expected that he'd dodge it so cleanly, and the Treasure Eater, that had labored in vain, shrieked again and twisted its body around. It seemed like it would take quite a long time for it to make a U-turn, as its body was too large when compared to the width of the passageway.

“Heup...!”

This was his chance. Lee Shin Woo firmly gripped his spear with both hands and held it to his side.

He subsequently pierced through the side of its body, as if he were shooting a cannon, and both of his hands creaked. He placed the full might of all of the stats he had stockpiled thus far into his Lv2 Bone Spear; the force behind the Bone Spear was truly

tremendous!

[Critical Hit!]

His spearmanship had been firmly tempered through the sacrifice of countless Pauls, resulting in a strike both heavy and sharp. The spear entered and split open its side, magnificently bursting open both its skin, and the flesh within. It was then that Lee Shin Woo realized that the concept of critical hits existed in this world.

[Ggueueeh!]

“W-Whoa!?”

But he had only thought of attacking with all his might and hadn't considered his next move. The moment the pained Treasure Eater turned its entire body, Lee Shin Woo failed to pull out the spear and crashed into the wall.

“Ah, ugh...!”

He was afflicted by a pain that felt as though all his bones were being smashed. The pain was killing him, but he knew he would really die if he lost consciousness here, so he desperately maintained his consciousness. It helped here as well that he was undead.

[Kwihehk!]

“Tch, this damned thing...!”

Lee Shin Woo was trapped between the bug's body and the wall; though he was receiving a shock that felt as though his body was being crushed to pieces, he used all his might, grabbed the spear, and pulled it out, causing dead flesh and blood to burst out.

[Ggueueeeeh!]

At that moment, the bug screeched like a pig, filling the passageway with its screams.

[The Treasure Eater used Shriek of the Dead. Those exposed to this shriek will momentarily enter a frenzied state.]

[As an effect of Invisible Heart, you ignore the effects of Shriek of the Dead.]

The effects behind its shriek were ignored due to the effects of Invisible Heart! However, Lee Shin Woo was moving without seeing that message.

To be exact, he aimed for the moment it shrieked, as it stopped moving while doing so, to attack the same area he had attacked last time. He believed he'd be able to land another critical hit by attacking the same area.

[Gguaaaahk!]

“Tch!”

However, was he still lacking in skill to intentionally land a critical hit? Although he had thought he had timed it perfectly, his attack missed. Compared to last time, his attack was only able to create a smaller hole.

Still, the fact that he could withdraw his spear and retreat immediately following his attack was progress, compared to last time. However, at that moment, a message update appeared.

[Beginner Spearmanship has become Lv4. You can swing your spear more easily now.]

“Huh...?”

Lee Shin Woo briefly voiced out in surprise. That's because Beginner Spearmanship had leveled up to Lv3 upon killing the 133rd Paul. It hadn't been long since it had leveled up, yet it had leveled up again, so he couldn't help but be surprised.

However, he obviously didn't have the time to look into that right now. Like the message had said, it felt much lighter than before. He gripped his spear and got ready to use his Sprint skill again.

[Gguaaaahk!]

The Treasure Eater had successfully managed to change directions, despite being

attacked, and opened its mouth wide, seemingly intent on swallowing both him and the treasure whole.

“Ugh... Sprint!”

[Kueeeeh!]

At the end of their split-second battle of wits, Lee Shin Woo dodged its charge again and flung his body.

Though it was a dangerous moment that would determine life or death, he was able to dodge its charge with more ease than before. That's because the Treasure Eater charged in a straight line, and he had used his Sprint skill to accelerate at the crucial moment.

If he didn't possess a skeleton's body which enabled him to utilize Sprint repeatedly, the battle would've already been over.

Conversely, it meant that he was confident that he'd be able to keep up with it as long as he wanted.

“Nice, then...”

Lee Shin Woo concluded that he'd need to prolong the fight, so he abandoned all thoughts of attacking, and decided to damage it little by little. He would use the reach of the Bone Spear at mid-range to nibble away at its body!

“Eat this!”

[Kuaaaahk!]

The Bone Spear quickly stabbed its rear end, splattering blood. Lee Shin Woo had successfully attacked, and he immediately retreated to a safe distance and observed the Treasure Eater.

However, its response was strange. Lee Shin Woo had expected that it would go wild like last time, but it ignored his predictions and had curled up as much as possible...

[Kihiiiiiiiiih!]

“Argh.”

It yelled its most annoying and unpleasant shriek to date! Lee Shin Woo grit his teeth to endure its intense, skull-ringing shriek. And there was a truly teeth-gritting scene before his very eyes.

[The Treasure Eater uses the Roar of Healing.]

[The Treasure Eater's health recovers completely.]

The wounds that Lee Shin Woo had risked his life to inflict were being healed in real time!

“Steve, you asshole...”

[Kuwooooooh!]

It was just an external passageway monster, but it was healing up like a boss monster! He was even more annoyed by the fact that he had no way of figuring out how many times it could use the Roar of Healing.

If it could use the Roar of Healing repeatedly, then this struggle would be meaningless.

“Ah, that's so demoralizing.”

[Kuoooooh!]

He felt as though his blood sugar was dropping, but it was just a misunderstanding. After all, he was nothing but bones so there's no way for his blood sugar to drop.

Lee Shin Woo weakly gripped his spear. He could do nothing but act on the assumption that right now, the Treasure Eater couldn't use its Roar of Healing indefinitely. And if not? Then he'd have to run away no matter what by using Sprint!

It was then.

[Monster discovered... during patrol...!]

[Requesting reinforcements...!]

“Huh...?”

Lee Shin Woo couldn't believe what he was hearing. He had definitely heard the voice of a Skeleton Soldier beyond the completely collapsed passageway!

Moreover, thanks to the Treasure Eater rampaging everywhere, the upper, lower, and side passageways had all collapsed, and the Skeleton Soldiers were coming out from everywhere. Of course, the Treasure Eater had absolutely no interest in the soldiers equipped with lousy bone spears, but Lee Shin Woo was different.

'Are these guys really coming to help me?'

[Requesting additional reinforcements...!]

[In the middle of requesting reinforcements...!]

[Discovered something... fighting the monster...]

One of the Skeleton Soldiers discovered Lee Shin Woo confronting the monster.

The skeleton tilted its head when it saw Lee Shin Woo's larger frame, compared to other skeletons (his body became slightly larger as his stats increased), and the shiny bone spear in his hand, ultimately asking.

[Are you a newbie...?]

"Yeah, I'm a newbie! Help me!"

Lee Shin Woo yelled distressingly. It seemed like the skeleton couldn't grasp the situation, as it stood there vacantly for a second, but soon, came up to the passageway, and pointed its spear towards the Treasure Eater.

[Participating... Hunting together...]

"Pauuuuul!"

Right after Lee Shin Woo shouted in gratitude, a message appeared before his eyes.

[You have achieved the feat of deceiving your enemies and manipulating them. Surviving using everything you have may be the most important talent in the Empire.]

[You have learned the passive skill, Acting Lv1.]

“ .. ”

It felt slightly strange that this was the first skill he had obtained through his own efforts, but he'd use it as much as possible if it would keep him alive! Lee Shin Woo sneakily took a step back from the Treasure Eater and yelled in an even louder voice.

“Pauls, let's beat this monster together! It's a thief that's threatening the security of our Empire!”

[Request complete... Participating.]

[Participating.]

“Hey you, yes you. Come over here!”

[Helping... the newbie...]

[Participating.]

More Skeleton Soldiers aggressively participated in the battle, and even those from further away, the more of a fuss he made.

There were those who would wait and see, but when Lee Shin Woo personally pointed them out and asked for their help, they couldn't just ignore him. Who would've thought that the first aid training^[1] from the military would help here?

[Kuoooh!]

[Hunting... the monster.]

[The bug that threatens... the Empire!]

The Treasure Eater disregarded the Skeleton Soldiers when more than 10 had gathered and lunged at Lee Shin Woo, but when the number had instantly surpassed 20, it seemed to panic, and change its tactics.

[Kuwooooooh!]

[The Treasure Eater used Shriek of the Dead. Those exposed to this shriek will momentarily enter a frenzied state.]

[As an effect of Invisible Heart, you ignore the effects of Shriek of the Dead.]

“Ah, I forgot about that.”

[There are a lot of enemies...!]

[Where are you aiming, that's... an afterimage...!]

Unlike Lee Shin Woo, the other skeletons were powerless before the Shriek of the Dead, and the skeletons that had died from infighting were quickly replaced by new ones. It seemed as though all the Skeleton Soldiers in the external passageways were gathering here.

[Kuwooh, Kuwooooooh!]

[The Treasure Eater tried to use the Shriek of the Dead, but it failed due to the lack of mana.]

“Oh, so that's how it is.”

While the Treasure Eater tried to repeatedly use its Shriek of the Dead, a message had appeared notifying him that it had failed due to a lack of mana!

At this point, it's highly likely that the Treasure Eater wouldn't be able to use its Roar of Healing either. All of the risk factors had disappeared.

“Good, Paul. Use the siege destruction formation^[2]!”

[Attacking...!]

[Killing the enemy!]

Ah, it's a line he'd wanted to say at least once in his life. Lee Shin Woo was moved, wiping the resulting (nonexistent) tears, and then gripped his bone spear.

Of course, even if it had depleted all its mana, the Treasure Eater's physical abilities didn't change and was wiping out the Skeleton Soldiers with relative ease. It would be easier for Shin Woo if it wiped out a lot of them.

“Wow, this year's harvest is great!”

He muttered satisfyingly as he saw the bones scattered around him, then gripped his spear and charged at the Treasure Eater.

The battle ended just five minutes later. It was a complete victory.

Chapter 1.4

Reinforcement Hero (4)

[You have defeated a Lv2 Treasure Eater. You have achieved a feat of defeating an enemy with a higher level than you. Your Strength and Health permanently increase by 2.]

[As a reward for your achievement, the proficiency of your combat-related skills have been increased. The Beginner Sprint skill has become Lv4.]

[Quest complete! Please check the treasure that the Treasure Eater left behind.]

[You have gained the minimap. If you close your eyes, you will be able to see the minimap.]

[We won...]

[We defeated the monster. I need rest...]

There were only two Pauls... or Skeleton Soldiers that had survived until the end of the battle. Lee Shin Woo hadn't tried to save them, but they had managed to survive. However, all their bones were cracked in the aftermath of the fierce battle, and it was difficult for them to even stand!

“Paul, I'll never forget the time we spent together.”

[Ugh!?!]

[What are you doing... keuahk!]

Lee Shin Woo forcefully embraced the two skeletons, who had gone through hardship with him. By doing so, he completely broke through the threshold of their health, and they crumbled to pieces.

Silence finally dawned upon the clearing (the passageway had significantly widened and become a clearing), that had been filled with the cries of the Treasure Eater, and the rattling sound of skeleton bones. He was the champion.

[The Acting Skill has become Lv2.]

“That's amazing timing... phew. I'm dying too.”

Though he was victorious, Lee Shin Woo had received a lot of physical and mental damage. His bone joints ached, and he even saw a part that was cracked. It hurt so much that he thought it might be better to die once and come back!

However, Lee Shin Woo didn't do that. It would be a waste to use his Invisible Heart like that, and he already knew of a method to restore his bones. That was...

'Now, let's start reinforcing, shall we?'

His eyes quickly scanned his surroundings. The bones and the Bone Spears of the skeletons that had died fighting here were piled in the dozens. There were also dozens of black coins, too.

That wasn't all. There was a distinct bone, compared to the skeletons' bones, that remained in the area where the Treasure Eater had died, as well as something shiny, causing Lee Shin Woo's heart to flutter. It had been worth it to overcome this ordeal (though it was mostly the skeletons)!

“I'll put aside the delicious one for later.”

He suppressed his desire to check the Treasure Eater's loot and picked up the nearby skeleton bone first.

They were mixed bones, but it was for the better. Increasing his strength or agility through an arm or leg bone had nearly reached its limit and increasing his health through mixed bones was much more effective right now.

[You have reinforced your tailbone. Health has increased by 1. Absorbing a portion of the Skeleton Soldier's memories and experiences.]

[I-I'm pretty sure my tailbone just broke. Really! - A nameless soldier]

“If these guys knew they could leave behind memories of their life, they wouldn't have left behind such useless memories...”

Lee Shin Woo stroked his tailbone and felt that the cracks had definitely decreased, compared to before the Reinforcement. And he repeated the Reinforcement process.

The more he repeated the Reinforcement, the more his stats and skill proficiency would slightly increase, and simultaneously, the cracks on his entire body began to cleanly disappear, as if they had been erased by an eraser.

“Huh?”

While Reinforcing, Lee Shin Woo found an unexpected item. He had picked up a bone that wasn't an arm bone, a leg bone, or mixed bones.

[Skeleton Soldier's rib bone.]

[A bone left behind by a Skeleton Soldier who had strong bones.]

“So, this kind of thing can happen, too.”

Was it a rare drop? Lee Shin Woo was slightly excited and sacrificed it to reinforce his ribs.

[You have reinforced your ribs. Health has increased by 2. Absorbing a portion of the Skeleton Soldier's memories and experience.]

[General Seagald has committed treason...? That's not possible. I'll trust him and follow him to the end. - A nameless soldier.]

“I don't think that's a line a nameless soldier would say, though!?”

What exactly did General Seagald do? He didn't know what he did, but in any case, raising 2 points in Health was awesome. He decided to remember the name, General Seagald, and absorbed the remaining bones one after another. His appearance was akin to a farmer who was harvesting his crops.

“Now, it's time to upgrade the Bone Spear...”

He looked at the mountain of Bone Spears that he had collected while absorbing the bones and looked like he was at a loss. It had been so hard to reinforce the Lv1 Bone

Spear, so he couldn't imagine how many Bone Spears would break in the process of reinforcing the Lv2 Bone Spear.

“Phew. But there's no helping it. I gotta do it.”

He had realized the importance of weapons several times during his fight with the Treasure Eater. A single attack from his spear had been more effective than 10 attacks from the other Skeleton Soldiers! He took a short, deep breath, and extended his hand towards the mountain of Bone Spears.

[Reinforcement has failed.]

[Reinforcement has failed.]

[Reinforcement has failed.]

[Reinforcement has succeeded!]

“Oh!”

He had succeeded in only 4 tries! He had thought that Lv1 items may be unable to reinforce Lv2 items, but Lee Shin Woo became confident after his single success and began to reinforce, one after another.

[Reinforcement has failed.] x30

“Please no, don't be like that. No!”

[Reinforcement has failed.]

[Reinforcement has failed.]

[Reinforcement has failed.]

...

[Reinforcement has succeeded!]

[Reinforcement has succeeded!]

[Bone Spear +3]

[Lv2]

[Durability: 590/590]

[Attack Power: 33 - 57]

'Ugh, I don't know what the probability is, so I don't know if it went well or not.'

When he was about to run out of Bone Spears, the final two Reinforcements had succeeded, and as a result, the Bone Spear became a Bone Spear +3.

Lee Shin Woo had quickly used up all the Bone Spears, and a part of him felt that it had been a waste but decided to be satisfied with the fact that his Bone Spear had definitely gotten stronger.

“Now, then...”

It was finally time for the main dish he had been saving. His bone joints rattled displeasingly as he approached the place where the Treasure Eater had died. The first thing he saw was a heaping pile of Perium. He extended his hand towards the pile, and a message appeared.

[You have acquired 1,250 Perium.]

“Whew.”

Where exactly was this Perium currency used? No, could it even be used? He had picked them up instinctively due to his past game experience, but he couldn't make sense of them. While he was at it, he checked how much money was stored in his pouch; he had gathered 3,340 Perium up until now.

'The money pouch is starting to get heavy. Is there no inventory here?'

Perhaps he would gain an inventory by completing a quest, like how he had received the minimap. Then, he picked up the Treasure Eater's bone next.

As expected, since the Treasure Eater was much larger than those pathetic Skeleton Soldiers, a single one of its bones was larger than Lee Shin Woo.

[Would you like to reinforce your bones with the Treasure Eater's lower jaw bone? You can reinforce your lower jaw bone.]

“This really pisses me off...”

This probably wasn't even its entire lower jaw bone, but just a portion of it. It was the area commonly called the jawbone, and just the thought of sacrificing it to reinforce his bones caused his skin (even though he didn't have any) to feel goosebumps.

However... he didn't really have any other choice. He shrugged his shoulders and proceeded with the Reinforcement.

[The Bone Reinforcement skill has become Lv2. The effectiveness of bone absorption increases.]

[You have reinforced your lower jaw bone. Strength has increased by 1, Health by 1, and Magic by 5. Absorbing a portion of the Treasure Eater's memories and experiences.]

[Kuwaaaaaaaahk! Kuheeeeeeeeeehk! - Treasure Eater]

“ ... ”

Lee Shin Woo, who felt the faint memories seep into his body, was briefly silent. He shivered, as the Treasure Eater's shriek in the message felt slightly, really slightly, affectionate. If he were to somehow meet another Treasure Eater, he felt as though he'd be able to understand what the Treasure Eater was saying, albeit a little.

“In any case, it increased my magic, so let's leave it at that.”

He might've gained a skill, but most of the memories and experiences he gained through Bone Reinforcement didn't immediately manifest as skills and would require a bit of time. Most of the time, the skill would only awaken at the right time.

If it was a skill though, he'd like to gain that Roar of Healing for sure... Lee Shin Woo earnestly prayed and extended his hand towards the final item that also doubled as the quest reward.

[Feather Bone Boots +1]

[Lv2]

[Durability: 256/320]

[Defense: 25 - 35]

[Options: Agility +5, Sprint skill +1]

“Wow...”

To think, an item could have both stats and skills. This was truly a treasure that was in a completely different league when compared to the similarly leveled Lv2 Bone Spear! Lee Shin Woo carefully put the bone boots on his feet. There was a slight problem; since both Lee Shin Woo and the boots were made of bone, it was difficult to figure out whether the boots were an item or the bones of someone with stupidly large feet. But considering the fact that his body felt lighter when he put the boots on, it was definitely the effect of an item.

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Normal Skeleton Blessed by God]

[Lv - 1]

[Strength - 65 Agility - 55 + 5 Health - 48 Magic - 11]

[Passive skills - Invisible Heart Lv2, Beginner Spearmanship Lv4, Acting Lv2]

[Active skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv2, Beginner Sprint Lv4 +1]

“Nice.”

Lee Shin Woo grinned as he looked at his stats; it had certainly changed as a result of the battle.

His health, which had been lacking compared to his other stats, had been supplemented to a certain degree, and his magic slightly rose as well. He was sure that he had successfully sublimated the Skeleton Soldiers' battle experience into his own, to a certain degree, in the previous battle.

“Let's see if I die again...”

The moment he died in a car accident flashed through his mind. Lee Shin Woo grit his

teeth and shook his head, shaking off the memory. He resolved to never die again. Whether this place was a cursed Underground Empire or the middle of a galactic war, he would survive no matter what.

[A quest has occurred!]

The moment he made his vow, a well-timed quest occurred. It was as though God had been listening and decided to intervene at just the right time.

[Infiltrate the Empire]

[You have remarkably taken down the Treasure Eater and grown. However, this is still just the external passageways, not the Empire. Follow the directions on your minimap, break through the soldiers guarding the Empire's walls, and infiltrate the Underground Empire!]

[Quest rewards: Inventory, use of God's Secret Shop.]

Well, then. The tutorial was coming to an end.

Chapter 2.1

God's Secret Shop (1)

“If I close my eyes... ooh, ooh.”

When he closed his (nonexistent) eyes, he could see it as an extremely intuitive image. It felt as though there was another eye centered on him that watched from above and scanned the entire area. And within that area, only the correct path shined brightly.

‘...Shall I go?’

There wasn't much more he could gain from staying here. Lee Shin Woo made up his mind, opened his eyes, and started moving along the confirmed path.

The clearing had stagnated from silence to dead quiet, and only the sound of his moving footsteps rang out. His footsteps had gotten a lot quieter, perhaps due to the Feather Bone Boots.

'Hoo.'

The passageway was quite long. Various parts of the passageway had collapsed thanks to the Treasure Eater's rampage. In order to reach those places, Lee Shin Woo had to at times jump high, and at other times jump far. He eventually came to, in a sense, the obvious realization: the Sprint skill could be used in tandem with his jump.

'If I become proficient in my Sprint skill, then time it, no, I may become a skeleton who can run in the sky... Ah.'

As he walked through the continuing passageway, the atmosphere in the passageway changed in no time.

If it seemed as though he had been reluctantly trudging through the underground passageway, filled with nothing but rocks and sand thus far, then this current area is the first place to have a clear path.

'This is the real Empire... I can see the walls.'

There was a clear distinction between the external passageways and the genuine Underground Empire: the castle walls. According to the quest's explanation, he would have to face Skeleton Soldiers over there again.

Honestly, he didn't think he'd lose to a few Skeleton Soldiers now, but he couldn't release his tension, so long as he couldn't ascertain how many of them there were.

[Halt...]

Lee Shin Woo stopped, his bone joints rattling. There was a single, imposing platoon of skeletons atop the castle walls, aiming their bone arrows at him. Yet, their numbers were small. They soon disclosed that reason themselves.

[The monster... was it hunted...?]

"Yeah, we got it! Though, everyone else died except for me..."

Now, he could start acting at the flick of a switch. A part of the soldiers that guarded the walls were probably sent to hunt the Treasure Eater!

This all happened because Lee Shin Woo had made a huge fuss. He lauded his foresight, which he hadn't even been aware of, and continued to speak.

"Paul, please open the castle gate for me. I have to return to guard duty too."

[Wait... just a minute...]

It seemed like this quest would go smoothly. However, had he jinxed it? One of the skeletons wielding a bone bow rattled its teeth as it spoke.

[I haven't seen that... spear before...]

"The Treasure Hunter dropped it."

Lee Shin Woo, who was only focused on entering the Empire, roughly concocted a plausible story. But the soldier's response caused his (nonexistent) heart to pound.

[Then... report it to your superiors...]

“Huh?”

[I'll... report it.]

No wait, he didn't think their military discipline was this strict. Moreover, superiors? Doesn't that mean someone stronger than them will come? He felt pressed and requested.

“Hey, Paul. Wait a sec. I'll give the report myself, so open the gates first.”

[The report... comes first...]

Report-then-action? Damn it! They hadn't even thought of complimenting and taking care of a comrade who had returned with great difficulty, and instead, would call their superiors when they heard the news that he had picked up a new item. You damn egotistic and ambitious skeletons!

“I said I'd be the one to report it!”

Since it came to this, there was no need to hide anymore. If that superior arrived, he'd definitely die at least once! He clicked his tongue and sprinted. The Skeleton Soldiers were startled and aimed their bone bows at him.

[Are you... revolting against the Empire?]

[Are you trying... to embezzle?]

[Is it corruption^[1]...?]

“Sprint!”

He completely ignored what the skeletons were saying and jumped while using his Sprint and clung to the castle wall. Surprisingly, it was possible for him to jump close to 2m high.

Even though he was only at the tutorial level, he thought that he had already transcended humanity, and belatedly realized that he was no longer physically human.

[Attack... Subduing.]

[Subduing.]

The Skeleton Soldiers determined that he was their enemy and began to aim and shoot their arrows at him. Though he planned to get hit by a few of them, when the arrows closed in on him, his hand, holding the bone spear, moved by itself.

'Huh!?'

It happened in a split second. Right after he grasped the trajectory of the arrows with the naked eye, he instinctively swung his bone spear and parried two arrows! The arrows he couldn't block hit his shoulder, but the damage was minor.

[You have learned the passive skill, Beginner Weapon Defense Lv1.]

That wasn't all. When he thought he needed to stop the skeletons from drawing their bowstrings again, he naturally opened his mouth and shrieked.

“Kuhwaaaaaaahk!”

[You have learned the active skill, Beginner Shriek of the Dead Lv1.]

[By using the Shriek of the Dead, the enemies in the entire area have momentarily fallen into a frenzied state.]

He didn't know how he had learned Beginner Weapon Defense yet, but the source of the Shriek of the Dead was clear. It was the Treasure Eater! He had wanted to learn the Roar of Healing, but the results were contrary to his expectations.

[You bastards... just when did you infiltrate...!]

[I'll... kill you...!]

He felt momentarily dizzy since he had used the Shriek of the Dead with his low mana, but its effects were astounding. The Skeleton Soldiers treated each other as enemies and started to attack each other!

Lee Shin Woo aimed for that opportunity, exerting himself, and crawling up the wall.

He felt motion sickness due to his unreasonable use of mana, but he grit his teeth and endured.

[W-What about that guy?]

“I'm right behind you.”

[Ugh!?!]

By the time the Skeleton Soldiers escaped the status ailment, Lee Shin Woo was already atop the castle wall!

There's no way arrows would be effective at close range. Lee Shin Woo cold-bloodedly swung the Lv2 Lord Bone Spear and broke them in a single strike. It was a quick and clean finish.

[You have hunted a Skeleton Archer.]

[You have hunted a Skeleton Archer.]

For a brief moment, the castle walls regained its silence. Lee Shin Woo grabbed and removed the arrow lodged in his shoulder and sighed. Though he had been slightly injured, he had stopped them from reporting to their sup...

“...The hell is this?”

After he had climbed atop the castle wall, he was finally able to see the scenery beyond. Since the walls of the castle had remained intact, he had thought that the city within would look like it was from the middle ages... but there was a different sight before him, as though it were mocking his naiveté.

“Is this the demon world or something...?”

A city? Perhaps it may have been called that some time ago. However, all the buildings were weathered, decayed, entangled with weeds here and there... it was already ruined, without any proper buildings remaining.

The entrance was the only thing barely intact. When he looked further ahead, he saw plains, covered in thick grass, and a sandy desert mixed together conflictingly. If this were like a game, it was as if the developers had tried implementing both a desert map

and a plains map at the same time, but the two maps had clashed and failed.

“What superiors?”

There's no way there would be any military systems left intact here. The skeletons here were just souls trapped in the past.

And those he would have to face from now on were probably the same. Even if he thought he was conversing with them, there was no actual conversation going on at all.

“Ha...”

Lee Shin Woo suddenly realized what situation he had been dumped into, sighed softly, and shrugged his shoulders.

Honestly, before he had come here, when God had told him that she wanted him to purify this place, he felt something like 'I don't really care, but if I can come back to life, I might as well.', but now he felt like he wanted to fix this place, at least to rid himself of his uneasiness.

'First, let's pick up the loot.'

He couldn't just sit thinking forever. Lee Shin Woo collected the scattered Perium atop the castle wall, as well as the Skeleton Archers' bones, bone bows, and bone arrows.

Strangely, their finger bones remained, and when he reinforced himself with them, the message was the same among them.

[You have reinforced your finger bone. Agility has increased by 1. Absorbing a portion of the Skeleton Archer's memories and experiences.]

[Why are you putting an apple on my head?... Wait a second, fine, I'll learn archery! Jeez, I said I'll learn it! - A nameless boy]

Compared to his leg bones, which he had reinforced to the limits and which wouldn't really raise in agility, whenever he reinforced his finger bones, his agility would raise with a high probability.

[You have acquired a Lv1 Bone Short Bow.]

[You have learned Beginner Archery Lv1.]

“That's right, I had expected this too.”

He searched the entire area and used all the finger bones he found to reinforce himself. As a result, even without the effects of the Feather Bone Boots, his agility had risen to 62, and his Beginner Archery rose to Lv2, even though he hadn't shot a single arrow yet.

He continued, combining (reinforcing) the less than 10 Bone Short bows into one.

[Bone Short Bow +4]

[Lv1]

[Durability: 220/220]

[Attack Power: 20 - 25]

“This ain't half-bad.”

Though its attack power was incomparable to the Lv2 Bone Spear, he felt reassured, now that he had acquired a way to attack from a distance. He felt even better since there were almost 200 arrows stored in the castle walls.

[Quest complete!]

[You have acquired an inventory. You can open and close it by shouting the inventory command.]

[You have acquired a permit to access god's secret shop. You can open it by shouting the shop command.]

“Wow.”

After he finished collecting the loot, climbed down the walls without much thought, and set foot in the Empire's territory, Lee Shin Woo saw messages in front of him, one after another.

He was lost in thought, so he had forgotten that he had been in the middle of a quest, so Lee Shin Woo was briefly surprised, and inwardly cheered. After all, he couldn't

carry 200 arrows all at once.

“Inventory.”

He muttered, and a checkered, transparent window appeared in front of him that he often saw in games. Lee Shin Woo muttered, saying it was an intuitive inventory, and when he touched the window, his hand was powerlessly sucked in. He was startled and pulled his hand out, but his hand was fine.

'Will this work?'

He grabbed a bone arrow and put it inside. The bone arrow was instantly sucked in, and an arrow icon appeared on one of the checkered boxes. The x1 sign next to it was a bonus.

“Let's see.”

He shoved all his bone arrows into his inventory. The sign instantly shot up to x189. He wasn't absolutely sure yet, but he felt like he'd be able to stack the same item inside, as long as they were identical. Since the inventory, divided into checkered boxes, currently only had 10 boxes, when he realized that they could stack, he was more than a little relieved.

“Let's put the bow in... ah, money too.”

When he threw the money pouch inside, the pouch disappeared somewhere, and a black coin icon appeared below the inventory, along with the amount 3,420. He honestly wanted to compliment it because of how intuitive it was.

“Good, close.”

However, it didn't close. He thought perhaps it would close if he muttered 'inventory', and when he did, the inventory completely disappeared.

Lee Shin Woo suddenly had an idea and he muttered inventory in his head without saying it out loud. The inventory opened. With this, he'd be able to open and close the

inventory amid battle without much difficulty.

'Then next up... '

With this, he completely understood the inventory. Lee Shin Woo took a deep breath again and muttered the command of the other reward.

“Shop.”

At that moment, the surrounding area distorted. At the same time, even Lee Shin Woo's consciousness became faint. He tried opening his eyes in an attempt to get a hold of himself no matter what, then...

“Guten morgen ^[2], Mr. Skeleton.”

He had arrived in God's secret shop.

[1] T/N: This term doesn't have a specific enough English equivalent. It's when you perform illegal activities because you need the money. Typically refers to politics.

[2] T/N: Good morning in German.

Chapter 2.2

God's Secret Shop (2)

When he came to, he was no longer in the Empire, but somewhere else. It was an enclosed space, with silver walls emitting a delicate light on all four sides, and one of those sides was the 'store'. The secret shop permit gave him permission to come to this place.

“Why are you just staring at me? I'm sorry but I'm not for sale.”

Lee Shin Woo tilted his head when he saw the woman behind the counter look back at him with a bewitching smile.

“...Have we met somewhere before?”

“Oh my, are you hitting on me? Unfortunately, your body's not my type.”

“I'm not hitting on you, you know. Even if I were, it wouldn't matter.”

She spoke while laughing annoyingly, and Lee Shin Woo became short-tempered. He had accepted that he was an undead now, but he needed more time before he accepted his impotence!

Even so, the woman, the storekeeper, giggled.

“Ah yes, you're right. Aw, how sad.”

The storekeeper was a remarkable beauty with burning red hair. Her red, bobbed hair trailed down to bottom of her neck, and slowly shimmered and swayed as if it were actually fire.

Yes, Lee Shin Woo had seen that almost living red hair before; he had seen it just recently.

“Are you God?”

“There's no way God would be that free. Are all people with red hair gods, then?”

“Ugh...”

Indeed, she looked different from the God that Lee Shin Woo remembered. By Earth standards, God looked both eastern and western, had truly strange physical features (ears, eyes, mouth, and nose), and looked like a 10 year old girl, and a 60 year old lady at the same time, such that it was difficult to tell.

On the other hand, the woman in front of him was different. She looked energetic and in her early 20s, and had western physical features as well. Her hair was shorter, and her red eyes were different from God's (God's eyes glimmered in five different colors). But he was sure of one thing: she was an undeniable beauty. That was her only similarity to God.

“If I were to explain... yes, think of me as a priestess. My role, given to me by God, is to supply my customers, that is, heroes, what they need in return for the proper price. I follow God's orders, so I'm a merchant and a priestess at the same time.”

“If a hero needs something, you should just give it to them for free.”

“Hehe.”

She'd probably heard that a lot from the other heroes until now. She narrowed her eyes and explained.

“You know the term 'karma', right? Karma exists in everything in this world. When you are accomplishing a special feat, perfecting a special skill... or even killing others; you gain karma.”

“Then are levels and stats a kind of karma, too?”

“It's nice that you catch on quick. You're right, They are a type of karma. And customer, by using that karma as a price, you're able to receive a different 'karma' in return. The karma I receive in return for my items is... Perium.”

The explanation was long, but it just meant that achievements, skill training, and killing would allow him to raise his level and stats and that the Perium he received from killing monsters could be used to buy items.

When Lee Shin Woo heard that Perium was also a type of karma, he took out a portion of his karma from his inventory and looked at it thoroughly, but as expected, he couldn't figure anything out. It seemed as though the woman was used to it, and

continued.

“Customer, you don't have the ability to process, or use it in another place yet. It will be much more helpful to you if you just buy items from me.”

“...Then, one more question. You said that levels are also a type of karma, but why haven't I leveled up yet when I've killed so many monsters?”

The merchant's smile thickened. Levels were a number that represented one's league and was also this world's standard of absolute strength. Lee Shin Woo mentioned it so casually, so she pitied him.

“I don't know what levels you're talking about, but levels in this world aren't something that can be raised that easily. You have to gather an appropriate level of karma to level up. And the most typical example of that karma are stats.”

“Then to become level 2...”

“All your stats combined must become 200, solely from your body, excluding all items or temporary buffs. It's easy to understand, isn't it?”

'200? How and when am I supposed to get that much', is what he wanted to say, but when he added up all his stats, he was already at 186. That meant that he could raise his level when he raised his stats by 14 more.

“But you don't need to be in such a rush to level up. You see, what you did to get to that level is just as important as the level up itself. Whether it's by a special feat or a skill, other types of karma are important as well. Well, you'll see once you've experienced it yourself.”

It seems like level ups aren't simply a change in number in this world. That means that... it might mean a job change? In any case, it would happen soon, so just like the merchant said, he'd find out for sure once he experienced it himself.

He was briefly lost in thought, and the merchant tapped the counter to snap him out of it.

“I think I've explained enough, back to the point that I should receive karma in exchange for goods. Would you like to buy something now, customer?”

“What do you sell?”

“I sell everything, aside from what I don't have. First off, potions.”

“Hmm...”

He really didn't feel like he needed potions, setting aside whether a skeleton could even drink a potion or not. That's because his injuries could be healed through Bone Reinforcement.

“Next are magic books.”

“Hm...”

Magic books, huh. Perhaps he might need them later, but not now. He didn't even have enough mana for the Shriek of the Dead and he could only use it once, so what would he do by learning magic?

If he hadn't learned the Shriek of the Dead, he might've thought about it, but since he already had a skill that could turn the tides of battle, it didn't really feel very appealing to him right now.

“But you won't be able to buy them right now since you don't have enough Perium. Of course, we also have equipment that you can wear.”

“Equipment, huh. As I thought, I'd really like to see th...”

“Ah, and finally we have bones.”

“Bones!?”

“Bones.”

Lee Shin Woo, who was about to buy equipment, stopped moving and talking at once without hesitation. They sold bones? What if he was right, and they were the bones he was thinking about? He wondered why they sold such a thing and he tilted his head, while the merchant's expression remained calm.

“There are bones scattered around the Empire, so there's no way our shop wouldn't sell them. The other heroes don't have a Bone Reinforcement skill, so they would mostly sell them to me at a cheap price.”

“Of course.”

Since he didn't really have anything worth selling right now, this didn't mean anything to him right now, but it would change in the future. He had an inventory that could store pretty much anything now.

Lee Shin Woo decided that he'd pick up stuff he didn't immediately need in the future and nodded his head. And he told her the type of item he wanted.

“Please show me the bones.”

“Hehe, I knew you'd say that customer, so I had them prepared.”

He pondered between the equipment and the bones, but most of his strength came from his Bone Reinforcement skill, so he went with the bones.

He simply thought that bones were, of course, better since they'd permanently increase his abilities, rather than equipment which he would have to change eventually, but it was mostly due to his experience with Bone Reinforcement, and the variety of abilities he could gain from it.

'There's, of course, the possibility of gaining skills, but I can't deny that the original owner's memories within the bones are greatly affecting my combat abilities.'

Lee Shin Woo knew well. The reason he, who hadn't learnt any martial arts on Earth, could get this far and put up a decent fight against the Treasure Eater, was because he had indirectly gained the combat experience from absorbing the Skeleton Soldiers' bones.

The true ability of Bone Reinforcement wasn't just the increase in stats or the acquisition of skills. It was inheriting the innate experiences and memories that only others had! If he continued to gather these, it would eventually become his strength, and no one else's, that would surpass everyone.

“Oh my, customer. You have 3,420 Perium on you right now...? I honestly didn't have any expectations, but you came with quite a lot, didn't you? Let's see, a bone that you could buy with that much money... here, you can buy one of these two.”

“...Huh?”

The merchant took out two pieces of bone and placed them on the counter, though he didn't know where she had taken them out from. Both of them were large, so he couldn't even guess what part they came from. One of them was slightly dyed red, and the other was dyed blue.

When he saw the two bones, Lee Shin Woo couldn't help but retort.

“...The Matrix?”

“You won't wake up from a dream just because you choose the red bone. After all, this is reality.”

“No, wait. Can't I just buy a lot of bones? I want to acquire as many experiences as possible.”

“You can only buy 1 bone with the money you have. Our shop doesn't sell level 1 monster bones. I won't stop you from buying bones cheaper than these two, but you'll regret it.”

Ultimately, it seemed like he had no choice but to pick one of the two bones. If so, he wanted to at least get the most information possible before buying, but she firmly shook her head.

“Item information is also karma. Customer, you don't have enough Perium to get information on these bones, and buy them.”

“Eek...”

At this point, this woman didn't seem like a priestess who helped heroes under God's orders, but a scammer instead, but it didn't seem like she'd give him the information on the bones no matter what he did. If both bones cost the same, then their potential should be the same as well... if so...

“Of the two, which is more expensive?”

“The blue one's a bit more expensive. It costs 3,350 Perium.”

He would only be left with 70^[1] Perium once he bought it... It would be irreversible, regardless of his choice. He nodded stiffly.

“Please give me that one.”

“A manly choice. Here you go.”

The Perium disappeared from his inventory, without him needing to pass her the money. When he saw the blue bone replace the money in his inventory, Lee Shin Woo felt somewhat relieved. Then, the merchant clapped her hands.

“Now, it's time to part ways. If you work hard on quests, you'll probably see me again soon. I'll tell you one thing, you just made a very good decision, customer. Since the base is important.”

“The base...?”

“Then, I'll see you next time.”

She said grinningly, and though he was incredibly confused, she smiled beautifully and clapped her hands again. At that moment, the space surrounding Lee Shin Woo instantly broke down, and he was returned to the place he was before entering the shop.

“...”

To be honest, he was a bit disappointed. These past few days, he hadn't been able to have a proper conversation with someone else. Regardless of how similar she looked to that cheeky god, just the fact that he was able to have a conversation with her was a huge comfort to him.

Only after that thought did Lee Shin Woo realize that he was starved of human contact.

“No... Don't be negative.”

The only thing that could push Lee Shin Woo forward right now was positivity. If he wasn't positive, he wouldn't be able to do anything. He shook his head so much that his neck joint creaked, and then, took the bone out of his inventory.

“Bone Reinforcement.”

[Would you like to use ???'s bone to reinforce your own bones? You can reinforce your skull.]

He had a good feeling about this. It was his first time reinforcing his head, but he felt like it wasn't a part that he could reinforce very easily.

“Alright, reinforce.”

He proceeded with the reinforcement without hesitation, and then, the blue bone in his hand disappeared without a trace; simultaneously, he felt a dull shock to his head.

“Ugh...”

[You have reinforced your skull. Magic has increased by 7. You have gained a portion of ???'s memories and experiences.]

[I can't understand you people. This research will lead us to ruin. - ???]

When a portion of the memories of the original owner of the bone flowed into his head, he understood the 'base' that the merchant had told him about. He didn't know about Earth, but it was the ability to wield the energy that was at the base of all existence in this world.

[You have gained the passive skill, Beginner Magic Affinity Lv1. Magic recovery rate increases.]

After Lee Shin Woo had barely overcome the migraine, he blankly raised his head and looked at the world.

He had thought there was only death in this world, but there was something that remained that still harbored life.

It was mana.

[1] T/N: Author writes 90 Perium, but that's not correct based on what he wrote earlier.

Chapter 3.1

Level Up (1)

Lee Shin Woo carelessly muttered. Although he was underground, mana was everywhere, and harmoniously floated about. Lee Shin Woo stretched his bare hand, and the mana briefly remained at his fingertips, and then went somewhere else. It seemed it was because his Beginner Magic Affinity was still only level 1.

'Getting this skill early on was definitely a good call.'

He stayed there, playing with the mana a bit more, and then, withdrew his hand and nodded his head. After experiencing the mystery of mana, he finally felt like he was in a different world. He had felt, how should he say it, that it was just a survival game up until now.

'If the blue bone was this effective, then what would the red bone do? It feels like the red bone would've been really helpful. I can't ignore Perium anymore... oh.'

[A quest has occurred!]

He wasn't that surprised this time seeing the quest message. Before the message appeared, he saw the mana in front of him distort, and not only that, he had predicted that it would appear at around this timing.

[The Ability to Survive Here]

[Though you have safely infiltrated the Empire, you are still too weak. The Underground Empire is vast, and there are powerful undead who have lived a long time within. However, there are fortunately some who evaded the undead curse and continued to live. These living beings inhabit an isolated environment, the dungeon.]

[You must first build up your strength in the dungeon before you start your battle with the undead in earnest. Pick a dungeon nearby and get to level 2. When the sum of your stats reaches 200, the karma that you've gathered up to that point will determine your future appearance and potential.]

[However, be cautious. The dungeon itself is safe from the curse, but those who were cursed and entered into the dungeon are not.]

[Quest reward - Open Heroes' Chatting Channel]

“What!?”

After he read the entire quest, Lee Shin Woo's eyes glared. A chatting channel? It would've been nice if they'd opened the chatting channel earlier!

If not, is this karma too!? If that's also not it, is getting to level 2 the prerequisite to entering the chatting room!?

“Let's go now. Right now.”

[The dungeon's location is being shown on the minimap.]

However, contrary to his massive complaining, he immediately nodded his head and accepted the quest. He had been lonely since he hadn't had anyone to talk to, but a channel where he could talk to the other heroes inside the Empire? He would be lying if he said he wasn't happy.

Furthermore, realistically speaking, this chatting channel would be helpful. The heroes agreed that their mission was to save the Empire. Then that meant they were on the same page. Lee Shin Woo hoped that the heroes deep within the Empire would each say a word or two to their junior.

'No wait, I might be thinking too optimistically since I've been starved of human contact, but... in any case, I'll know when the channel's open.'

As long as he behaved himself, Lee Shin Woo would be able to use this chatting channel effectively. He was extremely satisfied with the quest reward, nodded his head, and finally noticed the last phrase of the quest.

[However, be cautious. The dungeon itself is safe from the curse, but those who were cursed and entered into the dungeon are not.]

He tilted his head. The monsters inside the dungeon aren't affected by the curse, but

the heroes who had entered the empire have already been affected by it, so be cautious if you don't want to die, is that it? He was an undead that was blessed with immortality, so he didn't really worry about it too much.

'...Alright, let's find a suitable dungeon nearby.'

Lee Shin Woo leaned against a nearby building's wall and concealed himself; then, he gently closed his eyes and saw the minimap.

Things like the monsters' locations didn't appear on the minimap, but aside from that, it showed the surrounding area in fair detail. Lee Shin Woo tended to not have a good sense of direction, so showing the surrounding area would give him a solid sense of direction.

'There are three shining points above the minimap... Their size is subtly different; does the difficulty correspond with the size?'

There were three dungeons in the immediate vicinity. Right now, he couldn't tell what kind of monsters were in a certain dungeon, nor could he tell their difficulty level. He wouldn't know until he personally entered the dungeon.

If that's the case, picking any of them should be fine. Lee Shin Woo started to walk towards the closest dungeon. First, he needed to get out of the ruined city; then he would need to go past the desert terrain, which was all he saw, to reach his destination.

'The surrounding area should be safe. Since those skeletons just stayed atop the castle wall.'

Of course, he couldn't afford to be careless. After all, a Treasure Eater had appeared in the external passageways, which could be considered the tutorial stage, just because a Lv2 item had appeared.

Lee Shin Woo still wasn't confident that he could beat a Treasure Eater one on one with ease. The wall called 'levels' was huge and sturdy. However, it would change soon. As long as he raised his stats by 9, that is.

'First, let's be cautious of our surroundings... '

He had been afraid of the Empire ever since he saw the quest alert window, and he had comparatively been recklessly charging forward until now. Even so, Lee Shin Woo had no choice but to be on his guard. He couldn't afford to be reckless, even when taking on level 1 skeletons as his opponents.

However, fortunately, his concerns were unfounded. He hadn't encountered a single zombie or skeleton before reaching the dungeon that hid on the outskirts of the ruined city.

'...It's strange though.'

Since he hadn't encountered anything, he was even more concerned. How could there be fewer skeletons within the Empire than the skeletons guarding the external passageways? To him, who had prepared for a much more dangerous fight with the Treasure Eater, he felt all his energy drain away.

'Perhaps it's a matter related to the dungeon.'

He didn't ignore this sense of disharmony. He returned his bow that he had taken out to intercept enemies from a far distance and tightly gripping the bone spear. Then, he cautiously moved forward, being watchful of his surroundings.

His level 4 Beginner Spearmanship would be better than his level 2 Beginner Archery against a strong opponent. More importantly, his bone spear was at level 2. He felt more reassured when he held the spear than the bow.

He recollected his faint experience in the army, and instinctively guarded in all directions poorly, and after a while of walking tactically, he finally arrived at the point that shimmered on his minimap.

The problem was that it kept shining.

'I arrived but... So where exactly is the dungeon? Do I have to dig into the ground or something?'

The dungeon entrance was so well hidden that if the dungeon's location hadn't appeared on the minimap, Lee Shin Woo wouldn't have been able to recognize it.

He couldn't find it by looking at the ground, and it was a structure where he would find the stairway that led underground only after digging for quite a while, but

honestly, there was a secret that was hidden here. And before he went through the effort of digging, Lee Shin Woo, fortunately, realized that.

“What's this pattern?”

There was a pattern on the ground that faintly emitted light. Lee Shin Woo scrutinized it for a while and realized that the pattern didn't actually exist but was a trace of mana that had become fixed, albeit faintly.

'This does look like the dungeon's entrance. What do I have to do for the mana to, oooh.'

The moment Lee Shin Woo's bare bone came into contact with the trace of mana, the magic circle that blocked the dungeon's entrance responded to Lee Shin Woo and started to strongly surge up. Lee Shin Woo instinctually directed the mana that was gathered in his bone and touched it.

Then, it seemed as though a light more powerful than the pattern was emitted, and Lee Shin Woo absorbed it! At the same time, Lee Shin Woo saw a series of texts in front of him, like when he saw his status or quests.

[Level 1 dungeon - You have received a permit to enter the Rural Rat Nest. All of your stats increase by ten in the dungeon. Info on the dungeon is added to your minimap. All your actions in the dungeon are buffed.]

[Beginner Magic Affinity has become Lv2. Magic recovery rate increases.]

The pattern on the floor naturally shut off, and the stairway that led underground appeared. If he hadn't learned Beginner Magic Affinity, he probably would've had to dig into the ground until he found the stairs. He also wouldn't have known that the dungeon was level 1, that his stats would be increased in the dungeon, or that he'd be buffed inside the dungeon.

Lee Shin Woo suddenly self-praised his choice (though it was more like a gamble than a choice) and went down the stairs into the dungeon.

- Kwang

The surroundings gradually got darker, and while going down the top of the stairway, suddenly the ceiling made a sound as it closed, and pieces of rock fell down in a flurry. If he were still human, he would've said it was dirty and freaked out, but after becoming a skeleton, he didn't need to wash up. It was fine as long as he didn't take a lot of damage.

'I don't need to eat, don't need to bathe, and I don't even need to sleep. I might even have the greatest advantage in roaming around this undead nest.'

Just considering the fact that he was thinking so strategically about his undead situation meant that his thought process was already far different than when he was still human, but he wasn't self-aware of this. He was just curious when this stairway would end and busily moved his feet.

But in the midst of that, his tension and his wariness helped to keep him from foolishly losing his life.

[Keuhat!]

“Ugh!?”

The incident happened in a split second. Finally, at the end of the ladder, he saw a stone floor exposed underneath, and while he was going down the ladder two steps at a time due to his excitement, suddenly, a bright light attacked him from within the darkness.

It was extremely fast and at the same time, powerful. Lee Shin Woo instinctually used Sprint and tried avoiding it, but despite that, the elbow of his arm not holding the spear starting from the bottom was completely severed.

“Ggeuuuuhk...!”

Even though he had changed into an undead, he retained his sense of pain. The pain he received was naturally awfully huge.

Still, Lee Shin Woo suppressed his desire to roll on the floor and raised his spear. He couldn't even tell where his opponent was, so getting angry at his injury was just a luxury right now!

'I was careless. I thought that the dungeon entrance would be ok.'

No, that wasn't it. He had put up his guard. His opponent was just too fast, and he just couldn't evade it.

Even right now!

'Ugh!'

[Keuhaak!]

By the time he had seen a glimmering light in the darkness, it was already too late. Lee Shin Woo hunched down without thinking the instant he felt goosebumps on his entire body. Something passed over his head, possessing both destructive force and speed.

[Beginner Sprint has become Lv5.]

“Shit!”

After he had barely dodged his enemy's attack, he grit his teeth and stabbed his spear forward. Until now, he had always thrust with the strength of both arms, but now, since he was gripping it with one arm, the force behind it wasn't like it was before.

[Kuwaak!]

“Ugh, damn it...!”

His enemy couldn't dodge his quick counterattack and his spear did indeed pierce its flesh, but he could tell that it wasn't a fatal blow from the blunt feeling that was relayed from the spear. He withdrew his spear, desperately retreated back and grit his teeth.

[Kuhaaaak!]

“Why you...!”

It was at that moment. He didn't know where exactly his enemy was, but after it yelled

out a strange sound, the torches on the walls that no one knew about were lit in order and the whole area was slightly illuminated. Lee Shin Woo was finally able to see what his opponent looked like.

[Geu... Geuuaaaah...!]

It had rotting, decaying clothes, and similarly dressed down and dirty. There were cracks here and there on its body, and contrastingly, it wielded a long sword that gleamed silver... That was definitely a zombie.

'An undead...?'

Lee Shin Woo didn't think an undead would appear, yet one had appeared at the starting entrance. He didn't know what to think and momentarily stiffened. That was his mistake.

[Guaaah!]

His opponent's rotten eyeballs rolled, and it advanced towards him, swinging its sword. Lee Shin Woo instantly lost his head. It was an absurdly nimble and sharp strike.

'You bastard...!'

Lee Shin Woo had been reduced to a head and rolled through the air. As he did so, the damn zombie that had killed him didn't stop looking at him until the end.

He had vowed to never die again, and it felt unfair that he had lost one of his lives so futilely. They said that undead wouldn't appear in this dungeon, but the fact that an undead had suddenly appeared from the start pissed him off.

At that time.

[Invisible Heart has become Lv3. All stats increase by 3.]

[97 levels remaining until the max level.]

At the same time as he saw the message, he was familiar with it since he had seen it

once...

[Your total stat count is above 200. Would you like to receive level 2's karma? It is also possible to put it off briefly.]

[You have encountered an Undead Hero (Lv2). If you succeed in giving the Undead Hero peace, you will inherit the opponent's Perium that he gathered until his death, as well as a permit for God's secret shop.]

His eyes were filled with the appearances of strange messages.

Chapter 3.2

Level Up (2)

'An Undead Hero... Damn it, that's what it was talking about.'

Only after reading the message did Lee Shin Woo barely understand the meaning behind the message when the quest occurred.

The message, 'The dungeon itself is safe from the curse, but those who were cursed and entered the dungeon are not.' wasn't talking about Lee Shin Woo, but of those who may have gone into the dungeon before him and had become undead!

'It's level two and it's a hero too. So, if the other heroes die, they really are mercilessly turned into the undead.'

Right now, he wasn't even concerned about the reward for taking down the undead hero. That's because he was instead thinking of how much Perium it had gathered before dying, and what he could buy with that money in the secret shop.

But if there was something that concerned him, it was that the effect of Invisible Heart had increased all his stats by three, and his total stats broke through the 200 mark; he wondered whether he should accept the level up or not.

'...I'm strangely torn.'

Common sense dictated that he should immediately nod his head and level up. Though the enemy who lopped off his head was a zombie, it was still a level 2 hero, and if he wanted to kill it easily, he should also be at level 2.

However, there was something that bothered him; it was the message stating that he could briefly postpone his decision.

Why? Why would they need to ask that now? If he was only allowed one choice, telling him that he shouldn't proceed with that choice had absolutely no meaning!

'If that's not the case, then... do you perhaps get something for postponing your level up?'

Lee Shin Woo violently rolled his head as he saw the zombie hero confirm his death, return his sword, and turn around. What could be the reason for postponing a level up? And what would change as a result?

[Keuhak... Keuhahat.]

While he pondered this, the zombie hero hobbled away, slowly returning back to where it came from.

When he looked at the zombie hero's body, he noticed that it was badly damaged. Its entire body had slash marks, as well as traces of bite marks; its neck was especially damaged, as more than half had been cut off and the neck bone was struggling to keep the shoulder and neck together.

'...Then...'

When he saw the wound, Lee Shin Woo was sure. He would postpone his level up to 2 and knew what he had to do, what he could do.

No, he didn't need any more excuses. That's just what he wanted to do right now. It was a desperate revenge.

[Your advancement to level 2 is briefly on hold.]

[Your body is reviving.]

For now, he steeled himself and quickly proceeded with his resurrection. Even his once lost arm was completely restored, and Lee Shin Woo lightly retrieved the Bone Spear that was rolling on the floor; and he silently, extremely silently stood up.

The zombie didn't think that the skeleton it had just taken down had a resurrection skill, so it kept walking slowly.

'Heup... Die!'

Lee Shin Woo only properly aimed for the zombie's neck, and forcefully took a step forward, simultaneously gripping his spear and strongly pierced forward. His stats were buffed by the dungeon, so his spear contained a force that he hadn't had just

yesterday!

[Critical Hit!]

[You have learned the passive skill, Beginner Critical Hit Lv1! It will become easier to ascertain your opponent's weak points, and you can land a fatal blow.]

[Kyaaaaaaaaahk!]

Its sharp scream screeched like a drill, and echoed throughout the clearing. His attack had definitely hit the mark, and he had succeeded in shattering more than half of the zombie's neck bone. As expected, he had a chance, even at level 1!

Plus, his attack just now had caused him to learn the Critical Hit skill, so it was like killing two birds with one stone.

[Kik, Kihaaaaahk!]

“How dare you! Kyaaaaahk!”

The zombie hero was extremely agitated, turned around, and attempted to slash him with its sword, but Lee Shin Woo pulled the spear lodged in its neck with all his might and cried out a shriek that wouldn't lose to the zombie's. He had used his sole skill that utilized mana, the Shriek of the Dead!

[By using the Shriek of the Dead, the enemies in the entire area have momentarily fallen into a frenzied state.]

[Shriek of the Dead has become Lv2.]

The instant it heard his shriek, the trajectory of the zombie's sword stab greatly shook. Lee Shin Woo used that opportunity to safely pull out his spear and retreat. However, his (nonexistent) eyes were filled with unpleasant messages, compared to when he had swung his spear and slashed the zombie's neck.

[The enemy resists the status ailment. It was unable to completely resist the effects, but it has recovered its reduced accuracy rate.]

[Kuhwaaaak!]

“You piece of...!”

The zombie had immediately regained its form and its sword was approaching quickly! Before it was too late, Lee Shin Woo grasped its sword's trajectory, and raised his spear, using his Beginner Weapon Defense. However...

- Kwajik (breaking sound)

“Huh...?”

Its quickly approaching sword had broken his spear into pieces, the bone spear that was level 2 and had been reinforced three times (+3)! Its force truly felt akin to lightning.

However, despite the crazy situation, Lee Shin Woo frantically suppressed his unrest, and stabbed with a part of the split bone spear, shoving it into the zombie's neck. The zombie screamed and retreated.

“You piece of shit...!”

[Kuwaaaahk!]

He hurriedly picked up the remaining half of the splintered bone spear. However, because of the bone spear lodged in its neck, the zombie was worked up and attacked!

Fortunately, the force behind its sword swing was definitely weaker than before. The damage it had sustained was critical.

“Ugh...!”

The moment they clashed, Lee Shin Woo solely trusted in his instincts and used his Sprint skill, throwing his body at the zombie; and the zombie's sword dangerously grazed the small of his back. A savage breaking sound passed by him, and Lee Shin Woo nimbly uprighted his body, and before the zombie could take a stance, he thrust the remaining bone spear piece in his hand into its neck!

[Critical Hit!]

[Ugh..... Kuhaaak, Keueeek...!]

It had definitely hit the mark. Moreover, the unstable neck had two thick spears lodged into it, so the zombie couldn't even move, and merely floundered its hands around. The problem was that the sword within those floundering hands had a destructive power that couldn't be ignored and that it was cutting through the air.

No matter how he thought about it, the zombie's strength mostly came from its weapon, not its physical abilities. If not, there was no way that it would be able to easily cut through a level 2 weapon as if it were a straw!

“Hoo...”

Since he knew how frightening the zombie's sword was, Lee Shin Woo didn't hastily approach, and instead, stayed back safely, and took out his bow and some arrows from his inventory.

Although his Beginner Archery was only level 2, there was no way he'd miss at this distance. He notched an arrow on the bowstring, carefully aimed for its head, and fired.

[Guaaaaaahk!]

It hit the mark. Of course, even with a headshot, a level 1 weapon wasn't capable of inflicting a fatal wound. Though the kinetic energy from the arrow unleashed a force that violently shook the zombie's head, and as a result, it only received an intense shock, rather than damaging its unstable neck.

“Here, have some more!”

He shot another, and then one more. Its neck extended and sagged and was accompanied by the sound of flesh tearing.

Its sword, which continuously cut through the air, had momentarily stopped. Despite that, Lee Shin Woo didn't let down his guard, and once again notched an arrow, pulling the bowstring with all his strength, and... let go.

[Critical Hit!]

[The Beginner Critical Hit skill has become Lv2.]

[Kehk...]

The zombie muttered something, and the moment it took a step forward, its neck bone let out a horrifying breaking sound and broke. It couldn't bear its weight, so the head completely tore off, and rolled onto the floor.

Lee Shin Woo forcefully stepped on its head, which had rolled up to his foot, without hesitation. That was the moment his vengeance was complete, and simultaneously, the moment his level up began.

[You have defeated a Lv2 Zombie Hero. You have achieved a feat of defeating an enemy with a higher level than you. Agility and Magic permanently increase by 2.]

[You have acquired a permit to access god's secret shop. You have acquired 2,280 Perium.]

[You did not submit to defeat and succeeded in your revenge. Now, it is time for you to receive your karma.]

[Lv2 Feather Bone Boots (+1), Broken Lv2 Bone Spear (+3), and the Lv2 Zombie Hero's arm bones are absorbed through Bone Reinforcement. The Beginner Sprint skill has become Lv7. Strength has increases by 5, Agility by 10, Health by 5, and Magic by 15. Absorbing a portion of the Zombie Hero's memories and experiences.]

[You have learned the passive skill, Beginner Swordsmanship Lv1.]

[You have learned the passive skill, Low Rank Bursting Thunder. Beginner Spearmanship(Lv4), Beginner Swordsmanship(Lv1), Beginner Weapon Defense(Lv1), and Beginner Critical Hit(Lv2) have been absorbed into Bursting Thunder. You have acquired 17% proficiency in Low Rank Bursting Thunder.

[You have achieved a feat of acquiring a low rank skill. Magic increases by 5.]

[The Bone Reinforcement skill has become Lv3. The skill effectiveness increases.]

The instant his level increased, despite him not activating his Bone Reinforcement, the bones rolling around everywhere gleamed, and disappeared. The energy within the bones was absorbed into him. Even the Feather Bone Boots he was wearing! Fortunately, he was able to receive all the abilities within still intact.

'Ugh... my head hurts...!'

At the same time, memories were engraved in his head, overloading it. The Zombie Hero's memories had obviously increased his level, and its knowledge of this world instantly flowed into him!

Lee Shin Woo suppressed his desire to lose consciousness by gritting his teeth and organized and accepted the flowing knowledge as calmly as possible. His body made a dreary sound as well, and was changing in real time. However, because he had such a large headache, he didn't really feel the pain from the evolution of his physical body.

'Urgh...!'

His feeble bones became thicker, and the shape of his bones looked more suited for combat, as well as more durable. Compared to his body, his excessively large skull had reduced in size and became sturdier, while the skeleton which didn't have any dirt on it became slightly murky.

Meanwhile, a brand was engraved on his forehead, emitting a faint red light. Right now, Lee Shin Woo thought the word meant avenger, though he had no way of knowing. It was proof that his decision to defer his level up and prioritize taking down the zombie was the correct choice.

[You have become level 2. The effectiveness of your stats increases. Your inventory increases by 10 boxes.]

[Due to your achievement, you have gained the ability of an avenger. You have learned the passive skill, Beginner Avenger Lv1.]

How much time had passed since that message had appeared? He had frantically organized his brain and while he accumulated the knowledge, as well as the information, his front was filled with messages. For the first time, Lee Shin Woo realized that the pain that afflicted his body and mind had gone away.

“Hoo...”

He had gotten a hold of himself, surveyed his surroundings, and then took a sigh of relief. Despite the commotion, no monsters had appeared. Perhaps the Zombie Hero he had fought had killed all the living beings in the dungeon.

“Then, where?”

Too many things had changed all at once. He needed to more precisely understand the dungeon, if for no other reason than to explore the dungeon. Lee Shin Woo briefly took a deep breath and muttered status.

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Skeleton Avenger Blessed by God]

[Lv - 2(Status effectiveness 110%)]

[Strength - 73 + 10 Agility - 77 + 10 Health - 61 + 10 Magic - 43 + 10] (While the dungeon bonuses still apply)

[Passive skills - Invisible Heart Lv3, Acting Lv2, Beginner Avenger Lv1, Low Rank Bursting Thunder Lv1, Beginner Archery Lv2, Beginner Magic Affinity Lv2]

[Active skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv3, Beginner Sprint Lv7, Beginner Shriek of the Dead Lv2]

And then he suddenly realized that defeating the Treasure Eater or the Zombie Hero had been a miracle.

Chapter 3.3

Level Up (3)

Lee Shin Woo checked his status and couldn't hide his astonishment at all.

'It's not just a simple increase in stats, but it increases the effectiveness of my stats by 10%?'

So that's why there's such an obvious, overwhelming divide between level 1 and level 2! If this kind of calculation is applied going forward, there'll be an even larger difference from level 2 to level 3, and level 3 to level 4.

His eyes looked dazed just imagining it. He realized that he still had a long way to go. If he had known this information beforehand, he wouldn't have even thought about fighting the Zombie Hero. The only reason he could even win against it was because the damage to its body had been so severe. He had been extremely lucky.

[Strength - 73 + 10 Agility - 77 + 10 Health - 61 + 10 Magic - 43 + 10] (While the dungeon bonuses still apply)

The power of the level itself was amazing, but his stats, which had absorbed the Bone Spear, the Feather Bone Boots, and the bones that the Zombie Hero had left behind, were also quite impressive. Due to his stat bonus from dying, as well as the effect of his achievement, Bone Reinforcement had resulted in an inflation of his stats.

Losing the Lv2 Bone Spear was regrettable, to the point of tears, but it had caused him to grow since it had been broken anyway.

'Then how about... I have two new skills, huh.'

When he leveled up, he had acquired the skill, 'Avenger', and a skill from the Zombie Hero's memory, 'Bursting Thunder'.

Because they had such grandiose names, Lee Shin Woo was concerned that they might be all looks and no substance, but it was just an absurd misunderstanding.

[Beginner Avenger Lv1 (Passive)]

[Once you harbor a grudge on someone, they cannot escape. You will be buffed if you run from the battlefield, and you can find the opponent who defeated you on the minimap. When you fight that opponent again, all your abilities will increase by 20%. Every time your revenge is successful, the skill grows.]

He gained the Avenger skill on the premise that he'll lose.

It was definitely a great skill. However, it seemed like a strange skill that wouldn't have much opportunity for growth, so he was slightly lost in disappointment, but when Lee Shin Woo understood the meaning behind 'You will be buffed if you run from the battlefield', he came to his senses.

'Does it mean that it's ok to run away for the purpose of revenge? If that's the case, then dying in battle isn't the only thing considered a defeat... It might not be such a simple skill as I had first thought.'

True, if defeat only came at the hands of a lost battle, then there would obviously be no point to this skill since not everyone has a resurrection skill.

The method of using the Avenger skill was different from the other skills he had gained thus far and was caused by the effect of his actions. The potential growth of this skill depended on how he used it. Of course, there was still stuff he didn't know about the skill, so recognizing that there was potential in the skill was the best he could do for now.

[Bursting Thunder Lv1(Passive)]

[A close combat fighting style that was created by a legendary hero; after it was enhanced by God's power, this skill was born. As the greatest fighting style that includes all close combat techniques and defensive techniques that originate from unarmed combat, its power and speed are akin to exploding lightning and fatal. In order to properly demonstrate that strength, the techniques are naturally clad in magic, but this is not possible at the current level.]

On the other hand, contrary to Avenger, Bursting Thunder was an incredibly intuitive ability. For some reason, he was able to naturally understand why Spearmanship,

Swordsmanship, even Weapon Defense, and Critical Hit were absorbed in the process of gaining the skill.

It was a technique that included all close combat techniques! He didn't really need to say how amazing it was. It wasn't a technique that he could gain anywhere. By absorbing the bone that the Zombie Hero left behind, he had extracted the memories and experiences within. If it hadn't been for Bone Reinforcement...!

'For a legendary hero's ability to be enhanced by God's power. There's no way that a Lv2 hero could have created it himself, so he likely asked for this skill from God.'

When he thought about it like that, he felt like he'd scored. He'd be able to gain the abilities that God had given to the other heroes because of Bone Reinforcement! He had once again realized that that the Bone Reinforcement skill's potential was unlimited.

More importantly, it was amazing that the Bursting Thunder skill was at the low rank level. This was the first low rank skill he'd obtained, and considering his achievements, he was sure that it was a high-rank skill, rather than low rank.

'Then, lastly... let's take a look at the sword the zombie left behind.'

Honestly, when he defeated the Zombie Hero, he was most excited about acquiring its sword, not the level up, nor the acquisition of skills. Regardless of how experienced it was in Bursting Thunder, splitting a level 2 Bone Spear in a single strike was evidence that its weapon's ability was uncommon.

"It's over here."

Since the Zombie Hero had already disappeared and was gone, it was easy to find the sword that was rolling on the ground. The sword gleamed in a blue light within the darkness and looked truly mysterious, so his anticipation continued to rise.

However, the moment Lee Shin Woo excitedly grabbed the sword, something strange happened. The sword which had definitely been made of metal emitted a cracking sound and started to change!

[Through the power of Bone Reinforcement, all weapons that you gain change into bone.]

[Lv4 'Thunder Lasting' has changed into Lv3 'Bone of Thunder Lasting'.]

The weapon completely transformed the moment he touched it and it became really short. The bone blade radiated a delicate blue light, and the hilt became discolored, transforming into a black bone...

'...Bone?'

No, he ignored the impossibility of metal transforming into bone for now. How could a level 4 item instantly degrade into a level 3 item? What a waste!

He thought everything would be good, but he didn't know that Bone Reinforcement would have such a fatal flaw. Until now, all the items he had acquired were made of bone, so he hadn't been aware of it at all!

Lee Shin Woo was momentarily lost in a state of listlessness. If he was holding a level 4 weapon right now, he would've felt invincible...!

'No wait... Damn it, get a hold of yourself. I should've expected this kind of demerit.'

Moreover, it would've always been a demerit. Since Bone reinforcement would change all the weapons he acquired, he'd be able to use the weapons he wouldn't otherwise be able to use.

However, if he looked at the long-term, it would definitely be an advantage. He had no choice but to think that way for now. Tears flowed from his eyes (though they really didn't) and he checked the status of the weapon that changed to bone.

[Bone of Thunder Lasting]

[Lv3]

[Durability: 750/750]

[Attack Power: 100 - 120]

[Options: Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Increases Effectiveness of Bursting Thunder + 10%]

"Ugh, he probably got this from God, too."

The abilities of the hero he had just defeated were lousy, whereas the latent potential of the Bursting Thunder skill was ridiculous; not only that, its weapon was also closely related to the skill.

In other words, it was likely that the hero, in exchange for being dispatched to this world, asked God to give it a skill and a weapon. When he compared them to the abilities he'd gained, they seemed inferior, and aside from Bursting Thunder, there was a high possibility that the hero had gained other abilities, but he could care less since he didn't gain those abilities.

'It's definitely advantageous to have a high level weapon at the start but... this is the result.'

That was the only thing worth complimenting; that the hero had given to his junior. But he'd probably forget about it soon.

Despite the weapon degrading to level 3, the Bone of Thunder Lasting boasted strength that completely outstripped the Bone Spear. He tried swinging it around, and finally sighed, ridding himself of the regret of not obtaining a level 4 weapon.

It was at that moment.

[Quest complete. The chatting channel is opening.]

[Mr. Lee Shin Woo is entering.]

[Lloyd H.K: Hey, what's this? A newbie came in?]

[Seira Von Retadane: Hello, Mr. Lee Shin Woo. It should've been a hard decision to become a hero, so thank you for your bravery. Let's work hard in the future.]

[Prince Altania: Anyway, what level are you newbie? 5? 4? You're not level 3, are you? Please tell me you're not.]

[Lloyd H.K: He could start at level 3 and grow. Why are you discouraging someone who just came in?]

[Prince Altania: Damn it. That's because if you finish the start at level 3, even if you desperately try to earn Perium, the limit's level 5. Do you know how many I've seen die like that?]

[Lloyd H.K: But I started at level 3 and now I'm level 6.]

[Prince Altania: You're... you're talented.]

As soon as the chatting channel was opened, a few people hectically chattered away. It was called a chatting channel, but it was more like a group chat, so it was noisy hearing so many voices in his ear simultaneously.

Despite that, he was so happy that he could hear other people talk that tears threatened to flow. To the point that he somewhat regretted that he didn't have eyes from which tears could flow.

[Lee Shin Woo: It's nice to meet you, seniors. Please take care of me.]

The moment the chatting channel opened, he instinctively understood how to use the channel, and gently bent his left pinky finger and spoke. He spoke both reasonably and calmly, to the point where it was difficult to believe that he had become a skeleton. No wait, a skeleton talking was strange from the start.

[Lloyd H.K: Considering how courteous the newbie is... he'd get along well with Retadane.]

[Seira Von Retadane: It's really nice to meet you. You're still in the outer area, right? If you find something troublesome, please tell me at any time.]

[Lloyd H.K: See?]

[Shino Rendu^[1]: So what level are you?... Should I give you some Perium?]

[Lee Shin Woo: I'm sorry, but why does my level or Perium matter?]

Lee Shin Woo decided to ask what he was most curious about first. He thought that by diligently killing monsters, and stockpiling stats through Bone Reinforcement he would get karma.

However, his senior heroes were synonymous regarding Perium and levels, so he couldn't help but be curious.

[Shino Rendu: What? Are you kidding me?]

[Lloyd H.K: Shino, if he came out of the secret shop only buying equipment, he might not know yet.]

[Shino Rendu: Ah... is that possible? True, that's the time when you're most clueless.

Sorry, newbie. I lost a comrade just a little while ago, so I'm a bit touchy.]

[Lee Shin Woo: That's alright, I understand, senior. I was shortsighted. It seems that there are items in the secret shop that correspond to level.]

As Lee Shin Woo talked through the chatting channel, he felt a strange feeling. His personality was calmer than before, and he spoke respectfully; it felt like he had two personalities. It felt like he was wearing a mask... ah, he was using his Acting skill!

[Shino Rendu: Fortunately, your brain's not bad. Yeah, that's it.]

[Seira Von Retadane: That's the significance of the secret shop. You hunt the undead flooding from within the empire, acquire Perium, and then, go to the secret shop to purchase a medicine that increases your stats. Through that, we surpass our limits and are then able to do a more difficult area. At the same time, the purification of the empire progresses. It's fine, even if your level is a bit low. Since God's secret shop makes it possible for 'infinite growth potential'.]

[Lloyd H.K: The higher your level, the more expensive the medicine costs... Do you know how much it costs to buy a single health drug? 300,000 Perium, damn it. It'd probably be faster to achieve a feat and increase my stats that way.]

[Shino Rendu: But achieving a feat ain't easy. Alfy wanted to do that and overtaxed himself... Ha.]

Lee Shin Woo was moved once he heard a senior hero lament. He was suddenly sure that his request to God wasn't wrong.

Of course, he knew that they all didn't have a special characteristic like Bone Reinforcement, but he didn't know that they had to go through so much trouble just to level up. If they had to go through this much trouble, then it was worthwhile becoming bald and impotent! Probably! Please!

[Prince Altania: While we're on the topic, what level are you right now, Retadane?]

[Seira Von Retadane: Isn't Mr. Lee Shin Woo more important than me right now?]

[Prince Altania: You're avoiding it again. So, newbie, what's your level?]

Lee Shin Woo was briefly silent. He had just learned new information and suddenly realized how amazing his ability was, so his mind had become busy.

However, if he was sure of one thing, it was that he didn't really need to tell them that

he was level 2 and cause them to despair. There was the difference between the level they would accept, and the level he would accept, and in their eyes, his growth rate would seem excessively fast in the future.

[Lee Shin Woo: I'm level 4.]

[Lloyd H.K: Nice. If you're level 4, then there's still hope in this world.]

[Seira Von Retadane: That's a relief. Then it seems like you won't hopelessly die in the outskirts.]

[Shino Rendu: Not bad. Hey, after you've properly armed yourself, make sure you get the medicine. Increasing your level should be your priority over everything else, your level. You already know, right?]

Since he knew they would respond like this, he exaggerated quite a lot. He didn't even know how much he had to raise his stats to get to level 4, but he went with it for now. They had responded in the way he had expected.

[Prince Altania: Still, you're not very strong, so you probably received a special feature based on your characteristics. What did you get? You didn't ask for something like increasing your level, shooting fire, or asking for a sword, right? Please tell me you didn't.]

The abilities one receives when they cross over to Heguroa depends on how strong they were originally.

Normally, in a fantasy world, a strong person would comparatively get weaker abilities, while a normal civilian from Earth like Lee Shin Woo would receive the greatest of abilities. That bastard Prince was asking about that right now.

[Lee Shin Woo: I got a skill.]

[Prince Altania: Good job! Seriously, good job!]

[Lloyd H.K: Your base is good. If he does well, he should become strong.]

[Seira Von Retadane: You did well. None of the skills that God grants are normal. Yes... how can we help Mr. Lee Shin Woo right now?]

[Lloyd H.K: Newbie, tell us about your current situation. Since we'll do what we can to help you.]

Fortunately, his seniors seemed mostly amicable. He didn't know how many of his senior heroes were in the empire, but... he was slightly relieved and replied.

[Lee Shin Woo: I'm alright for now. If I get into a tough situation, could I please count on your advice then?]

[Lloyd H.K: Hey, you can speak a bit more comfortably...]

[Yasunori Akira: Hm, it's been a while since we've seen a guy with some common sense. If you can safely get to the capital, I'll put you in my party then.]

[Lloyd H.K: Akira, you're still not dead?]

[Yasunori Akira: You idiot, don't call me by my name.]

Even by his standards, he was extremely polite to the point he felt goosebumps! However, Lee Shin Woo was definitely weaker than his seniors right now, so he decided that he needed to thoroughly bow his head for now. Plus, he's a skeleton right now! There was nothing wrong with always being careful, regardless of who he was dealing with.

[Prince Altania: Yeah, when the time comes, I'll give you some advice. Think of it as an honor.]

[Seira Von Retadane: If you always keep the chatting channel open, you won't be able to focus on the current situation, Mr. Lee Shin Woo. Please keep that in mind. I'll be praying for you to safely arrive at the capital.]

[Lee Shin Woo: Thank you for the advice. Then, I'll see you later.]

Lee Shin Woo politely said his goodbyes and closed the chatting channel.

He could no longer hear the voices that had pounded in his ears, and it felt lonely, but still, he had found a place where he could chatter whenever he wanted, so he was delighted. From now on, he felt sure that he'd be able to cope with this world.

“Anyway, since a quest isn't coming up... it's telling me to do as I please for now.”

It worked out well. Since he decided to clear the dungeon to adapt to his body, which had advanced to level 2, as well as his new skill, and weapon. Of course, gaining Perium and bones was his highest priority.

“Hoo, then... shall we go?”

He sighed satisfyingly and took a step forward into the dungeon.

In order to completely adapt to this world, he moved his skeleton body.

[1] T/N: He's a man.

Chapter 4.1

Hunting Hero (1)

He stared intensely, but there really weren't any monsters at the entrance, not even one. Lee Shin Woo thought the Zombie Hero, who went into the dungeon before him, had probably cleared all the monsters. But he didn't know what monsters it had fought for its body to have become such a mess.

“Jjik, Jjijik”

“Ah, finally.”

He had been absent-mindedly running through the dungeon, without the appearance of a single monster for 10 minutes, and finally met a monster after he had traversed what he felt was halfway through the dungeon.

If you took a common house rat from Earth and made it five times bigger, how disgusting and big would those rats be! Then, he remembered that the dungeon's name was the rural rat nest.

“Jjiiiiiiiiiiiiik!”

“Heup...”

From the outside, they looked weaker than the Skeleton Soldiers, but he didn't know what kind of abilities the monsters of this world were hiding! Lee Shin Woo exerted strength into his hand gripping the sword and cautiously took a step forward.

At that moment, the Rural Rat exposed its brutally shining front teeth and lunged at him! Lee Shin Woo instinctually took a defensive stance and pointed his blade at his enemy. It was such a solid stance that if a skeleton who knew Weapon Defense saw his form, it would've been satisfied with it.

[You have defeated a Lv1 Rural Rat.]

[You have received 5 Perium.]

[You have acquired a Rural Rat's rib bone.]

“ ”
...

It was embarrassing to say that it was a single strike. He had exerted strength into his sword and positioned it so that it would hold back the rat's charge, but the rat had charged into his sword by itself and died.

Of course, it was also due to the fact that it was a fine sword, but just by looking at the amount of Perium dropped, he came to an obvious conclusion. The Rural Rat was ridiculously weak, even compared to the Skeleton Soldiers! His tension loosened tiredly, and he felt despondent. Despite that, he instinctually picked up its rib bone and used his Bone Reinforcement.

[Would you like to use the Rural Rat's rib bone to strengthen your own bones? You can reinforce your rib bones.]

“Reinforce.”

[Your rib bones have been reinforced. Absorbing a portion of the Rural Rat's memories and experiences.]

[Jjik! Jjijjik, Jjiiik! - Rural Rat]

Lee Shin Woo momentarily stood there and felt conflicted. What would be the point of exploring this dungeon now...?

However, he soon got a hold of himself and hit his own cheek. An unpleasant sound rang out at the clash of bones.

“If I can increase my stats by just one from these guys' bones, then it would still probably be best that I procure them all. Yeah, now that I've made up my mind, I'll clear out all the dungeons nearby.”

It'd be troublesome if he got arrogant just because he got a little stronger. The fact that he could grow this much despite not knowing magic or how to fight was all because of Bone Reinforcement!

He soon decided to calmly and orderly proceed and stepped deeper into the dungeon. It seems that his senior hero hadn't stepped foot from this point onwards as more and

more rats gradually popped out.

Of course, he cleaned them up in a single strike, but he gradually had to put more force into his sword, so it seemed as though the rats' health was gradually getting higher.

[You have reinforced your ribs. Your health has increased by 1. Proficiency in the Beginner Stealth skill has increased by 3%.]

[The Beginner Stealth skill has become Lv3.]

[Jjijijjik, jjiik? - Rural rat]

Was it because he became level 2? That's why the level 1 Rural Rat bones would barely increase his stats... However, just like how larvae are good at rolling, the Rural Rat species' proficiency in the Stealth skill wasn't bad.

Lee Shin Woo suddenly realized. All monsters have their own worth!

'I can only lighten my footsteps a little bit for now, but if I develop this skill, it should be really helpful when I need to run away from the battlefield.'

In other words, it would be best to use it in tandem with the Avenger skill. By killing the seemingly unimpressive rats, he had gained a skill with such amazing growth potential, so if he turned back after his first rat kill, he would've been really disappointed.

"Jjijik... Jjiiiiik!"

"Yeah, I'm trespassing, so why don't you try screaming a little louder?"

"Jjiiiiik!"

Rats appeared everywhere and after taking care of them without much difficulty, he greedily absorbed their bones. After walking for a while, Lee Shin Woo realized that the path was getting increasingly narrow. Conversely, there were more and more rats pouring out, and stirring about, making it difficult for him.

"Jjiiik!"

"Jjijijjik!"

“Yes, yes.”

He was well aware of how this dungeon roughly intended to instill the trespasser with terror, but unfortunately, he was able to cut down all the rats that crossed paths with his sword. Lee Shin Woo felt like the path was becoming just a tad bit stuffy.

Moreover, as he traversed deeper into the dungeon, his body was becoming more accustomed to the Bursting Thunder skill, so he was actually thankful if they changed up the conditions or the environment.

With that in mind, he swung his sword, tip facing the ground, upward, and the Bone of Thunder Lasting surged up from the ground to the sky like lightning, brutally slicing through all the rats in the entire area.

“Jjiiik! (No!)”

“Jjik!! (It's in front...!)”

The Rural Rats' death rattles filled the narrow passage. While he reinforced his bones with theirs, he had finally mastered their language, and he was naturally able to interpret the meaning behind their cries; he only felt a bit uncomfortable.

Their desperate behavior only confirmed that there was something deeper within, but he had absolutely no idea what it was. If it was a similar environment to the dungeons he had heard about in webnovels or manhwa, then there should be a boss within but...

'They're showing way too much loyalty for it to be just a simple boss.'

The overly dense population of rats in this area were fully showing their loyalty.

Whenever he swung his sword, the rats filling the passage would all die by themselves, so around now, it was no longer skill training, but arm swinging training instead.

Ultimately, he had no choice but to unleash a different skill. When it was overflowing with a mob of Rural Rats, he had the perfect 'escape from crisis' skill to deal with them.

“Tsk... Kuaaaaaaaaaaaaahk!”

[Using Shriek of the Dead. The enemies in the entire area have fallen into a frenzied state.]

[The Beginner Shriek of the Dead skill has become Lv3.]

“Jjik, Jjijik!?”

“Jjiiiiiiik!”

The effect was astounding! The moment the Rural Rats, who had all rushed at him with the intent to kill, heard the shriek, they were startled, and soon, fought in a fratricidal war! When he saw the dirty blood and flesh splatter everywhere, Lee Shin Woo suddenly trembled.

'This skill really isn't good for my mental health. However, if I train it, it might become more amazing than any other skill... '

He suddenly realized that Shriek of the Dead was obviously more effective the more enemies it targeted. How many enemies had been targeted for the skill to level up immediately!?

“Jjik...”

“Jjijik, Jjik...”

“Well done. Now, rest in peace.”

He waited for the commotion to calm down before he cleaned up the horrific area. After that, he gathered the rib bones without resting and inspected himself while using Bone Reinforcement.

Despite spending close to a whole day concentrating all his efforts into killing rats and absorbing their bones, his health had only risen by 5; but in its stead, his Beginner Stealth had become level 4. Although he could definitely see himself walking, his movements were light, like the movements of a rat, though it was strange to even himself.

“I've gotten a bit more familiar with Bursting Thunder, as well as my body and the sword... Good.”

Since the skill was so amazing, he felt like he couldn't even unleash a quarter of the

power within Bursting Thunder, but he could roughly imitate the appearance of the technique. For some reason, after swinging his sword in the air a few times, he nodded his head and looked ahead.

There was clearly a disparate iron gate located there.

'I feel mana coming from the gate itself. Since the mana within can't come out, does it have the ability to imprison whatever's inside so that it can't come out?

He didn't have any idea how the dungeon was created, but when he looked at the gate, he thought that perhaps the dungeons were originally set up by God to protect humans from the monsters.

Of course, now that all the humans who were supposed to be protected by the dungeons had become undead, they probably don't have much meaning anymore but... He laughed bitterly and placed his hand on the gate. At that moment, a message appeared in front of him.

[Once you enter the boss room, you cannot exit until either you die, or the boss dies. Will you still enter?]

“Yeah.”

He thought that perhaps the secret shop sold an item related to escaping the dungeon, but he thought he didn't need it right now. He wasn't being arrogant; this resulted from his extremely calm decision.

[Lv2 Rural Rat Queen]

[Lv2 Ratman]

The instant he entered the boss room, the first thing he saw were those two entities. Are the bosses normally a level higher than the dungeon? He couldn't tell yet.

A rat that was incomparable in size to the normal Rural Rats; the Rat Queen was stuck in a corner of the vast clearing, and the one standing in front of it was... Yeah, the rat standing on two feet was the Ratman. It was a rat commonly called a Were-Rat. Compared to mere Rural Rats, he felt a qualitatively different strength coming from it.

“Kihik... Kihiiiiiiik! (You cannot touch the queen!)”

“Kihek, Kihek, Kihek...!”

Indeed. It seems like this dungeon was a small kingdom. A kingdom where all the rats serve the queen!

By the time Lee Shin Woo had grasped the identity and location of his enemies, his enemies had also started the battle. The Ratman charged at him with surprising speed. At the same time, the Rat Queen began acting aggressively, and that, surprisingly, was 'childbirth'!

“Jjik!”

“Jjijjik!”

[Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier]

[Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier]

[Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier]

“Oh...”

When Lee Shin Woo saw the just birthed elite monsters following behind the Ratman and lunging at him, he exclaimed at the realization.

The Ratman guarded the queen against trespassers, and the queen would birth soldiers in order to help the Ratman drive back their enemy. Honestly, for a level 1 dungeon, they had such an amazing combination that he had no choice but to recognize them. He had expected an incredibly large rat at best.

“Heup!”

However, at best they were enemies that appeared with strength befitting of a boss, but unfortunately, he had fought against the Zombie Hero at the entrance of the dungeon and won, growing to level 2. So now, a Ratman wasn't a strong opponent for Lee Shin Woo anymore. That's because no matter how fast it moved, he could read its movements.

“Kahahk!?”

Lee Shin Woo used his Sprint and charged towards the Ratman whose nails were gleaming and was rushing towards him. The Ratman locked onto him and swung its nails, but at that moment, Lee Shin Woo aimed for its chest and stabbed. It was the stab he was most confident in.

[Critical Hit!]

“Kyaaaaahk!”

“Jjik, jjiiiik!”

Lee Shin Woo, as it were the natural course of action, pierced through the Ratman's chest. Was that all? He had simultaneously utilized Sprint causing the Ratman to be unable to endure the powerful force, pushing it directly back and causing it to roll to the floor. Its dirty blood scattered about through the air.

Two of the Rural Rat Elites that had followed behind the Ratman collided with each other and rolled onto the floor. Lee Shin Woo had the energy to spare and he finished off the remaining, puzzled elite.

[You have hunted a Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier.]

[You have acquired 15 Perium.]

[You have acquired the Rural Rat Elite Soldier's rib bone.]

When he set aside the Perium amount and looked at them objectively, the Rural Rat Elite Soldiers were stronger than the Skeleton Soldiers. Of course, even so, they would still die in one strike from Lee Shin Woo!

Lee Shin Woo collected its rib bone for now and turned his attention. Even though blood was pouring out of its chest, the Ratman bravely stood its ground. He saw the queen, who was astonished by Lee Shin Woo's ability, continue to birth rats at an even quicker rate.

“Jjik, Jjiiiik...! (I'll protect the queen no matter what...!)”

“You left behind such a magnificent line, so you shouldn't have any more regrets.”

Lee Shin Woo's red eyes sparkled and after checking the now standing Ratman's appearance, he prepared his Sprint skill. If he hadn't gained the Bone of Thunder Lasting, the fight would have gone longer, but it seemed like he'd be able to end it in one more strike with the strength of his sword.

“Jjiik...!”

At that moment, something surprising happened. The Ratman raised both its hands and it seemed as though it was preparing to scratch him, but the next moment, all its nails popped out and flew towards Lee Shin Woo. There were ten in total and considering either the force behind the nails or the mana within them, it certainly wasn't an ordinary attack!

“Ugh!?”

Lee Shin Woo didn't think an original attack method like that existed and hurriedly swung his sword to parry the nails. He couldn't block a few of them as they lodged into various parts of his body, and though it was painful, he had fortunately blocked it from reaching any vital areas.

If he hadn't learned Bursting Thunder, no, if he didn't have any experience in learning Weapon Defense before, he would've died once from this skill.

“Kiiiiiiiik! (Kill him!)”

“Jjiik!”

“Jjjiik!”

During the brief instant that he blocked the nails, the Ratman led five Rural Rat Elite Soldiers and pounced on Lee Shin Woo. Though blood was flowing down both the Ratman's hands, it was staking its life to fulfill its vow, and moving to kill Lee Shin Woo.

“Tch... Sprint!”

Lee Shin Woo also didn't stay still. He immediately took the nails that limited his movement out, grit his teeth, and used his Sprint, charging towards the front. The Elite

Soldiers tried to obstruct his vision by throwing their bodies at him first, but that wouldn't be able to hinder his movement now.

[You have hunted a Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier.]

[You have hunted a Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier.]

“Jjik!”

“Jjiik!”

“Kuhwaaaahk!”

“Huaaaahp!”

The sound of the rats' screams, the Ratman's shriek, as well as Lee Shin Woo's battle cry mixed into one. In the corner, the Rat Queen was birthing Elite Soldiers even faster in order to take care of the trespasser.

However, by the time the next batch of births was complete, the situation had already been completely cleaned up.

“Kik... Kihi... (My... queen...!)”

[You have hunted the Lv2 Ratman.]

[You have hunted a Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier.]

[You have hunted a Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier.]

With one sword strike, Lee Shin Woo killed the three monsters, including the Ratman, and nimbly swung his sword again, killing the other Elite Soldiers attacking him. The strength was truly like lightning falling from the sky and striking the earth.

[You have hunted a Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier.]

[You have hunted a Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier.]

[You have hunted a Lv1 Rural Rat Elite Soldier.]

“Ggiik...! (How...!)”

The Rat Queen spoke in a disbelieving voice. Lee Shin Woo was still intact and collected the bones and the Perium on the ground in one go.

Honestly, he wanted to reinforce himself with the Ratman's finger bone first, but right now, he needed to check something first. It was the ability within the Rural Rat Elite Soldiers' rib bones.

“Bone Reinforcement.”

[You have reinforced your rib bones. Your proficiency in Stealth has increased by 5%.]

[Jjjijijijijijik! - Rural Rat Elite Soldier]

“...So that's how it is.”

The crack in his ribs from the Ratman's nail throw was quickly healed. Was that all? His Stealth proficiency had increased by as much as 5%. He had predicted this, but it was much more effective than a normal Rural Rat!

Lee Shin Woo's eyes, which were gazing at the Rural Rat Queen, gleamed drearily.

“I'm curious how long you can keep giving birth now.”

“Jjik, Jjiik...!”

The Rural Rat Queen faced the wicked skeleton and was struck with horror.

Of course, all she could do was give birth, and just like he wanted, she gave him reinforcement materials... No, she had no choice but to birth Elite Soldiers.

Chapter 4.2

Hunting Hero (2)

[You have reinforced your rib bones. You have absorbed all the memories and experiences that you can from the Rural Rat.]

[Jjiiii! - Rural Rat Elite Soldier]

“...”

“Jji...”

Lee Shin Woo wordlessly checked the message and turned his gaze away. There he saw the face of the dying Rural Rat Queen. It seems that she had a limit to her birthing, and no matter how much she tried, there wouldn't be any more Elite Soldier births.

“What great timing.”

He couldn't be sure how long it took since he didn't have a watch, but he had killed the Elite Soldiers that she had birthed and Reinforced himself with the bones they left behind; he had already done this several dozens of times or more, and it felt like he had stayed here long enough. In the end, he had completely mastered the rat bones!

It was a task that caused him to recollect his time playing an RPG; he left his character in a suitable hunting ground and used his macros to farm.

“Jjik, Jji...”

“Yeah, you've done well. I hope you're reborn as a rat that Cinderella takes care of.”

Lee Shin Woo spoke tenderly and swung his sword, cleanly decapitating the queen. At that moment, Lee Shin Woo heard the sound of a trumpet ringing in his ear and his eyes were filled with messages.

[Level 1 dungeon, Rural Rat Nest, clear. Magic has increased by 1.]

[You have gruesomely slaughtered all life within the dungeon. You have gained 1 Slaughterer's token.]

[You have gained the dungeon clear reward.]

The queen only left behind a large bone and some Perium, and soon after withered away and disappeared. However, when Lee Shin Woo was picking up the bone and the Perium, he found a wooden box where the queen had disappeared.

It was a small and frail box that seemed like it would rot away immediately. It was definitely the dungeon clear reward.

“Hoo, now let's see.”

Lee Shin Woo opened the box. There was a book and a money pouch containing Perium inside. Lastly, there was also a dagger inside, but it didn't transform despite him touching it, so when he looked at it again, it was, fortunately, a weapon made of bone!

[You have acquired the Lv2 Bleeding Tooth.]

[Bleeding Tooth]

[Lv2]

[Durability: 450/450]

[Attack Power: 18 - 36]

[Options: When you attack, there is a fixed chance that it will inflict the 'Diseased' status ailment.]

“Strictly speaking, this isn't a bone... Well, whatever. There are teeth on a skeleton too, so it's probably something like that.”

Whether teeth were bones or not from a medical perspective, the important thing was that it hadn't transformed and hadn't lowered in level. There are probably authors who insist that the tooth should've changed since it's not technically bone, but he was willing to assassinate them all.

[You have acquired 1,500 Perium.]

[You have acquired the Beginner Stealth skill book.]

“It was Stealth!?”

He was, of course, familiar with and expected that it'd be a skill book. He had been secretly, really excited since he thought it'd be a new skill that would increase his overall fighting ability, but... to think it'd be Stealth, something that he'd trained to death in this dungeon!

His teeth trembled, and he stored the book. He was already familiar with the skill, so he felt like familiarizing himself with the skill wouldn't do anything and planned to sell it at the secret shop.

“When I put it all together, the dungeon reward isn't anything special. It's probably cause it's a level 1 dungeon... Tch.”

He wouldn't be able to appease himself without complaining. Lee Shin Woo sighed and checked the items remaining in his hands. They were none other than the Ratman's, as well as the Rat Queen's bones.

“Now that it's come to this, you're my only hope... Bone Reinforcement.”

[You have sacrificed the Ratman's finger bone to strengthen your own bones. Agility and Magic have increased by 1. Absorbing a portion of the Ratman's experiences and memories.]

[Ggiiiiik! Ggihik, Ggiiiiik! (The pain of losing a part of my body is nothing compared to the pain of losing the Queen!) - Ratman]

You asshole, even your dying will is way too cool! Moreover, he was able to roughly figure out what skill he would gain from this bone by automatically interpreting this guy's lines.

Lee Shin Woo sported an insufferable expression and checked his hand. Hmm, as expected, there weren't any nails. Teeth are acknowledged as bones, so why aren't nails...?

“This is gonna be a skill in name only...”

His agility and magic, which became harder to increase after becoming level 2, had increased by 1 each, so he shouldn't feel disappointed, but... still, he couldn't help but be disappointed.

However, he gripped the Rat Queen's bone, hoping that it would give him a better skill, but ended up with a ridiculous result.

[You have sacrificed the Rural Rat Queen's pelvic bone to reinforce your pelvis. Health has increased by 1, and Magic by 2. Absorbing a portion of the Rural Rat Queen's memories and experiences.]

[Ggii, Ggiiiiiii! (Ah, ah, my adorable children!) - Rural Rat Queen]

“ ... ”

Why did it have to be the pelvic bone...? No, it's probably not... It isn't, right? As the feeling of nausea shot up, he wasn't able to control his queasiness, but Lee Shin Woo tried really hard not to think about it anymore.

Then, a message appeared at an opportune time.

[The dungeon will soon collapse. Please escape before it's too late.]

“So, it's done its job, then it disappears, huh... Good.”

He briefly took a deep breath and turned around. He could already feel the dungeon starting to vibrate slightly. Lee Shin Woo wanted to check the Slaughterer's token too, but it seemed like he'd have to do that once he got out of the dungeon.

Lee Shin Woo took another deep breath, used his Sprint, and started running. Small fragments of rock were falling from behind him, as well as emitting ominous sounds.

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Skeleton Avenger Blessed by God]

[Lv - 2]

[Strength - 73 Agility - 78 Health - 82 Magic - 47]

[Passive skills - Invisible Heart Lv3, Acting Lv2, Beginner Avenger Lv1, Low Rank Bursting Thunder Lv1, Beginner Archery Lv2, Beginner Magic Affinity Lv2, Beginner Stealth Lv7]

[Active skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv3, Beginner Sprint Lv7, Beginner Shriek of the Dead Lv3]

“Nice.”

The first thing he did once he got out of the dungeon was check his status, and those stats made him incredibly pleased. Just before entering the dungeon, his stats hadn't even reached 200; although his Invisible Heart had activated once, his stats had risen to a sum of 280.

He didn't know how much his stats needed to be to get to level 3, but he was sure he'd be able to reach it soon.

'Moreover, my low health has completely overtaken my strength and agility.'

The Rat Queen, which had appeared as the dungeon boss, had played a huge role in that. Because it had birthed several hundreds of Elite Soldiers, he was able to raise his stats a lot, even though they were all level 1. He was also able to raise his Stealth to level 7.

'Now my bones shouldn't break, even if they're hit fairly hard.'

His increase in health through his level up had certainly thickened his bones, as well as made them sturdier; when he tapped his bones, Lee Shin Woo laughed satisfyingly. Then, right on time, the dungeon he had escaped from completely collapsed and a message appeared.

[A quest has occurred!]

[The callousness and the cruelty you showed in the dungeon has awakened the karma of a slaughterer. However, you are still too weak, and your enemies were even weaker; ultimately, you did not receive the whole karma, but just a token of it. If you are truly confident that you can bear the weight of the karma, then gather 10 Slaughterer's tokens, and complete the karma. You should already be well aware of the method.]

[Quest reward - 1 permit to the god's secret shop, and 1 exclusive equipment.]

“Now that I think about it...”

He thought it would be a quest like 'You've gone through a dungeon, so go deeper into the Empire now and annihilate the undead!', but instead, he got a quest that completely broke his expectations.

It reminded him of an item he had forgotten about and pointed him in a direction where he could grow, so it was as if God was personally telling him 'you're still too weak to get a proper mission, so get as strong as possible' through a quest.

'How could it be 10? I don't have to go through 10 dungeons, do I?'

There's no way he'd have to go through that many. Still, it would definitely be a long journey. Lee Shin Woo wondered whether or not he'd be able to gain a new quest while progressing through this one and became a bit uneasy, but he had no choice but to get a move on for now.

[Slaughterer's Token]

[A fragment of a Slaughterer's karma. Once you gather 10 tokens, the karma will become whole. It only has meaning when you gather them with your own strength. Since you have gained your first fragment, it becomes easier for you to gain the same token of karma in similar situations.]

'So, the tokens do have meaning after all. Does it mean that it becomes easier to get the rest since I've already gotten one?'

Lee Shin Woo was definitely concerned about the hard to understand and complex factors, so he decided to not think about it too hard.

He had even thought about asking his seniors in the chatting channel, but if this was a rare case, it may inversely cause them to pay more attention to him, so he decided not to. Even he thought the Slaughterer's karma wasn't normal.

'Then, shall we get going?'

Firstly, his goal was to acquire the 10 Slaughterer's tokens before he became level 3. Lee Shin Woo inwardly set his goal and quickened his steps. He tightly gripped the level 3 weapon in his hand, the Bone of Thunder Lasting.

[Lv2 Treasure Eater]

[Lv2 Treasure Eater]

That's right. This treasure drew monsters that he was already familiar with.

Two, at that!

[Guoooooooooooooooooh!]

[Kuaooooooooooooh!]

"No wait, all these guys live nearby?"

Honestly, these Treasure Eaters (Lee Shin Woo had encountered a Treasure Eater for the first time in the external passageways), had gathered and targeted his senior hero (they were enemies that would be relatively difficult to face for the other heroes), who had entered the empire with the then level 4 version of the Bone of Thunder Lasting.

His senior hero had probably been injured and exhausted from fighting so many of them, so he had run away into the dungeon and had died, but Lee Shin Woo obviously didn't know the story up to that point.

There was only one thing important to him right now: because of his senior's efforts, the Treasure Eaters had all gathered in this area. Not to mention, they had lost the level 4 item in the past and were really pissed!

[Guaaaaaaaaaah!]

[The Treasure Eater used the Shriek of the Dead, but it was nullified by the Invisible Heart.]

It must've really wanted his treasure, as one of the Treasure Eaters immediately used its Shriek of the Dead as soon as it saw him.

The shriek rang out far and wide and resulted in something Lee Shin Woo hadn't expected; a gathering of the undead. And that was good news for him right now.

[Patrolling... Discovered monsters... Skeleton... engaging...]

[A newbie...?]

The newbie enthusiast skeletons gathered one or two at a time. There were skeletons he was familiar with, like the Skeleton Soldiers or the Skeleton Archers, but surprisingly, there was also a huge skeleton with a large bone sword amongst them.

[Lv2 Skeleton Warrior]

It was the first skeleton he had seen since coming into the empire that was level 2, the Skeleton Warrior! If he fought it one on one, Lee Shin Woo would always come out on top, but he wasn't sure he could take on a group of them since he wasn't sure about their level of strength yet.

“Paul, it's good to see you! Hurry and help me!”

[It's also... good to see you...]

However, he was just glad that that strength was on his side right now! Especially since it was just as brainless as a Skeleton Soldier!

[Helping... the newbie...!]

[Requesting... reinforcements. There are a lot... of monsters...!]

Weak Pauls and strong Pauls came from various places. However, that gradually made it more hectic, and more Treasure Eaters appeared, as they caught a whiff of it. The situation had fallen into utter chaos.

And Lee Shin Woo froze when he coincidentally identified one of the newly arrived Treasure Eaters.

[Lv3 Treasure Eater]

“That’s crazy, a level 3 monster...? And it's a Treasure Eater at that, so it's much stronger than normal enemies!”

He was sure. Considering how the level 2 Treasure Eater had been vastly superior in strength to the level 2 Ratman, who had appeared as a dungeon boss, the Treasure Eaters were definitely elite monsters!

[Kuwooooooooooooooh!]

[The Treasure Eater used the Shriek of the Dead, but it was nullified by the Invisible Heart.]

However, to think that the first level 3 monster he sees would be a Treasure Eater... It seemed as though Lee Shin Woo had a strong relationship with that monster species. If another hero had heard that, they would think of him as a walking lottery ticket. Since the Treasure Eater was truthfully an elite monster, and it was harder to encounter one than taking one down.

'I might use the Avenger skill for the first time here... '

Even while Lee Shin Woo wracked his brain for a way to get the most benefit out of this situation, he raised his sword in one hand and bravely yelled out.

“We're going with the siege destruction formation; use the siege destruction formation! Move faster, Pauls!”

A fierce battle began between the skeletons, led by a swindling skeleton, and the Treasure Eaters. It was a battle that the one in the external passageway couldn't be compared to!

Chapter 4.3

Hunting Hero (3)

One way or another, the battle had gone on for 20 minutes, and Lee Shin Woo cleanly decided against using his Avenger skill against the Treasure Eaters.

While the Pauls were fighting against the Treasure Eaters, he used his Beginner Stealth and tried to covertly escape the battlefield, but it was impossible to escape their sight, especially when their goal was his Bone of Thunder Lasting.

'Still, I can't use my weapon as bait to run away. Ultimately, I have to clean up all of them here before I can proceed... '

Lee Shin Woo sighed and raised his head. He saw four Treasure Eaters that only watched him and followed him. There was no point to a beautiful girl chasing after him right now, let alone a caterpillar...

'How exactly am I supposed to take care of all of these?'

Truthfully, as the Pauls' bones fluttered in the wind, they were busy acting violently, and somehow managed to take down two of the Treasure Eaters. It wasn't hard to land a fatal blow if their swords boasted a high attack power.

The problem was that he didn't have the opportunity to collect their bodies as the other Treasure Eaters ran amuck, eating their comrade's body and treasure whole. Even though they were the same species, their avarice didn't lessen one bit. Moreover, it seems as though they became stronger when they ate their comrades' bodies, so it was truly nuts.

[Kuwooooooooh!]

[The Treasure Eater used the Shriek of the Dead, but it was nullified by the Invisible Heart.]

[Beginner Shriek of the Dead has become Lv5.]

Due to the Lv3 Treasure Eater's Shriek of the Dead, Lee Shin Woo's own Shriek of the Dead grew. He realized for the first time today that even if he didn't use the skill personally, it would increase his proficiency, as long as he was exposed to the skill.

[Ugh... Traitors of... the Empire...!]

[I'll get my revenge for... General Seagald here...!]

But whenever the Treasure Eaters shrieked, more than half of the skeletons he had gathered fought amongst each other; the fact that the numbers dwindled genuinely made his bones hurt. No, now that he thought about it, they knew about General Seagald! Exactly how popular could he have been!?

“You idiots, get a hold of yourselves! You're comrades!”

[Over there, too... An enemy...!]

[He's holding... a nice sword...!]

[Execute him... and report...!]

“Ah, shit.”

He wondered why his genuine scream hadn't caused the skeletons to get a hold of themselves. Rather, he had been targeted by the skeletons who were out of their minds due to the Shriek of the Dead. This is why they say kids are ruining comics these days!

“Sseup...”

It wasn't the time to leisurely take on skeletons right now. Though they had killed two Treasure Eaters, there were four remaining, and there was even a level 3 Treasure Eater amongst them.

Fine, since it's come to this, it's time to counterattack! Lee Shin Woo got atop the roof of a building that had been destroyed by the Treasure Eaters' rampage and shrieked.

“Kuaaaaaaaaaah!”

[You used the Shriek of the Dead! The enemies in the entire area have momentarily fallen into a frenzied state!]

[The Lv3 Treasure Eater has resisted the Shriek of the Dead.]

At that moment, the atmosphere of the entire area felt like it had calmed down the few skeletons that had been attacking him, as well as the huge caterpillar shaped monsters crazily crawling towards him... The Treasure Eaters even stopped as if they had been stunned.

“...Hmm?”

At that moment, Lee Shin Woo thought that it was impossible, but that impossibility had taken hold of those people, no those monsters. The Treasure Eaters started to fight amongst themselves!

If they weren't cognizant that they were allies anymore; the prey they were most hungry for were obviously members of their own species.

[Gguaaaaahk, Ggueueeeeeeeehk!]

The Lv3 Treasure Eater, the only one to resist the Shriek of the Dead, tried to pull them apart and got between them, but it had the opposite effect. Like how the skeletons had tried to attack Lee Shin Woo, the Treasure Eaters also started to attack the Lv3 Treasure Eater without fear.

“Wow, this is huge.”

[Kiek!]

While the Treasure Eaters were tied up in fighting amongst themselves, Lee Shin Woo cleaned up the skeletons running amuck.

The Treasure Eaters were level 2 and possessed the Shriek of the Dead themselves, so he didn't think it would work, but that was also his bias. As expected, before he used it himself, he couldn't know how it would turn out. He had gotten another good experience this way.

[New... bie...?]

“Die... You've recovered, Paul? You dumbass, I was worried about you!”

[Thanks... Joining...]

The moment he was about to shatter the Skeleton Warrior's head with his Bursting Thunder skill, it had recovered from the effects of the Shriek of the Dead. Upon seeing that, Lee Shin Woo quickly withdrew his sword and patted its shoulder. Even while being dazed at Lee Shin Woo's words of concern, it followed behind him.

“Those who have recovered, come over to this side! We can't do anything by ourselves, but if we're with our comrades, we can do anything!”

[I feel strength... from the newbie's voice...!]

[Over here, this way...!]

[Kugegegegek!]

He coaxed the unscathed skeletons nearby and finished cleaning up the rest of the afflicted skeletons.

Within the mayhem, all of the level 1 skeletons had already died, but the level 2 skeletons were fairly intact, and as a result, he gathered 15 Skeleton Warriors.

“Those wicked beings that are destroying the empire, let's take them down together! Let's pool our strength into one!”

[Defeat... together...!]

[Energy... is rising!]

[Acting skill has become Lv3.]

The Skeleton Warriors, compared to the Skeleton Soldiers or Archers, were relatively solid. That was especially true regarding their fighting spirit, which had been ignited from Lee Shin Woo's speech.

But their idea of a system of command was still a mess, and just by him speaking a bit bravely, it felt a little bit like they had, at some point, recognized him as their superior. Though it was the best thing that could happen to him.

[Kuook... Kuheeeeeeeeeek!]

Meanwhile, at around the same time that Lee Shin Woo had rallied the Skeleton Warriors, the Treasure Eaters were suddenly finishing up their bloody battle. In the most awful way at that.

[Kueeeeeeeeeek!]

Above the wreckage of the now ruined building, the sole remaining Lv3 Treasure Eater cried out as the winner. After being half torn apart and eaten, the corpses of the other abandoned Treasure Eaters truly looked pitiful. But Lee Shin Woo wasn't very surprised, as he knew about halfway through that this is how it would turn out.

“I can get all the treasure if I take care of that one guy anyway. And it got a lot of injuries from fighting too...”

[Report to... superiors...!]

“Yeah, yeah, I got it. But we gotta take down that guy first, right?”

Although they didn't even have any superiors to report to, the Skeleton Warriors kept talking about superiors, so Lee Shin Woo adequately appeased them, and raised his sword high. It was a sort of provocation towards the Treasure Eater.

Despite the thick dust filling the environment, due to the chaos that had occurred everywhere, his raised Bone of Thunder Lasting radiated light. Despite it changing into bone, the blade still gleamed with light, a truly mysterious sight.

[Kuhaaaaaaaaaa!]

[The Lv3 Treasure Eater used Shriek of the Dead, but it failed due to lack of mana!]

“Nice timing. Let's go, guys!”

[I got it!]

[Protecting the Empire...! That's the will of... General Seagald...!]

So, what the hell did General Seagald do!? No wait, I heard that asshole plotted treason!

[Kuaaaaaaaaaaah!]

As soon as the Treasure Eater failed its Shriek of the Dead, it seemed to become extremely uneasy, as it faced the charging Skeleton Warriors and cried out a manaless

shriek for a while. Then, it charged forward.

Its force came close to that of a speeding locomotive!

The Skeleton Warriors tried to charge at the Treasure Eater and foolishly attempted it head-on...

“Dodge what attacks you can! We'll survive and protect the Empire!”

[Oh, Ooooh...!]

[I'll follow... your words!]

He used his Sprint and leaped high into the air. The words Lee Shin Woo had blurted out seemed to stir a feeling within each Skeleton Warrior, as they changed their minds and engaged in evasive maneuvers.

Of course, there were some who couldn't keep up with the Treasure Eater's speed, so they were struck in the front, but luckily those guys didn't die in one hit, endured, and lodged their bone swords into the Treasure Eater's flesh. 'Even when it's rotten, it's still a herring'^[1]; it's worth surviving for this long!

“Bursting Thunder!”

Due to these guys' efforts, the Treasure Eater's charge had been halted; Lee Shin Woo aimed for that timing and attacked. Since it had risen to its utmost, he aimed for its head and plummeted down; he pierced with his sword, striking down with force akin to lightning.

[Critical Hit!]

[Gguweeeeeek!]

Though Bursting Thunder was nothing more than a passive skill, the moment he clashed against an enemy with a melee weapon, following the harmonization between his body's movements and his mana, an explosive force would occur, to the point that it could rightly be called a mystery. If it had been at the intermediate level, this battle would already be over.

And even if the skill was only low rank right now, after going through the dungeon, he had somewhat familiarized his body with the technique, so his sword strike was enough to exert a force akin to lightning against the Treasure Eater.

“Here, take one more!”

[Kuwaaaaahk!]

He could also interpret simple words now. It was saying that it hurt terrifyingly.

Lee Shin Woo radiated light and dodged the Treasure Eater spewing rotten blood. He used his Sprint to jump again and safely landed on the ground. He saw some Skeleton Warriors who hadn't been able to dodge its rampage and get crushed.

“Dodge, even if you have to roll on the floor! And stab your swords into that guy!”

[Ugh... as a warrior, as a soldier...! I'll face it!]

[Avoid it...! You have to avoid its attacks so that you can protect the Empire...!]

[We're the Empire's proud warriors...!]

The true intent behind his words was 'it's hard for me to beat this guy alone, so you guys can't die on me already!', but the Skeleton Warriors took it as encouragement.

Now, regardless of what he said, the Skeleton Warrior's fighting spirit was increasing. He thought briefly, 'Is this what it feels like to be a religious leader of a pseudo-religion?'. If the God who made him into a skeleton was to see this scene, her blood pressure would rise and would feel unsteady.

'In any case, I have to finish it before it recovers its mana. We've come more than halfway, more than halfway...!'

He checked the Treasure Eater's condition, as well as the Skeleton Warriors' condition, and intensely calculated how he should move next.

If it seems like it was distracted by the Skeleton Warriors, he would provoke it by swinging his sword within its sight; and if it seemed like a lot of Skeleton Warriors would remain while the Treasure Eater was gradually accumulating damage, he would cold-heartedly lead them to their deaths. This situational decision making was an ability that he always had.

[Kuek, Kuheeeeek...!]

How long did that gruesome battle go on? Through one of the Skeleton Warrior's brilliant sacrifice, Lee Shin Woo blocked the Treasure Eater's attack and forcefully struck with his sword. The moment he cleaved its rotten belly, the Treasure Eater coughed intensely and spewed out a blood clot.

“Now, guys! Gang up on him!”

[Keuhaaaaahp!]

[For the honor... of the Empire!]

While it was dying, they had to rush it! Lee Shin Woo bobbed his hand, sending the signal, and the Skeleton Warriors simultaneously charged at the Treasure Eater. The Treasure Eater had become a mess and one by one, the Skeleton Warriors' swords lodged deep into its flesh.

[Kuhek, Kueeeeeek...!]

The Treasure Eater spat out another clot of blood and was in pain. It was undoubtedly in a fatal state! Lee Shin Woo raised his sword and forcibly yelled. Now it was time to harvest the fruit of this long and distressing battle! The siege destruction formation (or ganging up) had paid off!

“We're all the way there! Charge, I said charge! Stab more forcefully!”

[Killing it!]

[If I'm with you... I can go anywhere!]

The Skeleton Warriors charged behind Lee Shin Woo while saying words that felt somewhat burdensome to him. However, talking about the conclusion first, this became Lee Shin Woo's greatest miscalculation in this battle.

[Kik... Kigihiiiiiiiiiiii!]

The Treasure Eater spewed out a blood clot, raised its rotten eyes, and gazed at them. Immediately after, from within the blood clots, flames...

“Oh, hey wait a sec...”

The blood clots exploded in a grand fashion and covered the entire area!

[1] T/N: It's a saying that means something that's originally good won't wear out/change and/or someone's nature/integrity won't change. Basically, he's saying that they still have their skill, even after they've degraded into skeletons.

Chapter 4.4

Hunting Hero (4)

[Treasure Eater uses Flames of Resentment! Scorching flames cover the whole area!]
[Critical Hit!]

The Lv2 Treasure Eater didn't have that skill though! But he couldn't complain. After all, when Lee Shin Woo realized that it was a higher level, he should've been suspicious that it had an ability that the Treasure Eaters up until now didn't have.

Because he was sure he had grasped victory, Lee Shin Woo had forgotten his sense of danger and acted recklessly; it was his mistake.

'It's really a good realization. If I come out of these flames alive, it should be a profitable trade.'

Lee Shin Woo didn't hold back, using all his strength in an attempt to get out of the scarlet flames that covered the chaotic battlefield no matter what. Though it wouldn't be over if he died here, he can't always rely on Invisible Heart!

The fact that he'd instinctually opened his inventory and grabbed his bone arrows the moment of the explosion was truly a wise response. Even though the strength contained in each individual arrow didn't compare to the bones left behind from hunting monsters, they would at least be enough for first aid.

'Bone Reinforcement, Bone Reinforcement! Use them all for Bone Reinforcement!'

The bone arrows were completely used up, and then his body, which had been entirely burnt by the huge explosion, was instantaneously healed.

Since they were just normal bone arrows, they didn't leave behind any experiences, memories, or skills, and his stats didn't increase either, but it was enough that he had fortunately avoided an instantaneous death. Of course, he wasn't out of the woods just yet.

'Bones... I need more bones!'

Fortunately, the battlefield was filled with the bones of the skeletons that had died prior. However, the bones themselves were burning within the malevolent flames, so he would have to hurry up if he wanted to use them for Bone Reinforcement.

It was a relief that his circumstantial judgment was quick as he was soon able to collect several dozens of bones.

'Bone Reinforcement! Bone Reinforcement!'

[Your arm bone has been reinforced.]

[Your leg bone has been reinforced.]

[Your shoulder bone has been reinforced.]

[Your arm bone has been reinforced.]

He couldn't get anything more from the bones from regular Skeleton Soldiers anymore. But they would still heal him if he used Bone Reinforcement, and he saw his reddish bones barely return to their natural color.

Of course, immediately after, he saw an even stronger flame rushing towards him, and he once again found himself in a dangerous situation. It was at that moment that he realized what a calamity fire was. Even more so since they were magical flames!

'Steve, you asshole...! Bone Reinforcement, Bone Reinforcement!'

[Your arm bone has been reinforced.]

[Your palm bone has been reinforced. Strength has increased by 1. Absorbing a portion of the Skeleton Warrior's memories and experiences.]

[You have to slash even harder. We're the swords of the empire! - Nameless soldier.]

Finally, the Skeleton Warriors' bones were starting to get mixed in. Its healing effect was even better! Lee Shin Woo's eyes gleamed and moved his body even faster. He needed to collect even more of these precious bones before they burned up!

[Your arm bone has been reinforced.]

[Your palm bone has been reinforced. Absorbing a portion of the Skeleton Warrior's memories and experiences.]

[It's pointless if you swing your sword a thousand times but not manage to cut your enemy once. Our goal is to precisely kill an opponent with only one swing. - Nameless soldier]

[Your palm bone has been reinforced. Strength has increased by 1. Absorbing a portion of the Skeleton Warrior's memories and experiences.]

[The imperial army is strong. We have to make everyone looking at us understand that. - Nameless soldier]

It seemed like he was being tested in reaction speed, and endurance at the same time. Even if he reinforced his bones to the point that he was breathless, he didn't know whether the Treasure Eater's flame would subside or not, and even if it did, it wasn't like he could just sit there and do nothing, else he would quickly die.

Since it's come to this, he had thought about just dying once and resurrecting, but the more that came to mind, Lee Shin Woo obstinately decided to endure.

He had already died twice. That meant that if he hadn't come to the empire without any extra lives, he would already be dead. He couldn't accept becoming dependent on that technique.

'I can't die easily... Bone Reinforcement!'

[Your palm bone has been reinforced. Absorbing a portion of the Skeleton Warrior's memories and experiences.]

[I did it! There was magic in my sword just now! - Nameless soldier]

He quickly sprinted through the raging flames and found bones. When he couldn't find any more bones, he attempted to escape the raging flames, but to his shock, those flames stuck to his body and didn't let go easily.

It was almost as if the Treasure Eater's resenting will resides within the flames, gritting its teeth, and saying that it would kill him. And that wasn't a misunderstanding. The surviving flames were tightening around his neck.

'Then... '

If he didn't kill the Treasure Eater, these flames wouldn't disappear. He had realized this instinctually. The moment he was sure of it, Lee Shin Woo found the Treasure Eater and turned his body.

The flames had already spread in all directions, and it was a situation where he couldn't even see properly, but the mana within these flames that stuck to his body was leading him. He himself thought it was strange that he could feel the mana, despite feeling the pain of his entire body being burned.

'It's this way.'

Don't they say that if you want revenge on someone, you'd have to dig two graves? This skill was truly like that. Its Flames of Resentment was a skill that burned its opponent by using its own blood and mana as fuel. Those two things are obviously closely connected to its lifeforce and magic.

Right now, Lee Shin Woo could feel that connection. In this urgent situation, his ability was growing at an exponential rate.

[The Beginner Magic Affinity skill has become Lv4.]

[The Beginner Magic Affinity skill has become Lv5.]

'Damn it!'

The fact that his Magic Affinity skill had increased was definitely something to be happy about, but it was becoming harder and harder to push through the flames and run.

He didn't have any more bones to reinforce himself with, his bone body burned, and he could feel his ability gradually slipping.

[The Beginner Magic Affinity skill has become Lv6.]

[The Beginner Sprint skill has become Lv8.]

'Sprint... Sprint!'

Whenever he fought a hard battle, he only increasingly hated and regretted the him who was attached to the past.

'Damn it...!'

But his health was gradually dropping, and it was at the moment he felt it drop; the moment he prepared for death and grit his teeth, the mass of mana inside his body changed his mind, and he felt it spread all across his body.

[You have learned the active skill, Beginner Regeneration Lv5]

His bones, which felt like they would crumble, were saturated with magic and instantly returned it to a healthy state. More than anyone else, Lee Shin Woo was able to ascertain its effect. It was truly a simple skill; it would consume mana to regenerate the body! It was the same for bones!

Lee Shin Woo was curious as to how he had learned this skill, but he didn't have the time to leisurely think about it right now. When he regained his energy, he used his Sprint and kicked off the floor, jumping into the sky!

'There you are!'

Lee Shin Woo, who had briefly escaped the sea of flames, caught sight of the wriggling and moving Treasure Eater. Like him, the Treasure Eater was dying. But...

[Kuhi... Kieeek...!]

It was sitting wickedly in the center of the flames, and then widened the distance; it then moved around as if it were drawing a circle. He felt like it would wait until he died and then the Treasure Eater would collect the treasure.

Lee Shin Woo was already pissed off, but he was also annoyed that he couldn't do anything to it right now. He was way too far from it! It was great that he had awakened the Regeneration skill at the right time, but it had the disadvantage of using up magic. This meant that he'd run out of mana before he was able to take it down.

'Even so, it's not like I can shoot arrows from the sky...!'

Unfortunately, his knowledge of archery was shoddy. Even if he had the skill, he had used all of his arrows back then to heal himself!

Even while he grit his teeth, his body felt the force of gravity and was falling back towards the flame scorched ground. While falling, Lee Shin Woo suddenly, without any thought, naturally raised his left hand.

[The passive skill, Beginner Archery Lv2 has been expunged.]

[You have learned the active skill, Beginner Catapult Lv5.]

That feeling that he had experienced just a moment ago dominated his body. It was the feeling of awakening a skill! Following the Beginner Regeneration, he had awakened the Beginner Catapult skill!

'Urgh!'

The brief and powerful pain accompanied his left index finger being pulled out, and just like the name implied, it shot out like an arrow. Most of the mana he had remaining was inside of that projectile.

Its accuracy, as well as its speed, were incomparable to mere Beginner Archery; it cut through the air, burrowed into the middle of the Treasure Eater's forehead, and in the end, penetrated through it. Since it had truly happened in the blink of an eye, Lee Shin Woo himself couldn't track its path completely.

[Ggiiiiiiiiiiiiiiik!]

However, the result was clear. The moment Lee Shin Woo dreadfully fell into the flames, the Treasure Eater gasped a horrific death rattle, and fell heavily with a thud.

Immediately after, the flames that had been stuck to his body, as well as the flames filling his surroundings cleanly dissipated. He stood dumbfounded and lines of messages started appearing before him.

[You have defeated a Lv3 Treasure Eater. You have achieved the feat of commanding your comrades and defeating an enemy that was at a higher level than you. All stats permanently increase by 2. You have acquired the passive skill, Command Lv1.]

[You have acquired the title, 'Treasure Hunter'! Whenever you hunt monsters or

explore a dungeon, it will become easier to acquire higher ranked rewards. The title box is open.]

[As a reward for your feat, the proficiency of your combat related skills increases. Low Rank Bursting Thunder has become Lv2, Beginner Stealth Lv8, Beginner Shriek of the Dead Lv6, Beginner Catapult Lv6, and Beginner Command Lv3.]

It was extremely hectic. He was sure that the skill he had used at the final moment was the skill he had gained from the Ratman, and he didn't think it'd have this much force. It felt really empty where he lost a finger, but he had gained the Regeneration skill just in time, so whenever he gets enough mana, he can just regain the bone.

'Wait a sec, did I perhaps get the Regeneration skill from the Queen?'

Lee Shin Woo recalled the Rat Queen's ability, who had birthed the elites, and he automatically nodded his head. Regardless of how much mana it had, that number of births was rare and beyond measure. However, if it had a healing ability, he could understand that many births in that short amount of time.

'Catapult, which would pull out a finger and launch it, and Regeneration which would restore that bone... who would have thought I would find such a perfect match in the same dungeon.'

In any case, he had survived because of those two skills. He thought it would've been better had they awakened a bit earlier, but... he couldn't be too greedy. Because he had moved so intensely, he had also grown.

"Hoo, then... Wow, it's a proper annihilation."

After he was sure that he wasn't at risk of dying anymore, he carefully stood up and surveyed his surroundings. There was nothing to survey. Since everything had turned to ashes.

He couldn't find any Skeleton Soldiers' or Skeleton Warriors' bones. He did see some of the greatswords that the Skeleton Warrior's had used remaining, but there weren't any spears. Seeing that, he realized that the Skeleton Warriors were better with a sword than a spear.

“I’ll pick you guys up later. More importantly...”

After Lee Shin Woo checked that the other Treasure Eaters' bodies had cleanly disappeared, he turned around while tears slightly flowed (even though he can't cry). Despite him having no way of restoring them... he still had the biggest reward left.

The reward known as the Lv3 Treasure Eater's corpse.

Chapter 4.5

Hunting Hero (5)

“Your big bro doesn't expect much, Steve. May you spit out a piece of level 4 bone equipment.”

Lee Shin Woo muttered unpleasantly and approached the Treasure Eater.

It was stiff, looking exactly like a cicada that had fallen from a tree and died, and its rotting flesh and its burns were covered in blood; it wasn't exactly a great sight, but right now, to Lee Shin Woo's (nonexistent) eyes, it looked like a stack of gold.

“Hoo... Heup.”

It wasn't anything special, so why was he shaking? Lee Shin Woo gently approached and with his index finger (that he regenerated with his mana) poked the body.

At that moment, the body divided into particles of light and fluttered away like spring cherry blossoms. He was able to see an undead completely disappear, and saw it naturally regress into mana for the first time! And he saw the inside of the orbs of light dropping onto the ground. These were the items that the Treasure Eater had left behind as it departed this world.

[You have acquired the Lv3 Treasure Eater's skull bone.]

[You have acquired 14,960 Perium.]

[You have acquired a Lv2 Iron Spear. It has transformed into a Lv1 Strong Bone Spear (+5).]

[You have acquired a Lv2 Iron Shield. It has transformed into a Lv1 Strong Bone Shield (+5).]

[You have acquired a Lv2 Blessed Rose Tree Staff. It has transformed into a Lv2 Blessed Bone Wand (+3).]

[You have acquired a Lv3 Dire Wolf Bone Armor.]

He had acquired the Treasure Eater's skull bone, 14,960 Perium, as well as a total of four items. Lee Shin Woo checked his list again and despaired.

“So, I really can't collect the bones from the other Treasure Eaters...”

Amongst the treasures that they possessed, a portion of them had entered the Lv3 Treasure Eater's storage organs, and he was able to collect them. However, due to this asshole's Flames of Resentment, he couldn't collect the other Treasure Eater's bones. He thought that perhaps it would also store the others' bones when it swallowed down the treasure, but that was just a silly dream.

He had gone through such a tough ordeal, yet he hadn't been able to procure the elite monsters' bones; Lee Shin Woo had realized that he had won this battle through reinforcing his bones, so in many ways, this situation was a bitter pill to swallow.

“If I learn magic, I should learn magic that extinguishes fire from my bones first... ’

However, it wasn't all bad news. First off, the reward's main dish, the treasure that the Lv3 Treasure Eater kept hold of dearly, was, fortunately, equipment composed of bone.

[Dire Wolf Bone Armor]

[Lv3]

[Durability: 800/800]

[Defense: 100 - 115]

[Options: Increases Health by 20]

“If I just look at the abilities, it's really simple, but...”

In many ways, it was an item that didn't seem very exciting compared to the grand Bone of Thunder Lasting, but despite that, the Dire Wolf Bone Armor was plenty amazing. That's because its goal as defensive equipment was to protect the body, and it did that thoroughly.

This upper body armor, created out of auburn dyed dire wolf bones, was ridiculously sturdy, though he didn't know how they had processed the bones. It was sturdy to the point that he'd find it troublesome and turn back if an opponent wearing this showed up. That was obvious since it was a piece of level 3 equipment.

Moreover, just by wearing it, his health would increase by 20; it would increase his overall defense as well as increasing his stamina. Lee Shin Woo immediately equipped the armor.

Regardless of how much he'd leveled or how much larger he'd gotten, he looked like just a normal Skeleton A who appeared in a beginner dungeon; but wearing this quite nice armor, and holding the Bone of Thunder Lasting, he had strength that wouldn't make him envious of other considerable, named monsters. As expected, items are the best.

'Good, it's perfect. I shouldn't hear them call me newbie anymore.'

Aside from that, there was other good news. The Blessed Rose Tree Staff transformed into a Blessed Bone Wand, and despite being level 2 equipment the item level hadn't even decreased, and on the contrary, had actually been reinforced.

[Lv2 Blessed Bone Wand (+3)]

[Lv2]

[Durability: 350/350]

[Attack Power: 10 - 15]

[Options: Increases Magic by 11, Increases Magic Casting Speed by 11%, Increases damage taken from living foes by 11%]

“In other words, there's no guarantee that the change into bone is necessarily a downgrade.”

It depended on the item; like in this case, when the change occurred, it would become stronger, or perhaps the item may even increase in level.

He felt much better, at least compared to when he thought that the item would always decrease in level. Of course, he didn't really have a use for the wand right now, so he shoved it into his inventory.

“Good. Shall we get to to the real main dish?”

The main dish was the Treasure Eater's skull bone, which he had placed carefully on

the floor. He picked up and raised the skull, and felt an unusual magic contained within. He could tell there was an intense heat that dwelled within.

Lee Shin Woo remembered the skill of the Treasure Eater that had threatened to annihilate him and the Skeleton Warriors alike, as well as pushing them into a crisis; after gulping down, he carefully activated his skill.

“...Bone Reinforcement.”

[You have reinforced your skull bone. Magic has increased by 15. Absorbing a portion of the Treasure Eater's memories and experiences.]

15! His magic had increased by as much as 15 all at once. He was attacked by the pain of the sudden change, but he was already somewhat prepared for it, so Lee Shin Woo calmly endured it.

He just followed the movement of mana. Within the pain that felt as if his head was being twisted, new mana welled up and expanded through his body; the mana was truly a refreshing sensation.

'Ah...!'

While that went on, a tiny flame bloomed within that mana. The instant Lee Shin Woo was about to exclaim after discovering it, it instantly swelled without him able to grab hold of it, and completely filled his entire body!

For a split second, a black flame rose up and then disappeared. Lee Shin Woo realized that the flame couldn't harm him. A strong will dwelled within those flames. That was none other than his own will.

[You have learned the active skill, Beginner Flames of Revenge.]

[Beginner Flames of Revenge Lv1(Active)]

[An Avenger's tenacity is put into their magic and manifested in flames. It will pursue and latch onto your target and will not extinguish until you run out of mana, die, or your opponent dies. It can be extinguished by someone with higher Magic than you. It is also possible to incorporate the flames into your weapon.]

'Huh?'

The skill it had used was definitely the Flames of Resentment. But for the skill name to change? Lee Shin Woo was puzzled by the name change but honestly, it was extremely obvious. That's because when he reinforced his bones, he would just get the object's memories and experiences, but he wouldn't get the skills intact.

In other words, his own memories and experiences would be added to the skill that was manifested based on the person's memories and experiences, so it was always possible that it would result in the skill taking on a completely different form. Like when he had absorbed the Ratman's finger bone, he had awakened the Catapult ability, rather than the Ratman's ability to launch its nails.

“...Hoo, now I'm feeling a little better.”

After the pain, as well as the dizziness from the sudden increase in magic had passed, Lee Shin Woo shook his head and got a hold of himself. He felt like the inside of his mind was much more refreshed. Though it was honestly still empty!

'Alright, shall we adapt and move around our body?'

He had collected everything the Lv3 Treasure Eater had left behind, but there might be some loot still on the battlefield that he hadn't collected. Even if he were to exclude the Skeleton Warriors' greatswords that he could easily see, there may be bones buried under the ashes!

As a result of him searching the entire area for 30 minutes, Lee Shin Woo collected 15 Lv1 Long Bone Swords (+5), 1 Lv2 Treasure Eater lower jaw bone, 3 Skeleton Warriors' palm bones, and lastly, 2,560 Perium.

The fact that even 1 Treasure Eater bone was left intact was truly a happy occasion, but... the problem was that it didn't end with him just acquiring the bone.

[You have acquired The Trickster's token.]

“...What's this?”

Lee Shin Woo's features frowned when he saw the gold coin in the palm of his hand, depicting a bizarre man wearing a helmet and shorts, with a spear in one hand and a

trumpet in another. Naturally, the explanation for the item came up.

[The Trickster's token]

[The token of a scammer who hates harmony, instigates disorder, and can plot anything. One is plenty enough, while two is too few.]

“...”

When he had first gotten the Slaughterer's token, he was pretty sure he remembered that it would definitely be easier to obtain Slaughterer's tokens than other types of tokens. And he thought that he'd done plenty enough here for him to earn another Slaughterer's token.

However, what is this? Trickster? What the hell is this? Is it saying that he had to gather both the Slaughterer's tokens and the Trickster's tokens? Lee Shin Woo furrowed his (nonexistent) brow and the moment he agonized over it, he observed the familiar distortion of mana. It was obviously a notice for a quest.

[The quest, 'Slaughterer's Token' has been canceled.]

[A new quest has been created.]

“...Ha.”

[A New Manipulator]

[The faces you possess are extremely numerous. And not one of them is the truth. If that's the case, fool everyone. If you do so, you can become anything! To be more specific, including The Trickster's token, gather 10 different karma tokens.]

[Quest progress - Trickster's token 1/1, karma tokens 2/10]

[Quest reward - 1 Lv6 Weapon Trickster's arm bone]

“Wait a sec!?”

Different individual karma tokens? Is it telling him to gain other karma tokens like how he had gained the Slaughterer's token and the Trickster's token? Didn't the quest difficulty go up outrageously!?

He thought about why he got this kind of token. He had thought that him acting like the Skeleton Warrior's ally, leading them, as well as making them fight against the Treasure Eaters might've had a huge effect but... still, the reality is way too harsh!

He didn't even know what conditions he'd have to fulfill to get the other karma tokens, and yet he had been given this quest; what the hell is a Trickster for him to get such a quest!?

“...It'll be fine if I just ignore it, right? It probably won't be much of a problem.”

That's what he said, but it actually weighed on his mind considerably. It was a quest that had appeared after chewing up the Slaughterer's token quest. He couldn't help but be curious. He wouldn't have to gather 10 Trickster's tokens, but including this one, he'd have to gather a total of 10 different karma tokens...

'Ugh... it's not like anything will happen right away by exerting myself, so let's think about it carefreely.'

Ultimately, Lee Shin Woo decided to positively put this off. Rather than rot his brain from thinking too deeply about this, he decided to instead do his best when it comes to a situation where it seems like he'll be able to progress the quest. After he decided to do so, he felt a bit more relieved.

'Anyway, the quest reward changed, so it's become kind of awkward to use the permit for God's secret shop right away.'

He had pushed through the dungeon and the Treasure Eaters all at once, so he had come to possess a fortune of 25,000 Perium in no time. Whether he buys a bone or a magic book; he had enough of a fortune to reinforce himself!... Is what he believed.

However, since he didn't have a promise for when he got his next permit right now, he refused to use his remaining permit without careful consideration. In the end, Lee Shin Woo sighed and changed his mind. He would continue to do what he had been doing first... in other words, cleanly mop up the level 1 dungeons in the nearby vicinity, and then go to the secret shop.

'I've decided, so shall we hurry?'

Lee Shin Woo gently closed his (nonexistent) eyes and after checking where each dungeon was, he gripped his Bone of Thunder Lasting and hurried his steps. He had grown rapidly after the intense battle, and his steps definitely contained more strength than before.

He was currently level 2, and his stat total was 323. He was confident that he was growing at a ridiculous rate. Perhaps even beyond his own imagination.

Chapter 5.1

Trickster's Karma (1)

Since it was underground, it seemed normal to be unable to tell how much time has passed, but depending on the time, the Underground Empire would brighten and then darken, and then repeat. From what he had heard, the magic originating from the large scale magic spheres, that were set up and attached to the extremely high ceiling, made it possible, though it wasn't really important to him.

[Mr. Lee Shin Woo has entered the chatting channel.]

Within the silent darkness, Lee Shin Woo gently leaned against a rotten, decaying old tree, and then checked the chatting channel.

[Lloyd H.K: Newbie, you're not dead yet, right?]

[Lee Shin Woo: Since you've been worrying about me, I'm still alive.]

[Lloyd H.K: Good, you're doing well.]

Naturally, Lee Shin Woo didn't need to sleep (not like he could), so regardless of whether his surroundings were light or dark, he continued to move; but he was mentally exhausted after clearing another dungeon following the battle with the Treasure Eater, so he didn't feel like moving.

Therefore, he decided to rest using night time as an excuse, as well as snoop around the chatting channel.

[Lee Shin Woo: Senior, you're not going to sleep?]

[Lloyd H.K: I feel like I'll be ok for about four more days.]

[Lee Shin Woo: Aha.]

'Perhaps that guy's also undead', he thought, but there was no way he'd be. It was just that the higher one's level was, the higher their physical abilities, so the less sleep they'd need.

[Prince Altania: Lloyd, how are you always in here? You're not in here all day, are you? Please tell me you're not.]

[Lloyd H.K: Shut up. I'm actually getting ready to give a group of undead a proper beat down, you know.]

[Prince Altania: Well, it seems like you're still diligently doing those hero quests that don't give you much of a reward... Just quit it right now. I discovered a level 5 dungeon, you know? If you want, I can put you in my party.]

[Lloyd H.K: Hmm... send the location to my personal channel. I'll finish up here and go immediately.]

[Prince Altania: In the end, you're still going to do the quest. What an amazing sense of duty.]

A personal channel. Contrary to the chatting channel, a personal channel allowed heroes to send messages to and from each other, and it hadn't yet opened for Lee Shin Woo. Of course, even if it opened, there wasn't anyone to really use it with.

[Shino Rendu: A dungeon? Hey, let me in too.]

[Prince Altania: You're still level 5. Don't you know the fundamental rule; that you need to be one level higher than the dungeon you're entering?]

[Shino Rendu: Ugh, that's true, but...]

[Lloyd H.K: Sorry, Shino. Ah, I need some help here, do you think you could help me out? I can also share the quest with you.]

[Shino Rendu: It's fine.]

[Mr. Shino Rendu has left.]

[Lloyd H.K: Oh well... It's quick going from level 5 to level 6. I should encourage him later.]

[Prince Altania: Lloyd, you nanny...]

Lloyd and the Prince spoke about this or that, and it seemed like they were quite close. It must mean that they've spent a lot of time together after they dropped into this world.

Lloyd was good-natured and honest while the Prince was immature and said whatever

he wanted; it did seem like they were a good combination.

[Ms. Ye Jin Jin has entered the chatting channel.]

[Ye Jin Jin: E-everyone. Have you all seen it, too? That thing!]

[Lloyd H.K: Oh, it's been a long time, newbie. Now that I think about it, you're not a newbie anymore. Did you know that you have a stronger junior under you now?]

[Prince Altania: Ye Jin Jin? I haven't seen you in a long time, so I thought you were dead.]

[Ye Jin Jin: I-I'm not dead, you know! But more importantly, a stronger junior...? Ah, that's not it. The horse is the problem right now, the horse!]

[Erian Ruparte:... A horse? Jin Jin, what horse?]

Lee Shin Woo half listened to what his seniors were chattering on about and rested. He held a circular chip in his hand that looked similar to a gold coin; it had a muscular warrior wielding a greatsword engraved on it.

[The Fighter's Token]

[A warrior who never looks back and struggles valorously. To a fighter, any plan, or aid is but a hindrance.]

“So, this does come out...”

He did want to obtain these tokens, but he didn't know what he'd need to do to obtain them. For him to just get one for clearing a dungeon... If he were to quibble as to why this token came out, he thought that it was due to him pushing through the dungeon in a straight line without using any skills.

'I had wanted to raise my Regeneration skill, but I got flustered since I didn't get hurt at all.'

When he had fought against the Treasure Eater, Lee Shin Woo had significantly grown in battle experience, as well as stats after his battle with the Treasure Eater, so he could no longer feel any danger from level 1 dungeons; he had put forward his Bone of Thunder Lasting and pushed through the dungeon.

He had intended to train his Regeneration skill by using it whenever he was injured

and thus increase his proficiency in it, but the dungeon was too easy, so he hadn't been able to use his Regeneration skill.

The boss was level 2, but its attack power, as well as its endurance, were just a little bit higher than the Ratman. However, he didn't need any other skills aside from Bursting Thunder to take it down.

After thoughtlessly clearing the dungeon like that, he had gained the Fighter's token. Since he had gained something, it was worthwhile pushing through the dungeon so ignorantly.

'Perhaps... it might be better to hold onto a solid singular concept to get other karma tokens.'

By slaughtering, he gained the Slaughterer's token. By pushing through the dungeon in a straight line without the use of skills (perhaps the time it took to push through the dungeon or his combat style had an effect), he had gained the Fighter's token. In a battle where he had fooled the Skeleton Warriors, and lead them to their deaths, he had gained the Trickster's token.

If it followed that logic, then he thought it might be best to pull the other abilities he possesses into a single concept in order to clear the quest. However, he smiled bitterly.

'Ha, talk is cheap.'

What concept is he even supposed to choose? Moreover, there wasn't any guarantee that he'd continue to face easy battles that he'd be able to plow through without using all his strength. Regardless of how hard he tried to think positively, his head just hurt, so he just stopped and shook his head.

[Ye Jin Jin: I'm telling you it's true. A Skeleton Horse that can run extremely fast! It's really scary and really fast!]

[Yasunori Akira:... What crap. If it were an undead, then it'd be hostile to humans. Have you forgotten the basics?]

[Lloyd H.K: Newbie... No wait, you're not. Ye Jin Jin. Explain it in more detail. First off, it's really an undead, right?]

[Ye Jin Jin: That's what I'm saying. It was all bone, and where its two eyes should be,

deep blue goblin fire was burning... it's as scary as a named Skeleton Knight!]

[Prince Altania: A Skeleton Knight's nothing, whether it's named or not.]

[Erian Ruparte: Sir Altania, Jin Jin is still level 3. Please fix that insensitive speech habit of yours.]

His seniors were still busy saying strange things in the chatting channel. However, Lee Shin Woo thought since skeleton heroes exist, a skeleton that just runs wasn't very strange, so he stopped paying attention early on in the conversation.

[Lee Shin Woo: Then, I'll get going so I can rest.]

[Lloyd H.K: Alright. Please don't die.]

[Ye Jin Jin: Ah, you're the newbie, huh! It's nice to meet you! If you don't know something, you can ask me!]

[Prince Altania: That newbie is stronger than you, you know. Just take care of yourself.]

[Ye Jin Jin: Ugh...]

Lee Shin Woo gently smiled as he heard the voice of a frustrated young girl and left the chatting channel. Despite being cursed and sent down to this distorted world, the fact that there were a lot of others who were trying their best to survive aside from himself became more than just a small comfort for him.

'Hoo, then let's go to the next dungeon.'

His energy had returned. Lee Shin Woo energetically stood up and hurried along the path to the next dungeon. His goal: gaining a token for every dungeon clear!

He already had a concept in mind that he'd use to clear the next dungeon. He had both the Stealth and Catapult skills, so he thought that if he balanced them correctly, he would get an assassination related karma as well as the corresponding token.

'Stealth is also fun the more you do it. I think I can do it with a beginner level skill, as long as my enemies don't discover me first.'

Lee Shin Woo, who realized that Stealth was an effective skill that didn't take up a lot of mana, was training his Stealth whenever he fundamentally moved.

He had learned everything there was to Stealth from the rats. He would lower his body, move closer to the darkness than the light, and make as little noise as possible. If he grasped the direction he heard someone approach from first and avoided them, he probably wouldn't be discovered.

[Gu... woohh...]

Like right now.

'Huh!?'

He survived because he was using Stealth. He was really thankful for his senses right now! Lee Shin Woo saw a giant monster come out from the darkness and into the moonlight; he desperately calmed himself down so that he wouldn't make a sound. He didn't even know where it popped out from!

[There's nothing... to eat...]

[Lv3 Giant Zombie - Edward L. Baker]

'That's crazy...!'

This was a real named monster! It was similarly level 3 like the Treasure Eater, but he felt an incomparably brutal spirit coming from the zombie.

Its movements were slow, but its frame was so big that it seemed to move several meters in a single step; its huge eyes that constantly swayed around were a rotten yellow, inciting a feeling of disgust. Above all, a faint green mist was spreading from its body and when he slightly touched it, a message appeared.

[You are being exposed to the Elite Giant Zombie's Acid Poison. Please hurry and escape the hazardous area and begin treatment.]

It was only a touch, yet he was afflicted by a horrific pain. However, he would be discovered if he made a sound, so Lee Shin Woo frantically endured and slowly, extremely slowly moved while maintaining Stealth.

'Just a little more, just a little... '

[There are... no bodies...]

The sight of his own legs melting away was an extremely horrific experience. And just through its presence alone, it had created that horrific scene; the fact that he had to hastily run in the current situation infuriated him.

However, his life came first right now. After all, he had sworn that he wouldn't let his Invisible Heart activate from now on!

He moved with his superhuman endurance and got as far as possible from the zombie. Fortunately, its senses seemed dull like a true zombie, as it didn't notice Lee Shin Woo and started to walk slowly in the opposite direction.

[If I just eat... a little more...]

The Giant Zombie, Edward, spoke ominously until the very end and disappeared into the distance. After Lee Shin Woo was sure that he'd managed to safely escape the range of the Acid Poison, he sighed in relief, and once again promised that he'd continue to maintain Stealth when he was outside of the dungeons from now on.

It was really fortunate that the zombie hadn't shown up when he had fought the Treasure Eater!

'Then.'

Lee Shin Woo activated his Regeneration. He had collected a heap of level 1 monster bones from the previous dungeon in case of an emergency (level 1 monster bones wouldn't raise his stats anymore), but since he had mana, he didn't need to use up the bones.

Rather, it was better to increase his proficiency in Beginner Regeneration when he could.

'Regeneration!'

[Activating Beginner Regeneration. Consuming mana to restore the body.]

[Beginner Regeneration has become Lv6.]

His Regeneration responded fiercely as the zombie's Acid Poison had almost completely melted away the lower half of his body. To the point that the skill leveled up!

The mana responded vigorously with a faint light within the darkness. As expected, not using his Regeneration the instant he sustained an injury was the answer. If he had, the Giant Zombie would've noticed him, and he would've died on the spot.

'At any rate, the armor is really great.'

Because the Acid Poison was in the form of a gas, it got inside his armor and did indeed melt his upper body, but compared to his lower body, the damage was minimal, to the point that he couldn't see any damage to the armor with the naked (nonexistent) eye!

'I have to quickly get some lower body armor too.'

He immediately vowed after checking that his body was fully healed. It would be ideal if it were excellent equipment like the Dire Wolf Bone Armor, but if that's not possible, a level 2 item is fine, too!

When he pounded on his legs and tried to hurry along, a message suddenly appeared.

[You have acquired a target for the Beginner Avenger skill. When you fight it again, all your abilities increase by 20%.]

[You have achieved the feat of escaping from an enemy, despite them being at a higher level than you. Agility has increased by 2. Beginner Stealth has become Lv9.]

[You have acquired the Avenger's token.]

...Why was it that he didn't feel happy at all, despite achieving a feat? Moreover, he had already received the Avenger's karma, yet he had received an Avenger's token; so, it was possible, after all.

No, but was it possible for him to take down that guy the next time they meet? Even though his body would melt just from being close to him?

'...Hoo.'

Lee Shin Woo thought of several things, sighed deeply, and then hurried his steps. It was then that a fire was lit within him, and he vowed to get stronger even faster than before.

Of course, he was definitely still maintaining his Stealth skill at that very moment.

Chapter 5.2

Trickster's Karma (2)

[Level 1 dungeon - You have acquired a permit to enter the Tainted Sewers. All stats increase by 10 inside the dungeon. Info on the dungeon is added to your minimap. All of your actions in the dungeon are buffed.]

[Beginner Magic Affinity has become Lv10 and has developed into Low Rank Magic Affinity. Magic has increased by 10. The higher the skill, the more your magic permanently increases while the effectiveness of mana recovery increases proportionally.]

“There we go.”

The moment Lee Shin Woo acquired the permit, he confirmed that his Magic Affinity had grown and yelled delightedly.

Of course, whenever he obtained a dungeon permit, there would be an intense flow of mana, and this mana helped improve his Magic Affinity; so he had anticipated that his skill would level up. Still, he was happy. It wasn't just a simple level up. Rather, it had risen to the low rank stage.

'That's because there are about three insurmountable four-dimensional walls between a beginner skill and a low rank skill.'

The instant the skill had been reborn as a low rank skill, he felt the flow of the surrounding mana change and he laughed satisfyingly (though he's a skeleton, his ribs didn't even budge), and checked his status.

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Skeleton Avenger Blessed by God]

[Treasure Hunter]

[Lv - 2 (Status Effectiveness 110%)]

[Strength - 94 Agility - 91 Health - 93 Magic - 86]

[Passive skills - Invisible Heart Lv3, Acting Lv4, Beginner Avenger Lv1, Low Rank Bursting Thunder Lv3, Low Rank Magic Affinity Lv1, Low Rank Stealth Lv3, Beginner Command Lv3]

[Active skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv3, Low Rank Sprint Lv2, Beginner Shriek of the Dead Lv9, Beginner Regeneration Lv7, Beginner Catapult Lv8, Beginner Flames of Revenge Lv3, Beginner Power Slash Lv5]

He currently had three skills that had started at the beginner stage and had grown to be low rank, and these skills were Magic Affinity, Stealth, and lastly, Sprint.

Ever since his encounter with the Giant Zombie, he had been using Stealth at all times, so it was natural that it had grown. He used Sprint the most since he possessed the Undead's characteristic of never tiring, and on the back of that, it had risen to the low rank level.

When these skills became low rank skills, he had obviously gained some stats, and if he were to compare them to when they were at the beginner level, their performance was completely different; they were supplementing his fighting ability.

[Low Rank Stealth Lv3 (Passive)]

[You hide your presence and move such that your opponent doesn't notice you. You can conceal any signs of your presence as well as your mana.]

Amongst those skills, Sprint was especially amazing. It had a huge effect in increasing his speed regarding his travel, evasion, and of course his attacks as well, but when it rose to the low rank stage, it became much easier to put that speed into his attacks. With just that, it felt like his fighting ability had increased by 30%.

Aside from that, Power Slash infused magic into his weapon, from which he would then forcefully slash; it was usually a skill learned at the very beginning by warrior classes in games and felt like it was their exclusive active attack skill.

It was a skill he had learned from the memories and experiences of the Skeleton Warriors; despite having several skills, he hadn't had a truly powerful one hit kill move until then, so Power Slash was like rain after a long drought for him. Of course, it had particularly good compatibility with Sprint.

However, if he were to ask if he could win against the named Giant Zombie, Edward,

head to head, now that he'd gotten stronger, he would say he definitely couldn't.

It had already been four days since he had encountered and run away from the Giant Zombie, but even now, when he thought back at its strength, his bones quivered. Even when he had encountered the Lv3 Treasure Hunter, he hadn't felt such vast despair...

It was probably close to a Lv4 elite. Basically, a monster amongst monsters. Despite that, he felt a murderous intent towards the zombie from time to time, so it may be an effect from accepting the Avenger's karma.

'But it's still too early. My magic rose by 10 this time, so my stats total 364, but... they said that my stats have to total 400 to get to level 3. For now, I'll think about it after getting to level 3.'

He heard that information from the chatting channel. It was the result of secretly throwing out a question to Lloyd, who had been complaining that he still needed 2,000 more stat potions before he reached level 7.

He didn't even need to suspiciously ask until he got an answer. Since even his seniors who didn't usually talk complained at the talk of stat potions and told him the whole story.

To get to level 2, one needed 200 stats, for level 3, 400 stats, and for level 4, 800 stats... each subsequent higher level requires double the stats.

Honestly, when he saw his seniors just chattering away that they were level 6, he thought that they may all just be lousy, but when he realized that they had reached at least a total of 3,200 stats, he completely discarded such thoughts. Right now, they could break him with one flick of their fingers.

'I lied to my seniors that I was level 4, so I gotta move faster.'

He organized his thoughts and his sight was fixed upon the giant manhole in front of him. It seemed like it was a ladder that only he, who had acquired the permit for the dungeon, could use. He took a short deep breath and started to go down the ladder.

“Umhp...”

He had become quite accustomed to entering dungeons now, since he had gone through five dungeons in the past four days. Though they were only level 1 dungeons.

And the last level 1 dungeon in the vicinity was this one.

'I'll quickly finish up with this dungeon and then go to the shop. It'd be great if a lot of Perium came out.'

His anticipation for the dungeons had cooled off compared to his first time. To be honest, he didn't think the regular mobs would give him a good skill, but he did have some anticipation that the boss might; but it ended up being a bust. Even if they had a skill, he had already absorbed a lot of skills, so it only ended up increasing his proficiency.

The bosses in the Rural Rat Nest were the only special ones. It wasn't common for a monster to use its nails or attack by birthing monsters. He could now conclude that.

“They said it was the sewers, and it's truly, really dark in here... ’

He probably wouldn't be able to gain many stats or skills in this dungeon as well, but he'd get Perium here. Lee Shin Woo planned to go to the secret shop soon after and buy a bone. He didn't know if it would be possible to level up by buying the bone, but he didn't plan on putting off going to the shop any further.

“Hoo.”

At around the bottom of the ladder, he jumped off and nimbly landed on the ground. He jumped from 2 meters high, yet his landing was truly light as if he were moving like a cat.

It hadn't even been 10 days since he'd been dropped onto this world, yet he felt a certain degree of dignity. It showed just by the fact that as soon as he landed on the ground, he ensured he was safe and checked his surroundings.

- Seureureuk

“Huh...?”

Lee Shin Woo heard something sliding towards him and his (nonexistent) ears pricked up.

In certain dungeons, he would have to explore for about an hour before he would encounter any monsters, while in other dungeons, mannerless monsters would be guarding the entrance. It seems that the dungeon was the latter this time.

[Gureureureureu]

At that moment, an opponent appeared from the darkness, one whose identity was difficult to ascertain. It attacked him, accompanied by the sound of a strange cry that made it even more difficult to figure out what it was.

However, because it was so slow, befitting a level 1 monster, Lee Shin Woo struck with his Bone of Thunder Lasting and slashed the monster's body without much difficulty. At that moment, he felt a strange sensation, like he was cutting apart a warm and tough jelly, making him shiver.

[You have hunted a Lv1 Sewer Slime.]

“Wow, it's truly...?”

The slime monster that had been split into two pieces emitted a bubbling sound and instantly evaporated. Lee Shin Woo, who had been watching that, looked really awful. Indeed, if it's fantasy, there have to be slimes, and if there are slimes, it has to be fantasy. Lee Shin Woo had expected them to show up at some point. However, he didn't want to meet them. That's because slimes didn't have any bones.

“It's not even worth my time to kill them... Huh?”

[You have acquired a deteriorated Skeleton Soldier's arm bone.]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

So it was worthwhile after all. He didn't know why, but a Skeleton Soldier's arm bone had popped out where the slime had died!

Lee Shin Woo was momentarily puzzled but he soon figured out the reason. In exchange for the slimes not having any bones, it seemed like they would spit out any bones that they had ingested before!

“Yeah, isn't this really profitable...?”

He felt somewhat uneasy that the bones were deteriorated, but it couldn't be helped. Lee Shin Woo was about to put it into his inventory, but it felt awkward so he just decided to use it to reinforce his bones.

Though he may die and die again a hundred times^[1], he had gathered more than enough bones to restore himself.

[You have reinforced your arm bone. Absorbing the Skeleton Soldier's memories and experiences.]

[Gugeugaaaaahk, I'm melting, I'm melting! My C3 cervical vertebrae...! - Nameless soldier]

“...”

He didn't think he'd gain the memories of a skeleton's last moments dying to a slime. Isn't this memory going in a new direction?!

Lee Shin Woo was seriously seized by an uncomfortable feeling. However, since he had gotten plenty of Skeleton Soldier's memories, he thought that it didn't matter whatever happened.

“Good, now shall we explore in earnest... Ah, before that.”

He needed to choose a concept if he wanted to receive a karma token from this dungeon. Last time, when he had run away from the Giant Zombie, he had safely acquired the Avenger's token. After that, whenever he went into a dungeon, he would wring his (nonexistent) brain and would go through the dungeon with a completely different concept.

Amongst those, the successful ones were the NINJA concept (the Assassin's token), where he moved covertly and killed his opponents one by one, and Lelouch Lamperouge's concept (Mastermind's Token), where he used his Shriek of the Dead to make his enemies kill each other.

Right now, he had the Slaughterer, Trickster, Fighter, Avenger, Assassin, and Mastermind tokens, a total of six karma tokens.

'...However.'

He only needed to get four more tokens from now on! Well, there was a time when he thought so positively. However, that great situation was nothing more than a delusion. Getting those four tokens was extremely hard.

"The shield warrior concept... no, I failed at this last time. Then how about the berserker concept... I failed at that too."

He had tried the Lee Bong Ju^[2] concept, where he ran through the dungeon fighting as few monsters as possible, and the Gandhi concept, where he similarly went through the dungeon as peacefully as possible without fighting, but they had failed. He realized after that they both weren't concepts that should be used in the dungeon.

Since it's come to this, it might be better to try the Emperor concept. It was demanding 100 bones of the same race from his enemies in exchange for their lives. He had promised that he would use that later when he found monsters that he could actually talk to.

'Hoo, then I have no choice... Since my magic has increased, let's go with the Sniper concept.'

Lee Shin Woo didn't have any alternatives, so he went with the concept that he had held back, the Sniper concept.

Due to the mana he used to regenerate his fingers whenever he used Catapult up until now, he hadn't been able to focus entirely on the Sniper concept, but since Magic Affinity had become a low rank skill, it felt like it might be possible now.

'I really hope that a usable skill comes out here.'

Lee Shin Woo made up his mind and after putting his sword into his inventory, pointed his finger and slowly walked into the dungeon. Up until now, no hero had dared enter a sewer dungeon (it was way too dirty); the moment the first explorer had appeared...

[1] T/N: Famous Korean saying from the Goryeo dynasty. It describes something that remains unchanging. In this case, it's the fact that he'll have enough stockpiled bones, regardless of how many times he needs to use them to heal himself.

[2] T/N: Lee Bong Ju is a South Korean marathoner.

Chapter 5.3

Trickster's Karma (3)

[The Slime's weak Acid Poison is melting your body.]

Lee Shin Woo gave up the Sniper concept, only 10 minutes after making up his mind. The reason was simple. There were too many slimes that inhabited the sewers for him to pick them off one by one.

[Gureuk]

[Gureureureuk]

“Ha.”

At least at this very moment, he was thankful that he was a skeleton. The slimes that were overflowing in all directions were stuck above his head, his back, and his legs, and were making a 'gureureuk' sound; if he still had a normal way of thinking about hygiene like a human, he probably would've ran away from here a while ago.

[Gureureureureuk!]

[Gureukgureuk]

[Gureureureu]

'Moreover, they're just level 1 sewer slimes inhabiting a lousy level 1 sewer dungeon, so they probably didn't think it'd have much appeal. So, that's why all of them avoided the sewers, and as a result, the slimes kept piling up more and more until... they multiplied this much.'

It had been 15 minutes since he'd entered the dungeon, and Lee Shin Woo's entire body was buried under slimes without a way out. If he was a normal Skeleton Soldier, he would've already completely melted away and disappeared within a minute.

However, unfortunately for the slimes, he was level 2, closing in on level 3, his stats

had also swelled by another 10 from the dungeon permit, and... the decisive factor was that he was a skeleton that possessed the Regeneration skill.

'My gear might get damaged so let's go naked.'

He had fought against the slimes for a few minutes, but ultimately became concerned that his equipment would get damaged from the slimes' Acid Poison, so he unequipped it all. He naturally put his armor into his inventory, as well as his sword!

'Alright, this should be fine with only my naturally recovering mana.'

As soon as he took off his armor, the health increase effect from the armor disappeared, and he started to incur more injuries from the slimes' Acid Poison attacks, but it was at a level that his Beginner Regeneration skill could bear. Of course, if his Magic Affinity hadn't reached the low rank stage, he wouldn't have even dreamed of doing this.

“Heup.”

[Gureuk!]

[Ggoreuk!]

Despite unequipping his gear, he didn't have any difficulty whatsoever hunting the slimes. Not only was his level higher than the slimes, but the combat technique he had learned, Bursting Thunder, was a technique that could also be used unarmed.

“Heup!”

[Ggureuk!]

Someone from the outside may see this scene as unusual; a swelling wave of slimes. There were so many of them that it looked like a sea of slime. But truthfully, Lee Shin Woo was in there, killing slimes left and right.

“Ha!”

[Ggeureuk...]

[Ggik!]

Whether he's unleashing Bursting Thunder with a sword, a spear, an axe, or his fists, it would converge at one point. As fast and as hot as exploding lightning! That was Bursting Thunder's start and finish!

Though there wasn't any mana within the attack, the force created by his two fists was plenty strong enough. Whenever that tremendous strength condensed in his arms passed through the slimes, they would turn to particles of light and disappear.

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired a deteriorated Skeleton Soldier's leg bone.]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired a deteriorated Zombie's shin bone.]

“Bone Reinforcement, Bone Reinforcement.”

As soon as he collected the Perium, it went straight to his inventory, but when he acquired the bones, he would immediately use them to reinforce his bones. One of his goals was regenerating his body, but as expected, the most important thing was his curiosity regarding the common memories that only those ingested by the slimes had.

[My body's melting. You weren't satisfied with my already melted skin, muscles, blood, and flesh. Now you're trying to melt my bones, which is all I have left. - Nameless skeleton]

[Ggueueeeek. I can't avoid the flood; it's a slumber more suffocating than death. An eternal slumber is approaching...! - Nameless zombie]

He could only absorb the memories at their time of death, but Lee Shin Woo thought there was a reason for that here. To be more specific, he was excited that he might get a skill.

[Ggureuk!]

[Ggirek!]

“Bone Reinforcement.”

[Guaaaaahk, my head's breaking. It's sinking in! - Nameless skeleton]

[Kuheuk, General Leofield...! I'll go down in history before you... - Nameless skeleton]

[Ggorok!]

[Gureureu!]

“Bone Reinforcement.”

[Jjijijijijijijik! - Nameless Rural Rat]

[Gugehk... To think that my end comes from the city's cleaning crew... - Nameless zombie]

However, it seemed like the skill this time was no joke, as there was no reaction to absorbing dozens of bones, neither in stats, nor in skills.

Moreover, he was really bothered by the skeletons that strangely had their consciousness intact, leaving their wills behind! He also remembered hearing about Leofield before! He must be just as famous as Seagald!

[Beginner Regeneration has become Lv8.]

Even so, it wasn't like this dungeon was a complete miss. Setting aside the amount of stockpiled Perium from the huge mob, he had been looking for a place to train his Regeneration skill, and this here was the optimum environment to train it in.

Even as he continuously took damage from all directions, he could continuously keep his Regeneration skill active with just the mana he had. His proficiency in Regeneration was increasing so quickly that he wondered if this place was created to train the Regeneration skill.

“Hoo.”

[Gureuk!]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

If there was one more beneficial point, it was that his proficiency in barehanded combat was gradually increasing, something he hadn't had the time to study in-depth. Of course, his fists couldn't match up to the force of his level 3 weapon, but he could unleash strikes with plenty of destructive force with his bone fists. Above all, he was attacking with both hands without resting one or the other, so his attack speed was incomparable to when he wielded a weapon.

'Bursting Thunder... it's not enough to call it an amazing technique.'

He wasn't just surprised by its destructive power and its speed. The more he used the skill, as well as the more his proficiency in said skill grew, the more he felt that his perspective during battle changed.

He thought about where he would need to attack for it to be the most effective, what timing and how he would retreat to get an opportunity; these thoughts rose up instinctually, and if he moved accordingly, his proficiency of the skill increased a ton. It was a skill that included all close combat techniques, and the meaning behind that certainly wasn't light.

'To think he died with such a frightening ability. That senior must've felt really frustrated.'

Even while he sympathized with his senior, he squashed the slimes without pause with both arms. The more he repeated unarmed combat, the more his body adapted to it, and despite his physical abilities not changing, he became able to move more nimbly. Naturally, his speed in hunting monsters also increased.

He was aware that he was hunting monsters much faster than before he had Bursting Thunder. Perhaps using this skill, which included barehanded combat, with various weapons, as well as various combat methods caused it to grow.

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired a deteriorated Skeleton Soldier's arm bone.]

When about 30 minutes had passed since being overwhelmed, the wave of slimes had lessened, and Lee Shin Woo was able to see again. Even while hectically hitting the slimes, he stealthily surveyed his surroundings.

“Hoo, then how much... Ha. Haha.”

When he looked at the surrounding environment, he couldn't help but laugh. He had come into the dungeon full of hope and roughly an hour had passed, yet he was still at the dungeon's entrance. Even though he killed so many slimes!

There were truly an outrageous number of monsters here, such that it was incomparable to the dungeons he had gone through before. If he combined the number of monsters he'd killed since coming to this world, it would probably still be less than the number he'd killed in this dungeon alone!

“This place is seriously no joke. Seriously...”

[Gureureureuk]

[Ggoreureuk!]

He shook his head and as if they were matching the rhythm of the muttering skeleton, the slimes cried out and attacked him. Rather than respond, he went with a precise one-two punch, cleanly squashed them, and grinned. He was satisfied that he had the proper form now, even barehanded.

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

'Then... then shall we wipe them all out?'

Starting from that moment, Lee Shin Woo stopped being concerned about time, and only thought about squashing his opponents with Bursting Thunder, and healing himself with Regeneration. He'd be the only one getting tired from counting the time.

[Gureureureureuk!]

[Ggureuk!]

[The Slime's weak Acid Poison is melting your body.]

[Beginner Regeneration has become Lv9.]

Compared to the Giant Zombie's Acid Poison that he'd been exposed to very briefly, the slimes' just itched, and because he kept using Regeneration continuously, he became unable to even feel the pain.

Now, the poison that the slimes emitted was like... yeah, it felt like a light sprinkling of rain, and made his bones feel a little better. If the other heroes knew what he was thinking, they would've clicked their tongues, pitying the newbie that had gone insane in an extreme situation.

[Ggureureuk!]

[Gguuah!]

[Kureuk!]

As he continued to extend his fists towards the unending waves of slimes, he eventually stopped thinking entirely.

It was certainly different from what's often called the elimination of the self, but after fighting while leaving his body to his instincts, his unnecessary, idle thoughts disappeared, and he only moved with the goal of destroying his enemies quickly and precisely. As he did so, his proficiency naturally had no choice but to rise rapidly.

He wondered how much time had passed? Lee Shin Woo only perceived the crisp trajectory of his fists. It felt as if he were executing the attack that only seemed possible within his mind. The bodies of the exploded slimes were everywhere, acting as proof of that result.

[Low Rank Bursting Thunder has become Lv4. Strength, Agility, and Magic increase by 2. It has become easier for you to handle a weapon, even if you have never wielded it before. The rate at which proficiency increases for combat related skills has increased.]

It was a splendid achievement that was incomparable to the growth of the Regeneration skill. Bursting Thunder, which was at the center of all his skills, wouldn't

rise in proficiency before; yet, in only four days after getting to level 3, it had risen to level 4!

His stats had naturally increased, and the power of the skill had also increased dramatically. Now, the slimes that hadn't sustained a direct hit were affected, as a portion of their bodies burst. Lee Shin Woo smiled faintly and started to move even faster.

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

“Nothing, again... Hm?”

But after he had cleaned up a clump of slimes in the blink of an eye, there was a bone in the center of them that caught his eye. Lee Shin Woo grabbed it and immediately used Bone Reinforcement. Then...

[You have consumed a deteriorated Poison Zombie's finger bone to reinforce your finger bones. Magic has increased by 1. Absorbing a portion of the Poison Zombie's memories and experiences.]

[Guwahk... Poison, even with my poison...! - Nameless Poison Zombie]

“Huh?”

The moment he absorbed the experiences and memories within, he felt like something was different. It was definitely a memory of a zombie dying to a slime, but a countless number of slimes had attacked in order to kill this zombie.

Moreover, the zombie resisted until the bitter end. Whether a Poison Zombie's defense was high, or its level was high, he was, at the very least, sure that the Poison Zombie had met a heroic end, compared to the other monsters.

[Gureuk]

Then, a rude slime stuck onto his back and sprayed its Acid Poison. The moment Lee Shin Woo went to strike it with his hand, a brief message appeared before him.

[You have learned Beginner Acid Resistance Lv1. You have become able to, albeit weakly, resist Acid Poison.]

[Resistance has been added to your status.]

“Huh...!?”

So that's how it was. The skill that he could obtain from the bones was none other than Acid Resistance! Now everything had become clear. Lee Shin Woo exclaimed, filled with both awe and realization.

“Damn it, now I can't train my Regeneration skill!”

Chapter 5.4

Trickster's Karma (4)

Lee Shin Woo supposed that the saying was true; misfortune and fortune come hand in hand.

[Beginner Acid Resistance has become Lv4. Resistance increases.]

“..”

His newly acquired skill, Acid Resistance, was truly amazing. Even though it was just at the Beginner stage, it blocked half the damage from the slimes' Acid Poison. Moreover, in the process, the skill proficiency increases as well!

But because half of the damage is blocked, there was a noticeable drop in the growth rate of his Regeneration skill proficiency. He had hoped that he'd be able to get the now level 9 Beginner Regeneration skill to the low rank level!

[Ggureureuk!]

[Ggreureuk!]

[The slimes sprayed their weak Acid Poison, but Acid Resistance reduces the damage.]

“Hoo... it can't be helped. I have no choice but to use the rest of my mana.”

Lee Shin Woo, who was fine even after being covered by the slimes, checked his body and conclude that he'd be fine for about 10 minutes without using his Regeneration skill. Then, he thought about what he would do with his remaining mana. Since he had realized how important skills were, he had already made up his mind to train his skills as much as possible.

'The Shriek of the Dead is... No, if these guys fight amongst themselves, I won't be able to train my Regeneration and Acid Resistance. The Power Slash... isn't possible since I'd need a weapon.'

He realised all that was left was either Catapult, or Flames of Revenge, and thought about which one he should train; he soon made up his mind to train Flames of Revenge.

The reason was extremely simple. Catapult just launched a bone at an enemy, but conversely, if he trained Flames of Revenge, it would be usable in various areas.

'I can shoot it from a far distance and I can put it on my weapon. It also has a pursuit function, and does persistent damage... In other words, just by training this, my overall power will increase.'

But this skill's output wasn't satisfactory for the amount of mana used, so he hadn't had an opportunity to actively use it. The fact that it was only a beginner level 3 skill was proof of that.

The Treasure Eater had created such an enormous flame though... Perhaps it could be due to the disparity between their magic, or it could be because something changed as it was modified from Flames of Resentment to Flames of Revenge.

'In any case, the higher the level, the more effective it should be. Let's train the skill to at least see if that's true.'

Since he had acquired the Acid Resistance skill, the burden to his mana had reduced significantly; right now, it was absolutely possible for him to simultaneously train his Flames of Revenge. Even though it was against his will, damn it!

“Kuuu...”

He definitely wanted to raise his Resistance skill to the low rank level, but... Lee Shin Woo made an expression as though he was going to cry (though of course, there wasn't any change whatsoever on the outside), and created flames.

The slimes that violently attached themselves to him seemed to also be intimidated by the mass of black flames floating in the air, and were melted by the flames; their bodies shrunk gradually and soon, emitted a sound of gas leaking and were completely destroyed. Since they had died so quickly, he hadn't used much mana.

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired 12 Perium.]

[You have acquired a Slime's Core.]

“Huh!?”

However, there was an even more surprising reward. He had killed hundreds of slimes thus far, and it might've even reached the thousands, yet a reward he hadn't seen before had suddenly popped out!

“What is this...”

All he was sure about was that it wasn't a common item! Lee Shin Woo collected the Slime's Core that emitted a dark light before the other slimes could eat it. At that moment, something happened.

[Through Bone Reinforcement, the monster's essence is being changed.]

[The Slime's Core has become the Slime Bone Core.]

'Huh...!?’

He was even more surprised than when he had first picked up the Slime's Core. He thought that Bone Reinforcement was only applicable to equipment, yet to think it worked on other items as well! No matter how he thought about it, the Slime's Core didn't seem similar to equipment.

If that's the case, then how...? Lee Shin Woo stood still, and even if the slimes swarmed him, he didn't concern himself with them and checked the item's information.

[Slime Bone Core]

[A Slime is sensitive to fire. Although normal slimes just spread their mana across their bodies, if you encounter them and their bodies melt, their mana gathers in their body. If you hunt the Slimes in this situation, you will occasionally receive a core filled with their condensed mana.]

[It can be processed into equipment that contains the monster's power, or it can be processed into a medicine that permanently increases your physical abilities. By changing the cores into bone, those special characteristics and rarity are decidedly

higher than normal cores.]

'Oh, Oooooooh...!'

It was nothing but dumb luck, but he felt really good. He felt like he couldn't receive anything from the slimes besides deteriorated bones and Perium, but to think there was this kind of twist waiting for him!

He could roughly guess why the core had changed into bone when he read the item explanation. Didn't it say a monster's core could be used as a material for equipment or potions? Just like how normal equipment is changed into bone, the cores that could be used as materials for equipment and potions are also naturally affected by Bone Reinforcement.

'It's turned out well. I won't be able to intake a skeleton's core with a normal method anyway.'

He didn't hide his excitement and used the Slime Bone Core as the target of Bone Reinforcement. Then, the message appeared.

[The Slime Bone Core works on the entire body. Would you like to proceed with Bone Reinforcement?]

“Yeah.”

[Reinforcing the entire body. Magic has increased by 1. Acquiring a portion of the Slime's memories and experiences.]

[Gureureuk! Reureureureureu! - Slime]

He probably wouldn't raise his magic by 1 every time he took in a core, so he had to see it as being lucky this time. Still, just the fact that he could intake cores in order to acquire magic was great. Since he had trained his skills, his magic had increased by a lot, but compared to his other stats, it was still lower.

However, if he did well in this dungeon, it's possible that his magic could become higher than his other stats!

“Now, then...”

It was important starting now. Of course, it'd be great if he were able to burn all the slimes inhabiting the sewers and acquire their cores, but unfortunately, his mana was finite, and he needed mana to use his Regeneration skill to safeguard his body from their Acid Poison.

So from now on, he would measure out enough of his remaining mana for his Regeneration and Acid Resistance skills, and would appropriately use his Flames of Revenge when he could; he would simultaneously train the Flames of Revenge and acquire as many slime cores as possible.

[Gureureuk!]

[Ggureureuk!]

“Yeah, yeah, let's play a lot, Pudding.”

How satisfied could he have been with the Slime's Cores for him to have given the slimes a nickname!? Lee Shin Woo took a deep breath and used his remaining mana, excluding an amount reserved for his Regeneration skill... and used his Flames of Revenge again.

“You like playing with fire, don't you, Pudding?”

[Ggureureuk!]

A countless number of Puddings... of slimes quivered intensely and were greeted by fire. Lee Shin Woo saw that and laughed pleasingly as they burned. Just like a demon.

“Yeah, yeah, eat a lot.”

They probably didn't understand what he was saying, and the slimes still trembled even more intensely. Lee Shin Woo laughed with a 'ha-ha' and threw his fist, popping the slimes in the center that couldn't bear the flames with their own mana.

[You have hunted a Lv1 Sewer Slime.]

[You have hunted a Lv1 Sewer...]

It probably wouldn't be perfect, but after repeatedly going through trial and error, and fine tuning his stamina and magic, he was confident that he could completely turn this

into a training environment.

And it was truthfully proceeding like that. Was it because he started properly? Or maybe because his mana senses were particularly sharp.

[Low Rank Magic Affinity has become Lv2. Magic increases by 2.]

His Magic Affinity skill, which had been reborn into a low rank skill, had finally risen to level 2 since entering this dungeon. His mana Regeneration was now faster, his Flames of Revenge naturally became more effective, he could use it more, and as a result, the proficiency rose.

Moreover, he was proceeding at a slower pace than before, but his Regeneration still rose. Whenever his Acid Resistance blocked the slime's Acid Poison and whenever he absorbed the deteriorated bones that popped out, he quickly grew. This dungeon was truly an immeasurably valuable treasure house for him.

'If I find a senior that I like, I should teach them about this place. That they definitely have to enter a Sewers Dungeon if there's one nearby... '

As he committed to his horrific plan, which would push someone he liked into hell and was something a human being wouldn't be able to think of, he gradually crawled further into the dungeon.

The Sewers was so vast that it covered this small town, and was wider and deeper than any dungeon he had learned about; obviously, there were heaps of slimes, piled up like mountains.

It was when five days had passed. He suddenly thought he felt the flow of mana; it'd been a long time since he saw a lengthy message in front of him.

[You returned to your wild instincts and have achieved astonishing hunting results. Strength, Agility, and Health have increased by 2. You have acquired the Barbarian's token. Proficiency in Low Rank Bursting Thunder and Beginner Flames of Revenge increases.]

[Beginner Flames of Revenge has become Lv7.]

“Hm?”

Lee Shin Woo, who was cleaving through the slimes with motions his body was now familiar with, and using his remaining mana to create flames, repeatedly burning the slimes (unfortunately, even though he burned the slimes, their core drop rate was low), was flustered at the sudden message.

'Barbarian's token? What barbarian?'

He had completely given up on going through this dungeon with a concept this time, yet he had suddenly achieved a feat and even received a token! He smashed the remaining slimes in the passageway and immediately took out the new token from his inventory.

[Barbarian's token]

[A karma that suits those who fight only with their bare body, without relying on weapons, armor or refined techniques. There is occasionally one amongst them that can harness the power of nature, and if this strength is used to its extreme, they will go beyond a Barbarian and awaken a Druid's abilities.]

“...”

After entering the dungeon, he killed the slimes using only his bare body, without swinging a weapon, and even used fire; is that why he got this token?

When he thought about it like that, Lee Shin Woo honestly couldn't feel happy about it. It felt peculiar like when he had received the Mastermind token or the Avenger token.

'Still, karma is karma, so... '

Moreover, since it was a karma he could only receive by hunting for a long time naked, considerable intellectuals wouldn't even be able to peek a glance at it.

Lee Shin Woo's (nonexistent) heart ached when he thought about it seriously, so he stopped thinking about it. In any case, he now had a total of seven tokens. If he just got three more, he would be able to achieve the Trickster's karma.

'At first, I thought it would take me forever to gather 10 tokens, but I just need to get three more of them like this.'

Of course, it would probably be best to get more skills and attempt a new concept. Like the Druid... Lee Shin Woo promised to remember the term 'Druid' for now, and raised his head. Now that he thought about it, why hadn't the slimes attacked him, when they hadn't left him alone before?

The path was ending.

There was a circular iron gate situated at the end of the path.

Chapter 5.5

Trickster's Karma (5)

“Is it the... boss room?”

The sewers dungeon he had entered had quite a simple structure. Though it thoroughly had roads that split off, other than the small waterway that organisms couldn't go in or out of, there were only a few wide passageways, so he could just thoughtlessly kill the slimes and follow the path.

And at the end of this path was this. He had a suspicion that the passageways were gradually merging into one, and it turned out it was all because of the boss room.

'There's probably no reason to hesitate at this point.'

It did seem like he had killed all the slimes, and he didn't have a reason to turn back without killing the boss.

But he hadn't felt danger from an enemy even once in this dungeon, and he was a bit exhausted, so if he were to fight the boss in this state, he might lose one of his precious lives, so before fighting the boss, Lee Shin Woo yelled out to refocus himself.

'I need to put on my equipment too.'

He hadn't worn his equipment for the past five days, so it felt a bit awkward. Lee Shin Woo wore the Dire Wolf Bone Armor, confirmed that his health had indeed increased, and raised the Bone of Thunder Lasting in his hand. This time, his strength and magic increased. When he checked his status in this state...

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Skeleton Avenger Blessed by God]

[Treasure Hunter]

[Lv - 2 (Status Effectiveness 110%)

[Strength - 98 + 16 Agility - 95 + 10 Health - 95 + 30 Magic - 102 + 15] (While dungeon bonuses are being applied)

[Passive skills - Invisible Heart Lv3, Acting Lv4, Beginner Avenger Lv1, Low Rank Bursting Thunder Lv4, Low Rank Magic Affinity Lv2, Low Rank Stealth Lv3, Beginner Command Lv3]

[Active skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv3, Low Rank Sprint Lv2, Beginner Shriek of the Dead Lv9, Beginner Regeneration Lv9, Beginner Catapult Lv8, Beginner Flames of Revenge Lv7, Beginner Power Slash Lv5]

[Resistance - Acid - Beginner Lv9]

There wasn't much change in his strength, agility, or health. At most, his skills leveled up, or his stats increased slightly as an additional effect of receiving a portion of the Barbarian's karma. However, the change in his magic was huge.

He trained his Low Rank Magic Affinity, and reinforced himself with the slime bone cores he occasionally acquired; as a result, his stat which had, funnily enough, been the lowest, was the stat that exceeded 100 first! Because of that, his stats reached a total of 390. If he raised his stats by 10, he would reach a total of 400, and would soon reach level 3.

'If we add in the bonus, I'm already level 3.'

It happened when he saw the equipment's effects, as well as the dungeons bonus on his stats. He thought he needed to be really focused, yet when he saw his persistently increasing stats, he couldn't stop the rushing feeling that he didn't need to be afraid of anything.

'No, I can't do that.'

Lee Shin Woo hit his cheek. It was annoying that he didn't even hear a slapping sound but instead heard a stiff sound, but he was able to get a hold of himself.

"Hoo... Alright."

His preparations were perfect. His health and mana were full, and his combat senses were well polished, unlike before. His Acid Resistance had also increased sharply due

to his body resisting so much acid.

Lee Shin Woo approached the circular iron gate after exhaling a deep breath. And daringly opened the door.

[Guoooooh...]

There was a really huge clearing within, and a really big slime filled about a third of the clearing... A *really* big slime.

[Lv3 Great Slime]

[Guooh?]

“...”

All of his concerns until now had been pointless. The moment he saw it, his abundant confidence disappeared into the ground.

Despite sufficiently preparing for the boss fight, he hadn't imagined that this kind of situation would be awaiting him. Why the hell did a level 1 dungeon have a level 3 boss?

[Guooh...!]

However, he didn't have time to spare quibbling over why. That's because the Great Slime noticed him, lightly sprung up from its position with its chubby body, and... with an astonishing speed, rushed towards him!

[Guooooh!]

“You asshole, that's cheating!”

'Would it just rush over like that?' is what he stupidly thought and survived as a result. He instinctually used his Sprint and was able to avoid its attack.

Instead of hitting Lee Shin Woo, the Great Slime collided with the iron gate, forcibly closing it due to impact, and making this place a secret room.

'Huh?'

Lee Shin Woo saw that and momentarily felt like something was strange, but that didn't continue for very long. Since it was already too much just to be completely focused on this fight!

[Guoooh!]

“Ugh!”

It seemed like it wasn't very hurt even after hitting the wall as it once again bounced in place and rushed towards him. Like it was proving that it was level 3, it rushed at him with an absurd speed he hadn't yet experienced before!

“Uaah!”

To think that a skeleton was dodging a slime bouncing in place; someone observing from the outside would think of this as an extremely comical scene, but honestly, Lee Shin Woo, who was facing the slime, felt like he was a soldier that came across a clump of rock launched from a catapult.

“Tch!”

[Guooh!]

The trajectory of its charge was really simple, so as long he grasped its charge beforehand, it wasn't actually that hard to dodge it.

However, he couldn't just dodge like this forever. Lee Shin Woo really didn't like this situation. It made him think of when he was in high school, competing in dodgeball, and him being the only one remaining in the ring.

[Guoooooooooh!]

He would've rather gotten hit quickly and gone out, but just getting hit on purpose was kind of awkward, so he had run around hectically; it felt really miserable back then!

Remembering that, spite welled up in his (nonexistent) eyes. This was revenge time. He would inflict his past revenge on this guy instead! Certain individuals might say that he was accusing the wrong person or passing the blame, but he wasn't concerned with that.

'Flames of Revenge.'

As he dodged its fourth charge, he manifested a mass of black flames atop one of his hands.

If he did as he wanted, he would've fought by putting the flames on his weapon, but if he clashed straight up with the slime, which was continuously charging without pause, his weapon or his body would be crushed, so it was impossible.

[Guooh!]

Lee Shin Woo rolled his body, and even as his body got wet from the dirty underground water, he once again dodged the Great Slime's charge. It once again hit the wall, creating a tremendous noise. And for a brief instant, it didn't move.

'Now!'

Lee Shin Woo, who had been waiting for that opportunity, swiftly blew the black flames forwards, hitting the mark. It had a homing ability, so the accompanying flames accurately hit the Great Slime's body, started draining his mana from far away, and began to burn lively.

[Guoooooooooh!]

Its response was truly fierce. Slimes' common weakness was fire, and it going completely up in flames in real time was proof of that! It rubbed itself in the dirty water in an attempt to extinguish the fire, but it wouldn't be called the Flames of Revenge if it were that easy to extinguish.

[Gugeugeugeugeugeuk!]

"Wow, you sure burn well."

This moment was the most fulfilling moment in his life. It would've been nice if he could've also burned those bastards that had only aimed for him in dodgeball like that!

[Goooooaaaaah!]

But that leisurely thought only lasted for a moment. The intensity of the flames gradually expanded, and when its body was engulfed and burning, the Great Slime seemed to shake... and instantly erupted in a grand explosion!

“What!?”

After the fire had attached to it, it had disassembled a portion of its body into pieces and erupted everywhere! It was like a missile that had slammed into the ground and exploded. Since there was nowhere to dodge, he just hurriedly curled up his body and protected his head.

“Ugh, urgh...!”

In a split second, he curled himself in a ball and the Great Slime shot out fragments of itself like shells, flying towards him and pummeling him. It hurt immensely. Each of those fragments contained a devastating acid within, and he felt his arms and legs, as well as various parts of his body being perforated in real time.

[Goooooooh!]

At that moment, the Great Slime shrieked once more. Lee Shin Woo was sure that it was a sign that the Great Slime was going to charge, and he grit his teeth and rolled onto the floor, even though his body was full of holes.

As expected, immediately after, he could hear the sound of the wind being split terrifyingly, and the Great Slime grazed past him and hit the ground with a thud. Its collision emitted a sound akin to an explosion!

'Regeneration!'

Since it came to this, he couldn't afford to conserve his mana. Lee Shin Woo hurriedly stood up, recovered his body through regeneration, and secured a clear view. In the process of tearing its body apart for the suicidal explosion, it had definitely gotten a lot smaller.

[Lv3 Great Slime]

'The level's still the same even though it's a lot smaller now... The magic within its body seems to be the same, too.'

The Great Slime, by exploding a portion of its body, had managed to extinguish the fire that would never go out unless its target was dead.

Due to that, its body had gotten smaller, but the magic was focused and condensed within its body, so its strength hadn't lessened one bit. On the contrary, although its stats were the same, due to its smaller size, it seemed to be even faster!

[Guoooh!]

“Eeeek...!”

However, despite the situation taking a turn for the worse, he was sure that his method of attacking was correct.

If he were to nitpick over its natural abilities, it was a monster that far surpassed the Treasure Eater. He couldn't even imagine taking it head on, so he needed to reduce its size this way.

'I'll burn its body using the Flames of Revenge, causing it to shake it off by using its suicidal explosion. I'll recover the damage I take from its explosion, and in the process, the slime's charge will gradually become faster. I'll dodge its charge and then hit it once again with my Flames of Revenge... Yeah, it's perfect. It's a perfect nightmare.'

As he repeatedly trained in this dungeon, he had certainly grown in stats, skills, and experience; yet he felt frustrated that he still had to struggle against the boss.

However, truthfully, it was the opposite. Because he did his best to train and went through the motions to learn his skills through firsthand experience, he was able fight this monster 1 on 1. If he hadn't thought of training his Flames of Revenge, no, if he

hadn't thought of immediately becoming familiar with his Regeneration skill, he wouldn't have even stood a chance in this battle.

“Sseup, there's no helping it...”

Lee Shin Woo, with the feeling that he was a newtype^[1] relying on his machine to plunge into the atmosphere, formed his Flames of Revenge. He didn't know if his health and magic would endure until the end of this battle, but he had no choice but to try it right now.

[Guuuuu... oooh!]

“Ha!”

It was preparing its charge again, but no matter how fast it was, the fact that its route was simple didn't change. Lee Shin Woo had also become familiar with it, so the instant it charged, he used his Sprint and avoided it; simultaneously, he successfully hit it with his Flames of Revenge.

[Gureureureu!]

“It's coming...!”

It bounced so quickly that it wasn't aware of the incoming fire and was struck by a direct hit. It hit the wall, its body rolled, and then... when it realized that its body was on fire, it rampaged about like last time, and exploded for the second time!

However, just as Lee Shin Woo had prepared beforehand, he protected his head, and the instant he took damage, he withdrew the stockpiled materials in his inventory and used Bone Reinforcement, healing his wounds.

'I have to use Flames of Revenge again, so I have to endure by using the bones in my inventory for now.'

Though his Low Rank Magic Affinity had grown, it was still low rank, and despite how much higher his magic had gotten, he was ultimately still level 2. He couldn't endlessly utilize both his Flames of Revenge and Regeneration at the same time.

Although Lee Shin Woo possessed an ability that allowed him to face his opponent, he

lamented that he was unable to use it as much as he wanted, and moved unceasingly. He would survive this battle no matter what, and next time, he would be a bit stronger.

[Guoooooooooh!]

“Yes, yes, you damn Pudding. Let's play some more...!”

Lee Shin Woo grit his teeth, muttered, and used Sprint. Immediately after, the Great Slime, which had lessened in size again, slammed into the spot he was just in. As expected, it was gradually becoming faster and faster.

...It seemed that his Sprint skill, which he had neglected in this dungeon, would get some good training in the end.

[1] T/N: Mobile Suit Gundam reference. It's about giant mecha, and newtypes are basically people with psychic abilities.

Chapter 6.1

Level 3 (1)

[Low Rank Sprint has become Lv3.]

[Beginner Acid Resistance has evolved to the low rank level. You can resist acid more effectively, and acid resistance is also given to your equipment.]

How long would he have to roll around in the clearing filled with dirty water? Lee Shin Woo honestly felt thankful that he was a skeleton with unlimited stamina. Even if his stats were the same, he would've run out of energy already if he were a human, and been squashed.

“Tch, you're still trying?”

[Gureureureu...!]

As a result of it self-destructing in an attempt to shake off the Flames of Revenge, the Great Slime had reduced to the size of a normal slime. It did increase its speed significantly, but the problem was that it hadn't gotten used to its smaller size, so its charge attacks' accuracy had dropped.

[Gureureureuk!]

“Umhp.” (let's see)

Lee Shin Woo avoided its attack, as he had gotten used to its movements. It slammed into the opposite wall, and completely destroyed the surface of the wall. The force behind its charge had certainly become tremendous, but he could now close his eyes and still dodge its attack.

“My magic is slowly reaching its limit. Let's finish this.”

[Gureuk...!]

If it wasn't for the bones stockpiled in his inventory, it would've been impossible to

endure until now. He had completely used them up, and squeezed out the mana to use his Regeneration skill. All in order to endure.

What's worse, he hadn't been able to repair a portion of his rib bones as they remained damaged until now. His armor was also worse for wear. He was already in this situation by the time his Acid Resistance had risen to low rank and he could imbue it to his armor.

However, the important thing was that he hadn't died yet and endured.

'Flames of Revenge.'

He thought about pouring all of his mana into the flames, but desperately controlled the urge, only instilling about half of his mana into the flames. He had left enough mana to utilize Regeneration, or the Flames of Revenge just one more time. If it didn't die after taking two shots, then he'd really have to die and come back to life.

[Low Rank Magic Affinity has become Lv3. Magic has increased by 2. Your magic will have a greater effect with a lower amount of mana.]

The skill level had increased by a lot, but as he fought various battles within this dungeon, he felt as though he had taken a step into the domain of detailed mana control that couldn't be explained simply by skill level.

There probably weren't many amongst the senior heroes that could manipulate mana as delicately as he could, so he could say that he was truly amazing. Though he himself didn't actually know that.

[Gureureureureureu!]

The Great Slime roared. It had realized that the flames that Lee Shin Woo used weren't normal.

It became aware that the next time those flames touched it, it would die, and tried to avoid the flames at all cost. It started to quickly bounce around everywhere, to the point that if one were to witness it, they would get motion sickness.

“Ha!”

However, Lee Shin Woo launched his Flames of Revenge without even properly aiming it. Since its size had lessened significantly, the slime seemed to think that it could somehow avoid the flames, but from the start, the Flames of Revenge was a technique that couldn't be avoided!

[Ggureureureuk!]

As expected, the Flames of Revenge, neither quickly nor slowly, proceeded through the clearing and accurately struck the Great Slime's body. And because Lee Shin Woo made use of the wind, the slime went up in flames. The flames burned slowly when its body was still huge, but now, its entire body was engulfed instantly.

[Kik... Kihik...]

At that moment, he heard a sound that he hadn't heard before from the slime. Lee Shin Woo prepared for its self-destruct, and curled his body up again, but no matter how long he waited, it didn't explode. Instead, this message appeared in front of him.

[You have hunted a Lv3 Great Slime.]

[You have achieved the feat of defeating an elite monster that was a higher level than you by only using fire. Magic has increased by 5. You have acquired the 'Four Elements: Fire' token. Beginner Flames of Revenge has reached level 10, and evolved into the low rank level. You can create stronger flames with less mana, and you can imbue not only your weapons, but also your body with fire.]

He opened his (nonexistent) eyes wide. It was already astonishing that he had gotten his second token in this dungeon alone, but the fact that this message appeared meant...

Lee Shin Woo carefully raised his head. There was no explosion, and there definitely wasn't a charge coming. Through the Great Slime's rampage, various parts of the clearing had collapsed, and he saw a sphere radiating light in the center. It was a core!

“Ha...”

Lee Shin Woo saw that and a lengthy sigh escaped his mouth. It was such a lengthy and intense battle that he couldn't easily get the feeling that it was over, despite it

definitely being over. It kind of felt like the day he was discharged from the army. The battle had felt that long to him.

“But I still won.”

He couldn't give himself lip service and say he won due to his skill. Rather than needing his polished combat skills, he was just busy running away and shooting out flames. If this were a novel, the readers would say 'what kind of development is this?' and criticize it.

However, he won. Regardless of the means necessary, he won. He won without dying. That was enough for him. He was as happy as he could be.

He won, so it was now time to collect the loot. Lee Shin Woo moved his creaking body and walked over to where the Great Slime lay dead. There were four things there. Perium, the Great Slime's core, someone's deteriorated bone, and finally, a large shield.

[You have acquired 11,210 Perium.]

[You have acquired the Great Slime's Bone Core.]

[You have acquired a deteriorated Skeleton Shielder's shoulder bone.]

[You have acquired a Lv2 Bone Tower Shield (+5).]

'If this goes well, I won't even need to go the shop to level up... '

Due to his achievement, his stats had risen to a total of 396. He didn't have a way to tell what level monster the Skeleton Shielder was, but if he included this, and the Great Slime's Bone Core, it felt like he'd be able to raise his stats by at least 4.

“Hoo...”

For starters, he collected the Perium. He checked his inventory and saw that he had collected 71,130 Perium after this last deposit. He was truly deeply moved. It only seemed like a couple days ago that he was pondering which bone he should pick which cost a little more than 3,000 Perium, yet to think he had gathered a sum of 70,000 Perium already...!

He looked at his inventory and after nodding his head a few times, moved on to his

next task. That was to put all his equipment into his inventory.

'When I got to level 2, Bone Reinforcement had absorbed all of my equipment as well. Since there's a high likelihood of that happening again... '

Of course, at the same time, the Bone Reinforcement's effects had been truly amazing. It would retain the abilities of the weapons, no, it could increase those abilities during the absorption. However... even if he obtained the abilities his equipment had, the defensive capabilities, as well as their attack power aren't retained.

Since the Bone of Thunder Lasting and the Dire Wolf Bone Armor were items that possessed outstanding attack power and defensive capabilities, it would be a complete waste to sacrifice them in order to gain some stats. So, he needed to prepare before leveling up.

'And.'

He actually removed the other items from his inventory, besides the Bone of Thunder Lasting, and the Dire Wolf Armor; this included the shield he had just acquired. They were all level 1 or level 2 equipment, and they were items he received as rewards from the dungeons.

Since both his weapon and armor were level 3, he thought the reinforcement would fail with this equipment, so he had stored them all. And if he were to aim for the right time for Bone Reinforcement with this equipment, he ascertained that that time was now: when he leveled up. He was starting to get the know-how of how this worked.

“Hoo, then shall we start?”

After he piled up the equipment right beside him, he inspected them with delighted eyes and raised the deteriorated Skeleton Shielder's shoulder bone in his hand.

“Bone Reinforcement.”

[You have reinforced your shoulder bone. Health has increased by 3. Absorbing a portion of the Skeleton Shielder's memories and experiences.]

[Kukek, this warped, cursed body will ultimately be buried here... General, please

forgive me for not being able to return to your side... - Hiles Keller]

Who the hell are you!? Why the hell are you saying something so profound!? No, and if we're talking about a general here, is it Seagald or Leofield? If not, is it a new, third general!? Why are all the generals here so popular!?

“Damn it, I'll remember the name 'Hiles Keller' ...”

He only wanted to improve his abilities, but why is this subplot constantly being attached? His curiosity naturally increased, but Lee Shin Woo decided to ignore it for now. More importantly, his stats now totaled 399 through Bone Reinforcement.

“I'm so scared that I'm shaking.”

Lee Shin Woo checked once again that his equipment was safely inside his inventory and cautiously grabbed the Great Slime's Bone Core. He gripped it in one hand, sighed once again, and... initiated the Reinforcement.

[The Great Slime's Bone Core reinforces your entire body. Magic has increased by 17. Acquiring a portion of the Great Slime's memories and experiences.]

[Guoooooooooh! Kugeugeugeugeugagagagaga! - Great Slime]

“ ...”

The Great Slime's extremely clear memories passed through his brain. Its first memory was the moment its entire body was burning, going completely crazy, and self-destructing.

“It shouldn't be, right...?”

He was worried with the Rat Queen that he'd get a skill based on birthing, but since he had acquired the Regeneration skill as a result, it should be like that this time as well. It had to.

The moment Lee Shin Woo muttered to himself, trying to get himself to accept it, a dark magic hung over him, as though it had been waiting for this moment.

[It is time for you to receive the karma you were endowed.]

[The Lv2 Bone Tower Shield (+5), as well as the other 13 bone equipment were consumed all at the same time, and Bone Reinforcement has been executed. The effects of the equipment a lower level than you are halved.]

“Ugh...!”

It went as expected. He didn't know how, but the moment he leveled up, all the bone equipment in his periphery were drawn to him and Bone Reinforcement was initiated! Perhaps this was why Bone Reinforcement possessed a modification ability; perhaps it was for this very moment...!

The equipment flew and changed into small particles. The instant those particles were absorbed, he felt a strong power rising throughout his body, as well as a sign that something was changing. Lee Shin Woo suddenly thought.

'Perhaps... the ultimate goal of Bone Reinforcement is to integrate the strength of the bones, as well as the bone equipment into my body as one.'

Of course, it was still impossible to make a deduction. Did he have to try Reinforcing bone equipment with other bone equipment, or should he try to reinforce his own bones? It was still a problem that he needed to solve.

He couldn't say which exactly was more effective yet. From now on, this was a problem he'd have to look into, possibly for quite a long time.

But right now, the only thing he was sure about was that he still needed the assistance of powerful equipment.

[Strength has increased by 11, Agility by 9, Health by 13, and Magic by 12. You have learned the active skill, Low Rank Harden Lv1.]

[The Bone Reinforcement skill has become Lv4. You can now target others and use your Bone Reinforcement on them.]

Even while he seriously considered his Bone Reinforcement and the direction of his growth, the change proceeded quickly. All the potential strength within the equipment was extracted and as a result, his stats were reinforced beyond his wildest

imagination; in the process of leveling up, his bones thickened once again and became even more durable.

His height increased considerably and became close to 1 meter and 90 cm. His bones were even more saturated with darkness and anyone that saw him would say that his bones were black. And once the acquired memories and experiences were collected and organized, they bore fruit.

[Low Rank Sprint has changed into the Combat Sprint skill. The level remains the same. In exchange for the skill duration shortening, when it is used in tandem with an attack skill, the attack is amplified. Agility has increased by 5.]

[You have acquired the active skill, Low Rank Self-Destruct Lv1. By exploding a section, or even your entire body, you inflict tremendous damage to all your enemies in the surrounding area. You also take a significant amount of damage. Health and Magic have increased by 3.]

Combat Sprint was probably an ability that the shielder had. It had changed in a way that better suited him, so it couldn't get any better than this.

More importantly, contrary to Regeneration, he hadn't been saved from receiving the Self-Destruct skill... Lee Shin Woo decided to think about this later. After all, there was something much more important that he had to do right now. A change much greater than any skill... a level up.

[You have become level 3. The effectiveness of your stats increases. Your proficiency in combat related skills, with the addition of a bonus, increases. The boxes in your inventory increase by 20.]

[Due to the feats you have achieved, your species changes. You have become a Dark Skeleton. You are more aggressive and handle magic superbly, but you are extremely vulnerable to divine power. However, you have been blessed by God, so this weakness is nullified.]

[Resistances that lay dormant have been revealed.]

As he saw the message stating that his evolution was complete, Lee Shin Woo, who had calmed himself down, checked his body and muttered.

“A Dark Skeleton, huh?”

A Skeleton Avenger, or a Skeleton Warrior, is like a 'job' in a game, not a species. But this time, his species had actually changed.

Honestly, his bones were all dyed black now, and with one look, he gave off more of a menacing impression than before. He felt that his strength and his magic were much stronger, to the extent that they were incomparable to before. If it was with his current strength, he felt as though he could face the Great Slime head on.

'However, my bones have turned black, so will I be able to properly fool the skeletons...?'

Lee Shin Woo had a concern that truly befitted a hero, and smiled gently. He could actually feel just how much more powerful his body had become, so he was able to cleanly sweep away his uneasiness and concern over the future.

“Hoo... then.”

He had something he needed to check first. Despite Lee Shin Woo roughly knowing, he shook for some reason, a reason that he himself couldn't understand; he smiled bitterly and...

Opened his status.

Chapter 6.2

Level 3 (2)

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Dark Skeleton Avenger]

[Treasure Hunter]

[Lv - 3 (Status effectiveness 125%)]

[Strength - 113 + 10 Agility - 108 + 10 Health - 127 + 10 Magic - 130 + 10] (While dungeon bonuses are applied)

[Passive skills - Invisible Heart Lv3, Acting Lv4, Beginner Avenger Lv1, Low Rank Bursting Thunder Lv5, Low Rank Magic Affinity Lv3, Low Rank Stealth Lv3, Beginner Command Lv5]

[Active skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv4, Low rank Combat Sprint Lv5, Low Rank Shriek of the Dead Lv1, Low Rank Regeneration Lv1, Beginner Catapult Lv9, Low Rank Flames of Revenge Lv1, Beginner Power Slash Lv7, Low Rank Harden Lv1, Low Rank Self-Destruct Lv1]

[Resistances - Holy: MAX, Curse: MAX, Acid: Low Rank Lv1]

“Wow, it increased even more!?”

When he went up from level 1 to 2, his stats' effectiveness increased by 10%. Of course, that was plenty amazing, but now that he'd risen from level 2 to 3, it had increased by an additional 15% to a total of 125% effectiveness!

Go figure, it felt like his body was overflowing with power, but the Giant Slime, which was only one level higher than him, felt way too strong!

'Levels really are everything in this world.'

He had acquired a lot of skills and had grown until now, but to properly unleash the power of those skills, his stats had to become his foundation.

He felt like he understood why his seniors were so focused on only increasing their

levels. Plus, they had revealed that they were level 6, so he couldn't imagine how powerful they were. Yet, even they wouldn't dare challenge the deep darkness that lay within the Empire!

'If we exclude the temporary bonus stats that the dungeon gives, my total stats are about 478. These numbers are impossible just from changing equipment... Ah, as I leveled up, my combat related skills went up as well. Because of that, my stats increased even more, I see.'

Because of that, Bursting Thunder, Catapult, Power Slash, and even the Command skill he hadn't had an opportunity to properly use, naturally leveled up, and his level 9 Shriek of the Dead, as well as Regeneration went up to the low rank level all at once.

Lee Shin Woo knew how drastically the skills change when they go from the beginner level to low rank, so he was really excited and checked the information of the ranked up skills.

[Low Rank Shriek of the Dead Lv1 (Active)]

[Causes the enemy to lose their mind, and puts them into a 'frenzied' state. Additionally, they are afflicted with 'Fear' of the caster.]

[Low Rank Regeneration Lv1 (Active)]

[Damage is healed through magic. Regeneration speed and effectiveness increases.]

There was an option added to Regeneration stating that its speed and effectiveness increased, and there was a 'Fear' option added to the Shriek of the Dead. He was excited as he wondered what kind of change this would bring upon the battlefield.

However, there was something he was more excited for; it was the new skills he had gained. Honestly, most skills start at the beginner level, but both skills started at the low rank level!

[Low Rank Harden Lv1 (Active)]

[Consumes mana in order to harden and strengthen the area of your choosing. You can also apply this to your weapons or armor.]

"Oh, this is simple and precise, so it's great."

Firstly, the Harden skill should be great both offensively and defensively. Especially, since it was a low rank level, it had additional options, and those options made his eyes go wide. It would reinforce his equipment, making them both stronger and sturdier. It would work as an all-purpose skill!

[Low Rank Self-Destruct Lv1 (Active)]

[By exploding a section, or even your entire body, you inflict tremendous damage to your enemies. The damage increases geometrically the larger the area you explode.]

Whereas Self-Destruct seemed like it would be extremely difficult to use. He would die on the spot if he exploded his entire body, so who the hell would want to use this skill!?

At least Lee Shin Woo possessed the Invisible Heart skill, so it wouldn't be so bad, but even taking that into account, it was definitely a skill with a horrific penalty.

“Moreover, even if I were to just explode a portion of my body, it ultimately just means that a portion of my body, which is attached to me, would explode right in front of me... Hmm?

He muttered like crazy, but then it hit him. A portion of the body... if that's the case, then what if he were to remove a portion of his body and then explode it? He had just the right skill for that.

'If I were to quickly launch my bone with my Catapult skill... and then add my Flames of Revenge to increase the accuracy and firepower... '

If he were to somehow succeed in integrating those three skills, he would completely rid himself of the weakness of 'self-damaging himself', and it seemed like he'd be able to create a skill with the maximum explosive effect. It may be a bit dangerous, but it was worth it to test it.

'Hmm?'

Lee Shin Woo, who had been immersed in his thoughts, suddenly looked over his status, and realized something new.

In exchange for the 'Blessed by God' words being removed from his species, the

moment he received Low Rank Acid Resistance, he saw that he had received a renewed section for Resistances, and two additional Resistances.

'Holy - MAX, Curses - MAX... How much do I have to raise the level of my skills to get to MAX?'

These two skills weren't new; he accurately interpreted it as the two Resistances that he already had being openly expressed in his Resistances section, something that had occurred following his level up, and the Resistances section being opened up.

It was much more intuitive, showing both his holy and curse Resistances maxed out, rather than a vague phrase like 'Blessed by God'. Looking at it like this, he suddenly realized just how much he had received from God.

'But what she took from me was equally as large...!'

Despite him leveling up to level 3, he grit his teeth at the empty space between his legs and his bald head. What, would she only feel better if she took it all!?

“Hoo, but still, for now...”

Rather than getting fired up for unclear, visionless revenge, he should be focusing on his growth instead! After checking the dungeon reward, he would go to the secret shop. He would get stronger.

“...Huh?”

Lee Shin Woo, who suppressed his rage and pacified himself, closed his status and checked the area where the Great Slime had died again; he soon realized that something was off.

“There's no dungeon reward.”

He had already cleared several dungeons. There wasn't a single time where he wouldn't receive a dungeon reward after defeating the boss monster. Aside from what the boss itself would drop, there would always be a small wooden box that appeared.

But there wasn't one. What did this mean? The conclusion was simple.

'Perhaps... Perhaps the Great Slime wasn't the dungeon boss?'

After thinking of that, he thought of the evidence that would back his hypothesis up one by one.

When he had first entered this room, he thought it felt out of place! Now, that reason was clear. Normally, the moment a challenger shows up in the boss room, it automatically turns into a secret room, yet the Great Slime closed the door itself, which felt odd.

Moreover, when he thought about it, even when he took down the Great Slime, he didn't get a message that he'd cleared the dungeon. By now, there was no room for doubt. He hadn't cleared this dungeon yet.

"Ha, an elite level 3 boss showed up in a level 1 dungeon, and you're saying that wasn't the main boss?"

Seriously? What the hell is this? Despite him already receiving a plentiful reward from the Great Slime, he was hit by a sense of frustration, feeling as though he hadn't gotten a proper reward for his efforts. And then, a piece of rationality soon returned to him.

'There definitely wasn't any other path, though... '

Lee Shin Woo used the slimes to train, and to get the most bang for his buck, he searched the entire dungeon, and killed them all. He checked all the blocked paths, and found that the passageways merged into one. Yet, if this wasn't the end of the dungeon, how would he even reach the end?

- Tak, Tadak

At that moment, a piece of rock fell from the wall. Since the Great Slime had moved around, ramming here and there, it wouldn't have been strange if the entire passageway had collapsed.

However, as he thought that, he casually gazed at the wall, and was dumbfounded.

“This crazy...”

He saw a tiny hole in the wall opposite the entrance, likely due to the Great Slime forcefully ramming, and digging into it. That's right. A hole. There was definitely a room beyond that wall.

Lee Shin Woo shivered at the pitch black darkness, and the magic he felt beyond the wall. It was a concentration of magic that didn't even compare to the room he was in! He was right. The dungeon continued on!

“...Shall we?”

Lee Shin Woo checked the side of the wall that still endured, despite receiving several of the Great Slime's charges, and took a deep breath. How could he turn back when he made it this far? He had to find out what was beyond this wall to be satisfied.

'And just in time, I've come up with a great method.'

Lee Shin Woo stepped away from his target, the wall, and considerably widened the distance. After that, he raised a finger, and aimed for the largest crack in the wall.

He utilized his Flames of Revenge skill, which could target his own body after leveling up, and a black flame ignited on his index finger... he quickly launched his finger with his Catapult skill.

- Kwang!

The Catapult skill itself was amazing enough. It was as if he shot a bullet, and the index finger quickly flew towards the wall, lodging so deeply into the wall that it couldn't be seen. He saw the cracks in the wall get progressively more severe.

If he just sat still like this, the flames would gradually rise, and melt the wall. Of course, all of his magic would be depleted by then, so he couldn't do that. Instead.

“Self-Destruct!”

Lee Shin Woo focused as much as he could on his index finger and activated his skill. He was concerned that it wouldn't work from far away, or that he hadn't adapted to

the skill yet, resulting in his entire body blowing up, but... they were all pointless concerns. His test had succeeded!

- Kwaaang!

The Self-Destruct skill's effect was quite amazing. Despite activating the skill by targeting his finger bone, it held an incredibly destructive power.

His index finger bone, which exploded magnificently in tandem with the flames, emitted a boom, and caused immense damage to the wall. The wall seemed to hold for a brief moment, but soon couldn't withstand the force, and crumbled, revealing the room within for all to see.

[Level 1 dungeon - You have found a secret path in the Dirtied Sewers. The dungeon information has been updated. Magic has increased by 1.]

[Level 2 elite dungeon - You have acquired a permit for the Secret Sewers. All stats within the dungeon increase by 5. The dungeon information is added to your minimap. All of your actions are buffed within the dungeon.]

“A level 2... elite dungeon.”

He had learned about elite dungeons just a little while ago from listening to his seniors. There was a high chance that especially strong, elite named monsters would appear, and the dungeon reward was great, but it was that much harder compared to normal dungeons.

“Hoo...”

There was an extraordinary mana being exuded from beyond the opening, so he thought it wasn't a normal dungeon, but... he stopped himself from being drawn in by the concentrated magic and thoughtlessly walking in.

It was an entrance that he had barely found after defeating a level 3 elite monster. If he took it lightly and went in, he might get into some trouble.

'But still, I have to go inside.'

He wanted to prepare as much as possible before going inside. If one were to ask what those preparations were, there was obviously only one answer.

It was the secret shop.

Chapter 6.3

Level 3 (3)

“Guten Abend^[1], Mr. Skeleton.”

The red haired beauty sat behind the silver counter, and was eating an orange. When she saw him, she raised her hand and waved. Lee Shin Woo opened his eyes (he didn't have any, but that's how he felt), and asked.

“In what time zone is that the standard way of greeting someone?”

“That obviously depends on how I feel. You're underground, Customer, so you probably don't know the time. But the passage of time differs for each region; you have at least that much general knowledge, right?”

“...”

After hearing that, he suddenly felt curious. He wondered where this merchant usually stayed. Since she talked about time above ground, she might be someone who lives above ground.

She might've misunderstood his gaze, as the merchant hid the orange in her hand and spoke defensively.

“I'm not giving this to you. It's something that's hard to obtain in the Empire.”

“I'm not interested, you know? Plus, I can't eat it, even if you give it to me!”

“Ah, right.”

The merchant cheerfully laughed while peeling the rest of the orange and throwing the slices in her mouth. Lee Shin Woo promised that she'd get her just desserts someday, and asked her something. It was to decide what he would do with the 'Beginner Stealth' skill book that he had continuously stored in his inventory.

“I acquired a skill book for a skill I've already learned, so can I sell it here?”

“I'd recommend that you read it.”

“Even though I've already learned it?”

“Though you've already learned the skill, the experience within each skill book differs. Your proficiency should also increase. And... unfortunately, our shop doesn't handle beginner skill books.”

“It's such a great skill, so why!?”

The shopkeeper giggled, and said.

“It's only good when one is placed in a peculiar situation like yours, Customer. Aside from you, Customer, most of the other heroes are higher than level 4, so when would they have time to train the skill while fighting monsters higher than level 4? It would just add another unnecessary weakness.”

“Ugh...”

It was a reasonable criticism. As he shook, he meekly retrieved the skill book and opened it. He didn't really need to read it. The moment he opened the book, the contents of the book entered into his brain, fully intact.

[The Low Rank Stealth skill has become level 4. You can move without making a sound. Agility has increased by 1.]

It was truly frustrating that the knowledge and the experiences within the skill book were never light. Lee Shin Woo, who had already trained and familiarized himself with the skill, was even more greatly aware of this, and by the time the skill book, which had done its job, disappeared into mana particles, the level of his skill went up.

The merchant beamed, as if she already knew about it, and looked straight at him. Lee Shin Woo felt angry, and was pointlessly curt, proposing the next order of business.

“Please give me a bone. The most expensive and worthwhile bone that I can afford.”

“Hmm, you're level 3, right Customer? Level 3 bones are quite cheap, but they probably wouldn't help you right now. Then, you'd have to go up to level 4 bones, though I don't think you'd have that kind of money Customer... Oh my, you have more

than 70,000 Perium already. How?"

When she checked the amount of Perium he had, her eyes gleamed with what appeared to be amusement.

"It's honestly not very surprising that you've leveled up to level 3 in two weeks since being dropped into the Empire. If we consider the power that you were given, we can say that you're talented. However, the total amount of money you gathered in that short period of time, as well as your Invisible Heart which has stopped at level 3... Customer, you're a bit interesting."

"I knew you thought I was interesting the first time you saw me, though."

The skeleton replied, uninterested. She burst out into an even greater laughter and clapped. And then she made an extremely unexpected offer.

"Very good. I've become interested in your story. Would you like to tell me about your experiences until now?"

"Are you going to give me something?"

"I wasn't planning on just hearing about your experiences for free. I'll reduce the price of your item by 20,000 Perium."

"Please sit down."

In exchange for telling his story, she would cut down the price of the transaction by 20,000 Perium, so he had no reason to refuse. He immediately straightened his neck and faced her. Her red eyes glowed, as if there were magic within them. She looked like she couldn't hold back her anticipation.

'Damn it, she's extremely pretty.'

It wasn't a problem that she was a beauty. The problem was that he didn't feel uneasy whatsoever when facing such a beauty.

"So in the beginning..."

Lee Shin Woo started his story with those dismal feelings. He precisely and concisely

picked out the central parts of his story, from the moment he ended up in the Empire, to now.

“So, I ended up finding the path that leads to a level 2 elite dungeon, and decided to drop by here.”

“Hoo, indeed.”

The merchant breathed out, seemingly expressing satisfaction, and opened her mouth.

“That guile, that composure... Above all, your obsession over your life has caused a change, Customer. Even though you possess 100 lives, to think you'd place so much value on each and every one of them. Even God probably wouldn't have been able to predict this. Yes... by doing so, you became a new Trickster, Customer.”

“Is that really important?”

“It is important. You're walking a path which no one else can walk in this world where everything is decided by karma. Moreover, you've already acquired 8 tokens at this stage? Ha, you're interesting. Really interesting. I don't feel like the Perium has gone to waste.”

She clapped her hands and nodded her head. Lee Shin Woo felt like he had become an entertainer somewhere and asked her a question.

“If this information gets leaked to the others...”

“It won't happen. I double as an informant, but your information will not be leaked to anyone else, aside from me, and will be kept a secret. Even if that person is another hero.”

“That's a relief.”

And it was also beneficial that he'd learned that she doubled as an informant. Right now, he didn't have any problems as he had a lot of things to do right now, but further along the line, if his progress were to be blocked, it wouldn't be bad to pay her Perium in exchange for her advice.

When they were completely finished with their talk, Lee Shin Woo went on to the next matter.

“If you're satisfied, you're going to reduce the price by 20,000 Perium, right?”

“I said I'm not a Trickster, so I'll settle the deal fairly. Here, I've picked out the most expensive bones that you can buy with 91,130 Perium.”

She took out two bones, one by one, from underneath the counter, and laid them atop the counter. One of them was a blue bone, and the other was a red bone. When he saw those two bones, he didn't know what to say.

“With a discount of 20,000 Perium... The red bone costs 67,510 Perium, and the blue bone costs 71,040 Perium.”

“To think I'd have to pick between two bones again...”

There's a limit to bad taste! Moreover, though the colors are the same as last time, the levels are different, and they're bones from a completely different monster! Lee Shin Woo, while firmly grinding his teeth, checked the prices first. If he bought the blue bone, he would be left with 90^[2] Perium, and was pissed since it was similar to last time.

“You obviously can't tell me what monster it came from, right?”

“Of course. Ah, if you were to buy a cheaper bone, you could check the information right after, but would you like to do that? Though I wouldn't recommend it.”

The merchant didn't hide her intent and snickered. Perhaps she had offered the 20,000 Perium discount in order to present these two bones at the same time and to piss him off!

Lee Shin Woo meticulously inspected the exterior of the two bones. He couldn't differentiate them by their hardness alone, and the magic coming from them as well...

Wait a second, magic?

“...Hmm.”

“Hoh.”

When Lee Shin Woo concentrated deeply on the two bones, the merchant looked

amused.

“You're honestly a bit surprising. To think you'd awaken such aptitude in magic from just the experience you acquired from that bone last time... Oh my, it seems like you already can't hear what I'm saying.”

“Hmm...”

There was magic in all the bones he'd acquired until now. It was just that the tendency of that magic changed.

When the bones contained a pure, deep magic, he would gain magic stat points, but if there was a different, complex power within, he could gain other stats as well.

'While it was alive, the owner of the bone had a special power, and that special power was wrapped in magic; through Bone Reinforcement, that lock was removed, and it felt like that power was transferred to me intact... '

Of course, even if he didn't know what monster the bones in front of him belonged to, he had absorbed hundreds, if not thousands of bones that raised various stats. Though he didn't know about the skills, he felt like he could read the pattern of the magic that changed depending on which stat it would raise.

[Low Rank Magic Affinity has become Lv4. Magic has increased by 3.]

'...Yeah, I feel like I know now.'

Of course, since they were both level 4 bones, the amount and quality of the mana differed compared to the other bones he had acquired, and the pattern boasted a complexity on another level to those that came before, but... still, he could read the flow of mana within and when he exerted himself, he was able to intuitively grasp the abilities of the bones.

'The red bone is clearly from a warrior, or something similar. I can probably gain strength and health from that one. The blue bone is... honestly purely magic. It's a magician. To think that they'd really be divided based on color... '

He didn't need to think about it complicatedly. Both the red bone and the blue bone would reveal their owner's power and characteristics. The red magic corresponded to strength and health, while the blue magic was entirely focused on magic, and emitted light.

'Between the two, the one I need the most right now is... '

Right now, when the level 2 elite dungeon is right ahead of him, which ability should he increase? If he were to just look at his stats, he should leave his excessively grown magic stat, and it seemed like procuring strength and health was a good choice. Moreover, acquiring the warrior's skill was appealing...

However.

"I'll go with the blue bone."

Despite all that, Lee Shin Woo chose the blue bone, which would further increase the imbalance among his stats. He honestly thought that there wasn't any other choice but the blue bone.

Whether it be the Regeneration skill that he had made good use of in this dungeon, or the Harden skill that he'd have to concentrate on and train, or the Flames of Revenge, etc; using all these various skills necessitated him using mana.

So, for Lee Shin Woo, who considered training his skills as important as gaining stats, there was honestly no other choice from the very beginning.

"Haha, does it seem like I'll say something?"

But it seemed like the merchant was satisfied with his decision. She smiled brightly, grabbing the red bone and returning it, and passed the blue bone to him. Lee Shin Woo slightly tilted his head towards the inquiring merchant.

"Are you saying it was an excellent choice?"

"Yes, you're right. You made a really, really good decision. You may be the greatest Trickster that God has created."

Ever since Lee Shin Woo had divided the two bones based on their magic, she had been continuously smiling, and that smile only further deepened now.

“Magic is the basis for all strength. It's fine, so long as it's not an amount that the body cannot withstand, causing the body to break. Since you can do the rest with magic anyway. I'm talking about strengthening the body, as well as its changes. This is especially important to you, Customer, who has opened your eyes to magic at an early stage.”

As he listened to her, Lee Shin Woo had a hunch. He could heal his shattered body through Regeneration, and the Harden skill he had just received could strengthen his body. So, there should be another skill that lets him reinforce his body in a different way.

Of course, strength, agility, and health were the fundamental abilities that influence the body and they were certainly important stats, but even when combining the three, magic was more important.

“Thank you. I've received your payment of 71,040 Perium.”

“Then, I'll get going now. I'll come back faster next time and get that red bone, so please wait for me.”

“Ah, please wait just a minute.”

He didn't regret his decision, but he still had a lingering attachment to that red bone. He spoke the lines that retreating enemy troops would say, and when he was about to leave, the merchant grabbed him.

“I haven't properly heard your name yet, Customer.”

“...My name is Lee Shin Woo.”

He thought that the merchant would've already known his name by now, but Lee Shin Woo obediently told her his name. Lee Shin Woo would see her a lot in the future, so he thought it'd be better to formally introduce himself.

“My name is Pleine. As you can see, I'm responsible for the secret shop.”

“Then I'll see you next time, Pleine.”

“I hope you'll come and see me when you've become stronger.”

It wasn't just his imagination that the merchant... Pleine seemed to be kinder to him than before. And that was all because he had personally proven his potential. The greatest virtue on this planet was none other than strength.

He suddenly realized that fact, smiling bitterly, he left the secret shop. He then returned to the clearing, in front of the dark, lengthy passageway.

“Hoo, then...”

Since he roughly knew the result, he didn't shake that much. After Lee Shin Woo had briefly grasped that there was no danger in his periphery, he boldly activated his Bone Reinforcement. He somehow figured out that it was a part of something else, and it was actually part of the skull, the sphenoid bone.

[Reinforcing the sphenoid bone. Your compatibility with the target is incredibly high and you have acquired a skill with great success! Magic has increased by 24. You are more deeply absorbing ???'s experiences and memories.]

“Hey, wait...!?”

Lee Shin Woo, who realized that the activation of the skill was different from last time, hurriedly tried to gesture, but it was obviously to no avail.

An enormous amount of information and a clear consciousness entered his brain, and for a short time, his consciousness was completely locked away.

And the appearance of another world unfolded.

[1] T/N: Good evening in German.

[2] T/N: Toika wrote 90 Perium last time when it should've been 70, but he counted correctly this time.



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