



토이카 판타지 장편소설

INTIME FANTASY STORY

Illust by 미키

최악의 대사 이노이다!

intime

STOP, FRIENDLY FIRE!

- 쏘지 마라 아군이다! -

- Volume 2 -

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Toy Car**

[Boko (Wuxiaworld)]

Chapter 7.1

Three way (1)

By the time Lee Shin Woo got a hold of himself, he was in a bright interior, rather than the sewers. It was as if he were in a dream, as the surrounding landscape looked blurry, and he couldn't move his body as he wished. Though he was able to indirectly experience the feeling of a human's body, he wasn't very happy.

Yes, he was looking through a certain human's memories. It was a moment where he once again felt the endless abilities of Bone Reinforcement.

“I'm here, Teacher.”

Those words came out of his own mouth. That person, whose body was permeated with Lee Shin Woo's consciousness, spoke those words, and raised his head. For the first time, he saw someone else in the room. He was really old, frail, and even the mana within him wasn't anything special.

'Teacher? But this guy seems like he's way stronger.'

Since he was within this person's body, he knew for sure. Lee Shin Woo had just become level 3 and possessed an ample amount of magic, yet this guy had much more mana than himself. He was obviously a higher level than him, and had probably focused on his growth in magic.

Whereas the strength of the old man before him wasn't even at the level of a Skeleton Warrior. If they were to quibble over mana, the old man had about half of Lee Shin Woo's mana. Normally, Lee Shin Woo didn't have the ability to precisely measure someone else's mana, but it was possible for the person who he was inhabiting.

“Gerrit... why have you come?”

“I have something I must tell you.”

Of course, since they had a teacher-student relationship, strength probably wasn't that

important. They don't say that the 'student surpasses the master' for nothing. For starters, Lee Shin Woo decided he'd listen to their conversation.

"I have nothing to hear from you."

"Teacher, I heard you've become responsible for a group that's researching under His Majesty's supervision."

"...Where did you hear about that?"

"That's not important. What's important is that what you're doing is wrong."

Ah, as expected. When he thought about it, the last time he reinforced his skull, he remembered hearing about 'research' of some kind. He had roughly guessed what it was, but this memory made it clear what the research was. It was the research that would fill this Empire with the undead.

"Teacher, you must stop that research at once. It's research that's twisted at its very core. Bringing immortality within everyone's reach will bring nothing more than ruin!"

"But that's what His Majesty wants."

"Isn't it you, who had told me that this research was wrong?"

"..."

"Teacher, please tell me honestly. Who's the one who really wants immortality? Is it His Majesty? Or..."

Around now, Lee Shin Woo started to feel like he was watching a movie. The Empire had fallen anyway, so there was no need to be on the edge of his seat! He watched their conversation extremely comfortably. Meanwhile, it seemed as though their argument was reaching its climax.

"Ha. Yes, one born with genius such as you wouldn't understand what it feels like to lack in natural ability and be unable to proceed to the next stage; you don't know how wretched it feels..."

"I just practiced as you taught me, Teacher."

"Then why couldn't I reach that level!?"

Suddenly, the old man's temper flared. It felt as though it had built up, more and more, and had finally exploded.

“I lack in talent, in magic, and in everything! I can't... I can't get to level 3 before I die. Karma... I don't have enough karma...! At least, if I don't buy more time!”

“And yet, why are you voluntarily trying to shoulder the burden of the horrific karma that you vehemently rejected in the past!? At the time, you were the one I respected the most!”

“You don't know! You, who has everything, wouldn't know what it feels like!”

The old man suddenly screamed. But Lee Shin Woo thought he had heard that voice somewhere before, and then, a truly shocking development occurred. The teacher had been delivering his impassioned speech, and suddenly, one of his eyes popped out and rolled onto the floor.

“What the...!?”

“Ugh!”

That wasn't all. The teacher suddenly vomited rotten blood and bowed his head. His student, Gerrit, had a hunch that something had gone terribly wrong, but the moment he was about to retreat, his teacher raised his head and suddenly attacked him. The teacher's eyes had turned yellow, and had a dull glow! It was like the standard development for a zombie.

“Kyaaaaahk!”

“What the hell!?”

Gerrit realized that his teacher, who had sought immortality, had instantly become an existence furthest from life... he had changed into an undead. He quickly diagnosed whether he could turn his teacher back to normal or not, but soon, shook his head, and extended his hand.

'Ooooh...!'

In a brief instance, the world's mana responded to his call, and he instantly created a net comprised of mana, trapping his teacher. It was the stage that his teacher had so fervently desired to reach.

Lee Shin Woo felt it across his entire body and was deeply touched. So this was how

you handled mana! He could energetically feel it all: how Gerrit had manifested his will in that brief moment, how he drew out the mana within his body, and how he caused change in the mana.

“Kyahak, Kyahaaahk...!”

“Damn it, Teacher...”

His teacher, who had transformed into a zombie, also raised his mana and struggled; but when Gerrit grit his teeth and flicked his finger, the mana net changed into flames and began to magnificently burn his teacher. When he released the flames, all that remained was a small blue bone.

“Damn it, what the hell did those bastards do to him...!”

The sole survivor, Gerrit, persistently grit his teeth, muttered, and picked up the bone fragment. The mana that arose from his body almost acted as proof of his rage.

“I can't let this insanity go on any longer. I have to protect the Empire at all costs. To do that, damn it...”

Gerrit chewed on his lips. Whereas Lee Shin Woo was concentrating so desperately in order to further engrave Gerrit's high level mana control into his mind that he couldn't feel sympathy for him.

“...In the end, I have no choice but to meet with General Seagald.”

'It's Seagald again!?’

He couldn't help but retort when he heard about General Seagald! However, Lee Shin Woo hoped that he would explain what Seagald did, though unfortunately his hope was dashed, as that was the last thing he heard before his consciousness became faint. It was as if someone decided that these were all the experiences and memories that he could receive, and cut it short. His sight turned dark, and his own senses gradually returned to him. Back to the senses of his cold, hard bone body.

“Tch.”

[Low Rank Magic Affinity has become Lv7. Magic has increased by 10.]

[You have learned the passive skill, Low Rank Magic Accumulation. Magic has increased by 5. You can draw your mana naturally, and by amassing it within your body, your total amount of magic increases; and by doing so, your body will harmonize with your mana better than before.]

The moment Lee Shin Woo completely awakened within the sewers, he received concise, and amazing messages one after another; he rubbed his (nonexistent) eyes. His Magic Affinity had leveled up and he had acquired a new skill, a really important one at that!

'Mmm.'

He had learned a skill that was essential in handling magic, and the Magic Affinity skill had sharply increased, so he could say that he had no regrets, but... the name, Seagald, weighed on his mind, so he couldn't feel happy about his growth.

'Since I keep hearing his name, he must've really been an influential figure in the Empire... '

He briefly pondered over it, but soon opened the chatting channel. It should be alright to ask his seniors about Seagald just once. He was famous enough for the skeletons to say his name in their death throes, so there should be someone amongst them that knew who he was.

[Lee Shin Woo: Seniors, may I ask a question?]

[Yasunori Akira: The newbie, huh. It's good that you're not dead.]

[Lee Shin Woo: Haha...]

It was something that he took as a greeting whenever he entered the chatting channel. It meant it was that hard to survive in this Empire. He smiled bitterly and started to speak.

[Lee Shin Woo: Have you perhaps heard of the name Seagald?]

[Yasunori Akira: Ah... it does seem like I might've heard that somewhere.]

[Lloyd H.K.: I've heard of him. He's one of the generals, right? From what I've heard, it

seems like there were 12 generals in this Empire.]

[Shino Rendu: Have you cleared the dungeon? That's a relief.]

[Lloyd H.K.: Because you worried about me, I was able to safely clear the dungeon.]

[Prince Altania: Whoever he was, that Seagald guy must've been really popular. The lower ranked the skeleton, the more fervently they talk about him.]

[Seira Von Retadane: Seagald... He's probably an undead right now as well. He's our enemy.]

[Prince Altania: That's obvious.]

As expected, it seems like his seniors had heard about Seagald before. Though he did feel disappointed that he couldn't get any additional information on him from them... Lee Shin Woo clicked his tongue and Seira asked him a question.

[Seira Von Retadane: However, Mr. Lee Shin Woo. Do you perhaps have a reason for asking about Seagald...?]

[Lee Shin Woo: Ah, like my other seniors, I've heard a lot about this Seagald guy from the skeletons. I was just curious as to who he was...]

[Seira Von Retadane: I see. However, Mr. Lee Shin Woo, regarding that person...]

When Seira was about to say something more, something happened.

[Ms. Ye Jin Jin has entered.]

[Ye Jin Jin: Please save me! Somebody please save me!]

“...”

Lee Shin Woo stiffened at the sudden call for help, but his seniors clicked their tongues, as if they were used to it.

[Lloyd H.K.: Damn it... I'd thought it'd been too long for everyone to come out unscathed.]

[Prince Altania: Rest in peace, Ye Jin Jin... If I see you later, I'll make sure to burn you to a crisp.]

[Ye Jin Jin: You're too much...! I-I'm going to die! I... ggyahk! A zombie, it's a huge zombie!]

[Erian Ruparte: Jin Jin, where are you!? Where are you right now!? I need to know

where you are if you want me to help!]

[Seira Von Retadane:... It's no use, Ruparte. God really values us, and if we're close enough to help, a quest will occur, even without her call for help...]

[Erian Ruparte: N-No... then are you saying we just have to sit here and watch her die?]

[Shino Rendu: We've already seen several dozens of heroes dying from here. We have a lot of regrets and remorse. You should just shut up if you're going to talk about responsibility or having a conscience so lightly.]

[Erian Ruparte: That's...]

In an instant, the mood in the chatting channel calmed down exceedingly. The seniors who got along well with her were distressed, and even those speaking curtly couldn't hide their pity for her... Lee Shin Woo understood all of them, and he even understood those who remained silent.

[Lloyd H.K.: Sorry I couldn't save you, Ye Jin Jin...]

[Ye Jin Jin: Please save me... Please...!]

However, their mood didn't match Lee Shin Woo at all. Even though a human being was on the verge of death, they're not even uneasy? Was it because he also felt contempt for himself, since he was also like them? Since he was suddenly starting to be unsure of his own identity?

They were all right, but they were also all wrong.

[A quest has occurred!]

[Hero Rescue]

[A hero close by you is in a life threatening crisis. If you succeed in perfectly rescuing her, you will acquire a suitable reward. Of course, if you fail or ignore her call, there won't be anyone who blames you, but there may be those who mock you and say that you are foolish.]

[Quest reward - 3 permits to God's secret shop, 1 random skill book, acquisition of a suitable amount of stats and Perium, and Lv3 equipment reinforcement permits based on your contributions.]

That's right.

It seems like this girl was nearby.

Chapter 7.2

Three way (2)

Lee Shin Woo accepted the quest, left the clearing and approached the sewer's ceiling. He had gone through the entire sewers over and over again for several days, so he knew the structure of the sewers well. There were other ways besides the official entrance to get into the dungeon, so the opposite was also true.

'Good, as I expected, there's a crack.'

He used his Bone of Thunder Lasting to shatter a drain pipe. No matter how tough the drain pipe was, it wouldn't be able to endure a hardened, Lv3 weapon's Power Slash.

- Kwaaaa

A heap of dirt spilled out and fell, but Lee Shin Woo didn't let it bother him. It had been a long time since these sewers had lost their original purpose. He wasn't going to complain just because of some dirt.

'It shouldn't be blocked to the point that I won't be able to come back, right?'

Of course, it didn't matter, even if it were blocked. He would just break through it and go on his merry way. Like right now! He returned his weapon, and like a mole, violently dug through the dirt, and procured a route to the surface.

He couldn't have even dreamed of doing this when he was still human, but since he was an undead that didn't need to breathe now, it was quite simple. Since the sewers weren't that deep, he was able to escape rather quickly.

“Hoo.”

Lee Shin Woo, who had gotten outside, sensed a huge presence straight in front of him. Would it take around 2 minutes by running? It was a distance close enough that could

be seen with the naked eye. A black haired Asian girl was in the middle of running hectically; behind her, a huge three meter giant undead was quickly chasing her...

[Lv4 Acid Ghoul - Edward L. Baker]

[You have found the target of your revenge. When you initiate battle, all abilities increase by 20%. Flames of Revenge receive an additional 20% increase.]

“Ha, really.”

The one he had encountered, and succeeded in barely running away from was none other than that Giant Zombie! Moreover, it had grown to become a level 4 Ghoul!

[Human...! It's been a long time since I've seen... a human possessing such appetizing flesh...!]

“Ggyaaaaaaaaahk! Save meeeeeeee!”

Though its body was smaller than the last time, considering how the Acid Poison it spread was getting stronger and stronger, as well as how its movement speed seemed faster than a normal monster's, it was certain that it had leveled up.

He had thought that it wasn't a normal monster, but why did it have to be the one to rise to level 4, and why did it have to be the one attacking another hero...

'Should I run away?'

Lee Shin Woo naturally thought. However, he soon shook his head.

It wasn't because he pitied the girl, who was weeping and ran while dragging her injured leg. It wasn't sympathy, contempt, goodwill, or regret either.

Rather, he didn't feel anything for the girl, to the point that he felt like he'd start feeling contempt for himself. He would've readily helped her if it wasn't very difficult, but it was also a situation where he didn't really want to actively help her. It made him realize that he was a completely different person from before.

Despite that, there was only one reason why he couldn't easily back down. He coveted this quest reward so much that he was ready to sacrifice a life or two to get it.

'Moreover, I have the Avenger skill right now, as well as the Flames of Revenge... '

All of his abilities increased by 20%, so even though the zombie had amplified its stats by reaching level 4, he thought it was definitely worth a shot. He hadn't been aware that the Avenger skill would additionally buff his Flames of Revenge skill, which was a happy miscalculation. He had procured a surefire way of inflicting damage to it.

Moreover, the fact that it was a monster that used Acid Poison was another reason that made Lee Shin Woo so bold. He had already cleared the slimes' den and come out, and in the process, his Acid Poison Resistance had gotten to the low rank level! He was sure he wouldn't be helpless against its Acid Poison this time.

Now that his mind was made up, there was only one problem left.

'Can I take care of this issue without exposing my identity to that girl?'

Ideally, he would act as an aloof Skeleton Knight, who wandered around following the collapse of the Empire; he would take care of the Acid Ghoul, receive the quest reward, and leave worry free... He wasn't sure if that would actually work, but for starters, Lee Shin Woo decided to run with that concept for now.

Of course, even if he is exposed, it wouldn't be too much of a problem. He was an undead, but it was undeniable that he was also a hero. He had all the evidence in the world to prove that he was one.

"Alright, then..."

Lee Shin Woo finished all of his calculations and raised his index finger. A black flame wrapped around his finger and softly burned.

He carefully raised his finger and aimed at the Acid Ghoul, whose heavy feet stomped onto the floor, and ran quickly. Perhaps it was by chance, or perhaps it was necessity, but the girl was running towards him, and because of that, it became much easier to aim at the Ghoul.

"Ready... Aim... FIRE!"

His index finger was launched, accompanied by a simple, short, and powerful pain.

The black flame engulfed the index finger and it went afar, faster than any bullet; it cut through the air, advanced, and burrowed into the Ghoul's shoulder!

'Tch.'

Lee Shin Woo briefly clicked his tongue. It was obvious, but he had originally aimed for its head. Of course, even if he had hit its head, he probably wouldn't have taken it down in one hit, but he was disappointed it didn't work out.

[Guwoooooooh!]

“A-An undead...!? But that attack just now...?”

While Lee Shin Woo was busy complaining, the Ghoul, as well as the girl, inspected him. The Ghoul shrieked, filled with pain and anger, and the girl was incredibly flustered at the unprecedented sight of an undead attacking another undead.

“Oh, ggyaahk!”

Because of that, she sprained her ankle and fell to the floor. That dumbass!

[Human! Eating!]

Rather than punish the skeleton that attacked it, it seemed like the Ghoul decided to eat the human in front of it first. Lee Shin Woo inwardly wanted to get rid of her of right now, and exploded the index finger burrowed in its shoulder!

[Ggaaaaaaaaaaaahk!]

“Euguk, Euuk, heuggeuk...”

The effect was amazing! The Ghoul was about to grab the girl's head with its rough arm, but its shoulder joint burst; it wasn't able to endure the horrific pain and stood in place, roaring in pain.

Whereas it seemed like the girl had realized that she had just escaped death, and even while crying, desperately moved her body and escaped the Ghoul. She had already been afflicted by its Acid Poison, so about half of her clothes had been melted, and she

truly wasn't dressed decently. However, Lee Shin Woo wasn't agitated by that at all. It should've been alright if he'd been a little uneasy, though...

[Kuwaaaaaaaah! Annoying, a mere skeleton!]

"Jeez, you burn well. It's hot enough to cook a sweet potato!"

The satisfying result of his attack soothed his regret of losing something important. It was because above the Ghoul's tattered shoulder joint, the clear black flames still blazed on, and gnawed at the Ghoul.

He knew it was an amazing combination, but he didn't think it'd be this effective. If he could repeatedly use this technique from afar, whether it be an Acid Ghoul or anything else, they would die all the same.

[Annoying guy, die!]

"Tch."

However, that was still only the ideal situation. There was no way that his opponent would take that kind of horrific pain and idiotically stay put. The Acid Ghoul seemed to be really pissed, as it even let the appetizing human go, and sprinted at full speed towards him!

Lee Shin Woo ascertained its speed, as well as the direction it was going, and raised his other hand's index finger, which he had already ignited with the Flames of Revenge, aimed, and fired.

"Firing again!"

[Kyahak!]

But surprisingly, the Ghoul swiftly swung its arm and parried the shot, as if he were waiting for it!

Of course, the Flames of Revenge excellently shifted to its arm, attached to it, and began burning it, but he hadn't gotten an opportunity to explode his shot; it just miserably bounced off, and rolled onto the floor. Lee Shin Woo saw that, and though he had roughly expected it, he clicked his tongue.

'Tch, well it is a level 4.'

It had a much faster reaction speed than a normal zombie, and the durability of its body was different as well. In a scenario where the Ghoul noticed him, and he wanted to fight it using Catapult, he felt like he'd need to be at least level 5. The fact that he'd gotten the first hit in was a tremendous success.

“Now I have to fight it off myself.”

In preparation for the coming Ghoul, he regenerated both of his fingers, and tightly gripped the Bone of Thunder Lasting. He activated Harden, applying it to both his sword and his armor, and even ignited the Flames of Revenge on his sword. Even so, he still had mana to spare.

'If it was before, it wouldn't have been strange for close to half of my mana to have been drained by now, but right now, my mana's overflowing.'

Since he'd strengthened himself with Gerrit's sphenoid bone, Lee Shin Woo's magic was at 173. Moreover, his Low Rank Magic Affinity had risen to level 7, and he obtained the Low Rank level 1 Magic Accumulation. Even at this very moment, the two skills were drawing the surrounding mana towards him and replenishing his mana. So at least in terms of mana, there was a world of difference between him today and him yesterday.

[You are exposed to the Acid Ghoul's strengthened Acid Poison. Low Rank Acid Resistance is mitigating the damage.]

[I'll crush you, Skeleton!]

“Ugh...!”

While he was busy preparing for the battle, the Ghoul had gotten really close. Its Acid Poison had become even more fearsome than before, and Lee Shin Woo, feeling as though his entire body would be melted away, had attacked first. Though it was actually bearable due to his Acid Resistance. He prayed that his armor would last until the end of the battle, and activated his skill.

“Power Slash!”

[Dieeeeeeeee!]

The Ghoul's sharp nails and the Bone of Thunder Lasting clashed. Immediately after the horrific shriek, Lee Shin Woo's body was mercilessly pushed back. In the ground, there were traces of two deep lines.

“Ggeuuuuhk.”

[You're weak! Skeleton!]

Despite using Power Slash, the strength behind Lee Shin Woo's strike couldn't match up to the Ghoul's. It was obvious. Even though his strength was counterbalanced by the amplification effect of his Avenger skill, he still couldn't contest a level 4 as a level 3 with purely stats.

'Moreover, this asshole seems to have especially high strength...!'

Lee Shin Woo gripped his sword with both hands, whereas the Ghoul extended one hand, so he was even more shocked. He grit his teeth and attempted to parry its arm, but its forearm was as hard as steel.

The flame blazing on his sword shifted to its arm, attached to it, and began to burn it, but he couldn't defeat the Ghoul with just that degree of pain. The flames on its shoulder were gradually expanding, so now it looked like some sort of flame giant.

“Eeek, Power Sla...”

[Not a chance!]

Lee Shin Woo pushed its arm away, and tried to use his Power Slash again, but the Ghoul used its other arm to smash him, like a straw cutter.

Lee Shin Woo, who used his Combat Sprint to seize that split second opportunity, swiftly retreated both his body and sword, and rolled onto the floor. Instead, the Ghoul's arm burst open the innocent ground and sank into it. It was truly a horrific destructive power.

[To think you'd get away! Die. I'm telling you... to die!]

'Damn it, since it became level 4, our levels are worlds apart. It seems like it's at least 300 stats higher than me... How the hell am I supposed to win?'

Lee Shin Woo evaded its next attack and had to consecutively back away. By simply swinging its arms, the ground was hollowed out, forming small craters; when he saw that, before fear, he just felt astonished... It was a relief that it wasn't very hard to dodge them.

[Kuwaaaaaahk! You rat...! A mere skeleton without a bit of flesh...!]

“Then are you that slow due to you having all that flesh? Oh, boy.”

[Kugiaaaaaht!]

The Ghoul truly had tremendous strength and health, but it wasn't very fast. The fact that Lee Shin Woo was able to dodge its attacks was proof of that. However, he couldn't just move around dodging this guy forever...

[You are being exposed to the Acid Ghoul's strengthened Acid Poison.]

[Low Rank Acid Resistance has become Lv2.]

'My armor's steadily melting away. I won't last long like this... '

He had applied both his Harden skill, as well as his Acid Resistance to his armor, yet the condition of his armor wasn't good. It was due to already having fought the Great Slime. If it kept going like this, his armor wouldn't even last a few more minutes and would disappear without a trace!

'Damn it.'

At the end of his brief pondering, he put his armor into his inventory. Even if he were to die once, he couldn't afford to lose his armor in a place like this.

[Kyahak, Kyahahak!]

The Ghoul saw Lee Shin Woo de-equip his armor, and even as its hands consecutively floundered in the air, it laughed. Though he didn't know what it was so happy about, the Ghoul's body was being gradually burned by the Flames of Revenge. He didn't know if the Ghoul realized that it was in the exact same position as he was.

'Now it's become us both having time bombs set up and we're just waiting for whoever's time bomb goes off first.'

Lee Shin Woo, even while furrowing his (nonexistent) brow, decided to make his next move. It was none other than himself who made up his mind to finish this quest, even if he had to risk his life to do so.

This was the time to stake his life. Even though he knew its body was damn tough, or that it was extremely strong, he needed to get one hit in with his sword...

-Kwang!

[Ggueueehk!]

Something forcefully hit the Acid Ghoul, causing it to miserably roll onto the floor. Lee Shin Woo, who had charged at it, stiffened in place.

"I'll help you!"

The one who had struck the Acid Ghoul, and appeared in its place was... a Skeleton Horse, and it spoke with eyes ablaze with blue goblin fire. Its voice was neither low, nor high, but simply just a charming, beautiful voice.

The Skeleton Horse spoke in that beautiful voice, so he thought there was a considerable disparity between them, but when he thought about it, he wasn't in much of a different situation.

"To think there'd be another undead hero like me...! It's really nice to meet you!"

"..."

Lee Shin Woo was speechless when he heard the Skeleton Horse continue, and kept his mouth shut. He had, at some point, heard about a Skeleton Horse in the chatting channel, a horse that just kept running within the confines of the underground empire; and the stories regarding the Skeleton Horse had coursed through his head.

Yeah, his seniors were right. There was no way that an undead wouldn't attack

humans and would just keep running.

...If they weren't a hero, that is.

Chapter 7.3

Three way (3)

A skeleton and a skeleton horse; both of them were heroes at that. They definitely had much to say to the other. 'What the hell did you ask God for', or 'Were you perhaps a horse to start', etc...

However, it wasn't the best situation for them to introduce themselves. Lee Shin Woo suppressed the urge to grab hold of and interrogate it, and he spoke simply to the Skeleton Horse, which (probably) looked at him as if it wanted something.

“Thanks for helping. Shall we talk about the rest after taking that bastard down?”
“A-Alright!”

The Skeleton Horse's reply seemed slightly anxious, but he didn't have time to be concerned about that. Right now, the only thing Lee Shin Woo was sure about was that the Skeleton Horse had equal strength to the Ghoul, such that it could ram into it and send it flying. There wasn't a more dependable ally than a level 4!

[Kugaaaaaah! Again, you're nothing but bones...!]

Meanwhile, the Ghoul, which had rolled onto the ground from the Skeleton Horse's kick, realized the identity of its attacker, and seemed to become extremely angry. However, the moment its temper flared, and it tried to upright its body, Lee Shin Woo used his Catapult; his index finger flew and burrowed deep into the Ghoul's forearm. Right as the Ghoul opened its eyes wide, the finger exploded!

“Go now, attack!”
[Kahak...!]

Lee Shin Woo aimed for the moment the Ghoul rolled onto the floor again, and activated his Combat Sprint, quickly advancing towards it. Through his Self-Destruct, about half of its forearm was severed, and he followed up by striking its other half with

his Bone of Thunder Lasting.

It was a Power Slash backed by Bursting Thunder! It looked akin to a blue streak of lightning.

[Critical Hit!]

[Kuaaaaaaahk!]

No matter how far apart their levels, the Ghoul wouldn't come out unscathed after receiving a Catapult, Self-Destruct, and the following Power Slash. As soon as its tough and sturdy forearm rolled onto the floor, it screamed awfully.

“Eeek, Die!”

The Skeleton Horse rushed over, and kicked it once again. It didn't seem like it had used a skill, but since it had rushed over frighteningly quickly, despite the short distance, its attack power was considerable. Just...

'Why is it so clumsy?'

Lee Shin Woo had consumed countless skeleton and monster bones, leveled up, and gained their combat abilities, so from his point of view, the Skeleton Horse moved crudely, even when considering the difference in species. Moreover, after its preemptive attack, it looked distressed as the Acid Ghoul's blood splattered, which was mixed with Acid Poison; he definitely looked like a newbie.

'Wait, high leveled heroes could be newbies. Moreover, since there's no way that it used to be a horse, it may be natural that it hasn't gotten used to its body yet.'

He decided he would calmly talk this over after the battle's conclusion. In any case, toppling the Acid Ghoul was his top priority. Lee Shin Woo yelled at the Skeleton Horse, which was going for another attack even while suffering from the Ghoul's Acid Poison.

“Stay back for now, unless you have a skill or equipment that repels Acid Poison!”

“But...”

“I'm not telling you to run away. When I ask you, attack him then!”

“...Got it!”

Fortunately, the Skeleton Horse meekly obeyed Lee Shin Woo and retreated. He wouldn't have an answer if someone unskilled decided to be stubborn, but it seemed like he had avoided the worst case scenario.

[You ridiculous bastards, I'll crush you into powder!]

Right then, the Ghoul stood up. It gripped its severed arm with its other hand and dangerously swung it. Whenever it swung it, a thicker Acid Poison spread out. It was mixed with the blazing flames on its entire body, so it gave off a smoky smell.

[You have been intensively exposed to the Acid Ghoul's strengthened Acid Poison. Though Low Rank Acid Resistance is lessening the damage, it seems like it is not very effective!]

“Ugh... Yeah, I'll cut off your other arm for you soon.”

[A mere feeble skeleton...!]

Even while saying that, the Ghoul seemed to regard Lee Shin Woo as a much more dangerous opponent than his exterior appearance might suggest, and moved warily. To the point that he felt as though its combat experience when it was alive was immense, especially because it swung its arm as a weapon, and stayed a reasonable distance away.

[Heh...]

“!?”

However, thinking like that was a miscalculation. It aimed for that split second where Lee Shin Woo couldn't move hastily, and shoved the arm in its hand into its gigantic mouth.

[Kuaaaaaah!]

“You crazy...”

Lee Shin Woo, who realized at that moment that the Ghoul's mana had increased explosively, regretted that he hadn't already severed its other arm. Then again, he obviously couldn't afford to, nor did he have the time to do so before.

“You dirty bastard!”

[I'm a Ghoul, you stupid skeleton!]

Just because it ate its arm didn't mean that another arm would grow in its place.

However, the moment it swallowed its own arm, the skin which had been blazing with the Flames of Revenge, immediately returned to its normal state, and not only that, his other remaining arm swelled fatly. It naturally felt as though the Ghoul's strength had increased a level.

“You asshole, you're not even a boss, yet you're starting the second phase...!”

[Die!]

After it finished consuming its arm, the Ghoul charged at Lee Shin Woo. It was astonishingly fast, so much so that it was incomparable to before!

Lee Shin Woo didn't act with reckless bravado, and immediately activated his Combat Sprint. However, when he thought he'd gotten far enough away, the Ghoul's arm strangely lengthened and smashed him!

“Urgh!”

[Kyahahak!]

This is where it seized the momentum. It pursued Lee Shin Woo, who was rolling on the floor, and attacked him again.

[Die! Break!]

“Tch, keuhut...!”

Lee Shin Woo trusted his intuition and rolled onto the floor, avoiding the Ghoul's arm, which it swung like a whip; though whenever its arm crashed into the ground, the wildly spurting Acid Poison was indirectly melting his body.

[Low Rank Acid Resistance has become Lv3.]

The fact that his Low Rank Acid Resistance, which had risen to low rank just a little while ago, was leveling up, proved just how extreme his environment was.

However, the situation wasn't great, so he couldn't be happy about the skill leveling up. Lee Shin Woo regenerated his body while out of breath, and grit his teeth. Maintaining his Flames of Revenge was continuously taxing his mana, and now, he didn't really have much mana to spare.

'Should I call the Skeleton Horse now? No, he'll just get even more hurt... Then.'

It was time to use the method he had been saving to turn the situation around. Lee Shin Woo mentally braced himself again and kicked off the floor, using his Combat Sprint. He leaped up into the air as the Acid Ghoul's arm came flying towards him! He activated Harden, applying it to both of his arms, and held tightly onto the arm.

[Heut!]

The Acid Ghoul seemed to think that Lee Shin Woo had given up his life, as it sported a wicked smile, and pulled him towards it.

Despite him activating his Harden skill, his arms started to gradually melt, but he didn't have any intention of using Regeneration. He calmly waited for the moment he got close. The moment the Ghoul was sure of its victory was the best time for a comeback! Good, in exchange for a life, he'll grab hold of victory...

"Ei... Eit!"

'This timing again!?'

However, when Lee Shin Woo had resolved himself, someone else interfered. To be exact, a javelin quickly cut through the air, and pierced the Acid Ghoul's arm.

[Kuaaaaaahk!]

The effect was amazing! The spear burrowed deep into the Ghoul's arm, and when the

Acid Ghoul contracted its arm, it was tormented by a horrific pain, due to the deep tear wound.

It was really impressive, especially when the sharp mana at the tip of the spear impacted the ghoul, and spread everywhere.

“Huhp!”

[Kuhwak!]

While Lee Shin Woo stood in awe, another javelin holding mana flew and burrowed into the Ghoul's arm. It was a speed and accuracy that gave him goosebumps! When he figured out who had thrown the javelins, he laughed forcefully.

'Ye Jin Jin?'

It was none other than Ye Jin Jin. He thought she had run off on her own since he hadn't seen her, but she hadn't.

“Hoo, hoo...”

She was still wearing rags instead of clothes, and she looked as though she would immediately collapse and start crying at any time, but she pursed her lips and endured; after that, she prepared to throw another javelin, and it actually didn't seem like she was going to run away.

He honestly looked again. 'Even when rotten, it's still a herring.' At least at this very moment, her gaze befitted that of a hero.

[Prey!]

“Where do you think you're going?”

Now that it's become like this, the situation's changed. There was the Skeleton Horse, while sloppy, which possessed a level 4's strength, as well as the coward that was only level 3, but was a hero with a talent in throwing... He had a chance of winning now without giving up one of his precious lives.

“Hubp!”

[Kuhak!?!]

[Beginner Power Slash has become Lv8. The activation speed of the skill has become faster.]

Before he was flung to the ground, Lee Shin Woo exerted all his strength to twist its arm, and then rolled onto the ground. He wondered whether he could utilize Power Slash with his body as well, so he had tried it, and it seemed like he had half succeeded.

[You insect, how dare you!]

“Heut, hey you!”

“Y-Yes!”

Lee Shin Woo avoided the infuriated Acid Ghoul's Acid Poison particles and retreated, calling out to the hero, Ye Jin Jin. He couldn't pretend like he couldn't talk at this point, and he didn't have a reason not to either. It seemed as though Ye Jin Jin didn't think she was in a position to discriminate about this or that, as she obediently responded.

“How many more times can you shoot that!?”

“Two more times!”

“If I give a location, shoot it right away!”

“Yes...!”

[I won't let you!]

“Ha!”

Perhaps the spears were quite painful, as it immediately aggroed onto Ye Jin Jin. It even ignored Lee Shin Woo and ran towards Ye Jin Jin, but Lee Shin Woo directly blocked its path. On his left raised hand, a black flame blazed.

“Why don't you try blocking this one?”

[Not a... chance!]

Lee Shin Woo's finger trembled, and the instant he made the motion for his Catapult, the Ghoul appeared to perfectly read its trajectory and swung its arm! However, it

didn't feel anything ever touch its hand.

[Kuha...?]

“It was a fake, you dumbass!”

The moment that the Ghoul felt quizzical, Lee Shin Woo was already drifting in the air, aiming his index finger at the Ghoul. He had taken the opportunity when its vision was obscured from swinging its arm and jumped.

[Kuahk!?!]

The Ghoul noticed him, but it was much too late to withdraw its arm. When it opened its mouth wide to shriek, Lee Shin Woo launched his index finger bone without delay!

[The Beginner Catapult skill has advanced to Low Rank. Agility has increased by 5. Continuous Catapults have become possible.]

[Kuaaaaaahk! I'll kill you!]

Lee Shin Woo exploded his index finger the moment it lodged into the Ghoul's head. Despite the Ghoul losing 20% of its head, its stance didn't falter and swung its arm at Lee Shin Woo.

It staggered a bit from the various injuries it had sustained, but the brutal force within its arm was still the same as ever, and soared through the air with an unpleasant piercing power.

'Damn it... '

If he could, he would've shot bullets continuously like the Ratman, but he lacked the mana to do so. He could use it twice more, and if he wanted the scale to be even bigger, he could only use it once more. Lee Shin Woo couldn't afford to waste that chance now, and as he fell down powerlessly, he grit his teeth and yelled out.

“Help me!”

“I was waiting!”

Its spirit was like Superman's. He didn't even know where he came from; the Skeleton Horse appeared with a speed that made it seem like it could even dodge lightning, and like it had done before, forcefully rammed into the Ghoul!

[Kugaahk!]

“Hoo.”

The Ghoul, which had aggroed onto Lee Shin Woo, foolishly suffered from the same type of attack as before, and rolled onto the floor. Lee Shin Woo used that opportunity to land safely.

'Still, we can't kill him like this.'

Lee Shin Woo put his sword into his inventory, took a deep breath, and scrutinized the Acid Ghoul. Despite the Ghoul experiencing the bone shot wreathed with Flames of Revenge, the javelin throw, and even the Skeleton Horse's weighty, full strength charge attack one after another, it still stood up in the end.

“Go ahead and rest now. I'll finish this and come back.”

“I came over to help... Sorry.”

“No, you did enough.”

It had probably been affected by the Acid Poison when it collided with the Ghoul, so its once dignified appearance had definitely lessened quite a bit compared to before. Still, it was worth it. It had not only saved Lee Shin Woo's life, but it had created a deadly opening for him.

“You, over there!”

“My name is Ye Jin Jin!”

He only hardened his left arm, and as he looked sharply at the Ghoul that stumbled as it stood up, called for Ye Jin Jin. She had already taken out another javelin and looked really nervous, but she was already ready to throw the next one.

“Ready?”

“Yes!”

“Good, then... let's go!”

Lee Shin Woo immediately used his Combat Sprint, kicked off the floor, and charged at the Ghoul. At that moment, the Ghoul seemed to be making a last-ditch effort and forcefully spewed its Acid Poison in all directions. Even while it was under the effects of the Flames of Revenge, it moved as if unhindered and Lee Shin Woo likewise ignored the Acid Poison, and charged.

His ribs and legs melted, but his hardened left arm was still intact. At the very least, he wouldn't fall before he reached it.

[Guwaaaaaaaaaaaaah!]

The Ghoul looked as though it had lost all reason and sensitively responded to Lee Shin Woo's charge. Its arm dreadfully wriggled and sucked in all the Acid Poison in the vicinity, and it shot that gathered Acid Poison directly at Lee Shin Woo! It looked as if he had shot a laser beam.

“Arm!”

“Hubp!”

Even to the very end, the Ghoul possessed an attack that he hadn't anticipated; were all level 4 and up elite monsters like this? But it didn't matter. Ye Jin Jin's preparations were all for a situation like this.

[Kuhak!]

As soon as he gave the command, Ye Jin Jin threw her javelin, piercing its arm, and the trajectory of the Acid Poison twisted significantly.

The Acid Poison spread through the entire area and the sight of the ground melting away was truly horrific, but the sprinting Lee Shin Woo remained fixed on the Ghoul. Lee Shin Woo approached within firing range and briefly yelled.

“Head!”

“Haht!”

Ye Jin Jin's spear throwing technique was almost like a work of art. The instant he had yelled out, her javelin flew sharply like an awl, and burrowed into the Ghoul's wide open mouth which was facing Lee Shin Woo! It was probably trying to spew out its Acid Poison through its mouth, but the timely spear throw from Ye Jin Jin stopped it.

[Guahk! Ahgaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!]

“I'll let you eat those bones you hate so much!”

Lee Shin Woo shoved his left arm into its fixed mouth with all his strength! His hardened arm cut through rotten flesh and muscle. The instant his arm burrowed deep within its head, the Ghoul opened its eyes wide and bit down. It had instinctually acted like that, as all it had left were malice and wickedness.

[Guaaaaaaaaah!]

“Self-Destruct!”

And that right there was the moment that Lee Shin Woo had been waiting for.

Chapter 7.4

Three way (4)

- Kwaaaaang!

This was the greatest impact he'd experienced since being dropped into the Empire. The sound of the explosion, the shock, and above all, the pressure that struck his entire body; he wasn't able to resist and Lee Shin Woo rolled raggedly onto the ground.

It just hurt, and hurt some more. The moment his arm had been severed, as well as the moment a huge explosion occurred, he felt pain that transcended the limits of his perception. Despite only aiming for the Ghoul and activating the skill, it felt as though there were several dozens of holes perforating his body.

[The Low Rank Self-Destruct skill has become Lv2. Magic has increased by 1. The force of the explosion increases.]

However, he was sure of its effectiveness. The fact that everything above the Ghoul's neck had cleanly disappeared from the Ghoul's body was proof of that.

[Gu... aaah...]

No, to be exact, it wasn't a corpse yet. Despite it losing its head, it was still alive. It was filled with wounds, and flailed its arm about; seeing it fumbling around the floor to find Lee Shin Woo, the culprit that made it this way, made him feel goosebumps. From its throat, of which around half was remaining, a truly grotesque voice trickled out.

“Hoo...”

“Heup!”

However, Lee Shin Woo resolved himself, and when he was about to grip his weapon, the Skeleton Horse appeared like lightning and struck the Ghoul, dropping its front legs onto it. It was so powerful that he thought that this was what Thor's lightning hammer might be like!

[Gu...]

The Ghoul wasn't even able to spread its Acid Poison and was stuck in that area, wriggling around a couple of times. In the end, it stopped moving, and the battle was over.

[You have commanded different individual species and successfully hunted a monster a higher level than you. All stats have increased by 2. Beginner Command has become Lv7.]

[This is a term that only those who have been saved, not the one who saves, can speak. You have acquired the Savior's karma token with great success. Strength and magic have increased by 4. You have acquired the active skill, Sacrifice Lv1.]

[You have superbly succeeded in executing your revenge. The Beginner Avenger skill has become Lv4. When you meet the one who defeated you again, all abilities increase by 30%.]

Was it because the Ghoul persistently hung on until the very end? Despite the message that the party had successfully hunted the Ghoul, Lee Shin Woo couldn't believe it and just blankly stood there.

However, he did so only briefly. When the Ghoul turned into mana and disappeared, leaving behind the dropped items in its place, reality hit him. None of them had died, and had amazingly defeated the monster.

“...We won.”

“It's all because of you.”

“It was all because you appeared at the right moment that we were able to win so easily.”

The Undead Hero and the Skeleton Horse Hero exchanged compliments. Truthfully, they both didn't even have the energy to stand, but while fighting against the Ghoul, the ground had become completely covered by the Acid Poison, so they barely endured, and stood.

“T-Thank you very much!”

“Oh...”

And the last remaining hero cut in. It was none other than Ye Jin Jin, who was dressed in tattered clothing. Of course, Lee Shin Woo had indeed saved her, but he hadn't expected her to bow her head in front of an undead and even thank him... It was honestly something he hadn't expected. It was only really possible if one was extremely pure.

“This was the first time I've realized that there are also good Undead in the Empire! I-I was really about to die... Thank you very much for helping me!”

“Hm?”

However, at that time, the Skeleton Horse tilted its head, and then, turned its head towards Lee Shin Woo, and asked.

“You weren't the one who was in danger? The quest or whatever definitely said that there was a hero who was in trouble, and when I got here, you were fighting with that Ghoul...”

“No, I also received the quest and came to save her.”

“Huh? You came to save... me? Wait, just a second. A hero...?”

The misunderstandings that the party had were all meshed together in the same place. Lee Shin Woo had roughly grasped the situation, but the Skeleton Horse, and Ye Jin Jin looked as though they couldn't understand what was going on at all.

Would they be able to understand each other just by talking? Lee Shin Woo sighed and spoke briefly.

“Let's talk in a calm and orderly way. Ah, before that, wear some clothes.”

“Clothes...? Ggyaahk!”

[Quest complete!]

[You have acquired 50,000 Perium.]

[Strength has increased by 5, Agility by 10, Health by 3, and Magic by 7.]

[You have acquired 3 permits to God's secret shop, the Intermediate Ice Resistance skill book, and 5 Lv3 equipment reinforcement permits.]

Now this was definitely a quest reward. He had acquired 50,000 Perium, and secondly, he had gained a total of 25 stats! He had inwardly been looking forward to the skill book, and was disappointed that it was an Ice Resistance skill book, but even when he considered that, it was truly a shocking reward.

“To think that both of you were heroes... God just granted your wish, yet you became an undead.”

Lee Shin Woo checked his rewards and when he sported a satisfied expression, Ye Jin Jin (she had safely changed) looked on disbelievingly, alternating between the two. The Skeleton Horse noticed her disbelief and spoke somewhat bitterly.

“You probably won't understand what I say, but I don't know what she did to me. I don't know what happened to my brain...”

Rather than something like supernatural powers or a miracle, he spoke as if he had experienced a taste of something far worse, and Lee Shin Woo nodded his head in agreement.

Of course, he realized that he was too greedy, but still, he hadn't thought that she would just abruptly turn him into a skeleton. If it weren't for the sense of composure that was forced upon him by becoming a skeleton, it would've also been difficult for him to bear.

“It might be difficult to believe me, but... just trust me when I say that I, as well as this guy, are your allies.”

“I trust you. If you think about it, it would've been difficult for you to save me at that precise timing had you not been heroes. It's just...”

Ye Jin Jin wavered, and then, quietly added.

“It seems like it was really difficult for you.”

“...”

There was no doubt about that, but the meaning differs depending on how it's said. Lee Shin Woo was momentarily speechless when he heard Ye Jin Jin's simple, honest, and careful words.

He felt slightly, extremely slightly guilty that he had acted in order to receive the reward, rather than save this girl. Rather, he felt happy about those emotions.

“You're a good kid.”

“Not really... But what good does it do me? Strength is everything in the Empire.”

“You're the same level as me.”

“I just feel more shameless hearing that.”

They had already finished their introductions. Lee Shin Woo's lie that he was level 4 had been exposed, but since it'd been revealed that he was an undead already, it didn't really matter anymore. Honestly, it didn't really matter if they figured it out, but if they weren't in a special situation like Ye Jin Jin, his seniors wouldn't easily accept that he was an undead hero, so he had been pushing it back.

“I'm level 4, but I'm weaker than you. So it's alright.”

“Jin, that's...”

“You said you were level 4 ever since you became a Skeleton Horse, right?”

“Yeah.”

'Jin' was none other than the Skeleton Horse. He was obviously a human before, not a horse.

In his original world, Jin was a sprinter, and had answered like this when God asked him what he desired.

'I just want to keep running, faster than anyone else.'

No matter how he thought about it, God was definitely crazy. To grant that request, she turned him into an undead, and a horse at that!

Lee Shin Woo could accept that she turned him into a skeleton and could even understand why, but turning Jin into a Skeleton Horse made him want to ask God, 'Do you really want the heroes to fight off the Empire?'

“So you're saying you just continuously ran, huh. Without even clearing a single quest?”

“Yeah. I don't know how long it's been since I've been dropped onto this world, but I

don't get exhausted, hungry, thirsty, or even tired, and I didn't know what to do, nor did I want to fight monsters... I just ran. I didn't even know about the chatting channel, and until I received this quest, I didn't even know that there were other heroes.”

If one were to make a wish and the next morning become a Skeleton Horse, they would obviously be stunned. He just felt that it was frightening that Jin relieved all that stress just by running.

He didn't know about anything else, but Jin had probably grown considerably in sprint related skills. He could completely understand his acceleration speed in such a short distance, as well as the force of the tackle that followed.

On the other hand, since he hadn't fought a monster face-to-face even once before, the fact that he responded so sloppily in a combat scenario was natural... Lee Shin Woo, who had some sort of pride in being the one amongst the heroes that had the most unusual history, meekly passed over the crown to Jin.

“That's why I think you're really amazing. You said you've only been here for 3 weeks? I don't know how you became such an experienced warrior in just 3 weeks...”

“He's right. That sword strike, or that shot were really...”

It was undeniable that Lee Shin Woo had played a crucial role in hunting the Acid Ghoul, but... he turned away as the two looked at him as if his face were golden. Just in time, he saw the loot that was rolling on the ground.

Ye Jin Jin, who checked which way his head had turned, smiled ambiguously and took a step back.

“Ah, the loot... I'll sit this out. Since you guys saved me...”

“Please take some, based on how much you contributed with your javelins. You have to be the one that handles the karma that you've sown.”

“...It's really only been 3 weeks since you've first been here, right?”

She couldn't believe what she was hearing; it seemed as though Lee Shin Woo knew much more about the truth of this world than she did, and had to ask back. Of course, it turned out exactly as Lee Shin Woo had said. There was only one monster and there were individual drops for each of them, but how their splits would be shared was already determined.

[23,510 Perium]

[Acid Ghoul's Thumbnail]

[Lv4 Acid Skull Helm]

70% of the total Perium was deducted from his share, but he got two items.

Though he was able to acquire new information that this world did indeed recognize nails as bones due to the Acid Ghoul's Thumbnail (a skeleton doesn't have nails, but they honestly don't need them), but there was something more important than that.

[Acid Skull Helm]

[Lv4]

[Durability: 1,500/1,500]

[Defense: 250 - 310]

[Options: Magic + 10, Effectiveness of Acid Type Skills + 10%]

"A helmet made of its skull; this is really valuable..."

"It's a level 4 helmet... I'm really jealous."

"Wow, it's really tough."

Lee Shin Woo as well as the other two began touching the pale green and sleek helmet, and couldn't stop from being moved.

It was beautiful, to the point that he couldn't believe that it was made of bone. It started from the neck, and completely protected the head; there wasn't a separate visor attached, but there was a small crack that he could see through.

'An undead's head is central to their life. There isn't much to think about; it's more important than body armor.'

He equipped the helmet at that very spot. Compared to the Dire Wolf Bone Armor, which increased his health by 20, it seemed like the additional 10 magic didn't compare, but it had other options besides that.

The effectiveness of acid types skills would increase by 10%. It wasn't just a valuable option because it would increase the effectiveness of his Acid Resistance...

'It'll probably help with the skill that I gain from the Acid Ghoul's Thumbnail, too... Yeah. I have to absorb that quickly as well.'

He turned around and spoke to the black haired girl, and Jin, who were conversing quietly.

“The battle's over and you're safe now, so I'll get going.”

“Ah.”

It seemed as though Ye Jin Jin hadn't expected him to say that, as her complexion became ashen, but soon, she nodded her head stiffly. He also had things to think about after this incident. At the very least, he hoped that he wouldn't be negligent during battle or have to roll onto the floor again in the future.

“Thank you very much for saving my life. I'll probably greet you again in the chatting channel, but let's definitely meet again in the future.”

“Alright, as long as you don't die, we should be able to see each other again.”

“Let's meet again.”

The Skeleton Horse, Jin, also said his farewells to Ye Jin Jin. Honestly, Lee Shin Woo had somewhat been expecting that.

He smiled slightly and turned around. Jin also turned his body in a similar direction. Ye Jin Jin then shouted at them as loud as she could.

“I'll help you next time!”

“Say that after you get stronger.”

Lee Shin Woo walked quietly until he couldn't see Ye Jin Jin anymore. He was trying to get back to the underground tunnel he had dug up to return to the dungeon.

“So.”

However, before he found the underground tunnel, Lee Shin Woo suddenly paused, and opened his (nonexistent) mouth.

“Shall we start talking?”

“Sounds good.”

Jin, who had been quietly following behind, replied in a beautiful voice that didn't at all match with his exterior appearance.

“I was waiting.”

Chapter 8.1

Elite Dungeon (1)

“I felt it this time. That I can't just go on like this...”

That was the first thing Jin said.

“Running was everything to me in my past life, but continuing to just run in this world is... nothing more than escapism. That's what I felt when I saw you and Jin Jin.”

“Well, probably.”

Lee Shin Woo agreed, uninterested. Of course, because of that, his running related skills had increased, but that's just a by-product of him escaping reality. In order to survive in this world, and in order to advance forward... one needed to fight.

“Tell me. How did you... even after becoming an undead, so quickly adapt to this world and proceed forward? And if you can, please help me so I can become like that too.”

“For free?”

“No!”

Jin strongly shook his head, but it seemed like he was really hesitating with his follow up. Lee Shin Woo had already roughly anticipated Jin's request, so he could understand his hesitation.

How long did he wait like that? Jin sighed deeply, and spoke.

“...I'll let you ride on my back. It should be helpful for travel as well as battle, right?”

“In other words, it's an offer to party up.”

“Yeah.”

Jin was originally a human. For him to have offered to let someone else ride on his back must've caused him to give up a lot of things.

It was no different from him throwing away precious evidence that he was human. He

was willing to go that far in order to advance further.

“It seems like it's way worse for me, but... yeah, your speed is definitely helpful. Honestly, I did need someone to talk to. Alright, let's work together.”

“Then... gaah!?”

Jin sounded relieved, yet he saw Lee Shin Woo straighten his index finger. Jin, who had seen this very index finger burrow into the Acid Ghoul and explode, couldn't help but flinch.

“Still, accepting you without any hesitation right now isn't best for either of us.”

“Then?”

“Here.”

Lee Shin Woo passed Jin a tattered sack. Jin obediently accepted it and tilted his head while holding it in his teeth. Lee Shin Woo smiled faintly and spoke.

“If you hunt skeletons or undead like zombies, they usually drop Perium and bones. Come back after filling that sack to the brim with bones. That's my condition.”

“...?”

The blue goblin fire, that acted as substitutes for his eyes, shook strongly, as if expressing his doubt. To think that it was possible to express his emotions through goblin fire; Lee Shin Woo was extremely jealous of that. When he becomes level 4, will goblin fire fill his empty eye sockets?

“It's all for your sake, so fill the sack. The higher the monster's level, the better.”

“But... ugh, I got it. So it's a test.”

It seemed like Jin was definitely misunderstanding. He thought Lee Shin Woo was testing him, testing whether he had the right to accompany him, or checking if he had the resolve to hunt monsters.

Of course, when Bone Reinforcement became level 4, he became able to apply it to others as well, so he just planned to use all the bones that Jin gathered to strengthen him all at once, imparting the undead's knowledge and experiences onto him.

“You'll definitely be able to become as experienced as me in no time.”

“That sounds impossible, but... I got it. I'll show you that I wasn't ignoring those undead until now because I was scared.”

Perhaps it was because he was an athlete in his past life, as Jin's spirit was considerable. The experience of taking down the Acid Ghoul may have instilled him with confidence.

“Come back here once you've filled it to the brim. Ah, if you can, do some quests. Since doing quests is the only way to unlock things like the inventory or the chatting channel.”

“I got it. Ah, and also take this.”

Jin stuck out his neck. There was a small pouch hanging on his neck, and after taking it off, Lee Shin Woo found 50,000 Perium inside, as well as 5 Lv3 Equipment Reinforcement permits.

“It's just what I got as the quest reward, but it's useless to me. It's cumbersome, so you take it.”

It seems like the skill book had already disappeared, as he learned the skill, but it seems like he couldn't do anything with these. Since Lee Shin Woo wasn't the type to refuse something offered, he immediately took them.

“It should be fine to take this in advance, considering what I'm going to do for you in the future.”

“Hmm...?”

“No, it's nothing.”

It's likely that Jin still wasn't familiar with 'karma'. Lee Shin Woo smiled bitterly and shook his head. Since he didn't have a clear understanding of karma, he wouldn't understand, even if Lee Shin Woo tried explaining it to him with words.

“Then get going. If you can, try to get level 2 bones or higher. That'll be good for you, too.”

“No matter how bad I am at fighting, I should be able to take them down if they're level 2... I got it. As soon as I fill the sack, I'll come back.”

“Ok.”

Jin nodded his head for some time, turned around, and then ran straight forward. His speed was greater than any monster's that he had encountered since being dropped into the Empire. With that speed, even if he were to meet the Acid Ghoul again, he wouldn't die.

In an instant, he was unable to see Jin's appearance, and soon after, Lee Shin Woo activated Bone Reinforcement on the Acid Ghoul's Thumbnail.

[By sacrificing the Acid Ghoul's Thumbnail, both hands are reinforced. Strength and Health have increased by 3, and Magic by 5. Absorbing a portion of the Acid Ghoul's memories and experiences.]

[This... this is... This seems like the wrong method, Doctor. This isn't it. This test is a failure! We can't stop it...! - Edward L. Baker]

“...This is...”

The amount of stats was also immense, but when he felt the flowing memories, he felt cold, as if he had just swallowed a block of ice whole.

This was a record of their struggle. A record of their struggle to not become undead...!

'So that's how it was. They realized that they wouldn't be able to prevent the curse that ruined the Empire, and they researched for a method to not become the undead. However, they failed... and instead, they put their hands on poison, and as a result, became a zombie that spurts Acid Poison.'

There was something he thought of when talking about poison and zombies. Hadn't he obtained a deteriorated Poison Zombie's bone in the sewers? Moreover, the slimes bore poison as well... As soon as he wondered whether there was something remaining in the sewers that connected the two, he couldn't sit still at all.

“However, before that.”

Lee Shin Woo had suddenly acquired 10 Lv3 Equipment Reinforcement permits, and

used one of them to reinforce the Dire Wolf's Bone Armor. The armor, which looked as though it would break any minute now, instantly returned to its original form, and was reinforced.

[Dire Wolf Bone Armor +1]

[Lv3]

[Durability: 850/850]

[Defense: 110 - 125]

[Options: Increases Health by 21]

“Next up is...”

Lee Shin Woo prepared for the future, where his equipment would get damaged, and separately stored 1 reinforcement permit. He used the remaining 8 all at once to reinforce his Bone of Thunder Lasting.

While his armor only really possessed the ability to protect his body, his sword had a hidden power related to Bursting Thunder.

[Bone of Thunder Lasting +8]

[Lv3]

[Durability: 1,070/1,070]

[Attack Power: 260 - 280]

[Options: Strength + 19, Magic + 19, Effectiveness of Bursting Thunder skill + 18%]

“Ooh, Ooooooh.”

As expected of a weapon that God herself bestowed (though it had changed); it certainly was different from other weapons. The more he repeated the reinforcement, the more absurdly the attack power grew. It was this strong at +8, and he felt that it had reached values that would enable it to outclass even level 4 weapons!

And that was the same for the stats as well. There was definitely a noticeable difference in strength depending on whether one equipped the weapon or not! It was to the point that around now, he thought that perhaps the true reward for saving a hero were the reinforcement permits.

'However, since I've received something so amazing, if I don't help that guy considerably, I won't be able to deal with the shortage of karma. Pleine doesn't speak idly. It'll leave a bad taste in my mouth if I'm just on the receiving end.'

But, well, that problem should be solved at around the time he meets Jin again. Since he was sure that Bone Reinforcement's karma wasn't trifling.

'Anyway, if he doesn't have Bone Reinforcement, what skill did he get from God?'

Lee Shin Woo briefly pondered on that subject. It was something he'd realized after being brought into the Empire. Everything had karma, and karma is never something to be taken lightly.

In exchange for becoming an undead, he gained 100 lives, as well as a reinforcement ability using bones, so Jin should have gotten something around the same level. Of course, Jin had started at level 4, contrary to Lee Shin Woo, so he probably had to take that into consideration as well.

'I should ask when he gets back.'

Lee Shin Woo shrugged his shoulders, brushed away thoughts regarding Jin, checked the results of his stats, and swung his sword in the air a few times. He trembled, as he felt as though his sword cleaved the air in half, and nodded his head.

Even though he knew it was ominous, he couldn't help but mutter like this for the second time.

"I'm not afraid of anything anymore..."

He immediately went into the underground tunnel he had dug and returned to the dungeon. He was able to return more quickly and easily than he had anticipated.

[You possess the dungeon permit. All stats within the dungeon increase by 15.]

'Now then, let's completely clear the dungeon before Jin comes back.'

However, as if it were ridiculing his thoughts, the interior of the sewers was extremely

silent and dark. Even if there were level 2 slimes crawling around, he trusted that there was nothing unusual going on; but in a different sense, he felt betrayed.

'Well this is disappointing.'

He wanted to familiarize himself with his strengthened body and go wild, but he didn't feel comfortable with that idea at all. However, the instant he thought so and sighed, he saw something glowing in the darkness.

[Guooh...]

"Hmm?"

It was a sound he'd heard somewhere before. What was it? Before he even organized his thoughts, the dominating sense of danger caused Lee Shin Woo to instinctually dive out of the way. A huge shot hit the ground just a little later! It emitted a horrific sound.

[Guoooooh!]

"You bastard..."

After Lee Shin Woo figured out the identity of that 'shot', he simply smiled bitterly and felt dejected. How could he not? This was a Great Slime, an enemy that he had risked his life fighting before finding this passageway.

[Lv3 Great Slime]

"I thought it was the boss before, but now they're just appearing in the passageway wherever."

Lee Shin Woo wasn't sure if it knew that he had fought one of its kin before, but after it impacted the ground, it rolled into a ball again, and got ready for another leap. However, compared to when he had first faced the Great Slime in the clearing, Lee Shin Woo didn't really feel that uneasy.

'I can see its movements better.'

[Guoooooooooh!]

It bounced its body quickly and forcefully charged. What's worse, the slime spun midair and was rotating. He hadn't noticed that when he had fought the slime from before.

'However, now I can...!'

Lee Shin Woo moved nimbly, the moment that the slime aimed for him and flew towards him.

Combat Sprint. It didn't simply enable one to move fast, it would increase the body's reaction speed, albeit for a short time. It felt as if he was the only one moving quickly within the slowed time... one's senses would disappear in the time it would take to say 'ah', but within that time, Lee Shin Woo moved in the best way possible.

“Heup!”

He raised his sword, which he had Hardened, pointed it at the slime, and with the strength of Power Slash behind it, precisely slashed the slime. He couldn't even think of fighting it straight up before, but this time, he was doing just that.

“Ugh...!”

Of course, the impact of their collision was tremendous, but he could endure it. His strength stat, which rose to 150 after the dungeon bonus, as well as his equipment bonus, enabled him to stand his ground.

[Gguoooooooooh!]

Ultimately, the slime hadn't inflicted effective damage onto him, and conversely bounced up, colliding with the ceiling. Even though it hadn't been cleaved by his sword strike, the moment the damaged area impacted with the ceiling, a considerable amount of mucus splattered down.

Then, an acid mist spread out, but since he had fought the Acid Ghoul, he didn't even really feel this level of Acid Poison.

“Hoo... That was good. Let's keep going like this.”

[Guoh... Guoooooh!]

Just now, he felt it. Rather than fighting weaklings to train, it was naturally better to fight monsters equally as strong as him, or even stronger, in order to get stronger much more quickly.

Lee Shin Woo saw the Great Slime repair its wound, as well as its body becoming smaller, and his eyes gleamed, while once more raising his sword. It wouldn't be unreasonable to say that around the time that he could comfortably fight a Great Slime face to face without using the Flames of Revenge, he would be qualified to reach level 4, would it?

“...I'm going!”

[Guuuoooooooooh!]

The giant slime and the skeleton clashed again. A fierce roar resounded through the dungeon... breathing life into the once silent dungeon.

Chapter 8.2

Elite Dungeon (2)

[Gureureureureuk...]

[You have hunted a Lv3 Great Slime.]

[You have acquired 9,350 Perium.]

[You have acquired a Lv2 Old Thorn Bone Spear (+3).]

[You have acquired a Great Slime Bone Core.]

“Hoo, that was easier than I thought it would be.”

After roughly 10 minutes of intense battle, Lee Shin Woo had emerged victorious in a face-to-face confrontation. Of course, he was injured in the process, but it was to an extent that he could easily heal with only one use of his Regeneration. His equipment was fine as well.

In the end, he had used flames in order to squeeze out a core, but by that time it was already dying, so he could safely say that he had killed it with only his sword.

“Now, shall we use Bone Rein... Hmm?”

[Guuuuuuuuuu!]

[Guooooooh!]

There was a problem that came around the time he finished up the terrific battle and collected the reward. Due to the battle, he had expanded the passageway, and two Great Slimes rushed in all at once!

[Lv3 Great Slime]

[Lv3 Great Slime]

“What the hell...!?”

It was indeed a Lv2 elite dungeon, and he wondered what it would be like if three Lv3 elite monsters had appeared in the same area, but now wasn't the time to be thinking about that. The Great Slimes were strong enough to break his bone joints the moment he was careless.

'2 versus 1... I don't really need to work myself too hard right now.'

Lee Shin Woo quickly made a decision. As soon as they saw him, they went into a frenzy and bounced their bodies around; he avoided their charges, and ignited his Flames of Revenge. While doing so, he suddenly thought 'perhaps it might work', then attempted to create a flame on both hands, and ended up succeeding!

Of course, it wasn't very difficult for him to accurately hit either slimes with the flames. Even if they weren't Great Slimes and were Emperor Slimes, they wouldn't be able to avoid the Flames of Revenge's homing ability!

[Guuuuuuuuuuu!]

[Guoooooooooh!]

The Flames of Revenge were significantly larger than before. Was it due to that? Normally, there would be a delay in between them getting hit by the flame and recognizing the danger, and exploding after, but they didn't even do that this time and immediately tried to explode!

“Heup!”

He made a split second decision and immediately activated his Combat Sprint, leaping high into the sky. Before he collided with the ceiling, he forcefully lodged his sword diagonally; perhaps it was because his body was made of bones or that he was so light, but the sword made no sign of slipping out, allowing him to hang safely. Immediately after, a huge explosion occurred.

- Kwaaaaang!

“Let's see.”

Lee Shin Woo hung onto the ceiling and after toughening his feet through Harden, he kicked away all the pieces flying towards him. His feet spun around like a windmill while kicking away the pieces.

It was something he himself had done, but it felt like he was watching some kind of movie.

'I just thought it was a lot better than getting hit, so I tried it, but it actually does work...'

His visual acuity had definitely grown as his agility went up. Even when he was level 2, he couldn't believe it, but now, he could read the trajectory as well as the speed of the pieces, match them, and respond accordingly!

Of course, he couldn't kick them all away, so he was hit by a few of them, but that was only about 5% of fragments. And that was no longer at a level that could really hurt him.

“Then shall we start in earnest... Hmm?”

However, when he was confident that he had skillfully handled the explosion, and was about to proceed with his next move, Lee Shin Woo realized that a strange phenomenon was occurring from below.

It was the Great Slimes' behavior. They were going to explode again!

'Huh? Now that I think about it, the flames on their bodies aren't going out...'

Of course, the Flames of Revenge were tenacious, but all they had to do was tear off the piece that was aflame. Then, why were they still burning?

The answer? It was due to their Self-Destruct skills which didn't discriminate between friend or foe. The fragments that were burning from the Flames of Revenge were spread everywhere, and the other slime that was in close proximity was struck without warning, and began to burn once more!

As a result, their bodies shrunk in size and they took damage; what's worse, the flames were shifted and they began to burn again!

'...They're really dumb, aren't they?'

He thought, hanging there vacantly, and while he was thinking, the slimes raised their magic and self-destructed again.

However, Lee Shin Woo was still hanging from the ceiling, and was even more easily kicking away the pieces than last time. His Combat Sprint sharpened his senses, so it wasn't difficult at all.

[The Low Rank Combat Sprint skill has become Lv6. Agility has increased by 3. You can activate the skill faster, and you can maintain the skill for a longer period of time.]

As Lee Shin Woo kicked away the incoming Great Slimes' fragments, he felt a thrilling pleasure. Did he always like moving his body around this much? It may be the influence of someone else; someone's bone he had absorbed through Bone Reinforcement.

Whether it was his original personality or not, he was sure that at some point he began to enjoy personally moving his body and fighting, as well as learning skills through experience. And that personality was something that was extremely beneficial in surviving in the Underground Empire.

[Gu, Guuoooooh...!]

[Guuuuuu...!]

After completing their second Self-Destruct, rather than completely extinguishing the flames, the flames actually expanded. At around that point, the Great Slimes realized that the situation wasn't as simple as it would seem.

Lee Shin Woo thought it'd be funny if they repeatedly used their Self-Destruct and died, but it didn't actually go that way. The slimes, which had focused only on Lee Shin Woo, turned to each other for the first time. They realized that they were the targets of the flames.

[Guu...]

[Guuuuuu...!]

And they soon did something astonishing. One of the Great Slime's mucousy body opened just like a mouth and ate the other one!

Even as the flames melted their bodies, they softly connected their magic cores together and fused into one whilst emitting sparks; a truly magnificent sight.

[A Lv3 Great Slime has fused with a similar organism.]

[Lv3 Great Slime (+3)]

“!?”

There was a reinforcing mark on a monster!?! Lee Shin Woo was astonished and couldn't believe the sight. The Great Slimes, which had become one, had become bigger (they would have compressed their mana centrally in their bodies in the process of self-destructing, so their abilities would've doubled) and pushed the flames onto the outer portion of its body, self-destructing once more.

As a result, it returned to its pristine form once again.

[Guuuuuuuu!]

Of course, while it was fusing, Lee Shin Woo had dislodged his sword from the ceiling and dropped down; he activated his Stealth and was already hiding within the darkness, but his sight didn't leave the fused and strengthened Great Slime.

'Perhaps the reason that there are Great Slimes in this dungeon is because they're the result of the originally low leveled slimes repeatedly fusing together over a long period of time.'

If that's the case, then he could understand why this dungeon, which was originally supposed to be level 1, had become an level 2 elite dungeon. Lee Shin Woo had unintentionally come across one of the truths about the dungeon and felt extremely strange.

[Guuu... Guuu?]

Meanwhile, the Great Slime (+3) lost Lee Shin Woo and thoroughly searched the passageway while perplexed. Lee Shin Woo matched its movements and repeatedly moved back into hiding, so it couldn't easily find him.

The slime's senses were so dull that it wouldn't notice him unless he made a huge noise or there was a huge rush of mana.

[Guuuuuu...!]

It soon gave up on finding Lee Shin Woo and turned around. However, it didn't appear as though it was returning back to its everyday life.

It realized that there was an enemy in the silent sewers and had become more aggressive after fusing. In other words, it was focused on getting stronger in preparation for the next time they met.

'This has become interesting... '

Lee Shin Woo slowly crawled through the dark passageway and felt conflicted as he watched the back of the slime.

He already knew that killing it now would be the safest option. However, if it somehow 'fused' with all the slimes inhabiting this dungeon... or even just the Great Slimes... he wanted to see the result.

'It might even become a level 4 elite monster like the Acid Ghoul.'

Of course, it may not become as strong as the Acid Ghoul, but in any case, if he let it be, a formidable slime would become even more formidable. The risk of dying would increase by that much, yet... Lee Shin Woo couldn't help but want to see a monster like that be born.

'It'd obviously be dangerous, but the reward should reflect that danger and be considerable as well.'

Lee Shin Woo already knew the rewards a level 4 elite monster would drop. The rewards that were a level higher than that of a level 3 monster!

It wasn't just the loot. In the process of fighting an enemy of a higher level, all his actions would become a strong karma and would come back to repay him. That's what happened when he had fought the Acid Ghoul together with the other heroes, too!

One would get solo rewards if they fight alone, and if fought with others, they'll be rewarded together! In this world, levels were an absolute standard, so by exceeding that very standard, he would obtain a 'karma' that went beyond his imagination.

And that would advance his growth beyond the norm. So much so that he wouldn't

lose to his seniors, or the undead that filled the Empire!

If the other heroes heard him, they would ask if he were carrying around a few spare lives and would be amazed; but honestly, he couldn't help it, he did have extra lives. Several dozen of them at that!

[You have acquired a target for the Beginner Avenger skill. When you meet again, all abilities increase by 30%.]

Around the time the Great Slime had went beyond the clearing and disappeared, a message quietly appeared in front of him. Everything was set; he would be able to defeat the evolved slime.

He felt really satisfied that he had gotten this skill from his own actions and the resulting karma, rather than anyone else's bones.

'And about the Trickster... '

By accidentally receiving the Savior karma, he now only needed one more token in the future. At the end of that, what karma would he acquire... he was sure that he wasn't very far off.

“For now... Bone Reinforcement.”

[The entire body is reinforced. You have acquired 3 magic. Proficiency in Low Rank Self-Destruct has increased by 10%. Absorbing a portion of the target's memories and experiences.]

[Guoooooooooooooh! - Great Slime]

'Tch, since I've risen to level 3, the amount of stats it gives me has decreased... '

Lee Shin Woo, who had finished with the Bone Reinforcement, concluded that it was a good decision to let the Great Slime go, and after nodding his head, started to proceed through the dark sewer passageway. Of course, while maintaining his Low Rank Stealth.

Chapter 8.3

Elite Dungeon (3)

Did the Great Slime (+3) already wipe out all of the slimes as it passed by? It was so silent that it felt as though his noisy fight at the beginning with the Great Slimes was a lie.

'Moreover, this place conversely doesn't have any filth. Ah, was it all melted by the acid?'

When a slime becomes a Great Slime, the acid that its spews out becomes stronger. It would melt solids, and evaporate liquids; the slimes that spew out this horrific acid were crawling around, so it was only natural that the sewers become clean. But around this time, he wondered why the sewer passageway was still left intact.

'I know it's tough, but the fact that the preparations were this thorough... perhaps the Empire treated it as though it was natural for slimes to appear in the sewers.'

When the Empire flourished, he wondered what it looked like, and suddenly couldn't get it out of his mind. He would probably never know and... he smiled bitterly (that's roughly what he imagined his expression was) and continued to explore.

"...Hmm?"

However, while he was exploring, he discovered a crack carved into a portion of the left passageway. When he thoroughly inspected it, he found that the crack was in the shape of a square, and it was a size that could comfortably fit the palm of his hand. And at the center, he saw the traces of hidden mana. They seemed to be an extremely old.

'Is this perhaps... '

It looked like a fingerprint scanner that showed up in movies... Lee Shin Woo pondered

briefly, but soon placed his hand atop the square. Then, the square pattern surprisingly emitted heat and slightly came out. Beyond any doubt, it was a lock!

“Hoo...!”

Lee Shin Woo was excited, thinking that he'd found a secret hidden within the dungeon, and immediately emitted mana, but the reaction wasn't great. The door lock turned red, and emitted an ominous light, though that was all. Nothing else really changed.

Of course, he had roughly expected that. It was a lock, so there was no way it'd open by just emitting a bit of mana.

However, be that as it may, he thought that this structure didn't just respond to a certain individual's mana alone. That's because he could faintly, very faintly, feel the traces of mana from a variety of humans that had stood before this very lock.

'Then... is it a pattern as expected?'

Unlocking it had now become difficult. It'd probably been dozens of years since the last time this lock was activated, and was so terribly worn out to the point that it'd be difficult to ascertain the origin of the traces of the time worn mana.

The saving grace was that there were countless traces of people's mana, and their strands of mana all overlapped; if he were able to analyze the flow of mana, he felt as though he'd obtain a meaningful result.

'It'll probably be a lot of work, but... shall we?'

There should still be some time left before the Great Slime cleans up this dungeon. Lee Shin Woo concentrated on the door lock and began to thoroughly analyze the traces of the faintly remaining mana.

'Figuring out a starting point is important. Yeah, here... No, is it here?'

He saw the conditions of opening the lock as follows: draw the mana to the center of the palm, and use that mana to create one pattern. Of course, it wasn't just that it had to be the same pattern, but it had to flow from the same starting place and end at the

same ending place.

He genuinely activated his senses and by analyzing the door lock's release conditions, he found and excluded the false traces that they had purposefully put in. He had fun, as it felt as though he was playing some sort of puzzle game.

[The Low Rank Magic Accumulation skill has become Lv2. Magic has increased by 2.]

“Ah, it goes up.”

It was the same process as when entering a dungeon, so perhaps by just carrying out these tasks, his proficiency in magic related skills would increase.

Lee Shin Woo, who was motivated to improve his skills and stats, didn't even know how amazing what he was doing was, and continuously analyzed the lock. And then, he finally succeeded in determining the pattern.

[The Low Rank Magic Affinity skill has become Lv8. Magic has increased by 5.]

“It's a skull. What completely bad taste.”

He knew approximately what the people who had gathered here came for. However, to think that the pattern that they used was a skull; the laughter came out naturally. It definitely should've been fairly difficult to get through, though...

'In any case, I just need to find the starting point and the end point now.'

They had gone so far as to hide it in the sewers and even maintain thorough security over it, so he probably wouldn't get through scot free if he got this wrong. Lee Shin Woo took a deep breath and concentrated even harder on the pattern. To be exact, he concentrated on the flow from the traces of mana that the humans had left behind dozens of years prior. However, there was no way it'd be that simple.

'Damn it... '

He gritted his teeth. Lee Shin Woo thought he might've been too arrogant to attempt

this, as someone who hasn't handled mana for very long.

However, despite that, he couldn't give up at all. In the end, it was pretty much a miracle finding the right pattern. He had no choice but to trust in his talent and concentrate right now...!

'Ah!'

Lee Shin Woo concentrated more forcefully on the pattern, even more than when he had taken the national college entrance exam, and at that moment, he miraculously succeeded in grabbing a hold of a faintly remaining flow of mana. It was truly a small trace, but it seemed as though some traces of mana were being absorbed into the pattern.

Lee Shin Woo could even go as far as to guess the owner of that mana, and he had very briefly assimilated their experiences... it was none other than the magician, Gerrit, who had burnt and killed his zombified teacher.

'Wait, it's the opposite. Since it was a trace from Gerrit, I was able to recognize it. I also experienced sharing a body with him as well, and... more importantly, the fact that Gerrit came here means that this facility is related to General Seagald.'

He knew that Gerrit wanted to meet with General Seagald from the memories of the bone he had acquired.

It was a facility within the interior of the sewers where they performed some kind of research, and Seagald and Gerrit... He couldn't be sure of anything yet, but Lee Shin Woo drew a truly persuasive scenario in his head.

“Then let's uncover what the secret is.”

Since he had uncovered a trace of the flow of mana, it was easy to find the rest of the traces. In his head, a series of streams of mana were cleanly connected!

'I got it!'

He inwardly yelled with delight and placed his hand carefully on the door lock; and after going through the simulations in his head several times and making sure... reproduced that flow. The slightly black dyed mana slowly and carefully started to

create the pattern of a skull.

Eventually, the pattern was completed, and thankfully the door lock didn't become hot. It emitted a delicate blue light, and soon was sucked back into the wall; at that moment, a larger square pattern appeared. It was a door that allowed him to enter the secret room!

[Releasing door lock.]

It was a miracle; he had revived something from several years ago... A part of lost history had been revived due to Lee Shin Woo, and it was at that moment that the mana within his body intensified, surged, and exploded.

The countless, dormant knowledge fragments and his talent connected, causing a big bang that he couldn't contain!

[You have acquired the passive skill, Magic Tracking Lv1! Magic has increased by 3.]

[Low Rank Magic Affinity, Low Rank Magic Accumulation, and Low Rank Magic Tracking skills have compounded and evolved.]

His ability to sense magic, accept it, and track it were all connected into one. A method of more effectively producing mana, circulating it, and utilizing it instinctually rose up into his head.

It was something that he couldn't have even dreamed of until now, as well as being absurdly complex and headache inducing, but... it was possible for him now. Lee Shin Woo nodded his head and accepted the mysterious feeling. He accumulated the knowledge and applied it.

[You have acquired the special passive skill, Low Rank Mana Bone Lv5! Magic has increased by 30.]

At that moment, mana indiscriminately spread through his body, covered his bones, and caused a fundamental change!

[Low Rank Mana Bone Lv5 (Passive)]

[Originally, humans were organisms that did not welcome mana, and through their strong tenacity as well as their talent, they realized a method to harmonize with mana. In order to more perfectly handle the mana that spread throughout the body as it

pleased, the mana is accepted, created, and circulated by an imaginary organ that covers the heart. They called it the mana heart.]

[However, you are a skeleton without a heart, so you have done something outrageous and substituted the mana heart with your entire boney body. That scale is truly enormous, and if you did not have a considerable understanding and handling of mana, it would've been impossible to even attempt.]

[By achieving a balance between the vast knowledge, your talent in mana, and the special situation, this astonishing skill was born, and no one besides yourself knows the growth potential of this astonishing skill.]

It was truly an odd feeling. It felt as though he had taken off some unnatural clothes and he'd been thrown into a world filled with mana, naked. His body, composed of 206 bones, was integrated with mana and each of those individual bones were now more closely connected.

Of course, controlling all 206 bones simultaneously while controlling the mana was certainly not easy. Even if he was aided by the skill, there was way too much to focus on at one time, and he was afflicted with pain that felt as though he was being split apart.

It wasn't a joke; if he were to lose control and was flooded by the mana, it wouldn't be strange for his bones to shatter. He would have to constantly exert himself to adapt to this skill from now on.

[The invigorated flow of mana increases the body's reaction speed.]

[The invigorated flow of mana shortens the activation time of all skills.]

[You have successfully absorbed some outside mana and stored it. Magic has increased by 1.]

However, enduring the pain was bound to lead to sweet rewards. He'd only tasted a portion of it, yet it wasn't hard to realize that the effectiveness of his mana increased by more than several times. Even manifesting, collecting, and producing mana had increased!

For the first time, Lee Shin Woo felt like he had the right to call himself a hero. And... that qualification wasn't just this.

[At only level 3, you have acquired a portion of the qualification necessary to walk the

path of an Archmage, one who naturally commands nature and changes the world. Magic has increased by 20. You have acquired the Archmage's karma token.]

[Quest complete! You have acquired 1 Lv6 Weapon Trickster's arm bone.]

[You have already achieved the Trickster's karma, but you are merely at the level of a toddler. The more personas you acquire, the more your strength grows. That is the path you have chosen, as well as the karma you have been bestowed.]

“Hoo...”

He had just been trying to find the secret room, yet had experienced a sudden change, one that he couldn't dream of; even after calming down the rushing mana, he momentarily stood still in order to get a hold of himself.

Lee Shin Woo kept control of the mana and circulated it. He felt the mana that his bones harmoniously spewed out as well as the resonating external mana so clearly that he thought that he would feel nauseous with the slightest slip. He likened this feeling to that of riding a roller coaster.

'I'd rather just vomit, but these damn bones won't let me.'

It wasn't an issue that could be dealt with in a short amount of time, though thankfully it was a problem that could still be solved. Just like how a human isn't usually aware of their breathing or the blinking of their eyes, but still does so naturally, he was training the control of his Mana Bone skill in order for it to operate unconsciously.

'Talk is cheap... '

Lee Shin Woo smiled bitterly and stayed in place for the moment. How much time had passed? At around the time where his head still hurt but he could move it like usual, Lee Shin Woo sighed in relief and checked the bone he had gotten as a reward for the quest.

[Lv6 Weapon Trickster's Arm Bone]

[A Trickster's arm bone, that was used as a weapon to cajole their enemies. There is enough recorded within to reform one's existence.]

“Huh...”

It was overwhelmingly distinctive compared to the other bones he had absorbed thus far; he couldn't suppress his admiration of the bone as he inspected it. It had an awfully large amount of mana within, was obviously extremely tough, and the fact that each of its finger bones was a different shape was especially distinctive.

Perhaps the Trickster was an existence that didn't need a weapon. He decided that it would be important to figure out how this weapon was connected to the Trickster; for now he'll reinforce...

[The activation of the skill has failed. You are not prepared to accept the strength within the bone yet.]

'...Ah, this pattern finally came up.'

He was already a bit prepared for this, but since it actually happened, it tasted bitter. If that was going to happen, he wanted to complain and ask why they gave him such a mouth watering bone at this time, but when he thought about it in another way, he felt like he was that amazing to have cleared a quest that was so far above his level.

'Well, it should be possible soon.'

If Bone Reinforcement couldn't accept it, then he would have to forget about this bone for now. Lee Shin Woo inspected the bone with a deeply regretful expression, and in the end, put it into his inventory.

Well, he already had his hands full adapting to, and applying the Mana Bone skill he had just awakened. It might've actually turned out well for him. Lee Shin Woo convinced himself of this and raised his head.

The secret door that had revealed itself for the first time in dozens of years looked worn out.

'Alright.'

Lee Shin Woo firmly resolved himself and placed his hand atop the door. The door silently rose up, to the point that it was difficult to believe that it had lain undisturbed for dozens of years.

The records of General Seagald, and the records of the research related to Gerrit...! Thinking that the secret was right before his eyes caused him to feel excited once again, but before Lee Shin Woo's eyes was...

[Keuhaaaaaaahk!]

A skeleton without an inch of flesh remaining popping out and attacking him!

Chapter 9.1

Anti-Skull (1)

[Keuaaaaaaaaahk!]

“Tch!”

It precisely aimed for Lee Shin Woo with its sharp sword strike! It truly was a perfect surprise attack, but Lee Shin Woo was faster, and avoided its attack. He bent his head back and kicked upwards, causing the sword in the skeleton's grip to go flying!

[Keuhaaaaaaaaaahk!]

“This is...”

The skeleton's sword flew directly up and lodged into the ceiling. However, the skeleton seemed unconcerned, fixed its gaze at Lee Shin Woo, and charged. It seemed as though its mana was focused into its palm, and it attacked Lee Shin Woo for a second time with its hands dyed in a dark green!

'It's acid, a poison made from mana. It's at a similar level to the Great Slime's, and if that's the case...!'

It was at that moment. Through his skill in mana analysis, which had noticeably increased due to his Mana Bone, he was able to grasp the structure of his enemy's skill, and at that very moment, the bone he had absorbed before... the Acid Ghoul's Thumbnail awakened its potential!

[You have learned the active skill, Intermediate Acid Poison Spray Lv1. Strength, and Magic have increased by 15. Low Rank Acid Resistance has become Lv7.]

[You have achieved the feat of acquiring a intermediate skill. All stats increase by 5.]

“Huh!?”

Lee Shin Woo was so astonished that he almost lost control of his mana for a moment.

Intermediate!? Though the Acid Ghoul's ability was indeed frightening, when he normally learned a skill, he thought that they'd always be at a reduced level, so he couldn't help but be astonished.

Could this also be due to Mana Bone? He was able to completely reproduce the special properties of the mana within the memories and experiences now, so if all the skills that he was going to learn in the future started at a high level... then him learning the Mana Bone skill would have been the best thing that happened to him ever since he was dropped into the Empire!

“Heut.”

[Ggeuaaaaahk!]

The deep green mist that rose from his fingertips softly wrapped around the skeleton's palm. At that moment, it yelled in fright and retreated back, colliding with a desk. Lee Shin Woo saw a portion of the documents atop the desk melt away from the poison and freakily yelled out.

“Hey, hey. Calm down!”

[Acid Poison!? Who... are you...!]

Fortunately, the skeleton stopped when Lee Shin Woo spoke. No, perhaps it regained feeling after seeing him use Acid Poison. Honestly, it was good regardless. His top priority was to calm it down if he wanted to preserve these precious documents and prevent further damage.

“I'm one of Gerrit's people.”

Lee Shin Woo slowly stepped back and lead him away from the materials, so that they wouldn't be damaged, and answered him calmly.

He had already begun acting by the time he realized that he needed to proceed delicately. And he was able to say the lines most suitable for the situation!

[Gerrit...?]

His hand paused its strike midair. He had hit the mark!

[You're... a subordinate of Doctor Gerrit Aterran? I... don't recall seeing you before. Are you part of the guard...?]

“No, I'm not a guard. If I was, I would've died with you. I came by his request.”

[Did Doctor Aterran die... T-That's natural I suppose...]

The skeleton despaired, and dropped its head. Seeing that, Lee Shin Woo was actually surprised. He had thought he needed to calm it down no matter what, but he didn't think that one line would calm it down.

The moment the skeleton got a hold of itself, a message appeared in front of Lee Shin Woo.

[The Acting skill has become Lv5. Those who listen to your words will instinctually have a good impression of you.]

[Your body is black, huh...]

“It's because of the poison.”

[Your poison's really strong... Yeah, our tests were like that. Now I remember a little bit.]

At around that time, the skeleton had completely lost its fighting spirit. It inspected Lee Shin Woo and when it subsequently turned to look at its own body, which was likewise composed of only bones, it muttered miserably.

[Our test ultimately failed. We couldn't stop ourselves from turning into undead... In the end, that foolish Emperor tried to prevent disaster by calling an even greater disaster!]

Those words felt as though Lee Shin Woo had just been hit by a straight punch. It had clearly recognized that it was an undead, and was also aware of the passage of time!

Was this perhaps an effect caused by them performing tests within the sewers? If that's true, then in the Empire...!? Lee Shin Woo did his best to conceal his astonishment no matter what, and replied to the skeleton.

“However, you're better off than the guys outside. Since the guys outside have lost their

reason and are going wild.”

[Is it a half success...? Come in, comrade. If I think about it, you, who knows the code for the Anti-Skull, can't be my enemy. It seems as though I had also lost my reason until just a little while ago. Since all I did was despair alone from within here...]

“Thanks.”

Anti-Skull, huh. It definitely had a connection with the skull pattern drawn on the door lock. There was a small chance that it was just a code name, but there was a high chance that it stood for the organization of their group as well. Lee Shin Woo decided to remember that word.

[Did you move around by yourself? If not, are you acting based on General Seagald's orders?]

“No, I'm acting based on Gerrit's request. I need to collect all the research materials so that it can't be misused.”

[Ah... I see. Those precious materials are spread about in this kind of place. That's certainly an important task.]

It was really easy to handle the skeleton. Was it because it had just regained its reasoning, or was it due to its memories not being completely intact? If it's not that either, then was it due to his Acting skill? If he could handle him as he pleases, then it didn't matter.

Lee Shin Woo collected all the materials that remained intact despite the passage of dozens of years. The skeleton even helped him with his task. In the end, he made this request.

[There may be some of our comrades still out there. Could you help search for them?]

“Alright. Since I need to collect all the materials anyway.”

He was patiently sitting in his seat, and though he really wanted to inspect the materials, the current situation wouldn't allow him to. However, the moment Lee Shin Woo nodded at the skeleton's words, the mana in front of him slightly shook.

[A quest has occurred!]

[Those who uphold the spirit of a ruined nation.]

[You have found traces of those who still resist in the Empire, and came in contact with them. No one knows how this attempt will turn out in the future. But what's certain is that it will be an extremely difficult challenge.]

[Quest goal: Find and aid the Poison Skeleton's comrades.]

[Quest reward: 1 permit for God's secret shop, and 1 Lv3 medicine.]

'This... does this mean that God is interested in this place too?'

It would be really unconventional as a hero to listen to their circumstances and act without killing them. However, on the contrary, God wouldn't punish him for it and instead encouraged him to do so, which was really interesting.

Of course, regardless of whether God liked it or not, Lee Shin Woo would act as he pleased!

[How are you going to deal with all of those?]

"I probably have to store them. There's something that Gerrit prepared before he died."

[As expected of Doctor Aterran.]

Lee Shin Woo and the Poison Skeleton confirmed that there weren't any more materials inside the room and left the passageway. As he saw the Poison Skeleton, which had withdrawn its sword, crawl out of the door, he smacked his lips.

"Shouldn't you move a bit quieter?"

[You don't need to be that careful. The only things in this sewer are just research material slimes.]

"Yeah, they are just slimes, but... Well, whatever."

Lee Shin Woo gave up on trying to convince it. When he thought about it, since he had invested so much time into familiarizing himself with Mana Bone, the Great Slime should've been far away from him by now. It was probably hectically eating up all the

other slimes in the dungeon about now.

[Now that I think about it, I haven't introduced myself yet. My name is... Ugh, I don't remember my name. It isn't just my name. I don't even remember who I was... I wonder why? I remember the tests and the curse, but there's nothing I remember about myself! It's as though the inside of my head is completely empty...!]

If he was a human instead of a skeleton, he would've seemed like a main character, but the world wouldn't remember a mere extra's amnesia! Surprisingly, Lee Shin Woo replied uninterestedly.

“The fact that your head's empty just means that there's a lot you can fill it with from now on.”

[That's...!]

He'd only said a suitable line he'd seen from somewhere before, yet it seemed like the skeleton was deeply moved. While he was at it, Lee Shin Woo decided to give him some more service.

“First, let's give you a name. Now your name's Paul.”

[Paul... It's an alright name! What's your name?]

“I'm... Paul Zero.”

It was a name he'd thought up himself, but it was really an alias without a speck of creativity.

[Then... Paul Zero, this way. I don't remember anything regarding myself, but I definitely remember the way.]

“Great. Let's go, Paul!”

Lee Shin Woo and Paul moved quickly. He definitely moved a lot more efficiently because he had a guide. No matter how excellent his mana senses had gotten from learning Mana Bone, it took a certain amount of manual labor to find the secret passageways...!

He was suddenly in awe of his foresight, as he hadn't killed the skeleton and dealt with

the issue by just talking. Lee Shin Woo honestly hadn't thought that this was how it would turn out.

[We've arrived. You see it too, right?]

“Yeah, I'm opening it right away.”

Lee Shin Woo released the lock more skillfully than before and opened the door. There were three skeletons within, but they were just like Paul had been, and had lost their reason.

[Kyaaaaaaahk!]

[Kiaaaaaaaah!]

“Yeah, yeah. I thought you'd be this way.”

Lee Shin Woo sighed and softly spewed his Acid Poison at them. It wasn't acid magic, nor was it a curse, and the skeletons that basked in the poison went 'hmm' in surprise, and stopped moving. It was honestly really funny.

[The taste of this poison is... It's the taste of an ally...!]

[Y-You're... Are you a soldier from another test by any chance?]

[To think that I'm a skeleton... A skeleton!]

“Now, I understand your complicated feelings, but I received Gerrit Aterran's request and you guys are undead that have their reason. We're all friends here, so just calm down for now.”

Lee Shin Woo perfectly utilized his Acting skill and calmed them down. Paul, who saw Lee Shin Woo instantly clean up inside, just carelessly clapped with his bare bone hands.

[The power in your voice is unusual. As expected, it seems you weren't a normal person after all. What do you think our relationship was in the past? Ugh, I don't remember!]

“You already said that before, so be quiet and stand over here in order. You're Paul 2,

you're Paul 3, and you're Paul 4..."

The four Pauls had a touching reunion, even though five minutes hadn't even passed yet. Since they were all composed of bones now, it was difficult to recover their previous form, but they definitely remembered that they followed and trusted the same general, and cooperated with the tests.

Moreover, since they were all level 3, they were highly likely to all have had the same post in their past life.

[To think that you're carrying out Doctor Aterran's will even after becoming an undead... You're amazing.]

[Won't you come with us to meet General Seagald? General Seagald definitely wouldn't have given up on the magic research.]

"I'll probably go and see you guys someday. I'll remember you guys."

Lee Shin Woo instantly refused the offer of the Pauls who had reached a mutual understanding, and quickly collected the materials.

And in the process, he took a sideways glance at the characters that they used, and the materials definitely weren't written in Korean, but he could naturally read them. It was probably the same reason he could communicate with others, despite never learning the Empire's language.

"Now, shall we go and check the remaining materials?"

[Hey, but wait... don't you hear something strange from somewhere?]

[Now that you mention it, yeah.]

Paul affirmed Paul 3's statement. Then, Paul 4, who had gone out of the door before the rest of them, spoke with a slightly stiff voice.

[I hear the crawling sound of... something huge.]

- Kwang!

Immediately after, a portion of the passageway burst. Beyond it, a huge slime dyed in

a dark green revealed itself and faced them. Its truly dreary aura was so heavy that its body sagged, and that heavy acid mist spread through its surroundings.

[Lv4 King Slime]

[You have found the target of your revenge. When you fight it, all stats increase by 30%. Flames of Revenge receive a 30% additional bonus.]

[Geureureuoooooooooooooooooh!]

The King Slime, which discovered Lee Shin Woo, forcefully howled and the tough passageway walls began to quickly crack. However, the Poison Skeletons were terrified and instinctually stepped back; on the contrary, Lee Shin Woo looked pleased and stepped forward. He was slightly disappointed that it wasn't an Emperor Slime, but still, this was great!

“Let's play, Pudding!”

[Gureureureureureu!]

The King Slime responded vigorously to Lee Shin Woo's offer. It seemed like it really missed Lee Shin Woo too.

The Pauls looked like they were going to cry when they saw the walls quickly crack as a result of the King Slime's full speed charge, but unfortunately for them, there was no place to run.

Chapter 9.2

Anti-Skull (2)

To cut to the point, the environment they were in wasn't great for running around and playing hide-and-seek. It was because whenever the King Slime moved, the drain pipes would split, crumble, and spill dirt, causing chaos. The Pauls, who hadn't yet gotten used to their skeleton bodies, flinched whenever that happened.

[Gureureureuaaaaaaaaaaaaah!]

“If I can properly see it, then there's nothing to worry about!”

Lee Shin Woo moved his body, avoiding the King Slime's charge, and comforted the Pauls. However, the King Slime collided with the sewer drain pipes, causing the whole area to crumble, and by seeing this, the Pauls yelled out.

[If this goes on, the secret facilities will collapse too!]

“What?”

Certainly, the whole sewer could collapse at this rate. Honestly, it didn't really matter if a worthless sewer collapsed, but he couldn't allow all the facilities to collapse before he got a chance to look over the materials.

“I have no choice since it's come to this.”

Lee Shin Woo stiffly nodded his head and retreated. The Pauls' attention remained completely fixed on him and followed him.

“I'll bring more reinforcements, so keep it busy!”

[We can't. That's impossible!]

“No, you guys can do it. I'll make it so you can.”

Pudding had pierced through the sewer pipes, became covered in dirt, and spread

poison while in the process. Lee Shin Woo took a short deep breath, and towards the Pauls, who sported expressions akin to young birds gazing at the mother bird (of course, skeletons are expressionless so one wouldn't be able to tell, but that's roughly the feeling), as well as Pudding... screamed with all his might.

“I'm really sorrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrry!”

[By using Low Rank Shriek of the Dead, you have caused your enemies to fall into a frenzied and fearful state.]

[You have succeeded in using a skill against an enemy a higher level than you! The Low Rank Shriek of the Dead skill has become Lv2.]

[Kurureureureureureureu!]

[Ugh... Keuaaaaaaaaaahk!]

[Kihik...! I-It's an enemy!]

The four Poison Skeletons, that had for a time regained their reason, had once again completely lost their reasoning due to Lee Shin Woo's shriek. It was such a heinous act that it wouldn't be strange if the Devil came and asked if he could take him as his older brother.

Of course, he had expected that it would work on the skeletons, but he hadn't expected that the skill would work on the level 4 King Slime! It might be because it hadn't been very long since it had evolved.

“Good. You're going to die anyway, so if you're going to die, you might as well shave off some of the slime's health!”

Lee Shin Woo left a rotten farewell to the Pauls, and rather than say a farewell to the King Slime, which began to struggle in what seemed to be an overlapping frenzied and fearful state, he shot a Fire Bullet at it (catapulting his index finger + Flames of Revenge).

He wanted to see if it would self-destruct like a Great Slime, or if it would have a different response to the fire, but... was it because of the frenzied state? It didn't show any signs of self-destructing despite the fire spreading. Lee Shin Woo was satisfied by that fact and retreated completely.

[You have run away from the target of your revenge twice. An Avenger can gladly bear the shame of running away twice. When you encounter your enemy again, all stats increase by an additional 15%. However, running away a third time is forbidden.]

[Quest failed.]

'I ran away from the target of the quest, so it's natural that I failed the quest, but... I didn't know the Avenger skill had this kind of option.'

The fact that running away a third time was forbidden meant that he couldn't just blindly run away from his enemy just because it was scary or else he may be penalized by the skill.

Well, he had thought that the performance of the skill greatly outweighed the risks, but he hadn't expected this kind of surprise hidden within the skill. He thought that there wouldn't be a case where he'd run away from the same enemy three times in a row, but there also wasn't a guarantee that it wouldn't happen, so it was truly a difficult situation.

'However, should I just meekly run away now?'

If he fought it right now, he was confident that he could win. However, he really wanted to collect all of the hidden materials in the sewers. Especially because he realized now that his Avenger skill overlapped and would increase his abilities even more, so it wouldn't be a loss if he just looked at the result.

'At best, I'm throwing away the navigator I'd gained into the jaws of death, and it's become a situation where I have to explore the sewers when I don't know when it'll collapse... '

However, since he'd gone through the hidden facilities' pattern twice already, he was just as confident in exploring the sewers. The sole problem right now was that he needed to find the hidden facilities before the sewers completely gave way...

'It was a good thing I chose to use Shriek of the Dead. It's become considerably quieter.'

Of course, the duration of his skill wasn't very long, so it should start going wild again soon, so... it was key that he found the facilities before then.

Lee Shin Woo used his Combat Sprint to its utmost and started to dash. The Great

Slime had cleaned the sewers of monsters, so it was completely barren, and if he excluded the dirt that occasionally dropped onto his head, there wasn't anything that got in his way.

“Found it.”

Within only 2 minutes, he found the third hidden facility, and thoughtlessly opened the door. Surprisingly, there were five skeletons waiting with bated breath!

[H-He opened the door.]

[You idiot...!]

[Who are you? Are you a member of the project? No, it doesn't matter who you are. There's a fearsome monster roaming around outside!]

This was unexpected. It seems like the catastrophe that befell the sewers after dozens of years of silence, the birth of the Great Slime, had caused them to independently regain their reason.

“So, you're planning on waiting until it collapses the entire sewer and then dying together? If you plan on burying the efforts of the General who struggled to stop the curse as well, then stay crouched there.”

[Ugh...!?!]

[Who do you think you are, to speak of the General here!?!]

“Does it matter who I am right now?”

He collected all the materials. Lee Shin Woo gazed at them icily (that kind of feeling), and the skeletons glared sharply at him; and he exited the facility, as if there were no value in saying anything more.

“After I collect all the traces of our resistance, I'm going to fight that monster in order to open up our future. You guys can stay here, cuddle with your curse bound bones and disappear.”

[...]

[W-Wait a sec.]

One of the skeletons grabbed onto Lee Shin Woo's arm bone. Lee Shin Woo, who had felt a bit anxious that he hadn't been harsh enough, secretly felt relieved.

[I-If the facility is going to crumble and everyone's going to die, then... I'll fight with you. Damn it, I can't go to hell without achieving anything.]

[It's the same for me too. In the end, I may have been too depressed that we hadn't been able to prevent the curse. If you're a knight of the Empire, you have to be able to fight your enemy without fear...!]

“...Talk is cheap. Prove it to me with your actions starting now.”

Lee Shin Woo thought it was time to reproach them more... and as soon as he replied frigidly, the skeletons actually seemed to show some pride, and walked ahead of him with heavy footsteps.

He thought when he saw them. 'Hoo, it may be because skeletons don't have brains, but I'm telling you, it's really easy to trick them!'

“We have to check the remaining hidden facilities first and then act. Before that... Do you each remember your names?”

[That's... I don't remember anything about myself...]

“Alright then, from this side in order, you're Paul, Paul 2, Paul 3...”

Lee Shin Woo treated the skeletons that he had left behind to fight the King Slime as already dead, so he forcibly took their names and passed them on!

It was an extremely wicked and careless naming ceremony, but the Pauls didn't realize it, and were touched as they thought that he 'accepted them as comrades'. They accepted Lee Shin Woo as their temporary leader, so he didn't really need to make up an alias!

'If I came out strong from the start, I could've finished it without lying unnecessarily.'

Lee Shin Woo learned a new way to conduct himself based on the situation. If he used the difference of strength between him and his target, and said something suitable,

they wouldn't probe him, and at the same time, he could set up their relationship such that he was superior!

'...Though even I think it's really not something a hero should do.'

Around the time that Lee Shin Woo pondered whether he was going in the right direction or not, he finally arrived at the last area. There were seven Poison Skeletons within, and they also obediently joined up with him. With this, he had gathered 12 level 3 Skeletons, excluding himself.

"I've collected all of the materials. Now let's go and take care of the monster!"

[Let's go!]

As they had increased in numbers, it seemed the skeletons inevitably swelled with confidence. Even though they had regained their reason, they were still fundamentally idiots.

'Anyway... '

While Lee Shin Woo was encouraging the skeletons and advancing forward, he caught a glimpse of the end of the dungeon. The final secret facility, as well as the adjoining passageway; on the side of the wall, there was a trace that it'd been completely torn out. It looked like that was the boss room... it was obvious, but he didn't feel anything in there.

'What happens in this case? Does it recognize killing the King Slime as killing the boss...?'

He had undergone various strange experiences in this dungeon, which was truly odd. The experience he acquired here should be helpful later. He ran while thinking such miscellaneous thoughts, and in no time reached the area where he had first encountered the King Slime.

[You have found the target of your revenge. When you fight it, all abilities increase by 45%. Flames of Revenge receive an additional bonus of 45%. It is your opponent's last chance, as well as yours.]

[Kureureureuaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!]

The King Slime, which had discovered Lee Shin Woo, howled forcefully. It didn't have any traces of the Flames of Revenge on its body anymore. He had felt the connection of mana terminate in the middle and had roughly assumed as much.

“You weren't able to shake it off at the right time, so your body has gotten a lot smaller, huh?”

[Kuaaaaaah!]

It acted as though it could understand what Lee Shin Woo was saying and the King Slime's temper flared, though its body had considerably lessened compared to when he had first saw it. It was to the point that he would believe it if someone said it was a slightly big Great Slime.

However, the smaller it got, the more its strength was concentrated in its body; its strength alone wouldn't lose out to the Acid Ghoul's.

[Kuaaaaaaaah...!]

[I-I can't believe it.]

[My bones...]

Whereas the 12 Pauls murmured to themselves when they saw the four big and small bones scattered around the battlefield. Of course, the owner of those bones were all dead... No, actually, they were the skeletons of the original Pauls 1 through 4.

They had fought so desperately, so there was no way they'd come out alive from fighting the King Slime.

“Those guys chose to sacrifice themselves in order to keep the results of our tests safe, as well as hide us from the enemy, which allowed me to rescue you guys.”

Lee Shin Woo chattered away so calmly about them, even though they had died so unfairly; if the original Pauls, who had become bones, had heard him, they would've returned as evil spirits to haunt him. It would be really fun if they came back as evil spirits.

“You're not going to let their sacrifice go to waste, are you? For the Empire, and for yourselves... We're stepping over their corpses!”

[Ouoooooooooh!]

[I'll survive no matter what! Even though I'm a skeleton, there's hope if I survive!]

[I'll crush that mushy monster!]

The effect was amazing! The morale of the 12 Pauls soared and they each raised their weapons, and charged at the King Slime! The King Slime seemed to find it laughable and spewed its Acid Poison, though because they were Poison Skeletons, they weren't harmed very much.

“Think back to when you were warriors! Dying to a mere slime like that is disgraceful!”

Lee Shin Woo encouraged the skeletons and comfortably took a pose from the rear. The flames would just cause it to self-destruct, so for now, he planned to fire his Grenade (Catapult + Self-Destruct) to weaken the slime.

“Then... fire!”

[Gguaaaaaaang!]

The resulting explosion from the index finger shot inflicted tremendous damage to the King Slime, causing it to rampage about; unfortunately, the 12 Poison Skeletons fought desperately without reservation, so Lee Shin Woo couldn't attack without them making way.

As it had done before, the Great Slime bounced its body, but even if it tried to crush the skeletons, there were heaps of earth everywhere and its huge body didn't allow it to move very easily!

“Hmph, it's all going according to plan...!”

Lee Shin Woo confirmed that the situation was going his way, going exactly as planned, though he hadn't actually set up any such plan; he regenerated his index finger and prepared his second Catapult. There weren't any skeletons that had died yet.

'I hope you guys last until the King Slime dies.'

Lee Shin Woo stood behind his human shields... no, his skeleton shields and leisurely fired his Fire Bullet while grinning. That's how he raised the curtains to an extremely

one-sided and cowardly battle.

Chapter 9.3

Anti-Skull (3)

Lee Shin Woo, the 12 Pauls, as well as the King Slime that tried swallowing them all, were bravely struggling and continued on for no less than 20 minutes.

If the environment hadn't been a cramped underground space, the battle might've already been over, but because the King Slime couldn't even charge properly, the level 3 Poison Skeletons were somehow able to stand against it.

“Put in some more effort, Paul!”

[I'm Paul 10!]

[Gureureureuaah!]

“Nice, you're blocking it well, Paul 10. I'm shooting one more time!”

[The Low Rank Catapult skill has become Lv2. The launching speed increases. Agility has increased by 1.]

While the 12 Pauls were busy holding off the King Slime's offensive, Lee Shin Woo used the Pauls as a moving trench to protect himself; so long as his mana would allow it, he would continuously shoot his Grenade. He had thought this before, but there was nothing more reassuring than having reinforcements blocking off the enemy!

[Gureureuoooooh!]

Whenever a portion of the King Slime's body burst, it would desperately collect the mana from those pieces, and though it would've been better if the flames had stuck, they at least forced a significant amount of mana to be condensed into its main body.

Rather than cleaving its core and killing it, he needed to slowly condense its mana, whether it be by fire, or explosions, as that would help him get the core!

If it didn't look like a core would come out, then he would use his Flames of Revenge,

even if it meant sacrificing the Pauls. Thankfully he was really lucky.

[Ugh, it's too strong...!]

[Hold it back, comrades! Our pain will be the foundation that unlocks our future!]

[Paul Twelve...!]

In the midst of the intense battle, it seemed as though the Pauls had formed a deep sense of camaraderie. Lee Shin Woo hated his body, which couldn't eat popcorn, and shot a Grenade at the King Slime.

Lee Shin Woo was excited about how many stats its core would give him, and was counting his chickens before they hatched. But at that moment, the King Slime quickly rolled its body and dodged the launched finger!

“What!?”

[Gureureuk...!]

Lee Shin Woo momentarily did a double take. He then saw that its flesh had been torn off from the constant Grenades in the past 20 minutes, and the size of its body had lessened to an extent that it could move now, even in this narrow space.

Furthermore, during the battle, a few of the Pauls had died, so there was a gap in their encirclement; at that moment, the King Slime didn't lose the opportunity and had begun its counteroffensive!

[Ggureuk!]

[Keuaaaaahk!]

[P-Paul Three!]

They couldn't cope with its swift movements and Paul 3 was struck by its charge. At that moment, it focused its Acid Poison at one point and spewed it! Paul 3 melted instantaneously and in its place, only a single shabby bone remained.

[Paul Threeeeeeeeeeeeeee!]

“Get a hold of yourselves you guys. Don't lose track of its movements!”

Lee Shin Woo gritted his teeth and shot a Grenade. Immediately after his attack, he would've taken advantage of the explosion's opening and hit it again, but something truly astounding occurred. Before the Grenade burrowed into its body and exploded, the shot melted away without a trace.

He didn't know what kind of conditions it satisfied to become like this, but he was sure that the King Slime's poison had been instantaneously strengthened! It might've even been comparable to the Acid Ghoul's!

“That bastard...”

[Gureureureuk!]

Then, the King Slime emitted a peculiar sound, as if it were mocking them, and vibrated its body. Compared to before, its body was definitely dyed in a deep green.

[Its poison has gotten stronger.]

[Ours bodies melt away just by getting close.]

The sickening deadly poison mist filled the narrow space. At that moment, the Poison Skeletons trembled as they were completely stuck within the poison mist. They had briefly forgotten how terrifying acid poison was after being reborn as Poison Skeletons!

[Gureureureuk!]

“Tch, it's troublesome if you all die already!”

The King Slime thought it had an opportunity, and attempted to sweep away all of the Poison Skeletons at once by spreading its deadly poison, but before it could do so, Lee Shin Woo charged and rammed into its body.

In the process of hunting it down, he could sacrifice the Poison Skeletons one by one, but he couldn't helplessly lose all of his shields all at once!

[Gureuk!?!]

Because its body had shrunk, its weight had also lessened; the King Slime couldn't endure Lee Shin Woo's charge and powerlessly bounced while being blown away.

However, there was something more important than that. Despite being in contact with the strong Acid Poison, the poison which melted rocks in one fell swoop, he flawlessly endured and was still standing.

[You have been affected by the King Slime's strengthened Acid Poison. Low Rank Acid Resistance has successfully resisted 90% of the damage.]

[The Low Rank Acid Resistance skill has become Lv8.]

“Good... As long as I don't get stuck inside its body, I can endure it.”

Since the index finger bone lodged into its body instantly melted away, he was secretly quite worried, but it seems as though his main body was able to endure its Acid Poison through a combination of his Harden and Acid Resistance skills. Though he did receive some injuries, he could heal this much damage with Regeneration instantly.

[Gureureureuk!]

It seemed like the King Slime realized that Lee Shin Woo wasn't an opponent it could overcome by just thoughtlessly spewing its poison around as it gradually began to retreat.

Lee Shin Woo hadn't come at it from the front and just trivially attacked it from the rear with flames or bullets, yet the fact that he actually possessed the toughest body here slightly shocked the King Slime... And honestly, the King Slime wasn't the only one shocked.

[H-How is he still alive even after taking that poison...!]

[W-We can't win. The test was a failure. In the end, we were cursed; by melting us all, that slime will completely bury us in darkness...!]

“You guys just sit in the back and watch.”

The Pauls' bones shook, like leaves in the wind, and Lee Shin Woo saw them retreat; therefore, he decided to completely forgo using them as shields any longer.

Their willpower was already down in the dumps and even if they were to step forward once more, he didn't know how much longer they'd last against the King Slime. And...

'The fact that the second phase has begun means that the King Slime's health and magic are slowly reaching their limit. It's definitely worth a try, as long as I can block its poison.'

Of course, it still possessed a combination of strength and speed befitting a level 4 elite monster, but Lee Shin Woo was also receiving the Avenger skill effect. He decided that he could definitely win.

He forcefully gripped Bone of Thunder Lasting with both hands and activated Combat Sprint, taking the initiative by charging at it first. The King Slime noticed and quickly bounced its body.

[Gureureuk!]

“Heup...!”

It was an absurdly fast reaction speed. If he didn't make full use of his temporarily heightened visual acuity, he would lose track of it. The instant Lee Shin Woo read its trajectory, he vertically cleaved downwards!

“Ha!”

He firmly stiffened his body with magic, and his sword fell with a force that could cleave the earth, clashing with the King Slime flying in from the front. However, rather than being pushed back, he exerted his strength and pushed downwards with his sword!

[Goooooooooooooh!]

The King Slime couldn't contest with his strength and bounced away, colliding with the opposite wall.

The instant it impacted the extremely precarious wall, the drain pipes completely crumbled and the foundation became unstable. Dirt spewed everywhere, but even within that messy situation, Lee Shin Woo's eyes didn't leave the King Slime.

'Does it also have a Harden ability? There aren't any scratches on its body... '

His sword was plenty sharp. The bastard was just excessively tough! Since its body had lessened in size, its physical strength had atrophied to the point that Lee Shin Woo could push it back, but conversely, its magic had been frightfully condensed; it had gotten that much tougher as a result.

[Goooooooooooooh!]

“Heup!”

The slime must've been uplifted after being unharmed by Lee Shin Woo's strike, as it bounced from its position and flew towards him again.

If he got pushed back here, it'll be the end! Lee Shin Woo gritted his teeth and clashed with the King Slime. With the resolve to take it down, he infused Power Slash in every strike!

[A-As I thought, we can't win.]

[If he can't kill it with that tremendous power, then... Ah, ahhhh. The poison, the poison mist is rising!]

Since he was fighting while listening to the Paul's draining 'BGM', it didn't work. No, it was honestly just that his current strength couldn't overcome the King Slime. Looking at the situation of the battle, he figured that if he could buy more time, he would be able to get a decisive strike in, but the problem was...

'...I can't just keep repeatedly attacking and defending until its mana runs out.'

This sewer facility was counting down to its destruction. The pouring dirt would make it difficult to even move soon. It would become the worst environment to fight in.

In order to finish it before then... it would be a bit difficult, but this was the only choice. He resolved himself and activated his skill.

'Flames of Revenge.'

The black flames softly blazed atop his index finger bone. Seeing that hateful fire, the King Slime spewed the deadly poison that had been condensed in its body all at once in all directions, and filled the space with poison.

“Good, you're definitely responding to it.”

[Gureuk...!]

The deadly poison mist and his black flames met, emitting a crackling sound; the flames burned the poison and the smoky heat surged. If he just remained like this, both sides would just run out of magic, so Lee Shin Woo raised his index finger about shoulder height, aimed, and postured to shoot.

'I don't know how many times it'll self-destruct from the flames until it leaves behind its core, but... I have no choice.'

However, before he shot, one of the vacantly watching Pauls suddenly muttered.

[...I remember.]

“Hmm?”

He spoke at such great timing that Lee Shin Woo stopped his Catapult. It was truly a relief that the King Slime saw the unwaning flames and felt extremely anxious, making it unable to move its body.

He didn't know whether they knew about the situation or not, but Paul kept muttering.

[I... Before I was appointed as a knight, I applied for this test.]

Hearing that, Lee Shin Woo furrowed his brows. Did they seriously remember their past at this timing? How? However, it wasn't just him. The other Pauls muttered as well, as if they had promised to do so.

[I was just a soldier, but due to my performance, I became a Centurion. The one who brought me there was none other than General Seagald...]

[I... I respected the Emperor. Because of that, I couldn't pardon his mistake, even more than the others.]

[How could I forget? The way I had lived, the way I must live from now on... All of it was within me all along.]

In no time, this space, which had been filled with the thickening, deadly poison the

King Slime had spewed, became clean. Even now, the King Slime was responding to the Flames of Revenge and was creating Acid Poison, but the Poison Skeletons were absorbing it all.

[The test... Was it not a failure?]

[It failed. It was truly a horrific failure. However, because it was a failure, there was something we could gain from it.]

[How miserable. However, we need this strength right now.]

There was nowhere to run; they couldn't escape from the Acid Poison, and the skeletons had no other choice but to accept it. And the moment they gave up on everything, they naturally absorbed the Acid Poison as if it were theirs from the beginning... The skeletons were starting to become stronger.

The vestige of their past test's failure had made it possible; it was at this moment that their past karma was connected to the present.

[Why did I forget how to use mana?]

[It feels like someone had locked me in the darkness and stripped away my reason.]

[I can't remember my past name at all, but... it's fine now. We've become able to accept both our past and present!]

[We don't need to think deeply about what's within anymore. We just need to walk the path we've been taught now!]

Their voices sounded much more sure of themselves now, and for some reason, they felt even stronger... The moment he thought that it seemed as though they had leveled up, a deep mana glaringly surged.

However, because Lee Shin Woo didn't have any eyes, he was able to properly behold the Poison Skeletons' change.

[Lv3 Acid Skeleton - Paul]

[Lv3 Acid Skeleton - Paul Two]

[Lv3 Acid Skeleton - Paul Four]

[Lv3 Acid Skeleton - Paul Seven]

[Lv3 Acid Skeleton - Paul Nine]

[Lv3 Acid Skeleton - Paul Ten]

[Lv3 Acid Skeleton - Paul Twelve]

“...”

To think he'd see the moment that the undead were reborn as named monsters. They became named monsters with the names he'd given them at that!

Lee Shin Woo was stunned and looked at them with his mouth wide open as the Pauls walked with heavy footsteps more vigorously than before and joined up with him by his side.

[Sorry we showed you something so unsightly, Captain.]

[We'll fight with you now, too.]

[Give us the command. I want to respond to the chivalry you showed, Captain.]

'When the hell did I become your captain, and what the hell do you mean by chivalry?' is how he eagerly wanted to reply, but... Lee Shin Woo discarded all those thoughts. Though the Empire was incorrigibly cold and arrogant, he acted as though 'their' Empire was the only warm place in this world.

“You've finally gotten a hold of yourselves. Hold it back for a bit. You can do that much, can't you?”

[Yes, sir!]

[Of course!]

The seven level 3 elites attacked the King Slime simultaneously. The King Slime attempted to kill them with its poison and charge attacks, but they were no longer the weak skeletons of the past. Ultimately, while it was restrained by the skeletons, Lee

Shin Woo took the opportunity to shoot his Fire Bullets in a volley. As it was being barraged with the Fire Bullets, it didn't even have an opportunity to self-destruct, and died from the flames.

It was truly a brutal victory.

Chapter 9.4

Anti-Skull (4)

[You have hunted the Lv4 King Slime. You have acquired the title 'Slime Hunter'! All of your abilities increase by 20% against slime related monsters, and you have a higher chance of acquiring better loot from them.]

[You have perfectly cleared the mutated dungeon, the Lv2 'Secret Sewer'. You have found all the secrets that lay in the dungeon, as well as slaying an elite monster that ate the boss and became stronger. You have acquired the dungeon clear reward. Health and magic has increased by 2.]

[You have led several subordinates into battle and defeated an enemy a higher level than you. All stats have increased by 1. The Beginner Command skill has evolved into the Low Rank level. When you make a command that fits the situation, the morale of your men increases.]

[You have succeeded in your revenge. The Beginner Avenger skill has become Lv7. When you meet the target of your revenge again, all abilities increase by 34%.]

They were all messages that appeared from him killing the King Slime. However, Lee Shin Woo felt slightly disappointed that he hadn't received another karma token, but right then, a message appeared that went beyond his expectations.

[You have achieved the karma of giving the undead who had lost everything a name, and awakening their rebirth. This is a karma that has long since been forgotten, and is a karma that no one can remember. You, who endowed these cursed and rotten individuals with unknown potential, will be called this by the world. The 'Joker'.]

[The Trickster karma has been absorbed by the Joker karma and has been strengthened. Your future is unknown, such that no one can predict it, and is filled with countless changes. No one can tell you what to do, and no one can dare block your path. Through a dramatic event, your karma has strengthened.]

[All stats have increased by 10. The Acting skill has become Lv6. The Low Rank Mana Bone skill has become Lv6.]

“This is...”

Lee Shin Woo felt a strength that was greater than any other before permeate his body. Although it might be similar to the Trickster karma, the 'Joker ' karma was a more powerful karma, so perhaps that was why.

As proof, all of his stats increased by 10. Aside from when he leveled up, he had never experienced such a shocking stat increase. Moreover, his skills had grown as well!

[I feel like Captain's become even stronger.]

[He's someone who could give us names. That's natural.]

[Those were truly powerful flames.]

The seven surviving Pauls, who had been reborn into elite Acid Skeletons towards the end of the intense battle, saw Lee Shin Woo becoming even stronger following the battle, and said 'as expected' while nodding their heads.

“Ah, you guys...”

Lee Shin Woo suddenly realized they were there and turned around. When he thought about how they had essentially given him the Joker karma, he had no choice but to change his attitude towards them.

“Have you recovered all of your memories?”

[Not all of them. However, I realized who I am and what I have to do.]

[This is all because of you, Captain.]

All of them, without exception, were dyed in a deep green, but the fact the weapons they possessed also changed color was truly peculiar. Though their levels didn't change, their bones were tougher and thicker, and their spirit was no joke.

[We have to find General Seagald. He definitely hasn't given up yet. He must be struggling to save this curse ridden Empire.]

[Like you, Captain. The General will welcome you with open arms.]

[Let's go together, Captain.]

It was a development that he had roughly expected. Lee Shin Woo picked up the dropped items and acted as if he thought deeply about their request, but truthfully, he already had his answer.

“I can't right now.”

[How can that be...]

“Since I have something I need to do, too. I'll go find General Seagald later. It'd be great if I could see you guys then.”

General Seagald was someone that was really on his mind too. However, even so, Lee Shin Woo was much too weak to go and find him immediately. His abilities were far too lacking to respond to this situation right now.

Above all, he didn't think that there was any reason to limit his movements this early. Not only did it not fit with his Joker karma, there were plenty of other things on his mind regarding the Empire. Like General Leofield.

[Is that so... Well, you have your own calling, Captain. We can't get in the way of that.]

[We trust that no matter where you are, whatever you're doing is for the Empire.]

All the Pauls agreed and nodded their heads. Seeing that, Lee Shin Woo smiled bitterly.

'These guys have already recovered their reason and their memories. It'd be great if I could continue to bring them with me as my subordinates, but there's a high chance that they'd catch onto the lie in no time.'

In the end, his Acting skill was impromptu. At least, for now that is. He would need to hide his human nature and the truth of his identity from them; even then, taking this many of them with him was definitely impossible.

If that's the case, then he could also cleanly take care of them here and take their bones, but...

'Shall I give it a rest?'

It wasn't a matter of them forming comradeship from fighting together or something like that. He was just purely curious how they, who were created by the 'Joker' karma, would turn out from now on.

He couldn't relax at all when he thought about how these skeletons, who were endowed with a different destiny because of him, would survive from now on in this Empire.

And honestly speaking... even if it were a sandcastle built on the beach, it would be too much for him to break down himself.

“...Wherever you go, don't go dying quickly. After all, it'll feel like what I did was meaningless then.”

[Of course. We won't let the names you gave us be in vain.]

[Paul Zero... I'll never forget your name.]

[Let's meet again for sure.]

The skeletons, who realized that they couldn't convince Lee Shin Woo, each said some parting words to him and turned around.

The sewers were already a mess and collapsing, and the space they were currently in wasn't wide enough to even stretch their legs, but they grouped together and spread their Acid Poison everywhere, allowing them to easily make a path. It was as if they used an eraser to erase the dirt.

'Now, let's see.'

He drove away the restlessness he felt after the Acid Skeletons—the Pauls, left, and completely raked in the loot buried in dirt and poison. Lee Shin Woo concentrated on that task, and was able to soon forget about those that had left.

[You have acquired 53,080 Perium.]

[You have acquired a Lv4 King Slime Bone Core.]

[You have acquired a Lv3 Poison Skeleton's rib bone.]

[Would you like to... with the Lv3 Poison Skeleton's rib bone...]

There was an inherent mana within, so he was able to find them quickly. He naturally received the loot from the King Slime, but he also received the bone from one of the Poison Skeletons that had fought before him!

He was naturally pleased when he found a safely remaining bone from their depressing solo act. Lee Shin Woo shoved the acquired Perium into his inventory, then activated Bone Reinforcement, cleanly using up both the bone and the core all at once.

[Through Bone Reinforcement, Strength has increased by 1, Agility by 1, Health by 6, and Magic by 9. Absorbing a portion of the target's memories and experiences.]

[The Low Rank Bursting Thunder skill has become Lv6.]

[The Low Rank Harden skill has become Lv2.]

[The Intermediate Acid Poison Spray has become Lv2.]

“Mmm...”

Despite it being level 4, the King Slime didn't give him as much magic as he had hoped. Was it because he had already hunted several other slimes and Great Slimes before?

Perhaps his magic stat had increased far too much already, so it was difficult for the maximum value of his magic stat to increase any further.

'Still, I'll be level 4 soon. Let's hang in there a little longer.'

He had gained karma and improved his stats through Bone Reinforcement, so now his stats totalled 756. As long as he gathered 44 more stats in the future, he would be reborn as a level 4. He tightened his fists, as if he realized how he was getting stronger more and more quickly.

“...It was good.”

Finally, he surveyed his surroundings. He thought there might be something he had missed and there really was. That was none other than the dungeon reward.

“And now that I think about it, there was a message like that.”

In a level 1 dungeon, the reward would be an old wooden box, but considering how it was a level 2 elite dungeon he'd cleared, there was a considerably sturdy and completely new looking wooden box that had appeared instead. Though the fact that it was a wooden box ultimately hadn't changed!

[20,000 Perium]

[Low Rank Acid Resistance skill book]

[Lv3 Grizzly Bone Leg (+1)]

[Lv3 Melting War Axe]

Lee Shin Woo's face paled once he checked the rewards. Should he says it's as expected of an elite dungeon? Setting aside the Perium and the Acid Resistance skill book, he was rewarded with 2 level 3 items!

Moreover, the Grizzly Bone Leg was lower body armor that completely covered his thighs, knees, legs, and even his feet; it was even made of bone.

[Grizzly Bone Leg +1]

[Lv3]

[Durability: 740/740]

[Defense: 105 - 115]

[Options: Increases Strength by 5, Agility by 5]

“Now it's perfect.”

He had a helmet, upper body armor, and lower body armor that also doubled as combat boots. Though it was somewhat troubling that all of his defensive equipment was made of bone, at least people wouldn't be able to tell that he was undead just from his exterior appearance now.

When he banged on his lower body, which was completely covered up by the Grizzly Bone Leg, he sported a satisfied smile. He collected the Perium, and thought about reading the Low Rank Acid Resistance skill book on the spot... but decided against it.

'Let's give this to Jin.'

When he thought about Jin, whose body couldn't endure the Acid Ghoul's poison and had been melted away, Lee Shin Woo decided it'd be better to give him the skill book, rather than raise his proficiency by a little bit. Then, he put the skill book into his inventory.

The problem was the final remaining item. The axe clearly gleamed in a metallic color, and it was so large that he wondered how it had fit inside the wooden box.

Just by sitting still, the axe emitted a green mist, and because of that, the surrounding earth gradually melted away; seeing just that, he knew that it was an incredibly powerful weapon. That's how he saw it, but...

“But it's not made of bone...”

He had to gamble after finally acquiring a level 3 item and change it into bone. Lee Shin Woo sighed deeply. However, there was nothing he could do about it. He couldn't just leave it here!

“Heup.”

[Through Bone Reinforcement, the Melting War Axe is changing.]

In the end, he tightly gripped the axe with trembling hands. At that moment, that axe emitted a hair-raising sound and began to change into bone.

Bubbles surged up above the blade and the fundamental metal portion changed; the sequence of mana was newly formed, and the shape morphed. It was an extremely unpleasant process.

“Ha...?”

But why? During that process, Lee Shin Woo felt as though his mana... or more precisely acid, was sucked into the axe. The weapon was radiating light, and the mana in the entire area resonated in that one spot, creating an even thicker mist.

When the acid mist that the weapon spewed out became even thicker, and thus made it difficult to ascertain its very shape, the once thick mist in the periphery was suddenly sucked into the weapon.

The mist was completely lifted and the light likewise cleanly dissipated; for the first time, he was able to see the double-bladed axe which had transformed into bone.

[You have acquired the Lv4 Melting Bone Double Axe.]

[Melting Bone Double Axe]

[Lv4]

[Durability: 1,550/1,550]

[Attack Power: 480 - 760]

[Attribute: Acid Lv3]

[Options: Strength +25, Agility -5, Effectiveness of Acid Attribute Skills + 20%]

“!?”

Lee Shin Woo momentarily couldn't believe his eyes, but when he thought about it, he didn't even have eyes so there was no way he saw wrong.

The item really had leveled up. He had thought that this would happen sometime or another, but he didn't actually think it would happen like this!

'It didn't level up just because I was lucky.'

He had realized when his magic transformed into Acid Poison and was sucked into the weapon just a little while ago.

Perhaps during the process of transforming the weapon into bone through Bone Reinforcement, some other power that he had was somehow activated? And if that's the case, wasn't this proof that the stronger he got, the stronger the weapon that transformed through Bone Reinforcement would be?

'It's a really... really fearsome skill.'

Lee Shin Woo gritted his teeth at the countless abilities that Bone Reinforcement possessed. Perhaps this skill, depending on the karma, could affect the very rules of this world!

Through the use of countless experiences and memories, he learned a variety of abilities, and changed countless things through those abilities... His compatibility with the Joker karma was also great.

“But... Wait a second.”

With this, he now had two level 4 items. And they were both items that would increase his acid attribute skills! If he combined the two items' abilities, the power of his acid skills would increase by as much as 30%!

Lee Shin Woo tightly gripped the double axe and muttered satisfyingly. He could feel it. That even though it had calmed down, he could spew out a horrific concentration of Acid Poison whenever he wanted!

“If I use this well, I could even go with the Hydra concept...”

Lee Shin Woo still couldn't get rid of his habit from the Trickster quest.

Chapter 10.1

Partner (1)

“Did you wait a long time?”

In just 13 hours, Jin had returned with the leather bag Lee Shin Woo had given him completely filled, speaking like a girlfriend who had arrived late to their meeting place. Of course, Lee Shin Woo didn't even have a girlfriend before, so he wasn't bothered at all and spoke.

“It's alright, since I was busy reading this.”

“What is it?”

Lee Shin Woo raised and showed the bundle of papers to Jin, who carefully thrust his head forward; the edges of the papers were gradually weathering away and disappearing with every gust of wind. Jin likewise didn't know the Empire's language, but he could read the title of the documents without much difficulty.

“The Anti-Skull... Plan?”

“You wanna read it?”

“Yeah...”

Originally, he didn't really like reading very much, but Jin thought that there was something more to these papers than just a waste of time; yet he couldn't joke like that as Lee Shin Woo's face was much too serious.

Ultimately, he nodded his head, and Lee Shin Woo laid one of the papers on the ground, which best summarized the current state of affairs, so that he could read it easily. Lee Shin Woo then turned his head back to the papers. It was the last page.

“This is... Did the Empire have a force that knew about the impending curse and was preparing for it by any chance!?”

“Ah, so you didn't know.”

For a few hours after clearing and leaving the dungeon, Lee Shin Woo thoroughly scrutinized the data he'd acquired from the sewer hidden facilities.

Anti-Skull was lead by General Seagald, and was a group created to prevent the Emperor's plan; at the same time, it was the name of the project that researched ways to prevent them from becoming undead.

“There're detailed records written here about their research into preventing them from becoming undead. In laymen's terms, at the heart of the research was their attempt to magically create a body beforehand which wouldn't be affected by the curse.”

“So what happened? Did they succeed?”

“No.”

Was it because he was also undead? Jin asked in a deeply interested voice, and Lee Shin Woo replied firmly, cutting him off.

That's right. The plan progressed in multiple ways, but all of them became frustrated. There were several cases where the tested individuals exploded, and it was common that their bodies wouldn't even be able to use mana anymore.

On the contrary, this experiment with Acid Poison wasn't bad. The test subjects didn't die, and actually became stronger; though they degenerated into the undead, they were able to retain their memories and their reason as well.

'Even if they meet humans, the current Pauls shouldn't be driven by their hatred.'

Regardless of their intent, all undead hated humans. It was like a suggestion engraved into their instincts. Because of that, humans also consider undead enemies. Though Lee Shin Woo didn't really know about it since he was an undead as soon as he arrived in the Empire!

'I wonder what state General Seagald is in?'

Based on the reports, General Seagald was gathering forces through various means to prevent the Emperor's plan, while also actively participating in the Anti-Skull's

experiments with his subordinates.

In the past, he opposed the Emperor and certainly raised a force, but considering how he couldn't prevent the curse despite that, his rebellion must've failed in the end. What happened to him as a result? Was he still alive, surviving as an undead? If he's still alive, what would be the state of his reasoning?

The day would come where he'd be able to figure this out. Lee Shin Woo didn't really need to take the lead and figure it out himself. Since there were a lot of seniors already ahead of him.

“Do the other heroes know about this?”

“Wouldn't they? I don't really have any plans to check, but they probably do.”

Of course, he had coincidentally learned of Anti-Skull in the sewer dungeon, but there were various secret facilities hidden throughout the Empire. If he assumed that the majority of them had become dungeons, a portion of his seniors should've been able to find them already. At least, that's what Lee Shin Woo thought.

“You did some quests, right?”

“I got the inventory and the chatting channel as well.”

As if he were demonstrating, Jin put the leather bag in and out of his inventory. Seeing that, Lee Shin Woo nodded his head and took the bag.

There were different bones that filled the bag to the brim, and they were all bones from at least level 2 monsters, just like Lee Shin Woo had instructed. Rarely, he saw some level 3 bones as well.

“How was your hunt?”

“When I actually got started, it wasn't that hard. It felt like I got a bit used to battle in just a few hours... Yeah, laugh it up.”

“Nah, it's normally like that.”

Lee Shin Woo finished inspecting the bones and raised his head, locking gazes with Jin. His face, which blazed with blue goblin fire, came right in front of his own.

“Now you're going to accept me as your colleague, right?”

“Of course. However, there's something I'd like to check before that. What's the ability you got from God as you were dropped onto this world?”

“Mmm, that's... well you're undead too, so I guess it's fine to tell you.”

Jin was briefly conflicted, but soon he scanned Lee Shin Woo's body and slightly nodded his head, and opened his mouth for the second time. In a way, Lee Shin Woo had anticipated what he had to say, but at the same time, his expectations were completely off.

“Truthfully, I have an ability that revives me even if I die. It's an ability called the Blessing of Death; the magic of the curse is absorbed, and the accumulated power is changed into a blessing. Even if I die, it makes it possible for me to revive.”

“The magic of the curse? Ah.”

“Yeah, that's why I'm accumulating magic even now. It's not very much, though...”

The curse's magic, which transformed people into the undead, was overflowing in this world right now. In exchange for Jin having no curse resistance, his skill took care of it. It was a complete surprise to Lee Shin Woo, who thought Jin would definitely have the 'Invisible Heart' like him.

“Though the magic I've accumulated is only enough to revive me twice.”

“So the reason you just constantly ran was because of that skill's effect, huh.”

“It's embarrassing, but... yeah.”

Lee Shin Woo felt refreshed. He had thought that no matter how depressed Jin was from becoming a Skeleton Horse, just constantly running was too much, but after learning about his ability, he realized that Jin had run to stockpile the necessary energy to activate his skill.

“I've already died once, so I've become afraid of dying again. I couldn't tell Jin Jin, but that's how it is. I'm pathetic, right?”

“No, I understand. Very sincerely.”

The reason Lee Shin Woo could decide to fight without much difficulty as soon as he was dropped into the Empire was because he could revive 99 times. If he had arrived with the same skill Jin had, he would've done the same as him.

'In any case, when I compare his ability to mine, it's kind of subtle.'

After listening to him, it seemed as though Jin's ability didn't have a limited number of uses, but it also seemed like Jin's ability would require him to gather a tremendous amount of mana to activate the skill.

In other words, he could futilely die before he gathered the required mana if he was unlucky. That probably contributed to him becoming more of a coward. He suddenly thought that God was truly ill-tempered.

“What about curse resistance and holy resistance?”

“I have both of them. They're maxed out. It seems like my curse absorption is the evolved form of maxed out curse resistance.”

“As I thought.”

His absorption was the evolved form of maxed curse resistance... Lee Shin Woo decided he'd store away that information for now, and nodded his head. Jin felt relieved when he saw Lee Shin Woo unperturbed and nodding his head, even after hearing about his revival ability.

“So you received an ability similar to mine, huh. I wondered whether I was the only one like this.”

“Yeah, though my revival conditions are a bit different.”

Lee Shin Woo explained the effects of Invisible Heart to him. Jin could've been really uncomfortable hearing it, but he didn't want to lie to someone he sympathized with. As expected, Jin was jealous of him.

“You have 97 more lives!? I'm so jealous...!”

“But the number of lives is annoying. So my goal right now is to die as little as possible. Acting as though I only have one life, and that I'm not undead.”

“...Yeah, I agree with you.”

From the start, Lee Shin Woo's attitude was something that Jin also wanted to learn. That attitude, where he didn't succumb to despair and endured firmly, despite being in a similar situation, and pressing forward!

However, Lee Shin Woo seemed burdened by Jin's blazing gaze (though in reality, it was always blazing), and slightly turned his head away and spoke.

“That's not all, right? Isn't there more that you got?”

“Ah, yeah... In the process of becoming a Skeleton Horse, or more precisely, a [Dark Bone Horse], I became level 4. And lastly, I got a skill called [Child of Light].”

“What's that? Does it let you kick at the speed of light or something?”

Amongst the several lines he'd always wanted to say, Lee Shin Woo mentioned one of them. Jin then cold-heartedly shook his head and spoke.

“By receiving the Blessing of Light, my agility growth rate increases by three times.”

“...Growth rate is kind of vague, so what does it mean in more detail?”

Even as he thought that Jin should be called the Child of Char[1] instead of the Child of Light, he asked for more details. Without hesitating, Jin elaborated. Without even realizing how amazing his own ability was.

“Whenever I gain agility, for whatever the reason, I gain three agility when others gain 1. That's my karma or whatever.”

“Whatever the reason...!?”

That's bullshit! Three times the agility no matter what? Increases in agility from karma, skills, and drinking the shop's medicine would be three times that of any other person! Though it was a cheat skill he could gain only after becoming a Skeleton Horse.

“It seems like it's an ability that's so good that it surprises even you. Well, my agility did shoot up as I continually ran, when my skills leveled up, or when I received some karma for running really fast. I feel like my agility was around 500 at the beginning, but right now it's close to 800.”

“800!?”

He already surpassed Lee Shin Woo with just his agility! Now he could understand his fearsome growth rate. If he were to exclude the increase in effectiveness of his other stats, he already had agility that rivaled a level 6's!

'Wait a sec.'

At that point, Lee Shin Woo suddenly thought. If that's the case, then would his ability activate when he reinforces his bones, too...?

If that's actually true, then his compatibility with Jin would result in an absurd outcome beyond his imagination. Jin could naturally attain a tremendous result, and Lee Shin Woo fighting in battle from his back...!

'Did God not expect this?'

These two unusual individuals' karma met and would create a ridiculous synergistic effect. If it's her, who was the God of this world, she probably could've predicted this.

If that's the case, then God had predicted that they'd work together at some point... and there's a possibility that she'd guided them such that they would. She didn't just make them undead simply due to her ill nature, but perhaps she wanted them to accomplish the tasks that 'couldn't be accomplished by normal humans'.

...Though she could've just done it on a whim.

“Do you also have a different ability?”

“Yeah.”

He was in deep thought, so he forgot that Jin was right in front of him. He saw Jin waiting for his response, and extracted a level 2 bone from the leather bag; he raised it, smiled mischievously (that kind of feeling), and replied.

“Yeah, I do have one. From the start, all of my abilities are because of this skill.”

“What kind of ability could it be for it to...?”

“I'll teach you using your own body.”

“What...!?”

“Be careful, since your head might hurt in the beginning.”

For some reason, Jin was shocked and stepped back, but Lee Shin Woo wasn't concerned by that and yelled.

“Bone Reinforcement!”

[1] T/N: Char is a character from Mobile Suit Gundam. I don't really understand the reference here, but it's probably a meme of some sort.

Chapter 10.2

Partner (2)

This was his first time using his Bone Reinforcement on someone else, so even though he seemingly used the skill without hesitation, he was actually quite anxious. Sure enough, messages instantly appeared in front of him, crowding his sight.

[Reinforcing Hero—Jin Taylor's shoulder bone. Determining the target's suitability. Check successful. Establishing a contractual relationship with the target through mutual agreement. Contract successful. Skill activating normally.]

[By consuming a Lv2 Big Zombie's kneecap bone, Jin Taylor's bones are reinforced. Jin Taylor is absorbing a portion of the target's experiences and memories. You also share a portion of the experiences and memories and are absorbing them.]

[I'll become the one of the 12 generals someday. My mum said that if I eat like this every day, I'll become a general. - Nameless Soldier]

“Ugh...!?”

“It's not too bad. Just relax and take it all in.”

The moment Lee Shin Woo activated the skill, Jin was startled and started quivering; Lee Shin Woo calmed him down and checked each and every message that appeared.

'Determining suitability, huh... As expected, it wasn't something that I could use on just anyone. I can probably only use it on undead, and amongst the undead, only the ones that are made entirely of bone. But what's this contract thing?'

Perhaps the faint string of mana that connected him and Jin the moment he activated the skill signified the contract. He didn't feel any negative energy from it, so as long as he was conscious of it in the future, it would be fine.

He didn't know if it was because of the contract, but despite the skill being used on Jin, Lee Shin Woo was likewise able to absorb a portion of the zombie's memories and experiences.

Of course, it was much less compared to if he had used it on himself, but... it was at that moment that he realized that using his Bone Reinforcement on other people wasn't a complete loss on his part.

'If that's the case, there's no reason to hesitate on using the skill on Jin.'

The instant Lee Shin Woo used his Bone Reinforcement, he ruminated over the zombie's memories that had been engraved into his brain, and gazed at Jin. As expected, the small blue goblin fire that blazed within his eye sockets mercilessly shook.

“This is... No, wait, ugh...!”

“You asked me how I got so skilled in such a short amount of time, didn't you? This is my answer.”

He definitely had a lot of things he wanted to say. Jin's mouth opened and closed, and he looked like he was about to say something when Lee Shin Woo spoke, with a slight amount of self-scorn in his voice.

“My talent, experiences, and everything is due to this skill.”

“You, this... you sure are...”

Was it because this was his first time experiencing Bone Reinforcement, and it wasn't easy to escape its effect? Jin tottered around as if he had become drunk.

Lee Shin Woo patiently waited until he calmed down and could stand up straight. He waited approximately 5 minutes before Jin narrowly sighed, raised his head, and spat out as if he had chewed on something foul.

“...It was a horrific experience.”

“Not a great experience?”

Of course, if such vivid memories melded into one's brain, there's a chance they'll be confused. However, if he showed such a violent reaction to it, wouldn't it make one want to tease him? As expected, Jin heard Lee Shin Woo, shivered, and replied.

“Ugh... I feel sick. How many times have you experienced this exactly?”

“Do you remember each and every piece of food you've ever eaten?”

“You're crazy!... But now I understand how you got so strong.”

For Jin, taking in another person's experiences and memories felt similar to his brain itself being injected with a foreign substance. Even though he knew this would be helpful to him, it wasn't something he was able to do so easily.

However, if he backed down here and now, Lee Shin Woo wouldn't help him. Perhaps this was the real test... at least, that's what Jin thought.

“I'm telling you. You'll get used to it soon enough. Then, let's move on to the next one, ok?”

“Ugh... O-One sec.”

However, Lee Shin Woo didn't really have any plans to test Jin. From the start, Lee Shin Woo passed over his moans and groans as him making a big fuss over nothing, and chose the next bone to step up to the plate.

It wasn't really him having a wicked personality or anything; he truly believed that there was no way Jin would be this anguished from just this.

“If you get past about 10 of them, your head will get dizzy, but if you focus and keep hold of your consciousness, the only thing that'll hurt is your head, and it won't be too much of a problem. You just have to take in what you need from them and make it yours. It's simple, right?”

“...Can't you at least take it a bit slower?”

“Fine then.”

Jin finally resolved himself. In order for him to become stronger, and to catch up to Lee Shin Woo by even just a little, he had no choice but to accept this and to endure!

'I'm sure of it now. If I work together with Lee Shin Woo, I can become strong...! I can't just weakly stay where I am any longer!'

Lee Shin Woo thought Jin would be disappointed in him after hearing about his ability, but it was actually the opposite. To Jin, Lee Shin Woo was someone who had an

overwhelming willpower, and Jin considered him as someone strong, someone who would fight regardless of what body he was in or whatever the method in this world.

And what he was seeking was that steel will. So, it wouldn't do if he couldn't even endure this much!

[By consuming a Lv2 Skeleton Warrior's arm bone, Jin Taylor's bones are being reinforced.]

[By consuming a Lv3 Ghoul Fighter's shinbone...]

...

...

[By consuming a Lv3 Metal Bone Snake's rib bone, Jin Taylor's bones are being reinforced. Jin Taylor is absorbing a portion of the target's experiences and memories. You also share a portion of its experiences and memories and are absorbing them. Health has increased by 1.]

There were 513 bones in total in the bag, and among them, close to 450 of them were level 2 bones; the rest were level 3 bones. Lee Shin Woo spent about five hours to allow Jin to absorb all of them, but the fact that just absorbing half of the effects increased his own stats by 10 was telling of just how many bones there were.

"Ugh, I feel like I'll vomit..."

As a result of absorbing all of the owners' various memories and experiences, Jin laid his huge body on his back and was dry heaving.

Since Lee Shin Woo was the pioneer of this specific field and fully utilized his know-how of maintaining his consciousness, most of the confusion had passed, but even so, if one were to ask if it were easy to overcome the aftermath, the answer would definitely be 'no'. Lee Shin Woo gazed stiffly at Jin and consoled him.

"It's alright. Since we have nothing to barf out anyway."

"You demon! I told you to do it slowly!"

"If I had absorbed these myself, I could've done it in 30 minutes."

“...”

Jin meekly closed his mouth, suppressed his nausea, and quietly stood up. The fact that his body still lightly shook was kind of funny. Lee Shin Woo smiled bitterly and asked him a question.

“So, how was it? Do you feel a bit 'experienced' now?”

“Though it definitely feels like a lot has changed, it's difficult to say what exactly has changed right now. I feel like it'll be difficult to figure out what's changed until I actually get into a fight... Moreover, I received way too many peoples' memories all at once, so I'm dizzy. Give me some time to organize it all.”

They were words that caused him to automatically nod his head. Originally, just using Bone Reinforcement isn't the end; that's because after the reinforcement is over, in the process of moving their body, they need to completely learn these skills through experience.

Then, it would be better to check something he could get a feel for right now that served as proof: the numbers.

“How much have your stats increased?”

“Strength by 7, Agility by 13, Health by 8, and Magic by 5... They've definitely gone up by a lot.”

“To me, the most shocking thing is the fact that your agility, which is already over 800, went up by 13.”

It might've been obvious, but the higher the level, and the higher the stats, the more difficult it becomes to increase one's stats. Despite that, the stat that showed the most growth for Jin was his agility...

“You said that you need 1,600 stats to become level 5, right? I have a total of 1,400 stats right now, so... If we do this a few more times, I should get to level 5, right?”

“It's not that simple. If you absorb a monster's bone that you've already absorbed before, its effect lessens more and more. The reason I asked you to fill that bag to the brim and come back was because I calculated that with roughly this many bones, the effectiveness wouldn't drop.”

“Ugh...”

Jin could do nothing but nod in response. The more the reinforcement was repeated, the more the stat growth from the bones would gradually lessen, and in the end, they pretty much wouldn't ever increase.

“Then what you're saying is...?”

“Yeah. We have to hunt monsters befitting our level. If it's possible, the monsters of a higher level than us, too.”

“But it's tougher the higher level the monster is because their memories are denser!”

“Isn't that better?”

“No way. If I don't do something about this guy, then...!”

Lee Shin Woo snickered at Jin, who was gritting his teeth and spoke.

“For the time being, I want to focus on my own reinforcement. Will that be ok with you? Because I think it'd be better if our levels matched.”

“Alright. Then, for the time being, I won't use that skill.”

“Good work.”

“...T-Then...”

Was he shaking off his dizziness? Jin extremely carefully turned to his side and spoke to Lee Shin Woo.

“Can you get on?”

“Yeah, I think I can.”

It seemed obvious, but he had never really ridden on horseback when he lived in Korea. Even when he did, it was only on a high school trip to Jeju Island, and he had gotten help then. The appearance of his friend's horse, galloping in front of him while pooping had left a deep impression on him...

“It's a relief that you're undead.”

“You wanna go?”

However, Lee Shin Woo had the memories of the countless soldiers and knight aspirants who were active in the past Empire. It hadn't become a skill yet, but if he rode...

“Umhp, as I thought. It feels like it'll work.”

“Ugh...”

After he had somehow gotten atop Jin, Lee Shin Woo successfully maintained his balance even without a saddle. His dormant experiences were given shape and were aiding him. Sure enough, immediately after, he got a message that he'd acquired a skill!

[You have learned the passive skill, Low Rank Horseback Riding Lv1. Agility has increased by 5. You can draw out the full potential of what you ride. The higher the level, the higher the buffs while riding in battle.]

Though each memory one by one wasn't enough, the combination of the countless hoarded memories and experiences had manifested into a low rank skill. Moreover, he had acquired additional stats from it!

When he thought that perhaps other skills lay dormant and were buried like this one, Lee Shin Woo felt great.

“Nice, Jin. Let's go.”

“...Yeah. I'm a horse. I'm just a Skeleton Horse...”

When he saw Jin, who was self-suggesting that he was a horse, Lee Shin Woo just laughed again. He had thought Jin had resolved himself by now, but it seemed like he still wasn't prepared. If he were in his position, he would feel just as agonized right now, so he could definitely understand him.

“Hoo... Alright. Where should we go?”

“For starters, let's take a lap around this city and check if there's anything we missed.”

“Ok.”

Jin weakly nodded and began to move. At that moment, Lee Shin Woo felt his body rapidly lean backward and was shocked, and grabbed tightly onto Jin. The surrounding landscape quickly passed by him, and it felt like he was time traveling!

“Hey!?”

“You wasted time because of me, so let's quickly look back and go!”

“If you keep running this fast, the only thing I'll be able to look back at is my previous lifeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!”

However, Jin didn't listen to him. Ultimately, it took Lee Shin Woo a few hours before he was somehow able to distinguish the surrounding objects clearly while Jin was running, and it soon developed into him training his Combat Sprint and Horseback Riding skills.

Chapter 10.3

Partner (3)

[The Low Rank Combat Sprint skill has become Lv8. Agility has increased by 2. Your instantaneous acceleration, as well as dynamic visual acuity increase proportionally to your agility.]

[The Low Rank Horseback Riding skill has become Lv3. Agility has increased by 1. By communicating with what you're riding, you can control it more easily.]

How long had he been holding out on top of Jin's back? At the end of this rigorous albeit short period of time, his extreme training resulted in his Low Rank Horseback Riding skill to rise to level 3; Lee Shin Woo's and Jin's senses were very gradually starting to overlap as a result.

“Ugh!?”

“Hoo, I feel like I'll survive now.”

Since their senses had started to overlap, Jin had no choice but to slow down his pace. If he ran at a speed beyond Lee Shin Woo's ability, then he would start feeling dizzy as well!

“Wouldn't it be better if you didn't level up your skill!?”

“No, since you've been running around like you've been lugging around a package on your back. You've been running up until now like a freight train and now you've barely 'class changed' into a trolley, you know?”

When they began to converse, Jin definitely slowed down for the first time, and it was a speed that Lee Shin Woo was likewise able to bear for the first time. To be honest, if he didn't use his Combat Sprint to its very limit, even this speed would've been too fast for him, but in any case, it was important that he was able to endure it.

“It's too slow. I'm bored...”

“For me, it still seems like the surrounding landscape is passing by a little too fast...”

By the time he noticed, they were near where Jin started running. In other words, in a few hours, they were able to run a lap around the city!... No, it might've even been a few laps.

“We haven't found anything yet. Let's take another lap.”

“It can't be helped I guess...”

Jin began to sprint again. For the first time, Lee Shin Woo realized that he was riding atop a horse and galloping away, and started to survey his surroundings.

Ever since he had acquired Mana Bone, his mana senses had become more sensitive, and after using these senses to search the area, there was something that stood out immediately. From behind at that.

“Hey, the undead are following behind us!”

“It's only natural that they'd be following us around like that. After all, we've been running around in the same city, and on the same route. Honestly, while we were travelling around the city, I got rid of a few of them.”

Hearing Jin's calm response, it seemed like this wasn't his first or second time doing something like this. Well, all this guy did was run until now, so it made sense that he'd have experience with the undead chasing behind him.

By running around the city, Jin had gathered all of the undead, and managed to gather them all into one group; such control was amazing.

“Hey, have you thought about talking with them?”

“What kind of conversation could I have with monsters like them!?”

This won't do. This guy's head isn't normal! He's been just idiotically running away from them, even though they were also undead; if he just lied to them, he would've been able to pass by without incident!

Lee Shin Woo just shook his head, but he didn't realize that he was in actuality, the one who was strange between the two. After all, not everyone could obtain the Acting skill.

“There's no good way of kiting the mobs... Wait. Kiting the mobs?”

“...I don't really know what that means, but why does it feel slightly ominous?”

Kiting mobs was a term commonly used in RPG settings; when it was too troublesome to hunt down the monsters one by one, a nimble player would aggro all the mobs in the area, gathering them all into one group.

If they worked together with a class who could use wide area skills, their effectiveness would increase by an absurd margin, and right now, Lee Shin Woo had...

“Alright, let's take care of them and then move on.”

“Ugh, as I thought...”

Humans could always turn danger into an opportunity to grow. Lee Shin Woo naturally turned around. No, to be exact, when he thought about wanting to turn around, his will was relayed to Jin, and Jin instinctually turned his body around. The effects of the leveled up Horseback Riding skill were definitely showing.

“Guh, this feels really weird.”

“Sorry, but try to bear with it since it'll help in battle from now on.”

As he spoke, he thoroughly surveyed the surrounding area. While he desperately endured so that he wouldn't fall off from Jin's back, Jin had very shrewdly drawn all of the mobs, so they were clumped in one place; the undead chasing after them numbered at least several thousand.

They were mostly skeletons, but he quite frequently saw Ghouls mixed in, as well as animals and monsters which had died and become undead. But since zombies were so slow, they lagged behind in the back.

“So you drew all the undead in this city, huh.”

“It seems like it's the undead's nature. When the mob begins to gather, they cause a commotion, and that commotion causes other undead to gather as well; when they get a hold of themselves, they seem to form a huge group like that.”

Seeing the calmly replying Jin, the stunned Lee Shin Woo seemed to blurt out.

“If a newbie hero was unlucky enough to get involved during that process, they would've died right there.”

“T-That's... I didn't think there'd be any other heroes besides me...”

“No, it's fine as long as you don't do it from now on. You won't need to do it from now on either.”

Lee Shin Woo raised his hand, extended his index finger, and aimed at the undead that were grouped together in one place while also chasing after them. Then, Jin asked doubtfully.

“I know how powerful your skill is, but will you hit them with it...? You're still at least 1 kilometer away. Should I get closer?”

“No, it's fine. Since I have something I need to prep before I shoot it.”

The first skill Lee Shin Woo had to activate wasn't his Catapult skill, but his Acid Poison Spray skill.

Of course, he wasn't talking about spraying his Acid Poison everywhere. He recollected how the Acid Ghoul and the King Slime concentrated their Acid Poison into a single point, and focused his attention on the tip of his index finger. The poison, which converted into mana, began to gather at that single point!

[Guwooh...]

“They're gradually getting closer.”

“I'm almost done.”

If he hadn't acquired the Mana Bone skill, which was considerably helpful in processing the mana that saturated his bones, it would've taken a considerable amount of effort to complete the task. The skill made the difficulty of controlling his Acid Poison much simpler.

“Good, then.”

Lee Shin Woo pushed all of the Acid Poison he could into the tip of his index finger, and next, activated his Flames of Revenge. Poison on the inside, flames on the outside!

With his know-how, just like last time, he focused on his flames, and those flames darkened to their limit; it felt as if there was dark matter in that space. At the same time, he also saw the presence of the flames disappear, as if the middle of his index finger had been cut off.

[The Low Rank Flames of Revenge skill has become Lv2. Magic has increased by 3. The diffusion force of the flames has increased.]

Was it because he concentrated the skill into one place? It had been a long time since his Flames of Revenge had leveled up. At the same time, the flames blazing atop his index finger intensified. It was at that moment that Lee Shin Woo figured out a new way of training his skill.

“I don't have flame resistance, though.”

Jin started to feel a gradually increasing heat from atop his back, and shook as if he were uneasy. Because of the Acid Poison Resistance skill book he had received from Lee Shin Woo, he learned Acid Poison Resistance and was able to resist Acid Poison to some degree, but he wasn't resistant to this level of fire!

“It doesn't burn allies, so don't worry. Then... I'm firing it!”

“Ugh...”

Lee Shin Woo's index finger was launched with a simple, weak sound. Just by seeing that, Jin looked like he himself was hurt by it, but Lee Shin Woo was accustomed to this kind of pain now, and didn't even feel an itch.

He checked the trajectory that his index finger drew in the air, and nodded his head in satisfaction. It was flying towards the center of the group of several thousand undead.

“How many of them do you think you'll kill with that?”

“All of them.”

“All of them?”

“Yeah. As long as I take one more step.”

“What step...”

Jin thought he was out of his mind, but when Jin tilted his head, Lee Shin Woo's Grenade had arrived at the center of the group of undead; with his command to self-destruct, it exploded grandly. At that moment it burst forth with a fearsome force of flames and poison!

[Kuaaaaahk!]

[Kihiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!]

Hundreds of level 1 undead at the center disappeared without even being able to scream, and even the level 2 and higher undead took significant damage. Moreover, since the poison and the flames had the quality of diffusing into the surrounding area, they were quickly expanding to encompass them within their range!

“Oh jeez, even the mana that's escaping is no joke.”

“That attack was definitely incredible, but what are you going to do now!? Even if they're low leveled, there're several thousands of them!”

“So what we're going to do now is...”

Lee Shin Woo measured the distance between them and the monsters. It was roughly 300 meters. Even by human standards, it wasn't very far, and it was a distance that quick monsters would be able to reach in only a few seconds.

“Cover your ears.”

“I don't have any ears, and I don't even have hands to cover them.”

“Well, I guess it can't be helped. Tough it out.”

And sound could travel the distance in only a second.

“Kill yourselvessssssssssssssssssssssss!”

[You used Low Rank Shriek of the Dead, and the enemies in the entire area fall into a frenzied and fearful state!]

[You have succeeded in using the skill while engaging more than 1000 foes! You have acquired a large amount of skill proficiency. The Low Rank Shriek of the Dead has

become Lv5. Magic has increased by 3. The skill's effect has become stronger, and the skill can affect a larger area.]

“Urgh!”

Jin screamed in anguish from Lee Shin Woo's momentary, horrific shriek. However, since Jin was Lee Shin Woo's ally, he wasn't affected by the skill in the least. Because of that, it took him a bit of time to realize the effect of the skill.

“What the hell are you doing all of a sudden... Huh?”

Jin abruptly shouted, and then quickly scanned his surroundings. The group of undead, which looked furious and would dash at them at first chance, didn't approach them anymore. To be more exact, they weren't worried about Lee Shin Woo or Jin any longer.

[Enemies. To think that there are this many enemies...!]

[My body is made of bones...!]

[Haha, I'll kill all the enemies of the Imperial Army!]

[Kyahaaaaahk!]

They each spat out a peculiar noise then stabbed with their swords, and swung their clubs at each other; seeing that, Jin looked puzzled and asked Lee Shin Woo.

“That's... What the hell is this?”

“The best tactic for not smearing your own hands with blood is using your enemies to defeat themselves. This'll show up on the test, so make sure you remember it.”

“...”

While Jin was speechless, the monsters fought intensely amongst themselves, confirming Lee Shin Woo's statement.

Furthermore, the monsters didn't really wander, and fought in around the same area, so the flames and the poison soon covered the entire battlefield. Thousands of monsters were being harmed by the DoT damage in real time.

“It probably wouldn't be very effective against high level monsters, but at least it's not out of my reach to slaughter a mob of monsters now. As expected, you can only do it with a large-scale ability.”

“A large-scale ability...”

Why does a level 3 skeleton have so many frightening abilities!? However, if he said that, it was obvious that Lee Shin Woo would just tell him it was all due to Bone Reinforcement, and that he should work harder, so Jin just kept his mouth shut.

While Jin kept his mouth shut, Lee Shin Woo concentrated on drawing the surrounding mana in order to recover the mana he was using to maintain his Flames of Revenge. The mana instantaneously entered and escaped him, so it was as if his entire body had become a passageway for mana.

[Gu... aah...]

[My... wife...]

Lee Shin Woo was busy harmonizing with the mana, so he didn't notice the passage of time, but honestly, everything was finished within 20 minutes.

The zombies, which arrived late, completely merged with the group, and the flames shifted and latched onto them. After they died horribly, they left Perium and bones in their place, and when all the undead had completely disappeared... a message appeared in front of Lee Shin Woo, one he hadn't expected at all.

[You have removed all the death within the city, 'Derita'. Though you haven't removed the curse, all the death energy in the entire area has faded, so no more undead will spawn in this area.]

[You have acquired 1 permit for God's Secret Shop. You have acquired 10,000 Perium. The proficiency of all your combat related skills increases.]

[The Beginner Avenger skill has become Lv8. When you meet the target of your revenge again, all abilities increase by 36%. The Beginner Power Slash skill has become Lv9. The power of the skill increases.]

Of those, Lee Shin Woo's attention lingered upon the message that appeared last.

[You have proven your qualification as a hero who lifts the darkness underground as a substitute of God's will. You have acquired the Hero's karma token. The growth rate of all skills increases by 10%. If you gather 10 of these tokens, you will become a true hero... but what a shame, it seems like this would be impossible for you.]

“Impossible, huh...”

“What's wrong?”

It seems that because Lee Shin Woo was the one who mostly 'purified' this city, Jin didn't receive this message. Lee Shin Woo replied like this to his question.

“It's nothing. It seems like I can't be a hero.”

“What are talking about all of a sudden?”

Lee Shin Woo just shrugged his shoulders and smiled. Whenever he got a karma token up until now, he would obtain a stat increase as well, but this time, he received a blessing that would increase his skill growth by 10% instead. He couldn't hold back his curiosity of what would happen if he obtained just one more token.

However, was it good or bad that he had become unable to gather all of them...? Even though he felt slightly complicated inside, he moved to collect all the loot with Jin. Right now, he needed to do what he could.

Chapter 10.4

Partner (4)

Lee Shin Woo used the bones they had collected on site and reinforced himself. Of course, level 1 bones were almost meaningless to him now, but he still repeatedly used Bone Reinforcement until he saw the phrase, [You have acquired all the experiences and memories that you could from XXX.]. He couldn't miss the opportunity to grow even a little bit more!

“Bone Reinforcement, Bone Reinforcement, Bone Reinforcement...”

“Ugh.”

Jin just got tired of seeing Lee Shin Woo continuously use Bone Reinforcement in place without pause. It wasn't a joke when Lee Shin Woo said that he could finish off 513 bones within 30 minutes. No, it was actually much worse.

In less than 1 second, he sorted out the bones he would absorb, then grabbed several of them at a time and activated Bone Reinforcement; it wasn't difficult for him to dispose of 100 bones within 1 minute.

“Bone Reinforcement... Oh, I'm done now.”

“You... Are you really human!?”

“Can't you see I'm a skeleton? You want a piece of me?”

As a result, Lee Shin Woo absorbed close to three thousand bones and left behind about one thousand of them, as he couldn't acquire anymore memories, experiences, and abilities from them. It didn't even take an hour.

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Dark Skeleton Avenger]

[Treasure Hunter and 1 other]

[Lv - 3 (Stat Effectiveness 125%)]

[Strength - 160 Agility - 169 Health - 164 Magic - 305]

[Passive Skills - Invisible Heart Lv3, Acting Lv6, Beginner Avenger Lv8, Low Rank Bursting Thunder Lv7, Low Rank Mana Bone Lv6, Low Rank Stealth Lv6, Low rank Command Lv1, Low Rank Horseback Riding Lv4]

[Active Skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv4, Low Rank Combat Sprint Lv8, Low Rank Shriek of the Dead Lv5, Low Rank Regeneration Lv2, Low Rank Catapult Lv3, Low Rank Flames of Revenge Lv2, Beginner Power Slash Lv9, Low Rank Harden Lv3, Low Rank Self-Destruct Lv2, Sacrifice Lv1, Intermediate Acid Poison Spray Lv2]

[Resistances - Holy: MAX, Curse: MAX, Acid: Low Rank Lv8, Ice: Intermediate Lv1]

“Man, I'm short a couple of stats so I can't level up.”

“So your stats don't go up even if you absorb three thousand bones, huh...”

“No, it's the opposite. It's actually gone up this much.”

Amongst the four thousand monsters Lee Shin Woo disposed of, there were basically no level 3 monsters. In other words, the absolute majority of the monsters were a lower level than him, so the fact that his stats rose by even this much was amazing. It was because Lee Shin Woo had ignorantly pushed ahead with quantity over quality.

“What are you going to do with the rest? I'm telling you ahead of time, but it's impossible for me. I can't, no way.”

“You sure are cowardly. Don't worry, they all have a use.”

Lee Shin Woo took out a huge bag from his inventory, shoved the hundreds of level 1 bones into it, and stamped onto the bag with all his might. Seeing that, Jin was stunned and tackled him.

“Is it for stress relief?”

“No, it's for healing.”

He continued to stamp on the bag and nodded his head once he saw the contents

within turn into a fine powder. Looking at the bag filled with fine bone powder, he felt like he was rich.

“For healing...?”

“Yeah. If you turn these into powder, all of the properties of the bones equalize, and though you become unable to acquire the memories or experiences within, the healing ability remains. Moreover, you can apply it to your entire body, so it's an advantage.”

“Ah.”

Jin had already experienced it, so he was well aware that Bone Reinforcement healed the portion of the body that it was applied to. In other words, Lee Shin Woo was processing the remaining bones, which he couldn't obtain anymore experiences or memories from, and turning them into medicine! It was also advantageous in that he could conveniently store it into his inventory now.

“I have the Regeneration skill, so I don't really need it, but it should be important for you.”

“You're being so considerate I feel like I'll cry.”

“Now then, let's...”

The remaining 200 bones were level 2 undead bones; it felt like too much of a waste to turn them into powder, so he didn't.

But when he told Jin to use them, Jin responded that it'd be too much for him right now; therefore, he only had one other option.

It was none other than weapon reinforcement.

'Bone of Thunder Lasting is at +8 right now, and I only have one more level 3 weapon reinforcement permit. In order for it to reach +10 and be reborn as a level 4 weapon, one of the reinforcements have to succeed.'

He gave up on the level 1 bones and weapons as he didn't think it would have any chance of succeeding with them, but what about level 2 bones? Wouldn't there be at least a slight chance? Jin saw Lee Shin Woo tremble as he grabbed a level 2 bone, and thought he looked like a gambling addict.

“...Bone Reinforcement.”

[Reinforcement has failed.]

[Reinforcement has failed.]

[Reinforcement has failed.]

The heap of bones they had acquired disappeared in an instant. He had already predicted that the probability of it working was low, but when he used up 100 bones in succession, Lee Shin Woo was shocked. He belatedly felt regretful, as he thought that it would be better to just sell them at the secret shop.

“But since I've already started, I can't stop.”

“You look really dumb right now.”

“Bone Reinforcement! Bone Reinforcement...!”

[Reinforcement has failed.]

[Reinforcement has failed.]

[Reinforcement has failed.]

[The Bone Reinforcement skill has become Lv5! The success rate of weapon reinforcement has increased. When you use Bone Reinforcement on bone weapons, the effectiveness increases.]

“Good, Bone Reinforcement!”

“You don't have any more bones, though.”

“Oh...”

Lee Shin Woo looked around dejectedly, but Jin was right; there weren't any bones left. The 200 level 2 bones were completely gone now. The only result was that his Bone Reinforcement leveled up...

“It feels like if I just do it once more it would've worked!”

“That's something only gambling addicts say.”

Even if he wanted to reinforce his weapons, he didn't have any more bones, so he couldn't do anything. Lee Shin Woo wasn't naturally the type to get attached to failure, so he just lightly sighed, shook off his regrets, and got atop Jin.

He had personally received a message confirming that he didn't have any more business in this city, so he didn't need to linger and check. It was time for him to leave.

“So where to now?”

“Didn't you originally run around here a lot? Let's go to one of the places with a lot of level 3-4 monsters.”

“Y-Yeah... fine. Let's go.”

Honestly, Jin was still a bit afraid of level 4 monsters, but when he remembered Lee Shin Woo's previous slaughter of thousands of monsters, he mustered his courage and began to move. He felt like even if a level 5 elite monster showed up, rather than a level 4 monster, Lee Shin Woo would be able to win somehow.

While he comfortably gave Jin the reins and entrusted him with leading him, Lee Shin Woo opened the chatting channel. It very slightly felt like he was on the phone while driving.

[Mr. Lee Shin Woo has entered.]

[Lloyd H.K.: Oh, Lee Shin Woo! I heard the news. So you met with Ye Jin Jin?]

[Lee Shin Woo: It's a relief that you're safe, Senior.]

[Prince Altania: Considering how he's adapted to this world already... More importantly, what did you get for saving Ye Jin Jin? I just heard that the reward was really amazing, but I don't know what it is since I've never gotten it before.]

[Erian Ruparte: Lee Shin Woo! Thanks a lot. Because of you, Ye Jin Jin was able to survive!]

As soon as Lee Shin Woo accessed the chatting channel, all of his seniors hectically greeted him. It seems like, just like she said she would, Ye Jin Jin had uproariously

chatted about him in the channel.

Honestly, that was an issue that she had talked to Lee Shin Woo about; if he improved his friendship with the other heroes beforehand, they might not be too repulsed by the fact that he was a skeleton when they find out later... which was a plan that came about from their shallow thinking. For reference, they didn't really talk about Jin.

[Shino Rendu: Good work, Lee Shin Woo. Whether you acted because of the reward or because you saw the person, we heroes have to stick together.]

[Yasunori Akira: You're seriously way too hot-blooded... In any case, good job, Lee Shin Woo.]

[Seira Von Retadane: It was really unexpected that you were both in the same area. But... but it was truly a relief.]

[Lee Shin Woo: I got a quest to clear out all the undead in the city, so while I was doing that quest... I was just lucky.]

[Prince Altania: Ah, that...]

Of course, it was a lie, but he was curious as to how his seniors would respond to this lie. As expected, Prince Altania, who seemed the most loose lipped amongst his seniors, was fooled by his lie.

[Prince Altania: You just need to do that once. Did you get the Hero's karma token?]

[Lee Shin Woo: Yes.]

This was it. This was the information that he wanted! Lee Shin Woo pricked his ears and Prince Altania explained.

[Prince Altania: If you have that, it's great since your skill growth rate increases, but once you get that one, you don't really need to get another one. It may not take very long since it was just a small city, but the further you delve into the Empire, the larger the cities become. I'm telling you, you won't be able to keep them under control later on. The karma tokens normally don't drop very often so it's impossible to gather 10 of them from the start.]

[Lee Shin Woo: So it would seem.]

[Prince Altania: Moreover, the important thing is that if you start extensively wiping out the undead, the other undead will sniff that out and gather, so you'll have to continue battling them unceasingly. If something goes wrong, even a hero can die.]

[Lloyd H.K.: But hey, isn't that exactly why God chose us as heroes...? I'm talking about purifying the Empire.]

[Shino Rendu: At the start, I somehow succeeded in cleaning up a small city and gained a Hero's token. I thought that there might be a chance that I could amplify the effects of the token, so I risked my life to enter a few cities and tried to clear out the undead, but getting one more token doesn't amplify the effects at all...]

[Prince Altania: Are you dumb? Tokens of the same kind don't amplify the effect. Get all 10 of them or stick to one.]

[Shino Rendu: This asshole... I was a newbie back then too!]

He had already gained a lot of good info. Lee Shin Woo took note of all the precious information and opened his mouth again. With a voice that relayed his seriousness and his sense of duty as best he could!

[Lee Shin Woo: Since you're saying it's a hero's duty, I'll clear as many of them as I can and then go up.]

Of course, it was a lie. He had already chosen the Joker's karma, so he didn't really need to put in the effort of collecting all 10 of the Hero's karma tokens! If he ended up cleaning up a city, it wouldn't be because he was burning with the desire to fulfill his mission as a hero, but because he wanted to collect materials for Bone Reinforcement!

[Prince Altania: This guy's like Lloyd... If you do that, it'll take a long time for you to reach level 5.]

[Lloyd H.K.: See, that's what a hero should be like!]

[Erian Ruparte:... You're cool, Lloyd.]

[Seira Von Retadane: Mr. Lee Shin Woo, you're doing well. Since we must allow the undead in the Empire to rest in peace...]

[Ethan Cruz: I'm pleased that there're more heroes acting like heroes now.]

At that moment, Lee Shin Woo felt like time had stopped within the chatting channel. At the very least, when he heard a middle-aged man's voice cut in, one that he heard for the very first time, he felt speechless! However, Lloyd soon responded to him.

[Lloyd H.K.: Oh, Senior!]

[Yasunori Akira: It's been a long time.]

[Prince Altania: I'm glad you're safe, Senior.]

If even the Prince addressed him with an honorific, then his position as a senior in the chatting channel must be unwavering. Lee Shin Woo followed their lead for now, and politely greeted him.

[Lee Shin Woo: I'm a newbie who got here just a little while ago. Please take care of me, Senior.]

[Ethan Cruz: Ooh, it's a pleasure. But you have such good manners, so it makes me kind of uncomfortable. Just speak comfortably.]

[Lee Shin Woo: Haha... I'll try my best.]

[Ethan Cruz: Good. I hope we get to see each other for a long time. Ah, by the way, Lloyd. Is Seira doing alright too?]

[Lloyd H.K.: Yes, Senior. She's alright.]

[Seira Von Retadane:... Please, go ahead.]

[Ethan Cruz: I have something I'd like you to help me with. The capital's thorn castle walls...]

His seniors began talking about places or geographical features he didn't know about at this time, and Lee Shin Woo thought he'd obtained all the information he could for now, so he decided to carefully say his farewells and leave. However, before he could, Ethan Cruz called him.

[Ethan Cruz: Work hard, Lee Shin Woo. You might think about a lot of things as you stand up against the Empire, but... all you need to remember is that all the undead are our, humanity's enemies.]

[Lee Shin Woo:... Yes.]

None of his seniors refuted his statement that all undead are enemies of humanity.

As he thought, the heroes in the chatting channel didn't know about the undead who didn't loathe humanity and had proper reasoning.

Or they were acting like they didn't know about them.

Chapter 11.1

Lightning Tooth (1)

[Lee Shin Woo: Then I'll get going now. I'll come back later.]

[Lloyd H.K.: Alright. Don't die, Lee Shin Woo. Hmm... yeah. Anyway, let's talk later.]

[Erian Ruparte: Are you leaving already? Jin Jin will be disappointed.]

[Prince Altania: Hey, I'm just putting this out there, but don't go overboard with the romance. If your relationship gets too deep and one of you dies first, the other will go crazy.]

[Lee Shin Woo: Romance? Hahaha...]

It seems that his senior heroes who, after hearing that he'd saved a hero of the opposite sex, thought it was plausible given the situation and had misunderstood, but... so long as Ye Jin Jin didn't have an extremely peculiar disposition, he didn't think they had anything to worry about.

Indeed, if his seniors were to ascertain his true identity, what would they think? Lee Shin Woo couldn't stop laughing at the thought. However, around the time when he'd quickly left the chatting channel, Jin called to him with some nice timing.

“Shin Woo, we're here.”

“Wow.”

It had only been a few minutes since he started talking to his seniors, yet he realized that the landscape had completely changed in that short time and exclaimed. It had definitely been flatland just a little while ago, but right now, it was the edge of a plateau.

“The view's nice.”

“You think the view's nice? It's terrible compared to my homeland's natural

environment... To the point that I feel nauseous.”

Lee Shin Woo laughed bitterly at Jin's statement. There wasn't anything remaining in the underground empire to call 'natural' anymore, so he wasn't wrong.

As an aftereffect of the curse, all the grass, flowers, and trees decayed, so all this empire really had left was rock, dilapidated buildings, filth, and undead. But when he looked down from up high in a remote location, he admired the view; it looked quite nice.

It felt like the moment Charlie Chaplin won 1st place again. When one looks at their life, their battles, or even this dirty and crude underground empire from afar, it actually looks quite nice.

“You'll have to survive in this Empire as well from now on, so try your best.”

“I'm really jealous of that mentality of yours.”

They tried to find the traces of where they had just been. They had left it just a little while ago, and as such, they saw the city they had departed from not very far away; strangely, the surrounding area was completely covered with a black mist, yet only the city was covered in a faint mist. It seems like it was an effect of them clearing out all of the undead.

“Hmm...?”

At that moment, Lee Shin Woo discovered something peculiar. He wanted to see what lay beyond the city, but there was a truly huge wall that blocked his vision, so he couldn't check. Seeing the wall that was god knows how high, he gasped.

However, when he looked thoroughly, he saw a huge hole at the bottom of the wall. It was a passageway that allowed access to the city.

“That means... that's the external passageway that leads to the surface. Does this mean this is the end of the Empire?”

“How do you think they made a wall like that...?”

“It's the opposite. They dug through the ground here and created the Empire, so they probably weren't the one who made the wall. Though they were probably the ones

who strengthened the wall.”

In a sense, that was even more amazing. They had dug a tremendous depth and width underground to fit the Empire, and fixed it so that the ceiling or the walls wouldn't collapse... After listening to Lee Shin Woo, Jin seemed to have realized something and sported a vacant expression.

“It's something I couldn't even imagine happening in my home world.”

“So your world didn't have magic either, huh.”

“I'm more surprised that you came from a world without magic.”

Lee Shin Woo chuckled at Jin's reply and turned around. They couldn't be overwhelmed by the scale of the Empire forever. Rather than figuring out the magic that they used to create the Empire, it was more important to improve his stats right now.

“Then... Huh?”

He looked around, and pondered where he should start his conquest. However, it was troubling that this vast area was a plateau, as there were no undead in sight.

Indeed, there was nothing to think deeply about; ultimately, undead were beings which had once been alive and had been reborn, so they would appear in environments which could foster life, not a place like this where there were only rocks and boulders.

“I don't sense any undead here.”

“You said you wanted to find monsters. I never said anything about them being undead.”

“You're right, but... From the start, most of the monsters that can move around in the fields are undead, aren't they?”

Lee Shin Woo recollected the unwavering thesis regarding the curse that covered the Empire, and spoke. The curse would kill all living organisms and transform them into the undead. It had already been several dozens of years since the curse had emerged, so there shouldn't be any other living organisms within the Empire, aside from the

heroes.

The only exception would be the living organisms living in an environment cut off from the Empire, the dungeons. Even so, the individuals who bore the curse, entered the dungeons, and died would ultimately become undead. Like the Pauls who were in the secret facilities.

“Nope. There are some, you know?”

However, Jin stubbornly persisted, and disagreed. Lee Shin Woo sighed, as he didn't know where to begin with this newbie hero, but soon, he was faced with the proof that Jin wasn't wrong.

[Sensing mana response from living bodies. Beginning movement.]

[Stopping outside entry. Unless directed otherwise, automatically removing trespassers.]

[Lv3 Stone Golem]

[Lv3 Stone Golem]

“Oh...”

“See, what did I tell you?”

Lee Shin Woo, who saw the neglected rocks and boulders within the plateau gradually gather together and form into a huge shape, stared dumbfounded while listening to Jin's proud boast, and just nodded his head.

'They weren't alive from the beginning, so there's no way they'd be affected by the curse. However, even so... '

To think he'd see slimes and then golems so soon after being dropped into the Empire; after all, they were regulars in fantasy. He just needed to meet goblins, elves, and dragons now, and it felt like he wouldn't have any regrets. Though it was probably impossible.

He raised his weapon whilst thinking of something so idiotic. He wasn't wielding Bone of Thunder Lasting, which had established itself as his main weapon; instead, he wielded the Melting Bone Double Axe, as he felt a weighty axe would be more effective

against huge and crude enemies like golems.

[Removing trespassers.]

[Beginning attack in order to figure out the enemies' magic patterns.]

The huge golems, which seemed to be about 3 meters tall, spoke politely and then dashed towards them, stamping on the ground while doing so. They gave off a truly bizarre pressure, but Lee Shin Woo didn't fall back. He tightly gripped the axe that was almost as tall as he was, exerted his strength, and his (nonexistent) eyes gleamed.

“Grasping my magic pattern, huh... I'm doing the same.”

Seeing them run was enough for Lee Shin Woo to tell that their agility was low for level 3s. But they were definitely a lot higher than him in terms of strength and health. However...

“Shall we?”

“I heard you just say that you're definitely weaker than them just now.”

“Let's take down the leftmost one first, so that we don't get surrounded. Charge!”

“Ah, seriously!”

Even while complaining, Jin followed his command and rushed towards the leftmost charging golem. Jin sprinted at such a speed that the golem couldn't even react!

Lee Shin Woo desperately focused so that he wouldn't be treated like a package again. He instinctually activated his Combat Sprint and focused all his attention in front. They quickly passed by the surrounding landscape, and in that accelerated time, the golems moved extremely slowly... Then the golem they had chosen as their target soon appeared!

'I already knew, but he's really fast! Plus, he's so precise that it makes me feel goosebumps...!'

Indeed, Jin's ability was astounding. He applied his agility, which was incomparable to that of the Stone Golems, and had superb control, getting them close to the golem without ever touching it.

Though their communication was still poor, if they took into consideration the fact that Jin hadn't received any special training as a horse, his skill was amazing.

[Tress... pass...!]

Was it because he was communicating with the highly agile Jin? It wasn't enough that his dynamic visual acuity had been enhanced, but he was also starting to hear things at a slower pace as well. It was funny, as the golems sounded like they were bugged, as they kept cutting off.

The end came quickly. One breath was divided into ten, and he then divided them into another ten; when he counted six of those, he found his timing! He wasn't as surprised at Jin's shocking speed so much as he was able to match and respond to it.

'Now! Power Slash!'

The moment Lee Shin Woo passed by the left golem, he narrowly matched the timing and struck with his axe. As quick and powerful as lightning! While only muttering those words!

Though it was the first time he'd wielded the axe, the superlative martial arts technique, Bursting Thunder was amazing, and though the strike wasn't sharp, it allowed him to pack the weight of the axe within the strike.

[Critical Hit!]

The moment his axe struck the golem's flank, the slowed down passage of time instantaneously returned to normal. An absurd roar spread throughout the plateau.

The outcome was truly brutal. The golem wasn't able to bear the force of his attack and crumbled right on the spot. After breaking the golem into pieces, Lee Shin Woo and Jin couldn't be at ease, as they were struck by a rebound force that shook their entire bodies; it was to the point that it was momentary difficult for them to stand.

[You have hunted a Lv3 Stone Golem.]

“Oh.”

Lee Shin Woo hadn't expected this development, and spoke perplexedly. He thought it would've taken at least two or three hits to beat it, but a one touch kill? Moreover, he

had moved so fast and had taken care of the enemy so quickly that the other golem hadn't figured out his location yet.

“You... you're so overpowered.”

“From my point of view, you're the overpowered one.”

The two heroes looked at each other in amazement. They realized that they made up for what the other lacked, but this was still too ridiculous.

Of course, Jin's role in helping Lee Shin Woo take down the Stone Golem, which was rumored to have an especially high defense, was huge.

It was obvious logic that the faster they moved, the more powerful the attack would be, and Jin's speed had changed a normal attack into a killing blow. Though, it required him to adapt to that speed and be able to control it during the moment before striking to optimally use it.

If Jin's part was 60%, then 30% of it was the weapon. The Melting Bone Double Axe was a suitable intermediate weapon to fundamentally gather all his strength into one point and burst it out all at once, and its level was also higher than the Stone Golem, being a level 4 weapon.

Furthermore, since the weapon had an option that increased his strength by 25, it was the most suitable weapon for destructive power. Besides, it had an option for acid. Even if he didn't finish his enemy off in one hit, the Acid Poison that came after would pour out into the area and melt them.

The remaining 10% was obviously Bursting Thunder, which allowed him to use the two elements properly and land a hit on his enemy.

Just by learning the skill, the practitioner is able to properly wield a weapon they've never held before, keep their center of gravity whilst gripping the weapon, and deduce the enemy's weaknesses; if he didn't have this skill, regardless of how amazing the individual elements were, he wouldn't have been able to finish off the Stone Golem in one hit.

[Confirming the destruction of 1 Autonomous Puppet.]

[Adjusting the assessment of enemy's strength upwards.]

[Impossible to respond to enemy's speed. Initiating long range bombardment mode.]

While Lee Shin Woo briefly spaced out due to the much too unexpected result, the golems recognized the severity of the situation and began to move differently. Lee Shin Woo felt slightly anxious when he heard about their long range bombardment mode, but Jin looked confident as ever.

“Those are slow too. Don't worry.”

“Right, you said you came here before.”

If that's the case, then he had the time to collect the loot. Lee Shin Woo bent his body and collected the loot from the floor. He was really looking forward to the appearance of a 'pet that collects the loot for you' that always appears in games, but it would never happen.

[You have acquired 3,700 Perium.]

[You have acquired an Autonomous Defensive Type Core. The core is changing. You have acquired an Autonomous Defensive Type Bone Core.]

“A core, huh...”

“Is this another material for Bone Reinforcement by any chance?”

“Of course it is. Plus, I don't even need to burn them one by one, so it's better than the slimes.”

“Burn? Slimes?”

He had felt slightly anxious when he'd stood atop the plateau and seen the golems, but after picking up a core, he thought differently. He didn't have time to waste when his growth was right before him!

[Firing...]

“Heup!”

Lee Shin Woo counted the number of golems that had revealed themselves in the entire area, and the moment he raised his axe for the second time, Jin, who he had

communicated with, kicked off the floor without even needing a signal.

Before the golems could even fire their prepared bombardment, Lee Shin Woo and Jin had already closed the distance. Then, Lee Shin Woo swung his axe with all his strength.

[Critical Hit!]

Chapter 11.2

Lightning Tooth (2)

The way the golems went about with their bombardment made him think back to the Ratman launching its nails. By human standards, they were forcefully discharging the rocks attached to their arms and using the surrounding rocks to replenish their losses.

“Seems like if you take a wrong step here, it'll be the end for you.”

Lee Shin Woo muttered, as he dodged the raining rock shells and drove his axe into a golem's body. If he had come here by himself, he wouldn't die, but he would've had to put in a lot of effort to clear out all of them.

But that 'end' had now become an impossible proposition. Compared to Jin's level, no, even compared to his own level, whilst riding on Jin's back the golem's bombardment was incredibly slow. Even if they shot the rocks point blank, they would be able to dodge them quite easily.

“So it seems like if there's a large difference between agility, then ranged attacks almost become completely ineffectual...”

[Ceasing... operation...]

While he was fighting against the golems, he suddenly realized how important agility was. The Acid Ghoul was able to intercept his shot without much difficulty because of its agility as well.

So long as it doesn't swerve along the way, and one can read the trajectory of the shot, one could avoid it without much difficulty; when he considered that the one dodging the projectile had more of an advantage than the one doing the shooting, if one wanted to kill someone with a long range attack, then he concluded that they would have to be much faster than their opponent.

Fast enough that they can't read the trajectory of the shot, and fast enough that they can't grasp the timing of the shot.

“If we were to say something like this on our home worlds, we would've been subject to ridicule.”

“Is that something you should be saying? I'm the one dodging all of the shells coming from everywhere!”

The first condition for surviving in this world was to accept that they had become a member of this world, and their preexisting common sense was invalid and couldn't be applied to this world. Based on that criteria, the two of them had passed those conditions with flying colors.

“Ah, there aren't any more.”

Had they crushed all of the golems? Once he'd taken care of the golems that had first responded to him and looked up, there weren't any more rocks in the entire area. Once broken, they were neither golems nor boulders anymore, and it seemed only natural that only the considerably large boulders were golems.

“What should we do now? Should we go across from there?”

“The region that these guys are in charge of seems to be strictly divided.”

If Lee Shin Woo walked for around a minute, he could reach an area with normal rock formations. But if he stepped one foot in, those rocks would immediately emerge as golems.

Even now, that area wasn't very far off. It certainly felt strange, the golems seemingly being measured and divided, as only the golems of a fixed area had responded to them. It felt like someone had decided that 'you guys are in charge from here up to here.'

“For starters, are these guys really formed naturally?”

“That's what we have to figure out now.”

Even with the shells flying towards him unceasingly, he could still fight, but the same couldn't be said about the loot; he had to leave them behind. He lead Jin around the whole area, and collected the sprawled cores and Perium off the floor.

[You have acquired 3,200 Perium.]

[You have acquired a Autonomous Defensive Type Bone Core.]

“Though they're level 3, they don't leave much Perium behind unless they're elites.”

“Where do you even use that?”

“Well, I completely understand where you're coming from since you've never gone to the secret shop before.”

He'd acquired 3,000 Perium from the golem, but it was only a third of what he'd gotten from the similarly leveled elite Great Slime. Of course, it was difficult to find even one Great Slime, but the Stone Golems were comparatively easy to find, as they were spread across the plateau area, so they made up for their quality with quantity.

After he'd raked in all of the Perium from the entire area, he checked how much total Perium he'd collected.

[Total Perium - 445,870]

“Hoo.”

Was this what it feels like to be amazed at how much has changed in such a short period of time? It felt like just a few days ago he had unhesitatingly told Pleine his story in exchange for a 20,000 Perium discount, but now, he had already amassed 445,870 Perium. Of course, there were a few special circumstances that helped in that.

“Shin Woo, there's something over here.”

“Ah.”

[Lv2 Stone Gloves]

It looked like it was armor. The gloves looked like they were made of stupidly tough rock, and he wondered whether this would actually be effective in fending off his opponent's attacks; but on the contrary, he had his suspicions that these would actually cause more harm to his hands. At the very least, Lee Shin Woo didn't really want to equip them.

[You have acquired Lv2 Stone Gloves. Through Bone Reinforcement, the item is changing. Your compatibility with the item is high, causing a special change.]

However, the moment Lee Shin Woo touched the gloves, something strange happened. It was a message he had never seen before, and what's worse, it was a message he hadn't even seen when his Melting Bone Double Axe had risen in level!

[You have acquired Lv3 Fossil Gloves (+5).]

“...”

But when he saw the outcome of that change, his (nonexistent) eyes naturally narrowed. Rocks and bone had come together, and had become a fossil; he wanted to tackle the Bone Reinforcement ability itself.

“But fossils aren't technically bones...”

“Why do you need scientific knowledge all of a sudden?”

“Nah, it's fine. It's good for me, anyway.”

Even if teeth or nails were regarded as bones, he just decided to let it go. Lee Shin Woo decided not to nitpick on each and every aspect of his ability. In any case, not only had his item leveled up, it had also been reinforced to +5, so he was satisfied.

...Though he still didn't have any intention of equipping them.

“Good, then there's only one other option.”

“You're doing it again?”

Lee Shin Woo didn't answer Jin's question, and quietly raised the Fossil Gloves (+5). In his other hand, he held not his axe, but his sword, the Bone of Thunder Lasting (+8).

It wasn't an item he would equip, so he didn't consider it to be a stupid gamble. While trying his very best to ignore the other option of using the equipment to reinforce his own bones...!

Something happened the moment Lee Shin Woo was about to use his Bone Reinforcement. One of the bone cores he still hadn't stored into his inventory seemed to shine brightly, and a message appeared in front of him.

[If you consume a bone core and then attempt reinforcement, the success rate

increases. If you use the bone core as a material for an equipment's reinforcement, it will increase even further. It is possible to use several at once in the reinforcement.]

“Huh...!?”

When he thought about it, he remembered reading that normally monsters' cores are used to produce weapons, or manufacture medicine. However, it turned out that the core itself had the power to reinforce equipment. Perhaps the equipment reinforcement permit also functioned by using the power of a core?

Just a little while ago, he felt like he had wanted to 'try it out', but now that he'd read that message, he trusted that the success rate would increase significantly by using the cores, though he had no basis for that. Lee Shin Woo put aside the Fossil Gloves for now, grabbed a bone core in one hand, and used Bone Reinforcement!

[Bone Reinforcement has succeeded.]

[Bone of Thunder Lasting +9]

[Lv3]

[Durability: 1,120/1,120]

[Attack Power: 300 - 400]

[Options: Strength +21, Agility +21, Power of Bursting Thunder skill +19%]

“Oh, Ooooh...!”

It had really succeeded with just one try! Lee Shin Woo was moved and embraced his weapon. However, Jin spoke calmly by his side.

“Shin Woo, on the ground.”

“Huh?... No...”

It was at that time that Lee Shin Woo finally realized that every single one of the bone cores he'd gathered in one place had disappeared.

There were a few inside his inventory that were still safe, but the rest disappeared.

There were more than ten of them there, and the moment he used his reinforcement, they had resonated without his consent!

“...”

He gained new knowledge again. If he used bone cores to reinforce his equipment, the cores would resonate as they pleased! It had increased...!

Fortunately, the price came cheap. It was such a relief that he hadn't attempted to reinforce his equipment while he had 100 bone cores laid out!

Especially since, if he hadn't gathered the bone cores and attempted the reinforcement, he didn't know how long he'd be stuck without being able to succeed. So this was fine. It was fine.

“Shin Woo, are you crying?”

“I'm not crying.”

He replied bitterly, removed the final remaining level 3 equipment reinforcement permit from his inventory, and raised it.

Even if he inspected his Bone of Thunder Lasting one more time, it was still at +9. He grit his teeth and used the reinforcement permit. Then, radiant light spewed out of the weapon and a tremendous amount of mana surged. This dense mana seemed to be able to change the very material of the weapon, and heated up the air.

[The Lv3 Bone of Thunder Lasting has evolved into the Lv4 Lightning Tooth!]

[Lightning Tooth]

[Lv4]

[Durability: 1,500/1,500]

[Attack Power : 450 - 480]

[Element: Lightning Lv4]

[Options: Strength +25, Agility +25, Power of Bursting Thunder +20%]

“This is...”

Seeing his completely transformed weapon, Lee Shin Woo interjected. It was a completely different weapon from the level 4 weapon, Thunder Lasting, that he'd acquired from the zombie turned hero.

By coming into his possession, it had deteriorated into bone in the past, but at least, the current Lightning Tooth didn't seem inferior to the Thunder Lasting; there was no mistake that it was actually much stronger than Thunder Lasting. That's because two tremendous powers had collided, ultimately harmonizing, and the outcome was its evolution.

“Wow, even if you compare it to the axe, the energy coming off that thing's no joke.”

“You have considerable talent in mana as well, huh. You're right. They're both level 4, but this weapon's exceptional and is incomparable to the axe. It's not an exaggeration to say that this bone contains God's power.”

“At any rate, it's a bone, huh...”

The blade consisted of a bone gleaming in blue light, and was longer, and sharper than before; the fact that there was a slight power of lightning within had surfaced, and began to spark.

He was excited thinking about what would happen if he held this weapon and used an intermediate level of Bursting Thunder. Thus, Lee Shin Woo was spurred on to train his Bursting Thunder even more diligently than before.

'Acid and lightning. Flames... Then, this makes me want to use the other elements a bit.'

If he only had one element out of three, that would be plenty to represent him as a hero, yet he was still greedy for more even though he had three. He still hadn't realized at this point that he possessed abilities that would more than shock his senior heroes.

- Gugugugugu

However, when Lee Shin Woo was fascinated with the power of his weapon, the once silent plateau area suddenly vibrated. What's worse, the vibrations gradually became worse!

Did the golems wake up? If that's not it, was it a natural earthquake? Both of those were wrong. The golems were still quietly staying in their places, and it obviously wasn't an earthquake. Then, what was it?

[Goooooooooooooh!]

“Mm, as I thought.”

Lee Shin Woo heard the faint cry from afar, nodded his head, and spoke, as if he had expertly anticipated it. Around now, it started to feel like a traditional event.

He quickly put the Fossil Gloves and his sword into his inventory, and cleanly used up the two remaining bone cores to reinforce his bones. His health increased by 1, so now he only needed 1 more stat point before he leveled up.

“What the hell is this? It's like there's a huge monster on the move, but I can't tell if it's actually coming!”

“Calm down, Jin. Since I already know what it is.”

“You can't even see it yet, so how do you know?”

“I just know.”

Around the time Lee Shin Woo calmly answered Jin, who was even more flustered than when he had fought the Acid Ghoul, the enemy revealed itself beyond the horizon.

It was rushing towards them, yet the golems didn't stand up and attack it. It seems like it wasn't considered a trespasser.

“What kind of monster could it be!? Don't we need to run away!?”

“There's no way to completely get away from it once it's picked its 'target'...Though it's level may be different, I have experience fighting them, so wait for now.”

Of course, he didn't really have any memories of fighting it from the front. This time too, he didn't plan on fighting it face-to-face. There were a multitude of ways to kill an enemy besides slicing off their head.

Around that time, Jin was able to confirm the identity of their enemy with his own two

eyes, and spoke in vivid horror.

“Lv5...!? Can we win!?”

“...Even if we can't, we have to fight. That's what the Empire's all about.”

“That's...”

Lee Shin Woo comforted the confused Jin and checked his opponent. It had less than a couple hundred meters to go, and the appearance of a monster filled his eyes, one which he was familiar with to the point that it felt slightly tedious.

[Lv5 Treasure Eater]

Steve, who he hadn't seen in a long time, was here.

Chapter 11.3

Lightning Tooth (3)

The level 5 Treasure Eater roamed the underground in search for higher leveled treasures.

However, by leveling up, the Treasure Eater's eyesight had drastically improved, and there weren't many items that it recognized as treasures. Thunder Lasting, which had dropped to level 3, had returned to level 4 and had actually become more powerful, transforming into the Lightning Tooth, thereby becoming enticing enough prey to draw the Treasure Eater.

[Lv5 Treasure Eater]

In the end, it wasn't a level 4 Treasure Eater that had arrived, but a level 5 one! He knew there'd be a day that he'd meet one again, but he didn't think he'd have to fight against one that was two levels higher than him...

Despite feeling slightly concerned, Lee Shin Woo greeted the Treasure Eater with unmistakable excitement and joy.

“Hey, Steve...?”

[Guwooooooooooooooh!]

[The Treasure Eater used Shriek of the Dead. Those exposed to this shriek momentarily fall into a frenzied and fearful state.]

[Invisible Heart nullifies the effects of Shriek of the Dead.]

However, the Treasure Eater responded to his lively greeting with Shriek of the Dead. ‘What shitty manners,’ he thought, while Jin spoke from beside him whilst persistently gritting his teeth.

“You learned that yelling skill from the same species as that weird bug, right?”

“Yep. How're you holding up?”

“Somehow...”

Lee Shin Woo naturally wasn't affected by the scream, and Jin wasn't either. It wasn't because they were undead, or because Jin was a horse, but because of his Horseback Riding skill; it was because they were connected, albeit superficially.

In other words, the status ailment that Jin should've received was shared with Lee Shin Woo, and in the process, Invisible Heart had completely taken care of it.

[Goooooooooooooh!]

Since its shriek was ineffective, the Treasure Eater seemed pissed and charged. The golems that were spread across the highlands rolled to either side, making a path for the Treasure Eater so that they wouldn't get in the way. It was as if they were saying 'It's not our problem. Take care of it amongst yourselves, whether you have to fight or kill each other.!'!

Jin spoke slightly urgently towards Lee Shin Woo, who was nodding, feeling as though the golems' IQ was higher than he had thought.

“How the hell are you going to fight against that idiot?”

“Hmm... I'll think about it after getting some more info.”

The level 2 Treasure Eater didn't have any special abilities aside from Shriek of the Dead or Roar of Healing.

However, the level 3 Treasure Eater possessed an outrageous ability, the Flames of Resentment, instead of the Roar of Healing (it might've had it, but at the very least, he didn't see it use it against him). So he didn't have any ways of knowing right now of what abilities, besides Shriek of the Dead, the level 5 Treasure Eater possessed.

It may have all of those abilities, or it may have something even more outrageous. Since this Treasure Eater was his first encounter with a level 5 monster, and it was also an elite, he couldn't know for sure.

“Could you maintain this distance for me? Can you do it?”

“Yeah, that's not a problem.”

Treasure Eaters tended to have high magic and health. In other words, compared to its size, its speed and strength aren't very impressive. Of course, it was level 5, so its stats should be amplified accordingly, but to Jin, who had overwhelming speed even at level 4, there was no way it would be able to catch them.

Even while Lee Shin Woo rode on his back, that fact didn't really change. Jin strode across the rugged highlands as if it were flatlands and leisurely widened the distance between them and the Treasure Eater!

[Guoooooooooooh!]

“Yes, yes. I'm over here. Catapult!”

[Kuhaaaaaahk!]

For starters, he needed to figure out whether his Catapult would be effective against it or not. Lee Shin Woo moved as quickly as possible and shot his index finger, but the Treasure Eater instantly emitted a horrific shriek and the flying shot exploded in midair.

He had expected it to evade it or block it, but he didn't think a method like that would exist! Seeing that, Jin spoke in disgust even whilst running.

“Don't learn that skill. If you don't want to burst my eardrums.”

“You don't have any eardrums to burst... Never mind, sorry. My bad. Please don't drop me.”

Lee Shin Woo desperately regained his balance atop the excessively shaking Jin and pointed both hands at the Treasure Eater this time. Of course, this attempt didn't come from a complacent idea like 'one didn't work, so let's fire several simultaneously, and hopefully, one will eventually hit the mark.'

“Firing!”

All 10 of his fingers, from his thumbs to his little fingers, were coated in flames and fired. However, they lost their power midflight, as if he had shot them improperly, and fell to the ground! Steve trampled those bones as if it were mocking him, and

attempted to keep charging but...

“Self-Destruct!”

[Kuwoooooohk!]

[Critical Hit!]

At that instant, Lee Shin Woo yelled vigorously, and all of the 10 bone pieces exploded, hitting its abdominal area hard, causing it to roll onto the floor while spurting blood! Though he was on the cusp of becoming level 4, a level 5 elite monster had been successfully struck by a level 3 hero's blow!

“Hoo, it worked...”

“You should've told me ahead of time.”

Lee Shin Woo, who had already fought Treasure Eaters a few times before, knew that the skin covering its head and its back were tough, and that only its stomach area was weak. He had shot his first Catapult in order to ascertain its abilities.

He acted as though he didn't have a suitable way to deal with it, lulled it into a false sense of security, and then, sprung the trap at the most opportune time; weren't these the basics for a Duelist? Though he wasn't a Duelist!

“Then... it's time. Jin, run!”

“Run!? You said we couldn't run back then!?”

“Temporarily! We need to run in order to get the last piece in place!”

Jin, who was surprised that Lee Shin Woo suddenly told him to run when it'd finally seemed like they'd have a shot at beating it, asked back, but Lee Shin Woo didn't explain at length.

Though they had an opening where they could get a huge hit in, a difference of 2 levels was huge. A similar attack likely wouldn't be effective twice, and if that's the case, they would lose if they kept going at it like this, as the Treasure Eater was unfathomably tough.

What could they do then? The answer was the cheat skill he had; he needed to activate his Avenger skill.

Him attacking the Treasure Eater was to satisfy the activation conditions of his skill. Whether he inflicted damage on it, or he took damage, they both count as being in battle!

“Tch... I got it!”

He knew that Lee Shin Woo's decision making in combat situations was much more accurate than his own, so Jin turned his body around and dashed away. Jin was running at his max speed, and Lee Shin Woo barely endured so that he wouldn't fall off!

As a result, they arrived within the flatlands he'd remembered seeing before in less than two minutes. The message Lee Shin Woo had been waiting for also appeared at an opportune time.

[You have acquired a target for the Beginner Avenger skill. When you meet the target again, all abilities increase by 36%.]

“Nice, now I should be overflowing with strength...!”

The Avenger skill was key in allowing him to fight enemies that were a higher level than him.

He felt anxious because the target this time around was a monster two levels higher, but he had Jin right now. If he supported him with his high agility, he may even be able to defeat the Treasure Eater more easily than the King Slime.

However, at that moment, Jin spoke thoughtlessly.

“Is that also a skill it normally has?”

“Huh?... What the hell?”

Upon hearing him speak, Lee Shin Woo turned his head and his (nonexistent) eyes widened. From afar, the Treasure Eater was chasing after them with frightening vigor, and dozens of blackish whips poured out of its body and were violently flying towards them.

No, they weren't whips. It was blood! It was controlling whips that originated from its blood!

“Hold on tight!”

“Ugh!?”

The whips were ridiculously fast compared to its main body. Immediately after seeing them move, Jin began to quickly gallop away but they would soon reach them any minute now.

[You have found the target of your revenge. When you fight it, all abilities increase by 36%. Flames of Revenge receive an additional 36% increase.]

“Nice... Take this!”

Lee Shin Woo clicked his tongue and shot out his Flames of Revenge, which were amplified by his Avenger skill; though the whips, originating from its blood, met with the flames, they didn't evaporate easily. Especially because several more whips were crazily flying towards them!

“Jin, run! Run for now!”

“Damn it. If it weren't for those weird tentacles, we could've completely slipped away...!”

[Guwooooooh!]

Was it considerably angry that it had been harmed by Lee Shin Woo, who was a lower level than it? The Treasure Eater, which had recovered from the pain and stood upright, divided the blood spilling from its stomach into dozens of whips and controlled them, simultaneously moving its main body and charging.

Lee Shin Woo grit his teeth. There were way too many of them to take down one by one with his flames! Yet, using Acid Poison would consume too much mana, and its characteristic of fundamentally focusing all of the poison at one point wouldn't be suitable at this very moment.

“Shin Woo!”

“Guh!”

Lee Shin Woo couldn't perceive the pattern of its attacks, and one of the whips latched onto Lee Shin Woo's arm the moment he panicked, stubbornly coiling and tightening around it. He was then afflicted with a horrific pain.

It was as if the whip contained the level 5 Treasure Eater's physical strength, and just from its exterior, seemed to possess an unimaginable toughness. The whips were overwhelmingly faster than its main body, and it had fully transferred its physical strength into them; this was the first time he'd experienced such a cheap ability!

“Tch... Catapult!”

“You!?”

Lee Shin Woo had a hunch that even if he tried to resist, he would just end up getting dragged by the whip, so instead, he gave in and shot off his grabbed arm! For just a moment, it felt like the tremendous pain would've dragged his consciousness under, but Lee Shin Woo resisted with only his tenacious spirit.

[Kueeehk!]

Even Steve, who possessed that bizarre ability, hadn't expected that Lee Shin Woo would get out like this! His launched arm, as well as the whip flew dizzily through the air, and the whips flying towards them ended up becoming tangled in one spot.

Lee Shin Woo didn't miss that golden opportunity. He treated those whips as travelling companions and unhesitatingly blew up his bone arm! As if it were proving that it had blown off the Acid Ghoul's head entirely on the spot, it exploded magnificently. It completely burned down the blood whips in the entire area.

[Kyaaaaaaaaahk!]

“Does it hurt? It really hurts for me too! Anyway, you're always using such crazy attacks...!”

The moment the whips were swallowed up by the explosion and dissipated, the Treasure Eater also seemed to take quite a bit of damage, as it momentarily paused in its pursuit and agonizingly yelled. It was a great advantage to learn that damage to its blood whips would cause its main body harm.

“Are you alright!?”

“I’ll be fine if I apply the bone powder. Just keep an eye out for those whips and move carefully.”

Jin was astonished at Lee Shin Woo sacrificing his arm without any hesitation, but Lee Shin Woo didn't think much of it, and used the bone powder from within his inventory, activating Bone Reinforcement around his shoulder area. Though he used a sizeable lump of bone powder, he was able to regenerate without even using a drop of mana.

“You're really...”

“Jin, it's moving again!”

“Ugh.”

It wasn't possible for it to attack with its main body anymore. The Treasure Eater simultaneously stretched out dozens of new whips and left half of them close to its body, while the other half shoot out and attacked them.

Even so, it was a relief that he'd spread his Flames of Revenge on its main body when he'd burst its stomach.

'I've lost my arm once already, yet it's only spilled blood once. Moreover, the number of whips popping out are almost endless. So this is a level 5 elite monster, huh... '

If he could, he would've ran until the Flames of Revenge claimed its life, but no matter how calmly he thought about it, he couldn't afford to keep running away from it until then.

Then... Lee Shin Woo thought he had no other choice... in the end, he gritted his teeth and raised his head.

It was time to battle it face-to-face.

Chapter 12.1

Joker Apprentice (1)

Lee Shin Woo's spirit changed, and Jin, who he was communicating with, was the first to react to it.

“You're going to face it head on? You've been attacking using Catapult all this time; can't you just keep doing that!?”

“No matter how much stronger I've gotten from the Avenger skill, there's no guarantee I'll be able to penetrate it's skin. It's even more impossible due to the blood whips that ensued from the direct hit to the stomach.”

The blood whips were quick, powerful, and contained deep magic within, so they were even strong against magic attacks, but against Self-Destruct, which was both powerful and explosive, they seemed to have futilely disappeared, so he could determine that they had low durability.

If there was one thing he trusted in, it was this: that he could take it down right now, while his abilities were strengthened by the Avenger skill!

“There's no other way. I'll make sure you can get away before you die, so go!”

Lee Shin Woo firmly resolved himself, pulled out his sword, and gripped it. A sword would be more suitable to deal with those whips that nimbly flew towards them than a heavy axe. He wasn't yet confident in his martial arts proficiency, but he had no choice right now.

“Everything doesn't work out if I'm the only one who survives, though... Ah, whatever!”

In the end, Jin gave up and instantly changed directions, dashing towards the Treasure Eater. As if it were awaiting them, it sharpened its blood whips akin to skewers, and the whips flew everywhere!

Compared to last time, they were much weaker, but in exchange, there were at least twice the amount pressuring him from all sides. With Jin's astonishingly quick

reactions, they were able to avoid around half of them, but Lee Shin Woo had to deal with the rest.

'If I fail, I just have to get Jin to run away, and die alone. From there, through Invisible Heart, I'll become level 4, and can then kill it... However, if it's at all possible, I'd rather not die...!'

Lee Shin Woo glared and gritted his teeth. Then, he activated Combat Sprint, and drew at his connection with Jin.

He desperately needed Jin's speed right now. If he could apply even just a little bit of that speed...!

[Guwoooooooooooh!]

No matter how superb Combat Sprint is or how much he communes with the highly agile Jin, it was impossible for him to ascertain the trajectory of each and every one of the attacks a level 5 elite monster launched.

Because of that, Lee Shin Woo decided to think in reverse. He didn't track the attack's starting point, nor its trajectory. Instead, he grasped its final destination and would block it from there!

'First, I'll take care of the ones closest to me in order... Now!'

His decision was truly outstanding. His senses, which he sharpened as much he could, caught the whip flying towards his head; at the same time, he instinctually thrust his sword, successfully cutting through the middle of the whip! The severed whip returned to being a normal stream of blood, and futilely moistened the ground.

[Kyaaaahk!]

The Treasure Eater yelled, but that was just the beginning. Immediately after severing one whip, his sword turned directions, as if it were alive, and cut through another whip! And faster, even faster than before!

'I can do it... I can! Now!'

He perfectly detected everything within the narrow radius, with him at its center, and struck down anything that trespassed within. Lee Shin Woo wasn't well aware of it

yet, but this was often called the 'Defense Zone' by the Empire's knights.

It was a skill that could only be developed by balancing one's physical senses and mana senses; it wasn't a standard skill, but it was certainly something a defender must learn. The level of a knight will differ based on the width of this 'Defense Zone', so it wasn't necessary to say just how important it was.

[The Low Rank Combat Sprint skill has become Lv9. Agility has increased by 3.]

[The Low Rank Bursting Thunder skill has become Lv8. Strength, and magic increase by 1.]

[The Low Rank Horseback Riding skill has become Lv5. Agility has increased by 3.]

[The Low Rank Mana Bone skill has become Lv7. Magic has increased by 5.]

[It is possible to level up to level 4. Would you like to receive the karma that has been prepared for you alone? It is also possible to very briefly put it off.]

While in the middle of that his skills rose, and he acquired stats, allowing for the level up he had so ardently wished for. However, it was truly ironic that he didn't read the messages as he was so focused on cutting down the whips and advancing closer to the Treasure Eater.

[You have deferred receiving the karma you must receive in favor of your immediate revenge. That is a true Avenger's instinct. The Beginner Avenger skill has become Lv10, evolving into the low rank level. All stats have increased by 2. When you fight against the target of your revenge, all abilities increase by 40%, and when you succeed in your vengeance, your stats increase.]

'Good... My detection range is gradually widening!'

His Avenger skill grew, and the increased abilities sharpened his senses and quickened his attacks! He didn't let go of this momentum, drew all his strength, and moved his body.

[Kuwaaaaaaaaaaaaaahk!]

The blood whips, which seemed like they would immediately pierce through his head, were cut apart like straws, spreading blood everywhere. His physical senses, his mana

senses, as well as Jin's connection harmonized together, causing him to fall into a trance.

Even Jin, who had a connection with him, had fallen into a trance as well!

'Huh!?'

How long had he been instinctually swinging his sword around and running around with Jin? There were no longer any whips that stretched out from the Treasure Eater.

By the time he noticed, he had already arrived right in front of the Treasure Eater. He had successfully severed all those whips! Though there were holes pierced through his armor in various areas, he had survived.

“Now, let's start the second round Ste...”

[Kureureuaaaaaaaaaaaaah!]

However, the moment Lee Shin Woo was going to make a bold declaration, Steve roared and spat out a clot of blood, one so large that it looked like it could trap both Lee Shin Woo and Jin.

It had seen how easily Lee Shin Woo had taken care of the whips, and purposefully acted as if it were panicking, drawing him into a close distance!

“Ugh!”

“Heut...!”

At that timing, many things happened; firstly, Lee Shin Woo aimed at the Treasure Eater's gaping maw, due to it spitting out a blood clot, and launched his arm inside.

[The Low Rank Catapult skill has become Lv5. Agility has increased by 2.]

The moment he launched his arm, the force pushed both Jin and Lee Shin Woo back; Jin actively utilized the ensuing recoil force and moved his body backwards. It was a perfect evasive maneuver.

However, it seemed as though the Treasure Eater had expected them to run away, as the spat out blood clot followed them with an absurdly quick speed! It swelled

brutally, as if it were part of the main body!

“Heup...!”

He needed to use all the methods available to him now. He gritted his teeth, stretched his remaining arm forward, and activated his Acid Poison Spray skill. Like the Acid Ghoul had, he focused his mana and spewed the Acid Poison in a straight line!

It was his sole skill that had reached the intermediate level, and befitting of a high rank skill, the Acid Poison spewed out like a laser; it struck the blood clot, emitted a hair-raising noise, and melted the blood clot away!

“Self-Destruct!”

[Kuaaaaaaaaaaahk!]

From there, he self-destructed the catapulted arm, burrowed at the roof of Steve's mouth! He was able to properly damage the gaping Treasure Eater, following its discharge of the clot of blood!

[Critical Hit!]

[The Low Rank Self-Destruct skill has become Lv4. Strength and Magic have increased by 1. The force of the explosion increases.]

Though their reactions were perfect, their situation wasn't. After acquiring the Mana Bone skill, he had never been lacking in mana; but because he had repeatedly used his skills and also used the Acid Poison Spray, which consumed a large quantity of mana, as well as a large-scale Self-Destruct, he was out of mana.

“...With this, is it over?”

“No.”

Jin muttered, and Lee Shin Woo briefly denied him. Immediately after, beyond the poison mist formed by the Acid Poison Spray, dozens of very slender blood whips rushed towards them. At a remarkably faster speed than before!

Jin briefly faltered in fear at its increased brutality, and realizing this, Lee Shin Woo quickly disembarked from his back.

“Get back. You only have two lives.”

“...No wait, you can't win if you're not with me!”

“That's...”

Because they were connected, he knew it as well. The reason Lee Shin Woo was able to react to its whips was because of Jin!

“Hey, they're coming!”

“Eek!”

Lee Shin Woo attempted to urgently push him away, but before he could do so, Jin bit his arm and skillfully pulled him onto his back. Immediately after, the blood whips flew towards them! Lee Shin Woo realized that there was no time for an argument between the two and he hastily swung his sword.

“Ugh...!”

“They're coming again! I can take care of the front, so you go left!”

Their timing was a bit off, so his left shoulder was shattered, but he severed the whip before any further damage could occur. Of course, he didn't have any time to relax! He had to swing his sword even faster to cover both him and Jin!

[Kuaoooooooooh!]

“Ugh...!”

The connection between the two broke, and they felt their loosened senses fiercely tighten around them again, afflicting them with terrible migraines, but it was nothing compared to the pain of losing an arm.

He had to swing his sword more quickly, and more precisely in order to better cover Jin, who had trusted in him and was risking his life for him!

[The Low Rank Horseback Riding skill has become Lv6. Agility has increased by 2. Your connection with your riding companion increases.]

The moment their wills were in agreement, a connection stronger than before was formed, matching their senses. Lee Shin Woo's reflexes had surpassed his limits!

'Even faster... '

One, two, three... six, nine. Eleven. Fifteen. Twenty one! His armor was pierced faster than before, but Lee Shin Woo's sword strikes were gradually catching up to the whips' speed.

He was completely out of mana, but because he was, his mana senses became even clearer. He had become extremely sensitive to the surrounding mana, and before the Treasure Eater's whips moved, he perceived the movement of the mana within the whips, and was able to move his sword beforehand!

[The Low Rank Combat Sprint skill has become Lv10 and is evolving. You have acquired a horse that will run for you and have given up on you yourself running fast. Instead, you have only trained the techniques which expand your own senses, and have exceptionally evolved them. You have acquired the passive skill, Intermediate Combat Sense Lv1. Within a limited time and space, you can effectively move and face your enemy.]

He had no way of knowing how the skill had changed right at this very moment. But he did realize that he had passed over a wall, and advanced to the next level.

Even if his agility, strength, health, or magic were lacking, it was fine. Perceiving stimuli, moving beforehand, and blocking completed the Defense Zone!

[Kuwaaaaaaaaaahk!]

The Treasure Eater emitted a final roar, but nothing happened. So long as its technique of controlling blood was a skill, it used mana. Because it had excessively utilized its skill, its mana was empty.

The blood whips began to lose their strength and fell to the ground, and the Treasure Eater's wound filled body was revealed. Its injury from the last Self-Destruct was especially large. It had lost half of its head, from the bottom up. Its skin had peeled and the ominous rotten flesh underneath was exposed.

[Kuu... Kuhaahk...!]

If it wasn't for the fact that he was a skeleton, his remaining arm, which he had swung much too fast, probably would've gone numb, and it would've been difficult to swing.

However, he was fine now. He was confident that he could swing his sword for twelve more hours. Though he didn't really want to feel thankful for many reasons, he still felt thankful that he was a skeleton right now.

“Hoo...”

He exerted more strength into the hand gripping his sword. His will was relayed to Jin, and Jin stepped forward.

The Treasure Eater, which had lost all of its methods of attacking, mustered its remaining strength and charged, but there was no way Jin wouldn't be able to dodge it, when he had even dodged its whips. The two were strongly connected, and the instant they dodged and passed by it, Lee Shin Woo forcefully cut through its injured area and inflicted an even larger injury.

“You were after another's treasure, so you're ready to give up your own, right?”

[Kuuoooooh.....?]

Steve, who hadn't taken a single step back thus far, emitted a weak sound in front of Lee Shin Woo.

If he were to interpret what it just said, it would roughly come out to, 'D-Do you want to call it a draw...?' or something like that. Of course, Lee Shin Woo acted like he hadn't even heard it.

“Then, Steve.”

Lee Shin Woo, confirming that Steve didn't even have a drop of mana left, naturally switched out his weapon and raised it. The double handed axe within his hand glowed an ominous dark green.

“Shall we see where you're hiding your treasure?”

Five minutes later, Lee Shin Woo was covered in rotten flesh, bone powder, and blood, and was greeted with a message he had been looking forward to.

[You have hunted a Lv5 Treasure Eater. You have acquired 225,000 Perium.]

[You have acquired a Lv5 Treasure Eater's tailbone.]

[You have acquired a Lv5 Drake Horn Lance. Though it's possible to change it through Bone Reinforcement, Bone Reinforcement is still lacking, so the change is cancelled.]

Chapter 12.2

Joker Apprentice (2)

Levels were an absolute standard by which organic and inorganic beings were divided. It was also the standard which discriminated between the superior and the inferior... Because of that, those who surmount those standards are given an unconventional reward for their efforts.

That was karma, the very basis of this world that was more absolute than even levels.

[You succeeded in meting out your revenge against a stronger foe. All stats have increased by 2. The Low Rank Avenger skill has become Lv2. The skill duration time increases.]

Overcoming the difference of even just one level was extremely difficult. Even if one possessed the Avenger skill, it was a karma that could only be achieved by staking one's life on it.

If that's the case, what about a two level difference? Others would call it brash. They would never attempt it, unless they had several lives. Even if they did have several lives, fighting with a two level difference was like trying to break a rock with an egg, so there wouldn't be many who would attempt it and risk their precious lives.

[You have defeated a foe two levels higher than you! It is an achievement that has never been seen before in history. All stats have increased by 5. You have acquired the title 'He Who Conquers the Impossible'. Whenever you attempt to challenge the impossible and succeed, you become stronger.]

However, what if that egg were extremely tough, and instead of egg yolk and egg white within, it was filled with explosives? What about if that rock was hammered away and cracked?

He would achieve each and every one of those conditions, and create a stairway in order to reach that karma step by step. Those rules were everything, and it was truly akin to the way one would think in a game. It wasn't ridiculously difficult or impossible for him to break through the wall known as levels if he properly utilized the karma

that he had gathered, as well as the skills he had learned.

Especially since he possessed the ever-changing persona, the Joker's karma!

[You, who have communed with a higher leveled riding companion and defeated your foe, show a glimpse of the qualities of the one foretold in legend as the Dragon Knight. You have acquired the Dragon Knight's karma token. All stats have increased by 5. The Low Rank Horseback Riding skill has become Lv7. Agility has increased by 5.]

“Ah, there are seriously a lot of messages.”

Lee Shin Woo always thought this. That these lines weren't enough for him to enjoy the lingering feeling of victory. It felt like he was reading a biography of what happened just a little while ago.

But there was also nothing better than these messages to verify his achievements. When he thought about it, perhaps God, or the world, was whispering to him. It was like they were saying, 'You have achieved such and such feat, and that was truly amazing. And that achievement makes you this much stronger.'

“W-We really didn't die and won.”

“If it wasn't for you, I really would've died at least once.”

“You...!”

Jin must've been reading his messages just like Lee Shin Woo and muttered, embarrassed. Lee Shin Woo replied carefreely, but Jin belatedly recalled the situation before and raised his voice. It seemed he was also upset, as he stamped on the ground a few times.

“I can't believe you. A person could be momentarily scared in a fight, and yet you see that and say you'll fight alone?”

“Well, I thought you might really die at that rate. I have a lot of extra lives, but you only have two.”

“Still, how can I help you if I always just back off when it gets dangerous? That doesn't seem like a proper contract!”

He was right. Lee Shin Woo didn't accept Jin because he needed a car. He believed that he would become stronger through Jin's help, so he decided to work together with him.

Honestly, in the recent battle, the both of them hadn't died and were able to kill Steve because of their deeply developed bond.

“But if you actually die, you'll probably be really pissed.”

“You don't need to worry about that. This is the path I've chosen, so I'm plenty prepared for it. So in the future, whether I'm scared or I freeze, just move me as you please and charge forward. Got it?”

When he heard Jin's unwavering voice, he sounded like a general. However, in actuality, the meaning behind his message was something like 'At the very least, Lee Shin Woo could use him as a horse while in battle'. It seems like Jin was humiliated from being temporarily frightened from the enemy.

“If that's what you want, then that's what I'll do. I won't be considerate of you in the future and tell you to back off.”

“Good. Just think about winning against the enemy. Because if you don't, I won't be able to get stronger either.”

Is he beginning to understand karma, the system that rules this world? Hearing Jin comment on the important parts of karma, Lee Shin Woo naturally nodded his head.

But that state of mind would certainly be dangerous for Jin, so he decided that from now on, he would figure out a way for Jin to more actively absorb more of the curse's magic.

Should he go check at the secret shop? But before that, he'd need to deal with the level up... Wait, the level up?

“Huh?”

Lee Shin Woo tilted his head and checked his status; he realized that he had already acquired the qualifications to level up to level 4.

When he thought about it, a few of his skills leveled up during the battle, and his

Combat Sprint was even reborn as Combat Sense, an intermediate level skill! So there was no way his stats hadn't risen over 800!

“But I ignored it all because I was concentrating on the battle.”

“Was there an easier way to win by any chance?”

“No, there wasn't. If I had acted like I was going to level up, I probably would've been hit and pointlessly die.”

The level up transformation wasn't as simple as it seemed in manga, where leveling up was as easy as changing clothes for the hero. In terms of the skeleton, Lee Shin Woo, all of his 200 bones would be fundamentally changed, and he would be reborn with a new constitution filled with new mana as well.

But to do that while fighting an enemy? He'd probably incur considerable damage or his level up may go wrong; it would be one of the two.

“Jin, stay back for now.”

“Stay back? Why?”

“Hmm... You should be fine, but it's just...”

If he were to say that he absorbed all the bones in his surrounding in the process of leveling up, Jin would probably say he's crazy.

Lee Shin Woo thought Jin would figure it out if he saw it himself, shrugged his shoulders, and inspected the loot the level 5 Treasure Eater had left behind. Though he had caught a glimpse of the message before... he couldn't believe what it said, and the 'treasure' that needed a second inspection was right there.

[Drake Horn Lance]

[Lv5]

[Durability: 2,220/2,220]

[Attack Power: 1,000 - 1,200]

[Options: Strength +30, Health + 30, Magic +10, Effectiveness of charge related skills +40%]

“Hoo...”

Lee Shin Woo interjected as he saw the truly large and lengthy conically shaped lance that lay before him. The level 4 Melting Bone Double Axe's power was likewise tremendous, but it seemed like a gentle breeze when compared to this lance.

“Wow, that looks way too cool...”

“I told you, it's dangerous if you get too close.”

Though he said it was dangerous, he could understand why Jin carelessly approached. The charm of this weapon was dimensions apart from the other weapons he'd acquired thus far!

Did a one level difference cause this much of a gap? No, no way. This weapon was special. An item that was worth the Treasure Eater lugging around in its body! It might even match up to Lightning Tooth, which was imbued with God's power.

But if there was a problem to speak of, it was that the weapon's usage was much too limited. The lance was much too large and lengthy for him to lift and swing around. It approached 4 meters in length, and its thickness was considerable as well. It would ordinarily be impossible to wield, unless one was a 3 meter tall golem.

Not to mention, one of the weapon's options was to increase the effectiveness of charge related skills. In other words, it was utilized by forcefully charging at the enemy, and landing a single strike on one's target; it was a siege weapon dedicated to this single strike.

“This should be important in the future, since you're here too, Jin.”

“...If you wielded this weapon, I don't feel like I'd feel very frustrated, even if you rode on my back.”

Lee Shin Woo imagined himself riding atop Jin and charging at a castle wall, lance in hand, and just laughed. If he excluded the fact that the knight was a skeleton, the horse was a skeleton, and even the weapons and armor were bones, it was something that came straight from a fairy tale.

'I hope you endure within my inventory until that time comes.'

Lee Shin Woo carefully opened his inventory and placed the lance inside. Of course, he likewise placed his axe, sword, helmet, armor, and lower body armor inside. Seeing Lee Shin Woo suddenly giving him a nude body show, Jin was appalled.

“Why the hell are you suddenly stripping!?”

“Whether I wear them or not, I'm just bones, so who cares?”

“Ugh, this is why being with a guy is...”

“You know you're drooling, right?”

“...”

He placed all his equipment into his inventory and took out the Weapon Trickster's Arm bone. Though he had failed in the past, he thought it might be possible the moment he leveled up. Well, trying wouldn't hurt.

“Then, should I start with Steve's tailbone... Jin, it might be really dangerous, so stay back.”

“Alright, alright. Let's see how rowdy it gets.”

He realized that suppressing the evolution to level 4 was actually extremely difficult. It was only natural, since it was normal that he accept the karma once he was qualified.

He made sure he was a safe distance away from Jin, and then, nodded his head and loosened his hold on the mana he had been suppressing. At that moment, a ridiculously powerful mana burst out and he floated into the air! Seeing that, Jin yelled in astonishment.

“It really is rowdy!?”

For starters, Lee Shin Woo used the karma tokens he had collected thus far, or more precisely, he absorbed them.

Before he gathered the 10 tokens, they couldn't become a whole karma, but the Joker's karma, which loved its owner's countless personas, accepted them all. Though he

couldn't have another whole karma, Lee Shin Woo would be able to endlessly mimic those karmas almost perfectly!

[You have accepted level 4's karma. The Joker's karma absorbs a portion of the countless karmas you have collected, and an unknown potential is added. All stats have increased by 10. The Acting skill has become Lv7.]

Of course, this was only the beginning. Following the absorption of the karma tokens, Bone Reinforcement absorbed the bone of the recently hunted Treasure Eater.

[Absorbing the Lv5 Treasure Eater's tail bone through Bone Reinforcement. Health has increased by 9, and Magic by 18. Absorbing the target's intact memories and experiences. Resonating with all the memories and experiences, as well as the standardized skills you have acquired accordingly.]

[The Joker's karma has tied all the chaos into one. The Low Rank Catapult skill, the Low Rank Harden skill, and the Low Rank Self-Destruct skill have been absorbed. You have acquired the active skill, Rule of Bone Lv3. All stats have increased by 5.]

[The Rule of Bone and Low Rank Mana Bone are resonating. The Low Rank Mana Bone skill has become Lv8. Magic has increased by 4. The mana consumption of Rule of Bone decreases.]

As a result, the Treasure Eater's ability of strengthening and manipulating its blood was adjusted for him, and transformed into the 'Rule of Bone'. Lee Shin Woo could manipulate a portion of his body (his bones) just like the Treasure Eater had with its blood; he even had the ability to target his bones and strengthen them.

The Catapult skill, which could shoot in every way, was already at its max potential, so as he naturally absorbed the karma, the skill would obviously upgrade... However, Lee Shin Woo hadn't expected that both Harden and Self-Destruct would be absorbed.

'Wait, so absorbing the skills means that the Rule of Bone skill either includes both the Harden ability as well as the Self-Destruct ability, or it has some sort of latent potential. Truthfully, using those abilities is still possible... and since it actually resonates with the Mana Bone skill, its effectiveness increases. Then does that mean that the Rule of Bone doesn't have any more room for growth in the future.....?'

He had his suspicions in other places as well. The Rule of Bone was like the Acting skill, Bone Reinforcement, and Invisible Heart, as they likewise didn't have something

indicating their rank. From now on, it would either have little room for growth, or it wouldn't grow at all; he couldn't think of it as anything else.

'In any case, I'm sure it's an amazing skill that exceeds all the skills I gained in the past... Huh?'

The moment Lee Shin Woo admired the latent potential of the Rule of Bone, tremendous mana burst forth once more. Lee Shin Woo briefly didn't know what was happening, but he soon saw something floating in front of him.

[Absorbing the Lv6 Weapon Trickster's arm bone through Bone Reinforcement.]

It was none other than the Weapon Trickster's arm bone. The arm bone that hadn't reacted thus far radiated light and was finally being absorbed.

It wasn't possible for him when he was level 3, but now that he'd acquired the Joker's karma which went beyond the Trickster's, and had evolved to level 4, it was barely possible!

[All stats have increased by 10. You have learned the active skill, Bone Armory Lv1. Magic has increased by an additional 5.]

As expected, it was an outrageous stat increase, befitting of a level 6 bone! Moreover, he gained another rankless skill. This was certainly Weapon Trickster's core ability!

However, the instant his two eyes gleamed with anticipation (though his eyes don't light up yet), something happened.

[You have acquired the Weapon Trickster's power, and are accepting all the karma that you ought to have.]

"...Huh?"

He felt as though he had seen this ominous line somewhere before, and Lee Shin Woo trembled. His inventory opened above his head. Lee Shin Woo felt as though all the blood in his body was draining. Though he didn't have any!

"Wait, don't do this. Please don't...!"

[Absorbing all equipment through Bone Reinforcement.]

The Dire Wolf Armor, Acid Ghoul Skull Helm, Grizzly Bone Leg... as well as the Melting Bone Double Axe, the Lightning Tooth, and the recently acquired Drake Horn Lance all dropped to the floor.

And all of them were entirely absorbed by Lee Shin Woo.

Chapter 12.3

Joker Apprentice (3)

[All the power of your equipment is absorbed into your body. Strength has increased by 90, Health by 62, and Magic by 45. Agility drops by 5. Through Bone Armory, all equipment has been recorded.]

[You have achieved a suitable karma for becoming a Joker. Unfortunately, because you are still too weak, you have been placed in a trial period, and you must tidy up your abilities. You have become a Lv4 Dark Skeleton Joker Apprentice.]

[You can learn the inherent skills from all other karma, and can even train them more quickly. However, you can only learn these skills up to the intermediate level. Currently, the only relevant skills are Low Rank Avenger and Low Rank Flames of Revenge. While the Sacrifice skill is an inherent ability of another karma, it is exempt as it is an extra skill.]

[Lee Shin Woo]

[Dark Skeleton Joker Apprentice]

[He Who Conquers the Impossible; 2 other titles]

[Lv - 4 (Status effectiveness 145%)]

[Strength - 291 Agility - 218 Health - 279 Magic - 428]

[Passive Skills - Invisible Heart Lv3, Acting Lv7, Low Rank Avenger Lv2, Low Rank Bursting Thunder Lv8, Low Rank Mana Bone Lv8, Low Rank Stealth Lv6, Low Rank Command Lv1, Low Rank Horseback Riding Lv7, Intermediate Combat Senses Lv1]

[Active Skills - Bone Reinforcement Lv5, Rule of Bone Lv3, Bone Armory Lv1, Low Rank Shriek of the Dead Lv5, Low Rank Regeneration Lv3, Low Rank Flames of Revenge Lv2, Beginner Power Slash Lv9, Sacrifice Lv1, Intermediate Acid Poison Spray Lv2]

[Resistances - Holy: MAX, Curses: MAX, Acid: Low Rank Lv8, Ice: Intermediate Lv1]

Following the waves of cascading changes, he just stood there.

Was it because he couldn't adapt to the sudden rapid growth? Or was it because he was dejected that his precious treasures were all absorbed through Bone Reinforcement? Or perhaps was it due to him finding out a weakness in the Joker karma that he hadn't even imagined? He thought he was going to become a complete Joker, yet he got a useless tag attached to it; maybe it was because of that?

Of course, that wasn't all.

'This is a really peculiar feeling... I remember all the memories regarding the absorbed equipment.'

His memory of the recently absorbed equipment was so clear that he felt like he could actually draw and see those items if he wanted. He had heard that it was important to possess a deep understanding of one's weapon, but it wasn't the level of merely handling the weapon, but actually making them.

He could presume why. Compared to before leveling up, his skills had changed the most, and of those skills, Bone Armory was the most drastic! Lee Shin Woo didn't waste time and called for the information regarding Bone Armory.

[Bone Armory Lv1 (Active)]

[As a result of extracting the Weapon Trickster's memories and experiences, who had freely transformed weapons and cajoled the battlefield, a skill has formed solely for your use. You record all information on equipment made of bone, and you can summon them by using mana.]

[Your abilities are still lacking, so you can only summon the equipment in their recorded state. You can manifest and maintain two pieces of equipment at most. Maintaining the equipment does not cost any mana.]

[Recorded Equipment:

Lv3 Dire Wolf Bone Armor (Defense 110 - 125)

Lv3 Grizzly Bone Leg (Defense 105 - 115)

Lv4 Acid Skull Helm (Defense 250 - 310) - Effectiveness of Acid Type Skills +10%

Lv4 Lightning Tooth (Attack Power 450 - 480) - Lightning Lv4, Power of Bursting Thunder Skill +20%

Lv4 Melting Bone Double Axe (Attack Power 480 - 760) - Acid Lv3, Effectiveness of Acid Type Skills + 20%

Lv5 Drake Bone Lance (Attack Power 1,000 - 1,200) - Effectiveness of Charge-related Skills +40%]

[Equipment summoned through Bone Armory cannot be targeted with Bone Reinforcement.]

“As I thought...!”

Lee Shin Woo was relieved that his equipment wasn't lost forever, but he also realized that this skill wasn't perfect.

There were two main problems right now. First, it was impossible to reinforce the recorded equipment any further. Second, because the level of the skill was low, he could only summon two pieces of equipment at a time. Considering that he'd need a weapon in a combat situation, he would end up only being able to equip one piece of armor.

“But it's a lot better than completely losing them, so should I just let it go...”

He felt like hanging himself when he saw the Lightning Tooth and the Drake Horn Lance being absorbed, so he felt grateful when he learned he would be able to wield them again. Especially since he was able to completely absorb all of their associated stat bonuses.

If he leveled up the skill, he would probably be able to summon and maintain more equipment. Lee Shin Woo decided to think about it positively. When he thought about it, he wouldn't need to worry about repairing damaged equipment from now on.

“...Wait a sec.”

“Shin Woo? Shin Woo, are you alright?”

The concerned Jin approached and asked, since Lee Shin Woo had been muttering to himself since the level up process began; however, Lee Shin Woo's mind was only focused on one thing, so he didn't even hear Jin speak.

'Isn't the bone equipment summoned through the Bone Armory made of bones as well? Plus, they're bones that I've made.'

If that's the case, then... will they be affected by the Rule of Bone skill? Lee Shin Woo went straight ahead and tried to put into practice what he just thought about. The weapon he summoned was naturally the one he was most familiar with, the Lightning Tooth!

“Oh, those weren't just absorbed?”

“Fortunately, no.”

The summoned Lightning Tooth was no different from the one he possessed before absorbing it. Aside from the stat bonuses, everything else was exactly the same.

But the Lightning Tooth retained a lot of experiences within, so perhaps that's why the mana consumption was tremendous; he would need to figure out just how long he could maintain the weapon. [1]

'...Then.'

Lee Shin Woo naturally focused all his concentration on the Lightning Tooth in his hand. Though it wasn't made of his own bones, it was definitely composed of bone formed by his own mana. Then, couldn't this weapon be considered a part of his body?

'The conditions for using Rule of Bone shouldn't simply be that it's a bone physically attached to my body. If it's a weapon formed by my mana, then it should definitely... that's right.'

His wish had come true. The Lightning Tooth escaped his fingertips and began floating all on its own. Moving it was still a bit unstable, but that was due to the low level of Rule of Bone, and soon, even that slight shaking lessened.

“Have you gained telekinesis!?”

“In terms of bones, then yeah, maybe.”

Jin asked in astonishment and Lee Shin Woo roughly replied whilst flying the Lightning Tooth higher into the air. In no time, the long sword flew much higher into the air than just above his head, and spun round and round according to his will; it was truly a menacing sight.

'Just moving it around doesn't cost much mana.'

Lee Shin Woo, who had learned that Rule of Bone applied to the weapons summoned through Bone Armory, brought the Lightning Tooth before him once more and reinforced the Lightning Tooth through Rule of Bone. It didn't consume much mana, and the amount of reinforcement was...

"Ooh."

The Lightning Tooth radiated a bright blue light, and the blade emitted even more light than before; he even saw it openly begin to discharge sparks.

Contrary to the Harden skill which simply increased the degree of hardness, Rule of Bone reinforced every aspect of the weapon. As a result, its lightning element had been improved as well!

"...It's perfect."

He muttered in awe as he saw product of the harmony between the Rule of Bone and the Bone Armory skills.

This was only the beginning. If he improved these skills from now on, how diverse would it become!? It would become a skill that wouldn't shame the name Trickster!

"Heup!"

"Whoa!"

He had retained the know-how behind the Catapult skill and launched the Lightning Tooth in the air forward. Though the Rule of Bone was still a low level, it wasn't any slower than the Catapult he'd used up until now!

- Kwang!

It didn't stray even once from its route, and the launched long sword rammed into the

hill. The mountain boomed and the impact from the sword ended up destroying a portion of the hill; however, it had lodged so deeply in that he couldn't even see the hilt.

Seeing that, Jin suddenly trembled.

“You... You're going to do it, aren't you?”

“Yep. I'm going to do it.”

“If another monstrous bastard comes from hearing that sound, you're on your own.”

“Right.”

Honestly, since he'd acquired the Rule of Bone from facing the Treasure Eater, wouldn't it be advantageous to prepare to face and kill another one? As he thought such idle thoughts... he activated Rule of Bone once more.

“Synapse, burst!” [2]

“Synapse?”

-Kwaaaaaang!

The sword erupted in a tremendous explosion. It was a much more horrific explosion than before when he'd exploded his arm; it was obvious, considering the fact that one of the hills had been completely destroyed. It was truly impressive seeing the sparks popping out from the collapsed hill.

“Ugh, the mana consumption's tremendous...!”

But he had figured out exactly how much it cost. He had only blown up one long sword, but it had sucked up almost all of his mana! Considering the fact that its destructive force was greater than Self-Destruct's, it still felt like an advantageous skill.

“Hey, couldn't you have killed that caterpillar with one shot of that...?”

“Yeah, but if I miss, I would've died in one shot, too.”

Lee Shin Woo sat down and focused as much as he could on absorbing the surrounding

mana. As Jin said, there was always the possibility that a monster heard the boom and would come dashing over, so he needed to replenish his mana in case of a battle. Jin was astonished once again.

“It's to the point that I feel the flow of the mana being drawn to you!?”

“It's because my Mana Affinity naturally went up as I leveled up.”

That was only natural. As he levelled up to level 4, his stat effectiveness increased by another 20%, his Magic stat included.

Especially since his Mana Bone skill was strengthened by Rule of Bone; his mana recovery rate had increased by about 1.5x compared to before. That meant it wasn't impossible to feel the flow of mana as if it were the wind.

“You've just become level 4, but how much are you...”

He had completely destroyed a hill with one skill and could swiftly replenish that mana. Because of Lee Shin Woo's achievements, Jin couldn't believe that Lee Shin Woo was a hero at the same level as him, and just stood dumbfounded.

'The more you level up, the more your stats are amplified. It's probably even higher at level 5 or level 6. If I'm at this level, then my seniors, the other undead, and especially the named undead are... '

But at the same time, he recognized with certainty that levels were no longer the absolute standard in this world. If they had been, then Lee Shin Woo would never have been able to defeat the level 5 Treasure Hunter. Even if he had been helped by Jin, the results would've been the same.

At that moment when he'd concentrated to his very limit during the battle, Lee Shin Woo and Jin had both overcome their limits and were barely able to defeat the Treasure Eater. What were the factors that made that possible? His concentration? His will? It wasn't anything so abstract.

'It's how one uses their stats... Stats that cannot be used are the same as rotten bones. Skills are the means by which you can push your stats to their limits and even overcome those limits; and ultimately, at the center of those countless skills, it's important to use them at the right time. Like Combat Sense... '

Lee Shin Woo realized that he had fully replenished his mana as he was immersed in such deep thoughts, and suddenly opened his eyes (or a feeling like that). And then, Jin, who was watching over him, suddenly spoke.

“Now that I think about it, you have goblin fire now too.”

“Really!?”

Hearing that, Lee Shin Woo hastily touched his face, but it was obviously still bone as usual. However, he definitely felt heat within his eye sockets. He asked Jin a question, whilst thinking that he'd never once wanted a mirror more desperately than right now.

“What about the color? Are they blue like yours?”

“They're a deep red.”

“Damn.”

Wrinkles formed upon Lee Shin Woo's forehead (that kind of impression). He was happy that he'd evolved and gained flames, but if he passed by another undead and looked different, it would be difficult to use his Acting skill!

“Well, even if they consider you the strange one, it would be difficult to use the Acting skill. Fine, I need to plan out a proper scenario...”

“I'm really scared of your thought process...”

“But let's go to the secret shop first. Normally, whenever I level up, I go to the secret shop and buy the most expensive bone. That's my spending pattern.”

“Ah, that?”

Because Jin hadn't actively wanted to do something in this world before, he had never gone to the secret shop either. He didn't seem to be regretful at all, and just shrugged his shoulders as he looked at Lee Shin Woo.

“I don't even have any money.”

“Now that I think about it, that's a bit strange. There should be a share for you from the monsters that I hunt, so why isn't any money coming out for you?”

It wasn't like that when he had hunted the ghoul with Ye Jin Jin in the past. At that time, Perium didn't drop for Jin, but it did for Ye Jin Jin. There was definitely some sort of secret there.

However, he figured out the secret in the next moment. It was at the very moment when Lee Shin Woo was about to enter the secret shop!

[There exists an entity who is contracted to you. You can enter the secret shop together.]

“Hmm?”

The contract. It definitely pointed to Jin. Strangely, at that moment, Lee Shin Woo figured out the circumstances surrounding them. He looked straight and Jin and spoke.

“It says we can go together. Do you want to go?”

“Huh? Well... if we can go together, I might as well look around.”

He would just feel uneasy if he were left alone. Then, it should be better to go with Lee Shin Woo, even if he didn't do anything there. Thinking that, Jin nodded his head and Lee Shin Woo used one of the permits right away. The surrounding landscape instantaneously melted away and soon, he was met with an unfamiliar sight.

“Guten Tag!”

It was an extremely simple square space, with a counter on only one side; and from beyond that counter, a red haired beauty gazed at and greeted them in German for a reason unbeknownst to them.

“Why did you come again so soon... Oh my.”

Pleine possessed the ability to ascertain one's skill quite easily. However, even if it wasn't her, it would've been easy for someone else to figure out that Lee Shin Woo had leveled up this time.

The power his body was giving off was definitely different. Above all, his eye sockets blazed with red flames, so there was no way she'd not know.

“I thought it would take you quite a long time to go from level 3 to level 4, yet you've surprised me once again. You're even half way to level 5.”

In the process of leveling up, he had attained several karmas, as well as leveled up his skills, but the deciding factor was that all of the equipment he'd gathered thus far had been absorbed, causing his stats to surpass 1,200 in total.

For one to reach level 5, they needed a total of 1,600 stats, and Pleine's statement that he was halfway there was right on the money.

“It's really a frightening ability. You're just looking at my stats, right?”

“I would never. In order to give you better aid, I simply received some information on you when you dropped underground. I cannot ascertain your always changing stats. Customer, if you gain some more experience, you should be able to do this kind of measurement... Hmm?”

It took quite a while for Pleine to realize that another customer was there, as Lee Shin Woo's transformation was so shocking. When Pleine turned her attention to him, Jin thought that she was an extremely beautiful lady, and awkwardly bowed his head.

“Hello.”

“Oh... my...”

Seeing the Skeleton Horse that indifferently stood beside Lee Shin Woo, she gaped, but she soon seemed to realize what she was doing and nodded her head.

“To think that you'd form a contract with another hero; and especially since that hero is... Customer, you haven't been to the secret shop before, right?”

“Yes.”

Jin replied, and Pleine smiled deeply. He felt uncomfortable seeing that smile and slightly shook, so Lee Shin Woo spoke for Jin.

“Are you saying that this contract causes our respective karmas to influence the other?”

“You're right on. You not only share the Perium that your enemies drop, but you can

also visit me together, as well as somewhat passing on your karma to each other when using items that you've acquired from the shop. Especially if that contract deepens; the deeper the contract, the more deeply you can use each other's karma.”

“It's something that important, yet I have no idea how that contract was formed...”

“Me too...”

“Pfft.”

Pleine ended up bursting into laughter seeing the two skeleton heroes tilt their heads at her. It was a rare spectacle, even though she was the one who managed the secret shop.

She laughed for quite a while, putting aside the two sullen looking heroes, then barely managed to begin explaining.

“There are a few bonds that closely tie two people together in this world. Of them, a contract is the most sacred and deepest bond. Therefore, one needs to possess a skill that can connect the two of you together, and then, mutual consent is required. So you have a rough idea now, right?”

“Aha.”

He had somewhat expected this, but he was right. Lee Shin Woo recollected his Bone Reinforcement skill, and nodded his head.

To him, his Bone Reinforcement was just a reinforcement ability, but to others, the moment he used Bone Reinforcement on them, a connection would form between them. That had appeared in the form of a contract between him and Jin.

“Is there any chance that there'll be harmful side effects to the target of the contract...?”

“You already know somewhat, but because it's a contract that formed out of concern for one another, there aren't any negative side effects. However, the target of the contract can saddle all of your karma, so you cannot take it lightly.”

It seemed as though Lee Shin Woo and Jin had formed a successful contract; it was because they had agreed beforehand that they'd work together that this contract was possible. Especially since they could open up to each other as they were both

skeletons...

However, he was now absolutely sure that Bone Reinforcement had formed the contract between them. Listening to what Pleine had to say, he thought even if he used Bone Reinforcement on someone else in the future, he would be careful not to form a contract with them.

“In any case, I have a rough idea of what's going on. On how you were able to grow this quickly, Mr. Lee Shin Woo. Of course, it's not entirely because of that...”

“Do you want me to tell you my story again?”

“No.”

Pleine unexpectedly shook her head with a firm look.

“It's not that I'm not curious, but the timing's not ideal. It doesn't seem like it's a story that I can hear with just a 20,000 Perium discount, so... let's leave that to next time, and for now let's trade, shall we?”

Pleine spoke, and looked straight at Jin, not Lee Shin Woo.

Jin, who'd received Pleine's gaze, simply tilted his head.

[1] E/N: It does say he's trying to figure out how long he can maintain it. It likely refers to something other than mana.

[2] T/N: I assume this is a reference to what Rikka Takanashi says in the anime Love, Chunibyō, and Other Delusions.

Chapter 12.4

Joker Apprentice (4)

Since Pleine was well aware of what Lee Shin Woo wanted, she didn't waste time and immediately placed bones atop the counter; this time, there was a total of three bones he could choose from.

“These are the three most expensive level 5 bones. Starting from the left, they cost 290,000, 310,000, and 370,000 Perium. Oh, and for your reference, they're all named.”

Similarly to heroes, monsters also gain a sharp increase in strength the higher their level, and naturally, the karma that they leave behind... their bones' value is beyond one's imagination.

The most expensive level 4 bone had cost around 90,000 Perium, yet a bone just one level higher cost 200,000 - 300,000 more, verifying the truth to that statement. Even considering the fact that they were named, it was quite a severe increase.

“Just as there are few high leveled monsters, it is likewise the same for humans as well. A person who reached level 4 in the past Underground Empire couldn't easily be confronted. The renowned elite group known as the Empire's Knights also started at level 4.”

“You're saying that I'm only at the level of a knight?”

“That's not what I'm saying. Customer, you're an elite hero amongst elites, so it's difficult to compare you so simply. If everyone's ability was the same just because they were the same level, then there wouldn't be people who pursue special or unique karma... You should already be well aware of how special you are.”

He couldn't fool her. Lee Shin Woo slightly sighed and examined the bones that she'd offered. For starters, there wasn't a blue bone this time.

Well, his fundamental mana proficiency (Mana Bone) or his mana application (Acid Poison Spray and Flames of Revenge) were attained through achievements, so he didn't really need to pick a blue bone every time; however, he couldn't help but have

mixed feelings.

“How about a level 6 bone?”

“You might be able to buy an ordinary level 6 bone, but... a level 6 elite bone starts at 1.5 million Perium.”

“Hmm, I see.”

Lee Shin Woo neatly discarded his ambitions for a level 6 bone. Since it was much better to obtain a level 5 elite monster bone than an ordinary level 6 monster bone.

Ultimately, he had no choice but to choose amongst these three... He used Mana Bone to its max and examined the three bones that lay before him. Due to his accumulated experience, he was able to more easily examine the bones now.

'The cheapest one increases strength, and the skill within is a powerful strike similar to Power Slash. I don't know how much it would increase my strength but it's not very appealing to me. The next one increases health, but... Ah, it seems like it contains a skill similar to Harden.'

He didn't really need this one either, since he already possessed Rule of Bone. But... Lee Shin Woo turned his eyes to the side and looked at Jin, who was expressionlessly examining the bones.

“? What is it?”

“There's a bone here that you need.”

“Me!?”

Jin's agility was monstrously high, but aside from that, his other stats were lower than Lee Shin Woo's, not to mention that Jin didn't even have a decent skill that wasn't related to running. That was a huge problem.

No matter how specialized he was in agility, he would obviously need the strength and health to use that agility more effectively, as well as the magic to supplement it. If he only focused on raising his agility, as it raised by a factor of three, he would eventually find his balance crumbling and ultimately wouldn't be able to keep himself steady.

His physical condition disallowed him from equipping armor, so a skill that toughened his body would be essential for Jin.

“But this is too expensive... It feels kind of weird just accepting it.”

“It's an investment for my partner. Think of it as not just for yourself, but for the two of us.”

“Ugh. Then what about you?”

“I'm picking this one.”

Lee Shin Woo had picked none other than the most expensive bone that cost 370,000 Perium. The mana pattern undoubtedly indicated that it increased agility. He had originally thought that he should give this one to Jin, but he decided that it would be better for him to take it, as it would balance out his growth.

'Originally, my stats were balanced, aside from magic; but in the process of absorbing the items, my agility completely fell behind. If I consider my battlefield connection with Jin, then the most important stat has to be agility... '

Contrary to Jin, his most pressing issue was to increase his agility, which was excessively lagging behind his other stats. Their agility stats had to be somewhat close in order for him to most effectively draw out his abilities.

“It comes out to 680,000 Perium in total. It's quite a sizable amount, so it should be difficult for the both of you to buy... Oh my, you're not short?”

“A lot went on, a lot.”

Pleine looked extremely curious once again, but ultimately didn't ask. It might be that she was being considerate to Jin, who had come here for the first time. She neatly collected the money and smiled as she backed off, which conversely made them feel uncomfortable.

“The next time we meet, you should be level 5. I'll prepare level 6 bones for your next visit.”

“I don't know whether I'll be able to gather 1.3 million Perium by then, but... I'll see you next time.”

The two immediately left the secret shop and returned underground. The shop and the accompanying red haired beauty completely disappeared, and they returned to the plains with traces of an intense battle. Then, Jin took a quick look around, sighed in relief, and spoke.

“I don't want to go there again. You just go by yourself.”

“Why?”

“I don't like that woman. It feels like she's looking right through me.”

Since it felt like Jin would kick him with his front legs if he retorted with 'But you were already filled with holes', Lee Shin Woo kept his mouth shut, but then, at that very moment...

[Four permits for God's secret shop have been transferred to Jin Taylor, who is contracted to you.]

“So transferring stuff works too, huh...”

In the past, there were times when he couldn't use the permit whenever he wanted, as it felt wasteful, yet now, he had enough that he could go and visit Pleine whenever he was bored. Though there wasn't a single time he was bored since he was dropped into the Empire.

“Then let's start with the Bone Reinforcement.”

“Do we really have to?”

“I'll give you some time to prepare.”

From the very start, there was nowhere to run for Jin. The reason he hadn't used Bone Reinforcement on Jin all this time and had let him off (?) was because his own growth was more urgent!

Jin would be in for some wearisome days once both their stats became similar. Since he already had a hunch, Jin sported a rotten expression, but unfortunately his feelings weren't relayed at all as he was a skeleton.

[Executing Bone Reinforcement on Jin Taylor by consuming a Lv5 Bone Wall Knight,

Predin Etlleser's rib bone. A portion of the target's experiences and memories is divided and absorbed. Health has increased by 3. Proficiency in Rule of Bone has increased.]

[We are the final defense for His Excellency. Show them the results of your training. I'll find the one who dies first and kill them again in Hell. - Predin Etlleser]

As expected, a level 5 monster's thoughts were indeed different from the norm. He only gained a portion of those memories and experiences, but his health had increased by 3; not only that, Predin's final moments were intensely relayed to him.

“Ughhhhhh.”

So what would it be like for Jin, whose mind was directly injected with those memories and experiences? It's only for an instant, but he would receive such vivid memories and experiences that it'd be a danger to his own sense of identity, and as a result, he yelled in agony and rolled onto the floor. Lee Shin Woo petted him and asked.

“You alright?”

“I'm not alright...!”

“Do you remember my name? My name's...!”

“I'm not that damaged, you know!”

He had thought about engraving their names on his palms just in case, but fortunately, it doesn't seem like he'd need to anymore. Lee Shin Woo sighed in relief, gripped his own bone, and executed Bone Reinforcement once again.

[Executing Bone Reinforcement by consuming Lv5 Armored Bone Knight, Ashkiss Von Belita's leg bone. Absorbing the target's experiences and memories in their entirety. Agility has increased by 18. The Low Rank Horseback Riding skill has become Lv8. Agility has increased by 4.]

[You're really disobedient. But you'll soon come to like me. There'll eventually come a time where we ride into the battlefield together. - Ashkiss Von Belita]

“Mmm...”

The memories that flowed into his head were that of a knight of the Empire, fully garbed in his uniform, and training a violent horse. As expected, it was definitely the ability he needed most right now.

It felt a bit regrettable that he hadn't gained a new skill, but he couldn't just keep blindly increasing the number of abilities he had, so in the meantime, he thought it'd be best to stabilize the skills he had.

'Moreover, while the memories I'd acquired until now had awakened the Horseback Riding skill, I hadn't been able to attain an expert's memories. The memories and experiences I've just gained should be helpful for a long time to come.'

Not only had it immediately increased the skill level of Horseback Riding by one, he was absolutely sure that the recently absorbed memories would help him increase his proficiency in the skill a lot faster. Though he didn't know how his partner... would feel about that.

“Do you feel ok now?”

“S-Somewhat...”

Jin replied with a voice that didn't sound fine whatsoever. Lee Shin Woo, who was truly worried about the goblin fire within his eye sockets that spun around dizzily, decided to test what he had just learned and got atop Jin's back. He then focused on the connection between him and Jin.

“Uh... Huh...?”

“Hoo...”

Soon, something changed. Though he was an undead, who couldn't actually breathe, Jin had emitted harsh breathing noises; however, he calmed down quickly. The trick was simple. Through his connection with Jin, he focused on one part of Jin's consciousness. He stopped the primary cause of confusion, and shared the burden on his mind.

“Take it one at a time. Just think of it as you watching an educational video.”

“Easy for you to say...!”

But his connection with Lee Shin Woo had certainly made the process much easier. Even as he complained, he followed Lee Shin Woo's voice, and accepted the memories and experiences. He felt a bit ashamed, but he couldn't tell that to Lee Shin Woo, so Jin just endured, and endured some more.

“...I'm really ok now.”

“Nice. Then shall we go to the highlands? We have to finish up what we were doing before.”

Jin took several deep breaths when he heard Lee Shin Woo nod his head and talk; then, he extended his legs forward. Lee Shin Woo was able to maintain their connection, even if Jin ran at a faster pace, perhaps due to his level up.

“But I'm still not there yet. I want to increase my agility by at least 300 more.”

“I've already given up on catching up to your agility.”

So long as Jin possessed the Child of Light skill, the disparity between their agility stats would likely continue to become more severe.

Therefore, it was more important to maintain a full connection with Jin whilst drawing all of his abilities to the surface, rather than trying to just thoughtlessly increase his agility stat. Besides, because his Horseback Riding had just leveled up, he was able to draw 30% more speed out of Jin now!

“We're here.”

“You're really frighteningly fast.”

If Lee Shin Woo were alone, it would've taken him a few hours to walk here, but since he was with Jin, they'd arrived before he was even able to utter a few lines to him! He felt like it was a dream, but it wasn't an illusion. The highlands were still filled with golems, and the signs of the Stone Golems allowing the Treasure Eater to pass were clear as well.

[Sensing mana responses from living bodies. Activating.]

[Stopping outside entry. Unless directed otherwise, automatically removing trespassers.]

He heard the same sounds he'd heard just a few hours ago as the golems stood up here and there. This time, the number of golems had increased significantly, perhaps due to them defeating the Treasure Eater.

However, what changed the most was none other than Lee Shin Woo himself. He summoned the Melting Bone Double Axe, gripped it, and checked with Jin.

“Where do the level 4 golems come from?”

“We have to go a bit higher for them. At our current pace, we could pass by them without fighting...”

“No, it's fine. I did need some sparring partners to adapt to my body, anyway...”

Above all, he realized that he needed a deeper understanding of the golems that inhabited these highlands, so... he gripped the Double Axe with one hand and lightly laughed.

“Then, shall we begin?”

The golems, which neither grew old or died, protected the silence of these highlands, yet flames of change[1] blazed within these highlands. It didn't take long before the flames devoured the highlands in its entirety.

[1] T/N: Not literal flames.

Chapter 12.5

Joker Apprentice (5)

[Unable to resist. Requesting reinforcements.]

[Blocking enemy until reinforcements arrive.]

The highland's golems could only move simply, as per their prior inputted commands, but due to that, Lee Shin Woo was able to grasp their limitations quite easily.

When they realized that Lee Shin Woo was too much for them, they immediately switched to a defensive position, and waited until reinforcements came. They were certainly a lot different from the undead or monsters that just attacked while following their faintly remaining instincts.

“But your timing was off.”

[Ceasing function.]

Lee Shin Woo smiled bitterly and shattered their bodies one by one with his axe. They didn't come at him aggressively, so the fight was boring; it was simple. No matter how long they waited, reinforcements wouldn't come.

Perhaps those reinforcements did indeed exist when these golems were first built and were inputted with commands, but a lot of time had passed. It was highly likely that those reinforcements either no longer existed, or the connection had been severed.

“Isn't that kind of worrying?”

With a single swing of his axe, he broke apart the golems; Jin, who was training the skill he'd just learned, 'Steel Body', tilted his head and replied to the words Lee Shin Woo had just thrown out.

“What do you mean that their connection's been cut?”

“Well, it's just that there are heaps of stone golems out here, even though they're set

up with an emergency call feature.”

[You have acquired 3,100 Perium.]

[You have acquired a Lv3 Stone Golem Bone Core.]

Lee Shin Woo picked up the loot and surveyed the area. Although they had returned to the highlands less than an hour ago, there was less than a quarter of the Stone Golems remaining.

“I feel like there's a new dungeon here.”

“How about asking about it in the chatting channel?”

“I asked about it before. Apparently, some of our seniors hadn't even discovered this area before, and there are also some who have passed through this golem infested area.”

Currently, Lee Shin Woo felt really suspicious, so how could his seniors not feel the same?

His seniors were sure that there was a dungeon somewhere nearby and told him that they'd disassembled the golems, analyzed the cores, thoroughly investigated the surrounding magic responses, and if all that didn't work, they'd just dig up an area which seemed suspicious to them and searched the area. After all of that, the results were...

[Prince Altania: There's no secret facility nor a dungeon. Definitely not. If it's something that the extraordinary Fire Magician, Altania can't find, then there should be nothing there. There isn't. End of story.]

Apparently that. Meaning that his senior heroes couldn't find it. However, Jin softly gazed at Lee Shin Woo and spoke.

“You're going to go looking for it, right?”

“Yep. How did you know?”

“You're easy to read.”

Truthfully, Lee Shin Woo was somewhat confident. He didn't even need to mention his track record of finding the secret facilities in the sewers. Didn't he have an ability that differed from his seniors? That ability was none other than Bone Reinforcement.

“Bone Cores... Will you really be able to gain the memories of it from them?”

“When I tried it last time, there was definitely some recorded information about it inside.”

But there was a problem: the memories were limitlessly vague and were difficult to accept. Was it best to describe it like reading a letter in computer code? It would be a difficult, long-term war, but Lee Shin Woo was confident. He already had an idea of what part he had to latch onto.

“I just have to keep absorbing them until I understand. It's not impossible.”

“What exactly were you doing in your own world before all this?”

“I was just a normal salaryman.”

“You're kidding me.”

If Jin knew how much effort someone had to put in to become a normal salaryman in South Korea, he wouldn't say something like that. Lee Shin Woo just clicked his tongue.

While conversing, his hand didn't remain idle. Whenever he discovered a golem, he would immediately dash over to it, break it apart with his axe, or throw his axe... It was only possible because his strength had increased by leaps and bounds after leveling up to level 4.

'Moreover, Rule of Bone reinforces the bones that make up my body. Plus, the mana that I absorb in real time can replenish the maintenance cost... '

It wasn't on the level of a skill that just launched a bone or controlled it from a distance. Rule of Bone was a cheat skill that would buff anything that was related to bones.

The buff wasn't very significant right now, but the higher he leveled the skill, the more he'd be able to make full use of the ability. Maybe he'd acquired a skill that was like the Avenger skill, which allowed him to overcome the limit known as levels. He suddenly felt gracious towards the Treasure Eater.

“Have you sorted everything out now?”

“There's nothing else, so... Probably?”

Three hours passed. Lee Shin Woo and Jin maintained their incredible mobility and searched the very outskirts of the highlands, all while neatly taking down all of the Stone Golems. Regardless of where they went, the Stone Golems would call for 'reinforcements', but they never appeared.

Yet the Stone Golems in the area adjacent to them wouldn't move. He was absolutely sure by now. Their command system had already completely collapsed. They had either been thrown away or abandoned.

'If that's the case, then there's only one question left. Why were so many golems left here, when there's nothing even here? It's unlikely that they moved here from where they were originally or that their previous owner told them to move here. There must be something around here that has a deep connection with their last command.'

He completed his thoughts and raised his head. He hadn't yet absorbed the Bone Cores that he'd collected. Before he absorbed the Bone Cores, he studied them to confirm they'd have an effect on him. It's likely that if he collected more Bone Cores, the outcome would be even greater.

“So if we go to the centermost area, you're saying that level 4 golems will appear, huh.”

“That's true, but they seemed really rusty. Apparently, they were called Bronze Golems.”

The Bronze Golems came after the Stone Golems. Based on the sequence of these names, wouldn't a level 5 named, elite Iron Golem appear? Lee Shin Woo felt slightly excited and entered the middle of the highlands.

[Ceasing function...]

[You have hunted a Lv4 Bronze Golem. You have acquired 5,120 Perium.]

[You have acquired a Reinforced Autonomous Defense Type Core. The Reinforced Autonomous Defense Type Core has transformed into the Reinforced Autonomous Defense Type Bone Core.]

The Bronze Golem was definitely a lot sturdier and heavier than a Stone Golem, to such an extent that they could certainly boast that they were level 4 monsters. Though each of their strikes were powerful, they hadn't been maintained over a long period of time, so just like Jin said, they were rusted.

[Eliminating... Trespasser...]

“They're seriously so slow.”

[Ceasing function...]

And while they were more powerful than Stone Golems, they were that much slower than them as well; it actually felt like it was easier to kill the Bronze Golems than the Stone Golems.

What's worse, the Stone Golems' bodies were composed of bronze, so they couldn't pick up nearby rocks like Stone Golems and use them to heal their bodies; and because of that, they couldn't bombard them like the Stone Golems had either!

“Heup!”

“Ugh, I can feel the recoil...!”

“Endure with Steel Body. This is all training, too! Let's go again!”

“Urgh...”

Lee Shin Woo struck once, or even twice with his axe at maximum strength. Because their bodies were so damn tough and thick, his weapon would eventually get worn, but when his weapon became unusable, he would explode it and summon a new axe.

Lee Shin Woo was gradually starting to like Bone Armory more and more. And at the same time...

[The Bone Armory skill has become Lv2. Health and Magic has increased by 3. The number of equipment you can create and maintain has increased to 3.]

“Nice.”

When Lee Shin Woo saw that line of text, he immediately summoned the Dire Wolf

Bone Armor and equipped it. If he just increased its level by 1, he would probably be able to equip his lower body armor again!

Jin said it was better if Lee Shin Woo's lower body was covered instead of his upper body, but he completely ignored him. There was no naked or not naked for skeletons.

“This way, kids!”

[Eliminating... Trepasser...]

[Surrounding and eliminating...!]

“Nice, then... Synapse, burst!”

“So what the hell is a synapse!?”

[Critical Hit!]

When his Bone Armory had leveled up, the excited Lee Shin Woo began to use the skill more actively in battle. He would gather the slow Bronze Golems in one spot, throw his axe towards them, and blow it up!

Though the explosive force behind his axe was tremendous, there was something even greater; when he exploded his axe that possessed level 3 acid within, a powerful cloud of Acid Poison would accompany the explosion.

[Outer gloves... have disappeared. Need to... swap parts.]

[Impossible... No reinforcements...]

[Ceasing... function...]

The powerful Acid Poison that resided within the weapon was amplified by the force of the explosion and engulfed the entire area. The Bronze Golems just melted away as they didn't have any particular resistance to acid. It was really easy to take down ten Bronze Golems all at once as long as he gathered them up properly.

“Moreover, it's great that the mana consumption's much less than when I'd blown up the Lightning Tooth.”

“How far are you trying to go, anyway?”

“Hmm, about the Bomber level?”

However, the moment Lee Shin Woo responded and took a step forward to collect the loot, a message that he'd become familiar with finally appeared.

[You have defeated several powerful enemies with a horrific explosion. You have the ability to wait for opportunities, as well as make split second decisions. Above all, you have the impressive ability of blowing up whatever you want. You have acquired the Bomber karma token. Strength and Magic have increased by 5. The Joker karma absorbs the Bomber karma token.]

“I'm speechless. It's not like I did anything spectacular.”

“Are you saying that on purpose to make me feel shameful?”

Lee Shin Woo smiled bitterly in response and collected the rest of the loot. However, the moment that the Bone Cores in his hand overlapped, it seemed as though his skill had misunderstood his intent and this message popped up.

[Would you like to reinforce the Reinforced Autonomous Defense Type Core by consuming a Reinforced Autonomous Defense Type Core?]

“!?”

Then, he suddenly had an idea. A great hint had appeared that could topple this current situation!

Normally, Bone Reinforcement would either consume a piece of bone or bone equipment to either reinforce his own bones, or reinforce his bone equipment. While he had thought that he could use them to reinforce his bones or his bone equipment, he hadn't thought that he'd be able to use the Bone Cores on each other and reinforce them...!

'Would it be better to bet on this, or not.....?'

Lee Shin Woo was conflicted. Of course, he was familiar with how a piece of equipment would transform when reinforced to +10, but what about cores?

There was a chance of failure, so he wondered whether he should use them separately, or combine them. Would there be some sort of new quality to the fused core? He had thought intensely for just a brief moment, but at the end of it he nodded his head.

'Let's take our chances.'

It was a decision that was very much like him, as he had never been let down from operating based on his intuition ever since he'd come to this world.

But now wasn't the time. He needed to investigate further into the Autonomous Defense Type Bone Core and the Reinforced Autonomous Defense Type Bone Core, and he also wanted to try absorbing a few more of them. After that, he'd start his Bone Core reinforcement plan in earnest.

"Alright, Jin. Let's go a bit faster."

"I've always been running at full speed ever since we've met."

Hearing Lee Shin Woo, Jin just briefly sighed and complied, increasing his speed. He'd already decided to help Lee Shin Woo, and he also didn't hate going faster!

His proficient kiting skill steadily gathered the Bronze Golems in the middle of the highlands. If any heroes who could use magic saw them, they would all feel jealous of his ability to gather mobs! That ability was beginning to bear fruit on the outskirts of the Empire.



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