

CHAPTER 29 – POISON EATER

Luke watched the Company Shop while his wounds were closing and the poison in his veins was clearing out.

He waited several long seconds before the items began to disappear. Their tiny floating numbers shrunk with a startlingly speed that only picked up as people with less Fate entered the shop.

Predictably, stat potions were wiped out within seconds. Then the dungeon keys, followed by pretty much every usable consumable that was in limited supply.

Luke had no idea how many people were in the assessment test. There had to be thousands at the rate at which the shop items were being depleted.

It would seem a lot of people had the same idea as him. Even if they didn't need the items, they could deprive those who did. It was needlessly cruel in a way, but at the same time seemed like the only way to ensure that you might survive.

A potion or rare item might be a valuable bargaining chip if you were caught out by a group that you couldn't defeat or escape from.

It seemed genius. All the Company had to do was place a stock limitation on these items, and everyone went crazy to obliterate their LP.

Luke hoped he didn't play right into their game within a game and was able to get ahead with his purchases. If that pill worked the way he suspected, he might be able to slaughter hundreds of monsters in a single day, catapulting his level forward and earning far more LP than the pill originally cost.

That was a big if, however. And that was also assuming he wouldn't run into a situation in which he needed to use it to save his life.

He wished he had been able to pick up the [Safety Ring] on top of the [Golden Ginger Pill], which prevented a single instance of life-threatening damage. The pill would seemingly work better in the long run, but that extra safety net would have been nice.

It was too bad some of those prices weren't cheaper. Maybe that rarity token would have dramatically improved his cloak.

It was definitely showing its age. The sewage had disgustingly shifted its tone from coal-black to an unflattering shade of brown.

He needed a change of clothes more than ever.

He would have liked a stat potion, or any of the potion boxes. Those were the next thing to be wiped out. He watched as first the boxes, then the individual potions vanished from the shop.

They still stayed up, which was interesting, suggesting that they might be restocked at some point. But anybody who wanted to get a potion was going to have to find it, make it, or barter for it from somebody who had one.

If there really were thousands of people here, then it would be pretty easy to hoard the few hundred potions that the shop gave out.

Luke was just happy that he managed to get one before the Black Friday shoppers demolished the store.

In less than two minutes, the shop was emptied of almost all limited stock.

The only things left were a single [Featherfall Potion (Uncommon)], a single [Goblet of Illusion (Limited)], 4 [Battle Manuals (Epic)], 9 [Antidotes (Common)], and of course the [Bastion Crystal (Unique)].

All 10 of those were still in stock. As Luke was watching, one was purchased.

He was tempted to whistle through his teeth, but managed to stop just in time. That was a lot of LP.

Without the waterfall of filth making a masking white noise outside, he didn't want to draw unnecessary attention to himself. He wondered who exactly the Four Kings were that the [Bastion Crystal] protected against.

It didn't seem like their attention was the sort of thing you would want. From what he could glean, the crystal created a sort of safety zone.

Sounds like something for a burgeoning settlement or camp, Luke thought to himself. Which meant that it didn't apply to him.

Maybe the Four Kings were impossibly strong monsters no human was meant to fight, hence the protecting crystal. It was also possible they controlled other groups of monsters, and having one of those crystals would guard your home against attacks.

If a leader could spin it that way, even if it wasn't the truth, it might let them bring more people under their banner that were just looking for safety.

He wouldn't be surprised if either Henry or Marcy bought that crystal.

Perhaps the Four Kings were the equivalent of optional boss monsters. The kind so unreasonably strong that nobody in their right mind would try to fight without having every possible item and power-up.

I think I'd like to fight one of those, Luke realized with a start.

Despite all that he had gone through, it sounded fun and challenging. Maybe he could dance the edge between life and death against an incredibly strong opponent like that.

He found himself hoping the Four Kings were actually optional boss monsters, and not just some kind of roaming force of nature,

utterly immune to all kinds of damage that would effortlessly obliterate whatever they walked across.

A notification drew Luke out of his reverie.

Title earned: [Poison Eater]

*Afflicted with no less than 17 different types of toxins and illnesses ranging from [Knocknees] and [Furry Lung] to [Desiccating Bladder], you have shocked your system with a fusillade of deadly and debilitating diseases and managed to survive. You gain resistance to poisons, toxins, and diseases of your Grade, and immunity to any below your Grade. Effect diminished for each Grade over yours. When you resist an affliction, you gain HP, MP, or SP depending on the affliction type. Your Marks have been updated.
+5% Fortitude.*

“I was hit with all... that?” Luke grimaced. He shivered in revulsion at the mental imagery that [Furry Lung] gave him.

He felt no small amount of relief that he would never have to become intimately familiar with whatever [Furry Lung] and [Desiccating Bladder] would wind up doing to his body.

His new [Poison Eater] title was nice, incredibly so in fact. That didn't mean he had to be pleased about how he acquired it.

It granted him another way of recovering HP, SP, and MP without having to exclusively rely on a potion or a healer.

That could dramatically increase his survivability if he could reliably find sources of afflictions that he could resist. Which was going to be hard because, as the System stated, G-Grade was the lowest that existed. There wasn't anything lower.

Unfortunately, the disgusting monster meat came to mind.

Title upgraded: [Soloer, Second-Class]

Only acquirable by those with the Soloer title, this auxiliary title grants boons specific to soloers. You have once again proved your

mettle against a wide range of threats, while completely solo and outnumbered. Whenever you fight an opponent solo, your stats are further enhanced based on how much stronger your opponent is, up to an expanded limit. Your Marks have been updated. +7 all stats.

Luke was impressed by the upgraded title. It made him even more powerful while fighting alone. The addition to all his stats was more than welcome, especially since even if he ended up occasionally grouping up, that boost would still be there.

After all those changes, he eagerly pulled up his status.

Status

Name: Luke Solus

Race: Human (G-Grade - Level 7)

Class: Thief (Level 14)

Profession: N/A

Vital Resources

Health Points (HP): 380/500

Mana Points (MP): 55/270

Stamina Points (SP): 67/280

Stats

Strength: 62

Dexterity: 96 (+2)

Endurance: 28

Fortitude: 27 (+2)

Vitality: 50

Perception: 44

Willpower: 27

Wisdom: 27

Arcane: 22

Fate: 45

Free Points: 0

He was honestly surprised that his equipment bonuses were still intact, considering the sorry state they were in. Fortunately, those

stats came from his [Climbing Gloves], which had a repair durability enchantment.

Though his MP was low, Luke had enough to spare to make sure his gloves were adequately repaired. He didn't waste any time instilling mana into the gloves. The scaled leather visibly mended itself before his eyes as if time was being reversed upon the item.

That aside, the health potion had helped tremendously, and the additional 7 stats from his upgraded title had a massive impact on his vital resources.

Just a couple of days ago, he had 40 HP, and now he was up to 500. Or rather, he would be in once he finished healing up.

He had grown in power *fast*. Luke started to look forward to how much further he could go in just a single day once he was rested up.

He was just a mere 2 points away from 100 Dexterity, which had turned into something of a goal.

For a moment, he grinned beneath his dark hood. Now he wanted to amass 200 points of Dexterity. He keenly wanted to know how much faster he would be with it.

He looked over [Poison Eater] again and cringed. *Does that mean I can eat raw food and actually get a higher benefit now than if I had cooked it?*

His stomach grumbled on cue, reminding him how little he'd had to eat lately. It was too bad he hadn't been able to buy any rations.

With secret shame and no small amount of queasiness, Luke took out the old meat slathered with... well, best not to think about it.

He wiped it off as best he could and took a bite.

Yep, still tastes like raw meat and... something disgusting.

But it was food. Apparently recovering from the brink of pestilent death, demanded more energy.

It was all he had access to.

The food was horrible. Even if it was edible, it was not the sort of thing Luke would ever wish to repeat. Ever.

However, it did confirm two things.

One: it was still diseased or poisoned, because he resisted a number of ailments that pinged as notifications.

Two: the food still applied its increased HP effect, but because of number one, it also increased his SP and MP more than he would have thought.

You resist the [Furry Lung] affliction. You gain SP.

You resist the [Omen Blisters] affliction. You gain HP.

You resist the [Void Pox] affliction. You gain HP.

You resist the [Nether Amnesia] affliction. You gain MP.

You resist the [Mana Rot] affliction. You gain MP.

I almost ate that earlier before getting the title, Luke thought with horror. All of those afflictions probably would have led to a prompt death.

His HP was now almost full, and his MP was over half. The amount seemed variable, as neither affliction resistance appeared to give the same quantity of HP, MP, or SP.

None of them sounded like fun diseases, but they were also handily resisted, giving him more confidence about descending deeper into the sewers.

It was a lot to go through in such a short time. He had learned something valuable throughout all of that.

Titles could *upgrade*. The first instance of [Soloer, First-Class] had given no stat points, just the enhancement to fighting creatures higher level than himself while solo.

After a sufficient showing, the System saw fit to upgrade it. [Soloer, Second-Class] upgraded how much stronger he became in response to a stronger adversary, and increased the upper limit of adversaries he could gain a bonus from. Not to mention the extra stats.

Getting 63 total stats for *free* was utterly insane. It hardly mattered that they were spread out evenly.

While he didn't know precisely what the title meant, it sounded to him like he could expect to gain more stats against opponents who were stronger than him. But now the limit, presumably the level difference between himself and the monster, was raised as well. Meaning, he would gain even more stats to bridge the larger gap.

It was all conjecture until he tested it out, though. Now that he was on the mend and had a direction to go in that didn't include a bottomless pit, Luke was more than happy to give his newly upgraded title a thorough workout.

If traveling through the storerooms was any sort of indication, then it was likely that he would find monsters very close to level 20 or even higher ahead.

He had fallen *very far*. It seemed to Luke that the greater the distance between himself and his starting location, the stronger the monsters became.

At a relatively sedate pace, with plenty of breaks for resting and recovery, Luke had gotten up to monsters that were around level 12 to 14 on average.

After that flume ride from hell, Luke had no idea how far he went. Add the fall down the tube, and he was in uncharted territory. But there was no use in worrying. This was the hand dealt to him.

He'd manage.

No, not just manage, Luke decided with sudden determination. *I'm going to become stronger than I ever was down here.*

On the heels of that conviction, charging off into battle would have been fitting. Instead, Luke slowly pushed himself up to his feet and tested his wounded leg.

He shook his head with a smirk. *At least I'm not going to die of dysentery.*

After a few tender seconds, he realized he could walk on it just fine. It was a little stiff, but otherwise good as new. The constant symphony of aches and pains that his body assaulted him with had all but vanished.

He was still sore, but he could deal with soreness.

Wishing and praying for a shower or a pool or clean water to soak in and befool, Luke headed deeper into the stone tunnel.