

World 1311

Chapter 1311: Solving the Sacrificial Room

The space around them was rearranged again just like yesterday. The outdoor field gave way to a dark and gloomy indoor chamber.

There were again many contraptions around the room. They were having trouble understanding what is what.

The second they were in this room, Jack searched around for Kramer. There were only eight of them standing at the center of the room.

This room was larger than the one yesterday, but Jack quickly found Kramer. A wire wall separated the room into two, Kramer was on the other side of this wire wall. He was bound and gagged. His eyes were looking straight at Jack. Jack could see from those eyes that the boy was terrified.

"Kramer!" Jack called. He ran to the wire wall. Kramer was a human native, which made the boy his subject. His responsibility.

Kramer also always treated Jack as his king, even when the others kept on telling him not to believe Jack was the king.

Jack couldn't let him die. A native's death was permanent.

The wire wall separating the two rooms seemed fragile. Jack used his bare hand, attempting to tear the wire wall apart to get to where Kramer was. But the instant his hands touched the wire, he was zapped by a strong electric current.

The shock threw him away from the wire wall. Damage number appeared above his head. Without his equipment and passive skills, his lightning resistance was none existent. His HP was too high, though, so that jolt didn't endanger his life.

Aglea materialized in the other room where Kramer was. She made a wave and one of the contraptions above Kramer started moving. The contraption opened and revealed a giant revolving circular saw. This circular saw was slowly lowered.

This time, Aglea just gave them two words. "Ten minutes." She was then gone again.

Kramer saw the circular saw above him. His fearful eyes turned bloodshot. He tried to say something but his voice was muffled by the gag in his mouth.

Seeing the boy's terrified expression, Jack couldn't keep his calm. He ripped his ragged cloth and wrapped his hands with the cloth. He knew it wouldn't stop the electricity from damaging him, but he believed he could rip the wire wall apart with his strength as long as he endured the electricity long enough.

Everyone could see his intention. Some thought he was being foolish to attempt the impossible. Some thought he was brave for risking himself for a stranger. No one stopped him except for one person.

Jack sensed this person came to his side and caught the arm that was about to stop him.

"What do you want?" Jack asked Master crudely.

"Do you forget already the lesson from yesterday?" Master asked back.

The statement reminded Jack. He had indeed been emotional. This was unlike him. This whole king's role did place a heavy burden on him. He was a gamer who liked to do whatever he wanted. No responsibility, no worry, no fear of dying. Despite this game world being the real world, he tried to keep this gaming spirit of his. Yet, the burden of taking care of others was indeed not light.

Jack took a deep breath. He forced himself into a gamer state of mind. Looking at all these as if from a third-person perspective. Detached. This was how he had always been able to keep his cool under critical situations.

"It's all just a game," he told himself.

He turned to Master and said, "I never expect saying this to you, but thank you."

"Hmph! I simply don't want you to waste a team member unnecessarily," Master replied.

Jack looked back at Kramer, who was still pleading with his eyes. His determination to save the boy was still there, but he was now looking at the surroundings with calm eyes.

The first sacrificial room had taught them that they needed to go through a proper method. Ripping the wire wall apart was most likely an unconventional method. That's why Master stopped Jack. Kramer would likely be killed instantly once Jack destroyed the wire wall.

Now that Jack knew there was a puzzle in this sacrificial round, he could see it. If it came to solving puzzles, he believed he didn't lose to Master.

"There!" Jack pointed.

Atop something that looked like a cabinet, there was a rubber duck. Jack went and took the doll. He then walked to one of the sides of the wire wall. There was a row of five open boxes on the ground. The boxes were fixed to the ground and not removable.

Jack placed the rubber duck into one of the boxes. The lid automatically closed shut and the light on the box turned green.

"How do you know you should put that doll in?" Stefan asked.

"Look for things that are out of place," Jack answered and informed the others at the same time. "Once we filled these boxes with such things, Kramer can be saved."

"Hm...," Master was again dissatisfied. He had been looking for the connection between the contraptions in this room like he did yesterday. He never thought the puzzle for today was much simpler that he missed the clues.

Everyone started searching around. Jack found another two and put them into the boxes. Master found one.

Stefan thought he found one but the box emitted an alarming sound when he put it in. He quickly took the thing back out. When they looked at the circular saw, they found that it had dropped a great deal. Kramer's time had been shaved due to the mistake.

Jack warned everyone to not just place the goods carelessly. Everyone needed to show him the thing first before putting it into the box.

Everyone started showing him what they suspected to be the correct ones. The more they showed, the more Jack was getting annoyed. The others seemed to just pick up things randomly. It was much better if he just went and looked for the correct one himself.

While he was studying all these random things, Master put in the last one and the box closed. A loud sound was heard and they felt the room shaking.

"What happened?" Dina asked in alarm.

No one could answer her.

They then saw one part of the floor open. They went over and looked at the opened floor. It seemed like a tunnel, and this tunnel was filled with green gas.

Chapter 1312: Corrosive Tunnel

Everyone stared at the green gas. It didn't take a genius to know that the gas was nothing good.

Jack looked at Kramer on the other side of the room. The circular saw was halfway down already. Kramer didn't have much time.

Jack squatted next to the open floor and stuck his hand into the green gas.

"Grrgghh...!" He gritted his teeth as he felt his hand burn. Damage numbers appeared above him every second.

He took his hand out and looked at it. There were burn marks. His HP recovery kicked in soon and the burn marks on his skin slowly healed.

He made some estimations. With his speed, it shouldn't take him too long to get through this tunnel. His HP should allow him to last quite some time inside the gas.

Unfortunately, all his skills are locked, even the passive ones. Hence, he didn't have HP recovery during combat. He was considered in combat when he was damaged by the green gas. His HP only started recovering after he stopped being in contact with the gas.

His HP was not the problem, he had an unusual amount of HP pool compared to standard players. The biggest problem was the pain. The agony the gas inflicted on his hand just now was rather extreme. He honestly wasn't sure if he could bear the pain for long.

The others saw Jack's expression and understood his intention.

"Do you seriously want to enter that?" Naomi asked.

"This is our only way in," Jack answered. "If I go fast, I shouldn't be down there for long."

"Don't count on it," Master said.

"Why do you say that?" Stefan asked.

Master pointed to the room where Kramer was in.

"Do you see a hole in the other room?" He asked. "This tunnel most likely leads to a dead end. There should be another puzzle down there to open the other end. This means that you will have to stay down there for as long as you are solving the puzzle."

Jack was actually aware of that. When he said he would go fast, he also meant about solving whatever puzzle that was down there.

"Just come back here if your HP gets low," Naomi said with a concerned expression.

The others except Master showed the same expression. They were touched that Jack was willing to go this far for a stranger. The two other natives were especially moved.

"I'm afraid we will lose time if I do that," Jack responded to Naomi. "I will act accordingly. Wish me luck!"

Before going in, Jack asked Master. "Care to give a hand? Your HP is even higher than mine. You can last longer. Having two minds down there will help solve the puzzle faster."

"If you want to be a hero, do it yourself. Don't lump me in with fools such as you," Master replied. "My concern is to keep as many members in the team for the end match, but I would rather lose one member if it poses a risk to myself."

The others gave Master a disgusted look. But then again, they were also unwilling to risk themselves. What right did they have to judge him?

Jack wasn't surprised. He already expected Master's answer. "Well, at least pray for me then."

"I will do no such thing," Master said.

Jack already disappeared into the green gas when Master was still speaking. They then heard painful screams from inside the tunnel. They expected Jack to come back out any second. Yet, the scream was getting softer. It could either be Jack was getting weaker or he was getting further.

They hoped it was the latter.

"That guy was one brave f*ck," Winson remarked.

Inside the tunnel, Jack was relying on his mana sense to navigate the tunnel. It turned out the tunnel was not a simple straight path. It had several turns. With the green gas obscuring the view, it was easy for people without mana sense to lose their way. They could be walking back to where they came from for all they knew.

But as Jack had expected, what was most disturbing was the pain. He felt like he was being burned alive. This green gas worked like acid. If he wasn't sure his game body would recover once he got out of this gas, he wouldn't have been so daring to enter.

The anguish caused him to have difficulty thinking. On several occasions, he lost grasp on his mana sense and had to stop to focus. Luckily, Peniel was with him. She couldn't come out to heal him or show him the way, but her voice helped him regain focus.

After stumbling through the tunnel for he didn't know how long, he finally hit the end. His throat was sore from all the screaming. He wasn't even aware of doing it half the time. Now, after reaching the end of the tunnel, he screamed again. Partly out of pain, the other part out of fear and frustration because he didn't see anything that looked like a mechanism or a door. He looked at the walls and the ceiling above. They were plain stone surfaces.

Did he make a wrong turn? No, his mana sense told him although there were many turns, there were no branching paths.

"Down there!" Jack heard Peniel's voice.

He looked down and saw it. At the corner of the floor was a small square panel. He was confused at first, but after a closer inspection, he realized what that panel was.

'F*ck me!' He cursed in his mind. 'So, they did include children's game, after all.'

The panel contained a kid's sliding puzzle. It was a four-by-four puzzle that contained fifteen blocks. One block was empty, allowing someone to slide one piece at a time. Each block contained part of a drawing. If all the blocks were arranged correctly, it would form a proper image.

Jack secretly celebrated. This was child's play for him. He used to play this a lot when he was a kid.

But after working on the puzzle, he found it easier said than done. He was constantly in pain due to the acidic gas. He was also not sure how long he had spent down here. Was Kramer even still alive up there?

He had trouble focusing due to these physical and mental tortures.

"You can do it!" Peniel never stopped encouraging him, for which he was very grateful. He wasn't sure if he would have turned back by now if it wasn't for her.

After several mistakes, he finally managed to complete the puzzle. When all the blocks were properly arranged, it showed Aglea's smiling face.

"F*cking hag...!!" Jack cursed loudly despite Aglea's beautiful face.

The ceiling of the tunnel above him suddenly opened upward. From that opening, Jack saw the ceiling in the room where Kramer was.

Chapter 1313: Saving Kramer

Jack didn't waste time climbing out of the tunnel. His entire body was smoking. He was as if a living meat climbing out of a cooking pot. He lay on the floor panting while his blistering skin started to heal. His HP

also started to recover. Without his skills, his HP recovered very slowly. But that was not a problem, he only lost around thirty percent of his HP. His HP was simply too high.

After a few seconds of gathering himself, then only he heard the voices. Some were cheering. Some sounded urgent.

"... You crazy mother*cker! You truly make it. Unbelievable..."

"Way to go, bro...!!"

"... Hurry! There is not much time...!"

"... The circular saw almost cut him!!"

The last voice jolted Jack to alert. He was reminded of the purpose he went through that tormenting tunnel. If Kramer died, then he would have suffered for nothing.

He turned and saw Kramer still alive. Kramer was mumbling loudly through the gag, trying to get Jack's attention. The circular saw was dangerously close to his head by now.

Jack pushed himself to rise fast but stumbled because his body was still very weak. He propped himself by holding the chair where Kramer was bound. He could see his skin was still in its grotesque burned state.

He threw away the concern about himself and focused on Kramer. He fumbled with the strappings that bound Kramer. It was tied with a complex mechanism. He couldn't untie the boy in a short time!

He then looked at the circular saw which was just a few centimeters from Kramer's forehead. The boy was looking straight at the revolving blade so close to him. Jack could see from Kramer's eyes how terrified he was.

Jack tried gripping the unmoving part of the circular saw, to see if he could stop its descent or try to plug it away. He couldn't do both. The circular saw was very sturdy and it continued to go down at a steady pace.

When Jack ran out of ideas and was about to try breaking the circular saw using a punch filled with mana manipulation, he heard Master's voice, "The red button on the side table, you fool!"

Hearing that, Jack looked over to the side table which was on the other side of Kramer. He saw the red button Master mentioned. He didn't see this button when he looked around Kramer's room when he was still on the other side of the wire wall.

The side table had opened its upper tray and revealed this red button when Jack opened the tunnel's door inside Kramer's room.

Jack hurriedly went over and hit this red button using his fist.

The sound of the circular saw powering down was heard. Its spinning became slower just as it was touching Kramer's head. A few damage numbers popped up as it did.

The circular saw finally stopped and damage numbers stopped appearing above Kramer.

The boy was still in shock. He was numb and unable to react. In his mind, he still saw the circular saw turning.

Aglea materialized next to Jack then.

"Congratulations! You have saved the second sacrifice. You will have one team member more than the other teams who fail," she announced, then added, "Now, rest for tomorrow's matches."

"Wait! How many more of such matches before the end match?" Jack asked.

"Why? Are you not enjoying this game?" Aglea asked.

'Who the f*ck enjoys such a depraved game, you sick f*ck!' Jack wanted to scream in Aglea's face.

When Jack didn't answer, Aglea said, "We are all here to enjoy. The longer the game, the more fun it is. So, there is no need to worry about when it will end. Now, rest."

The room broke apart and rearranged itself. They again found themselves chained in the familiar dungeon. Jack's body had miraculously recovered and his HP bar was full. Kramer was also there beside Jack, safe and sound.

"Your majesty... I owe you my life...", Kramer said. He wanted to kneel but the chains restricted him.

Jack waved him off. "I'm just glad that you are safe," Jack said.

Kramer didn't say anything further, but he bowed his head as low as he could and stayed like that for a long time, even when Jack asked him to stop and rest. The shock from the ordeal just now was not light for the boy.

The others also looked at Jack with different eyes now. Respect and recognition filled their gazes. Some even thought that Jack might truly be the king of Themisphere, after all.

The atmosphere was ruined by a mocking chuckle from Master, "I see this is how you dazzle people into your camp."

"Better than you who frighten and intimidate them into yours," Jack talked back.

"People respect power. As long as I'm strong, I don't need to pathetically save everyone to make them follow me. They will come by themselves. It is natural, it's survival of the fittest."

"Survival of the fittest? You do know the fittest mentioned in that phrase wasn't meant for physical strength, don't you? It was meant for the ability to adapt to the environment. A tiger might be stronger but a cockroach is fitter. A cockroach has a much higher chance of surviving a natural disaster compared to a tiger."

"Interesting analogy using a cockroach as an example. I do see you as one," Master said.

"It's pointless speaking to you. But I will tell you one thing, the saying that good always triumphs over evil is not empty words. Do you know why? Because all evil care about is itself, just like what you demonstrated today. All evil people wanted is becoming a solo ruler over the population. They want everything for themselves and they think they can do everything themselves, and all they achieved by

doing so is alienating everyone else. Remember what you said about numbers? That is how good always beat evil, with numbers! Because good will always have more people on its side."

Master sneered. "As I've said before. When I become a God, I will crush this stupid rule."

Chapter 1314: Sister

Jack wasn't interested in prolonging his debate with Master, he had a more important thing to do. He had an appointment he couldn't be late to and a quest he needed to take care of.

Yesterday, after visiting Talia and returning to his body, he found that he had automatically received a new quest.

*

Help Talia Escape

Difficulty: SSS

Rewards: 8,000,000 exp, 100 gold coins, 10,000 mana core, additional rewards possible

Resolve the situation in the Council of Charites and release Talia from her imprisonment

*

So, Jack stopped speaking to Master and pretended to sleep.

The others gave Master unfriendly looks. To them, Jack was now a hero. Master who ridiculed their hero was now someone they didn't want to be associated with. Jack might have decided Master be the leader at the start, but from now, they would only listen to Jack.

Jack focused his mana sense and entered the incorporeal state. He worked himself out of this pocket world and quickly made his way to the nexus world.

Talia told him that whomever she was afraid of should be occupied after the match. Yesterday, he spent a few hours finding this nexus world. Now that he could go directly, he should have plenty of time to converse with her.

It took Jack little time to enter the nexus world. He figured he was getting better each time he did it.

This time, he didn't appear inside the dungeon where Talia was at. The place where he ended up after forcing his way in seemed to be random. And since he wasn't familiar with this nexus world, he didn't know where he was at.

He tried interacting with the mana of this space, trying to sense its entire layout, but the space seemed to be resisting his poking. He was unable to gauge exactly how big this nexus world was and where Talia's jail was located.

'Damn it... Am I going to waste time searching around this place?' Jack wondered. That chilling presence he sensed yesterday might have returned by the time he found Talia.

Staying around won't solve anything, though, so Jack started roaming around like a haunting ghost.

He stumbled upon a large hall with an altar at the center, or what remained of an altar. Jack thought the place looked very much like the hall where he last saw Callan when the divine priest was still alive.

Jack approached the broken altar.

"This is an altar that is the center of power of this divine faction," Peniel informed. Jack was now maintaining a constant link between himself and Peniel during his incorporeal state.

"Yes. I saw a similar one in the Council of Virtus' main temple," Jack said. "Paytowin once said that destroying this altar will cause the members of the faction to receive a debuff. You think that's what happened here?"

"I think whatever happens here is more than a simple debuff," Peniel replied.

The broken altar revealed a hole underneath. Jack took a look. It was empty.

"The divine heritage is supposed to be inside this altar, isn't it?" Jack asked.

"If what Wilted said is true," Peniel replied. "If you want to find out what happened here, Talia is still your best option," Peniel said.

"You are right. I won't learn anything just looking around," Jack went and continued his search for the divine priestess.

This nexus world was larger than he thought, but everything seemed to be in a state of ruins. There was also no indication that the ruined parts were fixed as if they were intentionally left untouched. Jack felt as if he was wandering through a tomb.

"I think this nexus world used to be the Council of Charites' base," Jack conjectured. "They moved their original base into this pocket dimension and then brought it to the Sylvan region."

"Like I said, God-level power," Peniel reminded.

Her warning made Jack move faster around the place. They were all empty halls, devoid of people. There was no native, monster, or even animal.

After more than an hour since he entered this nexus world, he finally found the dungeon where Talia was imprisoned.

"You are late," Talia said when Jack arrived.

Jack could only slump with a defeated expression. He was too tired to explain. Using the incorporeal state constantly consumed mana and he burned more mana when he tried to move faster in this state. He felt more tired now than when he fought monsters for a whole day.

"I hope my sister won't return early. I will try to outline what had happened," Talia said. "But before that, I heard you come here searching for me?"

"You and your sisters. I come carrying a warning," Jack said. "Well... Now that warning might sound less menacing because the person I'm here to warn you about is in captivity with me."

When Talia's expression showed that she didn't quite catch what Jack was saying, Jack started from the beginning. About the war in Hydrurond and how the Gods involved themselves in the war. How Hope fell from a fabricated weapon called the Godkiller. A weapon that was fabricated from the essence of a fallen God, the divine heritage.

Talia was fascinated by the tale. She had been in captivity for quite some time. She knew very little of what was going on in the outside world.

"Hope has fallen... You said Courage as well. This means the good Gods camp was now three Gods less," Talia contemplated. "We have the same number as the bad Gods."

The situation was more complicated, but Jack didn't want to dump all this information on her. When they were freed of this constructed dimension and had more free time to talk, then maybe he would fill her in.

"You said the person who is after our Goddess' essence is locked in here with you?" Talia asked.

Jack nodded. "I'm unable to kill him due to the rules in this game your sister forced us to play. Maybe you can talk to Aglea to maybe, you know, strip him of everything he has and put him back to level 1? She can even keep him here for all I care."

"Unfortunately, my sister who you met is just a husk of her former self," Talia said.

"What do you mean?"

"It's because..." She stopped. Her face turned stern. "You need to leave. We will talk again tomorrow."

"Motherf*cker... For real...!?"

"Mister Storm Wind, that is very indecent," Talia chided.

"Oh... I'm sorry. I didn't mean to," Jack said. He was telling the truth. He was cursing in his mind. But because his current incorporeal state let him converse with his mind, he was not aware that he projected the thought to Aglea when he cursed.

Still, he had come here to satisfy his curiosity. He hadn't even learned anything yet and now he had to leave again.

"Ma'am, you have better started telling me what is wrong here the second I show up tomorrow," Jack said. He then left.

Not long after, a beautiful woman entered. "Hello, sister," the woman greeted.

Talia just gave her a disappointed look.

The woman walked around the dungeon as if inspecting the room. "The intruder came again," she said.

Talia was taken aback by the statement. "How... how do you know?!"

"I slightly felt his presence yesterday. I thought it is just my imagination, so I placed a stronger detection enchantment around this place."

"What are you going to do?" Talia asked.

"I'm going to modify the enchantment. He will be in for a surprise if he comes again. Hahaha..."

Chapter 1315: Underwater Cage

The match for the next day was a swimming competition in an Olympic-sized pool.

Kramer was exempted from the match. It turned out that the one who survived being a sacrifice received a free ticket directly to the end match. The native boy was relieved he no longer had to go through an experience like yesterday.

Jack and Master were again occupying the top two ranks. This time, however, Master was the first while Jack was second. Master proved to be a better swimmer despite Jack having higher physical stats.

The last and therefore, the sacrifice, was Naomi. She was nominated last because she couldn't swim. She was still hanging around the starting place, almost drowned, when everyone reached the other side.

With the sacrifice decided, they were transferred to the sacrificial room. It was an even larger room than yesterday. A large pool was at the center of the room, covering three-quarters of the entire floor.

They were wondering where Naomi was because they couldn't see her anywhere. That was until Kerry pointed at the pool below. They saw it then. The water was clear, allowing them to see what was beneath it.

Under the water was a steel cage. Naomi was inside that cage.

When they were wondering what this was all about, Aglea appeared above the pool.

"The third sacrificial round!" She announced. "Will the sacrifice be saved today? Or will she perish?"

After letting a dramatic five seconds pass accompanied by the sound of drums which no one could figure out where it originated from, Aglea said, "Ten minutes."

She disappeared. Following her disappearance, they heard a rumbling sound as if something was opening under the pool. They looked back into the pool and saw a huge deformed black shark swimming out from the wall of the pool.

This shark started attacking the cage.

The cage seemed to withstand the assaults for now. But they did not doubt that its durability would only last for a maximum of ten minutes.

"What should we do?" Stefan asked. There seemed to be nothing up here except for what seemed like an ice box at the corner of the room.

They went to that ice box and opened it. Inside was chock-full of bloody meat.

"What are these for?" Dina asked.

Almost all of them turned to the pool upon the question.

"You don't think... These are for that thing, do you?" Stefan asked.

"Let's find out," Jack picked up a piece of the meat. It was a huge chunk and was coated with dripping blood. It was both disgusting and nauseating.

Jack threw that piece into the water.

The shark who was just about to ram itself into the cage again, suddenly turned around. With incredible speed, it swam toward where the bloody meat was at.

Since the meat had just dropped into the water, its position was still close to the surface. So, when the shark approached, they got a clear look at the thing. It was terrifying. It had six eyes, all blood red. Its skin was cracked and layered with sharp thorns. When it opened its huge mouth, three rows of saw-like teeth filled that mouth.

The mouth chomped the chunk of meat and quickly reduced it into tiny pieces. It continued to go after those pieces of meat. When the meat was no more, it swam back to the cage.

"Uh... Should we throw more?" Stefan asked.

"What's the use?" Winson said. "We are just delaying its progress. There is only one ice box here. Once the meat in this box is gone, it will still go back to the cage."

"... It's a distraction," Jack said.

"What?" Stefan didn't understand Jack's words.

Jack turned to Master. "You already know, right? You don't say anything because you have already given up on this round."

"Correction. I would have told you soon if none of you figure it out," Master said. "Because I know one of you will gladly take the risk and go down there."

"Go down there?" Dina asked.

"There is nothing up here except for this ice box," Jack said. "That means whatever saves Naomi is down there inside the pool. These meats here are to distract the shark while I go down there to look for clues."

"Your majesty, I will accompany you!" Kramer exclaimed. He had been exempted from the match but he was still brought here with the others.

"That's brave of you, but no. Out of all of us, I and this a*shole are the fastest swimmers," Jack said while pointing at Master. "Other than the two of us, all of you just stay up here. I can't afford to worry about any of you down there."

"I won't go..."

"I know you won't go in," Jack cut Master's words. He then turned to the others and said, "You people need to time the meat properly. Throw them into the pool one at a time, and not too fast! Wait until it is finished with the first meat before you throw in the second. Stretch the time it stays on the surface for as long as possible."

Stefan nodded. "We will buy you as much time as we can."

"I will be counting on you all," Jack said and then ran to the opposite side of the pool. When he was in position, he shouted, "Okay, throw the first one in!"

Stefan took a piece of the meat and threw it in. As before, the shark was immediately drawn to the bloody meat.

When Jack saw the shark swim toward the meat, he jumped into the water. Inside the water, Jack didn't immediately swim down. He first observed the shark. If their theory was wrong, the shark would ignore the meat and come at him instead. If that happened, he still had the time to climb out of the pool.

When he saw the shark ignore him and started biting the meat, he was convinced their method was correct. He immediately kicked the water with all his strength and swam toward the cage where Naomi was in.

Chapter 1316: Circumventing the Method

The cage that held Naomi was farther than what he saw from outside the water. It took him more than ten seconds to reach the cage.

Naomi was very glad to see Jack. She wanted to say something but couldn't. The cage was not the fully closed type. The inside was filled with water as well.

Since they couldn't do messages, Jack tried reassuring her using his version of sign language. Dina didn't understand then, and Naomi also didn't. She just nodded repeatedly to express her gratitude.

Jack swam around the cage and saw a keyhole at one of the cage's sides.

'A keyhole... means there is supposed to be a key somewhere,' Jack thought.

He looked around. The key must be in this pool. There was nothing outside unless it was at the bottom of the ice box under all those meats.

Jack didn't have the time to go out and check. Stefan and the others had started throwing the meats to lure the black shark. If he went out and the key was not there, he would have to go back into the water with fewer meats left to lure the shark, which also meant lesser time he could spend in the water.

No, he would have to search this water now. He looked around the wall of the pool. It was smooth concrete all over the wall. Even the hole which the black shark came out from was not seen anymore. There was nothing on the wall.

This could only mean one thing. He had to go deeper.

He gave Naomi the signal that he would be back. Naomi, of course, did not understand Jack's weird gesture. Jack then swam down.

Jack couldn't see the bottom. The pool was quite deep. The water also got darker the deeper he went. Without his dragon eye's ability to see in the dark, this darkness of the water was very frightening.

'There should be only one of that black shark, shouldn't it?' He thought.

He threw his worry aside. He had gone this far, he had to go all the way. He continued swimming. Everything around him was dark. He couldn't see anything. He was just relying on his mana sense to check if he was close to the bottom.

His mana sense finally picked up the surface of a floor. It was not a flat surface, though. Jack slowed down and touched this surface. After touching around, he noticed then that this pool's floor was filled with junk.

There was something that he thought was a tire. Not a wooden tire, but the modern car tire. He wondered why this thing was in this world. Then there was something that he thought should be the handle of a bicycle.

Jack was dismayed. With all these junks, it would be a chore to look for a small key.

He didn't waste time complaining. He gave the matter a quick thought before deciding to take a risk.

The black shark up there should still be busy with the meats. Nothing should disturb him down here. He stayed still and focused his mana sense. He let his consciousness drift out.

In his incorporeal state, his mana sense was enhanced. He could sense better and had a longer range. He immediately scanned his surroundings, especially the floor. It was like a sonar system that mapped out the surrounding, except mana sense gave a clearer result.

With this method, Jack located the object he was looking for in no time. He quickly returned to his body and went to his target, which was hidden under what he thought was a modern sink.

On the way, he also picked up two things he had detected during his incorporeal state. A long and sturdy metal pipe, and a knife. He slipped the knife into his pants and held the pipe with one hand.

He arrived at the sink. He pushed it away and there it was. A golden key that gave off brilliant shine even in this dark water.

When he picked up the golden key, he noticed it was not the only thing shining. A loose line of green traces started from where the key was and seemed to lead somewhere.

'Fluorescence...,' Jack thought.

Jack realized then, the fluorescence was not leading somewhere. It was supposed to lead people to this key. The proper method of finding the key was to first find this fluorescence trail and followed it.

Jack wondered then. The key was still the proper method, so he was still following the correct method. He just found the key using an unconventional way. He was not violating the rule for this round, correct?

A rumbling sound answered his question then.

'Shit!' He cursed and hurriedly swam up toward Naomi's cage. Just like how in previous sacrificial rounds, Richard's chain was snapped when they tried to save him using a creative method, then a mistake during Kramer's sacrificial round was punished by the lowering of the circular saw. This time, there was also a punishment for circumventing the proper method.

Jack heard a similar rumble when he was outside the water. It was even louder from down here, but he understood it was the same thing.

As he swam upward. He vaguely saw through the dark water. A big hole appeared on one side of the wall and something huge swam out of it.

'F*ck! F*ck! F*ck!' Jack cursed non-stop within. He so very much yearned for all his equipment and skills at this moment.

He was still quite deep, so all around him was rather dark. He couldn't see properly. He put the golden key into a pocket in his pants and then gripped the knife he had picked up earlier. His other hand held the metal bar.

He kept on swimming in the dark, but he was also tensely monitoring his surroundings using his mana sense.

He sensed it then. Since mana sense had a limited range, by the time he sensed something, it was pretty close already.

He swiveled his body to face the direction the thing was coming from. A monstrous mouth filled with teeth came out of the dark water next to him.

Chapter 1317: Out of the Cage

Jack placed the long metal bar in his left hand perpendicularly to the monster's mouth, so the two ends of the bar touched the black shark's upper nose and its lower jaw. In this way, the shark's mouth couldn't reach him for as long as the bar held. He was instead pushed back following the shark's charge.

At the same time, Jack stabbed the knife in his other hand repeatedly into the shark's face. Damage numbers appeared but a glance at the shark's HP bar told Jack that this knife's damage was pitiful.

He accumulated mana manipulation into the knife and performed One-word Thrust. The martial art accurately hit one of the shark's six eyes. This wound finally caused it pain. It stopped its charge and swam away.

Jack took the reprieve and resumed swimming to the cage. Luckily, the shark's charge was slightly at an angle. The charge had pushed Jack further up and closer to the cage.

Jack continued to monitor his surrounding using his mana sense while approaching the cage. The water up here was not as dark, so he could see better, and so did Naomi. Jack saw Naomi inside the cage turning wide eyes and pointing at something behind him.

Jack's mana sense also sensed it then. The black shark was back.

Jack swiveled back and used the same tactic. The long pipe again protected him from getting bitten. The charge this time slammed him into the cage. The force of the impact caused his metal pipe to bend. It couldn't perfectly stop the shark anymore.

The shark bit down at Jack's hand that was holding the pipe.

"Arrhh...!" The pain caused Jack to let go of the pipe. His HP also went down by almost thirty percent.

Jack slashed using One-word Slash powered by mana manipulation. He was again targeting the shark's eyes. He missed the eyes this time but the slash still forced the shark back.

Jack readied himself to face the shark again. He propped his back to the cage, ready to use the cage to push himself away when the shark came. He gripped his knife tight. This was the only weapon he had now.

The shark swam in a circle before coming at Jack again.

When Jack was ready to push the cage to dodge, the shark suddenly changed direction. It swam up. Jack looked in the direction it was swimming and saw a slice of bloody meat there. The first shark was still up there munching on another meat.

The others had seen the appearance of this second shark and now threw two pieces of meat at the same time.

Jack gave the ones up there a thumbs-up. He wasn't sure if they saw it, though.

His hand went into his pocket. He had a brief fear that the key had fallen out of his pocket during his brawl with the shark. He was relieved when his hand touched the hard metal key.

He took it out and went to the cage's side with the keyhole. He inserted the key while Naomi looked expectantly from inside the cage.

The key turning was slightly heavy, which made the process slow. Jack also found that he had to turn the key several times, not just one time like a normal key. He thought this must be intentional. The sick designer of this game simply enjoyed watching people struggle.

But without the sharks harassing him, it was only a matter of time until the cage was unlocked. A click was heard every time Jack turned the key one time. After ten clicks, one side of the cage finally broke open.

Jack gave the signal for Naomi to hurry. This time she understood the gesture.

But since Naomi couldn't swim, Jack had to carry her. The two headed to the opposite side of the pool from where the others were feeding the sharks.

On that side, Stefan was reaching for another meat but found his hand empty. He looked back at Winson who was in charge of taking the meat out of the ice box.

"There is no more...," Winson said. The appearance of the second shark increased the consumption of meat.

Stefan looked inside the water. He saw Naomi was already freed and the two were halfway to the surface already. But one of the sharks who didn't get meat was now heading toward them. From its speed, it might get to Jack and Naomi before they reached the pool's edge.

Everyone watched with apprehension as the black shark swam at high speed. Its massive and deformed dorsal fin cut through the water as the shark swam close to the surface.

Because Jack was carrying Naomi, his swimming speed was not fast. His mana sense hadn't sensed the incoming shark, but he saw it while swimming. He tried not to panic. But with him carrying Naomi, he didn't think he could make it to the pool's edge before the monster arrived.

When his mind was rushing for a solution, he heard a splash and saw something had fallen into the pool on another side.

It was Kramer! The boy had run to the side close to where Jack would be coming out from. He jumped into the pool and was now making big splashing waves to attract the shark.

Because Kramer was slightly closer, the shark turned to him instead.

'No!' Jack wanted to shout but couldn't since he was underwater. All he could do was tried his best to quickly bring Naomi out of the pool before helping Kramer.

Kramer saw the shark coming at him. Seeing his plan work, he quickly turned around to get out. But he underestimated his movements underwater. He couldn't move that fast. Even though he was still close to the pool's edge, it took him a longer time than he wished.

Panic set in. He turned back and saw the shark was only a few inches away. Its large mouth opened and was about to swallow his small body whole.

A hand suddenly grabbed his shirt. He then felt himself pulled by something with incredible strength. He was yanked out of the water just as the black shark arrived and slammed into the pool's edge due to its speed.

He fell hard on the floor. Still panting and edgy, he looked up at his savior.

It was Master.

Chapter 1318: The Links Between the Pocket Worlds

The other shark, after finishing munching the last piece of meat, also went to chase the intruders in the water. But before it was halfway, Jack and Naomi already climbed out of the pool.

Naomi lay flat on the floor while panting. She tried to calm her heart rate down which was currently beating off the roof. She never liked water. That's why she never learned to swim. She had trauma after watching a shark movie when she was still a kid. What happened just now was like her nightmare came true.

Jack looked at Kramer's side. He was relieved to see Kramer was safe outside the water. He was surprised by Master's act, though.

"Congratulations, you have saved the sacrifice again today," Aglea's voice boomed from above. "Is this round too difficult? Is it too easy? Leave your comment in the box below."

'The f*ck is that b*tch on about?' Jack cursed within. He didn't voice it out of fear that Aglea might take his voice away again.

"Everyone can now rest. We will resume tomorrow," Aglea said.

They were then sent back to the prison dungeon.

Jack turned to Kramer beside him. "Are you okay?" He asked.

"Yes, Your Majesty. Thank you for your concern," Kramer replied.

"It is I who should thank you. If not for your actions, Naomi and I might not have escaped. You are very brave."

Kramer blushed at the compliment.

"Thank you both for saving my life," Naomi said to both Jack and Kramer.

Jack waved her off.

"Hey, what about us? We aren't exactly doing nothing," Stefan complained. "It is us who lures the sharks away."

"Yes, yes. Thank you, Stefan. Thank you, everybody," Naomi said.

Jack turned to Master and said, "Thank you for saving Kramer."

Kramer also followed suit, "Thank you for saving my life!"

Master snorted at them. "I'm sick of you people thanking each other. Just so you know, I save the kid because it doesn't pose any risk to me. If it does, I would have left him to die. Losing him means I have one less pawn to use during the end match. We don't know what this end match is yet. But considering the setup of these matches, it is safe to assume the more teammates we have, the more advantage it is for the team."

Jack turned back to Kramer and said, "There you have it. He is doing it for his own sake. There is no need for you to feel indebted to him."

"Oh... Okay...", Kramer said.

"Okay, everyone, rest. You all have been great today. As long as we work together, we will also beat tomorrow's round," Jack encouraged.

He then closed his eyes and pretended to sleep. He was eager to go meet Talia again.

As his incorporeal body came out into the space between worlds. He stopped and observed. Now that he had passed this space several times, he could better sense the links that connected the different worlds into the nexus world.

He wanted to go to Talia immediately but decided to stop and study these links further.

"This... I think if I can familiarize myself with the energy that forms these links. I can then use it to find the exit from each pocket world."

"It is not a real exit, though," Peniel said. "It will take you to the nexus world, not bring you out from this dimension."

"The real exit must be in that nexus world," Jack said.

"That's true," Peniel agreed.

Jack proceeded to let himself bathe in the mana that formed the link and became one with them. He could now easily interact with them. He should be able to use this link to transfer his body into the nexus world now.

"Too bad I'm currently chained. I can't move around to locate the exit. We will try it tomorrow during the sacrificial round when Aglea was not around," Jack said. "I feel bad about the one who is chosen for the sacrifice. I hope it is not a native. I sure hope it is Master."

"Highly unlikely," Peniel remarked. "His attributes are too high for him to lose to the others."

Jack didn't deny that. He would just act accordingly tomorrow. He now resumed his way to the nexus world.

Instead of penetrating the membrane wall of the nexus world as he did previously, this time he utilized the link between worlds and entered through the proper door. This way, he knew where he was when he used the link tomorrow. Using the proper door brought him to a fixed place instead of having him appear at random places within the nexus world like yesterday.

After using the link to go through the proper door, Jack came out into a garden. Jack believed this place should once be a very beautiful garden, but now it was filled with wilted flowers. Jack looked up and saw a blank sky. Beyond the garden was a huge mansion. It was still intact but appeared dilapidated.

Jack understood that the hallways he had traveled through yesterday in the nexus world should be inside that mansion. Talia also should be in that mansion.

Jack wanted to roam outside to see if he could find the main exit out of this dimension. But he had spent quite some time familiarizing himself with the links between worlds. If he wasted more time, he would have to delay speaking with Talia again and learn what happened to this faction.

So, Jack postponed the search for the main exit to tomorrow. He went toward the mansion. Around the garden were statues of children. They appeared to be playing. The statues were very lifelike.

Jack went inside the mansion through the main doors. Behind the main door was a huge lobby. It was also filled with statues of children. None of the statues was the same. Every statue depicted a different child in a different posture.

Jack didn't have the time to admire the craftsmanship so he proceeded deeper into the mansion.

After roaming around for a bit, he came into a hallway that he remembered from yesterday. He followed yesterday's path and quickly came into the dungeon where Talia was.

When Talia saw him, she panicked and yelled, "No! You must leave!"

But it was too late. When Jack was still confused by her reaction, chains made of pure energy appeared around him. Jack couldn't move fast in his incorporeal state. These chains quickly coiled around him and bound him.

Chapter 1319: The Truth about the Faction

"What...?" Jack tried to free himself, but he couldn't.

'How can this be?' He thought. He was supposed to be incorporeal. Nothing should be able to touch him. Yet, these energy chains held him as if he was a solid matter.

"No...," Talia lamented. "My sister had found out about your frequent visit. He lay this trap for you."

"Urgh..." Jack tried to break free again. His effort was futile. With a defeated sigh, he asked, "What do you think Aglea will do to me?"

"... Aglea won't do anything. It's my other sister you should be worried about."

"Euphosine?" Jack asked. Euphosine was one of the Council of Charites' three divine priestesses, together with Talia and Aglea. They were the highest authority within the faction.

Talia nodded.

"What exactly happened to your faction?" Jack asked.

Talia sighed. "It was more than one year ago. We stopped receiving any sort of contact from our Goddess. Euphosine and I feared that our Goddess had abandoned us. Only our sister Aglea remained strong in her belief. She encouraged us to continue praying and not lose hope. However, it was hard to do so when your prayers continued unanswered."

More than one year ago, Jack thought. Perhaps that was when players entered this world.

"Euphosine took this the hardest," Talia continued. "She stopped praying and no longer carried her duties. Because the leaders were divided, so too were our followers. Some left the faction. Some refused to do their tasks. Aglea's followers who were the most devout remained firm in their belief and chided the others. This caused tension among us. There was even one time when it came to a full-blown fight between the followers.

"After the incident, Aglea called Euphosine to the main hall and reprimanded her, but she just laughed it off. Her dismissal drew Aglea's ire and they ended up fighting as their followers did. I tried to break their fight but it was futile.

"Because they were fighting inside the main hall, their attacks damaged everything in that hall, including our Goddess' altar. Euphosine didn't care about it. Aglea became even more enraged due to that, and the fight became even fiercer.

"I tried to protect the altar the best as I could, but I couldn't contend against the power the two of them unleashed together. The altar was badly damaged. But before it was destroyed, we felt something that we haven't felt for a long time seeping out from the altar. It was the presence of our Goddess.

"Aglea was very happy by that presence. She quickly went to the altar and knelt for a prayer. Euphosine, on the other hand, was terrified. But she also came to the altar and knelt, begging for forgiveness. I, who had stayed close to the altar, had already knelt before they did. However, we then realized that something was wrong. Our Goddess was inert even when her presence was felt.

"We all realized it then. It was not that our Goddess had abandoned us. It was simply that she couldn't answer anymore because she was no longer with us. What we felt in her altar was just her residual essence.

"Upon the realization, Aglea turned mad with anger and grief. She lashed out her power. But this time, it was directed at the altar. She refused to acknowledge that our Goddess was gone. She instead imagined that our Goddess was simply imprisoned in that altar and she was now doing this to help her out.

"I tried to stop her but I was blasted away by her rogue power. Euphosine just stood at the side, watching.

"Aglea's attacks finally destroyed the altar. But as she did, a powerful force was unleashed from the destroyed altar. This force struck Aglea square in her chest and it depleted all her HP in a single strike. We watched with disbelief as our sister died in front of us.

"I went to my sister and tried casting a resurrection spell on her, but it was to no avail. It was as if her soul was no more. While I was doing that, I didn't notice Euphosine who went to the altar. She reached into the hole underneath the altar and when her hand was out, there was a glowing sphere in her hand. It was the most beautiful thing we had ever seen. Additionally, we felt the presence of our Goddess from that sphere."

"Goddess Joy's divine heritage...", Jack remarked.

"That's right. The thing you came to warn us about," Talia said. "There is no longer a need for you to worry that it will be taken because it has already been taken by someone worse."

"So... Euphosine holds the divine heritage now?" Jack asked.

"She does... I asked her to let go of the sphere, our Goddess' essence. I told her that the essence was hidden for a reason. That we should leave our Goddess to rest in peace, but she refused to listen. The way she looked at the sphere when she first held it in her hand... I should have noticed then. She was no longer her usual self. The power of the essence made her drunk. She kept the essence and walked away, while I mourn my sister's death.

"A few days after the incident, several strange things occurred. Many of our followers went missing. I thought at first that they left, following the members before them. The few that stayed, were as if in a blissful trance. They refused to do anything. They just stayed idle and be content with themselves.

"Then, some of the missing followers, who were also Euphosine's followers, returned. With them were people of the world, from different races. There were even outworlders whom we heard to have entered our world not long ago. All these people were shackled.

"I confronted Euphosine, only to be met by another dreadful surprise. Beside Euphosine was our dead sister, Aglea. She just stood there. Unmoving and silent as a statue. I realized then it was Euphosine's deed. She had corrupted our Goddess' essence and used it to do unspeakable things.

"She said she had constructed a secret dimension where we can perform our annual game. Something that we did for fun to celebrate our Goddess. She promised that the game this time would be more exciting and it could be done monthly instead of annually. The people whom her followers brought in would become the first participants in this redefined game.

"I scolded her and demanded that she let these people go. Instead of listening, she attacked me. With our Goddess' power in her hand, she easily subdued me."

"You should have gone to ask for help from the other divine factions," Jack said.

"I...," Talia was about to say something but she turned tense. Jack had seen this same expression on her in their previous two encounters.

"Oh, she did try to," a voice that sent chills down Jack's soul was heard. His senses detected someone entering the room. The same chilling presence Jack momentarily sensed the first time he was here. However, this presence was shrouded by intense force, Jack's mana sense couldn't quite read this person.

"You see, that's why I keep her in restrain. It's also the reason why I have to relocate our faction's base, so the other meddling Gods didn't interfere with our fun," Euphosine said.

Chapter 1320: A Normal Person

Jack couldn't get a clear view of Euphosine. His perception during the incorporeal state was all relying on mana sense. If Euphosine currently had God-level power, then she was undetectable by mana sense like the other Gods or eternal-grade beings unless they purposefully released their energies.

All he perceived was void in the shape of a woman.

"An outworlder who can get into the spirit form... Impressive," Euphosine said. "But what's more impressive is that I sense God's powers inside you... Hm... A divine treasure and... Hope's sanctification. Who are you to Hope? Does he know what happens here?!"

Euphosine's voice turned edgy upon her last sentence. Hearing that, Jack seized the opportunity, "Of course, Hope knows! You have better let everyone go now, or else, you will suffer his wrath!"

Euphosine was silent for a while, she then spoke again. Her voice had returned to the playful tone the same as when Jack heard her the first time.

"You naughty child. You tried to trick me, didn't you? Nice try. If Hope knows what happens here, I won't be alive anymore. I very much want to reduce you to ashes for scaring me for a second there, but I've seen your matches. They were very entertaining. I can also see that you had a lot of fun playing my games."

Jack wanted to think, 'Fun my ass, you b*tch,' but he remembered what he was thinking about could be heard in this incorporeal state. He instead asked, "You are watching me...? In real-time?"

"No, silly. Even though I have become a Goddess, I can't be everywhere at the same time. All the matches were recorded. I watched them after the matches. Why do you ask?"

"Nothing... Just curious..."

Euphosine chuckled. "At first, I want to just erase the trespasser who has been so bold to intrude my sanctum and disturb my sister. But after finding that the trespasser is you, I change my mind. You are just too fun for my game. You have to continue playing it."

"Uh... So, you are letting me go?" Jack asked.

"Yes," Euphosine answered. "But... I still have to give you a punishment."

After she finished speaking, Jack felt a great void enveloping him.

"You... What are you doing...?!" Jack shouted.

Jack sensed Euphosine's presence magnified. Something that seemed like an orb was floating beside her. This orb radiated divine power similar to when Gods released their energies.

The void blanketed Jack tightly. He felt as if he was completely wrapped. As if he was encased in concrete. He couldn't move. He couldn't see. He couldn't feel anything. He could still hear Euphosine's voice, though.

"Mana sense and mana manipulation are the very essences of one's being. They are very difficult to seal. But this is my world. As long as I exert enough will and if it is only for sealing one person, it is still possible. You are now no longer permitted to use this ability."

No mana sense? Then how could he return to his body? When he was worrying about that, he suddenly felt something again.

He opened his eyes. He was back in his body. He looked around and found himself back in the dungeon with the others.

"Your Majesty, are you all right?" Kramer asked. "You... You look pale."

"Nightmare?" Stefan asked.

Jack realized then that he was also sweating. "Ye... Yeah... Nightmare."

"Must be one hell of a nightmare to scare someone like you," Stefan said.

Jack was silent. He was back in his body but he felt like a naked person. He could no longer sense the mana around him. He tried using mana manipulation. He was unable to. Without mana sense, he could no longer do his incorporeal state.

Euphosine must have been the one who sent his blind spirit back to his body. Otherwise, he would have been lost forever outside his body.

'Damn it!' Jack cursed within. 'Without mana sense, I won't be able to detect the exit...'

'... We will find another way,' Peniel tried to console.

*

The next day, the match was again another standard Olympic competition. This time it was archery.

Someone else took the first place in this match. Kerry, the native ethereal. Turned out she was an excellent marksman.

Jack was in second place while Master was in fourth. Stefan, the draconian player with the hidden weapon specialist class, scored third place.

Everyone, except for Kramer and Naomi who no longer need to participate in the match, was a decent marksman. None of the arrows failed to hit the circular targets. Aglea informed them that the first one to fire their arrows outside the circular target would instantly be nominated as the sacrifice.

Everyone fired ten arrows. Everyone hit the target. So, the winners and losers were determined by their scores.

The last place fell to Dina, who got the lowest score. When the decision was announced, she glanced at Jack before the space around them was rearranged.

Jack understood the glance. She hoped that Jack could save her like he did the others. But this time, Jack wasn't confident. He could no longer sense or manipulate mana. He felt that he was now back to being a normal person.

As the space around them reorganized itself, Jack found that he was alone in what looked like a room of a house.

"Where are the others?" He asked no one in particular.

Aglea didn't show up like she used to but her voice boomed around the room.

"The sacrificial round starts now. You are to navigate the maze of this manor to reach the room with the sacrifice. As usual, you have ten minutes. Beside you are your weapon and ammunition. Since I'm feeling generous today, I will let everyone in on a clue. You may not miss your shot more than ten times, and... Uh, I think this is pretty clear already after previous sacrificial rounds. It is not just the sacrifice that can die in this round. Those who try to save the sacrifice, bear the risk of dying as well. If you want to be safe, then just stay in your room until ten minutes passed. Otherwise, good playing! Hahaha..."

Jack looked to his side at the weapon Aglea mentioned. It was a slingshot. Next to the weapon was a bag of small metal balls. Jack counted the balls. There were twenty. So, everyone had to score at least fifty percent accuracy, but on what?

Jack picked up the slingshot and tied the bag of metal balls to his pants. He then took out one of the balls and armed the slingshot.

"Maze, eh...? This would have been so easy if I can still do my incorporeal state," Jack sighed.

"You can still conquer this maze without it," Peniel encouraged.

"Yeah," Jack uttered. He had played multiple maze games in the past. He didn't rely on mana sense then, he didn't need one now.

After reassuring himself into a proper mindset, he took a deep breath and walked to the only door of this room. He opened it and saw a long hallway.

The interior was neoclassical design but with poor illumination. The dim lighting only came from the candles fixed on the walls along the hallway. The moving shadows that were created every time the flame flickers gave Jack the sense that he might not be alone in that hallway.

Jack looked back at the room. It was safe back there. It was just a glance. The thought of safety left his mind as soon as it appeared. Even if he was back to a normal person, he couldn't leave a comrade to die.