

World 1341

Chapter 1341: Exchanging Stories

Since their car was wrecked, they couldn't move fast. Grace offered her motorcycle to Jack. Jack was about to take her offer but he then saw it was getting dark. It was not wise to travel through unknown territory in the dark.

Furthermore, Stefan and Naomi insisted on following if Jack continued his journey. Though the two could see this fourth team didn't consider them enemies, they still didn't want to stay behind if Jack didn't stay. The motorcycle and its sidecar could only hold two people. Thus, Jack decided to stay there for the night.

He hoped Kramer and the others find a safe place for the night as well.

They went into one of the ruined houses Grace and the others had reorganized into a temporary fortress. This house had three stories.

In a room on the second floor of the house, Jack and Grace exchanged information about what had happened while the others kept watch around the house. Their two teams went through the same matches and sacrificial rounds. The difference was Grace's team managed to save all the sacrifices, allowing them to enter this battle royale match with a full team.

It was because Grace and Spring Crown managed to save all five sacrifices that they earned the respect of the team. They were elected unanimously as the leaders. Spring Crown gladly stepped down and let Grace have the spotlight.

"Where is the rest of your team?" Jack asked.

He only saw seven people. Aside from Grace, Spring Crown, and Evan, the other four were the ones who ambushed them using the spike strip.

"We lost two people due to an ambush earlier before you came," Grace answered. "They came using a large truck. We were caught by surprise. The huge thing just rammed into us on the street. Many of us lost our shields in that attack. The two who were killed were run over by the truck. They lost one shield when they got hit by the truck's front bumper. The remaining two shields were when they got pancaked by the truck's front and rear wheels."

"I guess those vehicles are included as the tools that can cause damage to us," Jack remarked.

"Spells and skills can as well," Grace said. "The ice wall that hit your friend was from the ethereal you almost killed earlier today. He has the Elementalist class. He used a tool that allowed him to use his spells one time."

"Such a waste he wasted that tool on us," Jack said.

"He thought you were that other team," Grace said. "After the truck ran over us, four people came out of the back of the truck to finish the job. One was especially troublesome."

"Is it an old elf?" Jack asked.

"Yes, you've already met him?" Grace asked back.

"His team was the reason mine got separated." Jack then told her about what happened to his team until they arrived here.

"That's why you want to go back, to search for the rest?"

Jack nodded.

"I'm sure the others are okay," Grace consoled. "Rest here today. Tomorrow, we will go and search for them together."

"No, you need to take care of your team here. Your people have prepared the defense of this place. You will be safer here rather than following me out into the open. Don't worry, I can take care of myself."

"I know you can," Grace said. She preferred to go with Jack than stay here with the others. But the others had come to look to her for decisions. She didn't have the heart to leave them behind just like that.

"So, how did you deal with the old elf's team?" Jack asked. "That old elf is an experienced martial artist."

"Yes. Spring Crown and I fought him both. He must not have expected to face capable martial artists, so he called for his friends to use their tools which allowed them to access their skills once. But when he saw us using the same skill-free tools, he called for a retreat. They ran to the truck that was waiting for them, before driving away. After that assault, we decided to take a defensive position."

"They must not have expected you to have those tools," Jack said.

"Yeah, the enemies' faces definitely showed surprise, but I'm also surprised they can create so much trouble for yours and my team with only five people."

Jack then told her about his theory that the old elf's team might be the past participants of this game. Grace agreed with his hypothesis. However, she was also confused as to why such a team only had five members.

"They might have split up to cover more grounds," Jack guessed. "Which means the next time they attack, they might do it in full force. Your team threatens them the most now. The other two teams are scattered and wounded. They will be using all their resources on you. You must take caution."

Grace nodded.

"By the way, you said two of your members have died. That still leaves one more. Where is this last one?" Jack asked.

"The last one went on a patrol like Spring Crown and I did before you came. We returned when we heard the sound of tires popping. He might have gone further so he didn't hear the sound."

"He went by himself? Is he suicidal?" Jack asked.

"Well, I guess you can call him a loner type, but he can take care of himself," Grace replied. "He is also an expert martial artist."

"A martial artist? Did he happen to come to this place with a friend named Dina?" Jack asked.

"I don't know, he is not too talkative," Grace answered. "But he did mention he came with someone. Is Dina an elf?"

"She is," Jack said.

"Then she is probably Tom's friend. Oh, his name is Tom, by the way. I'm sure he would want to accompany you to look for your team if he learns of this."

Jack sighed. "Unfortunately, Dina died when we are ambushed by the old elf's team."

"Oh, no... Tom will be sad hearing this."

"Well. She is a player. She won't die for real. We need to figure out first how to escape this place, then we can think of a way to save her."

"How? We don't even have any idea about this place."

Jack then told her about what he had learned when he used his incorporeal state. About Euphosine, Talia, and why this faction devolved into such a state.

During their conversation, they suddenly heard a commotion. Someone ran down from the third floor. It was Spring Crown, who was keeping watch from up there with a few others.

"Tom has returned, but he is not alone," Spring Crown said.

"What do you mean? Do the people with the truck come again?" Grace asked.

"No. Whatever that is chasing after Tom, they don't look humanoid," Spring Crown answered.

Chapter 1342: Creatures of the Night

"What do you mean?" Grace asked while she ran down to the ground floor with Spring Crown and Jack.

"I can't see clearly because it is nighttime, but those things have six legs and they move by crawling," Spring Crown answered.

"How can this be? Isn't this game supposed to be a battle royale between four teams?"

Both Spring Crown and Jack had no answer to Grace's question.

When they arrived at the ground floor, they saw Stefan, Naomi, Evan, one elven girl, and one elven man holding the barricades they had placed in advance. Jack figured the elven man was Tom.

The barricades were shaking, like someone kept on bumping their bodies from the outside. There were also scratching sounds like a crowd moving out there.

"That sounds like a lot," Jack said.

"I didn't get a clear look. But yes, there seemed to be a lot of those creatures out there," Spring Crown said.

"Tom, what happened?" Grace asked the elven man. "Where do these creatures come from?"

"I don't know," Tom said. "I was on my way back when the sky turned dark. Then I hear crawling sounds behind me. I thought at first it was those people who ambushed us earlier, but then the sounds were getting more and more. I decided to just run back here."

"Way to go bringing these things here," Stefan said.

"Where do you propose I go?" Tom returned, then added, "And who the hell are you?!"

"Sstt...! Listen! Listen!" Spring Crown exclaimed.

"Listen to what?" Naomi asked. She was holding a thick wooden table top that was propped against a hole in the wall.

"They can climb...," Jack said after he paid attention to the sound from the outside. The crawling and scratching sound from the outside had moved up to the floor above them.

"Are the windows upstairs barricaded?" Jack asked.

"They are," Grace answered. "But this house has an open roof..."

They then heard screams from above. Three other lookouts were up there keeping watch on the surroundings with Spring Crown. Those three were still up there when Spring Crown came down to warn Jack and Grace.

"Help...! Help...!!" Those people pleaded.

Jack and Grace ran up. Spring Crown and Evan followed behind.

"Be careful, my dear! Let me protect you," Evan shouted.

"Dude, you truly don't know when to stop!" Jack had the urge to stop and gave the man a back kick.

When they reached the second floor, they saw something fall from the stairs to the third floor. It was one of the three lookouts from above, an elven girl. All her shields were gone already. She lay motionless on the floor.

They saw it then, one of the creatures. It was as Spring Crown said, the creature had six limbs, except they were not legs. They were hands. The creature was crawling down the stairs on six hands. It had dark hairless skin. its head, however, was covered with long hairs. They could only slightly see the face behind those hairs. The face was dark and its mouth formed a spooky grin filled with unusually white teeth.

But the most unsettling thing was its eyes. They were human's eyes but they were bulging and gave disquieting stares.

"Angels in heaven! What in God's name is that thing?" Evan asked in horror.

Jack also asked the same question to Peniel inside his mind. Peniel didn't know what this thing was. She said it was probably a new monster conjured from the imagination of the proprietor of this dimension.

Remembering Euphosine, Jack thought it wasn't weird for such a twisted creature to be born out of her demented mind.

They then saw a second similar creature peeked upside-down from the opening to the third floor. Then a third one crawled down the stairs. There was no sign of the two other lookouts. The screams had stopped. They didn't make it.

The first creature jumped at them. Jack rushed forward and was the first to engage the creature. His wrench slashed with deadly accuracy, striking the creature right in the head. It slammed into the floor. An HP bar appeared above it. It had lost around 20% of its HP.

"It is not too durable!" Jack exclaimed. If he could use mana manipulation, the creature would have been near death already.

"There are a lot of them, though." Spring Crown said. He had moved back and shot using his slingshot as more and more of the creatures came down from the third floor.

Grace used a spear. She stabbed those creatures and kept them at bay while Evan stayed close to her in an attempt to protect her, but it was her spear that saved him most of the time.

Jack meanwhile swung his wrench around while using eight diagram illusory steps to maneuver around such a limited space. His formless flowing sword style was not too effective when performed using one hand, so he kept his attack to a regular swing and stab. Even so, each swing and stab was lethal. Guided by his sword's heart, each attack struck his marks accurately.

With them working together, they managed to kill some in a short time, but the swarm seemed to be endless. More and more came down the stairs. The rate by which they killed the creatures couldn't match the speed of new ones showing up. If this continued, they won't be able to move because of how cramped the place was. If that happened, they were doomed.

"We can't fight here! We are not killing them fast enough!" Jack exclaimed.

This place didn't provide an effective chokepoint. The dark creatures could also crawl on the ceiling. Luckily, they only needed one shot to be brought down to the ground. Spring Crown was in charge of shooting those on the ceiling.

"Look out!" Evan shouted

One of the creatures lunged from Grace's blind spot. She had mana sense but her hands were full dealing with the creatures from her front. She couldn't do anything as this one came from behind.

Evan jumped forward and put himself in between Grace and the creature. He stabbed the creature at its neck but the creature's two forearms also smashed into his head. He only had one shield left. That last shield was broken.

Grace looked at Evan who lay lifeless beside her. This guy was nauseating, but his selfless act just now earned him her respect.

She and Jack had also lost a shield in the ensuing battle, they both had only one shield left. Only Spring Crown who fought from range still had two shields.

More of the dark creatures continued entering the room from the opening above.

Chapter 1343: Using the Skill-free Tools

Grace decided she couldn't hold back anymore, she took out a small black ball, which Jack recognized as the skill-free tool. She had been saving this tool for when the old elf's team came attacking again.

A brilliant light filled the room. All the shields atop Jack, Grace, and Spring Crown's heads reformed. All three now had three shields above them. Grace had used the Generosity of Hope.

"Keep fighting!" Grace yelled. "After one minute, your shields will reform again. Kill as many as possible within this one minute. We can't let them get to the people downstairs. If they break through the barricades down there, we will be sieged from two sides!"

'One minute? I thought Generosity of Hope has a duration of thirty minutes?' Jack thought. He didn't waste time asking for an explanation, though. He instead went to Grace's side and picked up Evan's shortsword. Aglea said they can pick up a fallen enemy's weapons. She never stressed whether the picker had to be the person who killed the fallen one.

Jack tested by slashing the shortsword on one of the creatures. It caused damage. It was working. With a wrench in his right hand and a shortsword in his left, Jack performed formless flowing sword style. With dual weapons, the sword art showed its power. Countless slashes struck the creatures and the rate they were killed increased.

"Do you have more of those black balls?" Jack asked.

"Here!" Grace handed him two. "These are the remaining ones I have."

Texts appeared once Jack touched the small balls.

*

Skill-free Stone (consumable)

Activate one skill.

Duration: 1 minute (any skill that has a duration of more than one minute will have its duration reduced to one minute)

*

'No wonder Grace said one minute,' Jack thought.

This meant that skills with duration were nerfed even if he could use them. He originally wanted to use Beast Form or Strength of Hope. But if the buff only last one minute, it won't change the situation much. he was not confident he could kill all these creatures within one minute even with the buff.

"Hey! A little help here!" Spring Crown yelled. Since Jack moved away, the creatures could advance to Spring Crown who stood guarding the stairs to the ground floor.

Spring Crown used his legs to kick away the creatures that came at him, while his slingshot continued firing. But with the creature's number, he would get overwhelmed soon.

Suddenly, a shadow darted above him. He thought at first it was an eagle because he heard an eagle's screeching sound, but how did an eagle come inside this house?

This shadow landed in front of him and at the same time, three of the creatures in front of him were thrown away. He noticed then that the shadow was an elven man.

"Tom!" He hailed.

Tom was wearing the steel claw weapon in his right hand. He clawed the incoming creature using that weapon and dealt damage to them. When more than one creature came, his two hands formed into claws. These claws were formed using three fingers, thumb, index, and middle fingers, imitating an eagle's claws.

These eagle claws clutched onto the creatures with precision. The strength these claws held was higher than normal even when they used fewer fingers. Tom then performed acrobatic moves and utilized the momentum to throw the creatures away.

Jack, who watched from a distance, recognize it as the eagle claw martial art. He had seen a friend of his grandfather perform this martial art in the past. It was a claw art that combined graceful and swift movement with incredible precision. Tom seemed to be quite an expert in that martial art. Too bad he didn't have mana manipulation, otherwise those eagle claws would have caused damage as well.

"Why are you up here?" Spring Crown asked while continuing to fire his slingshot.

Not that he was not happy with the assist, it's just that if fewer people held the barricades down there, the creatures might break in through the ground floor.

"They are all climbing up," Tom replied. "The sound of them crawling down there is getting lesser."

Hearing that, Jack called Tom. "Tom, head back downstairs! When you hear all of them are gone from downstairs, let us know."

"What? Why? And also, who are you?! Why do we get so many strangers suddenly?" Tom returned.

"Do as he says, Tom!" Grace ordered.

Tom was still confused but he didn't waste time arguing. After throwing away a batch of creatures near him, he did another acrobatic move and used the wall to jump over Spring Crown and went back downstairs.

Jack returned to his original position to cover Spring Crown. With two weapons and his sword art, he could better cope with this swarm. But they were still getting pushed. More and more of the dark creatures entered from above.

The floor was already piled with the creatures' bodies. These creatures didn't disintegrate like normal monsters in the outside world. This increased their difficulty in dealing with the rest of the creatures because it was getting harder for them to move around.

They lost some shields during that time. One minute of Generosity of Hope ended and all their shields were reformed, but as time passed, they lost shields again.

When they were about to get overwhelmed, they heard Tom's voice from below.

"I don't hear them crawling outside anymore. I think all of them had climbed up there!"

"Go down! Go down!" Jack told Grace and Spring Crown. "Once you are down there, have everyone run out of the house."

Despite not knowing Jack's plan, the two didn't waste time questioning him. They turned around and ran down the stairs. Jack stayed before the flight of stairs to block the creatures.

Jack used the skill-free stone then and summoned his spirit weapon. The spirit weapon immediately got into melee mode once it appeared. Its two blades slashed all incoming creatures.

Jack sent a mental command to the spirit weapon. It changed into a ranged mode and went downstairs as well. Jack followed slowly while continuing to block the creature's advance with his sword art. His spirit weapon's flying blades battered the creatures to slow them down.

When he got down there, he saw the door was opened and everyone had run outside. He activated his spirit weapon's finishing mode. He continued blocking the creatures and waited for the finishing mode to proceed halfway. He couldn't afford to let these creatures kill his spirit weapon before its finishing mode was complete.

Once he saw the detonation was about to happen. He used the second Skill-free stone and used Beast Form.

He used the inherent Wind Jet skill of the supreme dragon form and shot out of the house through the front door, just as a huge explosion decimated the house.

Chapter 1344: The World Shrinks

The force of the explosion accelerated Jack's flying speed, throwing him further away than Wind Jet's normal distance. He ended up flying past the others who had come out earlier and landed behind them.

When he looked back, he saw the house was already in ruin. His spirit weapon's finishing mode had destroyed most of the interiors. Only a part of the roof was still intact, which had now fallen to the ground. Some of the creatures were still wriggling atop that partial roof.

Jack unleashed his soul breath before his beast form duration ran out. This soul breath took care of the still-alive creatures on the roof.

His beast form ended when he walked back to the others, who were watching him in awe.

Stefan and Naomi were especially wide eyes. Naomi said, "I heard that the player who becomes the king of Themisphere has a beast form that transforms into a dragon. Are you truly the king...?"

"I've already said I am. You, people, are the ones who don't want to believe it," Jack replied.

"Do you think we got all of them?" The elven girl, whose name was Windy, asked. She was the only native in this group now.

The others looked at the destroyed house. It was burning. This pocket world had turned out to follow more closely to their past world's rule. The detonation had caused sparks inside the house which triggered additional explosions that produced fire.

They couldn't see any movement from the flame.

"I think we got them all," Grace said.

"Do you think those were all of them?" Windy asked again.

The others looked around at the question. It was mostly dark. Even Spring Crown and Grace couldn't see if there were any more of the creatures out here.

"Let's find someplace to hide instead of finding out the answer to that question," Spring Crown suggested.

Everyone agreed.

They had scouted this place earlier so it didn't take long for them to find a second hiding place. It was a house similar to the one that was destroyed, except this one didn't have an open roof. Most of its walls were still intact. They started barricading its openings with anything they could find.

They took turns keeping watch from the third floor's windows. The ones who didn't keep watch rested on the ground floor. Not all of them could sleep, though. They waited restlessly for the night to be over and for sunlight to return.

When the sun was finally up, they peeked outside. It looked the same.

"Do you think those things only come out at night?" Stefan asked.

"I think so. They only appear once the sun is out," Tom said.

"I guess this is a mechanic in place to make sure the game ends," Jack said.

"What do you mean?" Stefan asked.

"It means it is a preparation for a scenario like the one we have here," It was Spring Crown who answered the question. "We are two different teams, but instead of killing each other like the game intended. We are buddying up to each other. Even if this world shrunk as Aglea mentioned. We can just sit together, refuse to kill each other, and let the game continues endlessly. But with the addition of these night creatures, it becomes a race to see which team survives the last."

"Or maybe these creatures can also be a punishment for two opposite teams working together," Tom offered his opinion.

"That is also a possibility. So, leader, should we honor the game's rules and back to having a deathmatch with these fine folks?" Spring Crown asked Grace.

Grace shot Spring Crown an annoyed glance. The guy should know full well the answer to that question.

"We have lost quite many members just in one day," Grace sighed sadly. "Our team is down to four. If the ones who ambushed us yesterday come back to hunt us, we will have difficulty fending them off. Our tools had mostly run out. I propose we follow Jack and look for the members of his team. By moving together, we can better protect each other."

"Okay. I guess we can put the deathmatch to a later time. You lots hear the leader, right? Let's move!" Spring Crown commanded.

"He makes a good second-in-command," Jack said to Grace.

"Why, thank you! Please put in the same words for my actual boss, wherever he is. Are you sure he is truly on your team?" Spring Crown asked.

"Do you think I can mistake him for someone else?" Jack asked back.

"I suppose not," Spring Crown said and walked out of the house.

Seven of them stood on the street. Four from Grace's team and three from Jack's.

"Let's get the motorcycle," Spring Crown said. They had left the vehicle in front of the burnt-down house. They were in a hurry to get to another hiding place to think about bringing the motorcycle.

"We should also search for the weapons from the fallen ones," Jack proposed. "It has been proven we can use them as long as the original owner has died."

"Good. I will need a melee weapon as well. Slingshot is good, but it's not dependable when the opponent appro—Ouch!"

Spring Crown was speaking while walking toward their previous hiding place. He suddenly recoiled as if he had bumped into an invisible wall.

"F*ck me...!" Spring Crown cursed while massaging his nose. His hand went forward and touched something solid in the air. "There is a barrier!"

The others went and touched the unseen wall. Jack did the same. There truly was one.

Jack was reminded of the time when he was in the tutorial period. This invisible wall was the same as then.

"But... This is not here last night," Windy said.

"The world has shrunk," Jack said.

"Yeah, this must be what that b*tch host mentioned," Spring Crown said. "Every day, we will lose more area until the land we can move in is the size of ten-by-ten meters."

Grace punched the invisible wall in frustration. The motorcycle and their fallen comrades' weapons were on the other side of this barrier.

Chapter 1345: The Enemies Show Up

"What do you think will happen to us if we are still in that old house when the world shrinks?" Stefan asked.

They were currently walking in the direction Jack remembered to be the place where they split up with Kramer and the rest. Without any vehicle, they could only walk slowly.

"I don't know. Probably we will get magically teleported to the edge of the barrier," Jack speculated.

"Or we get vaporized for being on the wrong side of the map or get trapped on the other side for all eternity," Spring Crown added.

"Can you be any more cheery?" Jack asked.

"This is my max version already," Spring Crown replied with a grin.

Stefan ignored Spring Crown and asked Jack, "Bro, I hear aside from being a king, you are also the leader of the number one guild in Themisphere? Do you mind accepting me and Naomi into your guild?"

"Sure. Once we are out of this accursed place, just sign up. I will take care of your applications," Jack said. "But do the guild tasks, okay? Don't expect any special treatment."

"You people are so optimistic we can be free of this place?" Spring Crown again ruined the mood.

"Look! You think that place might have tools?" Grace pointed to an abandoned accessory shop by the side.

"Maybe, that clothing store opposite from it also looks potential," Spring Crown replied. "I will take the clothing and you go to the accessory."

Grace nodded. "Everyone else, please watch the perimeter."

Jack followed Grace into the accessory shop. She could take care of herself but Jack still wanted to make sure she was close by if something bad happened.

"Last night, you were saying something about this faction before those creatures attacked," Grace spoke to Jack while she looked around for useful stuff. "You mentioned a possible way to escape this place?"

"Yes. As I said yesterday, this dimension consists of many pocket worlds that are linked together. This place we are in is just one of these pocket worlds. We can use these links to move into the nexus world. The exit to the outside world should be in that nexus world."

"How do we find this link?" Grace asked.

"I have interfaced with the mana that forms the link. If I can sense mana again, I will be able to sense the exit that allows me to connect to the nexus world."

"If...? Are you saying you lose your mana sense ability?" Grace asked. She stopped searching after learning about Jack's situation.

"Not just mana sense. My mana manipulation is also sealed. Euphosine considers it a fitting punishment for intruding into her nexus world. I guess I should be glad she didn't just obliterate me outright."

"She can do that?"

Jack shrugged. "She has the power of a Goddess in her hands."

"If so, even if you get your mana sense back, won't she just give you a more severe punishment if you intrude into her nexus world again?"

"She might be powerful, but she isn't privy to everything that happens in her worlds. Talia mentioned that Euphosine is not there a few hours after the matches. I think it is the same when the matches are in progress. So, as long as we can find the main exit before she is finished with whatever keeps her occupied, we should be able to escape."

"Here," Grace threw something at Jack. Jack caught it and found it to be another Skill-free stone.

"What about you?" Jack asked.

"Your skills are more powerful than mine. That stone is more useful in your hands. I also found an adhesive bandage here. Other than that, I don't think there is any more useful..."

"Enemies...!!!" A shout from the outside stopped their conversation.

They unsheathed their weapons. "Stay behind me!" Jack said as they headed out.

When they almost came out of the shop, they saw a huge fireball heading toward them. Jack instinctively grabbed Grace and jumped away. The fireball crushed into the shop and created a fiery explosion.

"It's that team again!" Grace exclaimed.

Four enemies were fighting the five from their teams. Tom was fighting Freddie, the old elven martial artist, while Spring Crown supported Tom from afar. Without access to skills, martial expertise became the deciding factor in the scuffle.

Tom's eagle claw style might be formidable, but he was not yet at the level of mana manipulation. Hence, Freddie held the advantage in the fight.

The others from Freddie's team had the advantage of tool-using. The fireball came from the ethereal woman who used the slingshot. She had the Elementalist class. She had used a skill-free tool to cast the exploding fireball, which missed hitting Stefan and ended up almost hitting Jack and Grace who happened to come out of the shop.

Another enemy was fighting Naomi. The enemy was a Weapon Master. He used a Skill-free tool to activate the Weapons Festival. Nine melee weapons floated around him and assaulted Naomi, who used the shortest-ranged weapon, a steel claw.

All Naomi could do was dodge. She was not a fast player but luckily she had the shield-protect stone. She used the stone and her shields didn't break even when the multiple weapons hit her body. She ran away during the five seconds when the protection was in effect. She kept a safe distance away from the weapon master, waiting for his Weapon Festival to end.

The one who was most in trouble was Windy. The native woman had to deal with an enemy who had transformed into a werewolf. That form should also only last one minute due to the tool's restriction but

this one minute could decide life and death since the enemy only needed to hit her twice. Windy only had two shields left.

When Jack and Grace were about to head over to help, they heard the heavy sound of an engine. They looked back and saw the monster truck that used to chase after them. Finn was behind the wheel and he was driving the truck straight at them.

"Screw these people!" Jack cursed and used the skill-free stone that Grace had just given him.

Jack transformed into supreme dragon form and flew straight toward the car. He crossed his arms before him and rammed himself into the monster truck.

Finn was in disbelief when he saw the opponent charge toward him. His opponent might have used Beast Form but this was a huge truck, for goodness sake. No way this truck would lose, right?

He found the answer when the truck was stopped abruptly from the collision. He crashed into the windshield before flying out and falling onto the road's pavement.

Chapter 1346: Master Shows Up

Despite his shock, Finn managed to position and covered himself when he fell. Thus, protecting his vital parts and avoiding getting his shields broken. He already lost one shield prior. He only had two shields above him.

He didn't let himself stay for long on the ground. He rose and watched the scene before him in disbelief. The front part of his truck had caved in. There was no way that truck was still usable. Jack in his dragon form was standing in front of the wrecked truck.

While he was still processing the scene, he felt a sharp pain from behind. One of his two shields broke.

Grace had taken the chance and stabbed Finn in his back.

Finn only had one shield left. He couldn't afford to be careless. He took out a skill-free stone from his pocket. However, before he could use it, Jack had come before him.

Jack's claw thrust forward with One-word Thrust. Jack's thrust struck Finn's wrist which hand was holding the skill-free stone. In this place, it was possible to wound a player. Even without mana manipulation, the power of Jack's martial art in his supreme dragon form was nothing to be taken lightly.

Finn's hand was cut off on his wrist.

Both the pain and the horrific sight caused Finn to scream hysterically. He couldn't take his eyes off his maimed hands. The maiming wound him but it didn't destroy his shield. Jack would have to hit his vital parts to do that.

Jack didn't plan to finish him yet. He used one hand to grab Finn's head before using the dragon form's wind jet to shoot forward. Dragging Finn with him, Jack flew at high speed toward the werewolf who was about to destroy Windy's last shield.

Jack slammed Finn into the werewolf. The force threw both Finn and the werewolf into a ruined building. Jack then fired his soul breath into that building.

"Go hide!" Jack told Windy. She was a native and she only had one shield left. Jack didn't want to risk her dying.

He then went to the next comrade who was in trouble. Naomi was also losing the fight and she had lost her shields until only one was left. The weapon master's Weapon Festival was already over, but the weapon master used another skill-free stone. His wooden bat was enveloped in light. It was the Ki Weapon.

Even though the skills are activated using a skill-free stone, the cooldown rule still applied. So, the weapon master had to resort to using Ki Weapon instead of using the more powerful Weapon Festival for the stone's second usage.

With Ki Weapon's increased reach, the bat was about to strike Naomi, but a hand came and caught the bat on its track.

"What...?!" The weapon master stared in disbelief at the one who had stopped his swing. It was a humanoid dragon.

He couldn't stare for long, though, as Jack's other claw came slamming into his head. He immediately found himself down on the ground. He wondered if the hit just now was a slap or a train ramming into his head.

Jack didn't stop there. He continued by stomping on the weapon master's head, taking out all the shields on the poor guy.

Jack's beast form ended then. A one-minute duration was too short. He couldn't finish all these enemies fast enough.

Unfortunately, even though Jack's soul breath was powerful, it was not a multi-hit skill. So, it only destroyed one shield from the beastmaster. The beastmaster who was no longer a werewolf rushed out of the ruined building. He had two shields left. Rushing out with him were six wolves. The beastmaster had used another skill-free stone and used Call Wolf Pack.

"Get behind me!" Jack told Naomi. He then used his wrench and shortsword to perform the formless flowing sword style. The six wolves couldn't get near them and were instead getting countless slashes from Jack.

The beastmaster tried to circle Jack and get to Naomi. But when he was halfway, he received a hard impact on his head. He immediately turned in Spring Crown's direction, thinking that Spring Crown had stolen a shot.

But he noticed Spring Crown was still busy helping Tom deal with Freddie. Spring Crown was also too far away to hit him even with the slingshot. He then felt a second impact. This second impact took out his last shield. He died without even knowing who had killed him.

The beastmaster's six wolves disappeared once their owner died. Jack turned in the direction where the shot had come from. He saw Master coming out from an obscured alley between two ruined buildings.

Grace had gone to help Tom and Spring Crown fought Freddie. It was now a three-against-one.

Freddie studied the situation, which was not good. They failed to take out any enemy and instead, he lost three members. He had been winning against Tom but with the addition of Grace, he won't be able to take down Tom in a short time. Tom only had one shield left, but he didn't think risking himself getting surrounded for one kill was worth it.

He moved away from Tom and called his one remaining comrade, the ethereal woman who was fighting against Stefan. "Saddie! We lost! We have to leave!"

Saddie didn't dilly-dally, she retreated once Freddie gave the order. She retreated while continuing shooting at Stefan to prevent him from chasing her. Stefan wasn't interested in doing so. He was happy this ethereal woman left.

By the time Jack came to where they were, Freddie and Saddie were already gone.

"Should we chase?" Tom asked. He was panting from the fight.

"No, there might be a trap where they are retreating to. We should recuperate first. Windy, use this," Grace gave the adhesive bandage to Windy. Tom also had only one shield left, but Windy was a native. Tom didn't object to Grace's decision.

"Yo, boss! You've finally shown yourself," Spring Crown noticed Master.

Master came out of the alley and walked to them.

"Where have you gone to? Why are you helping us now?" Jack asked him.

"I'm not helping you. I just chase away those people so we can talk," Master said.

"Talk about what?" Jack asked.

"I have a way to remove all these restrictions that are forced upon us, but I will need you to do something," Master said.

Chapter 1347: Gigantic Rune Diagram

"You can do that?" Everyone asked after hearing Master's claim.

Master acted like the others didn't exist. His eyes never moved away from Jack.

"You need my help to do it?" Jack asked.

"Don't sound so happy about it," Master replied. "You just happen to have the ability to give this mission the highest success chance."

"In other words, you need my help to do it," Jack repeated.

Master decided to just not say anything this time. He had learned by now that Jack would just respond with something that irritated him.

"So, what difficult mission do you need my help with which your great Godly self can't do anything about?" Jack asked.

Master took a deep breath. He decided he just had to suffer this fool for now.

"Let's find someplace we can talk. It is too open out here," Master said.

Spring Crown took them into the clothing store he went into before. Inside was a back room with a meeting table that was still intact. There was even a whiteboard.

Jack, Grace, Spring Crown, and Master went into this room while the others stayed outside to keep watch.

"So, boss. What do you need us to do?" Spring Crown asked cheerily after taking a seat.

Master glanced at Spring Crown annoyingly. This guy didn't seem at all bothered by the situation they were in.

"Yeah, boss. Lay it out on us," Jack imitated Spring Crown's tone.

Master took another deep breath. He guessed it was his fault for creating a world that empowered these gamers. He decided to just cut to the chase. The sooner they resolved the situation here, the sooner he was free of these fools... Except for Spring Crown, he still had use for that one for a while longer.

"This world might be a constructed dimension with its own rules, but it's not perfect. I think whoever is in control of this place is using a power that is not originally theirs. Stripping us from using our equipment and skills took no small energy. It is like fighting against the rules laid down by the world system. Hence, the controller of this place employed hidden rune diagrams to maintain the restriction of our abilities."

"Hidden rune diagrams...?" The others asked. At this point, they were all familiar with rune diagrams already.

"Apart from being invisible, there is another reason why those of you who have mana sense didn't quite sense them," Master continued.

"Ho... You know about mana sense?" Jack asked.

Master ignored Jack. "These rune diagrams are there in every different world within this dimension we have been to. The matches, the sacrificial rounds, all of them."

"So, why can't we sense it?" Jack asked.

"Because it is the size of the entire world we are in," Master answered.

Jack realized then. Mana sense had a limited range. Without sensing the whole thing, most would just consider the mana as part of the environment. It was like an ant who stand inside a footprint made by an elephant. The ant won't realize that it was actually inside a footprint.

"Let me guess, you want my help in unraveling this rune diagram," Jack said.

"I've already started unraveling it the moment I set foot in this end match's arena," Master said. "I've studied every rune diagram in our previous matches. All of them used the same version. This end match is no different. It might have a slight variation but it is essentially still the same diagram. With this knowledge, I've no problem tracking the node points of this world's rune diagram. If we depower all these nodes, the rune diagram will stop working."

"If you are already working on it, why do you need me?" Jack asked.

"Wait! You said you are depowering the node points. Won't Aglea or whoever is controlling this dimension be aware of your doing?" Grace asked.

"As I said, this controller seemed to be using a power that is not their own. They are not fully in control. Aglea only appears at the start and the end of the sacrificial round, because that round is more complex. As for the matches before the sacrificial round, it is simple so she can accompany us all the time. And one thing to note is, she was not aware of what happened during the sacrificial round when she reappeared. Remember how she was surprised when she found us fighting after the first sacrificial round?"

"I remember we were not fighting. I was whooping your ass," Jack said.

"This proves that she was not monitoring the round when it was ongoing," Master acted as if Jack didn't say anything. "With the scale of this end match, the energy needed to operate it is even much higher. Because Aglea is not using a power that is her own, she needed all her attention to keep this world working. She will only stop when this constructed world informed her that the match has ended. That's how I can depower all the nodes without her realizing it. It has been proven when I deactivated the first node. Nothing came out to stop me."

Jack and Grace looked at one another. The two knew for a fact that the controller of this dimension, Euphosine, was indeed operating as Master had theorized. She was using Goddess Joy's divine essence to make this dimension, a power that was not her own.

Euphosine herself also told Jack that she only watched the recording of the sacrificial rounds after the rounds ended. That's why she was occupied for a few hours afterward, allowing Jack to talk to Talia during that time.

Jack, however, was more impressed that Master learned all this on his own. He was peeved though, because Master had kept all this from them until now.

"So, what makes you come here now? If you are so capable, why not just proceed to depower the diagram on your own?" Jack asked.

"Because the last node, the main one, is guarded," Master replied.

"Guarded?"

"I assume you have encountered the dark creatures that come out during the night, haven't you?" Master asked. "The last node is inside a high-rise building, and it is full of these creatures."

Chapter 1348: Equipment-free Tool

"High-rise building? Which one?" Jack asked. He and the others had passed through a few areas with high-rise buildings when they were driving in the car, but all of them were in a ruined state.

"I will show you, come," Master said.

"Hold your horses. Do you think we are your lackeys?" Jack pointed at Spring Crown while speaking.

"You can't expect us to go when you say go. Explain first. If you can't get through the security to get to this main node, what makes you think I can do it?"

"Because you are the most likely to be able to battle through the horde," Master answered.

"You have more classes than me. Why didn't you do it?"

"My strength is in my spell casting. There are not enough skill-free stones here to give me enough spells to battle my way up to the top which is where the main node is. You, on the other hand, are still formidable by relying only on standard attacks."

"It felt weird receiving praise from you," Jack said. "But have you encountered those dark creatures last night? If your high-rise building is full of them, even I won't be able to fight my way up. All I can rely on are my basic stats and they only need to hit me thrice... Oh, I'm sorry, I mean, twice."

Jack pointed at the two shields above him. He had lost one shield from the fight from last night.

Master replied by throwing an adhesive bandage at Jack.

"Uh... You have more for the others?" Jack asked.

Master didn't answer. He instead threw a different tool at Jack. Jack caught it and a series of texts appeared.

*

Equipment-free tool

Pick one equipment. Duration varies based on equipment type.

Weapon: 5 minutes

Armor: 1 hour

Accessory: 8 hours

*

"Cool," Jack uttered. "But I can only use a weapon for five minutes. It won't get me far."

"That is for your armor," Master threw another two equipment-free tools. "Before you enter, equip your helmet, chest armor, and pants armor. Those are your vital parts. They should protect you from getting your shields shattered. These tools are limited, it is better to stack their benefits on one person and maximize that person's ability. That's why I choose you. With these tools, you should be able to make your way up to the main node."

"In that case, you shouldn't hold back. What else do you have? Give them all out. You want me to succeed, don't you?" Jack said.

"I will give it to you when we are at the entrance to the building," Master said. "There is no reason for you to refuse. You want to be out of this place as much as I do. Getting our abilities back is a start. We are powerless as we are. With our powers back, we might be able to force our way out."

Grace moved her chair to sit next to Jack. She then whispered, "If your abilities are freed, your mana ability should be back as well. Perhaps you can find the exit then."

Jack nodded. However, there was one thing he needed to do before that.

"All right, but I have to find Kramer first. I need to make sure he is fine," Jack said. Winson and Kerry were also still alive when they split, but Jack's main concern was Kramer because that kid believed in him and Kramer was also his kingdom's citizen.

"That human native? You are willing to delay our freedom for that insignificant person?" Master asked in disgust.

"Even if I try explaining to you, you won't understand, so I won't bother. Seeing that you need me to get to that main node, you will have to play this my way. You can come with us if you want, or you can go hide somewhere and show up again later. It's your choice."

Jack stood up and walked out. Grace followed him. Spring Crown stayed for a while, grinning widely. He then stood up and said, "Sorry, boss. Outside, you are the boss. Here, I'm on a different team. So, I got to follow my team."

Master remained silent as Spring Crown walked out.

After everyone was out, Master took deep breaths several times. 'Emotion is useless. Emotion is pointless,' he continued this mantra inside him.

When he felt himself calm down. He walked out of the building. Outside, he saw everyone gathered and started moving in a direction. He followed after them.

*

Without a vehicle, it took them hours to be back to where Jack last saw Kramer. He was now back to the park where they were ambushed by the first enemy team they encountered. Luckily, no one intercepted them. Considering both the enemy teams were down to two members the last he saw them, he figured these enemies won't try anything on them anymore.

"How are you going to find Kramer and the others?" Naomi asked. They could be miles away from here by now.

"Well, I was hoping they will be waiting for us here," Jack said. "Let's stay here for a while. They might watch this place from afar. They should come here if they see us."

They hung around the place. Grace organized several people to keep watch on their surroundings.

While waiting, Jack came to Master.

"What do you want? Other than about the main node, I'm not interested in a conversation," Master said crudely.

"Don't be like that. I'm just wondering. Even I who have mana sense wasn't aware of the rune diagram inside the worlds used for the matches and the sacrificial rounds, how could you tell there were rune diagrams there?"

"... I have my way," Master replied.

"So, we are keeping secrets, huh? And here I am thinking that we have started to open up to one another."

"Do you have so much free time to kill?" Master asked in annoyance. "It will be dark in a few hours. If we don't find a place to hide. You will lose more people."

"Yeah, you are right," Jack said. "If Kramer hasn't shown up by now. It means he doesn't watch this place."

Jack saw Spring Crown come back. He had gone somewhere since they started hanging in this park.

"You find any?" Jack asked.

"Yeah. There is a good warehouse building not far from here. The walls and roof were still intact. No window, only one way in," Spring Crown answered.

"Perfect," Jack uttered. "You and Grace led the others there."

"What about you?" Grace asked.

"I'm going to search for Kramer," Jack said and took out one of the equipment-free tools Master had given him.

Before Master could protest, he activated it. His God-eye monocle appeared on his left eye.

"I bet you have more of this, right? So, you don't mind if I use one first," Jack said to Master. "And this is how you move around without stumbling into enemies, isn't it? I'm going to use this radar to find Kramer."

Chapter 1349: Looking for Kramer

Master was peeved that Jack used the tool for something that he deemed extremely unimportant.

"Has it ever occurred to you that that human native might already die?" Master asked Jack. "Are you going to search for him endlessly? You should know that our time is limited. The world shrinks every day. By the fourth day, the high-rise building where the main node is will already be outside the area we can travel to."

"By the fourth day? That means we still have until tomorrow, right?" Jack said.

Master frowned. Perhaps he should have lied and said that the building will be inaccessible by tomorrow. He knew the exact day because he estimated by comparing the location of the high-rise building and the area the world had shrunk in one day.

"By the way, where is your vehicle?" Jack asked.

When Master didn't answer, Jack said, "You said the rune diagram covers this entire pocket world. With how big it is, you couldn't have gone around the place and depowered all the node points in just one day on foot. You must have a vehicle. Borrow it to me so I can shorten my time finding Kramer. The sooner I find him, the sooner we go deal with your main node."

When Master remained silent, Jack added, "Tell you what. If you lend me your vehicle, I promise we will go to this high-rise building by tomorrow noon whether or not I find Kramer."

Master finally took something out of his pocket. It looked like a small pill case. He opened the case and something jumped out from it. The thing enlarged instantly and turned out to be a motorbike.

"Holy f*ck...! It's a caps*le corporation's tech!!" Jack exclaimed. The others had no idea what he was talking about.

"Boss... You are truly something. Even with my eagle eyes, I still fail to find as many tools as you," Spring Crown remarked.

"I bet once he got one of these equipment-free tools, he used it to activate this thing to help him find more," Jack pointed at his God-eye monocle. Jack remembered Master's monocle was special compared to the other God-eye monocles. Perhaps that's why Master had an easier time locating precious items in the game world.

Jack climbed on the bike and started it up. The fuel gauge indicated that it was two-thirds empty.

"Um... Do you have spare fuel?" Jack asked.

It took several seconds before Master took out another magic pill case and a fuel canister came out of it.

"Can I have one of those too?" Jack asked when he picked up the fuel canister. He was indicating the pill case.

Master replied by storing the pill case back in his pocket. Jack chuckled as he tied the fuel canister to the back of the motorbike.

"Are you okay wandering alone?" Grace asked.

"Don't worry," Jack said. "Anything bad happens, I have the equipment-free stones." This caused Master to glare at him.

They then headed to the safe house that Spring Crown had found. Jack followed them first so he knew the location. He then rode the bike away.

He checked his radar. Before he left the group, he noticed the group was represented as a mix of green and red dots on the radar. His team, which consisted of Master, Stefan, and Naomi were green dots. The rest were red dots. The radar identified allies and enemies based on this pocket world's rule.

This made it easier for him to find his missing team. They would be the only ones marked as green dots on his radar.

He drove in a spiral, using the park as a reference point. Going outward as he drove, thus covering more ground.

He continued to pay attention to his radar. He rode the bike at as fast a speed as possible. It was just another three hours before the night arrived. He had to be back at the safe house before then.

He noticed two red dots as he drove. He wondered if those were the first enemy team or the old elf's team. He didn't engage them. He didn't have time for that. His priority was finding Kramer. Fortunately, this bike emitted very little noise, so it didn't attract the two red dots' attention. Jack surmised this was also another reason Master could travel around without getting found out by the enemy teams.

After more than one hour of driving, he finally spotted what he was looking for. Two green dots.

'Should be Kramer, right?' Jack thought. When they split, he saw Kramer flee with Winson while Kerry fled alone.

Jack headed to the two green dots.

The two green dots were hiding inside a partially destroyed building. When Jack drew near, the two green dots bolted in the opposite direction. They must have heard the bike since he was close.

"Kramer! Winson!" Jack shouted.

The two green dots stopped. Not long after, Jack saw Kramer's head pop out of the building.

"Your Majesty...!!" Kramer exclaimed with joy.

Jack was relieved, the teenager was safe.

Winson came out then. "Storm, you are alive!" He called.

"Did you guys see Kerry?" Jack asked.

The two shook their heads. "We haven't seen her since we split up."

Kerry was also a native, so if she died, it would be permanent. Jack felt pity for her, but the night was quickly approaching. He would go and try finding her tomorrow morning.

"Come with me. We have a safe house nearby. We need to get there before dark," Jack told them.

"Before dark. Why?" Winson asked.

"You... You guys didn't see any of the dark creatures last night?" Jack asked.

Kramer and Winson looked at one another with confused expressions. Kramer then said, "Last night we hid in the basement of an abandoned house not far away. We slept through the night. We came out today to see if we could find the others."

Jack thought perhaps they should use this basement as the safe house since it had been proven to be dark-creature-proof, but the others would worry if he didn't return. Grace might even take a risk to come out to find him.

Jack gave them a brief explanation about the dark creatures. He then told them to follow him by running. He could not carry two people with his bike, so he had to adjust to their running speed.

Running was slower but since they were taking a straight path, they should arrive at the safe house before nightfall.

As they were moving, he noticed on his radar two red dots were approaching.

Chapter 1350: Baiting with the Truth

Jack stopped after noticing those two red dots. Kramer and Winson asked why he stopped. He didn't reply. He was thinking.

After some time, he climbed down from his bike and started walking while pushing his bike.

"I thought we are in a hurry?" Winson asked.

"I've run out of fuel," Jack answered.

The two looked at the fuel canister on the bike's back. 'Is that empty?' They thought.

"Then why are we walking instead of running?" Winson asked again.

"I'm tired," Jack said, which caused his two companions to look at each other in confused expressions again. 'You were riding the bike the entire time. How can you be tired?' They thought.

Jack walked at a leisurely pace. Kramer and Winson had no choice but to follow his pace.

Jack watched his radar as they walked. Since they were now walking, it didn't take long for the two red dots to come close enough. He noticed the two red dots never got past a certain distance. It was the range of mana sense. Since it was this way, he deduced one of these two red dots must be the old elven martial artist.

Jack was right. The two creeping behind them were Freddie and Saddle. The two had seen Jack and the others from a distance. Seeing the group was only three people, they thought they might get a jump on this group and score some kills.

Freddie recognized Jack after getting nearer. He had fought Jack and knew Jack was an expert swordsman. Although Jack didn't show mana manipulation ability during the fight, Freddie suspected Jack might have mana sense. It would be weird for a youngster to reach such a height in martial art without an understanding of chi.

Hence, he took precautions and kept his distance outside of mana sense's range.

That range was not out of earshot. Jack talked in a rather loud voice to Kramer and Winson while walking, "You two, I have good news for you. We just have to bear one more day. Afterward, we will be free!"

"What? That's great, Your Majesty!" Kramer asked excitedly.

"For real? You have found a way to escape?" Winson was more skeptical.

"Yeah. There is still work to do, but I promise you there is a way. I will get you all out, but you need to follow my instructions."

"That goes without saying, Your Majesty," Kramer declared.

"All right. We have known each other for only a few days, but I can see that you are a good lad. I trust you," Winson said.

The two's mood was now more cheerful after hearing Jack's news. They chatted as they walked. Jack entertained them but he kept his attention on his radar, ready to act in case the two red dots decided to attack.

Freddie and Saddle heard the conversation.

"It's a trap," Freddie whispered to Saddle. "He knows we are following him. He is baiting us out so he can kill us."

Saddle showed a complicated expression.

"You are not believing that bullshit, are you?" Freddie asked. "There is no escape. This place is hell and we are its denizens. We will stay here for our entire lives."

Hearing that steeled Saddle's resolution instead. "This might be a trap, but does it make a difference? If we win this game, we will still be here to join the next one. If we lose, we are forced to train and then join the next game as well. I no longer care if this is his trap to kill us. But if there is a chance that he is being truthful, are you truly going to let it go?"

Freddie was unable to say anything back.

"I'm going out," Saddle told him. She then came out of hiding and onto the road.

"Wait!" She called out. Her slingshot was aimed at Jack.

Kramer and Winson turned back. "Enemy!!" They shouted as they brandished their weapons.

"Hold!" Jack told the two. He smiled at Saddle but otherwise didn't say anything to her. He saw on his radar the other red dot circled to his flank.

"Do you truly mean it?" Saddle asked.

"Mean what?" Jack pretended to not understand.

"What you said just now. Do you truly have a way out of this place?"

"I do," Jack answered.

"Prove it!" Saddle demanded.

"I can't," Jack replied. "It's your choice if you don't want to believe, but know that we are not your true enemy."

The other red dot had now stopped. It was behind them. It was still maintaining a distance outside of mana sense's range.

"So, what's it going to be?" Jack asked. "It's going to get dark soon. I don't think any of us wants to be out here when that happens."

At that moment, the red dot behind him sprang into action, it came at high speed. Saddle also fired her slingshot.

'They still intent on fighting?' Jack thought with disappointment. He unsheathed his wrench and shortsword, but then he noticed Saddle's shooting trajectory. It was slightly off.

The metal ball flew past next to Jack and headed to Freddie who was dashing over.

The shot took Freddie by surprise, but his reflex allowed him to block the shot with his Karambit. He didn't need to, though. A teammate couldn't deal damage.

Freddie glared at Saddle. "Are you mad, woman?!"

"Stay away, Freddie! I'm following them!" Saddle declared.

"Freddie...?" Jack turned to the old elven martial artist. "Uncle Freddie?"

Freddie was bewildered by Jack's statement. Jack pointed at himself and uttered, "I'm Jack! Jack Fei, Domon Fei's grandson!"

"Jack...? Do... Domon...?" Freddie stammered.

Freddie was actually Domon's friend who came to play with Jack using the drunken fist style in the past. Jack couldn't recognize Freddie because his appearance had changed tremendously from the past. He used to have full hair and a clean face. His head was now half bald and a beard covered most of his face. Hence, Jack was unable to recognize him.