

World 1361

Chapter 1361: Destroying the Main Node

Master cast two spells simultaneously using his two magic staffs. Both were cast extremely swiftly.

One of the spells was Telekinesis. The blob which was about to strike Master using its arms suddenly found itself unable to move. Master's intelligence stat was so high that his Telekinesis was able to contest the strength of this large monster.

With his telekinesis holding down the blob, he could peacefully complete his other spell which took a slightly longer time. The spell was Gravity Field. A black ball appeared next to the blob. This black ball released massive gravity that made the blob unable to move.

Master then cast another spell, Teleportation. He disappeared and reappeared up on the roof.

At the same time, Jack was already up there. The limiter-off stone lasted only one short minute, so he had to make every second count.

Jack first sent a Sword of Light to gauge the main node's defense. The crescent light struck the main node, causing a damage number and an HP bar to appear. It lost less than one percent from that attack.

"No barrier," Jack muttered. But its defense was very high. It might take them longer than one minute to deplete the HP bar.

He decided to try using the grenade from the stash room. Perhaps this item had a similar effect as the RPG. He removed the pin and threw the grenade to the floor right next to the main node. It soon exploded.

The result was seen instantly. Numerous cracks were seen along the black box's surfaces. Jack used Wind Slash. The damage the main node received was much higher than before.

"Time to go all out!" Jack exclaimed.

He activated Storm Breaker's Overlimit then called out his spirit weapon and Therras. He commanded his spirit weapon to use its finishing mode and he activated the Ultimate Beast on Therras.

He then cast Orb of Storm before following up with Perpetual Lightning Judgement. His divine skill was still on cooldown since he used them recently so he had to settle with an alternative lightning attack.

The Orb of Storm powered up his Perpetual Lightning Judgement. With his mana manipulation back, Jack controlled all the lightning snakes from the spell and directed them toward the main node, turning the spell into a concentrated attack instead of an area assault.

At the same time, he fired Soul Breath and Therras unleashed its earth core bomb just as the spirit weapon detonated.

Master didn't stay idle. As someone who knew most of the game mechanism, he was also aware of the damage boost from combining explosive attacks. He adjusted his castings to synchronize with Jack's timing and delivered three attacks.

The first was the upgraded version of Warlock's Hellish Explosion. Master had used a high-grade seed and evolved the spell into Final Explosion, which delivered a much higher damage output. The second spell was also an evolved spell, Exploding Fireball. This spell evolved from the Elementalist's fireball, making the spell more powerful and dealing AOE damage.

The third assault was his Wind God Blades.

The three assaults landed at the same time as Jack. Jack was astounded when he saw Master's attacks. Master could time his attacks so well with his own even when he didn't give Master any signal.

The seven attacks with six different elements landed on the main node at the same time. The glowing runes covering the main node shivered intensely as the main node was enveloped by brilliant yet chaotic lights. The force of the combined assaults burst in all directions.

Jack had to move away when his mana sense warned him to not stay too close.

Master did the same.

When the light display ended, they saw the main node was no more. Several pillars of light appeared in various spots in the distance. Since they were on the roof of a high-rise, they had a good view of faraway places. At the same time when these light pillars emerged, shining lines connecting these pillars could be seen. They lasted only a moment before all of them died down.

The night sky turned to daylight. The illusion that was shrouding this high-rise building was gone. At the same time, Jack's mana sense also detected a change in the atmosphere. He knew then that the restrictions were off. He was now free to use all his skills and equipment even when the effect of the limiter-off stone ended, which was in a few more seconds.

Jack landed next to the hole in the ceiling. He looked inside the hole and saw the blob had turned into a sprawl of dead night hunters. He supposed when the main node was destroyed, the energy that supported these night hunters also vanished.

Master was a distance away behind Jack. He was aiming his magic staff at Jack. He stayed in that position for a while but then he decided to lower his weapon.

Jack turned to him then. "So, you know how to find the exit of this place?" Jack asked.

"Didn't I hear you say you can do that?" Master asked back.

"I do, but I am interested to know how you plan to do it," Jack answered.

"... The gigantic rune diagram we just destroyed has a particular node that serves as a place where its energies are channeled. If there is any portal that is linked to an exit, it should be in that node's vicinity. If I search around the place, I can use my monacle to detect the exit."

"I have to say, your monacle is truly something. Well, it is so your style to give yourself an unfair advantage against the masses," Jack said, to which Master replied with a scoff.

"I want to ask you something," Jack continued. "I think you should know by now that the reason someone from this faction can create this dimension is by utilizing the divine heritage left by Goddess Joy. Do you have a way to deal with someone with that power?"

"... I do," Master answered.

"Okay. Let's resume this truce between us and deal with this being who possesses the Goddess' power," Jack said.

Chapter 1362: Riding to the Exit

"You know where we can find the one who has the divine heritage?" Master asked.

"I know," Jack replied.

"I can't say I'm not surprised," Master said. "Isn't the point of you coming here to prevent me from getting the divine heritage?"

"Don't misunderstand. I still won't hand that divine heritage to you, but I also can't leave this place as it is," Jack said. "This place has taken too many victims. I can't just leave the others trapped in this place even if by doing so, ensuring that you will never get the divine heritage. There is also someone in this faction I need to save and I can only do so by bringing down the one controlling this place."

Master sneered. "Your do-gooder's attitude truly disgusts me, but I guess I must thank that sentiment for once since it allows me to get the divine heritage."

"Your ears must have malfunctioned. I said I won't hand you the divine heritage."

"We will see," Master sneered.

"By the way, when did you learn mana sense?" Jack asked.

Master didn't answer.

"I can understand now how you know about the hidden rune diagram in the sacrificial rounds. I might not be able to understand the rune diagram because I only sensed a part of it. I just considered them random flows of energy. But for you who know a rune diagram's mechanism, you can recognize it if you have mana sense. Even if you only sense a part of the diagram, you can identify it as what it is. Just like a friend of mine who can recognize a spell even if he only sees its partially-formed spell formation."

Master did not comment.

"Well, since you are in silent mode, let's just move on," Jack said. "I can get us to the nexus world. That is the base of this faction and also the most likely place that contains the exit of this dimension. You just need to show me the location of the node you mentioned earlier. I will wait for you down there with the others."

Jack flapped his draconic wings and flew down.

Master activated his bloodline power and used the demonic wings. He flew behind Jack.

The others were still waiting down there. When they found that they could now access their equipment and skills, they knew Jack and Master had succeeded.

Jack landed and deactivated his beast form.

"Holy... So, you are truly the king of Themisphere?" Stefan said. Jack was now fully wearing his regal outfit.

"I'm hurt by your skepticism," Jack said.

"You even have a cute familiar," Naomi said.

With the restrictions lifted, Peniel was now able to come out of her hidden dimension.

"You are right. She is cute," Stefan said. He came to Jack and tried to nudge Peniel.

"Hey, no touching!" Peniel slapped Stefan's finger away.

"She talks!" Naomi exclaimed in surprise.

"You bet I talk, miss!" Peniel talked back.

Master landed then. He was also wearing a regal outfit. It was different from Jack's but everyone could identify it as something that was only worn by a monarch.

Stefan remembered then that Jack once told them that Master was the ruler of Liguritutum.

"What should we do now?" Grace asked.

"We are going to search for the exit," Jack said. He then turned to Master and asked, "Which way?"

"Let's head out first," Master said.

They walked out through the hole in the debris wall. Out there, Master took out a whistle and summoned his Qilin.

Everyone oohed and aahed over Master's distinctively-looking steed. Jack let them marvel at Master's steed for a while before he took out his red whistle. With a smug face, he blew the whistle.

Pandora burst out of the ground accompanied by a twisting flame. The heat from the flame forced everyone to move away. They then involuntarily moved another step back when an intensely fearsome aura hit them. They gazed at the fiery horse with wary eyes.

Was that a steed? It looked more like a monster. A boss-type monster!

"Ma'am, they are friends. There is no need to scare them," Jack said as he climbed up the Nightmare. A smug smile was still decorating his face.

"Hmph," Master scoffed.

Grace summoned her unicorn, which drew another gasp. Spring Crown's steed was also unusual. It was a giant fox-like horse with three thick tails.

"I can't just let you three steal all the spotlights," Spring Crown said with a grin.

"That's a Foxmare," Peniel told Jack. "It is a unique-grade steed."

Seeing these summons, Jack took out his companion token and tried summoning Arlcard. He failed.

"This is a separate dimension that blocked unwarranted passage," Peniel explained. "Therras, Pandora, and I were a part of you, while Arlcard was still an entity who roamed the world. That's why you can call us and not him."

Jack figured it would be the same case as his royal agents. He won't be able to summon them.

After seeing the four unusual steeds, the others were unsure about their feelings when they took out their whistles. They just stood there looking at one another until Master scolded them for wasting their time. They then summoned their steeds. Their mounts were only uncommon horses.

Two people were not summoning any steeds, Kramer and Windy. They were natives. They didn't have an inventory system. When they were trapped in this place, all their belongings were seized, including their steed whistles. They were until now still wearing the ragged clothes they wore before the restrictions were lifted. The difference for them was simply they could now use skills.

Jack offered Kramer a lift, while Grace offered to take Windy.

Kramer was a bit uneasy to accept Jack's offer because he felt extremely uneasy around Pandora, but Jack's outstretched hand gave him the courage to overcome the fear. He grabbed Jack's hand and climbed onto Pandora.

"Follow me!" Master commanded after everyone was ready.

Pandora's fear aura was causing the lower-grade steeds to move too slowly, so Jack took to the sky and followed from above.

While flying, Jack asked Peniel, "You said before that Pandora can pierce most barriers between dimensions, right? This means she should be able to help me escape this place?"

"I think she can. Do you want to give it a try?" Peniel asked. "But I don't think you can come back here safely. The entrance to this dimension, the mist, is enchanted. If you enter the mist again, even while riding Pandora, you will most likely find yourself chained inside the prison dungeon with all your abilities stripped again. So, once you leave, don't think about returning. If you truly want to leave with this method, you can only take one person with you."

Jack looked at the group that was galloping below.

"No. Let's leave with everyone," Jack said.

Chapter 1363: Night Hunter Swarm

Jack and Master spent significant time destroying the main node of the gigantic rune diagram. It was almost sunset when they arrived at the place Master led them to.

"This is the node where the outside energies are channeled to power the rune diagram we destroyed," Master informed when Jack landed near him. "If there is an exit, it should be near here. If you can locate it quickly, do it now."

Jack looked at the dark sky. "Considering we have destroyed that rune diagram, we should not have night hunters roaming around at night anymore, should we?"

"I doubt it," Master answered. "The one in the high-rise building is a part of the main node defensive function. The ones that roamed the night are governed by a different mechanism."

"Should we find a safe place and wait until tomorrow morning then?" Grace asked.

"We better not," Master answered.

"Why?" Stefan asked. He was not keen on facing those night hunters even when he was now geared with his equipment and was able to use all his skills.

"If the exit is truly around here, then we have to do it tonight," Master said. "By my calculation, this place is included in the area that will be inaccessible when this pocket world shrinks once this day is over. I might have a way to brute force an exit but it will be better if we use a proper door."

"In that case, we have no time to waste!" Jack said. "Okay, everyone. Form a defensive perimeter around me!"

Jack called out Therras to help the defense. He didn't know how long it might take him to search the exit, so he didn't call out his spirit weapon and wolves which had a duration.

Grace helped organize everyone to form the defensive perimeter while Jack sat cross-legged on the floor.

Master frowned. Weren't Jack supposed to go search for the exit? Why was he sitting here?

Spring Crown was also wondering the same thing, but he followed Grace's instruction with a smile. He was more fascinated than confused by Jack's actions.

Jack closed his eyes and concentrated. After losing mana abilities for several days, it felt truly exhilarating to be able to sense everything the way he used to.

His consciousness slowly separated from his body and floated out into the open. He focused his thought as he roamed around the place, magnifying the scope of his senses. The mana of this place was truly warped. It was not strange considering this was a constructed dimension.

He slowly searched for the mana that smelled similar to the one that formed the links between the pocket worlds. He finally sensed a trace of it, he should be able to follow this trace to the exit. Master was indeed correct. The exit was nearby here. However, he also sensed something else.

'Oh... It seems I need to hurry,' Jack thought to himself.

Now that Jack could communicate with Peniel even when he was in the incorporeal state, he no longer needed to worry about his body when he was out. Peniel could warn him if something happened. This warning system went two ways.

After receiving Jack's message, Peniel warned everyone, "The night hunters are coming!"

Master also saw the massive red dots on his radar. He was just about to warn everyone but Peniel beat him to it. He wondered how Peniel knew about the incoming night hunters before his radar did.

The others went into a ready position with their weapons equipped. Jack had given Kramer and Windy a set of armor and weapons from his large collection of equipment.

Kramer was a melee fighter. He used a shield and a spear. Windy was a magic user. Jack gave him a rare-grade magic staff.

Kramer, Therras, Grace, Spring Crown, and Naomi stood in the outer perimeter. They were the first line of defense. Stefan, Winson, Tom, Windy, and Saddle stood in the inner circle close to Jack.

Stefan was a hidden weapon specialist. He stayed behind Naomi who was a berserker and ready to support her with his flying daggers.

Winson was a bard. He played music using a flute that buffed allies with increased defense and HP recovery.

Tom was a reaver. He was like Jason who picked a staff during his basic class selection, mistaking it for a martial art weapon. The mistake continued and he went on the Healer's path. Jason had the advantage of getting informed to convert into a melee class by choosing the inquisitor class. Tom wasn't as lucky. He wasn't a social person and disliked asking others for information. He blindly chose an elite class and became a Reaver.

Saddle was an Elemental. She seemed to be a better and calmer player compared to the three others beside her.

Master didn't move from his initial position. He was outside the defensive perimeter set by the others. The others didn't bother asking him to cooperate.

Master watched his radar and moved to where the night hunters would first arrive from. He then started casting one spell after another in rapid succession. Everyone except for Grace and Spring Crown was flabbergasted when they saw a host of summoned creatures appear.

It was as if a small army emerged around Master. The numbers on Master's side now surpassed the number of players forming the defensive perimeter.

When the night hunters came into view, Master pointed forward. Led by the high demon summoned from his Prime Demonologist class, his minions rushed forward.

The night hunters were vulnerable, but they packed a punch. It was not so obvious before because previously everyone's life was represented with shields. Now that everyone's life was back to using the HP system, it was clear that the night hunters would still only need three standard hits to kill an average level 65 player.

The most troublesome aspect of the night hunters was their number. Their swarm was seemingly unending. Even though they were easy to kill, the dead ones were quickly replaced by the ones behind. With their high damage output, they gave Master's minions a run for their money.

Master saw that his minions couldn't completely block the tide. Hordes of night hunters swarmed from the left and right sides where his minions didn't cover. He cast two spells using his left and right magic staves. This again drew gasps from those who were not aware of Master's multi-classes.

Master's right staff cast Meteor Fall while his left one cast Sea of the Elementals. Both were high-damaging spells that covered a wide area. Untold night hunters were annihilated by those two spells.

"I don't think we are needed here," Stefan remarked.

Master, however, wasn't as relaxed. This was because he saw more red dots approaching on his radar, and this next wave was coming from all directions.

Chapter 1364: Master's Bafflement

Master grimaced. He understood that the number of night hunters might increase with each night, but these were too many. No way the spike of difficulty from one night differed so much.

'Is this because we destroy the rune diagram? Something like an automated response?' Master wondered.

Even with his minions and a large number of AOE spells at his disposal. He still couldn't stop hordes of enemies that came from every direction. Master warned the others. Spring Crown rearranged their defensive formation to cover the side opposite from Master's position. This was so they could better focus their defensive efforts.

The defensive perimeter around Jack was now split into two halves. Master defended one of these halves while the others defended the other half.

When Grace's group saw the sea of night hunters headed their way, many couldn't help but feel intimidated. The only ones who were still steadfast were Grace, Spring Crown, and Therras.

Therras came forward and engaged the horde without fear. It used the Oppressive Wave and all the night hunters in a large area in front of it were obliterated. It then used Imperious Pressure to stop other night hunters that tried to run past.

Spring Crown began by using Weapon Storm. Sixty-three copies of powerful melee weapons flew out and struck all the night hunters. Each weapon killed a night hunter with one hit. He then followed up by using the Weapons Festival. Nine melee weapons floated around him. All nine moved in a way as if they were handled by nine different players. None of the night hunters managed to get past him.

Grace first cast the Chain Lightning she had learned from the universal technique book. The incoming night hunters were forced to stop their advance because a large number of their brethren in the front line were paralyzed by the spell. Grace then cast Armor of Ego and Mace of Selfishness.

The Mace of Selfishness successfully struck a night hunter and killed it. Grace had max-leveled this skill. Every two levels added an extra target to the skill if it didn't miss. The mace proceeded to strike another night hunter. It continued without missing a hit and killed fifteen night hunters.

Grace used her body as a shield to block the night hunters that tried to get past her. With her exceptional defense and recovery, she was not worried about the night hunters' high damage. She split her unique-grade long mace into two shorter maces and used her martial art, Phantom Beating Stick, to strike those night hunters back.

The others didn't have the time to be impressed by those three. They were busy trying to block the night hunter swarm and at the same time not getting killed.

Kramer was a level 53 special elite native. His level was the lowest among the others. Luckily, with the restrictions lifted, he was back to having high HP which was a native's characteristic. Hence, he was not immediately in danger. However, the side he was defending was the first to give in.

Tom went forward and blocked the night hunters who slip past Kramer. He first cast Soul Link at Windy, the other native in the group. With him sharing damage with a high-HP native, he should be safe even if he suffered a few hits.

He used his martial art, eagle claw, to grab the night hunters who got past Kramer and threw them back out of the defensive perimeter.

"Do not give in, everyone!" They heard Peniel's encouraging voice. She also cast Healing Field where Kramer and Tom were, increasing the survival chance of the two. "Jack had found the exit point. He is currently working to open it. He just needs another ten minutes!"

'Working to open the exit?' Master looked at Jack who was still sitting on the floor. 'What exactly does he do?' All his mana sense detected from Jack after Jack sat on the floor was a massive spike in mana. After that, nothing. It was as if Jack had stopped existing even when Jack was clearly still there. Master couldn't help but be bothered by Jack's unknown ability.

His lapse of concentration allowed some of the night hunters to slip through. He cast Ice Wall and Chasing Arrows to stop those night hunters. The chasing arrows conjured arrows of pure energy that tracked targets. These arrows struck the night hunters that were blocked by the ice wall. However, a few night hunters survived and climbed over the ice wall. They were now in front of Jack.

The others weren't aware that some night hunters had breached through Master's defensive line. Even Peniel wasn't aware because she was busy healing the others opposite of Master's side. When Stefan, Winson, Windy, and Saddle, who stood the closest to Jack, noticed these night hunters. The night hunters were already dangerously close to Jack.

The night hunters' claws were about to hit Jack when a shadow rushed in. In a split second, this shadow walloped the night hunters and sent them flying back.

"Freddie...?!" Saddle called when he saw the one who had just saved Jack.

"Focus on your side! I will keep him safe!" Freddie told her.

The last time Saddle saw Freddie, Freddie insisted on remaining hostile to Jack. So, his appearance and his act of saving Jack just now surprised her.

The fact was, Freddie remained steadfast in his belief that Jack was trying to trick them. That was until he found out he could suddenly use his equipment and skills again. He knew then that Jack might just be telling the truth.

He had been trying to find Jack's team since then. If Jack was honest that he could escape this place, he didn't want to miss the chance. While he was searching around using his rare-grade steed, he saw something fly in the faraway sky. Something that left a fiery trail. He decided to follow that flying object.

That flying object was Pandora.

When he came near where the flying object stopped, he noticed the group fighting against hordes of night hunters. Some night hunters rushed past him not far away on his left and right, but they mostly ignored him. It was almost like these night hunters were fixated on Jack's group.

Seeing this scene, he was more convinced that the group must be his best chance of escaping this place. So, he stopped hesitating and rushed in to provide help.

Chapter 1365: Fighting Their Way to the Exit Portal

Freddie was a level 66 druid. He was the same as Tom who ended up with a healer-type elite class.

Although he was imprisoned in this realm pretty early, he was never killed throughout all the games he participated in, so he didn't lose any level. Additionally, during the waiting time between the games, he was permitted to use the training dimension. He was not that interested but there were only so many things to do in this place to kill his boredom. That's how he managed to keep up with the level of the average players in the world outside.

Freddie cast Summon Treant. Two large treants came out and protected Jack's two sides.

Freddie served as the last line of defense. With his help, the others had less pressure. His treants served as solid blockades while his martial arts covered those who slipped past the treants.

Even so, as time passed, the pressure returned. The night hunters just seemed unending. Most of everyone's skills and spells were on cooldown. They mostly fought using standard attacks and basic skills.

This caused the difficulty to increase, they couldn't block the swarm as effectively. They even suffered damages continuously. Grace, Peniel, and the other healer-type players worked hard to keep everyone alive.

Seeing the urgency of the situation, Master used his regal outfit's set ability, which was similar to Jack's Judgement of Past Kings. Master's was called the Punishment of Past Rulers.

One by one, the past rulers of Liguritutum appeared and delivered their strongest attacks, killing the night hunters en masse. The others were speechless by such a power.

'Why didn't you use this earlier?' Some complained in their minds.

The truth was, Master had no intention to go all out, certainly not for Jack's sake. He was still unable to understand the point of protecting Jack who only sat and did nothing. With the passing of each minute, he felt like he was wasting time here. Perhaps he should just go his way and search for the exit his way.

"It's almost ten minutes! How much longer does that fool need?!" Master grumbled.

"I said ten minutes. This is not yet ten minutes, so I'm early!"

They heard Jack's voice. They turned and saw Jack had risen.

"This way! Follow me!" He didn't waste time. He knew the situation was urgent.

Grace used the Generosity of Hope to heal everyone's health to full. She had saved this so that it was safer for them while on the move. It was difficult to protect everyone while moving. The Generosity of Hope gave everyone one free life.

Jack opened the way by using his regal outfit's set ability, Judgement of Past Kings.

Those who had never seen this skill were again awed when the past kings of Themisphere appeared one by one, decimating the night hunters and clearing the way for them.

"Everyone moves as one!" Jack commanded. "Grace, Spring Crown, protect the rear and make sure no one is being left behind. Uncle Freddie, watch our left side. Tom and Naomi, watch our right!"

Jack didn't bother giving Master any instruction. He knew the ethereal wouldn't listen.

Leading the way, Jack activated Asura. He then used Swords of the Brave and Dances of the Brave. Accompanied by the golden swords, he cut his way through the night hunters who tried to block their way. Now that he no longer had any restrictions, his sword art which was powered by mana manipulation and refined by the improved sword's heart technique easily slayed any night hunters that stood in his way.

Freddie was astounded by Jack's prowess. He didn't realize Jack was this powerful. His mana sense even told him that Jack's mana manipulation was top of the line, almost on par with him and the other old practitioners who had spent a lifetime training this ability.

He wondered why Jack didn't use his mana manipulation when they fought on the first day.

As Jack expected, Master had no intention of moving as a group. He flew above using his demonic wings and headed in the direction Jack had indicated. He instructed his summoned minions to move in the same direction while killing the night hunters, so these minions were still of help to the group.

Flying above, Master's advance was unobstructed. He flew ahead of the group. He was still wondering where Jack intended to take them when he saw a silvery portal not far ahead. His God-eye monocle informed him that this portal was indeed the exit from this pocket world.

Even though an escape was now visible, Master wasn't that thrilled. He was concerned about what Jack had done. Jack had never left his spot ever since he sat on the floor. How did he open this portal?

Jack originally planned to only search for the location of the exit before going there physically with the others. But after being in close vicinity to the exit, he found out that his connection with the mana that formed the links allowed him a shorter time to activate the exit while he was in the incorporeal state. Out of this state, he might need half an hour to one hour to open the portal. Under the incorporeal state, he predicted he only needed ten minutes at most. Hence, he decided to stay incorporeal even when the others were having trouble dealing with the night hunter's swarm.

Master looked back at the group. This was a very good chance to eliminate Jack. He knew Jack would never leave those useless people behind. If he commanded his minions to go aid the night hunters, Jack would be in trouble. Alternatively, he could enter the portal first and use his expertise in rune diagrams to reclose the portal and probably even strengthen it. Jack would then be trapped in this place.

But two things stopped him from doing so. Firstly, the Lightning God Blessing was still within Jack. He needed that divine treasure. If Jack was trapped here, so too was the divine treasure. Secondly, he also needed the divine heritage as a failsafe in case he was pushed to take drastic measures in the future.

The other place where he could get this divine heritage was in Hope's faction, but he had no confidence in going against the natives of that faction. Hope was the strongest God. Inside his faction were also the strongest natives of this world.

So, Master cast his spells, obliterating the night hunters in between Jack's group and the portal, clearing the way for them.

Chapter 1366: Entering the Nexus World

Jack saw icicles rain from the sky in front of them. These icicles were like ice swords falling from heaven, impaling the night hunters and killing them with a single strike.

"That is Hail of Ice Calamity, a non-standard spell for Elementalists," Peniel said.

Master also cast his standard spells that were off cooldown. In a short time, the path leading to the portal was filled with the bodies of night hunters.

"Go into that portal!" Jack told everyone. He let the others go in first as he dealt with the night hunters that were still coming at them.

Master commanded his still surviving minions to block the night hunters as everyone entered the portal.

When Master landed next to the portal, Jack said to him, "To be honest, I half-expected you to turn on us after seeing the portal."

"... What are you going to do if that happens?" Master asked.

"Oh, I'm confident that won't happen," Jack said.

Master just glanced at Jack without giving a response.

"Just as you find it easy to predict what I'm going to do due to my do-gooder personality, I also find it easy to predict what you are going to do based on your selfish and greedy nature. I know you won't let the chance to get the divine heritage slip your hands."

Master simply harrumphed at Jack's statement. He vented his frustration by using his spells to blast the night hunters around them.

After Grace and Spring Crown who were guarding the rear entered the portal, Jack moved toward it as well. Master saw Jack's attempt and he cast Wind Jet. His body shot past Jack and he entered the portal before Jack.

"So childish," Jack muttered and entered the portal, leaving Master minions that continued blocking the night hunters.

Jack experienced the same feeling as when he entered a dungeon. He went through what seemed like a tunnel of light with his mana sense sensing the familiar mana he had fused with when he was in the incorporeal state.

He came out at the garden outside the Council of Charite's mansion which he had visited during his incorporeal state. The others were standing and looking around with confused expressions.

"We are not yet out?" Freddie asked.

"This is the nexus world," Jack explained. "The main exit to the outside world should be here. We have to find it to escape this place."

He then looked back, making sure the night hunters didn't follow them here. He didn't see anything that looked like a portal, but he could sense the doorway there.

No night hunters appeared. It seemed that those creatures had no access to the pathway between worlds.

Jack noticed everyone was still wearing their equipment.

"Good. There is no hidden rune diagram here that seals our abilities," Jack remarked.

"There is," Master said. "But the function of the rune diagram in this nexus world and the one we destroyed in the battle royale world is simply to maintain the enchantment that is placed on us when we first entered this dimension. Once the enchantment is broken, we will stay unsealed until we reentered this realm."

"Great. This means we have a fighting chance. Let's go, there is still one person I need to save," Jack said.

"Hold!" Master called. "Against a being with God's power, we stand no chance even if our abilities are unsealed. If you truly want to go up against such a being and want me to succeed in giving us a fighting chance, you'll need to tell me everything you know."

"Why are we going up against such a being? I thought our primary focus is to escape?" Saddle asked.

"We might need to defeat the being for that." Jack actually didn't know that. But since he didn't know for sure, he didn't exactly lie. Master didn't bother to disagree with his statement. Whether these people could escape or not mattered not to him.

"If we find the exit while exploring this place, then I promise those of you who want to leave can leave first," Jack said.

"Then, let's hurry and find the exit," Freddie said. He had mana sense. He roughly felt the links when he was on the way here just now. He might be able to identify and differentiate between the main exit and the portals to the other worlds within this dimension.

The others said they want to search around the place as well, even if they didn't have mana sense or knew what exactly they were looking for.

Before they left, Jack asked them to form a party with him. He also sent the party invitation to Master.

Grace and Spring Crown stayed with Jack and Master. Master was still staring at Jack waiting for an explanation.

So, Jack told Master, most of everything Talia had told him. About what happened to this faction. About Euphosine who had Joy's divine heritage and used it to create this dimension as a place to carry out her sick games.

Master, Grace, and Spring Crown listened silently.

After Jack finished his tale, Master asked, "You spoke as if you have come here before... You are definitely with us all the time. How do you learn about all this?"

Jack had omitted the part where he used his incorporeal state to come to this nexus world. He didn't plan to let Master learn that he possessed this ability.

Jack's silence showed Master that Jack had no intention to answer the question. Master knew he won't be able to force Jack to answer, so he didn't bother asking a second time.

Master said, "After hearing your tale, I assume you intend on saving this Talia. I have no intention to do that. You can do that on your own if you want to."

"How do you plan to deal with Euphosine?" Jack asked. In his quest's description, it said that he needed to resolve the situation in this faction to help Talia escape. That's why he decided to ask Master's help. He suspected Talia won't agree to escape if Euphosine's situation wasn't dealt with. There was also the matter of the other prisoners participating in different games that Saddle mentioned.

"I will need to go to the altar hall..."

They heard panic shouts when Master was still speaking. They turned to the voice and saw Stefan and Naomi run toward them. Chasing behind the two was a horde of living children statues."

Chapter 1367: Going Ahead

Jack remembered those children statues were the same ones as those decorated the garden and the main lobby of the mansion. Those living statues were chasing Stefan and Naomi with cute smiling faces and cheerful laughter, which made the entire scene eerily unsettling.

"What did you do?" Jack asked the two as they ran back.

"We didn't do anything! We just tried entering the mansion to search for the exit from the inside," Stefan explained. "These statues suddenly came to life and attacked us."

"Perhaps it is the defense mechanism of this mansion," Grace offered her opinion. She cast a healing spell on Stefan and Naomi, they had suffered damage from the statues.

Jack used his Inspect skill on those statues.

*

Happy Dolls (Special elite monster, magical), level 65

HP: 350,000

*

"They are just special elites," Jack said and dove into the group of living statues. He used Whirlwind Slash and Ice Ring, damaging them all. His Formless Flowing Sword Style danced around the statues.

Now that Jack could use his full power, he easily dispatched these living statues. Stefan and Naomi were awestruck seeing the ease Jack took care of these monsters. They knew Jack was strong but only now did they see the gap between them. They also understood Jack had not gone all out yet.

The others were also running back. They were also chased by the children statues from the other side of the garden.

"There are too many of them!" Naomi exclaimed.

"We can still deal with them," Jack said confidently. He noticed some rare elites among the newly arrived horde of living statues but not at an alarming number.

As he was about to engage this new batch of living statues, he noticed the broken statues from the ones he had vanquished quivered on the ground. At first, he thought they were the same as the night hunters, they didn't vanish as the slain monsters in the outside world.

Then, he saw these broken statues reform themselves and were back to full health again.

"F*ck! They are the same as the undying draugr in Thesylvania!" Jack cursed as he engaged the statues that came back to life.

"Yes, they are tethered puppets," Peniel agreed. "To be able to tether with so many, I think only Euphosine can do this."

"What are you two talking about?" Stefan asked. He and the others joined in combating the statues.

"We won't be able to defeat these statues no matter how many times we kill them," Jack gave them the bad news.

"Theoretically, we can," Peniel corrected. "These tethered beings drew their life force from their master's energy. If they are continuously being killed, their master would run out of energy at one point. Thus, ending the cycle."

"How long will that take?" Jack asked.

"Considering that Euphosine is powered by a divine heritage, you might need to fight for months... Or even years," Peniel replied.

'@#\$\$%... Might as well don't say anything,' Jack thought with annoyance.

"This is pointless! I will leave you people to distract these things here while I do the important things," Master said.

"Do what important things?" Jack asked.

"Preparing so we can defeat the one that holds the divine heritage. I will go to the altar hall," Master said as his demonic wings reappeared. His body flew up, leaving the battle on the ground. He then took out a scroll and vanished from sight.

'Invisibility scroll again,' Jack thought. Having so many at hand, Jack figured Master must have created them using a recipe.

Jack heard Master's voice from above, "You should come with me. I hate to say this but even with my trap, I might not be able to deal with Euphosine alone."

"I need to go somewhere else. There is something I need to do first," Jack said.

"Are you two leaving us here?!" Stefan asked with worry.

"We need to," Jack said. "We can't waste our time fighting these things. They will just come back to live again. The owner of this dimension will realize something is wrong once she could sense the end match arena one day from now..."

"Probably less than one day," Master's voice was heard from above. He was still around. "With so much disturbance we have created, I think she would sense it sooner rather than later. Plus, you people are killing her tethered beings. The amount of energy that was sucked from her, even if it was minuscule, should draw her attention after a period. We should treat it as if we only have several hours left. That's why we have to hurry. I will be leaving now."

"Do you know the way to the altar hall?" Jack asked.

"Who do you think you are talking to? I have the layout of this mansion inside my head," Master returned.

Jack sensed Master's presence move away in the direction of the mansion.

"I have to leave as well," Jack said as he cast Soar. "Grace, Spring Crown, Uncle Freddie, take care of everyone here!"

"You will take us out of this place, won't you?" Freddie asked. He had lost all hope for some time. Now that a tiny hope manifested itself, he wasn't willing to see it go away. He won't be able to continue fighting if that happened.

"Don't worry. I will bring you all out. That's a promise," Jack said.

"I believe in you, Your Majesty!" Kramer shouted. He was fighting the living statues valiantly with his spear and shield.

"Don't worry, I will keep them all alive," Grace said to Jack.

"And I will try to not get bored fighting these same creepy things over and over," Spring Crown said.

"I hate to see you leave, but I guess it can't be helped," Stefan said. "I'm sorry I can't be of much help, and thank you for giving a shit about us. No need to be concerned, you do what you need to do!"

Stefan decided to be brave about the situation. The others expressed the same sentiment.

"Thank you, everyone," Jack said, smiling warmly. "I promise I won't let you all down."

He cast Invisibility. It had been more than three hours since he last used the spell. It was off cooldown. He then flew toward the manor's entrance. The happy dolls ignored him since they couldn't see him.

Chapter 1368: Lockpicking the Locks

Jack had been in this mansion before when he was using his incorporeal state, so it didn't take long before he arrived at the entrance of the dungeon that held Talia. No children statues inside the mansion, all of them had gone outside to deal with Grace and the others.

Jack looked at the door of the dungeon. He was free to enter when he was in the incorporeal state, it was not so now that he was in his physical body.

He tried to open the door. It was locked. He unsheathed his Storm Breaker and struck the door with it.

No damage number appeared.

"This one has a durability that far surpasses your power," Peniel explained.

"I guess we have no choice but to use the thieving way then," Jack took out his lockpicks.

He summoned his runestone of probability as he used the lockpicks. He failed multiple times. Luckily, it had been a custom for him to stock up on lockpicks so he had them ready when needed.

He spent several hours and wasted hundreds of lockpicks until he heard the melodious click. He only burned through one-third of his lockpicks for this door.

"Either my lockpicking is getting too good or I have brought too many lockpicks," Jack said haughtily.

The unlocked door opened and he saw Talia standing and looking in his direction. She had heard the sound of the lockpicking for quite a while and was wondering which thieving fool had blundered into this place.

Now that Jack was here in person and could use his ability, he used his Inspect.

*

Talia (Mythical Elf, Divine Priestess), level: 85

HP: 1,800,000

*

Jack expected as much. She was one of the leaders of a divine faction. She was at Callan's level, which meant Euphosine should be around this level as well.

"Storm...?" Talia couldn't quite believe her eyes. This was the first time she laid eyes on him outside his incorporeal state. "How...?"

"Long story. We can talk when we are out of here. Let's get you out of this first," Jack brandished his Storm Breaker and slashed at the chains that bound Talia.

"Wait...!" Talia warned.

But too late, Jack's sword clashed with the chains and an energy blast exploded from the point of impact. This blast threw Jack into the wall.

Jack crashed heavily into the wall. He lost almost thirty percent of his HP from that blast.

"Ouch... What the hell...," Jack uttered as he got up.

"... You are quite durable," Talia said. "Other outworlders at your level would have died."

"Can't you sense the mana in that chain," Peniel slapped Jack's head.

"This whole place is filled with weird mana. How do you expect me to know which is okay and which is dangerous?" Jack defended himself.

"This chain is enchanted. It will retaliate if it is attacked," Talia explained.

Jack came back to Talia's side. The chain was completely fine from his slash. There was not even a damage number appearing when he hit it. He then saw a keyhole at the part where the chain met Talia's handcuffs.

"Still think you bring too many lockpicks?" Peniel derided.

"Ugh... Well, I believe I should not need more than what I used on the door!" Jack encouraged himself. He took out his lockpicks again.

"Excuse me, miss," Jack said to Talia as he inserted the lockpicks into the keyhole.

He abruptly stopped and asked Talia, "Uh... Using lockpicks shouldn't be considered an attack, right?"

"No. But I'm not sure if you can succeed. This lock is rather high-grade," Talia said. "Maybe you will have more luck if you go to Euphosine's chamber and looked for the key to this chain."

"You don't think she brought the key with her?" Jack asked. Talia responded with a shrug.

Jack thought maybe he should try his luck by searching Euphosine's chamber as well. A native had no inventory system, so there was still a chance Euphosine left the key behind.

Jack cast Body Double. He then asked Talia to tell him the direction to Euphosine's chamber. He had his copy walked back to the hallways following Talia's direction while his real body used the lockpicks to unlock the chain. For his two remaining copies, he sent one to the altar hall where Master should be and the other to the mansion's entrance to check on his friends.

All the while, he had his mind focusing on his runestone of probability to boost the lockpicking's success chance. With his Hundred Synchronous Thoughts back in play, such multi-tasking was effortless.

"I think I have said this before, but you have a strong mind," Talia said.

She had been paying attention to the bright glow emitted by the runestone of probability floating beside Jack. The stronger the willpower injected into the runestone, the brighter it glowed, and the higher the lockpicking's success chance was.

Even so, the lockpicks kept on breaking one after another. Jack didn't let the constant failures bring him down. He kept his mind focused.

Since they had time now, Jack told Talia about what had happened. About the battle royale match, about how they broke the gigantic hidden rune diagram that sustained their restrictions, and how they found their way into this nexus world.

"No wonder she has not been around for the past few days," Talia said about Euphosine. "There were some days when she was completely absent. I guess that was when she was hosting her battle royale match."

"She shouldn't be back for a while," Jack said. "You and I will be long gone when she is back."

"..."

"You don't plan to just leave, do you?" Jack asked after noticing Talia's silence.

"Even if she has become like this, she is still my sister. I can't let her continue harming the innocence. I have to stop her."

"I guess as much...", Jack said. "Don't worry, we may have a way to defeat her."

"How?" Talia asked. Even if she was determined to stop Euphosine, she didn't know how to.

"That outworlder I came here to warn you about, he is doing something about it," Jack answered.

One of Jack's copies was currently in the hall where the altar was. He was watching Master who went around the hall drawing a huge rune diagram using mana paint.

Chapter 1369: Freeing Talia

Jack's other copy was in Euphosine's chamber. But since he was just a copy, he couldn't search around with his hands. He could only use his eyes. From what he could see, nothing in the chamber looked like a key.

The chamber even seemed like it hadn't been used for quite some time.

Jack guessed perhaps for someone who had gained the power of a Goddess, sleep was no longer necessary, and so was a bed-chamber.

There was a cupboard, a dresser with a small chest above it, and a box draped with a cloth. These were things that might hold valuable things, but he couldn't do anything to them as long as he was a copy.

His real self was at his last one hundred lockpicks. He kept on thinking the next lockpicking would succeed and ended up spending several hours lockpicking Talia's chain. Since they entered this nexus world, more than five hours had passed. He was not confident he could open the lock at this rate.

Jack decided to stop the lockpicking and checked the things in Euphosine's chamber.

"I'll be back," he said to Talia.

Talia then sensed the Jack in front of her became hollow. She knew then the Jack in front of her was just an illusion.

After changing place with his copy, Jack's true body was now in Euphosine's chamber. His vision swept around the items of interest in the room. To his disappointment, none of those items registered as anything special on his God-eye monocle.

But that simply meant the cupboard, dresser, and small chest were nothing special. It didn't mean the items inside them were the same.

He first pulled away the cloth that covered something that looked like a box. It was a box. Unfortunately, it was empty.

He then opened the cupboard. Some clothes were inside. Just as how the room looked, it seemed that these clothes had been untouched for quite some while.

Afterward, he went to the dresser and opened its drawers. They were mostly empty except for a few junk items. No key.

He held the last item, the small chest. When he tried to open it, it was locked.

"Since this chest isn't classified with a grade, it is a normal chest, right?" Jack asked Peniel.

"Yes. It might hold something inside, or it might not. The content will always be the same. It is not a treasure chest or a lockbox which generates random items based on the chest or lockbox's grade."

"Which means there is still a chance the key we are looking for is inside here."

"It might," Peniel replied.

"If I force this chest open with brute force, the items inside might break?"

"Correct," Peniel answered.

Luckily, he still kept one hundred lockpicks. However, he didn't know if the remaining one hundred lockpicks were enough to open this lockbox.

"I hope this lock is not too difficult," Jack prayed.

He started lockpicking with his runestone of probability hovering above him.

After he broke twenty-five lockpicks, Peniel said, "You know, if this small chest turns out to be empty, you would have wasted those lockpicks when you could have used them to try your luck opening Talia's handcuffs."

Jack rolled his eyes in annoyance. "Good job in giving me more things to stress about," Jack said sarcastically.

He heard a successful click then. At the same time, he heard a notification, informing him that his lockpicking skill had increased to Basic Master.

The lid to the chest opened and his monocle immediately marked four items of importance inside the chest. Jack's eyes were drawn to one particular item shaped like a key.

*

Talia Prison Key (Quest item)

Open the lock to Talia's handcuffs.

*

"Bingo...!!" Jack exclaimed. He was glad that he hadn't spent all his lockpicks on Talia's chain earlier.

His eyes were then drawn to the other three items. Those items were even more valuable in terms of grades. One of them was silver in color, indicating a unique grade. The other two were purple, indicating legendary grades.

However, Peniel's eyes were more fixed on the unique-grade item. She even flew over to pick the item up.

"This is a great find," She said.

*

Runestone of Spellcasting (unique runestone)

Empty. Required willpower to activate.

*

"Unique-grade Runestone...?" Jack muttered. A runestone could be upgraded to become a higher grade. For this runestone to start at the unique grade, it was indeed special.

"Do you remember Haon's runestone of combat?" Peniel asked.

"Yes. He uses that runestone to boost his attributes during combat... Wait, are you saying that this is also a runestone that can be used in combat?"

Peniel nodded. "Runestones that helped combat situations are extremely rare. Haon's runestone of combat and this runestone of spellcasting are one such runestone. This one will boost your spells if you use it during spellcasting."

"Wow! This is indeed a great find!" Jack exclaimed. "With this, my magic power will not be so behind my physical power."

"You have to fuse with it first to use it," Peniel reminded.

"We will do that later. We need to free Talia first," Jack said.

He then looked at the two remaining items. They were legendary-grade diamonds. These could be said as the best gemstones there were. Not only because they were legendary grades, but also because a diamond was compatible with all elements. They gave double elemental energies to every type of runestone.

These diamonds would have been perfect to get the newly acquired runestone of spellcasting to be closer to the legendary grade. However, he knew he had one runestone that was even more essential

than the runestone of spellcasting. It was his runestone of luck. This was one item that had helped him earn many bounties. If he could get it to the legendary grade, the benefit it could provide would multiply.

Hence, Jack didn't hesitate. He took out his runestone of luck and fed the two legendary diamonds to it.

60,000 elemental energies flowed into the runestone of luck. It now had 68,150 elemental energies out of the 100,000 required to upgrade to the legendary grade. He was more than halfway now.

"Okay, let's get back to Talia," Jack said and changed places with his copy again.

Talia sensed that the Jack in front of her became real again.

"Interesting spell," Talia greeted.

Jack smiled as he fetched the prison key out.

"You found it!" Talia exclaimed excitedly.

"Now, let's get you out of this thing," Jack said.

He inserted the key into the keyhole in Talia's handcuffs. A click was heard and the handcuffs magically disintegrated.

The moment that happened, an earthquake shook the entire place.

"What is this...?" Jack asked.

"Oh, no...," Talia uttered. Her voice was tense. "Euphosine hid another enchantment in my chain. She knows now that I am free. She will be coming soon!"

Chapter 1370: Facing Divine Power

"She will...?" Jack asked.

His copy which was in the altar hall saw that Master was still drawing his rune diagram. The rune diagram he was drawing was very complicated and he made it so it covered the entire hall, hence it took him hours for the task. Jack saw the rune diagram take shape already but he was not sure how close to completion Master was.

"How long before she arrives...?" Jack asked Talia.

"I don't know. The world you mentioned that the battle royale is taking place sounds pretty large. She should need time to power it down before she can leave. I say a few minutes... Or seconds."

'That is not good...,' Jack thought after hearing Talia's words. "Give me a moment," Jack said.

Talia sensed Jack becoming hollow again.

*

At the altar hall, Master was still applying the mana paint with precise precision.

He had noticed Jack near the hall's entrance. He ignored him at first, but he then felt strange since Jack had been silent all the time. He didn't believe this chatterbox could afford to be a silent spectator. He had been expecting Jack to throw him some ridiculing remarks for some time now.

So, he used one of his bloodline powers, Demonic True Eye. He saw then that Jack was just an illusion. He fully ignored the copy afterward. Jack probably sent the copy to keep an eye on him. It made sense that Jack didn't trust him.

An earthquake suddenly shook the hall. Master's brush stroke almost veered off course when it happened, but he was quick enough to affirm his footing.

Master stopped drawing and waited until the earthquake was over.

He knew for a fact that worlds in hidden dimensions didn't have natural earthquakes. This only happened when the power controlling the dimension was experiencing a jolt of energy or emotion. He knew then that his time was short.

A voice soon confirmed his suspicion.

"Euphosine is coming. How much longer do you need?" Jack asked.

"... Five... No, three more minutes," Master answered. With that statement, he went back to his drawing. His drawing speed picked up. It was now speed over perfection.

Jack didn't disturb Master further, he changed places back to the copy that was still with Talia.

Jack said to Talia, "The trap is almost done at the altar hall, but we can't enter the hall yet for another three minutes, or else Euphosine will know what we are up to. We need to be close, though. Let's head over there first."

Talia nodded. She wasn't sure what trap could be useful against Euphosine but she didn't waste time asking for an explanation. Euphosine could arrive any second.

The two moved through the hallways. Jack ran at full speed but Talia had no trouble keeping up. She moved by hovering over the floor like Arlcard did.

They soon arrived near the altar hall's entrance. Jack stopped. There was still around a minute before the three minutes Master advised earlier.

"We can't go in yet... I take it that since it was your freedom that triggered Euphosine's alarm, she will come for you first?" Jack asked.

Talia nodded. "Yes. We three sisters have strong mental links. She knows my position at any time. She will come for me first. That's why it makes no difference even if I flee this place. She will be able to find me easily."

"I see... hopefully she doesn't come for another minute," Jack said and cast Barrier.

"I don't think that will make a difference," Talia said. She suddenly went tense afterward.

The air near them shimmered and an ethereal woman with a glamorous robe appeared.

"I must say. I am not amused when I felt you break free from your restraint and after forcefully ending the control of my game, it is even more irritating to find that all my game participants are no longer in my arena."

The voice brought the same chill as what Jack felt when he first met Euphosine several days ago. He couldn't perceive Euphosine at the time. Now he could properly see her.

It turned out that the three sisters of the Council of Charites were not actual sisters. They were from three different races. Talia was elven. Aglea was human, and Euphosine was ethereal.

"It's you again...," Euphosine lay her eyes on Jack.

Jack felt the chill multiplied tenfold. Talia was right. His barrier couldn't do shit.

"You are the newest favorite in my game. I've been rooting for you," Euphosine said. "I've been hoping you can dethrone that old fart as my new champion. I've been eager to watch that happen... But I guess I will have to let you go. There are only so many times an owner may let her pet disrespect her."

Talia sensed Euphosine's intention. She wanted to act first. She tried casting a spell.

"Is there any point in doing that?" Euphosine asked with a ridiculing tone.

Talia felt the air around her solidify. She couldn't move. She couldn't speak. She couldn't even articulate mana properly. All she could do was just watch.

When Euphosine turned her attention back to Jack, Jack used the last switch of his body double. He changed places with his copy which was still inside the altar hall. All his copies disappeared afterward.

Euphosine turned her sight to the entrance of the altar hall. Jack and Talia were heading that way, so Jack might have fled there.

"After I eliminate that troublemaker who keeps on coming between us, sisters. I will bring you back to your room," Euphosine said. "Stay put in the meanwhile."

Euphosine was not in a hurry. She just floated slowly toward the door. Her prey was trapped in her world. There was nowhere Jack could run or hide. She was happy to play hide and seek if that was what her prey wanted.

When she entered the hall, she was surprised to see Jack just standing in the middle of the hall, waiting for her. She had expected Jack to run or hide. Perhaps the prey had given up? It's not fun this way.

She felt another presence within the hall. She turned to where this second presence was. It was an ethereal. She then remembered this ethereal was another participant in her game. This ethereal was having his hands on the floor.

Suddenly, the whole hall lit up.

She was confused, but not alarmed at first. She even felt curious about what all this was. Then he felt something within her getting ripped. For the first time in so long, she felt what she used to feel.

Vulnerable, weak, empty, and afraid.