

World 141

Chapter 141: Applying For Second Advance Class

'Interesting. Well, I have some extra coin, I guess I will start investing in this shop,' Jack said. 'There is nothing you want me to buy at this moment, right?'

"There are many things I can suggest you for spending your coins on. But yes, it is still better if you use it to invest in this shop first. This shop doesn't look too shabby despite its location at the outskirts of the business district."

With Peniel's blessing, Jack approached Amy at the counter.

"Good morning, Mister Storm Wind!" She greeted sweetly. "Do you want to get any bread for breakfast?"

"Not at the moment," Jack replied. "I would like to invest in this shop."

Hearing Jack's intention, Amy's expression beamed with a charming smile. "We will be glad if it's you, mister Storm Wind!"

"Please stop calling me Mister, it sounds so distant."

Amy thought for a while, before saying, "very well, then. I will call you brother Wind from now on."

She then opened up the shop interface for investing. Jack proceeded with the instruction given by the system. He then handed 50 gold coins to Amy. His wallet was immediately reduced to 16 gold coins left.

Once the investment process was completed, a notification sounded in the area surrounding the shop, "Amy's bakery will be undergoing renovation. Please complete your pending transactions within five minutes. The shop will be closed for one day for the renovation process."

"Renovation?" Jack was surprised by the notification.

"Of course, do you think the shop will stay the same after getting investment funds?" Peniel commented. "After renovation, the shop will likely increase in size, and its merchandise quality and quantity will also likely to increase."

'I see... Then that's mean I won't be able to sleep here tonight.'

After five minutes passed, the entire shop was covered by a thin layer of opaque cloth. The cloth looked fragile but when Jack tried to push through, it was surprisingly sturdy. The shop would be non-accessible until the enigmatic cloth was removed.

Jack didn't think too much about it. He left the bakery soon after. He wanted to apply for his Mage advance class this morning, but before he did, he made a stop at the Blacksmith Workshop which he had used before. He bought 5 steel ores which were the stock at the shop next door, then he paid 50 silver coins to use the workshop that had the rare tools.

Inside the workshop, he took out the unusable 10 common equipment and 2 uncommon equipment which he had stored in his inventory. He then dismantled them all at the forge. He received 12 iron ores, 2 steel ores, and 1 copper ore from the dismantling.

He used some of the iron ores to make 5 Whetstones. He then used 45 iron ores to upgrade the levels of his equipped helmet, shoulder piece, arm piece, belt, and boots all to level 21. With these upgrades, his total defense had increased further.

Physical Defense = 252

Magical Defense = 233

It's time to go to the Mage Academy for the advanced class, Jack thought. He then left the Blacksmith Workshop and went to the neighborhood where the academies were located. The area around the academies had more players compared to the last time he was here, probably because many players had started to reach level 15 and had also found out about the class change, so they came to try it.

After looking around, he found that the Mage academy was in fact next door to the Healer academy where he had asked for direction three days prior. The inside of the Mage Academy was much more organized compared to the Warrior Academy, but also less occupied. Within the foyer hall, there was only one wizened old man in full traditional magician garment, complete with the pointy hat. He was flipping through the pages of a book beside one of the tall bookshelves which lined up one whole section of the wall.

As there was no one else to ask, Jack approached the old mage.

"Greetings, sir. I am here to apply for Mage advanced class," Jack said in a respectful tone.

The old mage glanced at Jack for a moment before returning his attention to the book. With his eyes still on the book, he made a gesture with one hand pointing at the large stairs at the opposite end, and said, "second floor, green door."

That was helpful, Jack thought sarcastically, but did not let himself show any dissatisfaction. "Thank you," he said with the same respectful tone.

He then went up the stairs as instructed. At the floor above, he came to another large hall with most of the walls covered by bookshelves again, and it was also empty. He turned around trying to find the green door mentioned by the old mage below, but couldn't find any door, green or other colors. There was an opening that led to a hallway though. Since he could see no other path from this hall, he went into that hallway.

When he walked into the hallway, he was astonished to find the left side of the hallway was a verandah that opened up to spectacular scenery of nature. The scenery showed the building to be on the higher part of a valley overlooking a lush valley filled with greeneries. He could hear the sound of birds and occasionally one or two of them would fly by. There was a mountain not far with a beautiful waterfall, its water fell from the edge of the mountain into a crystal-clear lake below. He could also see some deer drinking the water from the lake.

Was this an illusion? Jack thought while observing the scenery. The building was clearly inside the capital, how was it possible for him to watch such a natural view from here?

He went to the railing of the verandah. He could even feel the breeze. He walked along the railing as he admired the scenery outside. While he kept on walking along the verandah side of the hallway, he realized there were doors along the wall to the right side of the hallway. In fact, he had passed through three such doors. He went back and made sure that none of those doors was green in color.

As he continued along the hallway, he finally found a green color door after passing by five other doors. He wondered if it was the right door, but since there was no other clue, he could just try going in.

He went through the door and saw the same old mage that had given him direction standing at the center of the room. The room was a circular shape with no windows and no other door apart from the one he had entered from. He was confused, did the old mage went past him and entered the room while he was distracted by the scenery outside?

The old mage gestured for him to approach. Beside the mage was a thin rod that stood by itself at the center of the room. The rod's height was to his shoulder and there was a large green gem at its end.

When Jack came before the mage and the rod, the mage touched the green gem and a series of runic symbols appeared. The row of runes hovered in the air for a short while before dispersing. Then seven orbs of light came out of the gem and hovered in front of it. Six of them formed a circular formation while one was at the center of the formation.

"Form a spell formation from the runes just now using the mana from these orbs," the old mage spoke. "If you want to see the runes again, touch the gem, but all prior progress will be reset. During the trial, your inventory will be locked. You have three hours. If you fail, you can only try again after three days had passed."

After finishing his sentence, the old mage walked out of the room with indifference, leaving the dumbfounded Jack alone in the room.

"What was that?" Jack finally exclaimed after some time.

"The instruction for Mage class trial," Peniel said matter-of-factly as he came out from her hidden dimension.

"I know, but why is the trial like this?"

"What? Do you expect to fight wooden puppets again like in the trial for Warrior class?"

"Well... Kinda."

Peniel rolled her eyes at him. "Not every trial was about combat. Especially for magic users, your control of mana is more essential. This trial tests your memory and concentration, your brute force way is useless here."

Chapter 142: Runic Formations

"So what am I supposed to do here?" Jack asked.

"Have you forgotten what that old mage said just now? If so, then you will surely fail this trial, considering your memory is so bad."

Jack ignored her mocking. He still remembered the old mage's words. It just did not make much sense to him, as the no-nonsense old mage did not give much explanation in his instruction. With Peniel also being stingy in handing out clues, he could only perform a trial and error method.

He first tried touching one of the floating and glowing orbs. The light stuck to the finger he had used to touch. When he pulled his hand, the light created a trail that followed his movement. The trail stayed visible even after some time had passed.

Jack thought back to the old mage's words again, he said something about forming a spell formation from the runes. Were the runes those symbols which were displayed by the gem? If he did not remember it wrong, there were seven of those runic symbols. The same number as these floating orbs.

He went and touched the gem. As the old mage had informed, the runic symbols appeared again, and there were indeed seven symbols. Each of the symbols was rather complicated, with crisscrossing lines and arcs that made no sense.

Jack tried to focus on one and commit it to memory. After a while, the runes vanished, and the seven orbs appeared again. Jack also noticed that the trail he had drawn using his finger previously had also vanished.

So this was what he meant by reset, Jack thought back to the old mage's words. He did not dwell too much at the thought, the memory of the rune was still fresh, so he set out to draw a copy of the rune from his memory using his finger.

"You are so primitive," Peniel commented. "You are the first person I had seen that draws a mana rune using a finger."

"How do you propose me to do then?" Jack asked her with forced patience. It's ok that you don't want to give me hints, and now you still dare to criticize me?

"Any decent magic user draws their runes by guiding the mana through their mind, only a newbie will draw with a finger like a child learning to draw using a pen."

Jack took in the first part of the sentence and ignored the second half. So I can use my mind to shape these glowing orbs? He thought as he retracted his hand and concentrate on one of the orbs. When he imagined moving it, it shifted and moved following his thought, the trail it created was the same as when he was using his finger.

He then sent the orb to move in the pattern that formed the runic symbol in his memory. He was still getting used to making the drawing using his mind, so some parts ended rather crooked and deviating. But he thought it was not a bad start for his first try.

After completing the first rune, he tapped the gem again to look at the other symbols. When the seven runic symbols appeared again, the rune he had drawn vanished.

"Oh, right. Reset..." Jack mumbled. This meant he had to memorize all seven of the runes at the same time. He was having a headache now. He was not the type with an excellent memory. He was good at analyzing information, but not so at memorizing them.

"I will just jot them down on a paper then," he said and tried to open his inventory. When he failed, he remembered the old mage's words about his inventory getting locks during the trial. There was also nothing he could use in the room to write things down.

Crap! He cursed in his mind. He could hear Peniel giggling not far away. He did not have the time to quarrel with her, the trial was only three hours. He could just try his best.

He made the seven symbols appeared again. This time he tried committing them all into memory. There was a lot of information there. When the symbols disappeared, he closed his eyes and tried to picture them in his mind. He did it three more times before trying to draw the runes using the glowing orbs with his mind.

When he finished drawing the third runes, it emitted a high pitch sound and the rune turned golden.

"Eh? Why does it change color?" Jack asked.

He was in actuality talking to himself, but Peniel answered him with a giggle, "that's what happens when the rune you formed is correct. That means those first two are wrong."

"Oh?" Jack looked at the two wrong ones. He could not quite remember which part is wrong. He then decided to reset everything and looked at the correct runes again. After reviewing them for a while, he finally found out that some lines were drawn at the wrong angles. He committed the right ones into memory, and then tried again.

He continued going back and forth between drawing and resetting again to see the wrong parts. Little by little he could remember more of the runes.

"This is surprising, I didn't know I have such a good memory," Jack said. "In the past, I would be struggling to remember such complex forms."

"You should thank your high intelligence attribute then," Peniel commented.

He looked at Peniel with amazement, "my intelligence attribute can help me remember better?"

"Why so surprised? Your strength attribute helps you hit harder and lift heavy things, why the intelligence stat doesn't help you remember better?"

Jack thought about it. He was still using past game concepts when thinking about the attributes. In previous VR games, the attributes only affected the artificial part of the games. Like the number of damages being inflicted, how fast the body was allowed to move. But it would never affect the fundamental aspect of the users, like their intelligence and reaction time. This world however, was no different from the real world. Different set of rules perhaps, but still real nevertheless. So it made sense if the attributes applied to his character would also give him real effects.

Although Jack doubted the intelligence attribute would affect how he thought things out, to help him memorized things was a quantifiable ability. So it was still viable that the higher his intelligence was, the better his memory would become. With high enough intelligence stat, he reckoned he might also have the chance to possess a photographic memory that John claimed he had. Now that he thought about it, wouldn't John become even better at his memory if his intelligence stat increased, considering his base memory was already so outstanding?

What about his reflex stat? He never thought much about it, but if he could increase more of that stat, wouldn't that give him the level of reaction time as those top martial art experts?

He suddenly became agitated to increase his attributes further. His dual-class gave him twice as many attribute points compared to other players, and the disparity would become more as his level increased. He rather looked forward to his future.

"What are you smiling at?" Peniel looked at him as if looking at an idiot. "You are wasting time, you know."

Reminded by the Fairy, Jack immediately went back to focus on working on the runes. After all, more than an hour had passed. He did not want to wait another three days before doing this trial again, he had to pass this trial today.

After endless repeats, only half an hour left for the trial time. He finally had six runes at the perimeter of the circular formation all shined with golden light, only the center rune was left, but he was confident he had drawn it right. When the final line was drawn, he exclaimed proudly, "ta-da!"

Yet after several seconds had passed, nothing happened.

"What?" Peniel asked finally.

Jack looked at the last rune in confusion. He was certain that he had drawn it right. The rune was exactly as he had remembered it. What went wrong?

Chapter 143: Spell With Rune Forming

As he was still pondering the problem, he saw from the corner of his eyes that Peniel was stifling laughter. He glared at her, then said annoyingly, "if you know which part is wrong, tell me, please. Time is running out soon. It will be really frustrating if we fail this trial due to your amusement."

Peniel tried to glare back, but when she realized that Jack was serious, she retracted her playfulness.

"Fine!" she said and flew towards the rune formations floating in front of the rod. "You noticed these runes are arranged in a circular fashion, right? What about the displayed images that you had to memorize?"

"They were arranged in a straight row," Jack answered.

"Exactly," Peniel said. "Now there is a significant clue in that point, because all spell formations that consist of more than one rune are always arranged in a circular formation, like the one you see here. There is no row arrangement for a spell formation. So it is not just about the runes, their arrangements are also important."

Jack pondered her words for a while, "so do you mean that the arrangement or the positions for these runes also determines whether they are correct or not?"

Peniel nodded, "the center rune is the one that connected all the others, so as long as the placements of the other six are not correct, the center rune will never turn golden, hence the formation will not be completed."

"How do I know the correct arrangement?"

"I don't know."

When she saw Jack gave her a suspicious look, she added, "I really don't know. Every spell formation is unique, but the trial usually gives you random kinds of formations and runes that are not runes used in real spells. What I can tell you is that the runes that can connect and formed a spell formation always have their inscriptions somehow connected as well. For example, a line that was extended at one rune somehow appeared to be passing through and continue to its adjacent rune."

Like linking a puzzle? Jack thought after hearing the explanation. He looked at the seven runes floating in front of him again. Some of them if being rotated and placed at a certain place, could be made to appear as if the lines continued between the runes. If it was about arranging puzzles, then he had no problem with it. He was good at it after all. Problem was, he was short on time now.

He immediately analyzed each of the runes against the others, trying to determine which one was linking to the other one. Too bad he could not draw them down onto a piece of paper. He could only do it using his imagination.

Jack was putting all his attention into imagining the arrangement. Some beads of sweat flowed down his forehead, exhibiting the intense concentration he was having at the moment. Even Peniel did not dare to make a sound for fear of disturbing him after seeing his focused expression. Time ticks by while Jack remained still.

When the remaining time left was five minutes, Jack moved. He tapped the green gem to reset the formation. He did not bother to look at the runes displayed and directly went to tweak the orbs of light. He dispelled any extra thoughts and set his mind completely on the task of reshaping the orbs into a series of glowing rune formations. He worked slowly to ensure there was no mistake, but at the same time, the slow process meant that he would not be able to have another try anymore, considering the amount of time left.

Peniel couldn't help but get nervous as well. She watched as Jack shaped the runes one by one with his mind. When she saw how the runes linked with each other from the ones that had formed, she was hopeful.

One minute left!

All the six runes at the circumference were glowing in gold already as previous, and Jack finished drawing the last line of the center rune at the last minute. However, the rune light remained white color.

Jack frowned. Peniel also checked on the formations. "Why didn't it work? All the lines were lined up already!" Peniel uttered in agitation.

Seeing Peniel's reaction, Jack knew Peniel had told the truth. He also believed that she would not keep on joking around now that the situation was critical. Although the rune formations seemed to be correct, something must have gone wrong!

He studied the formations intently. He then realized that when he looked at the central rune, if he rotated the runes a hundred and eighty degrees, the lines would still connect with the other six runes. However, there was no more time to do another retry. There was less than half a minute left.

Could he just rotate the rune with his mind? Since there was no other option, he decided to give it a try. At first, there was no response, but as Jack focus his willpower on pushing the central rune to rotate, he noticed a nudge. Encouraged, he pushed harder. Finally, the rune started to turn, albeit slowly. Jack gritted his teeth and kept his mind from giving up.

When the last few seconds were about to expire, the rune arrived at the position he had envisioned. For an instant, Jack was afraid it would still fail, but the rune abruptly turned golden. The entire formations shone brightly in golden radiance and the seven runes started to turned rapidly before exploding into countless magnificent fireworks around the room.

"Congratulations, you have passed the trial to become an advanced class. You are now a Mage. Receive inherent skill: MP +10%, basic spell range and standard magic attack range +10 meters. Acquires new spell: Barrier."

Jack could not believe how relieved himself when he heard the notification. He fell to the floor on his butt, he just sat there as he relieved his nerves. He did not move much muscle at all during this trial, but the fatigue he felt was no less tiring compared to when he just finished difficult combat.

Just like Warrior, he received inherent skill after becoming Mage, but he got two for Mage instead. The MP increase was nothing much to speak of, but the increase in range was significant. That meant the area he could cover with his spells was now around double.

He thought further about this increased of range. The stats-increase provided by advanced skill was large. Advance melee class players would slowly become much faster. The basic range attack provided by a normal magic staff was only ten meters. Those advanced class melee players would be able to cover such distance quickly. If advanced class magic users did not receive a boost in range, they would soon become handicapped players.

"That was closed," Peniel said. "I thought you have failed for a second there."

"Hehe, me too," Jack replied.

Jack opened up his status window to check his new spell, but before that, he set his experience gain setting back to 50:50, so that his new Mage class could start to receive experience points again. After that, he went to the skill page.

Barrier, level: 1/20 (Active skill, defensive, required magic weapon)

Create a barrier around caster that can withstand a damage of 50% from caster's maximum HP. Barrier will vanish once damage threshold is reached or duration had passed.

Duration: 30 seconds

Cooldown: 3 minutes

Mana: 50

A defensive spell, one that became more potent for players with high HP. A normal mage usually had only little HP. So this spell in his hand, who had two classes' combined HP, compared to normal mage was like heaven and earth. At this current stage, if he cast this spell, he could endure 345 damage!

While he was happy with the spell, he noticed something different. There was a rune symbol beside the spell name.

"What is this?" He asked Peniel while referring to the symbol.

"Try to cast the spell," Peniel replied with an instruction instead.

Trying to be enigmatic again? Jack thought with irritation, but he proceeded with her request. He focused his mind to trigger the spell activation.

"Hm?" Nothing happened.

"Why can't I cast the spell?" He asked nervously.

"Don't worry, that was normal," Peniel told him. "From advanced spells above, magic users no longer cast their spells instantly like basic spells. You need to construct a rune symbol or rune formations in order to cast the spell."

"Rune symbol? Like the one from the trial just now?"

Peniel nodded, "why do you think the trial was having you work on those symbols? Now try to form the rune as shown beside your spell name, in the same way as you did in the trial just now."

"Where do I get the mana to form the rune?" Jack asked.

"Pull it out from your staff," Peniel answered. "Just imagined your staff is the orb of light from the trial."

Following Peniel's explanation, Jack proceeded to apply the theory into practical application. He memorized the symbol beside the spell's name in his skill window, he then focused his mind to draw mana from his staff. A strand of light appeared from the tip of his staff.

It works! He thought. He then used the mana to form a trail that slowly shaped into the rune symbol same as the one shown beside the Barrier spell's name. Once the rune was correctly formed, it condensed into a small orb before bursting out to form an encapsulating light barrier around his body.

Success! Jack was elated, but not long after, he turned gloomy.

Chapter 144: The Man Wants To Become A Warrior

"What's the matter?" Peniel asked him.

"It took me around six seconds to form that rune. By the time I could cast the spell, my opponent would have hit me. Not to mention I need to concentrate in order to form the symbol, how am I to cast the spell during intense combat?"

Peniel rolled her eyes at him, "that's why you need to practice! So you can shorten the time you need to cast the spell, and to be able to maintain concentration for casting the spell under any circumstances."

"But, won't this make a magic user class completely inferior to melee class? My Warrior's advanced skills can still be triggered in an instant."

"That is your shallow thinking," Peniel replied. "Magic spells had firepower and effects that far outstripped most melee skills. Not to mention they could be cast from a distance. If both classes can equally discharge their skills in the same instant, melee classes won't stand a chance at all against magical classes."

Hearing Peniel's explanation, Jack thought back to his past VR RPG games. It was true that in those past games, magic classes had a casting time before they could cast their spells. Perhaps this was a replacement for that casting time. On the other hand, this rune forming method was more realistic. One who diligently trained to accustomed themselves in forming the symbols would hold an advantage against those who were lazy, as they would be able to cast their spells faster.

Peniel continued, "if you think that forming this single rune is already a headache, wait till you get higher level spells which required you to form a spell formation."

"Spell formation?" Jack asked. "Wait, do you mean spell formation like in the trial just now? One with seven runes?"

"Yeah, and that is not the worst one. The highest level I know required you to form a spell formation constructed with nine runes. Good luck when you get a spell like that."

"N— nine runes? How long will I need to cast that spell..." Jack was flabbergasted.

"As the saying goes, practice makes perfect. You better do lots of practice if you want to be a good magic-user class."

Jack let out a depressed sigh. He still preferred melee class after all.

Since he had completed the trial, there was no point for him to linger around. He went out the door to the hallway with the verandah. When he looked at the scenery outside, he was dumbstruck. Instead of the forestry and the mountain view from before, what was beyond the verandah was an ocean view. It was seawater as far as his eyes could see.

He could also see some seagulls flying close to the verandah. One of them even perched on the verandah railing not far from where Jack was standing. Jack decided to approach it. It squawked when it noticed Jack's coming and immediately flew away.

This is some seriously good enchantment, Jack thought to himself. The scenery was either an illusion or this part of the building actually existed in another place at the same time as it was in the capital. Anyway, this was too high level for him, so he left after admiring the view for a while.

When he came down the stairs to the ground floor, the same old mage was still shuffling through the books by the bookcase rows. Was there no one else in this academy? Jack thought.

He came to that old mage and said, "Thank you for your instruction, sir. I've passed the mage Trial. May I enquire to your name?"

"My name is not important. It's good that you have passed. Now if there is no more matter you need, I would like to return to my books," he replied as he waved his hand indicating for Jack to leave.

Jack felt awkward, the NPC overseeing this Mage academy was completely different from Gruff from the Warrior Academy. But he still replied politely, "then I will take my leave. Thank you again, sir."

Jack walked away. Before he went out of the exit, the old mage shot him a short glance.

Jack decided to go to the Adventurers Association to pick a quest at the Silver Hall. Now that both his classes were advanced classes, he was suitable to tackle the quests in that hall. He walked towards the direction of the Adventurers Association.

Before he walked far, he bumped into someone he knew.

"Boss!" That someone shouted at him with a gruff voice.

"Man... I told you already I'm not your boss," Jack said helplessly.

"Sure, sure," The Man replied as he approached with two other Fighters in tow. "Fancy meeting you here, boss. By the way, your armors looked sick!" He was referring to Jack's Blood Guard Scale armor and Shadow Bear Tasset. Especially the pants armor with its dark fur, it appeared really manly, completely suited The Man's taste.

"Thank you," Jack replied. "Yours not bad either."

"Really?" The Man looked at himself. Most of his armors were uncommon grade, but their appearances were roughly still the same as the standard common armors which Fighter got in the early stage.

"I was being polite," Jack told him.

"Hahaha," The Man only laughed as a response. He then said, "What're you doing here, boss?"

Before Jack could answer, another gruff voice was heard, "I was wondering why it suddenly stinks, so it happened to be you!"

"You! A**hole! What the f**k are you doing here?" The Man cursed back.

Jack looked at the one The Man was cursing at. It was a large man with feature and temperament which oddly gave him the same impression he got from The Man, except this new man was a younger version. The person was in a larger party of six people.

"Do you know him?" Jack asked The Man.

"Do not bother with him, he is a nobody," The Man answered.

"It's funny hearing a nobody calling someone else nobody," the other guy retorted. "I heard you even dare to copy our guild's name after you got kicked out. Do you perhaps asking us to come to kick your butt?"

"What copy? I have a part in coming up with that name, so it is partly mine as well. What's wrong with me using it? And who the heck got kicked? I quit myself because I can't stand an annoying upstart like you!"

"You prick! You looking for a fight?" The other guy wanted to lunge at The Man but his friends held him. "Not here," one of his friends said as he pointed towards a direction. The guy looked over and see a group of patrolling guardsmen who were walking by.

"Heh, you are lucky we are in the safe zone," the guy said to The Man. "And I don't have time to deal with you, I'm about to become a Warrior class. If you have the guts, let's settle our problem outside the city once I change class."

"You? You dare to fight me? Don't be ridiculous, how many times have I spanked your ass in the past? You are just looking for trouble. I am also about to become a Warrior. All right, let's settle this once we become Warriors!" The Man roared fiercely.

They were both coming to take the trials to become Warriors? Jack thought. He inspected them with his God-Eye monocle. The Man had indeed reached level 15, while his two subordinates behind him were level 14. Their level increase was not slow either, Jack thought he could not afford to slack around if he did not want to get left behind.

When he inspected The Man's opponent, he was dumbfounded, not for the person's level, he was also a level 15 Fighter. What blew him away was the guy's name. His alias was The Real Man. Jack was sure now that he and The Man were related in some way.

After further exchanging threats and insults, The Real Man left in the direction of the Warrior Academy.

"You mind telling me what that was all about?" Jack asked The Man.

"Nothing important," The Man laughed. "Just some upstart trying to make a name for himself. There is no need for you to worry about it, boss."

Jack nodded, he was not going to pry other people's issues if the other was not willing to share. He asked instead, "so you are going to try for the Warrior test?"

"That I am!" The Man said with pride.

"Have anyone from your guild tried the test yet?"

"No, I am the first one to reach level 15 amongst them."

"How do you know about the trial for advanced class?"

"Heard it from people, apparently some guy read it in the library. Someone else heard from that guy, we heard from that someone else. Something like that."

"Well, have you heard anyone succeeded in passing the test?" Jack asked again.

"Not yet, at least none had announced their success publicly," The Man answered.

"Have you heard from someone who had taken the test about how the test is like?"

"No, I did ask some people who are rumored to have taken the test, but they kept quiet about it. Strangely though, those guys were level 14, so I guess they lied about it."

"Actually, I don't think they have lied," Jack said.

Chapter 145: Trading Rare Weapons

"Hm? Is there something you know that I don't, boss?"

"Come, let's find someplace better to talk." There was a small tavern not far from the academies, Jack brought the three to the place and treated them with some drinks. A few copper coins for the drinks was nothing for Jack now anyway.

"Do you know something about the trial, boss?" The Man asked while taking a sip of his mead.

"Yes, first of all, I am already a Warrior," Jack told them truthfully.

The Man almost spat his drink out after hearing it. His eyes were wide with disbelief, but then he laughed loudly, and said to his two subordinates, "what did I tell you! My boss is something else, ain't he! Har har!"

"Okay, okay. Settle down, will you?" Jack said. "Since I consider you as a friend. I must tell you that the trial is not easy."

"Don't worry, boss. I might not look like it, but I'm not simple either."

"I know. I will tell you everything about the trial. You can decide about it for yourself."

Jack then described his experience on the test. Its objective, its difficulty, and the strategy he had used to pass it. He warned him about the puppets at the last section which had ranged capability in their attacks.

He also explained that he had managed to pass due to his high attributes, but he described the reason for those high attributes to come from the amazing gears he wore instead of his dual-class. He did not leave out the penalty for failing the Warrior test as well, which was losing one level, which then explained why those that said to have taken the test had dropped back to level 14.

After hearing the explanation, The Man was deep in thought. "It does sound rather difficult," he mumbled.

Seeing The Man's reaction, Jack figured the guy was not just a simple brute after all.

"Do you still want to try?" He asked.

After being silent for a while, he said. "You mentioned that with good gears we stood a better chance, right? I will be frank to you. The guys under me have borrowed me their best gears for this test, the lowest gear on me is uncommon. And I'm also lucky enough to have gotten rare boots that increased my movement speed. As long as I can get to the statue, I will pass, am I correct?"

"That's right, it's pointless to fight to the death with those puppets," Jack confirmed.

"In that case, I want to give it a try," The Man said with a serious expression.

Jack nodded, he admired the guy's directness and bravery. He decided to help The Man further. He took out the Chief Axe, the rare weapon he had no use of. He was originally still unsure whether to

disassemble this axe for materials or just sell it for coins. Now that a friend of his was in need, he might as well put the axe to good use.

"This..." The Man was astonished, he could see the axe was unusual from its appearance.

"Take it, this axe has an ability that is actually useful for the test," Jack said as he handed the axe to The Man.

When The Man held the axe in his hand, he exclaimed, "ra— rare weapon? I cannot accept this!"

"Take it," Jack said. "I have no use for two-handed weapon. You on the contrary, I have seen using heavy-weapon, so you should be able to handle this weapon well. Its knock-back ability is especially useful if you are challenging the Warrior trial, as it can allow you to shake off the puppets' blockage with a simple normal attack. If you still have free attributes, it's better if you put them all into Dexterity. As long as you are fast enough to avoid the puppets and arrive at the statue, then you will have passed."

The Man was touched by Jack's concern, "let me tell you again. Whatever other people say, you will always be my boss. Don't hesitate if you ever need any of our help!"

Jack just shook his head and laughed it off.

"Big bro, isn't you also have that sword from yesterday's quest?" One of The Man's subordinates whispered to him.

The Man's expression changed when he heard it. He slapped his forehead. "Right, how did I forget it!"

He immediately took out something from his bag. It was a green long sword. He gave the sword to Jack with a grin and said, "now I feel better about receiving your axe, let's consider it as a trade then."

Jack received the sword and inspected it.

Jade longsword, level 15/35 (Rare one-handed sword)

Physical damage: 64

Attack speed: 2

Durability: 50

Dexterity +3

10% chance to cause Bleed status effect on each attack

"A rare sword?" Jack exclaimed.

"Yes, I got it from a quest. Same as you, I have no need of a one-handed weapon as I prefer using two-handed one. So I just kept it in my inventory. I thought at first I'm going to use it as a motivation prize for the next person in my guild who can become a Warrior. But now I'm glad it can serve a better use."

"In that case, I won't hesitate," Jack said, and offer him a toast. "I wish you good luck in the trial."

"Don't worry, with this axe, I'm passing it for sure!" The Man replied passionately.

After a few more rounds, Jack bid them farewell. He looked for a deserted corner and took out the Jade Longsword to be sacrificed to his Storm Breaker, but Peniel came out from her hidden dimension and stopped him.

"I was hoping you can realize it by yourself, but your skull is too thick for it," Peniel said to him.

"What do you mean?" Jack asked in confusion.

Peniel gave a long sigh, she then said slowly, "you know that your Storm Breaker will inherit the same level as the sacrificed weapon if it is of the same rarity, right?"

Jack nodded, "so?"

"And you cannot upgrade your Storm Breaker's level with the usual Blacksmithing way, correct?"

Jack felt like there was a hint somewhere, after a while, he finally realized it. "So you mean I should upgrade the levels of this rare sword first before I fed it to my Storm Breaker, that way I could increase its level easier instead of looking for more swords to be fed!"

"You just think of it now, genius?" Peniel mocked sarcastically.

Jack ignored her. He immediately dashed back to the Blacksmith Workshop. He did wish that Peniel to have mentioned this to him last night, that way he could have used that method in the workshop this morning. Now he had to waste another entry charge into the workshop. Before he went into the workshop, he bought a batch of 30 Iron Ores first since he only had 10 pieces left in his bag.

He first used 7 Iron Ores to upgrade the Jade Longsword to level 21, starting from there, there was a chance of failure. He decided to continue upgrading since he had enough Iron Ores to waste. He immediately failed on his first try, wasting his 2 iron ores. He was wondering if his 13 points of luck were actually working or not? He then used another 2 iron ores to retry, it succeeded this time, bringing the Jade Longsword to level 22. He continued until level 25, wasting another 10 iron ores due to two fails.

When he proceeded to upgrade to level 26, he was asked to put in 2 iron ores and 1 steel ore, instead of just 2 iron ores. It seemed that the higher the level, the more high-level ores would be required for upgrading. He looked at the probability, 75% success rate. After contemplating for a while, he decided to go for it. Fortunately, this time his luck stat did not disappoint, he successfully increased the sword level to 26.

But as he tried to upgrade again to level 27, he received a notification, "You can only use equipment that is ten levels higher than your own level, do you confirm to upgrade?"

"There is such rule?" Jack blurted out in surprise.

"There is," Peniel answered that rhetorical question. "You can always upgrade it now first and fed it to your Storm Breaker later when your level increased."

If he possessed two rare swords, that method would be viable. But if he did that now, his Storm Breaker would then stay at level 16. His first priority was increasing his battle power at the presence. He wished again that Peniel have informed him yesterday, so he did not waste the rare sword he had gotten from Warpath. But since everything had happened, he did not dwell much on it.

Chapter 146: Another Mysterious Quest

He decided to still feed the current level 26 Jade Longsword to his Storm Breaker.

Storm Breaker, level 26 (rare one-handed sword, bound weapon)

Physical damage 104

Attack speed 3

Cannot be destroyed

Bound to Storm Wind

Dexterity +3

Parry skill +2

Overlimit: Release the weapon's hidden power that adds an additional 150% damage as chaos damage, increases weapon range by 2 feet, and decreases the target's defense by 65%. Duration 85 seconds.
Cooldown 8 hours

Amazing! Jack thought. His weapon's damage now had reached three digits. This would boost his damage further.

Since he could just equip until level 26, might as well not waste the current workshop entry and upgrade all his current equipped gears to level 26. But since his supply of ores was limited, he prioritized the rare Blood Guard Scale Armor and Shadow Bear Tasset.

The Blood Guard Scale Armor was already level 25, so he just needed to level it one more level. While the Shadow Bear Tasset was level 21. He failed thrice in the process, spending 16 iron ores and 8 steel ores. Before he ran out of his iron ores, he managed to upgrade Blood Guard Scale Armor to level 26 and his Shadow Bear Tasset to level 25.

Coming out from the Blacksmith Workshop, he continued with his original intention of going to the Adventurers Association. He went directly to the Silver Hall after entering the association building. He observed the list of quests on the notice board. Most were rank C and B quests.

With his prowess, he should have no problem in tackling any rank C quest. But for rank B, he might need to choose the ones that were meant for a solo player, as rank B quests had suggestions for adventurers mostly at level 25 or above. A solo player quest typically had lower difficulty than one that required a party, he would also have more freedom in utilizing his second class' skills in a solo quest.

He continued to browse through the quests. He would prefer a quest that took him outside the city, so he could try to complete his hunting quests at the same time. There were some quests like that, but he kept on reading the entire quest list out of curiosity.

While he continued reading, one quest stole his attention.

Investigate a Duke's missing painting

Difficulty: ??? (recommended: ???)

Rewards: 80 silver coins, 5000 Experience points, 45 Adventurer Points (subject to change)

"Don't tell me you are going to take that mysterious quest?" Peniel asked after sensing his interest in that quest.

"Why not?" Jack asked back.

"Didn't you already learn from last time how unpredictable this kind of quests is? It could be too dangerous for your level."

"But I ended up all right, didn't I? And also, there is a chance that it will end up easier than expected, ain't it? If the difficulty turns out to be lower, will the reward get adjusted to less as well?"

"No, the reward will only be adjusted if it is higher. If the quest ends up having lower difficulty, then you will still get the amount indicated originally. So in other words, the listed reward will be the minimum you will receive if you take on this quest."

"Now ain't that sweet? Look at the quest's title, it is to investigate a painting, how dangerous could it be. I don't even have to go out from the city."

"I thought you want quests that take you outside the city, so you can work on the hunting quests at the same time?"

"Yeah, but look at this quest title. It's from a Duke. Doesn't that mean we get to enter the Noble District if we take this quest?"

"You are interested in the Noble District?"

"I'm interested to have a look, before other outworlders like me get access to it."

"Fine, do whatever you like."

After making up his mind, he went up to the counter to accept the quest. He took a look at the quest description afterward.

Investigate a Duke's missing painting

Difficulty: ??? (recommended: ???)

Rewards: 80 silver coins, 5000 Experience points, 45 Adventurer Points (subject to change)

Go to the Noble district. Report to Duke Alfredo's manor.

Time limit: 3 days

He had guessed correctly, he did get access to the Noble District for this quest. Without further ado, he departed to said District. When he arrived at the gateway into the noble district, he was stopped by the two guards guarding the gateway.

Jack explained about his purpose of visit and showed them his silver Adventurer Badge, which the guard inspected. The quest had been recorded inside the badge so the guards could verify his statement by checking out his Adventurer Badge.

After making sure Jack was telling the truth, the guards gave him back his badge and moved aside to let him pass. Jack went in and came out to a gorgeous landscape, filled with lavish gardens and imposing estates. The gardens were filled with flowers of multitude color, their sweet fragrance filled the air. There was also an extravagant waterway that went around the neighborhood, the sound of water flowing soothed the scant pedestrians garbed in fancy and expensive clothing.

Jack observed his surroundings. There was no indication about where the manor of Duke Alfredo was, so he approached a couple of the nobles in the fancy clothing to ask for a direction.

"Excuse me, may I know where I can find Duke Alfredo?" He asked politely.

The noble couple just took a short glance at Jack before snorting disdainfully and walked away.

What the... Did the NPC nobles here have to act like those pompous rich jackasses in real-life? He complained in his mind.

He looked around, there was a guard who stood in attention not far from where he was. He went and hoped the guard would act differently from those nobles.

He made the same inquiry as he had given before to the noble couple. The guard looked sternly at Jack and asked, "what is your business with Duke Alfredo?"

Jack presented his Adventurer Badge and explained as he had done to the guards at the gateway. The guard made the same inspection, not long after, he told Jack the direction. Jack followed the instruction, the location of the Duke's manor was actually pretty far. He saw some horse carriages occasionally, but he doubted those were for public transportation.

After traveling for more than half an hour, he came up to a gated estate. The weird thing was, he could see some runic light along the walls encircling the whole estate.

"What is that?" Jack asked Peniel who was flying freely by his side.

"It's a rune diagram," she answered.

"What's it for?"

"For many applications. Different rune diagrams provide different functions. They were large collections of magic runes arranged in a systematic position to produce an effect. Mostly only big factions possessed knowledge of them and the resources required to construct them. This one here looks like it functions as a barrier that prevents travel."

Listening to Peniel's explanation, Jack couldn't help but clicked his tongue, "nobles are indeed different, even their lands are protected by magic."

"Actually, I doubt this is standard. Something unusual is likely going on inside," Peniel said. "A magic formation requires a large amount of energy to operate. Even a noble cannot afford to activate them

indefinitely, especially one of this size. Furthermore, there is no need for a barrier magic formation here since the neighborhood is safe enough."

Jack looked to the other estates. Peniel was right, he didn't see such rune diagram on the other estates, nor did he notice any of it when he was on his way here. Could this be related to the quest he was on?

Mulling over it won't solve anything, so he just came to the gate. There was another guard stationed there. He made the same explanation and went through the same procedure as before. He was getting tired of these repeated procedures.

After the guard verified his words, he was let through the gate. The guard made some complicated hand movements, a ripple appeared at the rune diagram covering the entrance gate, and then it ripped open creating a hole large enough to cover the gate. Jack was instructed to go through that hole. Looked like it was set so that people can only enter and exit from here, even with the right clearance.

When he passed through, he saw a squad of ten armored guards stood near the entrance gate. One of them came near and asked, "I am Captain Salem, are you the adventurer who comes to help solve the Duke's problem?"

"Um, if by problem you mean the missing painting, then yes...", Jack answered uncertainly. Wasn't this a bit too exaggerated for a missing painting?

Chapter 147: Quest Of A Mystery Case

"Come with me," Captain Salem instructed.

There were stunningly small woods and a small man-made lake inside the estate's ground. Jack could see some fishes in the lake when he passed by its side. After coming out of the woods, a huge mansion was seen. It stood magnificently at the center, lording over the rest of the estate. It looked like a castle, there were three towers at different corners of the mansion.

The front of the mansion was a garden with flowers and small trees which were professionally trimmed by gardeners. A large statue of an officer riding a stallion was erected at the center of the garden. Captain Salem took Jack past the garden and to the front entrance of the mansion.

There were two small lion statues by the large wooden double door which was the mansion's main entrance. The captain knocked hard on the solid door. Not long after, the door opened and revealed a middle-aged man in a butler uniform.

"Winston, this is the adventurer the duke has been waiting for," the captain informed.

The butler called Winston scrutinized Jack with his eyes, before he stepped aside and made a gesture for Jack and the captain to come inside.

The inside of the mansion was as extravagant as the rest of the estate. The foyer hall was decorated with various artworks and antiques. An enormous golden chandelier hung above them, while the whole ceiling was decorated with an enormous painting depicting heaven and angels.

"Come with me," the butler said, and then added, "do not wander off, do not make yourself at home."

He brought them past several rooms and into a long hallway, before coming up to an inner courtyard filled with decorated plants and trees. At the center of the courtyard was a tall fountain with water shooting out from its top and fell to the pond underneath the fountain. A man was sitting on a bench gazing at the fountain, his back was facing Jack and the others as they came into the courtyard.

"Your Grace, the adventurer for the quest that you posted in the Adventurers Association has come," butler Winston addressed the man on the bench with a bow.

Duke Alfredo stood from the bench and turned around. He looked to be in his fifties, with a square jaw, trimmed mustache, and sharp eyes. He was wearing a luxuriant green robe that flowed down to his legs. His hair was short and tidy, its color was brown with a sliver of grey.

Captain Salem made a small bow when the duke approached. "Your Grace," he said.

Jack copied the captain's salutation and bowed as well as he uttered, "Your Grace."

The duke nodded. "You are the first outworlder I have met. I always heard that they are a bunch of rough men and women, and have no respect for courtesy and tradition. But I see that you are not as the rumor had described."

"There are many kinds of us, Your Grace. It is true that not many of us are respectful of rules," Jack said, then added in his mind, not many would bother with courtesy in a game.

He for one had treated this world as real, and this way of thought had helped him numerous times.

"Then I'm glad you are not the disrespectful kind," the duke said. "However, rather than politeness and respect, I am more hoping that you are capable enough to solve my trouble."

"I'm all ears," Jack said.

"All right," the duke said, he waved to Winston to dismiss him. The butler made another bow before leaving. He then invited Jack to join him in sitting on the bench. The captain took his place standing beside the sitting duke.

"I needed help in finding a possession of mine that had gone missing," the duke said after Jack took a seat beside him.

"Is it a painting?" Jack asked.

"Mm, something like that," the duke answer.

"When had it gone missing?"

"Two days ago."

"So it was just recently, the thief might not have gotten far yet."

"Actually, the thief has not gone anywhere, he or she is still within this estate," the duke said.

"Oh? Why are you so sure?"

"Because I activated the barrier formation around this estate once I found out the thing is gone."

"Maybe the thief has left before the formation was up."

"Not possible, not even three minutes have passed between when I last saw the thing and realized it to have gone missing. I activated the rune diagram immediately, not possible for the thief to have gone out from my estate within that time frame."

"Then the thief must still be in hiding somewhere in this estate."

"No, it's not possible as well," it was captain Salem that answered this time. "I came soon after the duke's report. We have swept the whole estate and the mansion as well, there was no stranger within this estate."

"How are you so sure? The thief could be hiding at some corner or digging a hole into the ground."

"If that so, we will still find them," the captain said with confidence.

"Why?"

"Because we have this orb of detection," the captain brought out a small blue orb. "It can detect any living being in the vicinity. So if someone is hiding, we will still be able to find them."

Orb of detection? It sounded similar to the radar of his God-Eye.

"So you cannot find any stranger, that's mean the thief is someone who belongs in this manor," Jack uttered.

Duke Alfredo nodded with a smile, "I'm glad the Adventurers Association didn't send someone dull."

"But isn't it an easy case then? Just search everyone then, the missing item should be in their possession."

"We did," captain Salem answered. "But none of them have it. We have searched their rooms as well, and even spent the entire day combing through every corner of this mansion. We still couldn't find it."

Jack pondered about it. A strange feeling washed over him, why is the quest suddenly turned into a mystery game? The quest did not seem to have the prospect of combat involved in it. This was more like those mystery novels he enjoyed reading in the real life.

Except in those novels, it was usually a murder case, in a closed environment, and the murderer was someone present within the group. The detectives in those novels would then have to investigate and made a deduction to find out the culprit amongst the people within that group.

Now since this situation was similar, Jack figured that he could just try to copy the method used by the detectives in those novels. Apart from listening to the story of how the case happened, he would need to look at the crime scene and interview each people involved.

He sighed, this quest turned out to be quite a hassle. He liked to read mystery novels, but he would prefer to just play hack and slash kind of games, or at least simple puzzle games.

"Okay, tell me how it happened," Jack said to the duke. "Don't leave out any details. Every single thing you can remember will be helpful."

The duke nodded, he then started, "two days ago when this happened, I was in my workroom as usual. It was my routine to stay there the entire morning. Working with all sorts of documents and letters that required my attention. The... painting that was lost was also inside this room. It was kept in a small glass-case stand in the room. I was in the room working at the time before Winston came in to advise me about a friend of mine that had come to visit. I told him that I would come down soon to meet this friend, he then left. I tidied up my work before going down. The maid, Joselyn came in bringing another cup of tea. I told her to bring it downstairs. She cleaned the empty breakfast tray from my desk while I walked out. I had a glance before leaving the room, and the painting was still inside the glass case. I waited outside the room while Joselyn was cleaning my desk. After she came out, I locked the door, and then we walked down together."

"Wait, so the maid was the last one in the room?" Jack interrupted. "Then shouldn't she be the most likely to have stolen the painting?"

Chapter 148: Searching For Clues 1

"She was indeed the prime suspect at first," the duke said, "but listen to the whole story first. During our way down, I suddenly remembered to have not yet locked my desk's drawer. I hurried back to my workroom as I asked Joselyn to follow me back as well."

"Why do you ask her to follow you back?"

"Because there are many important letters with sensitive information inside my desk. I am not a suspicious person, but still, I like to be careful. If important documents are missing, then I want to search her first. When we came into the room, I found out the painting was missing. I immediately searched the maid. She was frightful but cooperative, I did not find the painting on her. So I activated the barrier and called the castle guards to stop anyone from going in and out of the estate. I also notified the palace to send military aides to help deal with this matter, in which captain Salem showed up soon after."

"I can't help but say, for these important items to be out in the open like that, isn't it begging to be stolen?" Jack said.

"These items in my workroom actually had enchantment on them. If they left the mansion, the barrier formation would have automatically activated, thus preventing anyone from leaving the estate ground. The fact that it didn't activate yet when I found out that it was missing, meant that it was still within the mansion, but since I couldn't find it, I chose to activate the barrier formation manually. Furthermore, only me and my butler possessed the key to this workroom, so normally the items inside were perfectly safe."

"You absolutely trust your butler?"

"With my life," the duke answered unhesitantly.

"I see. What happened next after the castle guards showed up?"

Captain Salem picked up from there, "after I came, we made a thorough sweep of the estate using this Orb of Detection as I have mentioned before, and found nothing. We also made a thorough search on

the mansion and checked all the occupants' belongings, especially the maid's. But they came out empty."

"Where was the maid during your search?" Jack asked.

"In detention, even though the stolen item was not found on her. She was still the main suspect. One of my men is watching her at all time."

"Even now?"

"Even now."

"So there is no other clue?"

The duke shook his head. "Then I decided to post a request to the Adventurers Association," he said.

"Could the perpetrator use magic to bypass the detection of the Orb? Or use magic to escape from the barrier?" Jack asked.

"No. Both the barrier and the Orb are immune to such trick," captain Salem said with certainty.

Jack was tempted to ask why, but he kept his mouth shut instead. This was their world after all, so they would be more clear on its rules.

"Furthermore," the duke added. "Apart from the guards that came later, I'm the only one within this mansion that could use magic. The others, they are all commoners."

"Commoners?"

"Commoners are our word for people who have no magic or battle skills, most of them are level 1 civilian," Peniel explained to him from her hidden dimension. She had gone into hiding since Jack stepped into the estate area. She felt something unusual about this quest, so she hid as a precaution.

'Oh, I thought for a second he meant a non-noble person.' Jack commented in his mind.

"Those we call peasants."

So, the duke could use magic? Intrigued, Jack used his God-eye monocle to inspect the duke and the captain.

Alfredo (Rare Elite Human, Duke), level 65

HP: 680,000

Salem (Elite Human, Knight-Captain), level 55

HP: 125,000

Jack took a gulp with a pale face after reading their descriptions. The captain was much stronger than the Priest of Phobos who had trashed him previously. The duke was even more crazier. Both of them might be able to kill him with just a single hit. Now he felt lucky this was not a combat quest. His level was absolutely not in the league.

"I would like to take a look at the crime scene," Jack told the duke after taking some time to calm down.

"The what?" The duke was confused.

"Um, I mean, your workroom, where your painting was stolen," Jack explained with an embarrassed face. It seemed that he took this detective role a bit too seriously.

Duke Alfredo nodded. "Come with me," he said.

Captain Salem continued to tag along. The two of them brought Jack through the mansion onto a gigantic hall with a large staircase that led upstairs. There was a large domed glass ceiling above where the sunlight came through and shone on the staircase. They went up the stairs as Jack admired the interior. The railings were coated with gold, he didn't know if it was real gold or simply gold color coating. Nevertheless, they still looked impressive.

Many large paintings decorated the walls. There was also a large painting of the younger version of the duke, hung on the wall facing them when they came up the stairs to the second floor. They then walked into a wide and long hallway. There were several suits of armor standing at a fixed distance along one side of the hallway. The other side was an open space facing the courtyard below where they were at some moments ago.

After walking for a while, they went up another flight of winding staircase, which brought them to a door. There was no other pathway, so the only way to this room was through this long staircase. Jack figured they must be in one of the three towers he had seen from outside.

Duke Alfredo opened the door and said, "this is my workroom."

Jack went in and saw a spacious office room. He was expecting a messy room typical of a busy working man's office. Instead, the room was especially tidy. Bookshelves lined up one side of the walls. They were full of books arranged neatly. A sofa with two lounge chairs and a coffee table adorned the other side. There were some portraits on the wall and a preserved head from some kind of large beast mounted on it.

The opposite wall from where they had entered was decorated with massive windows that overlooked the outside. When Jack peeked through the windows, he could see the garden at the front entrance of the mansion.

He looked for the knob of the windows and found them at the bottom side. He tried opening them, only the bottom part could be opened and it only opened by a little, the gap was only enough for his hand to go through. No way someone could enter through the windows. Not to mention this room was three floors up from the ground. For a Warrior like him, he should still survive after falling from this height, but for commoners, they would most likely die.

A large wooden desk was positioned before the windows. Several documents and writing utensils were arranged orderly on the desk. Apparently, the duke was as neat as he was elegant in his temperament. Beside the desk were some stands. One of the stands held a bust sculpted into the shape of the duke's half-upper body. While the other stands held glass cases with various artifacts inside. One such stand was empty.

"This must be where the stolen painting was placed?" Jack asked as he came to that stand.

"That is correct," the duke confirmed.

Jack observed the glass case of the stand. It was a rectangular shape the size of an A4 paper. It would be a tiny size painting if it was displayed on this stand. There was a glass case cover on the stand, it was to protect the thing being exhibited inside from outside elements. It had a hinge at its top part. Jack lifted the glass cover, it was easily opened, there was no lock on the glass cover.

"Was it closed when you found the painting missing?" Jack asked.

"It was," the duke nodded.

"Any other things gone missing or were out of place from when you left it?"

"No, everything is fine except for the missing painting."

After checking the display stand, he then glanced at the other display stands beside the one that was missing its painting. In fact, when he came into the room, his God-Eye monocle had marked the items on the stands, so he knew those items were nothing usual.

Inside the glass case of the display stand closest to him was an ivory horn. Out of curiosity, he inspected the ivory horn using his monocle.

Horn of Silver Rhino Emperor (Unique Consumable)

Summon a Mythical grade Silver Rhino Emperor

Duration: 1 hour

Usage: 3

Chapter 149: Searching For Clues 2

Jack's eyes bulged after reading the description. A unique consumable that summoned a mythical grade monster?

'How strong is a mythical grade?' He asked Peniel in his mind.

"Most of the boss you fought till now were Elite, right? Stronger than elite is special elite, like the Lizardman Blood Guard who you fought when we just met. After that is the Rare Elite, which was the grade this duke here has. Above it is the Mythical grade."

'Damn! Then the monster summoned by this horn will be absolutely terrifying!' Jack exclaimed.

"You don't say."

'Is Mythical the strongest grade for monsters and NPCs?'

"No, there is still the Eternal grade."

Jack's eyes twitched. He had already had to go all out fighting an Elite. He could not imagine the fearsomeness of the Eternal grade. He realized now that he was still at the bottom pool within this new world. He would need to get stronger if he was to explore this world further.

He then looked at the other display stand next to the one with the ivory horn. It held a simple stone, the shape was irregular and has no color. Its surface was so smooth that it reflected the images around it, similar to a mirror. Jack inspected it.

Divine Crystal (Legendary Material)

L— legendary?! It's the highest grade item if according to the beta guide. This was the second legendary item he had seen apart from the Second Soul Remnant which gave him his second class.

"I didn't expect to see a Divine Crystal here," he heard Peniel's voice in his mind. "This duke is obviously not a simple person."

'You know about this thing?' Jack asked.

"Of course, didn't you already know by now that I know everything?" Peniel replied with a disdainful tone. "This is one of the materials that can be used to upgrade or create legendary equipment. Countless factions would fight or pay a high sum for this crystal. I was amused that the duke left it in the open like this in his workroom."

So Peniel knew about this legendary material? Why did she not know about the Second Soul Remnant? When she was surprised by the existence of his second class, he thought that Peniel's wide knowledge was limited to below the Legendary realm, but it turned out that it was not the case. Could that Second Soul Remnant be something special even among legendary items?

Jack shook his head, no use to think about that now. He should focus on the task at hand. If the two items on the display stands were such extraordinary things, he doubted the missing item that was originally on a similar stand would be anything less. No wonder the duke activated such a huge barrier formation after it was found missing.

He looked at the other things around the room but couldn't notice anything out of the ordinary. He then approached the window again and glanced at the tiny gap at the bottom of the window.

"How many people were in this mansion when the painting was stolen?" He asked.

"Including me, my butler Winston, our main suspect maid Joselyn, there were six others," the duke answered. "One of which was the friend that I mentioned had come to visit me when the event happened, Marquess Fernando."

"He did not protest for being held here all this time?"

The duke chuckled, "he had no choice, I outrank him."

"I would like to talk to all of them, can that be arranged?" Jack asked.

"That will be fine, Captain Salem can help with the arrangement," the duke answered.

The captain looked at the duke before asking, "will that include Duchess Isabelle?"

The duke turned to Jack, who said, "everyone if possible, please."

The duke nodded to Captain Salem. "Everyone it is, then," he said. "I'm glad you seemed to know what you are doing."

Jack smiled awkwardly. He could not tell him that he was just copying what he had read from fictional detective stories, could he? He just hoped he could pick up clues from the interviews like the detectives in those stories.

"When would you want it?" Captain Salem asked Jack.

"An hour from now. One more thing, I would like to talk to them separately one by one and in an enclosed room."

"All right, let's do it at the study room on the first floor," the duke said.

"In the meantime, will it be ok if I roam around the mansion by myself?"

"Sure. All of the restricted rooms are locked. Unless you tried to forcefully open the door, there should be no problem."

"What happened if I forcefully try to open a locked room?"

"An alarm will sound out, and an offensive spell will assail the would-be intruder."

"That is the same to this door when it is locked?" Jack gestured to the door of this room.

"Yes," the duke confirmed.

"One last thing, do you remember the exact time when you found out that the painting was missing?"

The duke nodded, "yes, it was at 10:12, because that was the time I activated the barrier formation."

"Okay, I have no more questions at the moment."

Captain Salem said, "I will show you the first floor's study room first before assembling the occupants of this mansion, so you know where to find them an hour from now."

"That will be great," Jack said.

Jack and Captain Salem walked downstairs while the duke stayed in his workroom. Jack asked the captain during their walk, "when you make the search on this estate, did you find anything out of the ordinary?"

"Like what?" The captain asked.

Jack shrugged, "something that was not used to be in this estate, or someone behaving unusually compared to their normal behavior?"

"It's not like I often visited this place or accustomed with the people here, so how should I know? It's also my first time here due to this theft. I was just looking for the missing... painting, so I did not pay attention to other matters."

Jack nodded. He did not ask the captain any other questions, but he talked to Peniel in his mind instead, 'did you notice that both the duke and the captain had a slight pause when they mentioned the missing painting?'

"What's on your mind?" The fairy asked back.

'I don't think it is a painting that we are looking for.'

"So what is it we are looking for?"

'Not sure. But it's something small that could fit inside that glass case stand, and probably also narrow enough to pass through the gap at the bottom of the window of the duke's workroom.'

"You think the maid Joselyn threw the not-painting out from the window?" Peniel asked with a surprised tone.

'I'm not sure. That's what I'm trying to find out now.'

After Captain Salem showed him the study room on the first floor, they parted. Jack went back to the main entrance, after getting lost twice, the mansion was simply too huge. He went out the main door to the front garden. He then looked up at the mansion, he tried to identify where the duke's workroom was located from the outside here. While observing, he was amazed to notice his eyesight could see much better than he was used to. The windows that were far away on the upper floors were so clear, he could even see what was behind those windows. This must have been the passive effect of the Dragon's Eye skill.

With his improved eyesight, he could quickly identify which was the window from the duke's workroom. As he had guessed, the workroom was at one of the towers. He walked towards the base of the tower, he looked up again to determine that he was right under the window. Before he was thick bushes that covered the lower half of the wall. If anything fell from the window above, it would most likely fall into these bushes.

"Find anything?" Peniel asked as Jack was ruffling through the bushes.

'Not yet,' Jack said as he kept on searching.

'I think it must have been taken,' he said finally after searching for a while.

"How can it be? Isn't the duke said the maid in suspect had been taken into custody since the start? How is it possible for her to come and take it?"

Before Jack could answer, his monocle picked up something. He had never stopped ruffling the bushes, at this time a marking appeared from one part of the bushes. The marking indicated it to have a connection with his current quest, and then some tracking footsteps were highlighted in his God-eye monocle.

"Hey, the thing works its magic again!" Peniel cried out in excitement.

Chapter 150: Assembling For The Interview

Jack then followed the tracking footsteps away from the bushes. They brought him through the side entrance of the house. The door was not locked, so he continued following. After walking through a few hallways, the footsteps suddenly disappeared in a corner.

"Why does it stop here?" Peniel asked.

'How should I know?' Jack shot back. 'is there some ways to throw the tracking skill off?'

"There are some ways. The most common ones are if the tracks are too old already, or it can be the target uses an anti-tracking ability or item, or if the target simply flies off or go into the water."

'Well, considering we are in an indoor hallway, we can forget about the flying and swimming methods. How long is a track considered old before it disappears?'

"That will also depend on the tracking level, the most basic one can mostly track clues from two days old."

'the duke said that the theft happened two days ago, so that could be the reason.'

"Probably. So now what?"

'Well, the tracks have gone cold, but at least we learned something.'

"What did you learn?"

"That the stolen thing was indeed getting thrown out of the window, most probably by the maid. And she had an accomplice."

After further checking the areas around the hallway where the tracks disappeared without result, Jack tried to find his way to the study room where the interviews would be conducted. He lost his way again another one time.

By the time he found his way to the study room, a group of people was already assembled in front of it. They were sitting on a cluster of sofa lounges in front of the study room. Some were having drowsy looks, some were chatting, a few were having irritated expressions. Captain Salem and one other guard were present, standing nearby a woman in maid clothing. Jack assumed that maid to be Joselyn.

When Jack approached, one of the people stood up. The man walked up to Jack in a fire-up manner and spoke in an angry tone, "are you the punk that said you want to interrogate us? Are you accusing us to have something to do with the theft as well?"

Jack opened his mouth to speak, but was immediately interrupted by the man, "the culprit is already certain. It's that maid!" The man pointed at the maid that was sitting next to the guard. "What is the need to interrogate us anymore? This is preposterous! I'm demanding my immediate release from this place!"

Jack waited until the man finished his ranting. After seeing the man piped down and waited for Jack to give a response, Jack said with a smile, "you must be Marquess Fernando."

Actually, it was not difficult to recognize the noble. Out of the group, only two people wore luxurious attires. One was a woman, the other was this fuming man before him. The woman was clearly the duchess. Furthermore, though there were others with unhappy expressions, only this man here dared to express himself without concern.

As expected, the man replied, "I am indeed the marquess. Now I demand an explanation here, why am I still being detained? And who are you? To even have the audacity to request me for an interrogation!"

"That is right! You have no right to treat us like a criminal," an old woman in a similar maid dress to Joselyn spoke up. She was one of the few who wore an irritated expression.

Jack maintained his calm gaze and replied in a flat tone, "about the detention, I believe everyone has already been aware of the reason. While for me, I'm someone Duke Alfredo had tasked in helping him to find his missing item. In order to do that, I will need everyone's cooperation, and that includes you, Marquess Fernando. If there are any dissatisfactions, you may take it up with the duke himself."

"Why you...!" The Marquess's expression kept on changing as he tried to repress his anger.

"Please don't give the adventurer a hard time, Fernando. He is just doing his job," a sweet voice was heard, Jack turned and saw the speaker to be the elegant Duchess Isabelle. Now that he paid her more attention, he could see that she was what one would expect when a computer program was used to depict beauty. Her face was spotless, there was no imperfection on her skin. Her eyes, nose, and mouth were perfectly proportioned and aligned, her long blonde hair fell to her waist, accentuated the perfect curves of her body despite the extravagant dress that covered it. Her beauty was ethereal, the only other NPC Jack had seen that could contest with the duchess' beauty was Goddess Serenity who had bestowed him Peniel and Storm Breaker.

The duchess probably noticed Jack's stunned expression, as she made a soft giggle. Jack snapped out of his thought and made an awkward cough. He turned back to Marquess Fernando. "Since my lord Marquess had stood up, how about you be the first for the interview? Please understand that it is an interview and not an interrogation," Jack said tactfully.

The Marquess gave him a frown. He looked at the Duchess, before turning back to Jack, "fine, let's get it done with!"

Jack let the Marquess walk to the study room while he followed behind. He gave the Duchess a grateful nod when he passed her, which she replied with a smile. The old maid, on the other hand, sat back down with a huff.

The study room was as it was named. It was a room lined up with bookshelves that were filled up with books. It looked more like a library. Jack must admit the duke's passion for reading was admirable, considering his vast collections of books. There was a sofa lounge at one corner, and also a table with a few chairs. Jack chose to use the chair and table as it gave a more formal feel compared to the sofa lounge. The Marquess, on the other hand, was not so keen on Jack's choice, but he still sat on the chair with the table opposite from Jack.

"So, what do you want to know?" He asked impatiently.

"Can you state your purpose of visit?" Jack started with his question.

"What do you mean?! Do I have to have a reason to visit my friend? Are you insinuating that my visit has an ulterior motive? Like stealing my friend's belonging?" The Marquess exploded.

Jack's mouth twitched. He had the urge to attack the Marquess on the spot. He remembered the duke had informed him that all the current occupants in this house aside from him and the guards were all commoners which meant they were level 1 weakling, so that should include this Marquess. It should be a piece of cake to beat this pompous ass to a pulp, but he kept his calm. He did not know what effect it

could bring if he really beat the Marquess. He might end up failing the quest, or worst, the guards might consider him breaking the rule and lock him up.

Jack spoke with the marquess with the friendliest tone possible, "Marquess Fernando, I'm not insinuating anything. I'm sure that an upright noble such as you would have no need to resolve to thievery to get what you want. I'm just trying to understand the whole picture here. And for that, I need to know everything that had happened two days ago. I believe you are discontent for being constrained here. I'm sure you have many other urgent matters that need your attention out there. Help me solve the duke's problem, and I promise you I'll do my best to get you out of here as soon as possible."

The Marquess gave Jack a haughty gaze. He was being silent. He seemed to be trying to discern the sincerity of Jack's word. Finally, he uttered, "fine. I came because I've heard a rumor about the upcoming royal auction. I've heard that there will be a very special item in this auction. I came to see if the duke is interested to come with me to this auction around two weeks from now."

"Okay," Jack said. He jotted down the important points using a pen and notebook. He had put some of these mundane items in his inventory bag during the Tutorial phase.

"That was some fancy writing utensils you have there," the Marquess commented.