

World 161

Chapter 161: Brushing Deaths Again And Again

When he noticed a white dot coming to this room, as a precaution, he had cast the Body Double skill which he had just learned the night before. Luckily the five minutes duration of the spell had not expired. He managed to switch place at the last second with his fake body which he had hidden on the other side of the room, thus avoiding Winston's killing blow. The fake body produced by his spell cannot attack, but it possessed the same equipment and non-attacking ability, thus it could also use the Cloak of Shadow's concealment ability.

Furious at being tricked, Winston swore to tear the nosy adventurer apart. Yet he noticed captain Salem and Duke Alfredo had started to take action. Captain Salem and his retinue of guards were advancing at him, while Duke Alfredo started to form runic symbols with his hands. The Cardinal of Phobos' phantom apparition above Winston made a piercing shriek, a ring of dark aura radiated outwards and crashed onto everybody in the room. It stopped everybody on track and disrupted the duke's spell chanting.

Jack was also affected by the aura. A voice notification informed him that he had been afflicted by a Dizzy status effect.

Dizzy (Negative status effect)

Stunned for 1 second

Impaired vision, duration: 5 seconds

But this negative mental status effect was soon negated by his rare necklace, Purifying Pendant. The necklace could negate any mental status effect one time, it will enter a cooldown period of one hour before this ability could take effect again. Even so, this one-time negation had been extremely helpful. As he could still move and react while the captain and the others were stunned and impaired.

However, it might not make any difference for his current opponent. With the power of a level 60, even a small touch from the being would kill him, as had been proven a moment ago. Winston lunged at Jack again after stopping the captain and the duke.

Jack was panicking. His trump card of the Body Double spell was no more, he had hoped that one-time escape from death would be enough time for the Captain and the Duke to come to his aid. But it seemed that he was still unable to escape his fate.

During this moment of emergency, he instinctively activated Dragon's Eye. His surrounding abruptly slowed down. He watched the scene in front of him moving at a snail pace as if he had turned on the slow-motion button of the world.

However, despite the slow-motion perception, Winston's speed was still fast, he had covered half the distance already. Jack tried to move his body, but it moved too damn slow! Only his perception was accelerated by the skill, while his body maintained the same speed. At this rate, he would simply see Winston reaching him without being able to do anything!

"Movement magic scroll!" During his moment of helplessness, he heard Peniel's voice reverberating in his mind. The suggestion instinctively sent his mind into his inventory bag and retrieved the Wind Jet magic scroll. Since it was executed using his thought instead of body movement, the scroll materialized instantly on his hand. With the same speed of thought, he activated the scroll, it asked for a direction, Jack pointed with his mind in the direction of the windows. His first choice was to the duke's group but he would need to pass by near Winston. It was too risky, he didn't know if Winston was fast enough to catch him mid-flight.

The scroll vanished and the spell stored within was cast instantaneously. It created an explosion of wind on his back which propelled him with an insane speed towards the window. He realized he had grossly underestimated the movement speed produced by the scroll. He tried his best to move his hand in front to shield himself as he crashed hard onto the window. The glass shattered on impact and he was sent flying out of the workroom.

He still had the chance to look back during his flight and saw Winston forming a spell formation, it consisted of many runes but the speed he was casting was terrifyingly fast.

With the fresh experience of using a magic scroll a moment ago, he needed not being reminded again by Peniel this time. He immediately took out another of the magic scroll in his bag. It was the Magic Wall scroll. He activated it without hesitation.

A blue rectangle wall formed entirely of light appeared in front of him, right on time when Winston finished casting his spell. A thin line of yellow lightning shot out with blinding speed at Jack and smashed at the light wall in front of him.

The Magic Wall vibrated heavily from the impact and finally shattered with a deafening bang. For a second, Jack thought Winston's spell had overwhelmed the limit of the Magic Wall's defense and would continue and pierce through him. But the yellow lightning ended with the disappearance of the wall.

Jack exhaled a relieved breath after realizing he had again managed to elude another assured demise. But he immediately tensed up again when he saw Winston abandon casting another spell and instead jumped out towards the window.

The Wind Jet spell had expired and the force that was propelling him was no more. He could feel gravity had again pulled on his body. He started to fall.

Jack was still looking at Winston. The butler was about to come out of the window before a familiar blue Magic Wall materialized between Winston and the window. The butler smashed onto the Magic Wall but it remained intact. Jack looked further and realized the Magic Wall had been cast by Duke Alfredo. The strength contained by his spell was completely different from the one he had conjured using his magic scroll.

The last scenery he could see inside the room before it went out of sight due to his continued falling, was captain Salem and his guards resumed at enclosing the butler and his phantom apparition.

Now only he allowed himself to look down, and realized that falling from the third floor was scary. After all, it was not something that was advised to be done in the real world. He tried to adjust his position as best as possible before he crashed onto the ground below.

Luckily it was not a hard cemented floor, but a slightly soft soil suitable to grow crops. Still, the fall hurt like a motherf***er. He lost almost half of his entire HP bar. Considering his large pool of HP, if this had happened to a normal Ranger or Magician, they would most likely die from the fall.

He picked himself up despite the pain, and looked up at the tower. He could hear noises and sounds of things crashing from the window up in the tower. Some flashes of light were occasionally seen from the window, they were exceptionally glaring in the backdrop of the night sky.

Jack shuddered when he thought about how he had managed to escape Winston's sure kills again and again. It was lucky that he had bought the magic scrolls, learned the Dragon's Eye and Body Double skills, and possessed the Purifying Pendant necklace. If any one of those was missing, he would have been a goner.

"Thank you, Peniel," he did not forget to thank the fairy. If she had not shouted the advice on using the magic scroll, he wouldn't have remembered about them. It was his first time using them after all, under such a sudden and precarious situation, it was difficult to think straight.

"What can you do without me?" Peniel said back with pride.

He ran to the nearest door to go back into the mansion after calming himself. He continued running inside the mansion as he made his way back to the Duke's workroom. When he arrived at the stairs that would bring him up to the door of the duke's workroom, it was surprisingly quiet.

Jack's heart was filled with apprehension as he ascended the stairs slowly. He had just escaped death by a hair breath, several times! And now he was rushing back to the danger? It was indeed a reckless decision, he admitted, but he could not just leave after progressing this far. He could see in his radar that Winston was still alive up there, along with the others, but why was there no sound? If there was a big fight, he should hear something by now.

Both his hands were gripping on his sword and magic staff tightly. When the open door to the workroom was within sight, he did not immediately rush through. He sneaked to its side, before carefully peeking in.

Chapter 162: Talent

The scene inside was startling. He saw the duke and the castle guards circling Winston, who had already lost the phantom apparition and was lying on the floor face down. He was being pinned down by Captain Salem. He appeared to be unmoving, but Jack could still hear a slight groan from him.

Was it safe? Jack came into the door. The duke saw him and waved for him to approach.

"We have banished the Cardinal's possession. His influence is no more. But Winston's soul had been damaged, it would be a long time before he could return to normal, or ever," the duke said. Jack could hear a deep sadness in his voice, his relationship with the butler was certainly not shallow.

"Cardinal of Phobos, do you know about him?" Jack asked. "I have also entangled with Cult of Phobos in one of my quests some days ago. I think they should be related."

"Yes, I had heard about an adventurer that located their den in the Slum District. So, it was you? It was probably fate that brought you to my mansion then," the duke replied. "Little is known about this cult, they are a mysterious group. But we think they are a cult worshipping the God of Fear. The kingdom had sent its agents to learn more about this cult since it appeared inside this city. It seemed to be originated from a foreign power. Now that they had made an attack on my dwelling, I will make sure to have the kingdom focus on gathering more information about them."

"Could we find out more about them from Winston?" Jack asked.

"I doubt it. The connection had been severed. Winston probably wasn't even aware when he was being targeted. Furthermore, his mind had also been affected. He would not be himself for some time."

Winston was still struggling with a ferocious expression, but his eyes were hollow. It seemed like its body was only struggling out of an automatic response. He no longer had the imperious strength like when he was still possessed by the apparition. Captain Salem pulled him up and asked his guards to take the butler away.

"Thank you for your help," the captain said to Jack. "We wouldn't have been able to find out about Winston and the Cardinal's possession if not for you."

"Speaking of which," duke Alfredo turned to Jack. "I still haven't gotten the stolen item back."

"Oh, right," Jack said after being reminded by the duke. He took out a piece of torn paper from his storage bag. When he found this 'painting', he couldn't believe such junk like this was the cause of all these troubles. But after he inspected it, He kind of understood. It was a similar piece of paper that had caused Gilbert, who had given him the Sword of Light and Burning Life Art skills, to be hunted down by the Cult of Phobos. The torn piece of paper in his hand was one of the three pieces of Fragment of Map, another one of which was in his inventory, also given by Gilbert. He never expected that the duke's prized possession was this Fragment of Map.

Jack gave the Fragment of Map to Duke Alfredo. He was tempted to keep the thing, after all, he already had one piece. With the duke's piece, he was only missing another piece to complete the three pieces of the fragments. However, if he did that, he might fail the quest, not to mention it would also cause animosity with the duke. Furthermore, he still didn't know the purpose of these fragments, and the cult of Phobos also seemed to be hellbent on acquiring it, he found no reason to put himself in trouble for these fragments.

"Thank you," the duke said after getting back the fragment. "I really owe you one. You have done extremely well in this investigation, I will throw in a little extra for the quest rewards, you can collect them in the Adventurers Association tomorrow."

"Thank you, duke Alfredo," Jack said. At the same time, he heard a voice notification.

"You have successfully completed an investigation in an exemplary result. You have unlocked a hidden talent, Investigator."

Talent? Jack exclaimed in his mind.

"By the Goddess! You are exceptionally lucky!" He heard Peniel exclaiming in his head.

'What is that?' he asked her.

"Check it in your ability window," she replied.

Jack opened it. Under the Inherent Ability section, he could see a new sub-section titled Talent.

Investigator (Talent)

Intelligence +10%

Wisdom +10%

Has a chance to detect clues in the environment.

Has a chance to detect lies during conversations with NPCs.

This talent thing provided him with a boost in his Intelligence and Wisdom, which was a good thing. Because his equipment was mostly tailored for the melee class, hence none of them, except for his magic staff, had provided the stats that boosted his magical capability. With this talent, he would not be so lacking when it came to his magical power.

There were also these detect clues and lies, probably useful in solving quests. He thought about it, wasn't this detect clues something his Godeye-monocle already did several times now? So he simply got an ability that his tool had already provided.

'It's a good addition, but why call it talent? It was just another inherent ability, right?' Jack said.

"Inherent your sister!" Peniel scolded, "Inherent Ability was something that you acquired through an external source. While Talents were something that was already inside you. They just needed to be unlocked, usually via certain actions. Just as how you unlocked this Investigator talent after perfectly solving this case."

'Oh...'

"Furthermore, some quests can only be triggered or accepted if you have the appropriate talent. When you get to a higher level, you will find more of these quests that have requirements. Among which is the requirement for certain talent."

'I see. Then it would be better if I could collect as many talents as possible.'

"Did you not hear my explanation? Talents are not something that is acquired. It is something that is already within you. Some people have it, some people have none at all. Some have it but might not get it to unlock for their whole lives. So it is not something that you can go and collect. You can only depend on luck for this kind of thing."

Jack shrugged. Well, if it was not something that could be worked on, then there was no need to put effort into it. He would just let fate decide on this Talent matters. He looked at the Duke who was already putting the fragment back onto the display stand.

Captain Salem came back after giving instructions to his subordinates and dismissing them. He asked Jack, "by the way, I am still curious. You mentioned that Joselyn never took that fragment out of this room, so where did she hide it?"

The duke turned to him as well, clearly also interested in the answer to the question.

Jack smiled. He then walked to the display stand where the duke had placed the fragment back.

"May I?" He said to the duke while gesturing at the display stand. The duke stepped back to allow him access to the display stand. Jack removed the glass cover, then put his hand on the panel where the Fragment of Map was resting on. He shook the panel a bit until it shifted, then the panel got loose. He took out the panel with the fragment piece still on it, then turned it around and put it back onto the display stand.

Since the panel was made of solid wood, it had the same surface between the front and back. The fragment piece was now hidden at the back of the panel. The fragment piece was a special item that did not emit any marking on his monacle, same as other junk items. That's why his God-eye monacle didn't reveal any sign about it despite the fragment piece was right in front of him.

"It was here the whole time?" Captain Salem uttered.

"It is," Jack answered. "Joselyn never took it out. She just made it look as if the piece has been stolen. I came here to check about it and take it away as a precaution, before I went to dinner and laid the trap for Winston."

"How do you know it was there?" Duke Alfredo asked.

"Joselyn had the same display stands in her chamber. They were also made by Matias. She must have been experimenting to find out more about the stands in order to apply this trick."

"If that was so, then she in fact had no intention to steal the fragment. Do you know how Winsto..., I mean, the Cardinal of Phobos, extorted her to do the stealing?"

"No, I didn't find out about that. I guess she must have been under threat. Maybe Your Grace can start by checking on her family members, probably one of them was under threat by the cult."

The duke turned to the captain.

"I will get onto it once I finish up here," captain Salem said.

The duke nodded.

Chapter 163: Chain Quest

"If you don't mind me asking, what's so special about this fragment piece?" Jack couldn't help his curiosity.

Duke Alfredo did not give any response after hearing the question.

Afraid that he might have overstepped the boundaries, Jack immediately said, "I'm sorry if my question has offended Your Grace, I begged for your forgiveness."

The duke waved him off, "you have helped me in resolving this matter, so I guess I do owe you an explanation."

"I will excuse myself first then," captain Salem said.

"No, you should hear about this as well. You are one of the officers among whom I trusted within this Kingdom."

The captain felt appreciated hearing the duke's words.

"You both know about the duchess' condition, don't you?"

Jack and the captain nodded.

"She was not always in that state. She used to be a powerful sorceress, one that was even more powerful than me."

Jack's eyes widened. Was he for real? The duke was already a level 65 Rare Elite human, what level was the duchess originally? He could not picture the elegant and gentle duchess as someone who held power even stronger than the duke.

"How come she lost her power?" Jack asked.

"She was in her current state due to suffering from a curse. The curse put her in a weakened state that continuously eats away on her life force. If she cannot break free from this curse's hold, she will continue to weaken, and she might not make it past another two years."

"What does that have to do with this fragment piece?"

"This fragment piece was given by a divine seer who I have searched to ask about a cure to lift my wife's curse. The seer informed me that if I can collect three such fragments, the completed map will point me to a place where I can find such a cure. Three years have passed since the seer told me about it, but I still cannot find the other pieces of the fragment despite my vast connection."

The duke let out a defeated sigh, he was hopeful when he had received the clue from the seer. But after spending so long, he still could not make any progress. It was enough to beat down the unyielding spirit that he had when he first started on the search. Time was running out, and his wife's condition did not become any better. His wife had told him to let go, as she couldn't bear to see him waste his time away just to look for a cure that was nowhere to be found, but he was unwilling.

Hearing Duke Alfredo's story, Jack couldn't help but be touched. After pondering for a bit, he finally decided. He took out the other Fragment piece. Duke Alfredo was stunned by the revelation.

"Y—you have another piece?" He stuttered.

"Yes, now you only need to find the last piece," Jack said as he extended the hand that held the fragment piece towards the duke.

"You are giving it to me?"

Jack shrugged. "It was just a piece of torn paper to me. There might be treasure where the map pointed, but I can see that you need it more than me."

The duke was silent for a time. He seemed to be deep in thought. Jack's hand was still extended out.

Bloody hell, how long was he going to make me keep this pose? Jack complained in his mind.

After a while, the duke's expression turned resolute. He put his hand out to push Jack's hand which was holding the fragment piece away. He then took the fragment piece from the display stand and offered it to Jack.

"Huh?" Jack was confused by the duke's action.

"I would like to ask you a favor," the duke explained. "As it was evident, there are other parties who are keen on getting their hands on this fragment pieces. I'm out in the open, which makes me an easy target. I hope you can help me to keepsake this piece together with yours. Once we find the third piece, we can embark on the place pointed by this map together. I only need the cure for my wife, whatever other treasures you find there, you can keep them. What say you?"

When the duke's words ended, Jack heard another voice notification, "you have been offered a chain quest: The Duchess' Cure, part 1 is Fragment of Map Pieces, do you accept?"

'Chain quest?' Jack asked in his mind.

"It's a long quest consisted of several quests linked to each other," Peniel explained. "Each of the individual quests will provide reward once completed, but the reward will be paltry. It was tedious to complete a chain quest. However, if you can complete the whole linked quests, the main reward will make it worthwhile. Most of the highest grade equipment or item could only be gotten from such chain quests."

Hearing that, Jack said to the duke at once, "I will gladly accept the task."

"Good, now take this. Keep it with you at all time."

Jack accepted the piece of Fragment of Map from Duke Alfredo. He then stored it inside his inventory bag. He now possessed two pieces of the Fragment of Map. He took a glance on his new quest inside his Quest List window.

Fragment of Map pieces (Chain Quest Part 1)

Difficulty: SSS

Rewards: ???

Keep the two pieces of Fragment of Map and look for the third pieces. Return the three pieces to Duke Alfredo once all three pieces are collected.

'What the f**k! SSS difficulty? Are you shitting me?! Peniel, am I even qualified for this?' Jack exclaimed after seeing the description.

He didn't hear Peniel's reply, so he called again, 'Peniel?'

"Odd..." He finally heard her voice. "There shouldn't be any SSS difficulty quest at your stage..."

'Then why am I receiving one?'

"... I don't know. I think something strange is afoot here... But since you've already accepted the quest, might as well go with it. Don't worry, the SSS difficulty was referring to the overall chain quests, not the current part one you have here. And it doesn't indicate any time limit, so just take it slow."

'I remember the duke said his wife only had two years left, so maybe there is a hidden time limit?'

"Probably, and by looking at your progress, in two years, you probably will be strong enough to tackle the SSS difficulty already."

'Really?'

"I don't know. The speed of advancement of you outworlders is scary. It took us natives years to train until we are strong enough to ascend from basic class to advance class, and even longer to achieve the elite class. But from the time I met you, you were still a fledgling at the time. But only a little over one month had passed, and you were already an advanced class. I could not use common sense to estimate your kind's growth rate."

Jack thought about it. Well, it might be crazy for the natives, but this rate of growth was just right for them players. After all, they were following the game rules here. If the growth rate was too slow, no one was going to play the games. The difference was, in this alternate world, there was no choice. All those that came into this world would have to play it.

'Well then, no point to worry about it for now. Let's just do what you said, let's just go with it for the time being.'

He then said to the duke, "I think we should try to find out more about the Cult of Phobos. In fact, my piece of the fragment was gained when I was tackling the quest which involved the cult. Since they are so eager to get their hands on it, there is also a high chance that they might have the third piece. If we can find them, we might be able to complete the fragments."

"What you said makes sense, I will make collecting information about them a priority," the duke said. "Probably you should also go and check Winston's room. He had been possessed by the Cardinal for quite some time, he probably left some clues in his chamber."

"Okay, I will do that first thing in the morning."

"Yes. It is extremely late already. Let's us all take a rest. I'm glad we had managed to settle this matter favorably. If Winston had managed to get away with the fragment without revealing the cult's involvement, I wouldn't know where to look for it."

"I'll come and bring you to Winston's room first thing in the morning," captain Salem said.

Jack agreed. He then parted ways with them and went back to the guest room to rest for the night.

Chapter 164: Orb Of Disguise

The next morning, due to the fatigue from last night, he overslept. When he came out of his room, Captain Salem was standing there.

"Do you stand there all the time waiting for me to wake up?" Jack asked.

"I did knock, but you didn't answer," the captain replied.

"Should have knock harder. Sorry, man, to make you wait."

"No worry. Come, I will take you to Winston's room."

The room that the captain brought him to, was only a little bit smaller than the duke's chamber. Although it was less extravagant, it was still rather large for a man who worked as the butler of the house. The duke must have valued him highly, which made the Cult of Phobos who targeted the butler to go after the Duke looked all the more dangerous and trickier to deal with.

There was not much furniture and adornment in the room. Most were just for basic function, a bedroom for sleeping. A lounge chair for light reading, a simple table and chair for writing, a cupboard for his clothes, and a chest to store his personal things. The butler seemed to be a person who did not believe in excessiveness, which was good for Jack's current task. It meant that there were not many places for him to search through.

He started with the cupboard. Inside were basically just clothes. He ruffled through the clothes to see if anything was hidden in between them. The captain went to the table and looked through its content.

"He seemed to be doing a lot of writing recently," Captain Salem said.

Jack went over after finding nothing in the cupboard. "Do you think his writing has something to do with the cult? But what was the point? He couldn't send a letter out, right? The entire estate was under lockdown by the barrier formation.

"He could have used the message transference," the captain said.

"The what?" Jack asked.

"It's something that we usually used in the military. Verbal link with another recipient through long distance took up too much energy, and not many people had the ability. It is easier to send long-range message transmission via small thin items. We write in a piece of paper, and then the mages would send the paper through a rift of time and space to a designated receiver."

Why did it sound like their message system? Jack thought. The difference was it was using a solid object.

"But wasn't the Cardinal possessing Winston? He should see whatever he was seeing and was thinking, right?"

"It doesn't work that way. Their souls were linked but the Cardinal was not in control of Winston all the time. The energy the Cardinal needed to spent during the possession was enormous, it could only be done for a limited time. During the other time, Winston was acting on his own with the exception that his soul had been imprinted and hypnotized. He would do as was ordered of him. And if an emergency arises, he can activate the soul imprint which brings about the possession that we have seen last night."

"Sounds complicated," Jack commented.

"But the written paper has gone through to the other side," the captain continued. "So whatever message he had sent over, we might never know."

"Don't hold your breath yet," Jack said. He picked up the wad of paper on the table. He separated the piece of paper on the top stack and looked at it intently. They were lucky, there seemed to be some indentation.

"How do you turn on that magic lamp?" Jack asked while pointing at the lamp device on the table.

The captain went over and activated it. The light shone was not too bright but Jack thought it should be enough to do the job. He put the paper close to the lamp and played on the angle. Surely enough, the indentation became quite visible. They could now partially see what was written on the paper that was previously on top of this paper.

"Target ... not acquired, helper termina... .. to insubordination. Adventurer hinted at target, will retrieve tonight. Requested ... to be ready by ..., might need to the city guards ... exit the capital."

The two of them tried to digest the broken messages from the indentations on the paper.

"It seemed to be referring to his action last night when he took your bait. He must think that he would be completing his mission by yesterday night."

"Yes, but the second part of the message worries me," Jack said. "From its message, there seemed to be some remnant of the cult in this capital still. And they are to help Winston fight their way out of the capital with the fragment. I thought the city had cleared the cult's presence after their base was found in the slum district?"

"We did, but it was not put as a top priority at the time, so we didn't search further if there were still any member of the cult at large. I will relay a message at once to our headquarters to make it a priority to rid the cult from this capital."

"You do that. Ask them to check if there is any large movement near the outside of the estate last night. They can start from there as the cults must have been expecting Winston to break out of the estate yesterday night."

Captain Salem nodded and immediately departed from the room.

Jack looked around. Well, I should continue to search for more clues, I think? Just to make sure. When he approached the chest near the bed. His G0d-eye monocle detected three valuable markings inside. He immediately knelt down to open it. It was locked, which was normal. Jack didn't make a fuss about it, he simply took out his gold color Enduring Lockpick.

"Time to increase my Lockpicking grade," Jack said with a smile. He was only 2 proficiency points away from upgrading. A single try, whether it failed or succeeded, will be sure to upgrade it.

He inserted the lockpick and started the process. It failed, but sure enough, he heard the voice notification, "congratulations! Your Lockpicking has upgraded to Intermediate Apprentice."

With the increase in his lockpicking grade, he should have higher success chance in unlocking this chest. There was no indication of what grade this chest he was trying to unlock was. But he still had another 11 tries on his Enduring Lockpick, and even if they all failed, he still had 65 common lockpicks in his inventory. So, he was not too worried, he could afford to fail many times.

He exhausted all the 12 tries of the Enduring Lockpick but the chest remained locked. He did not think too much about it, he stored the Enduring Lockpick back into his storage bag, it would take twelve hours to replenish the Enduring Lockpick charges to full so he could use it again. He took out the normal lockpicks and continued on his attempt to unlock the chest while systematically accumulating proficiency points.

When his common lockpicks were down to 20 pieces, then he started to worry.

The heck was the grade of this chest? Wasn't it just supposed to be a non-grade chest? Why did he keep failing?

"Hey, Peniel. Is the success rate of a non-grade chest lower than a bronze treasure chest?" He asked after getting impatient.

Before he heard Peniel's reply, he heard a notification voice, "congratulations! You are successful in your lockpicking, receiving 100 proficiency points."

100 points? It was doubled than when he last successfully opened a bronze treasure chest.

"Non-grade chest was unknown. It can be harder or easier," Peniel still explained anyway. "the contents are also uncertain. Can be junk, can be extremely valuable. You can see this kind of chest as a lottery chest."

"Well, talking about lottery, I think we hit jackpot then," Jack said as he took out a small round crystal ball.

Orb of Disguise (Unique Artifact)

Input an alternative appearance setup, can be activated to replace the current appearance as a disguise.

Number of appearance setup: 1

Can be upgraded to increase the number of setups. Materials required for upgrade: 3 Magic Crystal, 1 Divine Gem

Chapter 165: Themisphere Beacon Stone

"That butler must have used this artifact to disguise into Jimena," Peniel commented. "You are pretty lucky to get this item. Disguise items are very rare, and usually they are one-time use only. You indeed hit a jackpot here."

"But is it okay to take it?" Jack asked, his expression seemed conflicted. "Shouldn't we report our findings here to the duke?"

"Well, you were tasked to find out clues about the cult, right? It's not like this orb is going to have the clue in helping you to find the cult anyway."

Jack looked around the room. He was alone, the captain had left to make a report on their recent find already. Nobody knew, so what the heck. He tossed the Orb of Disguise into his storage bag. He would experiment with it later after he was out of this estate.

"By the way, how many unique artifacts are already in your possession?" Peniel asked. "I have never heard of an adventurer who possessed as many as you do before even reaching the elite class. That luck stat you have there really shows its effect."

"Really? I wasn't even aware if this luck stat does anything."

"Of course it does! Even for an Elite class, possessing one Unique Artifact was already considered a stroke of enormous luck. Tsk tsk, you are lucky it's highly unlikely to steal from an outworlder since they only drop one or two random items when killed. If not, everyone would have come to steal your stuff if they know what you got inside that bag of yours."

"Yeah, lucky me," Jack said, and then joked about it, "what can I say, probably I have a hidden superpower which is luck. Hey, probably I will awaken another talent which increased my luck stat further."

"13 points are still not enough for you?" Peniel said.

There were another two more valuable things inside according to his God-eye monocle. They were covered by an assortment of junks inside the chest. Jack moved the junks aside to look for the other valuables. He found one to be a purple color robe.

Flowing Lavender Robe, level 15/35 (rare cloth armor)

Physical Defense: 30

Magical Defense: 36

Durability: 50

Intelligence +3

All elemental resistance +10

It's a chest piece cloth armor for magic-user. Why did the name sound so feminine?

"Well, I have no need for this cloth armor, let's dismantle it later at the forge," Jack said.

"No, now that you have that Orb of Disguise, you have a usage for cloth armor," Peniel countered.

"How so?" Jack asked.

"What do you have in mind for your disguise?"

"Not yet thought about it."

"Wouldn't you think disguising yourself as a mage is a good choice? Since you are half a mage. The others only know you as a Warrior. If you disguise as a Mage, no one will connect your new persona to your original one."

"And I will need cloth armor if I disguise as a Mage," Jack caught on with her train of thought.

"Now you catch my drift?"

"All right," Jack said and put the cloth armor into his inventory bag. He continued to shuffle through the junks inside the chest for the last valuable item.

It took him a much longer time to search for the last one. He was worried somebody will come into the room before he found it. It would be awkward then if he took the item for himself.

After shuffling through the chest content for a minute, he finally found it. It was a small ring, no wonder it took him some time to find it among the various junks inside the chest. Jack lifted the ring and inspected it.

Recovery Ring (Rare accessory)

Endurance +2

Active ability: Recover 50% of HP & Stamina/MP, cooldown: 3 hours

"Perfect! With this, all my equipment slots would be filled up," Jack thought aloud. He went ahead and equipped the ring. He had the Ring of Luck on his right hand and the Recovery Ring on his left.

"Such luck! Two rare and one Unique. Other adventurers would vomit blood knowing you get all this from a single chest," Peniel commented.

"Hey, look. I've not gotten any experience, coins, or items, since the start of this goddamn complicated quest. So it's reasonable to compensate me with these three items after these three days of vacuum," Jack said.

"The third day has not technically ended yet, and you are still going to get a reward when you report to the Adventurers Association," Peniel countered.

"Could you not just be happy for me? Whose side are you on anyway?"

"Whatever."

Jack continued looking through the room, but there was nothing else of value anymore. Nor was there any other clue about the Cult of Phobos, so he left the room.

He found Duke Alfredo and Captain Salem in the courtyard, they were discussing something. When they saw Jack come in, the Duke asked, "did you find any other clue?"

Jack shook his head, "unfortunately, no."

"I have made a report regarding the possibility of the cult's activity last night," the captain said. "There were indeed some movements reported. Currently, my associates are investigating the individuals that might have been involved, they will be apprehended if they are found to have a connection with the cult."

"Hopefully their influence in this capital can be uprooted," Jack said. "I guess I will bid my farewell."

The duke nodded. Since Jack had solved the case, there was no point for him to hang around anymore.

"All right, I will contact you once I find any news about the third fragment. In the meantime, please keep the two fragments safe."

"Your Grace can count on me," Jack said with confidence. "By the way, if I happen to find a clue about the third fragment, how should I be in contact? It's not like I can come and go into this district freely."

Duke Alfredo took out a piece of rolled paper as if he had expected the question. Jack checked the piece of paper, it was a writ of entry permit for the Noble District.

"With that writ, you can enter and leave this district as you wish," the Duke said. "But I would warn you to not cause any trouble in this district. I will not let you go easily if you do anything that is a disservice to my reputation."

"Don't worry, I will not disappoint, Your Grace, and thank you for the writ." He stored the writ and then took out a rectangle piece of Jade and handed it to Captain Salem, "I guess I don't need this, after all."

"Keep it," the captain said. "Its function is the same. If you are in danger, break it. As long as you are still within Themisphere kingdom, all the kingdom guards and soldiers within the vicinity will come to your aid."

Jack's eyes were wide, "really? I can summon kingdom guards? It sounds like a really useful thing then."

"Consider it a parting gift," the captain said. "I hope our paths crossed again."

"Likewise," Jack replied.

"How about joining us for lunch before you leave?" The Duke offered.

"Great, I'm starving," Jack said.

On his way to the dining room, Jack inspected the jade piece.

Themisphere Beacon Stone (Special consumable)

Summon soldiers and guards of Themisphere within a radius of 300 kilometers.

Summoned soldiers and guards will protect you for a duration of three hours.

Depending on the usage, this Beacon Stone could provide a very powerful aid. If he chose an area with a high population of Themisphere soldiers and used it, he could literally possess an army within that three-hour duration. He kept the Beacon Jade inside his bag, it would be his trump card if he was ever in an emergency situation.

'Not bad,' he said to Peniel in his mind. 'though my experience level does not increase, I harvest quite a number of useful items in this quest.'

"Indeed. I have a suspicion this quest's real difficulty is not in the range of Silver hall adventurer quests. But it was really a fun quest, I hope we can get more quests like this in the future."

'No way! I don't want to do this kind of quest again. No combat and still so exhausting. I prefer quests with more hack and slash action!'

"Brute!" Peniel mocked.

After the lunch, Jack bid them farewell again. When he stepped out of the mansion, the colorful barrier formation along the edges of the estate was no more. The sky was its normal color. It was already past

noon at the time, he traveled through the estate's outdoor landscape with ease. He saw Matias feeding the fishes in the artificial lake, and waved to him. The gardener waved back.

After he exited the estate gate, he headed directly to the Adventurers Association to claim his fair reward.

Chapter 166: Settling Dispute

"What was that ping ping sound I kept on hearing?" Jack asked Peniel as he walked.

"That was an indicator that you have unread messages in your chat inbox," Peniel answered.

"Really?" Jack opened up his chat interface. Indeed, there were four messages.

"Hey, all of them are old messages. Three were from yesterday, one from this morning. Why was it that I was not prompted about it at the time it was received?"

"You should have just received it now, that's why you heard the alarm sound," Peniel replied. "Most probably the duke's estate was an area where ordinary message signal was prohibited. Or it could be due to the barrier formation as well."

Jack opened up the messages, they were all from Bowler. It did not explain the nature of his messages, just asking about his whereabouts, but it sounded more urgent with each message. The last message from this morning even stated it as an emergency.

Jack immediately sent a reply message to Bowler. He soon received a reply, "Bro! Where are you? Emergency! Need your help! There are small woods not far from East gate, please come immediately."

Jack frowned. East gate was rather far, considering the size of the capital, it would take him some time to arrive there.

"You said before I could use carriage service for faster travel time within the capital, right?" Jack asked Peniel.

"Yes, and there was one over there, look. It seemed to be empty," Peniel replied.

Luckily, they were still within the noble district, there are plenty of carriages available. Jack immediately went up to the idle carriage. The coachman requested 50 copper as payment for the journey to the East gate. For Jack's current wealth, 50 copper was negligible, so he paid the coachman and got on the carriage. The coachman nudged the two horses that pulled on the carriage and they went onto the street.

"Can't you go a bit faster?" Jack urged.

"Not wise to speed on the street," the coachman replied, but then he added, "but for an extra 30 copper, I'm willing to take the risk."

Jack grumbled in his heart, this was one of those times where he despised the realness of the NPCs in this game world. But he still handed over those extra 30 copper coins to the coachman. The coachman urged the horses and they started to gallop a little bit faster.

While they were on their way, Jack sent a message to Bowler, "I'm on my way, but can you tell me what is this emergency?"

Jack received the message soon, "It's The Man. He had been set up by this guild called Warriors of Solidarity. It's a bit too long to explain in a message, and I'm not exactly free now. Short version, we are currently being hunted by that guild inside these woods."

"How the hell did you get mixed up with them anyway?" Jack sent another message.

"I've been hanging out with them often since our last work together on the Horned Ogre boss. I heard people coming! Can't chat. Come soon!"

Jack didn't send any more messages. Bowler sounded like he needed to focus on his current situation. The Warriors of Solidarity? Wasn't that the guild that The Man was arguing with when he met them near the academies? Who was the guy he was arguing with again? Oh, yes, The Real Man. Jack wondered if either of them had managed to pass their Warrior class test.

He remembered them saying that they would settle their dispute outside the capital after they passed the test. Was this them settling their disputes? He would think that their settling the dispute would be more like a duel, but from Bowler's short description, it sounded more like they were being bullied by a group of people.

Taking the carriage indeed saved up more time. If he was walking at normal speed, it would take him around three to four hours to reach the East gate. With the carriage, he arrived in less than an hour. He thanked the coachman and rushed through the gate. The gate guards eyed him suspiciously due to his hasty conduct, but they did not stop him.

The outside of the gate was peaceful, as no monsters could be seen in the vicinity. A few traveling people could be seen coming and going. He saw some rows of trees not far in the distance. That must be the woods Bowler had indicated. Without further ado, he ran towards the woods.

Inside the woods, a group of men was combing the trees and bushes looking for something, or someone. There were around twenty people in the group, separated into three teams, which walked at a certain distance from each other to cover a larger area while walking forward at the same pace.

"Come out! There is nowhere for you to hide!" One of the men in the middle team shouted out. "You said you wanted to settle our dispute right? Why are you hiding like a coward? You are no man, you should change your name, you should call yourself The Wussy instead!"

The men around him laughed out loud. "That's right, boss. The Wussy, that name suits him very well," one of them said.

The Man was hiding behind a tree not far away. He could hear the ridicule clearly. He had the urge to just rush out and teach that upstart a lesson.

"Don't!" Bowler told him, "they were obviously trying to provoke you. You have lost two of your friends, don't make their sacrifices for nothing. Fierce Flame was on her way. I have also just managed to contact brother Storm Wind. We will group up with them and strike back once we are together."

"Boss Storm Wind is available already?" The Man asked.

Bowler nodded. "They are getting closer, we should head deeper into the woods. We cannot get found out before they arrived."

"Fine," The Man said. He let Bowler take the lead, he was not used to sneaking around, he was more of a direct confrontation kind of guy. Bowler seemed to be more experienced in sneaking around, he could even avoid the monsters that were roaming these woods. The monsters ended up becoming a hindrance to the party from Warriors of Solidarity. As their numbers were bigger, that made it hard for them to avoid the monsters.

"It looked like they intend to continue this hide and seek game," a humongous man among the middle team said to The Real Man, who was the one that had shouted the provocation before.

"That old geezer," The Real Man spat. "Even after I managed to kick him out of the guild, he still continued to be a thorn on my side. I have to eliminate him no matter what!"

"Don't worry, he won't escape," the large man replied. "But we have to be cautious. The fact that he has not yet given up can possibly point to they are waiting for reinforcement."

"Heh, I've sent people to hinder his other underlings, they will have trouble coming out of the capital. Even if some managed to break out, one or two people won't make a difference. We will take them out together if that happens."

"Hehe, you are indeed a planner, unlike that brute. It's correct for us to follow you instead of him."

"That brute's way is already outdated, only fools will follow him. But his fighting ability is no kidding, perhaps only you, Goliath, who has also become a Warrior, can take him on in a single fight. We will need you to spearhead when we get him cornered so we don't lose any man."

"Don't worry. I don't even need any of your help. I can take him on by myself. Always have been, and it will be the same even now," Goliath replied.

"I'm sure you can," The Real Man said. "But I don't want any mishap to occur. We will take him together with you at our front once he reveals himself. I want this over as soon as possible."

"As you wish," Goliath said.

Chapter 167: Getting Found

Bowler brought The Man further through the woods, but gradually they found the trees starting to get sparse. They then realized that they had been pushed out to the other side of the woods. When they were nearing the edge, they saw outside the woods was a wide savannah. A few men were standing outside the woods at a large interval between each other. They seemed to be watching the woods.

"I bet those people are also from Warriors of Solidarity," Bowler said.

"Damn it! They really have thought this through," The Man cursed. There was no tree or tall grass to use for hiding out there. We will be caught if we go out."

"What to do? Cannot go out, we cannot go back as well..."

"Screw it to hell! Let's just fight our way out!" The Man exclaimed, he pulled out the Chief Axe that he had gotten from Jack.

"Wait! Don't be reckless. If we go out, they won't fight it out with us. They will just hinder us until their main group behind us catches up. We will be surrounded by then."

"Then what do you propose us do?" The Man said in exasperation.

Bowler could not reply. He looked at the savannah outside with a defeated feeling. Should they try their luck charging out? How did it come to this? He remembered he was hanging with The Man and his group a few days ago. The Man had just achieved level 15, he said he would be challenging the Warrior class then.

Afterward, they parted way. When they met again, The Man was still a Fighter. Bowler asked if he had failed the class change, he said he had not taken it. He said an adversary of his had taken it and gotten his level reduced by 1. He decided that he would take the prudent way instead and leveled up another two levels before he went at it. He did so and managed to become a Warrior just yesterday.

He invited Bowler to celebrate in the tavern. During their celebration, a group came in and sat at the table not far from them. The Man recognized the group and started to trash talk to them. Bowler did not know the group at the time but later found out that the group was from the famous guild Warriors of Solidarity.

It appeared that The Man used to be one of its members, but he had left the guild. Apparently, both sides still held a grudge against each other. The lead man from Warriors of Solidarity, someone with an absurd name called The Real Man, responded to The Man's provocation. The verbal altercation soon ended up with them agreeing on settling their dispute with a duel somewhere outside the East gate. The Man, true to his manly manner, agreed upon it.

That was yesterday. The agreement of dispute settling was today's morning. The Man brought only two of his underlings as it was supposed to be a duel. While Bowler came just because he was interested in the show. When The Real Man showed up, he was accompanied by a large number of people.

Bowler had felt uneasiness when he saw the large crowd, but The Man maintained his position. He still believed that the other side only brought the crowd as spectators and intimidation factor during the duel. Among their group was a large man they called Goliath, who was surprisingly also a Warrior and also level 17. Bowler and The Man first thought that this large warrior would be the one representing Warriors of Solidarity for the duel, since The Real Man was still at Fighter class.

But then everything went to shit from there. They ganged up on The Man's small party. Evidently, they had been planning to abuse using their larger numbers right from the start. They never had any intention on a fair duel. Bowler and The Man could only manage to break through their siege after The Man's two underlings sacrificed themselves. The area outside the East Gate was mostly open space, hence they had difficulty in hiding. The way back to the Capital was blocked by Warriors of Solidarity. They could only run to the small woods not far away. And they had been on the run since.

While Bowler was deep in thought, suddenly he heard the rustling of bushes by his side. Has Fierce Flame or Storm Wind arrived? He thought with rising hope. He turned to the direction of the bushes and

saw a short and plump man with a rough countenance coming out of it. The short man looked at them with an expression of surprise, before abruptly yelled out, "found them! They are here!"

"Motherf***er!!" The Man cursed and lunged at the guy, swinging his axe before the short guy managed to take out his weapon. The guy was smashed hard onto the ground, damage appearing on it. The Man released all his pent-up frustration on the poor guy, he continued to slash violently with his axe. The guy seemed to be yelling something while being chopped by The Man, but Bowler could not hear what he was yelling about as The Man was also screaming at the top of his lungs while he was swinging his axe. So much for hiding, Bowler thought helplessly.

Before long, the poor guy's body stopped moving, his HP had reached 0. But his body did not disappear, meaning the battle had not yet ended. Several people came out around them.

"Hehe, looks like the reward will be ours," one of them say.

"Yeah, let's finish this before the other teams arrive," another added. The group from Warriors of Solidarity seemed to have broken up again to form more teams with a smaller number in order to cover more ground.

"Good! I'll take as many as you before that!" The Man shouted with fervor.

He executed Swing on the newcomers, but they had seen it coming, so they could avoid it easily.

"Haha, he is nothing! Didn't the leader say he is a good fighter? Maybe in the past," one of them started to mock The Man's failed attempt.

Another of his friends was just about to join in the mocking when five balls of light came rushing at them. Bowler had reached level 15 at the moment and he had upgraded his Energy Bolts to level 8, allowing him to shoot five bolts when casting the spell.

The five bolts hit the four unsuspecting pursuers. They were told that they were chasing people from Men of Solidarity, which were all male with Fighter class, they didn't expect one of their preys to turn out to be a mage. Out of the four, only one managed to avoid damage by slashing on the incoming bolt.

The Man took the opportunity while they were stunned by the Energy Bolts to dash in front of one of them and used Power Strike. The move sent the sucker flying and crashed onto a thick tree trunk. The other three were furious that they were losing despite being twice their quarry's number, and started to gang up on The Man.

Bowler cast Mana Bullet and shot standard range attacks to lifted the pressure off The Man. One of their assailants who was also the one that had slashed at Bowler's bolt previously, yelled to one of his friends, "you, go take care of that mage!"

The guy promptly broke out of the fight and turned to Bowler. The man who had just given the order appeared to be the leader among their team. He was also the one with the most decent fighting ability among the others. Despite being outclassed by The Man, he could still manage to keep The Man on his toes with the help of his other friends.

The opponent who had been sent flying to the tree was still alive, he drank a recovery potion and soon came back to join the bout. With three people ganging up on him, The Man was having difficulty. He kept on losing HP as the fight went on.

Bowler used the surrounding trees as he ran around and kited the guy that had been sent to deal with him. Luckily, the guy did not invest many points in his dexterity. But when he looked at The Man, his heart sank. With the way things were proceeding, they might lose the fight even before the enemy's main team reached them.

Chapter 168: Crushed By Underlings

While Bowler was gloomy with the condition, he noticed a shadow moving swiftly behind the man he was kiting. The man's body jerked as the shadow backstabbed him. When the shadow stopped to stab the man, Bowler could see the person clearly. It was Fierce Flame, she had arrived in the nick of time!

The man backstabbed by Fierce Flame turned around and swung his sword, but she ducked from the swing while delivering another two stabs swiftly. The man's HP kept on falling rapidly. The man cleaved down, but Flame had already rolled away, she was just too quick for him. Bowler did not stay idle, he continued barraging the man with his spells and range attacks while the guy was busy with Flame.

When Fierce Flame got up from her roll, she surprisingly took out a blue short bow and an arrow. She made a quick draw on the bow and released the arrow, which traveled in a straight line and lodged accurately at their assailant's forehead. The guy got critical damage, which emptied out his HP pool. The body fell limply on the ground.

"Bow?" Bowler asked.

"Later!" Flame uttered, he took out another arrow and started firing at the people who ganged up on The Man.

Bowler followed suit. The two of them fired from afar. With the interference of range attacks, the three assailants lost their advantage. The Man did not let the opportunity go to waste as he fought back even more fiercely. One of them got their HP depleted not long after. The leader of the enemy team, seeing that the situation had turned for the worst, decided to turn tail and run. His friend who was still fighting was dumbfounded by his leader's action.

"I will avenge you!" The selfish guy still had the gall to utter a remark.

"Coward! Stay back!" The Man exclaimed with contempt. His body shot forward, his foe who was still in melee with him was knocked aside by his move. It was the Charge skill that he had acquired after becoming a Warrior. The skill brought him rapidly towards the fleeing guy. The guy obviously did not expect this move. There were still not many people who had managed to become a Warrior, so this class' skill sets were still largely unknown to most people.

The Man's Charge bashed onto the fleeing guy's back and caused him to trip and fell on his face. The Man did not show any mercy, he stomped on the guy's back, preventing him from getting up, while kept on hacking him with his axe. Bowler shivered seeing The Man's brutality. Fierce Flame, on the other hand, was oblivious of it, he kept shooting at the other guy who The Man had knocked over when he chased after the fleeing guy.

The remaining two assailants were soon killed off by the three of them. As the battle ended, their corpses vanished, leaving behind a few items. Never had the four of them expected that they would be the ones getting sent back to spawn point with all their levels and items reset.

The Man sat down and drank recovery potion after they dispatched the attackers, allowing his Natural Body Recovery to also add onto the recovery. Bowler went around collecting the drops. He did not forget to ask Flame about his previous question, "you used bow?"

"I am an advanced class now," Fierce Flame replied. "I am an Archer."

"Wow. I have thought at first you will be choosing the melee Rogue class instead," Bowler commented.

"And why did you think that?"

"Well, um... Because of the way you fight? You being so aggressive and all...," Bowler answered with some hesitation.

Fierce Flame rolled her eyes at him. Her expression soon turned stern. Bowler thought at first that Flame would be scolding him for his comment, but she lifted up her bow and shot at one of the bushes. The arrow flew straight and sank into the bushes, a metallic clang was heard.

A man with a large frame soon appeared. "I've never thought to see another advanced class here. If you are not a woman, I would have tempted to ask you to join our guild," he said.

"Hmph, even if I am a man, I will not bother to join your stinking guild," Fierce Flame retorted.

The large man's face darkened after hearing Flame's insult on his guild.

"Goliath!" The Man exclaimed, he stood up and brandished his axe.

The Real Man came out from Goliath back, followed by numerous players who emerged around them. They had been surrounded.

The Real Man smirked, "I should commend you for managing to dispatch five of my people, although that would only serve to infuriate me. I will make sure that you and your friends pay for them now!"

"They have nothing to do with our quarrel, let them go! This is just between you and me," The Man demanded.

"That was still a reasonable request if before, but after they assisted you in killing my people. Don't you dare to expect that they will be spared!"

Goliath laughed, "not that you plan to let them go anyway, right?"

"True," The Real Man said with a smug smile. "Those that befriend you will face the consequences. We will see if there are any other people that are still willing to be your friend after this. Don't you worry, after you, we will take care of your remaining underlings who are calling themselves members of that upstart gang of yours, Men of Solidarity. You will soon find yourself in a gang with only one member left, yourself!"

"Pah! Quit your yapping, you dimwit!" The Man spat. "You and all your scheming, you have no place to call yourself Warriors of Solidarity. If your old man knows of this, he would be turning in his grave."

"You and that old fool are the same! Both old-fashioned dolts! If we kept on following those outdated principles, the guild will just keep on declining. It had already been difficult in the past when the guild was just for games and money-making avenues, now this world is like the real one. If we don't improve, many will target our guild to devour it!"

"Heh, you are just trying to justify an excuse for your cowardly and selfish acts. Stop trying to delude yourself like you are doing something for the good of the guild."

"You stubborn old fool!" The Real Man was fuming with a red face.

"Why are you wasting your breath," Goliath interrupted. "Just get this over with."

Bowler was depressed, he had the urge to scold the crap out of that Goliath guy. He was hoping that this verbal bickering would last longer. At least it would give them more time to wait for Jack's arrival.

The Real Man seemed to calm down after the reprimand. He nodded. Why did he get angry over that old fool's words? "Get them!" He gave his command to his people.

His lackeys had been waiting for the order, they lunged forward immediately once the word was given. Bowler and Fierce Flame responded by throwing their range attacks at them. Since they were all melee fighter class, they could only eat those attacks while making their way over.

When they got close, The Man didn't shy away. He met them head-on. This time he did not use Swing immediately. Instead, he rammed his body onto the closest one, stunning the guy. The others assisted at once by sending attacks on The Man.

The Man ignored the first round of attacks, he executed Swing when all of them were hitting at him, trading life with them. The Man was higher in level and was of stronger class, his gears also completely outmatched his opponents, hence his one attack dealt much more damage to them compared to their individual damage on him. However, since there are so many of them, their total damage combined also caused substantial HP loss to The Man.

Some of the players came after Bowler and Fierce Flame, as too many were already ganging up on The Man. Flame could still contend with the Fighters when they came in range as she could still use her dagger and her past Ranger skills. Bowler, on the other hand, had to retreat to keep them in range. The battle shifted to being fought on three fronts. The Man, Bowler, and Fierce Flame could not help one another. They could only fend for themselves the best they could.

The Real Man and Goliath were just standing a distance away, they did not even need to involve themselves.

"See, you are too worrying. There is no need for me to interfere. He is no longer good enough in his age," Goliath said.

The Real Man was laughing when he saw his opponent's condition. Nothing felt better than seeing the person opposing him got crushed by his underlings.

Chapter 169: Taking The Head Of The Snake Hostage

"Hey, old man! Why are you no longer spouting any nonsense now?" The Real Man enjoyed adding insult to injury. "Did cat get your tongue? Wahaha!"

Goliath scorned his young leader's childish behavior, but he did not say anything to criticize him. The guy did bring a lot of benefit to the guild with his new methods which were more efficient and ruthless, compared to the previous leaders who held too much idealism.

The game business had evolved into something of a high profitability money-making avenue, and the old fools still treating it as an old-fashioned entertainment outlet. But he was just a grunt, he had no voice in the direction the guild chose to take. That's why when The Real Man came and declared his stance, he joined the young man's camp at once.

Bowler, Flame, and The Man's HP kept on falling. They could not find a path to retreat to, as they had been encircled. They could only fight as best as they could, trying to take at least a few of their opponents down with them. But their opponents were cunning, whenever one of their HP fell by even one-third, they would retreat and let their comrades take over. They then drank their recovery potions before re-engaging. They totally abused their advantage in numbers.

The Real Man was laughing his ass off and Goliath was wearing a smug smile on his face, both enjoying a deep sense of superiority watching their men bully their three prey. They were so absorbed by the show that they did not notice a movement from behind them.

Goliath, whose sense was sharper finally became aware, but it was too late. He brandished his large mace in front of him when he turned to his back, trying to use it as a shield. The mace did indeed block the sudden sneak attack, but the impact surprised him. His heavy mace bounced up due to a tremendous force, leaving him completely open.

He caught a glimpse of the ambusher, it was a man in fully garbed medium armors, using a one-handed black longsword. Which confused him, how was that one-handed longsword contained the monstrous force to throw his heavy two-handed mace aside as if it was a simple wooden stick?

Before his consternation was over, he was presented with another unreasonable occurrence. His ambusher twirled his sword with incredible speed. The sword slashed onto his armor without him managed to react.

He did not think much of it at first, he was preparing to swing his lifted mace down to bash his opponent's skull when the person slashed at him. But when the sword struck, he felt as if he had been hit by a fully loaded speeding truck. His body flew away at high speed.

His eyes were wide with disbelief as he watched his attacker getting smaller and smaller. His attacker completely ignored him after sending him away and turned his attention to The Real Man that was beside him just a moment ago. He was feeling an intense unwillingness before his vision trembled when his back crashed heavily onto the trunk of a large tree far away from where he stood a moment ago.

After sending the large man who appeared to be more of a threat away with Power Strike, Jack turned to the smaller guy who seemed to be the leader of the group. He had arrived a few seconds ago but did not immediately dive into the brawl. He listened to the two people standing a distance away and deduced from their conversation that the smaller one was the one calling the shot, and decided to attack them instead.

The Real Man was caught completely off guard. His facial expression was still pausing at a laughing position when he saw Goliath flew away without any warning. When he turned to Goliath's prior position, he saw a stranger coming at him.

He was about to shout a warning at the stranger to tell him who they were and how foolish he was to go against them, but the stranger's black longsword was already swinging before him. The thought of pulling out his weapon had never crossed his mind because the act of a lone player attacking him amid his gang was so absurd that it was borderline insane. But as the longsword cut through his armor, he was forced to accept the reality.

He was about to laugh at his attacker's stupidity and asked his minions to punish this irrational ambusher, but he was stopped short again when he noticed the HP he had lost from that one slash. The damage number above him indicated that he had lost 96 HP, but it did not make any sense. He did not feel the pushback force from Power Strike skill, the slash just now should only be a normal attack, but how come the damage was so high? With his fully geared armor, even Goliath's attack would not give him such high damage.

He looked again at his remaining HP to make sure there was no mistake, but it again decreased drastically as another two slashes swiftly carved through his body. His HP bar was less than half already by now. He was beginning to panic, but his body did not move until the fourth slash hit. By then, his HP pool had only 43 points left.

As The Real Man started to react and tried to move away, Jack used his left hand to catch the guy's shoulder and utilized his overpowering strength to pull him down and keep him in place. His long sword stopped close to the guy's neck. The fellow only had 43 HP left, one stroke was enough to send him to his grave.

"Everyone please stopped," Jack uttered.

Some that saw Jack's action had already stopped when they saw Goliath got sent flying with one hit. But many others were still unaware and were still fighting with The Man, Bowler, and Fierce Flame. The sequence of Goliath and The Real Man got attacked was so fast that not even half a minute had passed. The ones that were aware nudged his friends who were still attacking to ask them to stop.

"What," Those others grumbled unhappily. Why disturb them when they were so enjoyingly bullying people? Their friends made an eye signal telling them to look in the direction of their boss.

"Everyone, stop now! Or your boss goes bye-bye," Jack called out in a louder voice as some players were still continuing to be unaware and kept on attacking.

The last shout finally attracted the remaining ones. They stopped and looked at Jack in bewilderment. The Man, Bowler, and Fierce Flame were finally able to catch their breath and assessed the situation.

"B—boss!" The Man called out. He was as surprised as the members of Warriors of Solidarity.

"Boss?" Goliath who had just managed to pick himself up, looked at The Man in confusion.

Fierce Flame was more decisive compared to his other two comrades. She backed away at once and took out a basic healing potion to replenish her lost HP. Bowler and The Man after seeing Flame's action immediately followed suit.

The members of Warriors of Solidarity who saw what the other three did, wanted to intercept, but Jack quickly reminded them again of his hostage, "careful! You don't want to be responsible for your boss' losing all his levels and equipment, do you?"

"W—who are you?!" The Real Man who was being constrained, finally could speak up. His face was red as he was fuming with rage. "Do you know who I am?"

"Oh? Who are you?" Jack asked calmly.

"I am the co-leader of Warriors of Solidarity! You will apologize and let me go now, and I will let you compensate me and then will I probably forgive you and not have all my members coming after you!"

"Why would I do that?"

"Why... What do you mean why? I am the co-leader of the famous guild Warriors of Solidarity!" The Real Man repeated his words, assuming Jack did not hear him correctly the first time.

"What about it?" Jack replied with the same relax tone, as if what was happening now was no big deal at all.

Chapter 170: Think Carefully About Your Next Action

"You... Don't you know our guild!?" The Real Man asked with worry. He was afraid that the man before him was someone who was like a frog in a well, who was ignorant about the powerful groups in the gaming community. If so, then his guild's name would bring no weight. He tried to explain, "our guild is a powerful guild you don't want to mess with, we have large numbers of members and many highly skilled players who are well-known in..."

Jack was amused by the guy's effort to try to make him see the greatness of his guild, as if it would affect the situation he was currently in. Jack allowed him to take his time to finish his babbling.

"... So do you see now what a big mistake you have made at the moment?" The Real Man finished his lecture after quite some time.

Jack gave him a playful smile and said, "well, what I see is you are my hostage, and you ask those men of yours to back away from those three, or I cut your throat and let you start over again from scratch."

"You! Do you not hear what I just said!?" The Real Man felt like his mind was about to go off. He had explained to the man about the implication of his action but why did he still not understand? How could he be so unreasonable?

"I hear you all right," Jack said. "I just don't think it was a big deal."

"No big deal...?" The Real Man could not believe his ears.

"Now stop your nonsense, and ask your people to back off, please," Jack repeated his demand. "I will not repeat myself again."

"You...!" The Real Man was still unwilling.

"Everyone, back off!" In the end, it was Goliath that had given the command. He had just drunk a basic healing potion. Unlike his young leader, he was not misguided by their guild's illusion of grandeur. This assailant had taken out a huge chunk off his HP with a single Power Strike despite his high defense armors, he knew this person was not simple and had not decided to attack them out of ignorance.

The group of Warriors of Solidarity slowly put some distance from Bowler and the others.

Previously when The Real Man was giving a lecture about his guild, Jack had sent a party invite to his three friends. Afterward, he sent them a message in the party chat to flee towards the capital while he held the Warriors of Solidarity back. The Man refused to leave Jack behind, it was an utter cowardly thing to do. But Jack told him not to worry, he would be fine.

When The Man was still hesitant, Flame went on a more direct approach and told him in chat that his weak self would simply be a burden to Jack if he stayed behind. He was furious by the comment but was able to cool down soon, his long years of experience were not just for show after all. He told Jack to make sure to escape safely or else he would not forgive himself. Jack promised him.

After Goliath gave the order, Jack gave them the signal in party chat and the three of them immediately withdrew. The members of Warriors of Solidarity could only watch them bitterly as they left.

"Tell your people guarding outside these woods to not make any funny moves as well," Jack said. But actually, he did not worry too much about those sentries. They were too spread out, it would take time for them to assemble. Bowler and the others would most likely only meet one or two of their members, the three of them could easily handle such a number.

"Do you think you can escape," Goliath said. "I admit your damage is very high, I don't know how you do it, but do you honestly think you can take all of us on? If you let our leader go now, we can still talk about your transgression."

Jack ignored him and paid attention to his three friends' progress via the Map system. They had gone out of the woods and en route to the capital. Jack was happy to see that they did not seem to receive any interference.

Goliath was incensed to have been ignored, but he kept his anger in. He did not want to antagonize their assailant, not while the person was still holding their leader hostage. He secretly gave instructions in the party chat for his members to take position around the guy, to make sure he could not escape once he let go of The Real Man.

Jack saw them encircling him, but he didn't put much thought into their action, he was simply buying time so Bowler and the others could put more distance.

"They are far away already, there is no way we can still get them before they reach the capital," Goliath finally ran out of patience. "Now let our leader go, or we will show no mercy!"

"You talked as if you will let me go if I comply?" Jack asked him with a playful smile.

"If you think we will let you off for only killing you once, think again!" Goliath said with a grim expression. "We will hunt you continuously and make sure you never get past level 1. We will make so that you can only spend the rest of your life inside the city and will even make sure that your life will be miserable inside the city!"

"That's right! You better think carefully about your action for your own good!" The Real Man added, Goliath's words appeared to have given him some courage. His life was still in critical condition, his Natural Body Recovery skill did not activate as he was not yet considered out of combat, due to Jack was still holding him in an aggressive manner.

When he was still shouting to vent his frustration, Jack abruptly released his hold. He turned around and looked at Jack in a suspicious manner.

Jack looked back calmly at him in return and said, "you should also think carefully about your next action."

The Real Man eyed Jack and thought if he had any trick up his sleeve, he then looked around at his underlings. When his eyes returned to Jack, it contained its previous confidence and savageness. He jumped back towards his men and placed himself in reach of their protection, before yelling in a vicious tone, "Kill him! Chop his limbs to make him suffer before death! Then search for him in the city and make sure he cannot leave the city anymore, make him regret to ever put his hands on me!"

Jack sighed, he kind of expecting The Real Man's reaction already. He actually would let him go if he decided to just walk away, but he admitted that this was a tall order considering the guy's arrogance. Jack swung his sword in a leisurely manner, a crescent light shot out. Despite Jack's leisurely swing, the light traveled at a blindingly fast speed. It hit The Real Man when he was still uttering his last sentence. The little HP he got left was immediately snuffed out, his body fell stiffly with wide eyes, which had not yet understood what had happened.

When the light shot out from Jack's sword, the members from Warriors of Solidarity were just about to lunge at Jack, but they were stopped short by Jack's attack. They looked at The Real Man's still corpse.

"Le... leader?" One of them blurted out. They had yet to registered what had just transpired. What was that light just now, was that a skill?

Goliath could grasp the situation better, despite he was also shocked by Jack's sudden attack. He quickly gave the others the command to react, "kill him!"

He ran forward holding his heavy mace with two hands, ready to bash it at Jack's skull. The others were awakened by Goliath's holler and action, they simultaneously charged at Jack from all directions, giving him no space to flee. They were determined to take down their leader's killer and made him pay for his crime.

Jack was looking at them with the same leisurely smile. Goliath was puzzled by Jack's reaction, no way the guy was still expecting to get away from this, was he?

He arrived in front of Jack first. He made a downward swing but not in a reckless manner. He understood his opponent was not simple, his stance was in a position where he could change direction in a moment of notice. But contrary to his expectation, his opponent sheathed his sword instead and waved at him.

His heavy mace came down at his opponent's head while he was still baffled, and his opponent's body burst into a puff of smoke.