

World 181

Chapter 181: Real Test

Bigarm was initially stunned by what he saw, but anger soon replaced it as he saw how incompetent the underlings he had chosen are. He yelled at them, "use a pincer move, you morons! Why are you letting him kite you around like fools?! Split up and catch him from both sides!"

The basic healing potion had healed most of his lost HP, the Ranger nodded to the Fighter after hearing Bigarm's scolding. "You go left, I go right," he said. The Fighter nodded and they split up accordingly.

Jack was not too bothered by their change of tactic. He let them split away to the furthest distance of his two sides before he ran towards the Ranger. They had conveniently split themselves up, why did Jack not use this opportunity? Had they seriously forgotten just a moment before that he beat them up in melee? They were already back to the old mindset where the melee class just need to approach the magic class into melee range in order to secure victory.

The Ranger seemed to have realized it when his face became pale. Jack shot range attacks at him while he charged towards him. The ranger turned around and flee. Their roles were strangely turned around. Now the ranger was running and Jack was chasing, the same thing was that Jack was still the one throwing range attacks.

The spectators didn't know what to make of it. They were used to seeing kiting tactics where the range player shot at melee player while backing away to maintain distance. This was the first time they saw a range player was shooting and chasing a melee player, they did not know what was the term to use for this situation.

Bigarm was also speechless, he never expected the method that he had instructed his underlings would put them in such a position.

The Fighter tried to come to help, but due to his slow movement, he had trouble trying to keep up with those two fast players.

The Ranger could only continue to suffer the bullying. When he saw that his HP was near critical, he lost his mind and turned around to charge at Jack. "Ah! Screw it!" He screamed. He did not even bother to evade Jack's range attacks, he just kept on charging. He was determined to land at least one hit on this detestable Magician.

Jack didn't return to his kiting strategy, he kept on moving forward. The two players soon came into close range. When the Ranger was about to attack with a frantic expression on his face. Jack pointed his staff with a mischievous grin. He cast Mana Bullet which had already gone off cooldown some time ago. The spell blasted the remaining HP of the Ranger. He fell down unwillingly. Could he not at least stab this guy once? It was the thought in his mind before his vision went black.

Jack turned around and faced the Fighter who had just arrived and was slashing his sword at him. Jack used his staff and blocked the sword. The sword stopped dead on its track, unable to move an inch further after meeting Jack's staff. The Fighter was staring at Jack with wide eyes, not only his speed was fast, his strength could also rival his? What kind of Magician was him?

Jack made a push and threw the Fighter away. The fighter had to backstep a few times to balance himself from falling back. He looked at Jack like he was looking at a monster. His strength was actually higher? He then glanced at the body of the Ranger who had died. He was the only one left now. He looked around. Weren't those all his guildmates? Why weren't they helping him? Oh, wait! This was a test. Wait, were they testing this magician? Why did it feel like it was the other way around?

Jack took a step forward. The Fighter fell to his knees. "I surrender!" He shouted.

Jack stopped. This was unexpected, he thought. Well, since the guy had surrendered. He looked at Bigarm, who was wearing an ugly expression.

"So, did I pass?" Jack asked.

Bigarm mouth twitched again hearing Jack's question. He was having the urge to just give the order for all his guildmates here to swarm this guy. See if he could still be arrogant or not.

His guildmates had also turned restless after witnessing two of their friends got killed. But there were others watching as well, people who had followed them out here out of curiosity. If they swarmed this guy after he had won, their reputation would plummet. They would have more trouble recruiting people in the future. However, Bigarm just could not allow himself to give this guy his victory just like that. The guy's attitude was too aggravating.

As he was unsure of what to do, a voice was heard, "that was just a preliminary test to see if you are indeed what you said you are. Now, let's see how you fare with the real test."

A bald man walked out from amongst the crowd. He was wearing a crimson robe and carrying a long staff that looked as if it was made from intertwining vines. There was a long scar on his left cheek. Everyone from Death Associates settled down their restless murmur after seeing the bald man.

When Jack saw the man, he recognized him as well. So, he had managed to attract enough attention after all, he thought in his mind.

"High elder!" Bigarm exclaimed, and then hurriedly came forward and bowed.

Scarface waved him away. "I will take it over from here," he said.

Scarface stepped into the middle of the space that the crowd had created, standing in front of Jack. The Fighter from before was still kneeling on the ground. Scarface looked at the Fighter and frowned. The Fighter looked down with shame. He knew he had performed disappointingly.

Scarface showed an expression of disgust and cast a spell. A ball of light crashed onto the Fighter and it created a forceful outburst on impact. The Fighter lost 121 damage and was blasted away due to the spell. His body rolled a few times before coming to a stop.

"Get the hell away from my sight! You are not worthy as Death Associates members!" Scarface exclaimed.

The Fighter hurriedly pulled himself up and ran away.

'What the hell was that spell?' Jack asked Peniel in his mind. 'It looked like Mana Bullet? But why does it have the effect to strongly knock people away like that? It's almost like the effect of Power Strike.'

"It's possible that he had found an evolve seed for his Mana Bullet skill," Peniel answered.

'Evolve seed? What's that?'

"A rare consumable that allow your skill to have new or extra effect. Never mind about that, it depends on luck for you to find it. I'll let you know if you find one."

Scarface looked at Jack with a smile. "It appears that my damage is still less than yours. How do you get such high damage? Is it due to your equipment?"

Jack shrugged, "it's my secret." He Inspected Scarface using his God-Eye monocle, as expected, the man was already an advanced Mage at level 17.

"What's your level? I couldn't seem to Inspect your information. Is that a secret as well?"

"I'm level 15," Jack said truthfully on his Mage level.

"Hm..." Scarface seemed to be in thought. He had a hard time believing Jack's claim. He was two levels higher but his damage, speed, and strength were below the man? Never mind, he would test the man himself. Direct combat was the best way to gauge a person's skill.

"Shall we begin?" Scarface asked.

"Are you a high echelon of Death Associates?" Jack pretended to ask.

"You can say that," Scarface replied.

"Then sure, I will entertain you," Jack said as he twirled his staff.

Jack started the exchanges with a standard range attack. Scarface jumped back to dodge. Jack moved up to shorten the distance.

Scarface had seen Jack's style of fighting, the guy was not shy at close-range fight despite being a magic user, so he kept on stepping back to keep a distance. It's not like he had never fight anyone in close range, but as a pure magic player, close combat was not his forte, and he was not going to risk it just to prove that he was not any less than his opponent in a close-range fight.

As he continued to step back, he used range attacks on Jack as well. But unlike the previous Squid, he did not orthodoxly aim his staff when making the attacks. He made a short but fast motion swing with his staff, but accurately shoot out the attack in between the swings, making it difficult for Jack to predict the shot's trajectory.

Scarface's shots also targeted different part of Jack's body. Sometimes his torso, sometimes his legs, another time at his head. He also often made feign attacks, tricking Jack to dodge to one side while another shot was heading that way already. Jack could not dodge the shots as easily as in his previous fight. In fact, he needed to use his shield to block most of the attacks, which slowed down his advance significantly.

An expert truly fought differently, Jack thought in his predicament.

Chapter 182: Battle Against Scarface

Jack had fought against Scarface before, but at that time, he wasn't engaging directly with the man. He had made a short ambush attack on the first and second encounters, and on the third one, mostly it was Bowler and Flame who was dealing with the man. So in fact, now was the first time he had a direct match with this man. Not to mention previously he had been engaging as a Fighter, now he could only use his Mage skill, so it was a very different arrangement.

Jack could see that the man's skill in utilizing the mage's skills and attacks were better than him, thus he could only abuse his marginally higher stats. He cast Energy Bolts to distract the man, and would use the window it had created to dash forward and get into melee range.

Runic symbol quickly formed on the tip of Scarface's vine staff. Jack was alarmed. So fast! The rune was formed in just a second, and a light barrier appeared around Scarface. His five Energy Bolts slammed onto the light wall and dissipated.

Jack still needed more than one second to form his Barrier spell rune, sometimes even two seconds, despite his continuous training. He must admit that there were valid reasons that this Mage in front of him had become a famous magic player in past VR games.

But Scarface was also given a fright from Jack's Energy Bolts. His Barrier spell was level 5, he had invested the 4 free skill points he got after leveling up from level 15 to 17 all to the Barrier skill. This Barrier he had constructed could withstand damage equivalent to 62% of his maximum HP. And his crimson robe added an additional 50 HP to him, thus further increasing his Barrier's potency.

Yet it had shattered after being hit by only four of the bolts, the fifth bolt rushed towards him. Despite his shock, Scarface could still maintain his calm. He didn't have the time to summon a Magic Shield, so he swung his staff and hit the fifth bolt. The bolt was destroyed but since his staff's swing was much weaker than the bolt's power, he still received a portion of the damage.

The Energy Bolts however didn't manage to create much disturbance, hence Jack didn't manage to close in the distance much. Scarface continued to move back to keep his distance from Jack. They continued on this cat and mouse chase while dabbling in range attacks.

Jack lost more HP due to cumulative damage for receiving more attacks compared to Scarface, but Jack's HP pool was much larger, so it was of no concern. Jack was just frustrated as he could not land many attacks on Scarface. Out of the first hit from the fifth Energy bolt, he had only managed to hit Scarface one other time. It was clear who was more experience in range fights between the two.

Scarface, on the other hand, was also not having it easy. He was under constant pressure to not make a mistake. One small miss in concentration had caused him to get hit, and one hit from this opponent was hurtful. And he also had to constantly keep his opponent on his toe, or else his opponent would close the distance in a very short time. He was sure that he would be done for once his opponent got into melee range.

The thing that confused him the most was his own attacks had hit his opponents several times, but his opponent's HP bar was still more than half! How high was this person's HP pool actually?

Although Scarface appeared to be at an advantage on the surface, the fight was taxing him mentally. He was not sure if he could continue to keep Jack at bay for long. Time of gauging his opponent's strength

was over, he decided to go all out to decide the outcome. He cast his Energy Bolts and sent five bolts of light speeding towards Jack.

Seeing the five incoming bolts, Jack did not dare to underestimate them. He knew Scarface's magic power was considered high among normal magic users. He stopped his charge and took position to receive the approaching spell. When they came near, he slashed using his staff.

When both battling parties attacked at the same time, this world system would consider the one with the larger force to be the winner, and that winner would receive no damage from the attack. While the one with the weaker force would not receive the full brunt of the damage, but would still receive a portion of it.

So when Jack slashed at the Energy Bolt, it was considered an attack against an attack. Jack slash was more powerful than the energy bolt as he was secretly a Warrior, hence he suffered no damage. Contrary to the time when Scarface hit Jack's last energy bolt with his staff.

Jack used a combination between his staff's slashing and his shield's blocking to stand against Scarface's energy bolts. When he destroyed the third ball, he caught Scarface forming a rune spell from the corner of his eyes. Jack was confused, was he casting Barrier again? But it didn't make sense, Jack was not attacking him at the moment. Also, Barrier had a long cooldown of three minutes, and that amount of time had certainly not passed since Scarface last used it to block his Energy Bolts.

Realizing the oddity of the situation, Jack couldn't afford to concentrate on repelling the remaining bolts. He decided to cast Magic Shield, even though it would consume MP. Together with his left hand's shield, he used the Magic Shield to block the remaining two bolts, while he continued to observe Scarface's spellcasting.

Surprisingly, after the runic symbol was formed, it didn't stop. The mana light continued to start drawing another rune! Jack was alarmed, it was not a Barrier spell. And judging from Scarface's action of sending Energy Bolts to distract him before starting to cast the spell, it must be an offensive spell!

With the speed Scarface was drawing the rune, Jack presumed he would not be able to cover their current distance before Scarface completed his spell. He assumed it was a spell using three runes formation. Peniel had explained to him previously that a spell formation always formed a circle, hence there was no spell formation formed by two runes. After a spell of one rune, it would skip directly to two runes formation, then three, then four, and onwards until nine runes formation which was known to contain the most complicated and powerful spells.

With this assumption, Jack decided to use Barrier. He started drawing his own runic symbol. Although the speed of his casting was slightly slower, Scarface was still in the middle of his second rune, he was confident he should at least be able to complete his rune forming at the same time as Scarface finished his third rune.

When Jack started forming rune, Scarface's concentration wavered for a bit that he almost failed his spellcasting. A Mage? He didn't expect his opponent to also be an advanced class like him. He swiftly calmed his mind down as he continued drawing his runic formations. Now that it became a contest of speed casting, he wasn't about to relent. He focused his concentration and the speed of his spell formation drawing increased.

The speed was so fast that it caught Jack off guard. To his surprise, his concentration was lost. Oh shit! He thought. But when he looked at the half-drawn rune at the tip of his staff, it didn't vanish. It paused. Jack then remembered the ability of his Spellcasting Gloves, it was not a waste to spend his adventurer points for these gloves, it had really saved him this time.

Forming a rune during practice compared to during a real fight was indeed completely different. He immediately resumed forming his rune again.

But he was slower, Scarface had completed his spell formation. The three runes glowed proudly as the spell took effect. Scarface pointed the completed spell at Jack.

Jack felt pressure on his surroundings. He did not know what Scarface's spell was, but it certainly was not simple. When he was still wondering, he noticed the ground underneath him started to glow. Five long white shadows extended from where he stood. The shadow formed from light suddenly came out of the ground, like a giant claw of a subterranean creature which covertly came out from right underneath his feet. The five claws closed in on him from all directions, sparing no room for him to dodge.

Chapter 183: Joining A Guild

Fortunately, despite the gravity of the situation, Jack did not stop channeling his spell. He forced himself to concentrate on forming the rune. The rune was completed right before the claws struck his body. A light sphere came out and formed an impenetrable wall around him. The light claws slammed onto the barrier, which shook heavily upon the impact.

Despite the tremendous force suffered from the blow, the Barrier remained intact, which shocked Scarface greatly. This spell of his could annihilate a normal level 15 Magician or Ranger in one hit. Even if a Mage used a Barrier, a level 1 Barrier could only survive damage equivalent to 50% of the Mage's total HP. Even if he upgraded his Barrier until it could survive damage equal to 100% of his HP, which should be impossible at his level, the Barrier should still be destroyed after that one hit. The only reasonable explanation was that his HP was more than half of other regular Magicians or Mages, which was equally impossible.

With the Barrier remained in effect, Jack could ignore all his opponent's attacks while charging at full speed. Fully intending to utilize that, Jack dashed towards Scarface.

Scarface who was still dazed due to his shock, snapped back when he saw Jack approaching.

"Halt!" He said as he put a hand in front as a sign of stopping.

"Hm?" Jack stopped his charge. They were in the middle of a duel and were being watched by a host of Death Associates members. Scarface would not use such shameless distraction to allow him some reprieve time, right?

"You passed," Scarface said as he stored his vine staff.

"Huh?" Jack was baffled, his heart was still beating rapidly due to the intensity of the battle. He never expected the battle to end abruptly. But after a thought, he remembered that they were only battling for a test, not a life or death struggle. He put away his magic staff and shield. "So am I worthy enough?"

"You certainly are," Scarface answered. "May I know your name?"

"Unrivalled Arcaner," Jack replied.

The spectators who were originally impressed by his prowess had their faces turned dark and disgusted after hearing his name.

"That was one arrogant name," Scarface commented. "But one has the right to be arrogant as long as one has the ability to support it. You are very much welcomed to our guild if you are interested."

"I do. However, I would like to make some things clear first. I don't like getting tied down. I don't mind helping with the guild's quests or requests from time to time. But I won't accept being forced on it. In fact, most of the time I will be doing my own things."

Those Death Associates members around had their faces even darker after Jack's last sentence.

Scarface was silent for a while, before saying, "all right, but you should be aware that you won't receive any compensation or benefit from the guild if you do not provide enough contributions."

"That's fair, and also fine. I will find my own fortune."

Bigarm who had been quiet by the side could stand no more. "you a**hole! Then what the heck do you try to join a guild for?"

"Well, to be honest. I was just trying to borrow the big name of your guild. Despite my excellent skills, there is still a limit to being alone. One time I might offend a large party, at such time, I am hoping to use your guild's name as a shield."

Bigarm was at a loss for words hearing that. He wanted to scold this arrogant Mage as loud as possible but the words were stuck at his throat.

"Hahaha," Scarface laughter surprised everyone. "You certainly are an interesting character. All right, I don't mind you use our guild name for that. But I must warn you, if your actions bring excessive trouble to the guild, I will not hesitate to throw you under the bus."

"That's fair," Jack nodded. "In return, as I mentioned before, you can send me works to do, as long as I am free at that time."

"Deal," Scarface said as he sent Jack a guild invite.

Jack was about to click accept when he sort of realized something, he quickly asked Peniel, 'if my disguise becomes a guild member, when I change back to my real self will my name be tagged with the same guild member as well?'

"No, only Unrivalled Arcaner will be the guild member. Your Storm Wind alias will maintain unaffiliated," Peniel replied.

'That is good to know,' he accepted the guild invitation.

He soon heard a notification informing him that he was now a member of Death Associates. There was a new page in his status window where he could access the information about the guild.

Guild: Death Associates, level 1

Members: 326/500

Rank: Underling

Contribution point: 0

Underling, such a degrading term, but he would have to put up with it for now. After all, he just joined, it would be unfair for the others if he was given a higher rank simply because he was stronger.

His objective was to be invited to join that meeting said to involve prominent guilds. Silverwing said the meeting would be five days from now, meaning he had four days to give enough impression to be invited into the meeting, hopefully. Or if that failed, at least found out about the location of the meeting, so he could sneak to the place at the time of the meeting.

'What was that skill he used when we fought?' Jack asked Peniel.

"That spell is called Entrapping Mana Claws," Peniel answered. "It can deal large damage and you will also be unable to move for 3 seconds if the spell hits you. You are lucky you managed to block it in time with Barrier."

"By the way, someone as skilled as you wouldn't be a newbie," Scarface had come next to him while he was deep in thought. "But I have never heard of the name Unrivalled Arcaner before. Care to tell me your past name in the gaming community?"

Jack chuckled, "I don't like to be anchored down by past achievements. Every new game is a new journey for me. I will prefer to be like a blank sheet of paper ready to have my new feats and accomplishments written and recorded down as a new individual."

Bigarm had the urge to throw up listening to that statement, but Scarface just laughed at it. He just considered the man as an eccentric but skilled player.

"You know, I happen to know another person who is similar to you," Scarface said.

"Oh? Really?"

Scarface nodded, "like you, his stats completely defied the logical structure of this world's system as we have observed from most players. In other words, his stats were too high compared to other normal players, just like you."

Jack tried hard to remain calm, could he have overdone it? Had he instead revealed the connection between his real self with his current disguise? He could not afford to look nervous. Still, he was having a hard time preventing cold sweat from rolling down his forehead.

"I bet there was something you two had found that allowed you such an advantage," Scarface added.

"Do you mind sharing the secret?"

Jack was relieved in his heart, yet he maintained the indifference on his face, and said haughtily, "as I've said, it's my secret. But I can tell you this, it depends on fortune, not something that can be looked for, so it is pointless even if I tell you."

"I see," Scarface appeared disappointed, but he did not push the issue further.

"Come, I will introduce you to some of our key members," he added. "And if you are free for tomorrow, we are having those of us who had reached the advanced classes to do some hunting quests."

"Oh?" Jack raised his eyebrows.

"They were quests that could be received from Hunters Associations. It provided a much better avenue for collecting coins. We will pair one advanced class player possessing the hunting quests into a team with several basic class players as support. That way, we could complete the quests more efficiently."

"I was not surprised by the quest, I was surprised by the fact that you know about the hunting quests," Jack said, and showed his hunting badge. "I was also already a member of the Hunters Association. I already had a few ongoing hunting quests."

Scarface was taken aback by Jack's hunting badge, but not because of Jack possessing one. Instead, it was because of the color of Jack's badge. It was silver in color! That meant this fellow had completed enough quests that allowed him to increase his rank in the Hunters Association by one rank. This shouldn't be possible if the guy was only level 15, as he could only become an advanced class after reaching level 15, while only an advanced class could join the Hunters Association.

"You level is certainly not level 15," Scarface said with a frown. "I don't appreciate being lied to by my own members."

Chapter 184: Meeting A Past Victim

Jack looked back at him without averting his gaze, he said, "well, to be fair, I am not your member when I told you about my level. Let's say it was my attempt at throwing you off guard. But that said, I will still not inform you about my level. I have something that can conceal my info, and that is one of my edges. I'm not about to give out my info just because you demand it and lose this advantage of mine. If you can't accept that, then you can just kick me out of the guild."

"Why, you...!" Bigarm was about to scold him again, but Scarface stopped him.

"All right, I can accept your reasoning. I will not pursue this subject, but I would prefer if you don't keep too many secrets from the guild."

"As a matter of fact, I have been intending to share with you the information about the Hunters Association," Jack lied. "That's why I was surprised by the fact that you have already known about it. A big guild's intel is really nothing to be scoffed at."

Scarface was just smiling at the compliment. Jack was actually truly surprised by the fact that Death Associates knew about the Hunters Association info. Even White Scarfs guild which had more member counts was not aware of it when he was telling them about it last night. Did that mean Death Associates was a more capable guild?

"So how many advanced class players do you have?" Jack asked.

"Including you, six," Scarface replied.

Jack was again astonished. This guild which had lower member counts than White Scarfs was having the same number of members who had achieved advanced class, if not including himself. That's mean their core fighting strength was the same.

He had heard that the current Death Associates in this capital was just a splinter from the actual Death Associates guild. He couldn't imagine how terrifying the guild was if they could assemble all their original members. Perhaps he had really gotten himself a troublesome foe.

"Now with the addition of you, we will be able to complete more hunting quests swiftly," Scarface said.

"Wait a minute," Jack said. "I did intend to share with you the info about Hunters Association. However, regarding the hunting quest, I am perfectly fine to complete the quests by myself. Although it will be faster with the help of the guild, how do you suggest we split the rewards?"

"You...! The coin reward and trophy item drops should be given to the guild as contributions!" Bigarm exclaimed. He was truly unsatisfied with Jack's attitude.

Jack was unmoved by Bigarm's outburst, "I've already explained before that I had no interest in the guild's contribution points. But I can share 20% of the coin reward and trophy item drops if you spare some players under my command. Otherwise, it was perfectly fine for me to just do the quests on my own."

"The guild is in dire need of coins, I can agree with an equal split on the coin reward and trophy item drop," Scarface negotiated.

"I'm also in need of coins, 30%."

"40! Let's not act like traders on fish markets. If this is unacceptable, then it's better that we go our own ways."

Jack decided not to push his luck too far, he said, "Okay. Let's do 60:40 then. I will give the 40% of the coins and trophy items as a courtesy for allowing me to join the guild, but all other drops will be fully mine."

This guy, even when yielding he could still do it in a cocky way, Bigarm was thoroughly incensed.

Scarface, on the other hand, was not too fussy about it. He took Jack to meet the other upper-core members, but he did not see any other advanced class players that Scarface had mentioned, which he was sure that Red Death was one of them.

Scarface informed Jack that those members had been busy being out in the field to complete the hunting quests. He himself was originally also just back from completing hunting quests. He came by here after receiving Bigarm's report about a potential recruit.

After the brief introduction to important members of the guild, he told Jack to rest as it was late already. He also instructed Bigarm to assign a few members to Jack to assist him in his hunting quests tomorrow.

Jack didn't make any detour after departing with the people of Death Associates. He returned straight to Amy's Bakery, but he did not forget to change his appearance back to Storm Wind first. Otherwise, he would have some explanations to do barging into the Bakery in his Mage disguise. Before he entered the bakery, he could see the building next door was covered by construction cloth. He could hear sounds of

workers working behind the cloth. He didn't see Bill or Ellie around, they must have gone back to do their own things.

He spent the rest of the night practicing his rune forming. After experiencing the fight between Mages with Scarface, he realized more about the importance of speed casting. If he was to perform well under his Mage disguise, he could not be slow in forming his rune formation.

The next morning, he woke up early and departed as Scarface had made an appointment for him to meet early. When he left Amy's Bakery, the construction of the restaurant was still well underway. He looked for a secluded corner and changed into Unrivalled Arcaner, then he headed to the West gate which was the rendezvous point.

When he arrived at the gate, he met with six Death Associates members whom Bigarm had arranged for him. The allocated six members were divided equally between the three basic classes, two Fighters, two Rangers, and two Magicians. Surprisingly, he knew one of the members, or maybe more accurately, that member was one of his past victims.

He was staring at Warpath, who was known as a proud independent player who never submitted to any guild. But here he was. Jack even scanned him using his God-Eye monocle. There was indeed a guild tag under his name, indicating that he was truly a formal member of Death Associates.

His scan also showed that expert to be at level 12, which astounded Jack further. It had only been five days since he killed the fellow. It took him only short several days to increase his level from 1 back to 12. Seeing it made Jack wonder if the killing had actually made an impact on the guy or not.

But in actuality, Warpath had let go of his pride as an expert independent player and joined a guild in order to gain help in power leveling. That meant he had foregone his independence and was now in debt with the guild. The guild did not disappoint him, since he was used to be an expert player, they had high hope for him. They had attached him to numerous high-level teams to fight high-level monsters. He had accumulated experiences non-stop that allowed his level to skyrocket in just a few short days.

His decision in choosing Death Associates was not random. He would not degrade himself to join second-rate guild. But the most important factor was, he had heard that this guild also had a beef with Storm Wind, which was his nemesis. He swore he would build back his strength, and when he was strong enough, he would take his revenge. And with Death Associates' enmity against his enemy, he might not be alone when it was time for him to take his revenge.

Little did he know, the nemesis that he had a grudge with, was standing just a few feet from him, and had even been appointed as his team leader for the current mission. He noticed Jack's stare, even though he had lost his levels and equipment, his pride still made him hot-headed. "What the hell are you looking at?" He said in a hostile manner.

Jack was amused. If he was his usual self, he would just ignore the fool, but since he was now pretending to be an arrogant expert, he figured he should play the part. Instead of replying to Warpath's impolite words, he simply cast Mana Bullet.

Warpath was completely unprepared, the spell hit him squarely on his face. The force and shock caused him to fall backward. A large amount of damage appeared on his head since their levels were too far apart. He looked at Jack in disbelief.

"Another disrespectful word from you, and I will send you to your grave!" Jack uttered with an imperious tone.

Chapter 185: Hunting As A Group

Warpath stood up with an utterly dissatisfied look, but he kept his silence. The others seemed to be intimidated as well. They were still whispering to each other a moment ago, but now they stood still like obedient school students. Jack then checked on his supposed team members using his God-eye monocle.

What the heck! He blurted out in his mind.

He understood that Warpath was low level as he had just died a few days ago, but the others were not much better. The other Fighter was level 14, the same as the two Rangers. The decent one was only one of the Magicians at level 15, while the other was only level 13.

That bastard Bigarm, he had certainly done this intentionally. At this current time where the average players were at level 15 and 16. This bunch was practically newbies. Were they sent here to help him hunt efficiently or to drag him down?

He took a deep breath, there was no use complaining. He was just doing this short term to show some results to gain the guild's trust. It was not like he was trying to make this his long-term career. Furthermore, he never needed the others' help to complete the hunting quests. He supposed he could just treat them as passengers who were going along with him. Even so, it was still better to get them coordinated. He studied them again.

The other Fighter was a teenage man named Dasher. The Rangers were a tall male called Bangstick, while the other was a plump man called Suckit. The two Magicians were both females, the level 15 one was a young girl with the name of Flowerrain, while the other one was a skinny woman called Undo.

He sent a party invite to all of them. After they formed a proper party, he said to them, "okay, listen up. I want you to listen to my orders at all times. If any of you go out of line, I will waste you myself. Do not think I won't do it, I have got permission from Scarface to punish anyone that shows disobedience. Do I make myself clear?"

The part where he had gotten permission from Scarface was a blatant lie. But he figured the ones that Bigarm had sent to him were the ones with the lowest level amongst the guild. So they would certainly feel some kind of insecurity. Such a lie would sound pretty real to them.

As expected, no one showed an expression that doubted his claim. Even Warpath seemed to believe it, judging from his clear attempt to control his temper.

Jack nodded, "okay. We will move in formation. Warpath and Dasher would be walking at the front. Bangstick and Suckit..." Jack paused a moment, what the heck kind of name is this? He had trouble pronouncing it, "... will walk at our flanks, each at one side. You two girls will be in the middle. I will be at the back. Is everything clear?"

They nodded.

"We will walk West to Siren Hill, then we will go North from there to the Harpy Valley. We should meet the monsters in my hunting quests along the way. When we encounter monsters, do not wander too far. Keep the formation as best as you can. Understood?"

They nodded again.

"Okay, let's move out then."

As they crossed the plain to the Siren Hill, there were mostly Silver Wolves and Goblins, they were low-level general monsters which every each of them had accustomed to beating already, so not much difficulty in taking them out.

Jack used the chance on this easy fight to make them get used to the formation. Warpath and Dasher were in charge of taking on the brunt of the monster's assaults. Bangstick and Suckit were tasked to hassle the enemy, attracting their attention and keeping them busy from approaching the damage-dealer team, Jack and the two girls.

As the leader of the team, Jack picked up the dropped loots from the monsters they killed, but he noticed one of the Magician girls, Undo, was taking notes on the stuff he picked up. Apart from picking up loots, Jack mostly stayed put from taking any action, he wanted to see the team's capability.

Dasher had the habit of charging onto an enemy, which caused him to keep on breaking out too far from the formation. Jack had to scold him a few times to get him back to position.

Bangstick had dull attack varieties, he mostly attacked the enemy from the front, competing for skill while he had no outstanding skill to show. Suckit was even worst, Jack figured him to be those kinds of a slow and lazy person. Despite his speed in this game world was not constrained by his body weight and shape, he still acted as if he was being burdened by it. Jack kept on yelling at them to move more, their jobs were to keep the enemies busy, so they needed to move around while avoid getting hit, only to attack from the side or back when an opportunity arose.

The two girls were taking it easy, as they were just standing there shooting from a safe distance. Jack could not gauge their skills under such a safe condition. However, the young one which was the highest level among the lot seemed to be more accurate in her shot, compared to the older one. She also seemed more relaxed, she might have been one of those who had plenty of experience playing VR games. The older one was more stiff, by the way she was throwing her standard attacks, she would most likely waste her staff's ammo before long. Jack hoped she bring some Magic Stone to replenish her staff's ammo.

He had nothing to complain about Warpath's skill, but the guy just did what he wanted. He did not bother to listen to orders.

Bigarm really had given him trouble this time, what's the deal with this lot? He swore he would get the guy back later.

Even though Jack was not involved in the combat, he still received experience as a party member. His Mage class was already close to level 16 before, after a few combats, His Mage class became level 16.

"Congratulations your Mage class have reached level 16

Your HP increase by 20

Your MP increase by 40

Your Strength increase by 2

Your Dexterity increase by 1

Your Intelligence increase by 5

Your Endurance increase by 2

Your Reflex increase by 2

Your Wisdom increase by 4

You receive 2 free attribute point and 2 free skill points"

Like his Warrior class, the boost from Mage class was way better than his basic Magician class. This would improve his Mage's prowess, it would be a great help during his current disguise.

After they arrived at Siren Hill, they didn't go up the hill, they turned North towards Harpy Valley. On the way, they passed through small rocky hills with several mining spots. Gremlin and Gnomes filled the place. Jack had bought a few pickaxes in the city shop for stocks after learning about their use, but he didn't mine any of the spots. His priority right now was to complete the hunting quests to impress the guild's upper echelons.

They completed their quota for Gremlin and Gnome before they arrived at the entrance of Harpy Valley. The valley was home to Green Harpy, Bald Eagle, and Giant Worm, which were the monsters in his hunting quests. They spent more time in the valley as most of the monsters were new types that they had never encountered before, including Jack.

The Harpy and Bald Eagle were especially troubling, as they were level 14 monsters and could fly. The melee Fighters and Rangers in their team lost their initiative in the fight, they needed to wait for the monsters to swoop down to attack before they could counter-attack. The star of the show in this valley were the three Magicians, but they had to be careful as the monsters could bypass the melee players and attacked them directly.

Flowerrain proved to be a decent player. He could see the sign when the Harpy and Eagle were about to make their attacks and moved away beforehand. But due to the monster's numbers, she still received damage from time to time. Luckily, Undo was not as useless as Jack afraid her to be, she did bring some Magic Stone to replenish her staff's ammo. But she did struggle more against the two types of avian monsters compared to Flowerrain.

Chapter 186: Unwilling To Admit Defeat

Jack couldn't keep on being passive anymore in this valley, it would take too long of time for them to complete the quests otherwise, not to mention the others were having trouble fending off these flying monsters. When Jack sent his attacks, the Green Harpy and Bald Eagle started to fall down in droves. These monsters were high level compared to the other field monsters they had encountered, but their

HP was low, probably compensating for their flying ability. Hence with Jack's high damage, it just took him a few hits to kill one harpy or eagle.

Jack could feel the respect in the glints of his team members' eyes, except Warpath. The guy still had the illusion that he was the main character. He kept on chasing after the Green Harpy, who flew low, bringing him away from the team. Suddenly another Green Harpy swoop in from behind. Its two large claws grabbed onto Warpath's shoulder.

Warpath tried to turn to strike at the harpy grabbing onto him, but the claws were like iron grip preventing him from moving his arms too much. He heard the flapping of wings and felt the rush of air around him. He soon felt his body became weightless as his feet separated from the ground below. He looked up and saw the Green Harpy, grinning savagely showing a row of yellow sharp teeth while lifting him up into the air.

The other harpy which he was chasing previously, clawed at his defenseless torso, enjoying her sweet revenge. Warpath could feel the pain as his HP ebbed away at the attacks. He screamed and struggled, but he could not escape from the grip, his body dangled helplessly in the air while the other harpies feast on him.

All his martial art skills were useless under his current sealed position. He was unwilling, he had worked himself hard to get back to level 12, even at the cost of spending half of his nights to continue on grinding for experience. Did he have to restart again?

A large blast sounded nearby him with an explosion of light, he then felt the claws holding him got loose. His heavy body fell to the ground below. The other harpies chased after him but he immediately rolled away once he touched the ground. He could see from the corner of his eyes, several balls of light went past him as he rolled and struck the harpies that chased after him.

He quickly determined the position of the team and run back to them while he took out a basic healing potion to drink.

When he arrived, Bangstick said to him, "you should thank the leader, his spell was the one that struck the harpy that was holding you."

Warpath looked at Jack instinctively, Jack took the opportunity to say sternly, "if you run off again like before, I will just let you die the next time."

As a matter of fact, Jack did indeed think of letting the guy die when he saw him dangling in the air among the harpies. Why must he save someone who obviously had a grudge against him? It would just be nurturing an enemy for the future. But if he lost a team member in this first mission, he was afraid that it might affect the guild's opinion of him. So, he reluctantly intervened.

After seeing what had happened to Warpath and witnessing Jack's damage power, the group was more vigilant and more obedient to Jack's orders. The four melee players stood around the three magic users in a circle, swinging their weapons at the harpies and eagles that flew near. With the close protection, the two magician girls had an easier time sending their range attacks.

Jack himself had no trouble dodging when the avian monsters swooped down, he even took the chance to knock the incoming eagle using his staff, causing it to fall to the ground. He then called Suckit over to finish the poor bird off.

"Why don't you pick someone your own size, fattie?" Bangstick teased.

"Why don't you just suck it!?" Suckit retorted.

"Cut the crap! Focus on the fight," Jack reprimanded. The guys could joke again meant they were feeling relax again, which was not necessarily a good thing. Overconfidence would cause them to make mistakes, thus Jack had to play the strict instructor role.

When they got deeper into the valley, another monster showed up, the Giant Worm. It burrowed inside the ground and only came out to attack when it was near. This monster was contrary to the flying harpy and eagle, which mostly required range attackers to deal. This burrowing monster instead was difficult to hit with range attacks.

They could see the ground bulged up as it moved closer to them, but when they shot the moving soil, it only broke up a little bit of the soil, the Giant Worm behind it didn't suffer any damage. They could only attack after it was close enough that it came out from the ground and revealed itself. At that time, the monster was already in melee range. Hence range attackers were instead having trouble dealing with this monster.

Because of the situation, Jack split them up. The two Fighters dealt with the Giant Worms while the Magicians dealt with any flyers that came by, with Bangstick keeping an eye to prevent any flying monster from snatching them. Suckit protected the two Magician girls while they continued to attack the flying monsters.

Jack moved freely as he attacked whatever that came near, he didn't have any trouble even when a Giant Worm burst out in front of him. He could knock the large worm around using his staff and shield before blasting it with his magical attacks.

Once they got used to the monsters' attack patterns, they could kill them more efficiently. Once they filled up the quota for the hunting quests, they went out of the valley from its East exit. They continued East until they came to a small rocky hill. The hill was home to Fire Jackals, another type of monster under Jack's hunting list. They were the highest level monster on his list, being level 15 and possessed fire element. Their clawing attacks could cause burning effect on the skin while they could also breathe out a small burst of fiery breath.

Two Fire Jackals were coming at them for trespassing into their territory. Jack asked the lot to stay back while he studied the jackal's attack patterns. The others followed Jack's instruction as they stood a distance away, except for Warpath.

He might be at a disadvantage against the flying enemy who could ambush suddenly from behind, but he was confident against this land-based enemy, even if it had a higher level than him. He engaged one of the Fire Jackals as Jack was tangling with the other.

Warpath used two swords on both hands. Because his off-hand weapon damage was minuscule, he mostly used his left-hand sword for defense. Even though it was more effective if he used a shield

instead of a sword, he still chose to use a sword, because dual-sword wielding had been his style since his past VR games.

He deftly evaded and parried the Fire Jackal's attack. Due to his low Dexterity attribute as he was only level 12, he was having difficulty dodging. He had to give his full concentration in order to predict the creature's movements and took the initiative to move first in order to have enough time to dodge the creature's attack.

He occasionally landed some attacks, but the damages were really low. The swords he wielded were only common swords, hence his damage was low. He not yet had the luck to acquire a better grade weapon, and Death Associates had not yet considered him as important enough despite his martial art expertise, hence they only gave him standard common equipment which they bought from city shops.

He suffered some hits from the deadly Jackal when he slacked off, and was in critical situations several times. He had drunk two basic healing potions in the process. He only had one more bottle left in his stock.

He had blisters all over his skin, some part of his body was even still burning from the jackal's attack. He yelled in frustration, but he refused to give up, his pride wouldn't allow it. Such a weak monster was nothing if he had good enough equipment. He persevered and continued to battle the Fire Jackal.

After another intense minute, he finally managed to take down the monster. When the monster fell, he heard cheering from behind. He turned back and saw Jack with the others were looking at him while clapping their hands. The bastard had finished his fight a while ago and was just watching him all the while with the others!

Chapter 187: Efficient Hunting Route

Warpath sat on a rock panting, while his HP was still decreasing due to the burning effect. He realized the reduced health and hurriedly take out his last basic healing potion to drink. The burning effect disappeared after a while.

The others had come over. "Is that your last potion?" Jack asked.

Warpath nodded silently with a gloomy expression.

"Do you want to buy mine? 1 silver for one bottle," Jack offered. He took out a bottle for show.

Motherf**ker! Warpath cursed in his mind. Wasn't he supposed to take care of his teammates by giving the potion for free? And why was it 1 silver? It was only 60 copper if he bought it at the shop!

Warpath gritted his teeth. He could let his Natural Recovery Body recover his HP for now, but later if there was an intense fight again, he would be a goner if he did not have a healing potion. He took out 1 silver coin and reluctantly handed it over.

Jack grinned widely as he made the trade. It's his own fault, why tried to show off? He clearly had asked him to stay back with the others.

They then continued to look for more Fire Jackals. Now that the others had seen how the monsters fought, they won't be in a quandary anymore when they fought one. Soon another two Fire Jackals showed up.

"Okay, Dasher, you engaged it. Focus on defense, use your shield to block, especially when it about to use its fiery breath. Don't bother to attack. Bangstick, circled around while Dasher engaged, attack only when you are sure. If it comes after you, retreat and let Dasher took back his aggro again. Undo, you backed them up by attacking from distance. Suckit and Flowerrain, on me, I will engage the other one and you two support me. And you..." Jack looked at Warpath. "Do whatever you want."

Warpath was forlorn, this team leader obviously had something against him. Was it because of his disrespectful remark before they departed? Never mind, he just needed to work back on his level and found better equipment, soon people would respect him again! For now, he needed to endure.

Since he disliked the team leader, he went and assisted Dasher. The two Fire Jackals were soon dispatched. Another pack came with three jackals. After they had the experience of fighting the jackals, combine with their teamwork, the fight became easier.

Warpath gained a level after the fight and became level 13. Jack also finally received enough proficiency after using his Mana Bullet skill many times, it increased its grade by 1 star. Jack checked the description, this 1 star increased the Mana Bullet range by an additional 1 meter.

After completing the hunting quest for Fire Jackal, the team went back South towards the capital. They passed through the area roamed by Lizardmen, which was also amongst the monster in Jack's hunting quest. After that, they went past small woods that had Grey Sabrecat, which was the last hunting quest to be completed. After their experience in working together against the Fire Jackal, fighting against the Lizardmen and Grey Sabrecat were much more relaxing. Undo also increased a level to level 14.

After all the hunting quests were done, Jack led them further South. When they were at the edge of the woods, Jack noticed a group of blue dots in the vicinity, Jack looked in that direction. He saw two players looking at them, but they just stood there. They did not seem to be hunting, it's more like they were waiting. Jack continued watching them, and they looked back. But since they didn't do anything provoking, Jack ignored them.

Coming out of the woods, the capital was already in view. One huge round trip, a very efficient route for the hunting quests, without wasting any detours. All thanks to Peniel for planning this route. This route took them six hours to complete, the sun was high in the sky when they entered the gate. Jack asked them to take a short rest and replenished their supply before heading back to the West gate, while he went to the Hunters Association to submit the quests and trophy items.

Before he left, Undo came to him and reminded him about the portion for the guild. She had taken into account all the loots and quests they had completed. It seemed that Undo was someone Bigarm had arranged in his team to make sure that Jack did not cheat on the coins. Jack didn't feel offended, it was sensible for him to not be trusted yet. He assured her that he would deliver the coins as in agreement.

While for the dropped coins that he had gotten from the monsters they killed, as agreed all the drops were his. But still, he shared them with the team. They had gotten 12 silver and 74 copper coins from the drops, Jack divided them equally and gave them each 1 silver and 82 copper coins.

He then went to the Hunters Association to submit the quests. He changed back to Storm Wind first before he entered. He didn't see any players on his visit, considering how the advanced class was still rare at the moment. He went to the Bronze Hall and submitted all the ten completed quests. He received 20 silver coins, 4300 experience points, and 67 hunter points. He set aside 8 silver coins for the guild. He then handed over the trophy loots, he received 2 gold coins and 35 silver coins from it, more than his previous time. He set aside 94 silver coins, so that made it 1 gold and 2 silver coins for the guild.

Although he could go to the Silver Hall, he didn't take any of the Silver Hall quests yet as the monsters in the silver list were much stronger and their locations were also much further from the capital. He did not have the time to do long travel for now, so he took the exact same quests again.

After he came out, he found a secluded place and changed back to Unrivalled Arcaner, then headed to the West gate. The others were already there when he arrived. He showed the coins that he would give to the guild to Undo, but he did not hand them to her. He would like to hand the coins himself.

"Let's go," Jack told them.

"Where to?" Suckit asked.

"Same quests again," Jack answered. "We are going to go through the same route and kill the same monsters again."

They looked at each other, "again?" They said at the same time.

"Yes, again. Do you guys have a problem with that? As I remember, the guild assigned you all to me for the whole day. Are you requesting to quit already?"

"No, no problem," Bangstick said. "Come on, you lot. Look alive!"

Suckit reluctantly dragged his large body forward. Jack ignored their somber look and urged them to go faster, "come on! since you are familiar with the route already, we should be able to complete it faster this time."

Unlike before, he went all out from the start, allowing them to kill the monsters faster. Their overall efficiency also improved as they already knew what to expect and do on this second trip. In the end, they completed the route much faster than before. They were back in the capital again after only four hours.

While on the way back, Jack noticed the same group again at the edge of the woods. What the hell were they waiting for? He wondered. But as before, they were just looking at him, so he also ignored them.

Jack looked at the time, it was maybe two hours more before the sky turned dark, but it didn't mean they could not do battle in the dark. So he decided to go again for the third trip. The others were scared by his demand, but they couldn't disagree, or else they had to answer to the guild.

And it's not like they did not get benefit from the trips, Bangstick and Dasher had also increased to level 15. Also, they would all be granted guild contribution points based on the number of coins they produced in these trips, so one more trip would mean more contribution points.

Same as before, after Jack divided the coins from monster drops. They then went to resupply as Jack went to submit the quests at the Hunters Association. Jack got the same coins, experience, and hunter

points as they were the same quests, but for the trophy items, he got more this time as the monsters dropped more trophy loots. He received 2 gold and 95 silver coins. Together with coins from quest rewards, he put aside another 1 gold and 26 silver coins for the guild.

When he was about to pick up the same hunting quests again, he asked Peniel, "is there any stronger monster with better reward along the route we have been using?"

Chapter 188: Small Rock Golem

"There is one, it is at the top of the rocky hill where you fought the Fire Jackals. But you will need to pick up the quest in the Silver Hall," Peniel answered.

"How strong is the monster?"

"It should be around level 16 or 17."

"It is just a basic monster, right."

"For a low-level hunting quest, naturally."

Jack pondered about it, if he fought as a Warrior, it should be no problem for him, but as a Mage, he was not sure. Not to mention the others might be in danger of going against the monster. After some thought, he decided to try it. It's boring to repeat the same fight again and again, let's give the team something more exhilarating, Jack thought with a mischievous grin.

After taking nine hunting quests in the Bronze Hall, Jack went to the Silver Hall. It was basically the same as the Bronze hall, except the board contained a different quest list. The quest in this hall had difficulty from C to B. The quest with the lowest hunter point was 15 points, while the highest he saw with difficulty B provided up to 99 hunter points.

"There it is," Peniel flew up to the board and pointed the list for him. There was not yet any player that had amassed enough points to get to Silver Hall, so she was free to appear here.

Kill 1 Small Rock Golem

Difficulty: C

Rewards: 16 silver coins, 1000 Experience points, 25 Hunter Points

"I only need to kill one?" Jack said after reading the description.

"You should be more worried if you are only asked to kill one," Peniel said. "That means it's going to be a tougher opponent compare to those that ask you to kill many."

"All right, I'll go for it. I need to see more varieties of this world. I'm going to go out on a journey to a further place one of these days, so it's better to see as much as I can before that. If anything goes wrong, I can always just sacrifice those poor sods."

"I think you have embodied too much of that bad-mannered arrogant persona you used for your disguise."

Jack went and took the quest. He then went back to the West gate. This time they were short one person, Suckit. Jack frowned after seeing it, did he bail?

He sent a message into the Party chat, Suckit was still registered as a party member. "Suckit, where the f**k are you?!"

He received a message soon. "I... I am sorry, chief! I am really tired, I've never worked for so long before in my life. I need to rest, can you leave me out of it this time? Please?"

"If I don't see your fat ass in five minutes' time from now at the West gate. You better quit Death Associates. Or else, I will ask for you and I'm gonna flay you alive for as long as possible, and then send you to reset all your levels and equipment. I dare you to test me!"

The others that were around were stunned by the message. They kept their silence. Some of them were actually interested to see if their leader was okay with Suckit bailing. If he was, they were going to find some reasons on the spot to bail out as well. But they did not expect the guy to be so ruthless. Now they were relieved they didn't do like Suckit.

There was no reply from Suckit after Jack's message. Jack didn't send any more messages as well. He just stood there waiting calmly. Before five minutes passed, they saw a fat man came running at full speed towards them. Suckit arrived and was panting heavily.

"Okay, let's go," Jack said.

"C—come on! Give me a minute to rest, will you?" Suckit uttered.

They repeated the route that they had gone through two times before. By the time the sun was setting, they were at the Harpy Valley, in the middle of battling the Green Harpy, Bald Eagle, and Giant Worm. When they came out of the valley, the sky was dark already.

There were stars in the sky, but unlike when he was decimating the Lizardman Settlement, the moon was not full anymore, so it was not as bright as that night. The moon was a little bit more than half tonight, although it was not as bright, visibility was not too bad either.

However, for Jack, he could see as clearly as during daylight. It was the passive ability of his Dragon's Eye skill. There was no need for him to bring a torch any longer. For others, some of them still prefer to use torches at night. Undo, Suckit, and Flowerrain took out torches and equipped them on their off-hands.

They arrived at the rocky hill. Eager to finish the trip as soon as possible, they went and battled the Fire Jackals fiercely. Utilizing the same tactic and formation, it didn't take long for them to kill thirty Fire Jackals to complete the quest. When they were about to head down after fulfilling the quota, Jack told them to go up instead.

"Huh? What for?" Bangstick asked.

"We have one different hunting quest this time. The prey was up there at the top of this hill," Jack informed them.

"You are kidding, right, chief?" Suckit said with an aggrieved expression.

"Nope," Jack replied with indifference. "Now move your butt up."

Reluctantly, they all followed. Every one of them was now cursing inside their mind. What had they done to deserve being paired with such a demanding leader?

To save time, Jack took advantage of his radar to avoid the Fire Jackals as they moved up the hill. His team members were actually wondering how come they kept stumbling on the Fire Jackals when they were roaming around the foothill, yet they did not meet even one when they were on their way up.

When they were near the top, Jack noticed on his radar that the red dots were getting scarce. In fact, the area within the radius of 100 meters around the top was completely devoid except for one sole dot. Jack figured that one sole dot should be the mark they were looking for.

When he got nearer to the red dot, he still did not see any monsters. There were only rocks and boulders scattered around. Where was the golem? He wondered.

"What are we looking for here?" Undo asked.

"My hunting quest objective, it should be around here," Jack answered.

"We are wasting time here," Warpath complained with discontent.

"You do what I tell you to do," Jack said sternly. "Now stay alert. Ready your weapons."

The others heard the warning but did not really put it to heart. There was no living thing around that could be seen. They all agreed with Warpath that they were only wasting time here. They were eager to go back to the city and back to the inn they had rent to rest their weary bodies after a full day of walking and fighting.

Jack readied his magic staff and round shield as he continued to approach the red dot. Despite there were times when he had doubted the radar, it had always proved true in the end. So it must be the same this time, there was a hostile being a few meters ahead of him, even though he still could not see one.

Was it hiding behind that large boulder? Jack wondered. He took a roundabout way to maintain distance while searching for an angle to look behind the boulder. He would not want to get jumped by the monster when he got too near. But when he got to an angle that made the back of the boulder visible, he still could not see any creature.

He made a quick circle all around the boulder. Was the monster playing hide and seek? Where it continued to move opposite from his direction so he could not see it when he was circling the boulder? But he didn't believe there was such a playful monster. Furthermore, Warpath and the others were not moving from their original place, so they should see the creature if it really did play hide and seek with him.

He was confused now, did the God-eye monocle finally broke this time? He walked forward and approached the boulder. The red dot was directly in front of him now, but he still saw no creature anywhere. Even if it was invisible, it should have attacked him at this range already, it was a hostile red dot after all, but he saw no movement.

He looked back at the lot waiting some distance away. They had the expression that said 'are you done messing around already?'

Chapter 189: Battling The Small Rock Golem

It would be totally uncool if he went back and told them to go back down and return to their previous route after forcing them all the way up here, he felt awkward now. He leaned onto the boulder and asked in his mind, 'Hey, Peniel, is that rock golem really is here? Why I didn't see any?'

"Of course you see it," Peniel replied. "You are leaning on it."

Leaning? While he was wondering about it, he felt a tremor from his back and feet. Coming to a realization, he immediately dashed away. He turned back and saw the boulder he was leaning on previously broken apart.

The round boulder now stood up as it formed four thick limbs around its central part. Above its central part was a piece of large rock as big as Suckit's plump belly. At the center of the rock was a small hole that emitted eerie red light, which made the whole construct looked like a one-eyed humanoid rock monster. When it stood upright, the thing was more than three meters tall.

Once the boulder transformed, his God-eye monocle started to pick up its existence and marked it with a red denominator. Oh, now only you showed me? Jack complained in his mind. He then inspected the rocky monstrosity.

Small Rock Golem (Elite monster, Elemental)

Level: 18

HP: 3,800

This what you called small? Jack wanted to scream out. He had the urge to have a talk with the developer that gave the name to this monster, if there was such thing as a developer in this world.

And what was it about it being a level 16 or 17 basic monster? He immediately demanded an explanation from Peniel, in which she casually replied, "It's a monster, it's not like they stay the same level and grade all the time, some can evolve to a stronger version. Just consider it as bad luck for encountering such one."

Jack was speechless by her offhand reply, but he had no time to argue with her. The Small Rock Golem was looking straight at him and started to move towards him already.

Jack calmed himself down, it was not like he had never fought against an elite monster with a higher level than him before. Moreover, this was just an elite monster, not an elite boss. It's the same situation as when he fought an elite monster for the first time, the Skeleton Captain. He also had a lower level than the monster at the time, and he still came out victorious.

Except at the time he was free to employ both his classes' skills. This time he was only allowed to use Mage's skills, unless of course if he was willing to reveal his secrets. But then again, unlike last time, this time he was not alone. He could take advantage of their bigger number.

"Hey, you lot! Come over here and give me a hand!" He shouted to the group behind him.

"Are you kidding, chief? That's a level 18 elite!" Suckit protested.

Jack was amazed, one of them must have a very high Inspect skill to be able to scan the monster.

"Just take it as the final boss for our jobs today," Jack said. "Don't you play games before? Where is the thrill if there is no boss after the end of a quest?"

"I would prefer not to deal with a boss."

"Get your asses here, right now!" Jack was done talking with them. The golem was slow, but every step of its caused the ground to shake, it easy to judge its raw power from there, and it had arrived in front of Jack.

It lifted one of its thick arms up, and slammed it down towards Jack's head. If Jack was any other regular magic user, he would have difficulty dealing with the golem in close range, but he was half Warrior, hence his speed was not lacking. He rolled sideways and easily evaded the slam. The ground shook as cobwebs of cracks spread out from the center of the impact. Jack almost lost his balance from the shaking.

The others who were making their way forwards also halted their advance after seeing how hard the golem punched. Except for Warpath, the fellow continued to advance. For once, Jack was grateful for the fellow's pride and stubbornness.

Warpath ran to the golem's rear as it was still after Jack. Jack didn't mind being the bait. He kept the golem at arm's length, dodging left and right as Warpath sneaked behind it. He then slashed forward with a Power Strike, his sword crashed heavily with the sturdy skin of the golem. A hard impact sound could be heard. And a damage number of 8 appeared above its head.

What the...!

Every one of them was stunned by the damage number. So low! They clearly see the shining light enveloping the sword before the impact, it indicated that Warpath had used the Power Strike skill. Even though his sword was just common grade, 8 points of damage were still too low after using the skill.

The golem turned around after feeling the strike. It looked down at Warpath. He could faintly feel the disdain from the red light out of the monster's one eye. It swung its arm forward. Luckily, Warpath was not a simple expert. He moved back reflexively after predicting the monster would attack, yet he could still feel the strength of the wind from the swing. If it hit his body, he would most probably be half-dead already. He kept on stepping back as the golem chased after him.

Jack had a brief wicked thought of letting Warpath poked at the golem alone to study its pattern, but the thought soon passed. The guy was brave enough to come to his aid while the others froze on their feet, he should not leave him to fend the monster alone. He cast Mana Bullet at the monster's back.

The magical ball slammed onto the monster's back with resulting damage of 143.

"What..?"

"Huh?"

The others watching were flabbergasted by the hit. They had known that Jack's damage was much higher than them, but it was not that contrast. Jack was also astonished by the damage, but he didn't stop. He followed up with standard range attacks as the golem turned around and chased him angrily.

51 damage.

55 damage.

"It was weak against magic attacks!" Flowerrain exclaimed, he then threw his own Mana Bullet at the monster. Since the golem was slow and its body was big, it was not difficult for her to score a hit.

A 59 damage was seen after Flowerrain's Mana Bullet hit the golem. Her hypothesis was correct, but somehow she didn't feel great after seeing the damage. Why was her Mana Bullet only slightly stronger than Jack's normal attack?

"Oh, really?" Bangstick was unconvinced. He used Weapon Throw and sent his dagger onto the golem.

1 damage.

"Physical class stands aside!" Undo uttered disdainfully and joined Flowerrain at shooting at the golem.

The golem was still chasing at Jack, his attacks had caused the highest damage. Its aggro was entirely on him without bordering about the others. Jack ran around in a circle while kiting it, sending a few shots once in a while. It was easy to do as the golem was slow and he was fast, unlike typical Mage.

The battle suddenly became as easy as pie. The monster was obviously being catered for magic class, but a normal magic class would be having trouble against it. Although the golem was slow, a typical magic class was slower. So the golem would catch up to them sooner or later, they would need protection from melee classes in order to survive.

No one had seen the damage by this golem, but from the force of the impact they felt, it was not something that they could walk away from safely. Therefore, any melee class protecting the magic class would be at great risk. And they could not use Rangers to distract, as the golem would just ignore them entirely because it would chase after the one that dealt the highest damage on it, the magic class.

Jack's existence had caused this monster, which was designed to give a huge headache to the party that unluckily stumbled upon it, into a joke. He dealt the highest damage that forced it to chase after him, and could still run around as fast as a ranger keeping the golem at a distance.

Warpath, Dasher, Bangstick, and Suckit just stood aside watching the golem play tag with Jack, while Flowerrain and Undo added some extra damage once in a while.

"How about we go down first? It's not like we are needed here," Suckit said.

"You want the leader to flay you alive?" Bangstick reminded him.

Chapter 190: Spirit Of A Hero

They were leisurely chatting while the golem continued to lose HP. Suddenly they were startled by a loud roar, they looked at the golem and found that its body had turned hot red.

A shockwave exploded from the golem at its center, they were pushed back one step due to the shockwave. Then they saw the golem springing away like a bullet, they saw the fast-shooting golem

collided with Jack, who then flew away like a kite losing its string. They still stood stiffly when the red golem turned around and looked at them with its menacing single glowing red eye.

The shock in Jack's heart did not diminish while he was flying away in the air. The golem had abruptly turned red after it lost half its HP. The shockwave that was created when it turned, knocked him back and stunned his movement for a second. It then suddenly shot towards him with crazy speed.

If he did not manage to summon up his Magic Shield to defend, he would lose more than a quarter of its HP which he had lost in the impact. His HP was a whopping 750 now, a quarter of his was around two-third of a regular level 16 Mage. Any other Mage would be in critical condition now. And if they didn't manage to summon their Magic Shield, they would be outright killed!

Since they were on a slope, when he was knocked flying, it took him quite a while before he landed back on the ground. He could see the golem turned towards the remainder of his team while he was still falling down.

Suckit and Bangstick were panicking once they saw the golem coming over, but they soon realized the golem was not after them. It was after the two magicians who had been harassing it while it was chasing that previous annoying mage around.

Suckit and Bangstick were stuck at their place, but Warpath and Dasher took action and stood in front of the two magicians. True to their Fighter class, they did not waver despite the imposing presence of the large golem.

"Go back!" Dasher told Flowerrain and Undo.

Flowerrain had run away right when Dasher warned them, Undo was slower in response due to being overwhelmed by fear. Warpath didn't show any consideration when he kicked at her to make her move.

The red rock golem had arrived at their front. It swung its arm horizontally. Warpath jumped back while Dasher used his shield to block. Dasher soon realized it was a wrong attempt, he was knocked flying and lost half of his life in just that one hit. Warpath was greatly alarmed. If one hit blocked by shield could knock out half of a level 15 Fighter's HP, it would most certainly kill him if he was knocked by one clean hit.

He was an experienced VR game player, he had been in such dangerous situation before, so he tried his best to remain calm. He jumped left and right as he dodged the golem's punches. Its turning red had increased its power and speed but he could still cope with it as long as he focused on evasion. As long as it didn't make a rocket shot with its body like it did when it sent their leader flying, he should still be able to manage.

As he continued evading, he couldn't help but thought the probability of dying again. After he died and experienced the complete loss of all that he had before, it was an extremely depressing condition. Although he technically didn't have any valuable equipment on him at the moment, he still definitely would not want to experience it again. He yelled loudly as he focused his mind to continue dodging.

The golem was originally targeting the two magicians, but this Fighter was like an annoying fly, kept on buzzing around. It would not be satisfied if it did not squash it to a paste.

"What the hell are the two of you doing?" Undo snapped at Bangstick and Suckit who were still frozen stiff. "Why don't you go lend a hand?"

"What's the point? We can't damage it, we will just get ourselves killed if we go over there," Bangstick argued.

"You two are hopeless!" Undo hissed.

"Let's go back, it's suicide to stay here," Suckit said.

"What about our leader?" Flowerrain asked.

"What about him? He probably has already suck it!" Suckit uttered.

"I suck your sister!" Suckit heard a voice and felt a kick that jolted him forward. The others turned around and saw Jack was safe and sound.

"Alright, you two, resume your attacks!" He said to Flowerrain and Undo. "The others, move aside."

Jack cast Energy Bolts, Flowerrain and Undo followed suit and cast their Energy Bolts as well. Numerous magical bolts rushed forward as Jack chased from behind. All the bolts stabbed at the hard body of the golem, taking a huge chunk of its life. It stopped its advance and turned to the source of its attacker. Warpath quickly put a distance during the respite.

When the golem saw Jack, it uttered an enraged bellow. It's the detestable mage again! It completely ignored Warpath. It advanced at Jack with large and heavy stompings. Jack ran sideways, circling the golem, putting it in between him and the two girl magicians, trying to repeat the previous kiting strategy. But the golem seemed to have gotten smarter, it knew it couldn't chase after Jack, so it changed direction and headed to the two girls.

The two girls were wide eyes. Why were they being targeted while Jack's damage was higher? They immediately turned and ran away.

But their speed was slow, they couldn't be able to overrun it. Warpath didn't want to bother to be a hero anymore, he was still catching his breath. Dasher was the same, the shock of having his life being cut to half despite blocking the attack still haunted him. Bangstick and Suckit were worse, they had run further away happily when Jack told them to move aside.

"Hey, blockhead!" Jack yelled as he chased after the golem frantically. He fired a few attacks as he ran.

The golem suddenly stopped and bent down. It picked up a large rock and lifted it up high. It then tossed it away at the running girls.

"Look out!" Dasher called out.

Flowerrain glanced back due to the shout and was terrified by the sight of the large rock encroaching. She pushed at Undo before lunging to the side. The rock missed them barely, and landed on the ground next to them. The outburst of the impact threw them away as the rock broke and its shrapnels fired at them. It caused them damages, but luckily the damage was not fatal.

Their relief of not being crushed to death by the rock was soon squandered by the loud stomping and the tremor they felt on the ground. The golem had resumed advancing onto them. They hurried to pick themselves up but the golem was almost onto them. When they were feeling despair, Someone came between them and the golem.

Dasher had always been interested in Flowerrain, but he didn't have the courage to express his feeling. The first time he had come to protect her from the golem was not because he was brave, he just wanted to prove to her that he could protect her. Even though he was still fearful of the golem's power after tasting it once, he forced his fear aside to allow himself to stand before her again, so he could protect her.

"Go back!" He said to her as he did before.

The towering golem had approached. Dasher screamed at it aloud to dispel the terror in his heart, and placed his shield before him. He would stand his ground! The golem sent a straight punch. It crashed heavily onto his shield. His body bent backward and he shot away at high speed.

"Good job, hero!" Jack yelled at him as he flew away. Although it was just a moment, the kid had halted the golem's advance. Jack came beside it and cast Mana Bullet at its large rocky head. The attack clearly enraged it as it turned around and slammed both its arms down at Jack, who deftly stepped aside from the point of impact.

He didn't use the kiting strategy anymore. He kept the golem at an arm's length, tempting it to continue throwing punches at him. He danced around the golem as he dodged its punch while occasionally sending magic attacks at it from point-blank range. It was riskier to fight this way, but this way forced the monster to focus its attention on him.

When the monster's HP was getting lower, it suddenly hunkered down.

Uh-oh, it's going to do that rocket spring attack again, Jack exclaimed in his mind when he saw the golem's action.