

World 221

Chapter 221: Shackle Of Vows

"That's pretty cruel of you," John said. "But smart. You know this is going to come back and bite your ass so you cut them loose. But don't think for a second that we believe that you have nothing to do with those robberies. Those acts were too organized for thugs' works. Only a guild the level of yours could pull it off."

"I would warn you to not slender us any longer," Manager Steelhand was no longer feigning his anger. "I've held back out of respect as we have invited your guild, but don't think for a second that I will let you off if you continue to disturb this meeting!"

"So, are you saying that I'm no longer welcomed here?" John asked, he was still wearing his smug expression.

Queen Magenta took the chance to hiss out, "Of course you are no longer welcomed here! If you still don't leave within five minutes, don't blame us for being discourteous."

Scarface didn't say anything, but his face clearly showed that he was in agreement with the statement. Manager Steelhand who had been playing the good-cop part since the start, no longer try to mediate. He was even regretful that he did not chase away John from the start.

John shrugged and picked up the recording stone, "all right, I'm leaving."

"Put that stone down!" Manager Steelhand told him.

"Oh? Do you want to erase this evidence of your guild's treachery?" John asked.

"That matter had nothing to do with us!" Manager Steelhand bellowed.

"Then this stone has nothing to do with you. Why should I give it to you? It is mine, so it is my right to take it away."

"It can cause misunderstanding and ruin our reputation!"

"So you want to take it away from me? Like a robber?"

Manager Steelhand's hands were trembling. He tried his best to hold back the urge to pounce at this detestable man.

John turned around since Manager Steelhand was not saying anything. "Any of you is welcomed to stay here. I bet we will soon see the rise of an alliance of thugs and bullies. I for one want nothing to do with it."

He went to the team he had come with, "let's go!" He said.

They stood up and went away with John. The players who guarded the entrance looked at their superiors, trying to see if they gave a signal to block these people, but their leaders were silent.

Another group stood up. It was Saint Edge people led by William of Wellington. He gestured to Manager Steelhand and the others and said, "Please excuse me, I will leave as well."

Kill Order also left with the rest of Black Cloak's members. He didn't even bother to address Manager Steelhand and the others before leaving. He simply walked away from the venues.

Several guilds started to leave as well under the leads of the two largest guilds amongst the audiences. Some opted to stay. Weary Wolf and Warriors of Solidarity were amongst those that stayed.

"Let them leave, they are just wimps who are not destined to be rulers," The Real Man said.

Scarface stood beside Manager Steelhand, "we have always expected there to be some that are unwilling to join, but this was much more than expected."

"Yes... that prick had truly ruined our plan," Manager Steelhand grumbled. "Who is he anyway? Saint John... I know some influential players from Handy Craftsmen, but I've never heard of him."

"Nor do I. Are you letting him go?"

Manager Steelhand had a steely tone when he said, "what do you think? We have prepared some strike teams for this scenario, it is just larger than we initially thought. I'm going to prep the team. You and Queen Magenta should mobilize yours as well."

"Agreed," Scarface replied.

Jack clicked his tongue seeing the outcome, almost half of the participants had left. The result was even better than his expectation.

"What's going on?" He heard Earmouth's voice from behind. The guy had just returned. "I saw many people leaving."

Jack told him of the events that had just transpired. Earmouth stomped his feet and cursed out loud. He was just about to say something when his expression showed as if he had just been distracted by something. He had a blank face for a while before saying, "I have to go," and left to the back of the central courtyard where the three organizing guilds were at. Jack wondered what that was all about.

Manager Steelhand was still at the center of the courtyard. After he saw that no one else was leaving, he proclaimed, "I assumed those that are still here had already made up your minds to join our alliance? For the next phase, we will reveal something which was our three guilds' secret. Only those that agreed to join our alliance would be privy to it."

Guild's secret? Jack was intrigued. They had kept the best for last. Maybe John shouldn't have left so soon.

Manager steelhand took out a device with a strange shape. It had jagged claws on its edges with a weird-looking dark blue orb at the center. There was a thin mist that constantly swirling around it.

"This is a Unique Artifact!" Manager Steelhand told the others.

Everyone gasped. They knew about the rarity grade of items, and Unique was just one step away from the best grade of Legendary. Not many knew the term Artifact, but those that knew were even more

amazed that Corporate United had got their hands on one such item. An Artifact was a one-of-a-kind tool in this world.

Jack had several Unique Artifact with him, but that was also the reason he was worried. He knew from experience how a Unique Artifact could be a gamechanger.

After everyone quieted down, Manager Steelhand described the tool in his hand, "Our guild was lucky enough to get our hands on this item when we were exploring another ruin nearby here. This artifact was called Shackle of Vows. It might be a unique item, but it gave no boost in combat ability. However, its function was rather special. It can bind the promises between two parties. Each party will state his or her promises and conditions. If one party broke the promise, a curse will fell on the person. We have never seen the effect of the curse yet, but its description said that the curse is very severe and can potentially lead to death. And the death penalty is the one when you died in the wilderness. Even if you try to hide in a city when the curse takes effect, you will still suffer the same penalty."

Jack was astounded, that was the perfect tool for secrecy. It held no benefit if he got the item, but for guilds that mostly valued secrecy, this was a heaven-sent tool. Jack could roughly guess in which direction this conversation was going.

As expected, Manager Steelhand told the remaining audiences that in order to join the last phase of this meeting and join their alliance, everyone had to make a vow using this artifact. Where they will promise secrecy on what they heard and witness during the rest of this meeting.

Jack wondered if this would include him as well. He thought about what he should do if he was asked to take a vow. After thinking for a while, he realized that he had a way to circumvent the artifact. He might not be able to tell others about it, but that didn't prevent him from recording the event in the meeting and then probably accidentally drop the recording stone in some people's laps.

That wouldn't be considered as he was the one that spilled it, right? He was laughing in his mind. It was lucky that he had bought three recording stones. He had given one to John. Another one he had used to record the meeting before this. He could use the last one to record the remaining meeting.

He was still laughing in his mind when he suddenly received a guild message. He checked the message and saw it was from Earmouth. Strangely the message asked him to go to the outer edge of this ruin. What was he being called over there for when the next part of the meeting was just about to start?

He asked Peniel, "can I leave the Recording Stone here to record the event?"

Peniel replied promptly, "nope. The stone could only record the things in your vicinity, and has to be in your possession when being activated."

Too bad, Jack thought. He reluctantly left the premises. Before he left, he glanced at Warpath who was still standing there. "You didn't receive any message?" Jack asked him.

"What message?" He asked back in puzzlement.

"Never mind," Jack said and left.

Chapter 222: Joining The Pursuit Party

When he arrived at the rendezvous point given by Earmouth, he was surprised to find a large group of players was already on standby there. There were probably more than one hundred players. There were still several groups at a distance from his place.

He was with the largest group, the others were only around twenty to thirty people. He scanned the groups and found out that they were from the collection of the three organizing guilds. He didn't expect the three guilds to have prepared so much manpower in the vicinity. They were certainly not visible when they first arrived at this ruin.

As he joined the largest group, those smaller ones started to depart. Each group went in a different direction. Jack wondered what this was all about. He was eager to find out about the content in the last part of the meeting, are they sending him out at this time?

The group was mostly consisted of basic classes with level 16 and 17, with a few level 15. They could be considered as the upper mainstream players. No wonder Warpath who was still at level 14 was not called here. There were two level 17 advanced class players apart from himself, a female rogue from Wicked Witches and a warrior from Corporate United.

He saw Earmouth amongst the group. He seemed to be one of the leaders of this group. "Okay, everyone is here now," he heard Earmouth said after noticing him. Jack had the feeling that Earmouth had intentionally removed him from the meeting, was he really suspicious of him?

This largest group was further split up into three teams, based on guild affiliation. Jack obviously joined the team filled with Death Associates members led by Earmouth. Earmouth then explained to them they would be going on a hunt. To chase the guild members that had left the meeting. Those scums had rejected their guilds' kind invitations and thus deserved to be punished.

Jack was amazed by this cult's reasoning, so people reject you and now you are gunning for them? Well, guilds were sort of the mafias of the game world, so it still made sense if they acted the way they did.

Jack took the chance to ask, "I see that our group has the largest number, are we targeting Black Cloak and Saint Edge?"

Earmouth replied, "no, those two are off-limits. Top brass wouldn't want a conflict with them, yet."

Jack then asked again which guild they would be chasing after. Earmouth only grinned and replied, "the one that deserved it the most."

Jack had no doubt as to which guild he was referring to. He had a struggle whether to inform John or not, that a group of players was coming after him. But he had a feeling that Earmouth was suspicious of him. If they failed to catch John's group, Earmouth might suspect someone from the team was leaking information. He had no doubt that he would be the prime suspect.

His initial purpose of infiltrating Death Associates guild was to check on this meeting that they had arranged, so if following his initial plan, it should not be a big deal if he fell out with them now. However, he thought there might be a time in the future when he needed to approach this guild again to get insider information. Just like how he had learned that Death Associates had a high-profile spy within White Scarfs.

There was also the matter in which Corporate United had bothered to use a unique artifact to keep a secret of. He would need to stay as a Death Associates member if he wanted to learn of it. He looked back helplessly as they started to leave. He was curious about what the three guilds were up to with the remainder of the meeting, but there was nothing he could do.

On their way, he continued to struggle. Should he message John? Or should he not? He was not really that close with the guy. They only had a quest together once, one that he had been coerced to, even. Apart from that, they didn't really have any interaction until today when he saw the guy in the meeting. But Jack still considered him as a friend, so wasn't it the right thing to do to warn him of this attack?

He was struggling with the dilemma until Earmouth told them to pick up the pace. The scout that had moved before them informed that John's group had taken a rest at a nearby rock basin. It was a perfect chance for them to catch up to them and caught them unguarded.

Jack decided to throw away caution. So what if he got find out, it just meant that he lost the chance to spy on Death Associates. But if John got killed in the wilderness, he would lose everything. He couldn't let that be in his conscience, not if there's anything he could do about it. He sent a chat message to John using Storm Wind's account telling him that an attack was coming.

He received a reply soon after. When he opened it, he was dumbfounded by its content. I was a simple two words.

"I know."

Jack was still mulling over the message when he got another message from John.

"It was easy to guess their intentions. Considering their egos, it will be weird instead if they don't send retaliation. What I don't know though, is how you also know about this. Don't tell me you are with the attacking party that is on their way here?"

Jack was impressed by the guy's intuition, but he was not going to admit it. He replied, "I have my way of knowing. Why aren't you guys running? The scout said that you are resting in a nearby rock basin. They will catch up with you if you are not moving."

"Because we are preparing an ambush here," John replied soon.

"An ambush? There are maybe a hundred people here!" Jack told him.

"I've expected as much, so will you lend us a hand then?" He read John's reply.

Jack felt pointless to have sent him a warning. The guy had figured out everything. He sent a message, "I might not be able to. I still think you should just run. I wish you good luck."

John replied, "I know you will not let us down, friend. We thank you beforehand for your assist. Let us crush them together!"

The crap! Jack cursed in his mind. Did the guy even read his message?

They were coming up to the rock basin soon. Earmouth informed that it was after the hill in front. They could see several rock formations behind the hill. The basin was at the center of the formation with the largest space. But to its left and right were several small alleyways formed by natural rock barriers.

When they reached the hill and looked over, the rock formations looked like a naturally occurred maze. It was easy to lose your way around the place. Jack understood now why John chose this place for an ambush. Did he had planned this out before coming to the meeting? He couldn't help but wonder.

Earmouth urged them onwards, eager to get himself on the hateful prick who had ruined their guild's plan.

If they ended up clashing with John's people, what should he do? Jack was reminded of the situation. He could not just be a bystander. Earmouth and the others would question him. But he also didn't want to attack John's team. Could he just feign failed attacks? He doubted that Earmouth and the others would buy it, he was famous already in the guild as someone who had dueled against Scarface evenly. There was no way they won't get suspicious if he acted clumsy now that they were fighting an enemy.

He was in another dilemma now. The hell, why did that guy not just run away? Now he was caught in the middle of their stupid fight.

He slowed down his walk, he was around the middle part of the advancing team before, now he was at the rear. At least when the fight broke out, he would have the chance to be the last to take action. He might even use the opportunity for being at the back to avoid others from noticing him. He would feign an attack only if someone was looking his way. Yes, this could be a good solution.

He saw Earmouth looking around. His eyes stopped searching after landing on Jack.

"What are you doing over there?" He asked.

"I'm a Mage, I should be at the rear," Jack replied with a sensical answer.

"What nonsense is that? Come over here!" Earmouth yelled. "Everyone knows how you fight a fighter and a ranger in close range during your guild initiation test. You will be fine at the front."

Jack wanted to cry. Perhaps he had been too show-off at that time.

Chapter 223: High Ground Attacks

Before they entered the rock formation, the group broke again into the three teams divided between the different guilds. The rock formation had more than one entrance which led to the central basin. The three guilds would enter from different directions and converged on the basin where they executed their assault. The last contact with their scouts indicated that John's group was still resting within the basin.

They stopped moving hastily as they entered the rock formation, now that they were close to their prey. If they could secure a surprise attack, it would make the fight much easier. There were some low-level monsters on the paths. Earmouth arranged for one or two players to deal with the monsters as quietly as possible so as to not hinder the others' advance.

After several minutes of walking, they were getting closer to the targets. Earmouth slowed down their pace even more so that they could approach undetected. He sternly warned everyone with a hand signal to not make any noises.

They crept slowly forward. They soon met with the advance scout who had been sending them their targets' position. Earmouth typed in the party channel that the basin where the targets were located was just behind this next rock wall.

Everyone brandished their weapons and prepared to attack. Earmouth stood at the front giving a hold signal. Jack imagined he was coordinating with the other two teams through chat so that they could execute the assault at the same time.

Jack could just hope that John wasn't kidding when he said he had known about them coming.

Earmouth finally gave the signal. Everyone charged out while yelling. They could hear a series of shouts from the other side. They came into a large open area surrounded by high and thick rock walls. The other two teams came in from the other side from different openings.

John's group was positioned at the back of where they came from. Upon seeing many players rushed in, they didn't panic. They stood up and formed a line as they slowly backed away to an opening behind them.

"Attack!" The leader from Corporate United roared. One could imagine his fury from his voice. He was anxious to tear the guy who had ruined his guild's reputation to pieces.

Countless balls of light started to fly forward. Almost every magician on the three teams cast either Magic Bullet and Energy Bolts at the small group ahead. The numbers alone would be enough to obliterate them. Everyone was thinking this fight was over already just as it began.

But everyone who was paying attention to John's expression would find him to be extremely calm. Jack was amongst those who noticed John's calm demeanor. What was he up to? He asked himself.

John answered him by taking out a roll of paper. The roll of paper shined with power before exploding into a spell formation. A wide wall of light appeared in front of his group.

A magic scroll! Jack recognized the tool. The spell was even one he had used before to defend against the attack from possessed Winston, Magic Wall.

The countless magic attacks slammed onto the magic wall. Attacks sent by that many Magicians were dazzling, but none of it could pass through the wall formed of light. Jack didn't find it surprising. Peniel had informed him before that Magic Wall was a spell from Elite class. It was a whole two-class difference from the offensive spells currently battering at it. Even if the number of spells was increased to double, it would make little difference.

The magic wall was still standing proudly in place, there was not even a crack on it. Unlike the time when he had used it to block Possessed Winston's assault, which had destroyed the wall in a single attack.

John and the rest backed away leisurely. There was no hint of panic at all on their faces. The magic wall covered the entire opening where they had retreated to. None of the three guild members could go through the wall to get to them. The duration of a level 1 Magic Wall was one minute long, Jack didn't know what level of the magic scroll that John had used. But even one minute was enough time for them to put a distance from the mob.

While the three guild members were frustratingly beating at the magic wall, several figures appeared at the tops of the rock formations. The rock formations were not all separate entities. Some had connecting rock bridges spanning from one to the others. Which connected with pathways that allowed players to go up there if they knew the way. With the confusing maze layout of the rock formations, it would take a long time of exploring to find these routes. John certainly had prepared this plan for a while.

Jack had known about the players hiding at the top there from his radar, he didn't warn the three guild members that were with him. He would be able to defend himself even if they were ambushed.

The players that appeared on top were mostly Magicians. They didn't waste any time. They hurled their spells and magic range attacks at the people underneath. The attacks rained down and damaged the crowding mob below. They had no chance to evade as all of them were crowding in to destroy the wall. Even if the magicians up there threw their attacks randomly without aiming, they could still hit someone.

The magicians on the ground were not to be outdone. They started casting their spells and hurled them up there, but most of them dissipated after traveling a distance. Jack learned something new from these exchanges, on how height affected range attacks.

Range attack sent from higher elevation could travel a longer distance, while one sent from a lower ground would have their range reduced. A normal Mana Bullet could travel ten meters, when the magicians from down here cast the spell to target the players up there, the spell disappeared after only traveling seven to eight meters. While the height of the players standing atop the rock formations was around twelve to fifteen meters, the same Mana Bullets thrown from up there were still going strong after reaching the ground.

John had obviously known about this high-ground feature to choose such a strategy here. Jack couldn't help but admit that the guy did have the right to treat this assault by more than a hundred players lightly.

There were also a few Rangers up there with the Magicians, they used their skill Throw Weapon. The Throw Weapon normally had a range of 8 meters, but it was also affected by height advantage, allowing this class to also inflict damage to the mob below without any retaliation. Their shortcomings compared to Magicians were the long cooldown of their range attacks.

The ones who had received damage took out their recovery items to replenish their HP. One of them, who was a magician, stood just a few feet from Jack. The rain of attacks didn't fall on Jack, but even if they did, he had no problem nullifying it. He could just simply swat the attack using his staff. His physical attack easily surpassed the common magician's attack. Even if he couldn't swing his staff, he could simply put it in front for a Parry. This fighter's skill of his would reduce the attack's damage.

As the magician close to Jack was about to drink his potion. A burst of shadow struck the guy's forehead. Jack was rather startled by the sudden quick attack. Upon closer inspection, he found out that the thing that hit the guy's head was an arrow. The vital hit had caused a critical hit upon its victim. The critical damage devoured the remaining HP from the magician and he fell lifelessly to the ground.

An archer?

Jack looked up to where the arrow had come from, and saw a young girl with wavy brown hair that fell until her shoulder. She was holding a blue short bow in his hand.

Fierce Flame? What was she doing here?

Her proud posture added to the chilling aura surrounding her as she continued to pull arrows from her quiver and shot at the players below who had been damaged by the magicians. All of her arrows targeted those with the lowest health, trying to take out their lives before they could recover their HP with a potion. Because of her arrows, more players drop to the ground with an empty life bar.

It felt like this was the first time he saw her. She had always fought on his side, now that she was on the opposite sides, he realized what a menace she could be. An archer placed on a favorable terrain could really be a grim menace. If he was going at her seriously, he would also be at a loss at what to do in this situation. Luckily, he was actually rooting at the failure of this mission.

The Magic Wall finally crumbled, either it had run out of its duration, or the combined assault of the players banging on it had finally accumulated enough damage to shatter it. At this time however, John and the others were some distance away. Weirdly though, they did not continue to run, they were just standing there as if waiting for the three guilds to come at them.

Chapter 224: I Will Flank Them

Although the three guild members kept getting harassed by the endless bombardments from above, their casualties were negligible. After all, there were only a handful of attackers up there. John's strategy was sound, but he was still lacking in manpower.

Since there was nothing they could do, the three guild members charged towards their main target, John, who was still waiting calmly. Seeing John's calmness, some of the more wary players suspected that something was wrong, but they were still getting pushed forward due to the crowd's momentum.

The path that John had retreated to was a long alleyway formed by two walls of rock. John and his gang were waiting at the end of this natural alleyway. The formation of the three guild members was forced into a long line by the terrain. Anyone with a bit of awareness could see that this was a classic chokepoint scenario.

But the members of the guilds were not at all worried. After all, there were only six people defending the other side. Once they punched through this alleyway, the table would turn where they swarmed those measly six. The level 17 Warrior ran at the front leading the charge, completely ignoring the spells and arrows raining from above.

Jack in the meantime, used his incredible strength to push to the side, escaping the crowd momentum. He stayed at the entrance of the rock alley observing the situation.

"What are you doing?" He heard a question from his side. He turned and saw Earmouth staring at him with wariness.

"Why didn't you attack?" He asked another question.

"Can't you see what those guys are doing?" Jack answered. "It was obviously a trap!"

Earmouth glanced to the other end. He actually had the same suspicion. "So what? Are you going to just watch from here?"

"It's better than charging in blindly," Jack replied.

Earmouth's face didn't show that he was convinced, so Jack added, "look, let the fools from the other two guilds open the way. If they managed to break through, we follow from behind. If there was a trap, let them bear the brunt of the attack. Why take the risk?"

Earmouth thought about it, what he said make sense. The ones that had been utterly insulted were the Corporate United people, that's why they were so eager in charging. They couldn't wait to tear John apart. Why should Death Associates' people bear the risk? It's not like there was any reward for this. As Unrivaled had said, let the Corporate United people open the path, they could join in the slaughter once John's trick was revealed.

Earmouth clapped on Jack's shoulder and gave him a thumb up. "You are a cunning son of b**ch, bro," he said with a grin.

Jack was at a loss, did this guy suspect him or not? He showed distrust at one time, but at another time, he acted as if he was your best bro in the world.

Surely enough, a commotion was heard at the other end. They both turned and saw John took out another set of Magic Scroll.

That guy sure was not afraid to spend his coins, Jack thought.

The scroll flared to life, green light spread out along the ground before the end of the rock alley. The ground that was covered by the green light started to crack. A series of thick vines soon sprang out, forming a line of wall made up from the greeneries.

"What was that?" Jack asked.

Earmouth shook his head. However, another voice answered him. "That was a spell from Druid class, Walls of Vines," Peniel's voice echoed in his head.

'Druid?' Jack said in his mind.

"It was one of the elite classes branched out from Healer."

Jack didn't have time to discuss with her more about the spell or the elite class. He saw the level 17 Warrior from Corporate United brandished his large axe ferociously, completely undeterred by the wall of vines in front of him. After all, who would be afraid of a hedge? It was just a slightly bigger shrub than your usual garden variety, just cut it off and be done with it!

He activated Charge and struck his large axe at the wall of vines. The weapon cut through the plants easily. The Warrior was smiling at how fragile this so-called wall was. However, his smile soon froze. His weapon had passed through the vines and he thought he would soon face John and his crews, but instead his Charge was stopped halfway. He looked down and saw the numerous vines entangling his body. The ones that he had cut just now had regrown into new vines, clutching on his arms tightly, while the rest of the vines held tightly to his other body parts.

While he was struggling to break free from the entanglement, he heard a chuckle.

"Get him, boys," the voice in front of him spoke. He looked forward and saw John and the others grinning widely as they moved forward.

"W—What are you...," his words were cut short as the players beyond the plants started to throw attacks upon attacks on his incapacitated body.

There are others who rushed forward as well following the Warrior's example, and ended up entangled as well. Their bodies were hanged right in the middle of the plant wall, couldn't go forward nor retreat. The five fighters vigorously hacking away at these players, using all the skills at their disposal. Now Jack understood why his companions were all Fighter class.

John walked away from his group and climbed a slope nearby. He soon appeared above the rock formation. He joined the other mages as they fired the spells and attacks relentlessly at the people below.

'How long does that Wall of Vines last?' Jack asked Peniel.

"The first level of that spell has a duration of ten minutes," she answered.

'Woah! Isn't that more badass than Magic Wall?' Jack almost blurted out loud. 'Why didn't you recommend me to get that spell instead?'

"Wall of Vines is good for large number but low-level opponents. If you have high enough strength, you could still forcefully pull yourself out of those vines. The best it can do is only slowing down such an opponent. Magic Wall is a pure defense spell that can block stronger attacks," Peniel explained.

While they were observing the situation, John walked leisurely along the top of the wall of the rock alley. He reached the other end soon. Jack looked up and saw the guy casually took out another magic scroll. He was no longer surprised at this stage.

The same Wall of Vines sprouted from the ground, blocking the entrance to the rock alley where Jack was at, trapping the mob within the rock alley. Only a handful was outside, which included Jack and Earmouth, with a few other Death Associates members that were not too hot-blooded to rush in with the others.

The mob that rushed inside thought they could just wait out until the Wall of Vines expired, but now that they were trapped inside the alley. They had nowhere to go. They became sitting ducks to the Magicians and Rangers from above. John's spells and Fierce Flame's arrow were especially damaging, many continued to fall. The mob below were unsatisfied. It was fine if they died from fighting a glorious battle, but this was simply them getting slaughtered without being able to fight back.

One of the Corporate United players screamed discontentedly, "you a**holes! Do you know who you are dealing with? Don't you expect you can live peacefully now, the Corporate United will hunt every one of you down for this!"

In response to the threat, John simply said to the others, "don't worry, just keep attacking."

The Corporate United player felt like vomiting blood from John's casual remark. How could someone be so ignorant? Don't they know the severity of offending a top guild?

"You are right, it was lucky that we didn't follow them to rush blindly in," Earmouth commented, he felt cold sweat rolling down his forehead.

Jack had been having an idea for a while, he finally made up his mind. He said, "don't worry, you guys wait here. I will flank them and resolve our problem."

Chapter 225: Copy Of Disguise

"What are you planning to do?" Earmouth asked him.

"I will flank them," Jack repeated. "It's impossible to go through that plant wall spell."

"Yeah, no shit. Don't you think we would have done it already if we can? This place is like a maze, you can easily lose yourself if you wander off aimlessly."

"Don't worry, I have a way to know the right direction," Jack replied with a wink.

"I'm not worrying, and why the f**k did you just give me a wink for? I just don't want you to go off by yourself. I will need you here to help fight when the spell wears off."

"Look at that guy," Jack pointed at John who was at the top happily blasting the mob down there. "Do you think that's the face of one who is worrying about when his spell runs out?"

Earmouth didn't answer the question, his solemn face showed that he knew that point as well.

Jack continued, "he had planned this, man. Ruining your meeting, riling you up. He had known from the start that you are coming for him, and he had prepared this trap beforehand. You will just play into his hand if your hope is on the spell running out."

After a long moment of silence, Earmouth finally said, "do you really think you can find your way to their flank."

Jack clapped his shoulder as the guy had done to him before and added with a thumb up. "I'm a cunning son of a b**ch, bro," he said with a smirk. He then turned and left without waiting for Earmouth's comment.

Earmouth had a bad feeling, but not for Jack's safety. He had no care for the man. In fact, his bad feeling was on the man, he had been having the feeling since he started talking with him. He had always been good at detecting lies. His sixth sense had been blaring off since he started talking with the man. He had been talkative with him all this while, trying to see if he could make him slip and gave him a hint.

But then again, he couldn't deny that the man's argument made sense. If they just waited it out like that, and John still had a trick up his sleeve, they would end up getting decimated instead. If the news spread about how the three guild's large number of troops got wasted by a handful of unknown players, their reputation would go down the drain.

The leader of Corporate United team, the level 17 Warrior, had already fallen from getting ganged up by the enemy fighters while he was unable to move. Whichever way the battle here ended, the Corporate United would already be the laughingstock. He definitely cannot let that happen to Death Associates as

well. He needed to keep as many of his guildmates alive as possible, and not let John's people escape alive, that's the only way they could maintain their dignity.

He couldn't believe it would turn out like this. This was supposed to be an easy hunt, the many bullying the weak. But the reality in front of him was completely different.

Earmouth continued to observe the fight in front of him, or rather, the one-side thrashing in front of him. The three guild members that were trapped inside the rock alley kept on wasting their recovery potions. Some had even run out, they tried to hide behind their comrades to avoid getting attacked. It was still fine if they hide behind their own guild members, but when it was the other guild members, they instead ended up quarrelling among themselves. Things had gotten really chaotic inside. Casualties continued to increase.

When a long time had passed, Earmouth noticed the plant wall on the other end started withering, before they collapsed to the ground. The sight created a clamor to the players trapped inside. They bellowed a thrilled outcry as they rushed over to the open path. They finally could get their revenge on the people.

Yet, as soon they almost came out of the opening from the rock alley, vines sprouted out from the ground again. The foremost batch that was eager to escape from the alley got stuck at the wall of vines, just like their predecessors. The Fighters at the other side of the wall were grinning as they approached the trapped victims and started dishing out attacks.

"Motherf**kers! How many of that scrolls he has?!" Earmouth cursed out resentfully.

"What are those things?" One of his people that didn't rush in asked.

"It was a magic scroll, a tool that can be used to release high-level spells," Earmouth explained.

"Why didn't our guild have them as well?" His people complained.

"We have them, but only the highest authorities hold them," Earmouth said. "Those things are expensive. Our guild needs coins for guild base, so expenditure is limited. That guy sure is royal, how the heck did he has enough coins to buy so many magic scrolls?"

While they were chatting, Jack had been halfway. He was not lying, he did able to determine direction by using his radar. Although the path was confusing and kept on branching out, he could check on the position of the players and know which direction he should be heading towards. As if a spectator with a bird-viewpoint was guiding him, hence the maze within this rock formation was not at all troublesome to him.

However, he was not serious about flanking John's party. After all, his original enemy was Death Associates, why should he help them? He should be helping John in decimating them instead. And that's what he was planning to do. Even so, he would still prefer to keep up his guise inside the guild. That's why he separated himself from Earmouth's team.

He looked around to make sure that no one was watching. He then started casting a spell. A glowing rune started forming at the tip of his staff. After one rune was formed, it didn't stop. It continued until three runes were formed into a spell formation. The spell took effect and a shadow slowly took shape next to Jack. The shadow solidified until it formed a person that was completely identical to him.

He looked at the doppelganger in front of him. The Mage copy looked back at him. This Body Double spell of him took a lot of time to cast as he was required to form three runes. But it was not an issue, he didn't think this spell was a suitable spell to use within combat. He usually just used it to prepare for an escape route, so he could take his time in casting it before battle, under a safe situation.

Still, he was not using this spell as a mean to escape this time. He was planning to use it as an alibi.

"Let's see if this works," he mumbled to himself.

He then deactivated the Orb of Disguise and reverted back to Storm Wind. He looked at his doppelganger, and breathed out a relief. The copy was still having the appearance of Unrivalled Arcaner. The black dots and green dots on his screen all changed into the neutral blue dots that represented players. His guild alignment as Unrivalled Arcaner was no longer valid once he transformed back to Storm Wind.

"All right then," He said gleefully and guided his doppelganger to continue on his way towards John's people. He himself traced back to where he had come from after applying Whetstone to his weapon and ate one Sweet Dumpling to boost his damage output.

At the rock alley, the coalition of three guild's members had lost one-fifth of their numbers, with many members were without full health and had run out of their recovery potions. The Magicians above had prepared many mana recovery potions to keep their attacks at a steady pace. If this continued, the three guilds might really end up getting wiped out by the handful of these players.

Earmouth looked at the situation with grim expression. He couldn't continue on being passive.

"Spread out! Find a way to get up there," he commanded his available underlings.

But before they moved, one of them uttered, "look!"

They turned to where the person was pointing at, which was the other end of the rocky alley. The vines of the plant wall were not jam-packed with each other, so they could still see what's behind it. The five Fighters of John's team were startled as an unknown player had suddenly appeared behind them.

"It was Unrivalled!" One of them exclaimed.

It really was him, the son of a b**ch truly managed to find his way there, Earmouth thought with a surprise. He saw Unrivalled Arcaner waving his staff around challenging the Fighters.

"What the f**k is he doing?" Earmouth cursed. The man was taking his melee fighting skill to a stupid level. Why didn't he just blast those Fighters to smithereens with his spells? Was he taking the critical situation at this moment as a game?

Unrivalled retreated as two of the five Fighters advanced on him. They were soon gone from view as they disappeared behind a rock wall.

Earmouth was still swearing his mouth off when he heard screams from behind.

Chapter 226: The Open Path

When he looked back, he was given a great scare. There were six of his people out here with him who were not trapped inside the rocky alley. But now, two of them were lying on the floor. A man in full armor was waving a black longsword cutting at his other underlings.

"Who are..." He was halfway in his shout, demanding the identity of their ambusher, before stopping. Because he realized he didn't need to ask the person's identity. The man was already famous amongst the upper management of Death Associates guild. His image had been circulated to warn them about him, and was one of the targets that the guild plan to deal with in the near future.

He didn't expect to meet the man here. But, wait, now that he thought about it, he could see that this ambush made more sense. He must have been working together with that group from Handy Craftsmen guild to attack them here.

While Earmouth thought that it was all a conspiracy, their attackers, John and Flame, on the other hand, were themselves surprised to see Jack appearing here.

"So you really are around. How do you conceal yourself in the meeting?" John sent a message to him.

Jack replied with a short message, "can't you see that I'm busy here?"

John chuckled, "aren't you an expert? Don't tell me you have trouble fighting while texting. Not to mention the texting was thought-activated."

Jack didn't bother to reply anymore. He never stopped moving as he fought against Earmouth's underlings. Earmouth himself had been firing his spells non-stop at Jack, but all of them had been cut by Jack's sword or nullified by his kite shield. Another player was in critical health already after suffering several cuts from Jack.

A Fighter came at Jack, trying to prevent him from killing another player, and gave that player a chance to use his restorative potion. The Fighter executed Power Strike, Jack let the skill struck him as he sent the same skill unto the attacker. Jack was pushed back two steps by the skill, while the Fighter was sent flying back. Before the Fighter hit the ground, Jack used Sword of Light and slashed the Fighter mid-flight. The Fighter crashed down to the ground and was not getting up anymore.

What was that crescent light? Earmouth was in a panic. A high-HP Fighter was killed with just two hits?

Earmouth instinctively moved back, letting his underlings dealt with Jack. He was never an expert. His high position in the guild was all due to his management skill and his aptitude in evaluating new recruits. Hence, when another of his underlings fell, he had the urge to just run away.

At this time, the Wall of Vines behind him started to wither. He looked back and then looked up at John who was standing atop the rock formation. Seriously terrified that John would pull out another magic scroll to recast the plant wall spell.

John did still possess some Wall of Vines magic scrolls, but after a thought, he decided to not use it to block the back path. After all, there was a monster of an expert down there, why not use him to his advantage?

After seeing that John didn't cast another of that plant wall, Earmouth immediately ran inside the rocky alley. At that time, another of his underlings had fallen again. The remaining one, a ranger, ran away following Earmouth.

"The path is open! The path is open!" He shouted to attract the attention of the trapped players.

The ones that heard his yelling, turned and looked. When they realized there was no Wall of Vines at the entrance from where they entered this rock alley, they immediately ran in that direction. They had been continuously harassed by the players up there, without being able to retaliate. Now that one of the blocked paths was opened, how would they still want to stay inside that rock alley and be punching bags?

They ran towards the opened path in droves. On their way, they saw two fools ran inside frantically. What were those two doing? Didn't they know that the inside here was a trapped hell? They couldn't care less about those two fools. Most of them had already run out of their restorative potions. They needed to run out there out of the range of those abhorred players above.

Earmouth saw the belittling look from the players who passed by them, but he couldn't care less as well. These players would soon find out, that the players up there were nothing compared to the freak of monster that had come up from behind them.

As the players that were trying to run out from the rock alley were about to reach the exit, a lone unknown player stood in their way. He carried a black longsword and a kite shield.

What was this clown doing? They all had the same thought.

A female Fighter from Wicked Witches came forward and bellowed aggressively, "move aside! Or prepared to get trampled!"

In VR games, Jack had gotten accustomed to not differentiate between genders. After all, whether it was male or female, their strength was determined by their stat points, not their real physics. There was no such thing as weaker gender in games. Hence while he was a gentleman mostly in real life towards women, in games, he bore no such discrimination.

Furthermore, in past VR games, there was even a possibility of a man using a woman persona in the games. Thus the female characters in those past games were not necessarily women in real life. Jack had developed the habit to treat both genders with equal prejudice. When the female Fighter approached him in an aggressive manner, he responded by using Power Strike as he would if the Fighter was male.

The female Fighter was sent tumbling back by the strike, crashing the players behind her which were trying to make it out of the rock alley.

"An enemy! He is an enemy!" They started to scream.

Jack didn't respond to them with words, instead, he just dashed into their throng, cutting and thrusting with his swords. He repeated his strategy like when he was fighting the robber mob from before, utilizing his speed and not stay in one place. He charged from one opponent to another, delivering only one attack to each, didn't stay long enough for them to land a successful counter-attack. When his opponents formed a wall to block him, he used Charge to forcefully punched through their formation.

The expertise of this lot was actually higher than the previous robber mob. After all, they were the official members of three famous guilds. However, several aspects had caused their prowess to fall, which allowed Jack to not find fighting them any harder than the robber mob.

First, it was because they were no longer in their top condition. They had been harassed by John's people without being able to fight back. Their mental fatigue and helplessness had made them forget the mindset that they were amongst the top combatants in VR games. At the moment, they were just trying to escape from the slaughtering field.

Secondly, they were made up of three different guilds. Who prior to this operation, had never worked together. In fact, they were even competitors most of the time. Hence, the synergy between members of these three different guilds was completely off balance. Jack had capitalized on this by charging in between the groups of these three guilds back and forth.

Thirdly, many of them had lost much HP. Some had even burnt through their stock of restorative potions. Hence, they were fighting with a worried mind, which in turn affected their performance. Jack had made sure to target those with low health, increasing their casualties and plunged them into a more panic mindset.

John was admiring Jack's work from up there. "That guy sure is something," he mumbled to himself. He glanced at the other end of the rock alley and noticed more people had realized the back path had been freed. They started to push their way back.

Despite Jack's performance, John still thought that if all those people went to him, he would get overrun. So he unfurled one of the magic scrolls that he still had in his bag, and aimed the spell at the middle part of the rock alley. Wall of Vines erupted from the ground and cutting the mob into two. One half was still trapped at both ends by the Walls of Vines, while the other half was tussling with Jack.

John sent an instruction to all his people except Fierce Flame to deal with the half that was trapped by the spells. While he and Flame went to assist Jack. The reason why he didn't send others to assist Jack was because Jack's movement was too erratic. Without enough skill and exceptional aim, these helpers might end up hitting Jack instead.

This was also the reason why the magicians from the three guilds were having trouble hitting Jack. He kept on moving in between their teammates unceasingly, if they cast their spells carelessly, they might friendly-fire their team instead.

Chapter 227: A Slippery Rogue

Jack was focusing on fast motions coupled with fast attacks. He was not aware of John's and Fierce Flame's assist until one of Flame's arrows lodged onto the skull of a Fighter whose weapon was about to hit him. He made a quick glance and saw the two atop.

Of the two, Fierce Flame was playing a better assist role, as her aims were more precise and swift. John knew his aim wasn't top-notch, however, he assisted Jack not by targeting those near Jack. Instead, he played it smart by sweeping out those that was at death's door after getting attacked by Jack. Since Jack couldn't stay at one place long enough to finish the task, he gladly picked up the baton.

The rate by which the players at this outer half fell was higher compared to the ones that were trapped at the other half. However, even when they kept on losing people, not one of these ones from the outer half fled. Jack must admit he applauded these players' solidarity.

Little did he know that it got nothing to do with their comradeship. It was simply that they had been thoroughly frustrated at being bullied without any ability to fight back when they were being trapped by the Walls of Vines. Now that an enemy presented himself on the same ground as they, they were eager to vent out their frustration on this lone enemy.

However, many of them especially those at the back were starting to get confused. What were those at the front doing? It sounded like they were still fighting? Wasn't the enemy just one person? They had been shouting at first for the ones in the front to not finish off the enemy, to let them have a piece of the guy as well. But the fight had been going on for a while and yet the commotion from the front had yet to cease. Couldn't you guys hurry up? Or else that detestable Mage at the top was going to trap them again. While they were still wondering, a shadow slipped through the crowd in front and passed through them. Suddenly their HP was reduced by a huge chunk. What had just happened? When they turned at the shadow, it was nowhere to be seen.

Jack who was causing the chaos, was instead enjoying the exhilarating feel. In the past VR games, the game systems were always tried their best to bring balance amongst players. Of course, there were those pay-to-win players who spent real-life money to gain an advantage in-game. Nonetheless, the difference wouldn't upset the balance too much. And even if such pay-to-win brought a huge advantage, there were always other pay-to-win players to provide some balance.

What Jack was experiencing now, was a sole advantage where his attributes completely trumped others. And he was the only one to possess such an advantage. Hence his euphoria. The best comparison to describe his condition was of a cheater who had managed to hack his character and was still allowed to play freely.

As Jack continued to abuse his superiority, something on his radar attracted his attention.

Hm? Jack muttered as he put more attention to his radar. He immediately saw what had caught his attention. A single red dot was following his movement with equal speed as his from behind. And since he was attacking as he moved, this red dot was gaining on him. In fact, it was almost upon him.

Despite his consternation, Jack didn't panic. He swiftly swiveled his body and brought his arm which was holding the kite shield to his back. He was lucky to have performed that defensive movement, because just as his kite shield was brought to cover his back, he felt a hard impact and a loud clang.

The attack was not strong enough to push him away, but he still chose to jump back to provide some space from his covert assailant. With how close he had been to getting hit from the back, this assailant was not simple.

After he jumped away, he finally got a good look at the attacker. It was the level 17 female Rogue from Wicked Witches, one of the two advanced classes in the three guilds coalition apart from his disguise. Jack used his God-eye monocle to scan the Rogue and learned her name was Slim Blade, with an HP of 310. She was wearing red color leather armor. Jack noticed the crimson dagger on her hand appeared to be not ordinary. He surmised that the weapon was at least Uncommon if not Rare grade.

Due to the Rogue attack, Jack's movement had stopped for a brief moment, allowing other players to land some attacks. He quickly used Swing to repel those opportunistic players before dashing away again. He turned to look at the Rogue but found that she had disappeared. With how chaotic the condition was, he couldn't afford to look around to search for her. His radar was of little help as all the players were the same red color dots. He could only return to his previous tactic while being alert at the Rogue's hidden offense.

"Peniel! What's the first skill one gets when becoming a Rogue?" He asked her fairy friend while continuing his fast movements and attacks.

"Backstab," Peniel answered simply.

"Sister, can you be a bit more informative, please? Can't you see that I'm busy? I can't keep on repeating the same question at the moment. Is it some kind of an active skill? How much damage can it cause?"

"It is a passive skill. It will render every hit struck on the back of a target to have a higher chance of being a critical hit and also caused higher critical damage. Even if the hit failed to score a critical, the base damage will still be increased by half."

No wonder she was trying to attack from the back, Jack thought. For it to be a passive skill was sure a headache. There was no cooldown nor stamina consumption, the only drawback was it was only affective if struck from a specific direction, which was a target's back. Now that he knew about the skill, he could anticipate the direction from which that Rogue would come at him.

As expected, he quickly noticed via his omnipotent radar, an approach from a red dot with a distinguished movement pattern, coming at his back. He was exceedingly thankful to have gotten this God-eye monocle. Without its radar, it would be extremely difficult to notice the Rogue sneaking up on him amongst this chaotic fight. Under any other circumstances, the Rogue class would perform exceptionally well in such a turbulent battle.

Since he had known about the coming attack, he purposefully slowed down his steps. He needed to brush off more attacks from the others due to it, but his concentration was more onto the Rogue as he deemed her as more of a menace. When the red dot was almost upon him, he turned around abruptly and used Swing.

The skill caught the Rogue off guard, she still managed to stab at Jack but since the hit was to his front, it was considered a normal attack. While she herself had more than a third of her HP shaved off just from that one Swing. It terrified her greatly, she had never met such a high damage player before.

Jack was just about to follow up with a Power Strike, but the Rogue rapidly retreated to behind the crowd. Her speed and decisiveness in retreating were astounding. Jack figured the girl was accustomed to the hit and run tactic, she was practically made for the Rogue class. She soon disappeared amongst the masses. Jack tried to chase after her but she was nowhere to be seen.

Jack took out a basic healing potion and drank it to recover his HP, he never stopped moving and dodging other players' attacks during the time. Since the Rogue was nowhere to be found, Jack went back to harassing the other players, while paying attention to his radar for a backstabber.

More of his opponents fell as time went on, and even more ran out of their supply of restorative potion. Only Fierce Flame's arrow was assisting Jack at the moment. John had gone back to the other end to renew the Wall of Vines spell, the guy seemed to have a limitless supply of that magic scroll.

Hm? Jack suddenly noticed something weird. His HP bar was almost half empty! He knew he couldn't dodge every attack, but even so, his defense allowed him to brush off most of it. His health after last drinking the basic healing potion was almost full, and not too long had passed since then. It didn't make sense for his health to drop so expeditiously.

As he was wondering what was wrong, a flash of light swept past his side while he was blocking a player's attack using his shield. He turned and caught a glimpse of a red-figure disappearing behind other players.

It's that f**king Rogue again!

Chapter 228: The Power Of An Elite Spell

The Rogue had apparently changed strategy after noticing her back attacks failing twice. Jack had to give the girl some credit. Her assertiveness to switch methods from a failed one to a successful one was indeed impressive.

Maybe she thought the reason her opponent had managed to evade her backstabs was that he was on guard against back attacks, and she was not far off with that deduction. If that was the case, then she just changed to attack from the side, while masking her attacks behind those other players. Taking a slice here and there in between the small windows of opportunity.

Jack was dismayed. If it was a back attack, it was easier to notice on his radar because only the Rogue had the speed to catch up to him from the back. But if it was from the side, it was more difficult for Jack to determine which of the multiple red dots were the Rogue. Hence the Rogue had managed to land several opportunistic blows on him without him noticing.

When he was uncertain of how to proceed, an arrow whistled through the air and struck an enemy beside him. He turned and saw the struck enemy stumbled back due to the arrow, revealing the Rogue behind. Jack immediately faced that direction to engage the Rogue. However, the Rogue was also very fast, she retreated back at once after herself was revealed, sinking into the crowd of players again.

Jack lost her again. He irritably released his frustration at the surrounding players, hacking and slicing at those poor schmucks. He also took out and drank another basic healing potion and basic energy potion. His stamina had also depleted at a rapid pace, due to his continuous use of skills, hence the need to consume the basic energy potion. He waited for Fierce Flame to help him fish out that sneaky Rogue. With Flame's bird-eye view, she should be able to spot the Rogue much more easily.

But when he felt the Rogue's dagger stab into him again, no arrow had come. He turned and saw the Rogue was moving in a crouching position and she had already changed her leather armor, from the glaring red one to a normal one that was similar to the other players around them.

What a sly move! Jack exclaimed in his mind.

By using a low position to move and changing her appearance to camouflage with the crowd, the Rogue had avoided detection by even Fierce Flame who stood above the rock wall. The Rogue was successful at landing another two sneak blows again, while continued to conceal herself afterward.

This won't do! Jack activated Charge and forced his way out of the mob.

"Don't let him escape!" A familiar voice was heard.

It was Earmouth, Jack hadn't seen the guys amongst the crowd. He must have kept his distance from him all this while. The guy now cast Energy Bolts at him. The other Magicians who were having trouble aiming at him since he was always sneaking around inside their formation, now capitalized on him being in the open and at once sent their spells at him simultaneously.

Oh, crap! Jack realized he might have made a mistake.

He had almost instinctively taken out his magic staff to cast the Barrier spell, but he managed to stop himself mid-way and instead took out a scroll similar to the one that John had been flashing around since they came into the rock basin. The scroll flashed a bright light before the magic runes on it formed a large protective wall, which blocked all the attacks coming at him. Jack had used up the last Magic Wall scroll he had in his arsenal.

Annoyed for having forced him to use the magic scroll, Jack took out another one.

"You asked for it!" He exclaimed as he activated the scroll.

Several magical runes Popped up before a dangerous aura washed over. Everyone could hear cracklings sound as they saw Jack's hand which was holding a scroll an instant ago was suddenly lighting up into a series of raging lightning. The lightning shot out into a long snake that swept at the stunned masses. The lightning snake crashed onto a person and disintegrated him immediately, creating a shockwave that shoved everyone nearby aside.

The lightning didn't stop after its first victim. It shot out again in a different direction, completely unpredictable, and snaked around through the mob. Those that were touched by it had their HP decreased significantly, many even lost their lives. The lightning punched into another player after traveling for a while and disintegrated that person as well, before changing direction again, curbing the HP of the players along its way.

It continued to create a blast and changed direction a total of five times, before vanishing. Leaving behind a score of terrified and injured players. Many had lost their lives with that one spell. There were only a handful of players left in the outer half of the rock alley. The spell had basically taken out almost half of the remaining players who were ganging up on Jack, while leaving most of the rest at low HP.

"Damn!" Jack couldn't help but exclaimed, dumbfounded by the spell's power. The Chain Lightning spell was truly badass! An Elite offensive spell was truly something else. His coins were completely well spent.

"Damn!" Another person exclaimed from the top of the rock wall. "I should have bought that spell instead," John muttered.

Now that there were much fewer players around, Jack could see everyone clearly. His eyes immediately locked onto a figure amongst the remaining opponents. The Rogue was miraculously untouched by the Chain Lightning spell.

When Jack's eyes locked onto her, Slim Blade shuddered. She was fully exposed now. She was no newbie, she grasped the gap between Jack and her. Even though she didn't understand how Jack had managed to raise his attributes to such height, she did know that on a direct clash, she would stand no chance to win the confrontation. Now that the sea of players who she could use for covers had thinned out, she could not use the same trick anymore.

She looked back at the other half of their troops who were still trapped by the Wall of Vines. Gritting her teeth, she decisively yelled out, "Wicked Witches! Fall back! We are getting out of here."

The others looked at each other, one of them said, "what about the others. Some of our sisters are still trapped behind there."

"No choice, they will have to escape by themselves. Now, move!" Slim Blade didn't show any hesitation at all as she circled away from Jack while making her way to one of the openings out of this basin. The others from Wicked Witches followed suit after sending a short glance to their comrades who were still trapped.

Slim Blade was slightly worried that Jack would chase after her. Jack was indeed thinking about that at first, but after calming down a bit, he let her go. First, it would be too troublesome. The Rogue was almost as fast as him, and she had also displayed an aptitude at escaping. He would waste too much time just trying to catch her.

Second, he didn't exactly have much bad blood with that Rogue. She had annoyed him for sure, but they were in a battle. It was reasonable for her to use whatever means necessary to secure an advantage.

Slim Blade let out a relieved sigh when she saw Jack showed no intention of stopping them. She might still be able to flee if Jack came after her, but then she would have to abandon her other teammates. She would not be able to do anything to save them if Jack decided to slaughter them.

Jack looked at the other groups that were still around. Earmouth was also amongst the one that was spared from the Chain Lightning. Lucky bastard. Well, not so lucky after I'm done with him, Jack thought.

Earmouth seemed to realize his predicament after feeling Jack's stare. He copied Slim Blade and shouted, "Death Associates, we are leaving!"

He was just about to move out with his team when Jack stepped in front of them.

Brother, what have we done to have offended you? Why do you let that girl go but stop me? Earmouth asked silently in his mind with an exasperated expression.

Corporate United team took the chance to run away following Wicked Witches footsteps.

Earmouth saw Jack leave them alone with a gloomy expression. "So, you are resolved to pick a fight with Death Associates?"

Jack revealed an evil grin, "hehe, your guild and I have always been at odds. I'm just one person, I sure cannot allow your guild to thrive. Otherwise, when you are strong enough to come at me, wouldn't I be

the one at disadvantage? That's why I have to use every opportunity to hinder your progress. Unless of course, if your boss is willing to issue a public apology and use that Shackle of Vows to promise not to cause trouble to me anymore."

Chapter 229: Paid

"You are being too arrogant! Don't think you can do what you like just because you are stronger than us," Earmouth roared angrily. "We will fight you till our last breath."

"Sure," Jack gave him a short reply. What a joke, their guild was the role model on the concept of being stronger giving the privilege to bully others. Now they were complaining about such behavior? Jack didn't bother to justify his action, he simply started chopping them up.

Earmouth forced his underlings to cover for his escape. These underlings' loyalty was rather admirable, as they sacrificed themselves to provide safe passage for him. Earmouth HP was already in tatters as he made his escape, his underlings were using their bodies to block Jack's advance.

Jack simply sneered at their attempt as he jumped and then made a slash in the air. A crescent light shot out and hit Earmouth's back just as he was taking out a basic healing potion. His body fell to the ground as his HP zeroed out. The underlings that were forming human-wall looked at each other before turned around and ran in different directions. Jack didn't bother to chase after them.

The Wall of Vines blocking the middle of the rock alley finally came off. John didn't refresh the spell anymore. The survivors came out through the open path eagerly. They had been helplessly suffering through the harassments of the Magicians and Rangers above the rock wall without being able to fight back.

They had lost one-fourth of the numbers that were originally trapped, many of the remaining ones had low health, and most had also burnt through their restorative potions.

When they came out of the rock alley, they expected to be able to join with the other half to plan a counter-attack. But it was completely empty outside, except for a lone player sitting on a small rock slab. When that lone player noticed they came out, he stood up and unsheathed his weapon. They were confused at the sight. They looked around the rock basin again, none of their comrades were in sight.

Some started to take the initiative to send a message to the ones that were still alive but were not here.

"Huh?" One of them uttered when he got a reply.

"What did they say? Where are they?" His friend asked.

"They said, run!"

"Huh?"

At that time, Jack came before them.

"What do you want?" A member of Corporate United yelled at him in an antagonistic manner. "Three famous guilds are conducting matters here. Leave if you don't want to get hurt!" The Magicians and the Rangers above the rock formations were still chasing them and attacking them from the top of the rock

formations. They didn't have the time to stay around, hence they had no time to deal with this lone player that came out of nowhere.

"Are you dumb or something? I'm obviously an enemy," Jack said and slammed his Power Strike at him. The Corporate United member flew back with a dumbfounded look. He could consider a lone person facing a large group as either an idiot or someone who had a death wish, but he would never register the person as an opponent, even though the said person had brandished his weapon.

"I received another message," another member of Corporate United said.

"What are you still reading a message for? There is an enemy in front of us," his friend scolded him.

"It said do not fight the lone sword-wielding Warrior. Run away."

"..."

His friend looked at the lone Warrior, who was now engaging the front-line group. The Warrior cut through them with ease. He looked back at the back line who was still being harassed by the players standing at the top of the rock formation.

"Let's get out of here," his friend said.

"Let's," the Corporate United member agreed.

Many started to turn tail and fled. Those that were too stubborn or blinded by pride were soon regretting their choice as they met Jack's blade. The three guild members continued to diminish until even John's group no longer afraid to come down and clashed with them directly.

Soon the only ones remaining in the rock basin were Jack, Fierce Flame, John, and his people. The three guilds lost almost half of their numbers with the remaining ones running away. Once the last person from the three guild coalition left the area, the combat ended and the corpses vanished, leaving behind random items littered around the ground. Some corpses dropped one item, while a few dropped two, the combined volumes were rather aplenty. It was a sight to behold.

John went ahead and picked up the items. The others from his team were just standing at one side and watched, maybe they had had an agreement beforehand. Jack didn't join him in snatching the dropped items. Fierce Flame was also just standing at one side, so Jack approached her.

"How come you get involved in all this?" Jack asked her.

"He hired me," Flame answered as he pointed to John.

"Hired?" Jack was puzzled by the answer.

"Uh-huh," Flame confirmed nonchalantly.

"Did he tell you that you are going against three big guilds?" Jack asked again.

"Doesn't matter," Flame replied. "The guy offered me something I want, so I help him."

Jack couldn't tell if the girl was brave or ignorant. He could only shake his head. While they were conversing, John continued to pick up the dropped loots. After he was done, he gathered his team. He had a short talk with them before giving them something, then sent them away.

John came to them after he finished debriefing his people. His people went their way in the direction of the capital.

"I know you wouldn't let me down, friend Storm Wind," John said. "This had all gone without a hitch due to your assistance."

"What the hell are you trying to pull anyway? Getting into that stunt, are you not afraid of those three guilds' wrath? You have a beef with them or something?" Jack asked him.

"I have no enmity with them. I was simply get paid for doing it."

"Huh?" Jack was bewildered. Flame was getting hired and he was getting paid for all this mess? "What do you mean?"

"Come, let's sit down," John picked a rock slab that was large enough for three people to sit on, and gestured for them to sit on it.

"Ah, before we waste time on pointless explanation, here is your reward, miss," John handed a pair of gloves to Fierce Flame.

Jack used his God-eye monacle to inspect the gloves before Flame stored it away.

Proper Archer Tab, level 15/35 (rare light armor)

Physical Defense: 22

Magical Defense: 21

Durability: 40

Dexterity +3

Bow damage increased by 20%

It was specialized gloves for Archer's class, so she was lured into this mess due to that equipment.

"Don't forget this," John gave her one gold coin, and then said, "I've collected sixty-nine equipment from this fight. Three of them uncommon and the rest were common grade. You and brother Storm Wind can choose one each from these three uncommon equipment."

He showed the three uncommon equipment, they were a pendant, boots, and belt.

"You didn't share the dropped equipment with that team that had just left?" Jack asked.

"I did, but I just let them choose from common equipment. They were just average thugs, how could I give them the same treatment as experts such as you two?"

"They are willing to offend the three guilds for a paltry common equipment reward?"

"Of course not, I paid them one gold each. The common equipment was just a bonus."

"Still, 1 gold coin to offend the big guilds, they sure have balls."

"Oh, they don't know what guild they were attacking."

"Huh?"

"I recruit people who were newbies in the gaming world and don't know about famous guilds," John said with a shrug.

Jack was speechless, this guy was unbelievable. Could this be considered entrapping? But then he remembered something, "wait. Even if they were newbies, those guys that followed you to the meeting, they should have seen that these guilds are not to be messed with. They are still willing to go ahead with your plan?"

"Oh, those guys are different. They are part of the group who paid me."

"Now I'm intrigued, who is it that paid you to mess with those three guilds?"

Chapter 230: Half-assed Plan

"Before that, please choose this equipment first," John said. Flame had already picked up hers. She took the uncommon pendant.

"I have no need of them," Jack said, the two uncommon pieces of equipment were nothing special. After all, the equipment he wore was all rare grade already. "How about you keep these two uncommon, and give me all the common equipment you looted instead?"

John was surprised. Even though the common equipment he looted was much more numerous, but they could be considered trash. After all, players could easily buy common equipment at the shops in the city. At this stage, everyone had had at least full gear common equipment already. No one would have a use for this common equipment other than to sell it or dismantle it into materials. But the coin they could get from selling the common equipment was just too dismal, and the material one could get from dismantling it was only common iron ore, which could also be easily bought at the shops at a low price.

As for the uncommon equipment, even if he didn't use them, John could sell them to another player and get more coins compared to selling these huge numbers of common equipment to NPC shops. That's why he was rather confused as to why Jack was refusing the uncommon equipment and instead asked for the common equipment.

What John didn't know was that Jack had the Transformation Box. He only needed four common equipment to fuse them into an uncommon one. With a large pile of common equipment, he would get more uncommon equipment than what John was offering.

Since John didn't see any loss for him, he agreed with Jack's request. He kept the two uncommon equipment and handed Jack fifty common equipment, which were what he had left after sharing them with his team.

"I can understand you didn't invite Men of Solidarity since they won't be willing to go up against the big guilds for no reason, but why you didn't invite Star Bowler as well?" Jack asked.

"He is not an expert," John answered.

"But he is a ranged magic user, and he is also an advanced class already," Jack countered.

"He doesn't like me, he won't listen to my order, it will cause trouble instead," John said. "And his advanced class is a healer. What do I need a healer for?"

Hearing John's words, Jack thought he got a point. The ploy this guy made didn't require any healing. From start to finish, almost none of his team received any damage. Come to think about it, Jack was impressed that he could come up with such a plan.

"Your plan is really good, choosing this place for an ambush, occupying the high ground, using the Walls of Vines to trap them and whittled them down until they all died. I am surprised you have so many coins to buy that many magic scrolls."

John chuckled, "not really, I was only given 15 gold coins to cover the operational cost. Most of them were used to pay those recruits. As for the scrolls," he took out one magic scroll. "This was my last Wall of Vines magic scroll," he said.

Jack was flabbergasted by his reply. He tried to count from his memory, and said, "wait! You only have six of that scrolls? Are you nuts? What was your plan if I didn't show up?"

"Well, six of these scrolls could last a total of thirty minutes, I was hoping they would have decided to run away by the time I reached the last scroll."

Jack's eye twitched, he didn't know how to respond to this.

"Wait a minute," Fierce Flame joined in. "You are blocking their two paths of escape. Even if they want to run away, they wouldn't be able to."

"You are too shallow, I will just leave one path open when I am down to two scrolls. I can use that scroll to refresh one end and I got an extra ten more minutes. That should give them enough time to think about escaping."

John kept on explaining, he didn't notice Flame's eyes which had narrowed to slits when he called her shallow. All through his rambling, she had been thinking whether or not to stab this asshole. Now that he had given her pay, she would not lose anything even if she killed him.

"And what if they are still not running away when your last scroll expired?" Jack asked.

"Then we will be the ones that run away," John replied nonchalantly.

Jack's eyes twitched again.

"Of course we are not waiting until the last Wall of Vines to disappear before we run. I mean, that will be stupid, don't you think? And I'm certainly not stupid," John continued. "If the last Wall of Vines was already halfway through and the enemies are still being stubborn. Then we will start moving away. Even if they tried to look for a roundabout way from the other exit, it would take them much time to find their way through this rocky maze. It should be enough time for us to disengage from combat. Then we will use the Town Return scroll which I have given one such scroll to each member, and voila, mission accomplished!"

"If you run away, then you didn't eradicate them. What mission accomplished?"

"The mission is not to destroy our pursuers. It is to disrupt the meeting. Messing with our pursuers is only a bonus."

"Anyway, that was still one half-assed plan," Jack criticized.

"It was still a half-assed plan that's successful," John countered.

Jack decided not to argue with this lunatic. He asked instead, "Who the hell are the group that is crazy enough to pay you for messing around with those three big guilds?"

John didn't immediately answer, he put on a cryptic smile and said, "another big guild of course."

"Who? White Scarfs?" Jack guessed. They were the only primary guild that was not invited to the meeting. Silver Wing had mentioned that he was looking for a way to find out about the meeting or do something about it. Perhaps hiring John should be that something. But spending so much gold coins to hire John? Weren't they in a race with Death Associates to be the first one to build a guild base? They should be in dire need of coin.

"No, no, no," He said with his finger doing the no sign. "I was thinking at first to approach them as well for some extra income or additional manpower, but decided against it. Because the more party that knows, the more chance my intention would leak."

Hearing his words, Jack remembered what Earmouth had mentioned about the White Scarfs. John had made the right decision. If he had approached White Scarfs, the spy inside would have learned about his ploy before the meeting. Death Associates would then find out about it."

"If not White Scarfs, then which guild?" Jack asked again.

"It's another big guild."

"Cut the crap! I'm not playing a guessing game here," Jack said in vexation.

"Sigh, kids these days. No patience," John commented.

Jack felt like slapping him. The guy didn't look that much older than him.

"If you want me to stab him, just say the word," Flame offered.

"It's Saint Edge," John told them.

"Them? They were in the meeting as well. They didn't look that hostile to the three guilds. I thought they only decided to leave after you ruining the reputation of Corporate United."

"You talked as if you are in the meeting directly. Where did you hide? I don't see any place that is possible for hiding, and I certainly didn't see you," John said to Jack with a suspicious look.

Jack felt awkward for his stare, he waved his hand and uttered, "that's not important. Don't distract the subject. Why did Saint Edge have the interest to disrupt the meeting?"

"Is there a need to ask? Are you a newbie in gaming?" John satirized him. "What had those big guilds do all the time? Fight with each other, compete with each other. They never stopped messing with one

another, for whatever stupid reason there is. It was no different this time. The three guilds were planning something big. If they succeed, they will have a certain advantage over the others. Saint Edge didn't know what their plan was, but they were sure they don't want those three guilds to succeed. Yet they don't want to confront them directly, considering they were not in top shape due to a large portion of their original members didn't appear in this capital Thereath here. Hence their decision to use an outsider to do their dirty tricks. That's where I come in."

After hearing John's explanation, he did think it made sense. This was another reason Jack chose to be an independent player. He disliked the senseless competition these guilds were always having, all the dirty tricks behind them.

"Anything else you want to ask, newbie?" John asked him.

"The offer still stands," Flame said.