

World 24

Chapter 24 - 24. The Block Puzzle

He looked around, nothing could be seen in this darkness. He extended his hand outward and used his magic staff to try to feel obstacles, like a blind man feeling his way. In a way, he really was blind here. He moved around several steps in random directions, his staff didn't bump into anything. It felt like this space was really spacious.

He was considering maybe he should just go back the way he came from, how could he find any clue in such a dark place? Then he realized he didn't know which way the door was. Once the door was shut, it blended into the darkness. He didn't memorize its direction so he was completely lost now. He thought to himself that he should have prepared something like a flashlight or at least a makeshift torch before he came.

He was not afraid of the dark, but being lost in the dark without knowing what's inside the room and which way to go could be very unsettling. When he thought about casting either Mana Bullet or Energy Bolts, as they both emit a brief light that might allow him a glimpse of the room, a hum sounded. He tensed up. It was like the sound of a machine starting up. He cast Magic Shield instead and took out his sword.

A bright light flashed abruptly around him, completely illuminated the room. Jack shut his eyes as they could not cope with such drastic change. He opened them slightly and let them gradually adjusted to the bright light. When he could finally see things, he realized he was in a large room with an oval shape.

The curved wall was covered with a metallic sheet that reflected light. The source of the bright light itself was from the floor. The entire floor was a series of glazed panes that radiated light from underneath. The ceiling was over ten meters in height with a dark background and small dots of light crowded around it. It created the feeling of an outdoor setting under a starry night sky. Yet the most astonishing sight was at the center of the room. A series of random blocks were floating over a round pedestal. He could feel a strange aura from those floating blocks.

He looked back and saw the door which he had come from. He inspected the surrounding walls and noticed that it was the only door. That meant there was no more stage after this. Whatever the Lizardman was guarding, it was in this place. But he could not see anything resembling a clue in this place.

So he was mistaken, there was no trace in this place as to what had caused the changes to the world. He told himself not to be somber, if following game world rules, there should at least be a treasure here, otherwise there was no need for a guard. The only things out of place were the floating blocks, so he approached the pedestal.

The whole setup was rather big once he was near. The pedestal height was halfway to his chest. Its circumference couldn't be covered even if he used two hands to hug it. Each of the floating blocks above was larger than a basketball, and they were irregular boxy shapes. None of the blocks were identical. There was a panel on one side of the pedestal. There was no button to press so he assumed the panel was a touchscreen.

He touched it with his finger. No response. Upon closer inspection, he saw a thin slit beside the panel. The width was the size of a card. He looked at the card that was still being held in his hand. Maybe this card could also be used here? He slid the card inside. When it was halfway, a force suddenly sucked the card in. It slipped from his fingers and went all the way inside the panel.

"Crap! I can't take it out anymore," he lamented.

Some undeciphered voice suddenly sounded out. It was like the sound of a broken computer. The panel lit up, then a holographic image appeared in front of the panel. It was an image of multiple blocks. He looked at the floating blocks above and then looked at the image. They were the same. Fascinated, he moved his finger to touch the hologram. The block image which he touched was moved following the motion of his finger. He heard a sound and looked up and saw one of the floating blocks moved.

So the hologram from the panel was a control panel to move the floating blocks. But what's the point? He studied the holographic blocks. It was much easier compared to the floating blocks above, they were too big and so it was difficult to see the whole picture. After observing for a while, he thought he might have grasped the secret. The blocks were some sort of puzzle. They looked disconnected from each other but some pieces he noticed had edges that might fit with each other if brought together.

Excited, he started to work on the blocks. He moved the blocks around and tried different combinations. It was not easy, as the blocks were not able to move freely, there were some invisible patterns that he needed to follow in order for them to move, which made the effort harder. But he enjoyed the process.

One other hobby he had other than playing VR games was playing puzzle games. Whether it was computer game puzzles or traditional block or jigsaw puzzles, he played them frequently during his free time.

There were more than a hundred blocks in the holographic constellation in front of him, solving it would take a long time. Without realizing it, time flew by. It took him around two hours to complete half of the blocks. There was now a colossal half cube floating above the pedestal, the remaining blocks scattered around it.

It took him another two hours to complete another one quarter. Strange, he assumed it would be easier when the blocks became fewer, instead he used more time to complete fewer blocks as they became more complete. He realized it was due to an invisible link that allowed the block's movements. At the start, there was more freedom to move the blocks around. As more were completed, the links decreased. He could only move them in a limited way now, which increased the difficulty.

After being aware of this rule, he decided not to rashly connect the blocks anymore. If the final block was left with a link that cannot fix with the rest of the cube, he might end up failing the puzzle. He was not sure if he could have a redo if he failed.

It was around twenty blocks left now. He studied them all and visualize their possible movement patterns. Like a chess player figuring out several moves ahead. Good thing he brought a pen and paper in his inventory. It didn't provide any effect but he was used to carrying them around. He used them to write notes and draw maps on important landmarks when he traveled.

He jotted down the possible movements of the blocks onto the paper, and imagined several simulations. He tried several configurations on paper to make sure he could complete the entire block. He met several dead ends when arriving at the last few pieces and had to redo them again on a new paper.

He was glad that he realized this early, or else he would have failed the puzzle. But as each configuration failed, he was worried that maybe he had made a mistake prior, so the remaining blocks might no longer be possible to be completed. He drove away the pessimistic thought and continued to work on the puzzle. On his forty-sixth tries, he finally reached the last piece and got the completed configurations.

"Yes!" He screamed out. A sense of achievement was always there whenever he completed a puzzle, that's why he enjoyed them so much.

He followed the configurations recorded in the last paper. He carefully moved the blocks. If he made the wrong move, then it would waste all his simulation efforts just now. When the last piece was inserted into the cube, the hologram vanished. He saw the floating cube started to hum and glowed. It began to revolve, slowly at first but then the rotation was so fast that he could no longer saw the cube shape, it looked more like a round object now. Several electrical discharges shot out from the cube.

Jack moved away, afraid that the electrical discharges might cause him damage.

Suddenly there was a bright flash followed by a loud explosion.