

World 241

Chapter 241: Change Of Attitude

As they were confused about what to do. Five light bolts crashed into the monsters, staggering them. Another ball of light shot by, accompanied by a figure jumping over their line formation. This figure landed in front of the monster mob and plowed through their center.

"Mister Storm Wind?" Lindsey said after seeing the figure more clearly.

"The Outworlder?" Walter uttered in disbelief.

After all, this outworlder he looked down upon had brazenly rammed into the mob of monsters that had dismayed the six of them. More absurd was this mob of Ice Trolls seemed to be having trouble dealing with this lone intruder amongst their rank.

Jack had taken out his Magic Staff. He had cast Barrier before he attacked the Ice Trolls with Energy Bolts and Mana Bullet. A thin layer of light was enveloping his body, the Ice Trolls hit at him with their clubs. Some even carried small spears, but none of these weapons could get past through his light barrier.

Since he was completely protected by the Barrier, he attacked the Ice Trolls without reservation. He slashed using Storm Breaker in his main hand while holding his Magic Staff in his off-hand, occasionally firing range attacks or spells on the monsters or simply used the staff to knock the trolls aside. He had no qualm showing his dual-class nature to NPCs.

Of course, despite Barrier's outstanding protection, he didn't abuse it by ignoring every attack from the monsters. He still dodged the ones that he could, and used his fast movements to weave around the monsters and confused them. The feeling he had when he did the exercise this morning was coming back. He could feel his body doing things that he couldn't do before. A human did physical training to improve their muscle strength and speed, but in this game world, such improvements were gained from leveling up. With sufficient strength and speed, the fancy maneuver that usually only forms and no substance, could transform into a deadly blow.

Such was the case for Jack, he implemented his grandfather's martial art in the fight. From the outsider's point of view, he seemed as if dancing. But each of his strikes and kicks carried great force due to his overwhelming strength.

The kicks only sent the monsters tumbling without damage, but his slashes trimmed a large chunk of HP from the monsters. He spun his body in mid-air and did a double three-sixty degree slash with his sword, cutting each monster around him twice. His Strength and Dexterity stats allowed him to perform such rapid twirl in the air which was otherwise impossible.

At the end of his spin, he sent a downward kick at a nearby Ice Trolls, slamming his head on the ground, before impaling its skull with his longsword.

The six squires were flabbergasted by his display. During his acrobatic spinning in the air, the tip of his magic staff had started glowing. By the time he landed, there was already half a shape of a rune forming

on it. He had always been good at multi-tasking, and he had furthered practice forming spell runes during melee fights.

When the spell rune was completed, a ring of bright flash exploded out with Jack as its center. Pushing back every Ice Trolls who stood five meters from him, and damaging them with an average of 110 damage. Most of the monsters stumbled and fell from the knockback force.

After casting that Mana Detonation spell, a clear area around Jack was formed. He looked back at the six dumbfounded squires, and yelled, "why the hell are you all idling? Attack them!"

Hearing Jack's rebuke, the six was roused up from their trance. They immediately struck at the closest monsters who were still on the ground due to the effect of Jack's spell.

Jack stayed in the middle of the monster mob, taking away their attention, while the six squires assailing from the side. Their cooperation gradually thinned out the monsters' numbers.

After the last monster fell, Jack again busied himself in picking up the dropped items. As expected, the six squires still didn't compete with him on the items. It took him longer to pick up the items this time due to the larger quantity, there was even two equipment that dropped. Unfortunately though, they were only common grades. He picked up the pace in picking them up as he was worried that the disobedient cadets would continue forward and left him again. However, the squires stayed in their places.

When he picked up the last piece, the cadets were still not moving. He looked back at them in bewilderment. "Let's go," he said.

"Sir, yes, sir!" They bellowed, with the exception of Walter. Jack was slightly taken aback by their ardor. He guessed that even NPCs respected strength.

They moved forward. This time with Jack at the head, the cadets following from behind in an obedient manner. Walter was at the most rear of the line, wearing a dark expression and grumbling with gritted teeth, "what's so good about this outworlder. He must have used some sort of trick. I'm not going to fall for it."

They took care of more Ice Trolls as they traveled deeper into the cave. Jack found several more copper ores behind layers of ice. Walter didn't come to snatch them anymore. However, since the cadets saw Jack acquired those ores, they had also starting to pay attention to the ice wall. Seeing their eagerness, Jack was mindful enough to not monopolize all the ores even if he could see all the ore's positions clearly from his God-eye monocle. He let the cadets take some of the ores. Only if they seemed to have completely missed the spot, he then went and took it.

The cave had several branching parts. However, the cadets seemed to know the way so Jack was not worried about getting lost. The lighting apparatus along the wall of the cave starting to decrease. He could see some of them with a broken condition, it was probably the doing of the Ice Trolls.

Without the lighting apparatus to illuminate the cave, only darkness could be seen in the inner part of the cave. Lindsey took out a torch and was about to light it but Jack gestured for her to stop. He waved his magic staff and cast Illumination. A ball of bright light appeared and floated above Jack. The light shone from it could illuminate areas ten meters away from them clearly.

He didn't actually need the spell since his Dragon's Eye skill gave him a passive ability to see in the dark, he was doing it for the cadets. It was better to rely on this spell so none of them needed to spare a hand to hold a torch.

The breadth of the cave was getting wider and the air colder as they went deeper. As the temperature dropped even lower, Jack heard a notification that announced he had been afflicted by a physical status ailment called mild freeze. He checked this ailment in his status window and found the description saying that his speed was decreased by 10%.

He saw the squires shivered from the cold temperature. They took out a blue cloak from their bag and used them to cover their bodies. Jack inspected the cloak and found that it gave them 20 ice resistance and 50% resistance to Freeze. They were clearly aware of the cold effect in this cave and had prepared for it. Damn that Bailey, why didn't she give him a heads up as well?

"Have you people scouted this place before?" Jack asked.

Pablo nodded, "me and Walter had come to scout before."

"How far does this cave goes?"

"A few hundred meters more, we will come to a large opening. The cause of this cold was supposed to be there. Based on the report of the miners who used to work in this cave. An ice mana site was discovered during their mining, which caused this cold phenomenon."

"You mentioned before that our mission is to stop this anomaly. How do we stop it?"

"We were given an orb that can absorb the cold energy from the ice mana site. Once all the energy was absorbed, this mine should go back to normal."

"Oh? Where is the orb?"

"I have it," Alonzo said and patted on his saddlebag.

Jack nodded. "There should be a lot of Ice Trolls near the ice mana site. How long does it take for the orb to complete the absorption?"

"Every mana site is different, but I think it might take fifteen minutes to half an hour," Alonzo answered.

"That long? Meaning we have to clear the space around the mana site before we can perform the absorption."

Walter made a smacking sound, "there is no Ice Troll around the ice mana site."

"There is none?"

"I've scouted the place during a previous visit with Pablo. There is only one boss there, an Ice Troll Sentinel," Walter said.

"Really?" Jack looked at Pablo.

"I didn't manage to reach that far," Pablo said. "It was Walter that had gone ahead and saw the place with the ice mana site."

"You don't believe me?" Walter said with annoyance.

"How strong is the boss?" Jack asked.

"So-so. A level 22 Elite boss. It was just the right difficulty for us six here, hence the mission. You can just sit back and watch us in action."

Chapter 242: Second Special Elite

If that was so, I would be happy to just stand back and watched, Jack said in his mind.

They continued to proceed forward. They clashed with another wave of Ice Trolls before they arrived at the large space mentioned by Walter and Pablo. The temperature dropped a notch lower at this place. At the far end of the corner was a large jagged ice crystal that emitted cold energy. Jack assumed that should be the ice mana site. Everything at its vicinity was frozen solid, except for a large figure that sat cross-legged beside the ice crystal. Its back was facing Jack and the others. That figure should belong to the Ice Troll Sentinel.

The ice crystal was bright enough to provide light to its surrounding, so the ball of light above Jack was no longer useful. Jack and the cadets were standing in an opening placed around ten meters in height from the ground. There was a rope ladder that took them down to the floor with the ice crystal. One by one they used the ladder to reach the ground and advanced towards the large ice crystal. The sitting large figure was still unmoving, apparently deep in meditation to detect the approaching intruders.

When Jack got into the range of detection using his God-eye monocle, he used his Inspect skill.

Ice Troll Sentinel (Special Elite boss, humanoid), level: 28

HP: 46000

Jack stopped his steps abruptly once the information of the monster was displayed on his screen. He looked back at Walter and Pablo. F**king newbie scouts, who the heck said it was a level 22 Elite boss? Jack cursed in his mind.

The two squires detected Jack's gaze and were puzzled by it.

"What's wrong?" Pablo asked.

Walter was less civil, "do you have a problem with us?"

"Damn right I got a problem, are you telling me that is a level 22 Elite boss?" Jack pointed at the Ice Troll Sentinel.

The squires went closer to inspect the monster, the NPCs' inspect skill apparently had a shorter range.

"What the f**k!" One of them screamed.

It was not known whether it was due to the scream or because those cadets went too close to check on the monster's info, but at that time, it rose from its sitting position and looked back at them.

Everyone could feel the chill entering their bodies.

"Crap, run!" Jack called out. The last time he fought with a special elite was the Lizardman Blood Guard, who completely trumped him. Although at the time he was still at basic classes with low-quality equipment and a little arsenal of skills, the gap between their powers was still very large. Only after he received the Goddess' Godly Might temporary buff that he could contend with said monster.

Now even after he had vastly improved from his previous condition, becoming advanced class, almost fully geared in rare grade equipment, with a variety of powerful skills to boot. He was still not confident enough. After all, the monster in front of him was a whole ten levels higher than him. When he fought with Lizardman Blood Guard, the difference was only two levels.

Everyone ran once hearing Jack's call.

'Do you think I can win?' Jack still asked Peniel while he was running.

"Aren't you running now? Then your thought is the same as mine," she answered.

There was only one way out of this place, it was through the opening that they came in from. They would need to climb the rope ladder in order to go back up to the opening. There was only one rope ladder, which meant that they had to do it one by one.

Jack looked back at the Ice Troll Sentinel. Surprisingly, it was still standing at its original place. It was simply staring at the fleeing intruders. This troll was larger than its usual counterparts, it stood taller than any of the humans there. There were two big tusks pointing upward from its bottom jaw. Jack imagined that he saw a sneer from its tusked mouth, as if ridiculing the scurrying pests in front of him.

The cadets reached the rope ladder. Teddy was at the front, so he immediately ascended the rope ladder. Alonzo was behind him, but he let Marriet to climb ahead of him. Jack took on the rear guard in case the Ice Troll Sentinel made a move. This trial of ensuring the cadets' safety was starting to be dangerous.

At this time, the foot of the Ice Troll Sentinel shifted. Jack had only noticed that minute movement, and then he lost sight of the Ice Troll Sentinel. His intuition made him glimpsed to his side, Lindsey was at the last of the queue to ascend the rope. His body moved instinctively as he summoned Magic Shield using the magic staff on his left hand. A shadow arrived as he put himself at Lindsey's back.

The shadow crashed into him. His body jerked as he flew away some distance, landing a few meters away. He hurriedly got back up as he examined his HP bar. Even with the Magic Shield, he still lost almost 200 HP from that single exchange. Another four more hits and he was a goner.

The Ice Troll Sentinel stood with his hand outstretched. Its hands didn't hold any weapon, unlike its smaller brethren. The attack had been the result of his bare-handed swing. The Ice Troll Sentinel looked at Jack with an interested stare. An ant had survived its assault.

The others had frozen due to the monster's sudden assault. Its speed was too fast.

Teddy, Marriet, and Alonzo had climbed up the opening. Pablo was still in the middle of his climb, but he had stopped in the middle of his climb. Walter who was prepared to climb yelled at him, "hurry up your fat ass!"

"You up there, leave first!" Jack yelled at Alonzo and the others who had already made it up there. He then motioned to Lindsey, "you climb next!"

"The hell she is!" Walter protested.

"She goes first!" Jack demanded.

Walter fumed at the side of the rope but he didn't force his way when Lindsey took the rope ladder.

"Thank you," she said sincerely to Jack before climbing it.

The Ice Troll Sentinel was peculiarly still standing at the place where it had attempted to attack Lindsey. It didn't make any movement since that first attack. Its eyes were locked onto Jack.

Had it taken an interest at me? Jack took a gulp with worry.

After Lindsey climbed up, Walter hurriedly climbed as well. Alonzo and the others had left following Jack's instruction.

A rune started to form on the tip of Jack's magic staff. The Ice Troll Sentinel saw Jack's action and frowned. Its figure suddenly disappeared again.

There was nobody down here anymore, and since Jack noticed the monster had taken an interest in him, he was sure he would be its main target. He had given the monster his full attention, in order to determine when it started moving. Knowing the timing of its attack and its target, he could better plan an evasive maneuver.

He jumped backed diagonally. Whether the monster attacked directly from the front or sneaked from the sides, the attack should miss him unless it was coincidentally attacking in the same diagonal direction he was retreating to.

The Ice Troll Sentinel appeared where he was a second ago, striking from the side with a right punch. He had managed to dodge it. Yet, the monster didn't stop after its attack failed, it turned and swung his left arm before Jack's feet even landed on the ground.

Jack abruptly used his Storm Breaker to parry. The blow sent him flying again, crashing onto the wall right beside the rope ladder. His spell rune was still forming, he had trained with the spell so often that he could still concentrate on it despite the heat of battle. The rune was completed and an energy bubble enveloped his body. He immediately reached for the rope.

His plan was to cast the Barrier shield and relied on it for protection as he climbed the rope ladder. The Ice Troll Sentinel seemed to place the ice mana site at considerable importance, so he deduced that it won't chase after them once they left this place. Just like when he met his first special elite monster, the Lizardman Blood Guard who stayed at the entrance to the room with the Goddess.

Walter was already at the top of the ladder. Lindsey had proceeded ahead following Alonzo and the others. Jack felt his barrier shaking as the Ice Troll Sentinel attacked him, but he ignored it as he focused on climbing the ladder.

Jack saw Walter had already reached the top. He looked down at Jack, looked back to the opening where Lindsey and the others had run ahead, then looked back down at Jack again. His expression was strange. Jack had a bad feeling after seeing the guy's weird action.

Before Jack could make sense of the guy. Walter used his sword and cut the rope ladder.

Chapter 243: Trapped

Jack watched with disbelief as the ladder he was holding onto suddenly lost its hold. He fell back down at the same time as he felt a second impact on his Barrier. The energy barrier burst apart on this second impact. Jack had lost all its protection as he landed back onto the ground, trapped with a special elite boss who completely over-leveled him.

He quickly jumped to the side and rolled on the ground, in fear of the boss' follow-up attack. He turned to look back at the end of his roll, and found that the Ice Troll Sentinel remained under where the rope ladder used to be. He was sure now that the monster's weird mouth was grinning. He looked up and saw that there was nobody anymore up in the opening, Walter had gone away.

That prick! Jack cursed him in his mind. He had known that the NPCs in this world are unlike his previous games. He had always treated them as if real people, but he never expected them to be capable of bearing a grudge for such a small issue, and actively putting players in harm's way just because of their mood swings.

The Ice Troll Sentinel was in front of him, watching him with ridicule. But what Jack felt at the moment was not fear, but anger. He swore he would pay that stupid NPC back for what he had done. He forced himself to calm down, what he needed to do now was finding a way out of this cave. It was impossible for him to defeat this boss at his current level.

But this boss gave a different feel compared to all other monsters he had met in this world. Actually, it was different from all monsters he had fought in VR games. There was something different with it. Was it intelligence? Jack thought at first, but no, it was different from intelligence. He had met monsters that possessed high intelligence in past VR games due to advanced AI, but this was different. It was more like a simple emotion from the monster. It felt slightly arrogant, other monsters would simply pummel intruders on sight, but this typical one seemed especially enjoyed gloating.

Jack cleared his mind and looked around the place. It was not the time to ponder about the behavior of the denizens of this game world. He looked around with half of his attention still on the Ice Troll Sentinel. He was trying to see if there was any other way out. However, the only opening from this space was the hole above where he came in from.

The Ice Troll Sentinel took a step. Jack's body tensed up, a shield made of light materialized at the tip of his staff. He expected the boss to move with its super speed towards him, but on the contrary, it simply took normal steps slowly towards him.

He didn't get the sudden fright as he did the first time the boss attacked. However, the sight of the boss taking its slow walk towards him was instead more dreadful. He calmed his nerve down. He reminded himself that he had encountered such a dangerous situation as well in previous VR games. He knew the key to dealing with such precarious circumstances was to maintain his calm. Panicking would not help. Even though he had the Immortal Soul skill to help him mitigate the death penalty once, he didn't intend to simply give up.

Better to take the initiative! Jack thought, and fired a Mana Bullet directly at the Ice Troll Sentinel.

The Mana Bullet spell traveled in a straight line, Jack directly ran behind the speeding bullet with all his speed. His objective at the moment was to force the monster to move away. Its body was currently below the exit hole. Jack needed it away before trying to climb the wall. He hoped to rush past as the monster was dodging his Mana Bullet.

However, to his alarm, the Ice Troll Sentinel rushed straight at him, completely ignoring the spell. The Mana Bullet burst like a pitiful bubble as it touched the boss' body and caused 68 damage. The damage number alarmed him a second time, under normal circumstances this spell of his would result in over 200 damage, but against this boss, it got badly nerfed.

The boss' speed was already very fast, coupled with his surprising approach, it was already in front of Jack before he could stop his forward momentum. A cold blue fist stretched out towards him. Luckily he had prepared Magic Shield right after he cast Mana Bullet. He kept the spell on as he ran behind his Mana Bullet. The fist collided with the magic shield and sent him flying another time. He now could sympathize with his enemies who he kept sent flying by exploiting his overpowering attributes. He had now experienced himself when he was at the receiving end.

He tumbled on the ground but quickly got back up. He had only a quarter of his life left. The monster wasn't staying in his place any longer, it probably was done playing. Just as it disappeared from its position, Jack activated Dragon's Eye. The Ice Troll Sentinel figures could be seen again after the skill's activation. The monster's movement was still fast but not as extreme as when he was facing the possessed Winston.

The boss made a sideways move before making a beeline towards him, trying to catch his prey from the side. He activated his Recovery Ring's ability, which recovered half of his total HP, stamina, and MP, bringing his health back to a safe level.

He then immediately activated Life Burning Art, bringing his HP to half again. Then used Heal scroll to replenish his life again. All three actions were done at the speed of thoughts, and due to the slow-motion effect of Dragon's Eye, he managed to complete all three actions which didn't require movement, before the Ice Troll Sentinel reached him. He had to use everything in his arsenal that could keep him alive, he couldn't afford to hold back anymore.

The Ice Troll Sentinel threw a fist again at him, but he could see it clearly now. The boost from Life Burning Art allowed him to match speed with the monster even just barely. He ducked away from the punch and slashed his sword horizontally with a Power Strike. The attack hit, yet there was no usual knockback effect from Power Strike. The Ice Troll Sentinel's feet firmly stayed in its place. The damage, however, was 122, which was still much lower than what he usually inflicted, but the reduction was not as extreme as when he hit the monster with Mana Bullet. He deduced that this boss' magical defense was much higher than its physical defense.

Jack was in fact not trying to damage the boss, he was expecting to have his Power Strike pushed the monster back and staggered it for a bit to allow him some space. Seeing that his intention had failed, he kept the Ice Troll Sentinel in front of him and tried to sidestep around it to get closer to the exit hole.

The Ice Troll Sentinel was rather surprised that this low-level human had managed to dodge his punch. It paused for a bit, but quickly regained its composure. It sent another punch as the human was trying to move around it. The human dodged the punch again! It was not a coincidence. Feeling humiliated by

having this ant dodging its attack twice, it opened its mouth and roared. Its eyes shone with a deep blue glow that radiated outward.

The glow's shockwave crashed onto Jack's head. He felt a heavy mental pressure that pressed into his mind. The pain was almost unbearable before a warm feeling came from his Purifying Pendant and dispelled his headache. His pendant had saved him again from a mental status ailment.

Jack looked at the Ice Troll Sentinel and realized this was his chance. The monster had halted due to performing that mental attack. His Dragon's Eye active skill only lasted for ten seconds. He could not rely on it indefinitely. He had prepared a plan and this could be the only window available.

He took out a magic scroll from his inventory and activated it. A rope of pure light lashed out as the scroll disintegrated. It snaked around the still monster and started entangling its body. The long rope wrapped around the Ice Troll Sentinel rapidly and bound its body, preventing it from moving.

The monster was dumbstruck. It was supposed to be the prey that was immobilized by its mental attack. But not only its mental attack ineffective, the human had even made use of the pause at the end of its attack and sent a spell that constrained it.

Jack quickly turned his back to the Ice Troll Sentinel. Considering the monster's power, the Magic Bind spell wouldn't last long. Peniel had informed him that spell was only advanced class grade, not elite class, so he didn't put much faith in it.

He looked at the hole above and took out the last Wind Jet scroll from his bag. He activated it, the propulsion of the wind pushed him up and forward. His body shot at a high speed towards the opening on the wall.

Chapter 244: Dismembered

The spell sent him further than he intended and his body crashed at the ceiling after going inside the opening. He ricocheted from the ceiling and crashed back to the ground. He had finally managed to escape back to the exit hole.

He felt a huge wave of relief despite the pain of crashing twice, "that was a close call just now."

"I wouldn't consider it safe already if I were you," he heard Peniel's voice.

"You think it will leave the mana site and chase after me?"

Before he received Peniel's reply, his thought was shattered by a loud roar. He could sense the anger from that roar.

"I think it will be wise to start running," Peniel said.

Seriously? It was not going to chase after me, right? Jack was still optimistic. Still, he did think it was not wise to stay around to find out. He quickly got up and sprinted away. His Life Burning Art was still active, it consumed bits of his HP each second, but he couldn't care less. He needed the speed increase for his run.

He heard a crashing sound from behind. He glanced backward and saw a blue figure in the distance.

Shit! It was really chasing me! He thought in dismay.

He changed one of his Storm Breaker's weapon skills to the one that increased his movement speed to aid him in running faster. He even used Charge every now and then to increase his traveling speed. Good thing his intelligence stats had increased quite high, he had no problem remembering the route back to the outside amongst the many branching pathways. However, he also knew from his memory that the exit was still far away. The pressure he felt from behind was getting closer each second.

He was depressed with trepidation. He was running out of options, was he finally going to put his Immortal Soul inherent skill to use? He rummaged through the inside of his bag with his mind without slowing down his running speed.

He only had three magic scrolls left, Fireball, Heal, and Magic Bind. Fireball was an Elite class single-target offensive spell. He had no doubt that it could inflict decent damage on the Ice Troll Sentinel, but a single spell wouldn't make much difference. Alternatively, he could use Magic Bind to stall the Ice Troll Sentinel again, but based on the first usage, it would only buy him several seconds. It wouldn't be enough for him to reach the exit of this cave.

He also had five Disruptive Bombs which could deal damage and stop the target for two seconds. The damage was too minuscule for the boss, while the time stop was too short. Even if he used all these five disruptive bombs with the Magic Bind scroll, the accumulated time still could not provide the time he needed to reach the exit.

The other item in his bag that could probably save his current predicament was the Themisphere Beacon Stone. It would summon soldiers and guards within a radius of 300 kilometers that would protect him for the next three hours. But would the reinforcement come fast enough before the Ice Troll Sentinel reached him? And he felt it was such a waste to use this item on a single boss. The beacon stone was a one-time use, after all. Should he just let himself be killed and save this beacon stone for another time? He was conflicted.

He could hear the Ice Troll Sentinel getting closer now.

After a short struggle, he came to a conviction. In his past VR games, even though he could always come back to life and redo his attempt, he had always treated it as if he would really die if he failed. That's how he climbed to become one of the top veteran experts amongst the independent players. It was this will that had pushed him to become better.

Even if he had the Immortal Soul skill which gave him a much more lenient penalty compared to others, he had to treat it as if he had only one life. If he allowed himself to become lax, it would cause a chain reaction that would shape a bad habit of continual compromises.

With his determination set, he prepared to use the Themisphere Beacon Stone. The soldiers and guards would need time to reach his place. He would use the Magic Bind scroll and Disruptive Bombs to stall for time. He would spare nothing to stay alive!

As his hand held the Themisphere Beacon Stone in preparation to use it, a movement in his radar caught his attention. There was a white dot approaching at high speed.

An NPC? Jack turned in its direction and saw a blurry figure rushed past him. His radar's range had been heavily weakened inside this cave, so this newcomer was already very close by when detected.

Jack turned back and watched as the figure made a heavy impact with the Ice Troll Sentinel. Jack was actually rather shocked to find that the Ice Troll Sentinel was already this close. The impact threw both parties skidded back. The Ice Troll Sentinel was driven back further than the ambusher. Its body knocked on the cave's icy wall, breaking chunks of ice from the impact. The monster also suffered some damages, it was clear from the exchange who was the winner.

After that collision, the assaulter stopped and Jack could finally see who the figure was.

"Lieutenant Bailey?" Jack said.

The female warrior was holding a long spear with both her hands. There was a faint green light at the tip of her spear.

"Stand back! I will handle this monster," she said.

Jack didn't try to act brave, he complied and moved back further to allow them some space.

The Ice Troll Sentinel made a low growl as it pushed itself away from the cracked wall. It stretched its arms. Icy breath coalesced on both his palms. The breath solidified into two large icy sabers. Looking at the two sabers and the aura they emitted, Jack realized the monster was only toying with him previously. It could have killed him easily if it went all out from the start.

The Ice Troll Sentinel was completely ignoring Jack now. Its playful mood was no longer evident. It was fully focused on Bailey. It lunged forwards swinging its two sabers rapidly. The two sabers crisscrossed and created a tempest of icy wind, cutting everything that it went past.

Bailey didn't stay still. When the Ice Troll Sentinel came into her spear range, the spear vibrated into many images. Each of the images shot out, painting many straight green lines that met with the Ice Troll Sentinel's rapid swings. Each clash caused the monster to retreat one step.

Jack thought it was obvious. Even though the monster was one grade higher at Special Elite compared to Bailey, but the lieutenant was a whooping twenty-two level higher. It would be weird if she could not deal with the monster. However, the gap was still not that big, Jack thought it could be caused by the environment. The cold temperature in this cave empowered the Ice Troll Sentinel while it hampered others who had no resistance to the ice element.

Slowly but surely, the advantage held by Bailey was getting more palpable. Her spear managed to break through the protection of the monster's two sabers several times and scored some hits. More impressively, as Jack noticed, was that the hits were always on the same point, at the monster's left thigh.

It often used its fast movement speed to try to sneak an attack onto Bailey, but her own speed was not lacking. Combined with her spear's large reach, she managed to deflect each of the sneak attacks and counter-attacked with a thrust to its left thigh.

After a while, it started to limp and lost its previous super speed. Jack thought by then that the battle's outcome was decided.

Seeing her opponent's movements getting sluggish. Bailey prepared a large attack. She arched herself backward, as a torrent of green wind encircled the tip of her spear. After a second of concentrating her power, she unleashed the gathered green energy by thrusting her spear forward. The green energy shot ahead with spiraling momentum, it struck accurately on the left thigh of the monster which had been suffering continuous abuse. Upon this last blow, the monster's limb tore apart. Jack watched with astonishment as the Ice Troll Sentinel's left leg was thrown away.

He had known from his previous battles that attacking a certain part of the body would have added effect, but apart from dismembering Giant Ants' tiny appendages in the past, he never thought that it was possible to dismember an actual limb of a monster.

The monster screamed in pain as it tried to balance itself on its single leg. With the last attack, its HP had fallen to less than half.

Bailey didn't ease up after her success. She threw multiple thrusts at her opponent. Now that the monster had difficulty moving, it had become no more than a punching bag for the female warrior. She moved in high speed encircling the monster while sending repeated stabs onto different parts of the monster's body. Its HP continued to decrease at a steady rate.

Chapter 245: Kill Steal

The fight was completely one-sided. Jack had not seen Bailey get hit at all. Her technique with the spear was remarkable. Jack surmised that the skill she exhibited was not any lower than a skilled martial artist. Her fighting style was more rich, unlike players who were locked on a fixed class.

As he saw the monster's continuous decrease in its HP, he suddenly thought of something. If he could kill this boss, wouldn't the experience and its loots be marvelous?

However, he would need to deal the killing blow himself. Bailey was registered as white on his radar, meaning she was not part of his hidden party, unlike those cadets. If she killed the boss, he would not get the experience. And there was even a possibility nothing would drop since it was an unassociated NPC who made the kill. Judging from how the cadets showed no interest in the killed monster's loots, he doubted that monsters killed by NPC would drop loots if they were not under a player's influence.

He watched as the fight continued. Most of Bailey's standard attacks dealt around 180 to 230 damage, while her skills could dish out up to 800 damage without critical. In order to kill steal the boss, he would need to deliver damage more than that before Bailey's last attack hit, which was impossible with his available skill.

He looked into the Fireball scroll inside his inventory. He thought back to the Chain Lightning scroll he had used on the three guilds' members. The effect had been devastating. Although the Chain Lightning was a higher-level spell than the Fireball, they were still both under Elite class spells. Chain Lightning was an AOE spell, while Fireball was a single target spell. The single damage of Fireball should not be less than Chain Lightning's individual damage, right? The question was, could its damage eclipsed Bailey's?

Magic spells generally had higher damage output than physical skills, so it should not be that strange if the damage dealt by this spell was higher than Bailey's attacks. But he also remembered that the Ice Troll Sentinel had a higher magical defense than its physical one, this gave Jack a headache.

There was also the possibility whether Bailey would get angry if he stole her kill. Kill stealing was an abhorred practice yet often found in VR RPG games. The players who did it will become a target by the masses, especially by the victims they stole from. Unless the perpetrator was confident of their own strength, or had strong backings. Generally, players would avoid doing it.

Now Jack was just wondering if kill stealing from an NPC would yield the same response.

Damn it! His head hurt from thinking too much. No pain, no gain. Let's just give it a try! He would wait until the boss' HP was around 1000 before he made his move. He could just hope that Bailey didn't execute any high damage finishing move or scored a critical hit during that window.

He moved closer as the Ice Troll Sentinel's HP entered critical health. His right hand held the Fireball magic scroll in preparation to unleash it at a moment's notice.

Bailey never stopped his offense. The Ice Troll Sentinel's HP kept on falling, 10%, 5%. Jack went closer. A little bit more. He aimed the Fireball magic scroll at the monster. Good thing since it had lost its one leg, it didn't move much, so Jack did not worry about missing his target.

Bailey made a sweep and countless green wind stabbed at the helpless monster. Its HP received a sharp decline and fell immediately to only a little above 600. She then bent her knees and arched herself back while her spear glowed wildly with green energy.

Crap! Jack cursed, he recognized that move. The female warrior was making two consecutive high damaging moves to finish off the boss! If this second skill hit, it was as good as gone.

"Allow me!" Jack shouted as he activated his Fireball scroll. His shout momentarily disturbed Bailey's concentration, she looked at him in consternation. A huge ball made of fire in the meantime was formed and sped towards the dying Ice Troll Sentinel.

Jack was not confident of his spell damage. He followed up with Mana Bullet spell using his left hand even before the fireball reached the Ice Troll Sentinel. He then resummoned his Storm Breaker and was about to use Sword of Light, which he planned to follow up again with Energy Bolts. Four consecutive moves of the highest damage available to him at this stage, he thought they should be enough, shouldn't they?

But his sword hand stopped before he executed Sword of Light, because of the damage number above the Ice Troll Sentinel. It was 1200 damage, almost twice over what the boss had left. The boss' body was burnt to ashes. Jack's Mana Bullet passed through the scattered ashes and hit the wall behind. Several loots dropped to the ground.

Jack was dumbstruck by the result. Wasn't the boss supposed to have a high magical defense? But after thinking about it, he thought the fact that the Fireball spell was of fire element might have been the cause. After all, fire was the bane of ice. He then heard notification informing of the experience gained from killing the boss, followed up by three consecutive notifications of level up.

His Warrior class had leveled up successively two times, arriving at level 20, while his Mage class crossed through level 18 and just a tad bit more from reaching level 19. The experience from the boss was so generous! Jack thought.

But he thought it shouldn't be too strange, the boss was after all ten levels ahead of him, and was even a Special Elite grade to boot. Having multiple level-ups from killing such an over-leveled enemy was not so out of the question. If he didn't have a dual-class, maybe he would have leveled up directly to level 21. He was very satisfied with this result, this should put him back ahead of current players' general levels.

While he was admiring his advancement, he realized that Bailey was looking at him.

Oh, shit! Was she mad?

"Thank you for the help, but it wasn't necessary," he heard her say. It took a few seconds for Jack to register her words and discern that she took no offense from his kill steal. He heaved a relieved sigh.

He walked to the boss' loots, there were only four items, but the color indicated from his God-eye monocle showed that none was mediocre. He glanced at Bailey first, making sure that she did not have an issue with him picking up the items. Seeing that she didn't have a reaction, he crouched down and inspected the items.

One was a bag of coins, Jack opened it up and 10 gold coins entered his pocket. That was a generous sum, he remembered how the guilds struggled to get this amount to register their guild formally in this world.

The second one was a ring, he used his inspect skill on it.

Swift Ice Ring (Rare accessory)

Reflex +2

Ice resistance +20

A rare ring. Coincidentally, out of all his currently equipped gears, only the ring on his left hand was below rare grade. It was the uncommon grade Ring of Luck, which was the first accessory he had obtained. He took a bit of time to mull over. The Ring of Luck gave +1 to luck stats, which was the hardest stat to increase. Yet his basic luck stat was already 12, losing this 1 point from the ring should not be too consequential.

He decided then and took off the Ring of Luck and replaced it with the new Swift Ice Ring. Once he wore the ring, the discomfort from the cold temperature reduced significantly. The effect on the increase of his ice resistance was felt immediately.

He moved to the other item which was a pile of weird-looking obsidian metal in a ring shape. There were ten of them in that pile. His Inspect informed him the name of the metals was Mana Core. Apart from that, there was no description of its usage or effect.

'What are these?' He asked Peniel in his mind.

"Those are Mana Cores," Peniel answered.

'I can inspect their names,' Jack said with exasperation. 'What are they used for?'

"For many things. They are a power source for many magical tools and applications. You can consider them as the second form of currency in this world, the difference is you can't trade them normally in

shops as you do with coins. You will get them from monsters as often as coins starting from monsters with level 25 and above."

Something for the future then, he thought and stored these Mana Cores into his inventory.

He picked up the last item, which was a tiny pebble with a cold aura. The aura was so thick that it formed an icy mist around it. The thing was so cold it stung, Jack was jolted by the stinging cold that he released the hold of the item, which fell back onto the ground.

Chapter 246: Retaliation

The heck! He used his God-eye monocle to inspect the pebble without touching it.

Ice Seed (Rare consumable)

Evolve a skill

'Evolve a skill? Hey, Peniel, I remembered you said something about this. Is this something that can give extra effect just like Scarface's Mana Bullet spell?'

"Yes," Peniel answered.

Jack was ecstatic, he had been interested to find this seed ever since he saw Scarface's spell effect. He picked up the Ice Seed again. Now that he was aware of the cold sting, he could bear it. He held it just long enough to transfer it into his storage bag.

Seeing him finished collecting the loots, Bailey said to him, "you are lucky to survive long enough until I arrive."

"Yes, thank goodness that you came. I thought you will just be waiting outside the cave and not coming in?"

"That was my intention, but I receive an alarm beacon from Alonzo. He carried it for an emergency. I came in immediately. I met them halfway and they informed me about the boss and that you were still inside. I told them to stay behind as I rushed here. I half expecting to find your corpse actually, imagine my surprise when I found you are still alive. That was very brave of you to hold the boss to allow my cadets to escape, I sincerely thank you."

Hold the boss? Walter's act of cutting the rope came back to his mind, his anger was welled up again.

"That was some cadets you have. How could they mistake a level 28 Special Elite for a level 22 Elite?" Jack uttered with annoyance.

"It's not entirely their fault. I think when they first scouted this cave, the boss was indeed level 22 Elite. There was a possibility it underwent evolution."

"Evolution?"

"Yes, it was when a monster increases in grade and level. That Ice Troll Sentinel must have absorbed a large quantity of energy from the Ice Mana Site to be able to reap such an advancement."

There could be something like this also in this world? Jack thought. As he contemplated over this info, they heard some footsteps approaching.

They turned and saw the five cadets came back. All of them gave a surprised and relieved look when they saw Jack was still alive, except for Walter, his surprise carried a grim expression.

"Thank the Gods you are safe!" Lindsey was the most enthusiastic seeing Jack was safe and sound. It was understandable considering how Jack had saved her.

The other cadets save for Walter also came and expressed their relief of his safety. Their cold treatment towards him when they first entered the cave was no more. They had been impressed by his prowess and also moved by his willingness to engage the boss and let them escape first. Jack just replied to them with a smile and small nod. His eyes stared at Walter.

Walter was obviously unsettled by the stare and also unhappy with his comrades' warm treatment of Jack. He spoke out loud, "what's so special about this outworlder? He is clearly just lucky enough to stay alive until Lieutenant Bailey saved him!"

Jack's eyes narrowed. The guy had left him trapped down there to fend for himself, and he didn't seem to have any guilty conscience about it.

"What?! Are you unhappy about something?" Walter uttered.

Lindsey couldn't tolerate Walter's attitude, "you are really annoying! You might not have made it out if mister Storm Wind hadn't stalled the boss to give us more time to escape."

Hearing Lindsey's words, Jack could guess that it was what Walter had told them when they didn't saw him during their escape.

"Heh, if he foolishly wanted to become a hero, that's his problem. He is probably just trying to earn more merit. After all, don't outworlders have the ability to revive again after they die?"

Jack took a step towards him. Walter immediately goes into alert. But after seeing Jack's warm smile, he relaxed. He had heard that outworlders are savages who mostly didn't respect laws when given the chance, but he supposed even an outworlder would be wary of making an enemy with the noble of the kingdom. His confidence was back.

"You should know your limit. This is not your world after all. Know your place and you will less likely to get in trouble."

Jack still wore his smile when he spoke, "trouble? You mean like when you cut the rope and let me fall to fight with the boss alone?"

After Jack finished his sentence, he dashed forward. His action caught everyone by surprise, including Walter. Before the squire could unsheathe his weapon, Jack's Storm Breaker was already in his hand. He executed Swing skill vertically. The move slashed Walter's left arm. Jack then followed up in a fluid motion and used Power Strike at the same arm that was hit by Swing. The skill sent Walter flying back. While he was still in the air, Jack performed a third skill, Sword of Light. The shining crescent shot through the air and hit the exact same spot which had been hit twice before.

Jack had copied Bailey's method when fighting the Ice Troll Sentinel. Walter's defense was definitely not as tough as the boss', and he was also not wearing armor at the arm part where Jack was targeting. The effect of the three consecutive skills resulted in an outcome expected by Jack. When the Sword of Light hit, apart from the damage number appearing on Walter, his left arm was also sliced apart. Jack was completely furious with the NPC's treachery, he couldn't care less about the penalty of attacking within the capital. He, however, was still conscious enough to not take the guy's life.

"Argghh...!! You a**hole! What have you done...!?" Walter was screaming in pain, holding the stump of his arm. Blood was spurting out from the cut part.

Jack showed no intention to continue his attack. Nevertheless, Bailey still stood between him and Walter.

"What's the meaning of this?" She asked with a stern face.

"It's a retaliation for what he had done to me," Jack replied calmly. "He intentionally cut the only rope that can be used to climb out from the boss' lair, leaving me down there to die."

Bailey's brows furrowed further upon hearing it, he turned to Walter and asked, "was that true?"

Walter's eyes were red with madness as he gritted his teeth to endure his pain, "what the f**k does it matter?! He is an outworlder! He has no business here in our world. They should all be chased out from our kingdom! So what if I try to kill him? What value does he have against a noble such as me? He has attacked me, I command you to kill him...!"

The punk didn't even try to deny it, Jack thought. His intolerance against outworlders was excessive. It was probably similar to the racial discrimination in his original world.

Walter continued to rant through his pain. Bailey wasn't in the mood to listen anymore, she said to the other cadets, "Marriet, use your heal to stop his bleeding. You and Pablo take him back."

Marriet went and cast her heal spell. She wasn't using any magic staff, but was instead using her two hands facing Walter's wounded arm while chanting the spell. A golden healing light enveloped Walter's stump. Jack saw Walter's HP got replenished. The blood was no longer coming out from his wound. Yet the arm was still severed. The healing spell didn't grow the limb back. She and Pablo then carry the wounded cadet and brought him away.

Walter was yelling in anger as he was taken away, demanding Bailey to capture or kill Jack. When he saw no response from the Lieutenant, he threw threats at both her and Jack, proclaiming that his father would not let this go, and for Jack to prepare for his punishment.

"Who the heck is his father anyway?" Jack asked when the sound of Walter's frantic ravings lessened due to distance.

"A magistrate of the kingdom," Bailey answered, her sight was still in the direction of the three leaving cadets.

Jack didn't exactly understand the hierarchy of power in this kingdom, but he assumed this magistrate held quite a high position in the kingdom.

"I guess I am in big trouble then?" Jack asked.

Bailey turned her attention back to him, her expression was serious. She then sighed and said, "you are, but since it was him that had performed dishonor act against you, we might still sort it out. Still, it would have been better if you have just reported his deed to me instead of taking the matter into your own hands. It was fortunate that you didn't kill him. Otherwise, no one would be able to protect you even if he is in the wrong."

Jack shrugged. If they were in the wilderness and there was no one around, he might actually have killed the punk.

"So are you going to protect me?" He asked.

"No, but Lindsey's old man probably could. We will see," Bailey replied.

Chapter 247: Daughter

Jack turned to Lindsey. "Who is your old man?"

"I will try to persuade him to help," Lindsey said without really answering Jack's question.

"Let's go, we should complete the mission," Bailey spoke out. She walked forward to the depth where the ice mana site was located. Alonzo, Lindsey, and Teddy hurriedly moved along.

"You are coming along?" Jack asked Bailey as he followed behind. "Will the mission still be considered as complete with you around?"

"The mission is to clear the cave and deactivate the ice mana site to restore this mining cave. Whether I come along or not does not matter. It is just a good opportunity to train the cadets. That's of course, before we found out about the existence of that Special Elite boss."

They arrived back at the depth of the cave. There was no more rope to let them go down, further reinforcing Jack's story. Teddy took out a roll of rope from his bag. He secured one of its ends to the ground with a steel hook, then everyone used it to climb down. Except for Bailey who simply jumped down. Jack didn't lose to her, he also jumped down. It was not too high, his stat was high enough to not suffer any damage from that height. Still, his legs hurt a bit from the jump. Bailey rolled her eyes at him.

After the Ice Troll Sentinel was vanquished, no monsters could be seen anymore around the ice mana site. Alonzo went up to the ice mana site and took out a large indigo-colored orb. Bailey and the other cadets stood around him in a protective formation. Jack thought the gesture was unnecessary, he could see on his radar that there was nothing alive in the vicinity except for them. But then again, there was the case with Swamp Croc which had hidden itself from his radar, so it was not wrong to be careful.

Jack went nearer to Alonzo since he was curious. The indigo orb started throbbing. He could hear the sound like heartbeats from the orb, yet it was not a sound that was heard in his ears, it was more like he heard the sound directly in his mind. The ice mana site started to release icy fumes, which slowly flowed into the orb. The absorbed fume formed a small cyan-colored core at the center of the orb, which slowly enlarged as more fume was absorbed.

The process lasted a very long time. Jack who was interested in the process soon lost interest. With nothing better to do, he walked around the place. Nothing caught his attention. There were some

mining spots, but they were covered by a layer of ice. Interesting though, the ice seemed to be melting, as the ground below the wall started to become wet. Jack assumed it should be the effect of the icy energy within the ice mana site got absorbed by Alonzo's orb.

With nothing better to do, he went to one corner and started practicing his spells' rune formation. That was what he usually did when he got nothing better to do. Barrier, Mana Detonation, Body Double. He cast one spell after another, apart from getting more accustomed to the process in forming the spell formations, he also received proficiencies from each casting. His Barrier was already halfway to the first star. He also activated Heightened State to increase mana regeneration and reduce cooldown time. He cast basic spells when all his advanced spells were on cooldown. He drank basic energy potion when his MP almost depleted. He got lots of those potions from the robbing incident, so he didn't feel it was a squander to use them. Bailey glanced at him, giving him a weird look before ignoring him altogether.

While Jack was spending his time practicing his spells, he also took a look at his skill page. He had received a new skill after becoming a level 20 Warrior.

Adrenaline Rush (Active skill), level 1/20

200% attack speed, additional 25% damage to all physical damage.

duration: 1 minute

Cooldown: 5 minutes

Stamina: 40

It was a support skill that increased his overall offense. If he combined it with the Life Burning Art, his damage output would rise to another level. He also checked on his Container of Souls, surprisingly there were already 2971 souls collected in it. He didn't know how many souls he got from the Ice Troll Sentinel but it should contribute a large portion of the souls he had at the moment. He used 2000 of the souls to increase his Power Strike another two levels to level 9.

He also had 8 free skill points for both his Warrior and Mage classes. After pondering for a bit, he used 4 of each to upgrade the Adrenaline Rush to level 3, Sword of Light to level 9, Barrier to level 3, and Mana Detonation to level 3. He kept the remaining 4 free skill points of each class for later.

He then spent all of his free attribute points again on Dexterity, bringing his Dexterity to 90. Keeping all three of the main stats of Strength, Dexterity, and Intelligence at a high standard.

It took Alonzo almost an hour to finish absorbing the energy from the ice mana site, longer than his previous prediction. By the time it was done, the indigo orb had completely changed color to bright cyan. There were even some traces of leaking icy energy from the orb.

"The ice energy is much denser than we originally expected," he heard Alonzo said. "Luckily I didn't bring lower grade mana orb." He put the filled orb back into his bag.

The previously radiant ice mana site had now turned into a cold-looking common stone. The temperature in the cave had also returned to normal. The ice covering the walls had now disappeared, leaving puddles of water on the ground.

Several chunks of ice crystal were underneath the ground where the powered-down ice mana site was. Jack's God-eye monocle gave yellow marking on the crystals which indicated them as rare items. He was just about to go forward to pick it up but the cadets beat him to it and took all of them.

That's right, if it was not monster's loots, these NPCs would still express interest. He looked around and then asked Bailey, "can I mine those mining spots?"

"No, they are properties of the kingdom. You will need a permit to mine them," she answered.

That sucks, Jack said in his mind. Good thing he had gotten a nice harvest from the Ice Troll Sentinel.

"Let's leave, you have all completed your mission. We will report back to Commander Quintus," Bailey said.

Jack followed them out of the cave. They went back directly to the tower where he first met Commander Quintus. The said commander was still behind his desk. Gruff on the other hand, was not around anymore. Bailey and Alonzo went and sat in front of the commander and made their report about the mission. Teddy and Lindsey stood at the side, Jack stood with them since there was no instruction for him.

Quintus made a short glance at Jack when he heard about Jack's act in saving Lindsey and allowing the other cadets to flee first, then his forehead creased when it reached the part where Jack cut Walter's arm apart. He was silent for a long time after the report was done. He massaged his temple for a bit before saying, "everyone's dismissed, except for mister Storm Wind."

Everyone walked out afterward. Lindsey gave Jack an encouraging gesture when he passed him by. Jack was a bit puzzled by the gesture.

I guess I am in trouble? He thought.

"Sit," Commander Quintus said to Jack after everyone was gone.

Jack took the chair opposite the commander.

They were staring at each other for the longest time. Jack was not sure if he was supposed to be the one to say something first. After couldn't stand the silence for too long, Jack spoke first, "not to try to make excuses, I don't think I've done anything wrong. If someone tried to kill me, I'll..."

"Let me stop you right there," Quintus interrupt Jack's words. "The problem is not about right or wrong. I would have done the same if I am in your place, maybe in an even more extreme way. The problem is having the power to deal with the consequences. As you should have aware, Walter was the son of a magistrate. That means his family has a certain political power. Whether it's right or wrong, crossing such an individual will have its consequence. I can help you on the lawful side, but you will still need an equally powerful backing if you are to weather from Walter's family's hidden retaliation."

Jack's eyes lighted up, "you will help me?"

"Did you only pick up the good parts and forget about the one I mentioned about retaliation?" Quintus replied with annoyance. "It's the least I can do since I owe you one."

"Huh? Why do you owe me?"

"For saving my daughter."

"Daughter?"

"Lindsey is my daughter."

Chapter 248: Merit

He remembered Bailey mentioned something about Lindsey's father, so her father was none other than Commander Quintus. His Knight Commander rank should be enough to deter a Magistrate if he wanted to put in a word. This also explained how the commander was not as rude as in their first encounter.

Quintus could feel Jack's relaxation after knowing that he will help him, he said, "you will still need to deal with their harassment due to this incident. In what form I can't say. The worst is if they send an assassin against you. How can you deal with that with your limited power? If you are already a high-ranking noble, something can still be done, but you have just started to join our faction. There is a limit to the protection that I can give."

"Don't worry, as long as they can't do anything to me in the open, I should be able to manage."

"Don't mistake confidence for recklessness, young man. For these few days, you will stay in this noble district first till we sorted this out. There happens to be a nobility branch's mission that is specifically offered to you."

"Specifically for me?" Jack asked with puzzlement.

"Before that, let's settle your mission completion and officiate you into Themisphere Nobility Faction. Give me that trial token."

Jack handed the plain metal badge back to the commander. The commander's hand which held the metal badge shone with a purple glow, he traced a rune symbol in the air with his free hand. The rune and the glow entered the badge and Jack could see a transformation on that metallic token. The color was brighter and there was some sort of an insignia crafting on the badge surface.

While he was fascinated by the display in front of him, Jack heard a notification voice, "congratulations on completing the faction quest, Initiation Trial, keeping the cadets alive during their mission. Receive rewards of 5 silver coins, 5000 Experience points, and 50 Merit Points. Additional points for fulfilling certain conditions:

Cadets successfully completed their mission: 100 merit points.

All monsters are cleared in the cave: 50 merit points.

Mission completed within a short time: 50 merit points.

Deliberately injuring a cadet: deduct 200 merit points."

The coins and experience reward were meager for him at this point. The merit points were new, it should be specific points for this Kingdom Faction, similar to the Adventurer points and Hunter points.

But what did it mean by deduct? If they didn't clear all the monsters or within the time limit, wouldn't his merit point in the minus already then? Jack grumbled in his mind.

After the addition and deduction, the final merit points he received were the basic 50 points for completing the quest. He was not sure how much was 50 points worth, so he asked Commander Quintus, "what can I get with 50 merit points?"

Commander Quintus looked at him in a weird way before answering, "nothing."

"Nothing? Don't I able to exchange the points for something?"

"Are you comparing our kingdom faction to that Adventurers and Hunters Associations? Excuse us for disappointing you, the merit points are not for you to use for exchanging for petty items."

"Oh? So there is no further use for these points other than to rank up within the faction then?" Jack asked.

"Of course there is," Commander Quintus replied. "You can still use the points for exchange, just not for items. However, you can only start exchanging after you acquire the rank of Viscount."

"What sort of things can be exchanged if not items?"

"You will know when the time comes."

Since the commander didn't entertain him with a clear answer, Jack changed his question, "how many merit points do I need in order to become a Viscount?"

"You need to become a Baron first before Viscount. You will need 500 merit points for that. After that, 2000 merit points for Viscount."

500? Shouldn't be difficult then? Jack thought. If he didn't cripple Walter in that last mission, he would have gotten half of what was needed to become a Baron.

"You mentioned another mission specifically for me?" Jack asked in eagerness.

"Store this back first," Commander Quintus gave the token back.

Jack took it and observed the token. It looked completely different now. It had a brighter color with a hint of purple. There was an inscription on the badge which resemble the horned beast drawing on the large banner behind the commander. There was also a crown insignia above the horned beast. Jack used his Inspect skill on it.

Themisphere Nobility Faction Badge (current rank: none)

Merit points: 50, available points: 50

So he was now officially part of the Themisphere kingdom, Jack pondered. He stored the badge in his inventory bag.

"Now, about the mission I mentioned. It was issued by someone of your acquaintance," Commander Quintus said after seeing Jack storing his faction badge.

"my acquaintance?"

"Yes, he is... speaking of the devil," commander Quintus' eyesight turned to Jack's back where the stairs were. Jack turned and saw a flamboyant man in a luxurious dress.

"Him?"

Jack was surprised to see this person here. If he remembered correctly, his interaction with this NPC was not really that harmonious. Why would he specifically pick him for a mission?

Marquess Fernando approached and just took the seat beside Jack without waiting for Commander Quintus' permission. The commander's brow slanted slightly to show displeasure on the act, but the marquess either deliberately ignoring the sign, or genuinely unaware of his rudeness.

"So, have you been briefed about the task?" The marquess asked Jack.

"I am just about to," Commander Quintus answered on Jack's behalf. "What are you doing here? Isn't the event in two days from now?"

"I am just making sure that he accepts it," Fernando said. "Duke Alfredo was adamant that he does."

"The duke?" Jack was surprised. "What does the duke want me to do?"

"You remember when we were talking in the duke's mansion?" Fernando asked.

"You mean when I interrogated you?" Jack asked back.

"I mean when we were talking," Fernando replied, emphasizing the word talking. "I mentioned about an auction coming up, remember?"

Jack nodded. "I do recall something like that. What about it?"

"Well, the duke wants you to represent him to attend this auction."

"Me? Why?" Jack was bewildered by the request.

"Beats me. I also objected to your participation. I mean, I was hoping to go attend with the duke, why he ends up asking a lowly commoner who is void of any noble descent like you to represent him? I mean, even if he is busy, there are much better candidates available. There are practically rows of noble youths who will kill to earn the duke's favor. To have him put his trust in a nobody such as you is completely beyond me."

"Are you done?" Jack asked with an irritated tone.

"Oh, one other thing, he did mention that you should not be known to have represented him. You should go with your status as an independent outworlder. He will provide you beforehand with the funds to bid on during the auction."

"What item does he want me to bid on?"

Fernando shrugged. "Dunno, he said you will know when it appears. Just don't squander the fund on useless things."

"Huh?" Jack scratched his head, what sort of request was this? He heard the notification voice of the quest.

"you have been offered a faction quest, Attend the Auction, do you accept?"

Jack rubbed his chin. Such a vague quest, he thought. It's easy enough to attend the auction, but if he was not sure what was the target item then how could he know if he did the quest correctly? After some thought, he decided to just accept the quest. It was not a bad thing to gain more favor from the duke. He reckoned Duke Alfredo's position was higher than Commander Quintus. If Walter's family gave him troubles, he might be able to utilize his relationship with the duke to assuage the matter.

"All right, I'll join. The auction is in two days from now?"

Fernando nodded. "Yes, I'll come to pick you up in the morning the day after tomorrow. We will go to the auction together."

"We will? I thought the duke doesn't want me to be seen as having a connection with him?"

"You are just going there as a friend of mine, what does it have to do with the duke? As long as you didn't mention that the duke sent you then no one will know."

"Whatever you say," Jack shrugged.

"So, where are you staying? Is it at that bakery store in the business district?"

Did everyone know about my living place already? Jack contemplated in his mind. Before he could answer though, commander Quintus uttered, "he will be staying at my place. You can come to pick him up there two days from now."

Chapter 249: Training Ground

"I will?" Jack was startled by the commander's statement.

"Did you forget already when I told you to stay in the noble district for now?" Commander Quintus said.

"Oh? Why is that?" It was Marquess Fernando that asked.

Commander Quintus then told him about the incident between Jack and Walter. Fernando's eyes went wide when he heard Jack's act of crippling the noble youth. Jack stayed silent while they were busy gossiping. After commander Quintus finished telling the tale, Fernando smacked Jack on his back.

"That was one badass thing you did there! Not that I disapprove. I know that prick. He is a typical son of noble who is arrogant because of his birthright and looked down on those without the noble line."

Weren't you the same? Jack uttered in his mind.

"Then I will pick you up the morning two days from now at commander Quintus' residence."

"Wait! Why do I have to stay in the commander's place? This noble district should have an inn that I can use, right?"

"Are you saying that my place is not good enough for you?" Commander Quintus gave Jack a sharp stare.

"No, no, of course I don't mean that," Jack hurriedly said. "I just didn't want to intrude. You know, I'm a stranger. I don't want your family to get uncomfortable due to a stranger in your house."

"My family only consisted of Lindsey and me, both of us already know you. So that settles the stranger issue."

Jack was abashed, it was not that he was afraid that the commander's family would be uncomfortable with his presence. It was him who was uncomfortable. He wouldn't want to get cooped up by the commander, he still wanted to go out there and level up. He was not that afraid regarding the threat from Walter's family.

"I would suggest you not take the problem with Walter lightly," commander Quintus said, as if he could read Jack's thought. "I won't take a no for an answer. In fact, you will follow me back to my place right now. We will settle you in nicely. Don't worry, I know you outworlders were obsessed with increasing your strength. You will not get left behind by staying at my place, you might even benefit from it. Additionally, tomorrow my daughter would be going on a training expedition again, you can join her team if you want to kill some monsters."

"Will that be a faction mission as well?" Jack asked.

"If you had picked the Military branch, then yes. But since you are of the nobility branch, you will not get any merit point."

"Ah... a pity."

"Don't listen to him," Fernando barged in. "The nobility branch is much better. Once you rank up and become a proper noble, come and find me. I will show you the many privileges of being a noble."

Commander Quintus stood up, then said curtly to Marquess Fernando, "isn't your business done already? You should leave now and stop corrupting a good seed."

"See! The military branch is too stiff. You have made the right call not picking that branch," Fernando said.

Commander Quintus gave the marquess a death stare, his hand moved to the hilt of the sword hanging beside his waist. Marquess Fernando took the hint and hurriedly rose from his seat and walked back to the stairs. "I will come to get you in the morning, don't make me wait! I don't like it when I have to wait," he said before going down the stairs.

"Annoying punk," commander Quintus swore, then he said to Jack, "let's go."

Seeing that he was not given any option, he reluctantly followed the commander. Lindsey was waiting outside the tower. She greeted them once they came out. Bailey and the other cadets were gone already.

The commander took them to a structure beside the tower. When they went in, Jack identified the place to be a stable. There were several horses inside.

"Do you have a steed?" Commander Quintus asked Jack.

"No," Jack answered.

"Then you will ride with me," the commander said. He then went to the stablemaster who had prepared two horses. Both had their saddles readily prepared. Commander Quintus and Lindsey each held the horse's reins and led them out of the stable. They climbed onto the horsebacks once outside.

"Come," commander Quintus gestured for Jack to climb up and sit at his back.

Ugh, Jack grunted in his mind. He would prefer to ride his own horse. Getting carried behind another man on a horse was so uncool. But since he had no horse of his own, he unwillingly complied.

The horses started galloping once Jack climbed on. Commander Quintus' steed took the lead while Lindsey followed from behind.

'Can I get a steed as well?' He asked Peniel in his mind.

"You can," Peniel answered. "There should be a stable near the city gates. You can purchase or rent a horse there. Before you complain that I didn't give you this information, please know that you are not allowed to ride your own horse within the city limit unless you are a noble. And a horse is not cheap, you are not going on any long expedition so there is no reason to get one."

The ride was not long, they arrived in a huge mansion with a large courtyard around it. Not as impressive as Duke Alfredo's estate, but the structure sure conveyed its standing compared to the other houses around.

When they arrived on its patio, some servants took care of the horses as they climbed down. The servants took the horses away as Commander Quintus signaled for Jack to follow him into the house.

The commander asked Lindsey to take Jack on a tour around the house while he took care of some matters. He mentioned for Lindsey to take Jack to the training ground after they finished the tour. Jack was intrigued by the words, and his interest was further piqued when he heard Peniel said, "Training Ground? They have one here? You are in luck."

'Really? What is it for?' Jack asked.

"You will see," the fairy replied.

Jack didn't bother her for an answer, he was used to the behavior of this guide of his. If she didn't feel like sharing, there was no use in pressing for it.

He followed Lindsey's lead as he toured around the house. It was not as big as Duke Alfredo's manor, but still imposing nonetheless. Each room was clean and neat. He could see the commander's strict and disciplined aspect represented in this house.

Lindsey also showed him to the room that he would be spending his night in. It was roughly the same as Duke Alfredo's guest room that he used when he was there. The girl chatted along the way. She spoke about different kinds of topics mostly about her squire training.

She expressed her excitement to go on a training excursion with Jack again tomorrow. She informed him it would be on another cave, but not the mining cave like the one they cleared today earlier. It was a proper training cave inside Mount Thenias located at the back of the capital.

Mount Thenias was full of such caves filled with various kinds of monsters. The cave that they would have their training excursion would be the caves that had been used frequently for the kingdom's squires' training. The danger level within this cave was more controlled, they won't meet with an unanticipated incident such as today with the special elite Ice Troll Sentinel. They would go to a cave where the average monster was level 20 basic grade.

That was better, Jack thought. He would hate it if he was forced to coop up here without a means to increase his level.

The mansion had two floors. After they walked one round on the upper floor, they came back down to the ground floor. Lindsey led him to the backside of the residence, which opened up to a large enclosed courtyard.

Three-meters high walls encircled this courtyard. Jack could see traces of magic runes along these walls. The upper part was open to the sky. The field was mostly empty with no plant or flower in this courtyard. Instead, the farther side was filled with wooden dummies in the shape of men. They looked similar to the puppets he encountered during his Warrior class test. Commander Quintus was standing at the center of this courtyard with his back towards them.

"I presume this is the training ground?" Jack asked.

Lindsey nodded. "Good luck," she said, before she turned and left.

Chapter 250: A Touch

Good luck? Why the hell did she wish me good luck? Jack wondered as he saw the girl departing.

He gazed back at the Training Ground. The commander was standing still at the center of the training ground, his hand was holding a long wooden rod. He released an intimidating aura even without doing anything.

Jack gulped. Don't tell me this level 60 special elite commander is intending to spar with me? He thought. He walked into the training ground with a nervous feeling.

Commander Quintus turned around once he heard Jack's footsteps.

"Ah, there you are," he said, setting the tip of the rod he was holding on the ground. "The report said that you managed to survive a special elite monster ten levels above you. That was impressive. How about you show me what you can do so I can experience for myself?"

"Um, Sir... You do realize you are forty levels above me," Jack replied weakly. "You are not serious about asking me to spar with you, right?"

The commander made a hearty laugh. "No need to be concerned. I won't attack. I will just stay still and see how good you are. Tell you what. If you managed to land a touch on my body, I will let you use this training ground freely during your stay."

Huh? What's so special about being on this training ground? He had been standing inside for a while now but he didn't notice any difference.

"Agree to him," he heard Peniel's voice.

'what?'

"Just agree to him. Be serious! Use all your might in order to touch his body with an attack," she stressed.

'Fine.' He declared in his mind as he brandished his longsword and magic staff.

"Sword and magic," Commander Quintus mumbled. "You are indeed different from the other outworlders."

"Begin?" Jack asked.

"Whenever you are ready," the commander replied with a confident smile.

Jack activated his Life Burning Art from the get-go. Blood red aura enveloped his body, elevating all his stats to another level. He immediately sent Sword of Light as an opening move, hoping to catch the commander off guard. Yet the commander only waved his hand, the rod he was holding crashed with the crescent light and it broke apart into particles of light.

Though he was hoping to catch a lucky break with that sudden move, he was not delusional enough to think it would be that easy. While the commander's rod touched with his Sword of Light, he had already activated Energy Bolts. He ran sideways as the six magic bolts flew towards Commander Quintus from all directions. Jack added a Mana Bullet from the side as he continued to circle around the commander.

The commander's hand became a blur as his rod twirled around him, smashing every each of the magic bolts sent by Jack. Even the Mana Bullet that came from his flank was squashed without him even turning to look.

By that time, Jack had circled around to the commander's back. He used Power Strike right at the commander's open back.

The blade of his sword hit something hard, which was the rod that the commander had brought to his back at the last moment before Jack's sword connected. Jack's Power Strike didn't move the commander even a little.

Damn! He cursed in his mind.

The rod which was still in touch with his sword swiped to the side, and he felt like he was swept by a typhoon. His body was lifted and he flew for several meters before landing back on the ground.

"I thought you are not going to attack?" Jack protested.

"You called that an attack? I was simply moving your sword away. You didn't receive any damage now, do you?"

Jack didn't quarrel further, he started forming a mana rune on his magic staff. The rune forming continue after the first rune was done. Soon three runes were formed in a circle creating a spell formation. The spell took effect and a clone of him appeared by his side.

"A copy? What use is that if I already know which of you is the real one?" Commander Quintus mocked.

Jack didn't answer. He and his clone separated and sped forward from two sides. Both he and his clones had the red aura from Life Burning Art. Normally both bodies would be indistinguishable, but since commander Quintus had seen the spell formed, he had known from the start which one was the fake.

He saw the commander hit a small stone on the ground and threw it towards his clone. The stone passed through the clone as if nothing was there. The commander was trying to determine if this clone spell had the ability to affect the material world. Since it didn't, the commander could completely ignore his clone and focused on his real body.

Jack shot standard magic attacks from his staff as he approached, which the commander easily nullified with a twirl of his rod. When he got into melee range, he utilized his rapid martial art swings to hit the commander. Since the deal was only a touch, he could just focus on speed. He even used his magic staff as if it was a second sword and swung them in conjunction with his main sword. Rapidly striking from every angle.

However, despite the effort, none of his attacks could reach the commander's body. The rod on the commander's hand moved with superhuman speed and continued to deflect each one of his swings.

A rune spell started to form as Jack continued to rain down attacks at the commander. The Mana Detonation spell took effect and a ring of energy radiated outward. Yet even this spell broke apart when the ring of light touched the commander's rod. The energy shockwave failed to touch the commander, and his position didn't shift at all.

Jack's clone came to the commander's side and made a swing. Despite the commander knowing the clone to be immaterial, he still twirled his rod to meet the clone's sword swing. The rod and the sword passed through each other without any impact.

He was still cautious, Jack thought in his mind. Jack went on to send unceasing attacks at the commander. His clone did the same.

At first, the commander still paid attention to the clone's attack. Even when he was entertaining attacks from four sides, two from Jack's left and right hands, and the other two from the clone's left and right hands, he was still having an easy time. But little by little, he started to ignore the clone's moves. Some swings from the clone were allowed through and went past the commander's body.

Jack activated the Dragon's Eye skill and scrutinized the commander's movements in slow motion detail, while he himself continued his barrage. During a single moment when the clone's attack was ignored, Jack activated the switch effect. His original body disappeared as he took the position of his clone.

Commander Quintus was startled by this sudden turn of events, but his years of experience had helped him to keep calm in all situations. Knowing that something was wrong, he bent his body, just as Jack's sword was about to hit. The sword went past and missed his body.

That was a good one, the commander thought. Too bad it was still not enough.

But then he felt something on his leg. He looked down and saw Jack's staff was touching his knee. Both of them stopped and looked at each other for some time.

Jack was the first to move. He deactivated his Life Burning Art and fell down sitting on the ground. He took a large gasp of air.

"Damn! That was intense," he uttered. It was lucky that the condition required was just a touch. It's a good thing as well that the commander was arrogant enough to keep standing in the same place. The commander never mentioned that he was required to stay at one place when the deal was made. If he had run away when he realized something was wrong, Jack wouldn't have managed to make that touch.

Commander Quintus was staring at Jack with a mixed feeling. He did intend to loosen his defense and let the boy touch him once he had seen this adventurer's full effort. But he didn't expect him to be able to make it using his own power.

Perhaps they had indeed picked up a valuable asset for their kingdom. He was puzzled at first by Gruff's recommendation and the Royal Advisor's act in inviting this adventurer into their faction, but now he could probably see his reason. The boy was not exactly the brightest, but his decision-making and calmness during a critical situation were remarkable.

"All right, you are free to use this training ground for as long as you like during your stay," the commander exclaimed. "Use it well. Lindsey will come to call you when dinner is ready." He then walked away, leaving Jack who was still sitting on the ground, confused as to what that spar just now was all about.