

World 251

Chapter 251: Effect Of The Training Ground

Once the commander was out of sight, he said to Peniel, 'so, are you going to tell me now why I bust my ass off just for the chance to be allowed into a piece of empty land with nothing but a few wooden dummies?'

Instead of answering, Peniel came out of her hidden dimension. She flew around the training ground, observing the magic runes along the wall before returning to Jack.

"This training ground is not bad," she said after returning to Jack.

"How so?" Jack asked skeptically.

"Open your skill window," she ordered.

Jack didn't object to her request, he opened his status window and shifted to the skill page.

"And?" He asked.

"Take a closer look at the skill proficiency."

"Which one?"

"Any one."

Jack focused his mind on the proficiency of Energy Bolts spell. The first star section was around three-quarters full. When he focused on the first star, additional information surfaced. 352 usage to complete the first star.

"Is this... so does it mean I have to cast this spell 352 more times to upgrade it to the first star?"

"That's correct, genius. Now, how about you cast that spell on one of those wooden dummies there?"

Jack stood up and cast. Six magic bolts spread out and stabbed randomly on the wooden dummies.

"Now take a look at the proficiency again."

Jack did so, the information resurfaced. 349 usage to complete the first star.

"Hey, it jumped three numbers. Wait... Are you telling me this Training Ground can triple the speed we increase our skill proficiency?"

"Do you still think this as an empty piece of land?"

"Oh, great fairy! You have my reverence," Jack uttered with an exaggerated bowing gesture.

Peniel seemed to enjoy the show of appreciation. She added, "this one is not bad. There are even training grounds that increase the speed five times, or even ten times, but I doubt you will find them anytime soon. It was already lucky that you find one with triple effect here."

Jack didn't waste more time. He at once started practicing. He used all his skills and spells and repeated them when they were off cooldown. He did some checking on the spell's proficiency from time to time. He noticed that those with longer cooldown required less usage to upgrade. Probably to balance the difficulty of upgrading each skill.

The Heightened State spell helped increase his training speed even faster as it reduced all skill's cooldown. He had to continuously drink basic energy potions as his stamina and mana were decreasing at a rapid pace.

For Parry skill and Magic Shield spell, they were rather peculiar compared to the others as the count on their usages were depending on the number of times they defended an impact. Good thing the wooden dummies in the training ground were not as useless as they seemed. He could activate them to perform simple attacks, hence he could use his Parry and Magic Shield to defend from their attacks and increased their proficiencies as well.

Natural Body Recovery was another unique one, its proficiency increased each time the HP was healed within the 10 seconds interval. Jack used the same attacking dummies and allowed its attack to hit. He would suffer some damages, he would then allow the Natural Body Recovery skill to take effect and raised its proficiency. The best thing was, as long as he was inside the Training Ground, he would be considered as off combat, so the Natural Body Recovery would take effect even as he continued to dish out skills and spells and getting hit by the dummies.

Jack abused his time on the Training Ground, practically not willing to leave the place. When Lindsey came and fetched him for dinner, he blurted out that he was not hungry. It was only after she expressed displeasure and pointing out that it would be rude to decline a dinner invitation from the host, that Jack reluctantly stopped his training.

He was restless throughout the dinner. He ate his in a fast manner, acquiring commander Quintus' glare. Unfortunately, the dinner was a full course meal, with the dishes coming out at separate times. Hence, even when he had finished the current dish, he was not excused as there would be a follow-up dish coming up.

Commander Quintus could sense his impatience. He shook his head and let the anxious fellow go after he finished his dessert.

Jack went back directly to the Training Ground to continue spamming his skills and spells. His stock of basic energy potion continued to dwindle, luckily he had a large stock from the robbery incident. He told himself that he would need to stock up again soon.

Jack spent all his time in the Training Ground even after the night was late. There was enough illumination from several magical lamps above the enclosing walls, so visibility was not a problem. His Dragon's God Eye had also rendered him unneeded of the lightings.

If he could, he would spend the whole night awake and practicing in the Training Ground. Unfortunately, Commander Quintus came and demanded for him to leave the Training Ground.

"Didn't you say I can use this place freely during my stay?" Jack protested.

The commander shook his head. "I didn't expect you to be a lunatic after experiencing this Training Ground. Otherwise, I would have said only when the sun was up. Do you think it is free to maintain this Training Ground? Now get the hell out and go rest already! I will allow you to use it again in the morning."

Jack gave a defeated look. He walked weakly towards the exit of the Training Ground, but stopped when realized something. "Wait, give me a minute more!" He shouted.

The commander was confused. What's the difference of one minute?

While he waited impatiently and counting the time, Jack used the minute to perform skills and spells that he could do. When one minute was almost up, Jack's body burst with a red aura. Commander Quintus remembered that skill, Jack had used it when they were sparring earlier today.

Jack deactivated the aura as soon as it was activated. The Life Burning Art had a six hours cooldown. It was the skill with the longest cooldown in his arsenal aside from Overlimit, but Overlimit was a weapon skill that had no proficiency so using it in this Training Ground here provided no bonus. Seeing that the six-hour cooldown of Life Burning Art was almost up, it was a waste if he didn't use it, hence he asked for the one-minute extension.

"All right, I will go now. I can just come back here first thing in the morning, right?"

Commander Quintus sighed and nodded.

Jack smiled at the nod and went away to the guest room that Lindsey had shown him prior.

When he entered his room, he made a check on his skills and spells. Many of them were on the verge of upgrade. After hours of practice in the Training Ground today, several had gained their first-star grade. Namely Parry, Natural Body Recovery, Magic Shield, Energy Bolts, and Heightened State.

He studied the effects of their star upgrades. Each star increase of Parry reduced the extra effect from enemy attacks, strength modifier would be added to Parry's effectiveness. That was a vague description, Jack thought. By extra effect, did it mean like knockback effect? This increase didn't sound too impressive then?

Peniel was beside him as he studied his skills. She could sense his thought. "Don't underestimate this upgrade. Higher-level attacks or weapons can inflict many different effects like stun or dizziness. Also, with the added strength modifier, you would see better results during a parry. If your strength far outstrips the attacker, there might be a chance to even nullify the attack completely. Just like how your Magic Shield was affected by your intelligence stat."

Jack nodded at her explanation, for other players, the strength modifier might not mean much. But for him who had better stats due to his dual-class, the effect would be much more notable. He moved to the next skill, Natural Body Recovery. Each star would decrease by 0.5 seconds to its recovery frequency. This skill was more clear in its benefit description from the improvement.

He then looked at Magic Shield. Each star added 1 second before mana was consumed. This spell currently ate up mana each second, with this upgrade, it would only consume mana every 2 seconds. This practically doubled up the life of this spell.

He then checked on his Mage class' favorite spell, Energy Bolts. Each star reduced the cooldown by 3 seconds. The Energy Bolts had a cooldown of a full minute. A 3 seconds reduction didn't sound so impressive, but if he fully completed the ten stars, the cooldown of this spell would effectively be halved. Meaning he could cast this spell twice as many times. However, filling up all the ten stars sounded like an arduous effort. He would have to be content with its current 57 seconds cooldown for now.

Chapter 252: Ice Ring

He looked at the last skill which had improved, Heightened State. Each star increased mana regeneration by an additional 5% and decrease skill cooldown by an additional 2%. This upgrade increased the effectiveness of this spell by 10%, overall a good upgrade in his opinion.

After understanding the improvements he had gotten from his skills, he went on to the next thing which he had put on hold since early today. He took out the Ice Seed from his inventory bag. He had learned about the chilling touch of the seed so he had prepared a thick cloth to hold it. His current arm equipment, Silver Beast Vambrace, didn't have the part that covered his palm. He hoped later he could get better arm equipment that covered his entire hand.

He had never stop thinking about what skills he was going to use this seed on the entire time he was practicing in the Training Ground. During that time, Peniel had also informed him that the effect of the seed would differ depending on which skill it was used on. But mostly it should have the characteristic of the seed, which was of the ice element. So it should provide some slowing effect if not outright freezing the target.

At first, he thought that it should be his Warrior's skills, since that was his primary class. However, most of the skills from that melee class were for single target. Even Swing had very limited range, which reduced the numbers of potential targets getting hit. To maximize the extra effect from the Ice element, it would be better for him to choose the one with the widest area of effect range.

After reviewing his available skills and spells this whole time, he had decided on one spell with that AOE attack. He activated the ice seed, a list of all his available skills and spells on which he could use this seed appeared. Jack clicked on the Mana Detonation spell.

This spell was a crowd control spell designed for keeping a mage free of interference from the melee classes. However, since Jack's Warrior class made him excel in a melee fight, the spell became rather useless. But if the effect of the spell was changed to freezing or slowing instead of knocking the opponents back, It would become a much more effective spell in combination with his melee prowess.

The ice seed shone brightly before breaking into several strands of bluish light that entered his body. He felt a biting cold for an instant when the light entered, but it receded soon after. When he felt the process was completed, he opened his skill page. The Mana Detonation was replaced by a completely new spell name.

Ice Ring, level: 1/20 (Active Skill, range, required magic weapon)

Deal 150% ice damage to a radius of 6 meters area around caster.

All enemies within the area are slowed for 10 seconds, 10% chance of enemies struck to get frozen for 2 seconds.

Cooldown: 2 minutes

Mana: 50

The damage and range had increased, and it was an ice element damage now. The effect of slow and frozen was as good as he could hope for. The cooldown and mana consumption, however, had increased, but he thought that it was still fair considering the increase in power and effect. The spell formation to activate the spell was still only one rune. The lines in the rune were slightly more complicated but as long as it was still one rune, he should be able to cast it with speed during battle.

Jack was satisfied by the result of the evolution. Today had provided a good harvest in terms of his personal battle prowess. Increase in levels, skill grades, and one evolved skill. Tomorrow he should be able to increase the grades of his other skills, some of them were close to their first star as well, while Power Strike which he had been continuously using since he became Fighter class, was not far from its second star.

The next morning, he woke up early and went to the Training Ground immediately while skipping breakfast. He repeated his extreme regime of training again.

He spent hours repeating his skills and spells, until he was distracted by a commotion. He turned towards the sound. It was from the direction of this mansion's entrance. Curious by it, he took a break from his training and went towards the front side of the mansion.

He could hear loud voices as he went closer. Sounded like a dispute. Who had the nerve to create an upheaval in front of a commander's residence? At one point he even thought that he heard his name was mentioned.

When he walked out of the front door, he saw a crowd in front of the residence. The Commander and Lindsey were there standing with a few soldiers. Opposite them was a larger group, mostly comprised of armored guards, but at the head of this group were three people in noble robes. He recognized one of them. He suddenly knew what this commotion was all about.

The person who Jack recognized, was Walter, who turned his gaze at him. His eyes went wide when he saw Jack. "That's him!" He exclaimed loudly to notify the person beside him.

The person, who was an obese middle-aged man in a luxurious green robe. Turned to where Walter had pointed at. His already slanted eyes squinted when he looked at Jack. "So you are the audacious outworlder that dares to cripple my son," he uttered.

Son? So he was that magistrate commander Quintus had warned him about.

"Mister Storm Wind here is my guest, I warn you to not cause disturbance here," Commander Quintus spoke up in defense of Jack.

The fat magistrate harrumphed upon hearing the commander's words, "Hmph! I didn't believe at first when I receive the report that you are harboring a criminal. But even if you are a Knight Commander, it

doesn't mean that you can protect him. Now be compliant and hand him to me. I will make sure you are finely rewarded."

"Do not mistake me for the colleagues you used to deal with. Not everyone appreciates your bribe."

"Then you will prefer a threat then? We know of your capability, but we outnumber you here. Even if we can't do anything to you, we have enough manpower to prevent you from protecting this outworlder."

Jack understood that the magistrate was not bluffing. He had been inspecting the groups here with his God-eye monocle. Commander Quintus was the strongest, yet on his side were only four soldiers of basic human grade with level 45. The magistrate's side, on the other hand, had over ten guards of basic human of level 40, six basic humans of level 50, two elite humans of level 50, one special elite of level 55 which was one of the three who wore noble robes apart from the magistrate and Walter.

The Magistrate himself was an elite human but only level 30, yet him alone would already prove to be a problem to Jack. With such a roster, there was only so much that the commander and his four soldiers could block. Even if one of the magistrate's guards managed to reach him, he doubted that he could survive long.

Jack considered if he should run away, but then again, those high-level guards should have better dexterity. He didn't think that he could outrun them.

"Are you saying that you will be trying to make a move in this place? Here? In my residence?!" Commander Quintus' voice boomed out. His aura exploded outwards, enveloping the surrounding.

Jack felt suffocated from the dense pressure. He realized then that in their spar yesterday, the commander did not even use a fraction of his true power. The magistrate and his guards behind were giving an uncomfortable look in their expression.

The special elite from the magistrate side took a step forward. He tapped a long staff which he was holding in his right hand on the ground. A soft light radiated out and opposed the commander's aura, greatly relieving the pressure felt by the magistrate and the others.

"I see that you are determined to protect this outworlder," the magistrate said with a threatening voice. "Is it worth it to risk yourself for an outsider? I won't be able to guarantee that your daughter over there will be unharmed when we made a move."

"Try it! You disgusting toad!" Lindsey showed no fear of the situation. He even drew her sword out to show her determination.

The magistrate's face was especially ugly hearing the insult. Jack was inertly cheering inside his mind. He didn't think the teenage girl had such mettle in her. Perhaps it was due to the confidence of having her commander father beside her.

"Do not try to use threat against my family, Warren. You will regret it," Commander Quintus said. "Know that at this moment, my soldiers were en route to this place. I would suggest you make yourself scarce before they arrive. Otherwise, I will not show any mercy even if you are a magistrate of the palace."

Chapter 253: Royal Intervention

"Protecting a criminal and still acting so righteously? Hmph! You are the one that will regret this stubbornness of yours. I know you can have your people coming, then we will just make sure that this is over before they arrive!"

Everyone looked tense. All the soldiers and guards from both sides were having their hands wrapped around the hilt of their swords, ready to tussle at a moment's notice. Jack looked at the scene in amazement. He never expected that he would become a reason for two groups of NPCs to have a confrontation with one another.

Magistrate Warren had his hand lifted, about to give the sign to attack when he was interrupted by a voice.

"What in the name of King Themos is going on here?"

Everyone turned to the source of the voice and saw a group of five people. All of which were familiar faces to Jack. It was Bailey and the rest of the cadets.

"Miss Bailey!" Lindsey called out. "You are early, but it's good that you are here. These people here want to bully Mister Storm Wind."

Bailey looked at the group that was mentioned and recognized Walter. "Walter? What is the meaning of this?"

Walter harrumphed in exactly the same manner as his old man, "hmph! Don't act like you are still my instructor. You already lost that title since you failed to defend me from this fiend and even worse, fail to exact justice for me!"

"Lost the title? You have guts, you little punk. Do you think I don't dare to teach you a lesson if your dad is here?" Bailey retorted.

Magistrate Warren gave a short glance before returning his attention to Commander Quintus. "Only an insignificant lieutenant with a bunch of kids. Don't you think this tip the scale in your favor. I will give you another chance. By the end of my count to three, if you are still being stubborn and refuse to hand over the criminal who crippled my son to me, do not blame me for being discourteous! One..."

"Save your breath, three! If you want to fight, let's fight already!" Commander Quintus was unflinching.

"You stubborn old fool!" Magistrate Warren gritted his teeth. "Fine! Have it your way! Everyone, att..."

"Halt!"

Another voice interrupted the magistrate again. He turned furiously to the source of the voice.

Jack also turned and was astonished to see that it was Alonzo that shouted, who prior to this had stayed at the back of the cadets' group. What is that young cadet doing trying to interrupt the magistrate? That fat official didn't even give a face to a Lieutenant and a Knight Commander, this squire was clearly looking for trouble.

As if agreeing with Jack's thought, Walter spoke out, "who the hell do you think you are? You are not even worthy enough to be my lackey, now you dare to interrupt my dad? You know I can have you slapped till your cheeks are swollen? Know your place and be silent!"

Jack didn't find Walter's outburst to be odd. However, one thing surprised him though. The expression of the magistrate turned from belittling, to astonishment, then to worry and uneasiness. Even the color of his face turned slightly pale after Alonzo made himself known. What the magistrate said next, caused most of the people around to look at the young squire with wide eyes.

"Yo... your majesty! What are you doing out here?"

"Your majesty?" Walter turned to his father, unable to believe what he had just heard. "Father, did you recognize the wrong person?"

Magistrate Warren pulled his son back and put a restraining hand on his shoulder. He said apologetically to Alonzo, "I'm sorry, young prince. My son had always been brash, but he means no disrespect. Please forgive his obtuseness."

Prince? Gasps could be heard from the guards and soldiers and even the other cadets, but Commander Quintus, Lieutenant Bailey, and Lindsey didn't seem as surprised. Jack figured that they had known about Alonzo's identity from the start.

Was this something like those plots in old telenovela where a charming prince went to disguise as a civilian? Well, in this case, a disguise as a young soldier.

Alonzo who had become the center of attention, didn't show any sign of faltering. His stern face carried a confident authority. "What am I doing here? I'm meeting my friend and benefactor here as we have a schedule for a training trip. Now I demand your explanation! What are you doing here bringing such a troop and create disturbance in the residence of an honored commander of the army?"

"Re... reporting, my prince. I'm here to apprehend the criminal who had caused harm to my son," magistrate Warren answered with a slight bow.

"Criminal?"

"Yes, it's that outworlder over there! He had attacked my son and the Knight Commander had unjustly harbored this lawbreaker."

"How dare you!" Alonzo yelled out. "That person is my benefactor. How dare you accuse him!"

"Be—benefactor?" Magistrate Warren felt like he was going out of his mind. "Ho... how...?"

"He had saved my life yesterday during our training mission. Same as the rest of the Cadets and Commander Quintus' daughter. In fact, that ungrateful son of yours had also owed him his life!"

"That's bullshit! I..."

"Shut up!" Walter's outburst was quickly getting shut by his father's scolding. He didn't dare to offend his father.

Magistrate Warren was silent for a while as he pondered about the situation. He then said to the prince with a bow, "my prince. Even if he is your benefactor. It was a fact that he had assaulted my son and crippled his arm. The proof is right here and I believe from what he told me that his fellow cadets, which must include you, had borne witness to such violation. It is the law of this kingdom to punish the offender. We cannot let go of a crime just because he is your friend, how can the masses believe in the

law if we failed to uphold it? I demand justice be served and punishment be enacted upon this outworlder!"

Jack furrowed his brow. This magistrate deserved his post. Seeing that violence was out of option, he quickly switched tactics to reasoning. That fluidity in his attitude was commendable. Now, what should he say to defend himself?

As Jack was still thinking of a counter-argument, Alonzo had already beaten him to it. "Well said! Certainly, justice must be served. Law must be upheld. No royalty nor official may abuse their power and ignore the law. Talking about injustice and crime. I must also address another crime from yesterday's occurrence."

Magistrate Warren lifted his head from his bow. He stared with an inquisitive look at prince Alonzo. There was weariness in his eyes.

Alonzo continued without deigning the magistrate a look, "as another matter of fact from yesterday's training mission, we had encountered a boss monster that was way out of our league. One of us had kept this monster occupied while allowing us an escape. While said comrade was trying to make his own escape, another one of us was despicable enough to cut the means of escape from this comrade, simply because of petty enviousness. Now I would like to ask, what is the punishment for such a crime?"

"Penalty for betraying a comrade is death!" Bailey uttered.

"I see. Thank you, instructor. Now, what do you think about this, magistrate?" Alonzo now gave the magistrate a meaningful look.

"I... I don't see why this matters at the moment. If we..."

"It definitely mattered, because the perpetrator is the one behind you. Your precious son, Walter," Alonzo said.

Magistrate Warren turned to look at Walter, who didn't dare to look back.

"Did he not tell you the reason why mister Storm Wind lashed out at him?"

"This... this is slander! My son would never..."

Alonzo cut him with a stern voice, "he had confessed to it! Everyone in my team heard it including me. Are you calling me a liar!?"

"I—I would not dare...", the magistrate replied with a weak voice. "But... but... this does not exclude the outworlder from a punishment. I demand he be taken into custody."

"Of course," Alonzo said. "how about this? We perform the punishment at the same time. Your son and this outworlder. That's only fair, right?"

The magistrate turned pale at the words. The outworlders were known for their immortality. Even if they were killed, they would still come back to life. They would lose every progress they had made from the start though. On the other hand, for natives like them, death would be permanent. It was clear who would lose out if both parties were punished.

Furthermore, the penalty applied to the Outworlder might not be death. After all, he had only taken his son's arm, not his life. The jury was still out on the nature of the punishment. His son's treachery, however, was governed by military law which was harsh in their implementation.

Chapter 254: Matter Resolved?

"I... This..." The magistrate was out of words.

Seeing the magistrate's defeated expression, Alonzo said, "look. I know how hot-blooded young people could be. I am one of them after all. There is no sense for this incident to ruin our kingdom's future promising talents, right? Both your son Walter and mister Storm Wind, who has joined our kingdom faction, might become the pillars of this kingdom. How about the two of you make peace with each other, instead of going after for mutual destruction?"

Magistrate Warren stared at him with a meaningful look. He understood, with the prince here, he had lost the possibility to settle the issue with this outworlder. The best he could do was taking up the prince's offer. Otherwise, his son would not escape punishment as well.

Of course, he would not just let the outworlder go like this. No one that had crossed him or his family was allowed an easy life, especially an outworlder. He would think of another way to deal with this matter.

After coming to this comprehension, he decided to not drag this matter. He said, "the prince is wise. We shall do as the prince had instructed. I thank you for the leniency you have shown my son. I will make sure his blunder will not be repeated."

Walter cringed hearing his father's words. He knew he was in for a scolding after this. He turned back and glared at Jack. Not only had he failed to enact his revenge. He was even going to suffer further. He could not forgive this outworlder for the suffering he had caused him.

Jack caught Walter's stare. He gave him a simple shrug and smile. Walter felt like exploding where he stood, but his feeling mattered not as his father started dragging him as they walked away.

"Magistrate Warren!" Alonzo called out. The magistrate's group stopped upon hearing the call.

"Yes, my prince? Is there any other instruction?" Magistrate Warren answered politely.

Alonzo turned to him and said seriously, "I know of your reputation. Please believe me when I say if there is anything untoward that happens to mister Storm Wind. I will make it my personal mission to investigate the cause, and you will be my primary suspect. Do I make myself clear?"

Magistrate Warren's eyes gave a savage glint, but his expression remained neutral and unperturbed. "If such a thing happened, I will cooperate fully with the investigation. Please be rest assured that I will not cause any trouble to mister Storm Wind here."

"That will be the best then," Alonzo nodded.

The Magistrate group then left the premises. Jack and the others could only see their back, but if they could see the magistrate's face at the time, they would see him exhibiting a very ugly scowl. The

magistrate swore in his heart that he would make the outworlder pay for this humiliation, one way or the other.

Huh, it's over? Jack thought as he watched the magistrate's departing back. He had not made a sound since he came out. The NPCs were bickering so intensely that he felt like he was watching a drama. Before he knew it, the discord was over. There was no effort on his part at all. Could this be the luck stat from Goddess blessing at work? He wondered amusingly. And here he thought that he would have a hard time with the NPCs due to his action against Walter, so the matter was resolved just like this?

'Well, don't look a gift horse in the mouth,' he said out loud in his mind. He would take an easy outcome any day. He was not the kind of guy who preferred hard challenges when there was another easy way out available.

"What gift horse? What in tarnation are you thinking about?" Asked Peniel who heard his thought.

'nothing. Just a saying from where I came from,' Jack replied.

The atmosphere in front of commander Quintus' residence was much more relaxed now without the magistrate's group. Lindsey sheathed her weapon. Commander Quintus dismissed his soldiers to go back on patrol around the residence. Bailey and Alonzo approached them.

"So, you are a prince?" Jack asked Alonzo, at last breaking his silence all this time. If he didn't start talking, others might have thought him scared shitless from the ordeal.

Alonzo nodded.

"He is the third prince of King Themos. The youngest one of his highness' offspring," commander Quintus informed. "The young prince had requested to join formal training of the squires, and for his identity to be kept secret. He didn't want special privileges during the training. Only me, Lindsey, and Lieutenant Bailey knew about this."

Jack was scanning the prince with Inspect again during commander Quintus' explanation. His description was still just a squire, no mention of a prince, so NPC's identity could also be hidden if they willed it, Jack thought. He also realized no wonder Alonzo had that beacon thing to summon Bailey when they were in trouble inside the cave yesterday. He must have had it for an emergency when he needed help.

The expressions of the other cadets were rather complex. They didn't expect that the comrade they had been training with all this time was a prince. They might even have made fun of or teased him in the past. Walter most likely did. With his status exposed now, they won't be able to treat him the same way anymore.

"Thank you for the help, Prince Alonzo," Jack said sincerely with a bow. "I owe you one."

Alonzo shook his head, "that's nothing. It was nothing compared to your bravery yesterday. I meant it when I called you my benefactor. I hoped we can still be friends despite my status."

"It will be my honor to befriend a prince," Jack replied.

"That's good to hear. Many others might balk after learning my identity."

Jack was confused. Was he kidding? Wouldn't it be more correct to say that many others would be swarming to try to be his friends once they learned of his identity? But Jack didn't think too much about it.

They did indeed come for the planned training trip. Lindsey was already prepared so they could depart immediately. Jack had all his belonging in his personal inventory bag, so there was never a need to prepare, he did feel a little reluctant for leaving the Training Ground though.

Yet, it did get a little boring only practicing on wooden dummies, better to fight real monsters. He couldn't just focus on skill proficiencies after all, level was still the primary parameter of power.

He went together with the five cadets. Lieutenant Bailey was still the one overseeing their training, so she came along as well. The three cadets acted timid throughout the journey. Jack couldn't blame them though, he assumed that was due to the revelation that Alonzo was a prince. Only Lindsey treated Alonzo the same way as before.

They went a little further than yesterday for the training cave. It was a series of cave holes at the side of the mountain cliff. They didn't look too different from yesterday's mining caves though. But instead of miners working around, all they see were soldiers guarding the caves. Maybe to keep watch that none of the monsters came out to create havoc in the city.

The soldiers saluted Bailey when they approached. She stopped in front of one of the caves. There was a plate sign fixed above. Number twenty was carved on that plate.

Bailey turned to everyone. "All right, go in. You five should be clear on the drill already. As for Storm Wind, this was a training cave suitable for level 20. The monsters inside ranged from level twenty to twenty-five, but all basic monsters. So you shall not encounter a problem like yesterday. Even if you meet a level 25 monster, as long as you cooperate well, all of you should have no problem."

Everyone nodded. Jack mimicked them.

"Okay, same as yesterday. Mister Storm Wind would take the lead," Bailey said.

Oh, come on! Sister, this was my first time here, the others were frequent already here. Shouldn't one of them take charge? Furthermore, Alonzo was a prince. Wouldn't it be weird if he commanded a prince?

He looked at the others, they didn't seem to mind. Even Alonzo had saluted him once Bailey announced him as the leader. Oh, such an obedient prince. He was more suited in the military than in the palace court.

Oh, well, since no one objected, he yelled out, "all right, you apes! We don't have all day. Move out!"

The cadets looked at each other before following Jack into the cave.

Chapter 255: Rune Diagram

The monsters inside were indeed as mentioned, all of them were basic monsters with levels between 20 to 25. All of the monsters were the same type, Lesser Earth Elemental. They resembled the Small Rock Golem which Jack had fought before in his hunting quest. However, unlike the Small Rock Golem, these

Lesser Earth Elementals weren't impervious to physical attacks. Their outer skin was more similar to dirt than rock, hence it was not too difficult to break through their defenses with physical weapons.

Their movements were rather slow, and they could only execute melee attacks, making them an excellent target for accumulating experience points.

Jack scored more than just experience points. He also got loots from these Lesser Earth Elementals which the cadets were ignoring, mostly coins and materials. There were also trophy items called Elemental Powder, he should be able to exchange them for a fair amount of coin in the Hunters Association. He happily stored all the loots.

He also received souls from each of the Lesser Earth Elemental slain. The higher their level, the more souls they gave.

Unlike yesterday, Jack didn't just stay passive and let the cadets do all the work. He would still get the same amount of experience even if he just stayed at the back, but he would not get any proficiency points if he didn't use his skills. So he put all his skills into use against the Lesser Earth Elementals, even when a normal hit was already sufficient. His addiction to increase his skills' grade from the Training Ground had followed him here. The proficiency gained however was at a normal pace.

The monsters were mowed down expeditiously with Jack's help. As they ventured deeper, Jack also noticed that at several intervals, there was some kind of large glowing rune carved on the cave walls.

His interest was piqued. He asked Peniel in his mind, 'What are those runes on the wall that I keep on seeing?'

"That was part of a rune diagram," she replied.

'Rune diagram? Like the one we saw on the walls of Duke Alfredo's estate when we were investigating the missing painting quest?'

"Yeah, this is another one of those."

'What's the one in this cave for?'

"I haven't seen all parts of the diagram to be sure, but it was most likely got to do with how this cave was made into a training place for the cadets. It controls the growth of the monsters to a certain grade and range of levels. It also increases the spawning rate of new monsters after the previous ones were vanquished."

Ah, no wonder there seemed to be no end to these Lesser Earth Elementals, Jack thought.

"I will not be surprised if the diagram can also be used in case of an emergency, to render all the monsters here to become stagnant."

'I would have appreciated that effect yesterday when we met the Ice Troll Sentinel,' Jack commented.

"If there is a rune diagram there, there won't be an Ice Troll Sentinel to start with," Peniel remarked.

They spent almost five hours inside the training cave. All the cadets managed to level up to 21. Jack's Warrior class stayed at level 20. As he had only leveled up yesterday, added that he needed a larger

amount of exp compared to a normal person in order to level up. His Mage class, on the other hand, managed to level up. He was already close to level up his Mage class yesterday. Today's training trip had managed to push him to level 19.

He had gained 59 silver coins from this training trip, a few materials and ingredients, 124 Elemental Powders, and he reaped 776 souls, bringing his collection of souls to 1447. He spent 1000 souls again, he chose to level up the Heightened State skill, bringing it to level 3. Each level up allowed the skill to last 10 seconds longer. He could now be in Heightened State for 3 minutes and 20 seconds. This should increase his efficiency when he went back to Commander Quintus' residence and used the Training Ground.

One of his skills, Swing, had also increased its grade to the first star. Each star of this Swing skill increased the swing speed and its area of damage. He should be able to hit more targets with this increase.

After coming out from the training cave, they made a report to Bailey. The lieutenant dismissed them after reviewing their growth. Jack and Lindsey took a carriage to go back to commander Quintus' residence while the others went their separate ways.

Jack asked Lindsey for a detour to a shop that sold general goods. He went inside the shop and purchased basic energy potions to replenish his stock. He still had a decent amount in his bag but he thought he might as well stock up more. He was afraid he might have developed a habit of not reserving stamina or MP from the Training Ground practice.

After arriving back at the residence, Jack went directly to the Training Ground and continued his skill practice. He practiced till night again. He had to again be forced to leave the ground for dinner and be threatened to stop using the facility. The difference was the commander let him use it till midnight this time.

When Jack got back to his room to rest. He was glad about his progress. He had three skills upgraded during this phase of practice. Sword of Light and Dragon's Eye both reached their first star, while Power Strike had managed to achieve its second star.

Each star of the Sword of Light reduced its cooldown by 6 seconds. Not a big difference for its current 3 minutes cooldown, but if he could complete all ten stars, the cooldown would only be two-thirds of the original.

For Dragon's Eye which could not be leveled up, proficiency was the only way to strengthen this skill. Each of its stars bestowed its passive skill of distant seeing by another 5%, while its active skill duration was increased by 2 seconds. If he completed all ten stars, the Dragon's Eye active skill would last for half a minute. That was a very long time when he was in that slow-motion perception.

The next morning he woke up early so he still got the chance to use the Training Ground while waiting for Marquess Fernando to pick him up for the auction. The marquess arrived around 9 AM. Jack left the Training Ground reluctantly when commander Quintus came to inform him that the marquess had arrived. Unfortunately, he didn't manage to further upgrade another of his skills during this morning's practice.

"Now that Prince Alonzo had given you his protection, the magistrate should not be able to cause too much trouble for you within the capital. But you should still be careful when you went out to the wilderness. It would be easier for the magistrate to arrange for an incident when you are out there, and harder for the prince to investigate," the commander warned him.

"Well, if I am killed, I will just come back to life in the capital, right? I can just inform the prince if the magistrate indeed makes his move against me out there."

"I would advise you to try not getting killed. As I understand, you outworlders will lose everything and start from the beginning again if you die in the wilderness, am I correct? The prince might still try to investigate as he had given his promise, but the difference between if he investigates to gain favor from a powerful asset against if he investigates for a level 1 who is restarting his journey, there will be a big difference."

"You are saying that I will lose my value if I restart from the beginning?" Jack asked.

"Would you think otherwise?" Commander Quintus returned his question.

That was not so strange actually, Jack thought. That was also how it worked in his real world. People were always valued based on their worth. If you didn't worth a dime, there won't be anyone that would bother to invest in you. Only by proving your worth, that you could make something out of yourself in the world. The core belief between this game world and his original world remained the same.

He was not going to tell the commander that he had Immortal Soul inherent skill which would protect him even if he died in the wilderness. He preferred fewer people know about it, the better. After all, the skill had a weakness of 24 hours cooldown. If his enemies knew about them, they might figure out a way to exploit this weakness.

"And since you are no longer in danger in the capital," the commander continued as they came out into the living hall, where marquess Fernando was seen lounging on one of the sofas. "There is no need for you to hide in my residence anymore."

Chapter 256: Trade Association

Jack turned to the commander, "I'm not welcome here anymore?"

"Heh, look at you. When I first asked you to stay at my place, it was as if I have to wring your arms for it. But now, I feel like I have to throw you out, if not, you won't be willing to leave," the commander replied. "Answering your question, of course, you are still welcomed. You are even welcomed to stay from time to time if you like. It's just that if you want to use my Training Ground again, I will have to charge you for it."

The commander knew the whole reason Jack was reluctant to leave was the existence of the Training Ground.

"How many coins?" Jack asked, he should have no problem paying for it.

However, commander Quintus shook his head. "I don't accept coins," he said. "10 merit points for three hours usage."

"Merit points?" Jack asked with surprise. He looked at the Themisphere Nobility Faction Badge in his inventory. There were only 50 points inside. So he could only use the Training Ground for fifteen hours. That was only a bit over one day of usage.

"So expensive?" Jack couldn't help but blurt out.

"Friend, that is already cheap," marquess Fernando had approached and joined in their conversation. "You remember I said I will show you the many privileges once you become a noble? The Training Ground was one such privilege, we have one that everyone can use in the palace barrack as long as you have merit point. But that public Training Ground there cost 20 merit points for two hours of usage, and the effect is only twice the gain from normal proficiency. Commander Quintus' private Training Ground here was already famous amongst the residents of the Noble District. As its effect is three times gain from normal proficiency. But this geezer is miserly, he just kept his Training Ground for personal use. The other nobles won't even be able to lay eyes on his Training Ground."

"Who did you just call miserly?" Commander Quintus growled at the marquess.

The marquess ignored him and continued, "so, you are already very lucky to receive his offer. You can use a Training Ground which is better, with a lower expenditure of merit points, but a longer time usage compared to the others in the faction."

Jack thought about it, so in the future even if other players joined the Themisphere Kingdom Faction, he would still hold the advantage in the Training Ground division as he had built a rapport with Commander Quintus who possessed a higher standard Training Ground. While the others could only use the regular one offered by the faction. He felt lucky now he had defended the commander's daughter during his first faction quest. Perhaps that was the luck from Goddess' Blessing at work again?

Jack bowed to commander Quintus, "thank you for your offer, I greatly appreciate it." After all, he was just a guest. The fact that the commander had let him use such a precious facility for two days was already very generous. Paying for future usage was only fair.

The commander nodded. "I won't be always at this place, but I have informed the servants. As long as you gave them the aforementioned merit point, they would let you use the Training Ground."

"Let's go, we will be late to the auction if we still don't depart," marquess Fernando said.

Jack bid the commander farewell before leaving. Lindsey also came out to send him off when they arrived at the exit. She told him that he was welcomed to join their training whenever he was free.

Jack and the marquess took a carriage on their journey. They stopped in front of a private residence that almost the same size as commander Quintus' one.

"The auction was held in a private residence?" Jack asked as they stepped off from the carriage.

"Are you kidding? Of course not!" Marquess Fernando replied. "This is my house."

"Oh? What are we doing here? I thought we go directly to the auction venue."

"I need to pick up something, and also someone," the marquess replied.

Someone? Jack thought. His sight then wandered to a lone figure who stood in front of the residence. The person was a young man, probably younger than him. His stature was rather short and skinny, but he was very neat. His attire was not luxurious as the ones nobles usually wore, but still very stylish. Jack used Inspect on him.

Dylan Fairdeal (Ranger, level: 11)

HP: 210/210

Huh? A player? It was so unexpected that he repeated his Inspect again? The data was still the same.

"The hell were you from?" This neat player said to marquess Fernando, "I have been waiting for ages here."

"Apologies," the marquess smiled apologetically. "Please wait a few moments more. I will just get something from inside and then we are good to go."

"Storm Wind, you wait here as well. I won't be long. Try to get to know each other, we will be going to the auction together."

With that, the marquess disappeared into his house. Jack turned to the neat player, who was staring at him as well.

Jack still found it hard to register him as a player. First, he thought that he was the only player that had managed to gain a pass into this noble district. Second, his attire didn't look like typical player armors nor robes. It looked more like those decorative clothes with no battle property which he had seen in an expensive shop within this Business District. Wait, did this guy buy his clothes there? What's the point of using those useless decorative clothes?

Another peculiar thing, this player's level was embarrassingly low. Level 11? The mainstream had been around level 18 or 19 already at the moment. What had this guy been doing all this time?

This neat guy seemed to sense Jack's inquisitive thoughts, he said, "something you want to ask?"

"Should I call you Mr. Dylan or Mr. Fairdeal?"

"Just Dylan is fine."

"Ok, just Dylan. How did you gain access to the auction?"

"How do you?"

"It's part of my quest."

"What a coincidence, so am I."

Jack looked at him skeptically. "You are also in Themisphere kingdom faction?"

Dylan's face which was indifferent all this time turned interested. He looked at Jack with fascinated expression. "You are in the kingdom faction?" He asked.

"You are not?" Jack asked back.

"No, the kingdom faction is rather hard to join. I am from the Trade Association," Dylan answered.

"Trade Association?"

"It was one of the league factions. One that emphasizes members with mercantile skills," it was Peniel who answered him. "They usually only accept members with a high level of Haggling skill."

"You never heard of Trade Association?" Dylan asked. "That makes sense. You looked to me like those brute kind who like to play hack and slash."

"Well, this is a world with magic and monsters after all. Hack and slash I reckon are what normal players do. What's your poison? You like to play merchant games?"

"I'm a businessman," he uttered with a prideful tone, he straightened his fancy clothes to further accentuate his elegant style. "your barbaric way holds no sway over me."

"How the hell did you get to level 11 then if you don't do any barbaric deeds?"

"It was unintentional. My faction's bodyguards fought the monsters during our travel. When they were defeated, I receive the experience points."

"Bodyguards? Travel? Tell me more about your faction. What's a merchant faction doing with traveling?"

"You ignorant brute. What do you think a merchant does? They take goods of little value from one town and moved them to another town that values the goods better, then sell them at a higher price. That's what calls trading, and it involves a lot of traveling."

"Wait, wait, wait! Are you telling me that you have been to another town aside from this capital?" Jack asked with a tinge of disbelief.

Chapter 257: Caravan Function

"Of course," Dylan replied as if it was the most normal thing.

Jack was speechless for a while, before repeating, "another town away from this capital?"

Dylan furrowed his brow. "Are you a retard or something?"

Jack thought back to what the guy had told him, then said, "are you saying that your faction helps you to travel to another town by providing bodyguards to deal with the monsters along the way?"

"Not just bodyguards, I was also provided with carriages, to carry me and my wares."

"What wares? Can't you just put them inside your storage bag?"

"Trade goods can't be put inside storage bag, and can't be teleported as well. Hence the caravan function of my faction. It provided me with the means not only to travel to other towns, but also to carry the trade goods back in order to make a profit."

"Trade goods?"

"You are such an ignorant rookie. Don't you know any aspects about the mercantile system of this game world?"

"My friend, as you said. I'm more of a hack and slash kind of brute."

Dylan gave him a derisive laugh before saying, "then let me enlighten your shallow knowledge. Trade goods are items that you can buy in a shop that serves no other game function apart from to be sold. However, simply buying any trade good you find in a shop will not do as well. Because there is a possibility that you buy it at a high price already, and you will end up unable to sell it for profit. You need to study first the price of the goods in one town and compare it with the other town before you can make a profitable trade. If you can identify the town's specialty goods, then you can make a killing. But take note that you don't overbuy or oversell one item too much, or else you will affect the demand and supply of the towns and the prices will change."

Jack nodded throughout the explanation. After Dylan stopped, he said, "thank you for your explanation. That is all well and good, but I'm actually more interested in the means to travel to the other towns. Is it only reserved for your faction members? Can you sneak a friend into this caravan?"

"Sneak? What do you think the caravan is? A stowaway boat? Of course, it is not possible! The caravan will undergo a strict check by the faction NPCs before leaving. There is no possibility for an illegal entry."

"Ah, too bad... What is the requirement to join this Trade Association?"

"Advanced apprentice in Haggling," Dylan answered. "But even if you entered the faction, the caravan function won't immediately be available to you. You will need to do some of its quests to accumulate points. Once you become a basic expert in Haggling, then you can start to use the points you have to request for a caravan trip. The longer the trip requested, the more points it will be required. But of course, the longer the distance, the possibility of profit from bringing back correct trade goods will be higher."

Jack checked his status. He was an intermediate apprentice in Haggling. According to Dylan's account, he would still need to level up his Haggling skill twice to be able to use the caravan. Too much hassle. He was not the type that enjoyed trading, so increasing his Haggling skill would be a chore. He dismissed the idea of traveling to other cities using the Trade Association. He would just have to go through the normal means.

As he pondered about the new info from Dylan, he suddenly thought of something.

"Hey, Dylan. If you can go to the other towns, that means you should be able to find wares that you might not find in this city, right?"

"Naturally," Dylan answered.

"Do you mind keeping an eye out for an ingredient for me?"

"Hm? What ingredient?" Dylan's business sense tingled from the request.

"Rosemary," Jack said. It was one of the ingredients required by food recipe Well-done Steak which he had given to Ellie. It was an expert-grade recipe that could increase the experience received by the

consumer by 20% for 6 hours. He had been searching for this ingredient all over the capital, including the shops in the noble district, but to no avail.

"Rosemary," Dylan jotted it down on some kind of a notepad. "I will keep an eye out, but mind you. It won't be cheap."

"Well, as long as you didn't rip me off and it was still a reasonable price, I will buy it."

"The system won't allow me to rip you off. There is a range of prices when I sell an item. Even if it is to a player. I cannot just enter my own skyrocket price. All I can do is just set the price to maximum when selling it to you, but it won't be too far from the fair price."

"Can't you just sell me with the standard fair price? Considering we are friends."

"What friend? I just know you five minutes ago!" Dylan remarked. "How many of this rosemary that you need?" He then added.

"As much as you can buy," Jack replied.

"Do you have the coins for it?" Dylan said sarcastically.

"Heh, kid. Don't you worry about it. I dare say that I might be the currently richest individual player in this capital."

"Such a boast from a guy who knows nothing of trading," Dylan mocked. At the time, the door to the residence in front of them opened, interrupting their banter. Marquess Fernando came out of it.

"All right, I'm ready. Let us depart," he said, and led them into his carriage.

As they were inside the carriage, Jack sent Dylan a friend invite, which he accepted. He said to Dylan. "If you have gotten the Rosemary and I'm not around. You can go to this restaurant called Ellie's Restaurant." He sent the coordinates to Dylan using the map interface.

"Ellie's restaurant? Hey, I know that place. It was quite famous amongst players. As it was run by players as well. This Ellie is rather resourceful to be able to build a business place before others. She was one of the players who I respect due to this achievement."

'Should I tell him that the restaurant belongs to me?' Jack thought.

"You can give the Rosemary to her. Don't worry, she will honor our agreement and pay you for all the rosemary you bring."

Dylan nodded, then look at Jack in a more appreciated gaze. "I didn't know you are related to her. What connection do you have with her?"

Jack shrugged. "Just a business associate," he said.

Marquess Fernando had no idea what they were talking about, so he waited for them to finish. When he saw their conversations had stopped, he handed to Jack a large pouch. Jack received the pouch and checked it.

"O—one hundred gold coins?" Jack blurted out.

Dylan's eyes widen at his words.

"Don't be so excited. Those coins are not for you," marquess Fernando said. "Those are the funds to be used in the auction."

"Which item in the auction that I should use it on?" Jack asked again.

"As I've said, I don't know. The duke just told me that you will know when you see it. Just don't waste the coins to bid on useless things. I will be watching you."

"Why doesn't the duke just ask you to bid then?"

"I don't know. He just said he needed a player to do the bidding."

Jack was intrigued, this faction quest didn't look so simple. He would prefer a simple quest of monsters killing or such. But beggars couldn't be choosers, this was currently the only nobility faction quest available after all.

He stored the coin pouch in his inventory. The coins didn't get mixed up with his personal coins count, probably because it was considered as a quest item.

"You got a quest from a duke?" Dylan asked.

"Apparently yes. And apparently, it's a vague quest where I need to bid on something which I don't know, and without being provided any clue. Should be a piece of cake, right? What about your quest?"

"My quest is simply to attend the auction," Dylan answered.

"Huh? What kind of cheap ass quest is that? So you just have to be present there? That's cheating," Jack complained.

"As I said, you are an ignorant buffoon. Attending such an event is in itself a learning process. Not to mention that I can get to know many nobles and influential NPCs in the auction. A merchant needs to build as wide a connection network as possible if he is to succeed."

"So troublesome. I would prefer to be the hack and slash kind of brute, thank you," Jack commented.

Dylan gave him a contemptuous look.

They continued to chat along the way. Marquess Fernando chimed in once in a while. Dylan himself was quite easy-going and fun to talk to. Jack thought that his attitude should be one of those qualities needed for that wide connection network building he was talking about.

Chapter 258: Going Into The Auction

In their course of conversations, Jack learned that Dylan had gone to two towns till now. They were just small towns, not even one-tenth of the capital, but he had scored a decent profit from the travels. He said after this auction quest, he should have scored enough points to attempt another caravan travel.

"We almost arrived. Here, wear this," marquess Fernando said as he fished out two long black coats.

"What for?" Jack asked.

Dylan's reaction was a bit stronger, "no way I'm going to wear something that grotesque!"

Marquess Fernando gave Dylan a sharp gaze. "Remind me again the arrangement of our deal with your faction regarding you joining this auction."

Dylan's expression was as if he had just swallowed a bitter pill. He said, "I am to follow your every instruction..."

"Good, now wear it!" The marquess shoved the coats at them.

"What for?" Jack repeated his question again, he still received the coat though. He observed that the coat was large enough to cover their whole body. There was also a hood that could cover his head.

"So that no one will recognize you guys," marquess Fernando answered.

"What?! So how am I going to make acquaintances with the other nobles and influential officers?" Dylan protested.

Marquess Fernando looked at him with an amused expression. "I was just about to give you people another instruction that you are not allowed to communicate with other people in the auction venue, whether natives or outworlders."

Dylan's mouth twitched, speechless at the instructions.

"Now you want to wear it or go down here?" The marquess said.

Dylan grumbled and snatched the coat with an unpleasant mood. He put the coat on while he continued grumbling.

When Jack used Inspect on the coat, he found out that its description said that it was a rare grade cloak piece and had the ability to conceal the wearer's data, it didn't increase any attribute though. Jack assumed that the concealment ability served the same function as face cloth masks that Blackjack's people wore when they ambushed him in the past.

Jack already had Cloak of Shadow which concealed his data. But unlike this coat that Fernando gave, his cloak did not cover his entire body. So someone could still recognize him by eyes. With this coat, he would be completely unrecognizable even visually.

Jack equipped the coat. So did Dylan, albeit begrudgingly. Jack used Inspect on Dylan, as he had expected, he could still see his info due to his God-eye monocle, just like what had happened with Blackjack's group in the past. But as Jack's Inspect was still on him, Dylan coincidentally pulled his hood up and covered his head. The info that was floating above him suddenly all turned to question marks.

Huh? It's got hidden after the hood was up? Not even my God-eye monocle could look through the concealment? Jack thought a bit about it. The conclusion that he could come up with was because this coat was a better grade compared to Blackjack's face mask.

He decided to ask Peniel about it. Peniel replied by emphasizing again that she had no idea what Jack's God-eye monocle could or could not do, but she did acknowledge that this concealment black coat was at a higher grade compared to the previous Blackjack's face mask.

"We are here," Marquess Fernando informed them as their carriage slowed to a stop. "You both pull your coat's hood up. Do not take it off and do not talk with other people unnecessarily."

The journey took a bit more than half an hour. The auction venue was still in the noble district, so the journey wasn't long. When they got off from the carriage, they saw they were in front of the gate to a courtyard of a huge domed building. Inside the courtyard, there were many people in fancy clothes hanging around. Several tables were set up around the courtyard providing snacks and refreshments. Jack assumed these were the participants of the auction who were enjoying their time while waiting for the auction to start.

There were two armored guards at the gate into the courtyard. After the marquess showed the guards his identity, the three of them were allowed to pass. The marquess took them across the courtyard without stopping at any of the refreshment tables. Jack could see Dylan's head under the hood looking around. He could tell that the kid was very eager to join the other guests in hanging around.

The marquess went directly to the entrance of the dome building. There were two other armored guards there blocking the entrance.

When the three of them came near, one of the guards put up a hand asking them to stop, and said, "please wait outside patiently. An announcement will be given once the auction is about to start, you cannot enter until then."

The marquess showed the guards some sort of token. They checked it for a bit before one of them said, "Come with me, I will take you to the VIP spot."

One of the guards stayed, while the other led them to another door into the building.

"VIP?" Jack said to marquess Fernando.

"You expect anything less?" the marquess replied with a smug face.

After passing the other entrance, the guard left them with a female attendant who then took over and led them to the upper floors. They came into a small waiting room which also had snacks and beverages prepared. There was no one else in the room except for them.

Once they had all entered, the female attendant said to them, "please make yourself at home. You will be informed when the auction was about to start, you can go through that door into the main auction hall. A private VIP viewing stand was beyond that door, where you can join the auction and make your bid from there." She pointed to the other door opposite from where they entered. "If you need anything else, I will just be outside at your service."

The female attendant then left and closed the door of the room for their privacy.

Dylan took off his hood and went to check on the snacks and beverages. He tried some of them.

"Hey, these are pretty good," he said.

"Hm? Do they give any extra effect?" Jack asked.

"You gaming freak, does it have to give extra effect for it to be good? I was referring to their taste!"

Jack took a sip of the red wine. It did taste good. He filled up a cup and brought it to one of the lounge chairs in the room and sat down. He didn't try the snacks.

The marquess joined Dylan in enjoying the refreshments. They waited less than half an hour before the female attendant reentered their room and informed them that the auction was about to start. She went across the room and opened the other door before ushering them into it.

The marquess reminded Jack and Dylan to put their hoods up before the three of them went into the door. After passing through, they were greeted by the view of a humongous hall with a half-round shape. They were at a small platform at the most upper part of the viewing hall, below them was the normal seating place, facing a large center stage which Jack assumed would be the auction block where they showed the auctioned exhibits.

They could watch the entirety of the auditorium from their platform. They saw many attendees trickling in and took their seats below. When Jack was observing the people below, he noticed some of them looked intangible, something like a hologram.

Jack pointed it out to marquess Fernando, who then explained, "this auction was a royal arrangement which spanned across the entire kingdom. So the participants are not only from the capital. Many others from the other cities within the kingdom also attend, but they don't have to come all the way here. There are auction facilities in the other cities, which are linked here. So they can attend from there and their presence is projected here."

Sort of like remote online auction then, Jack thought. Very practical, considering the space between the cities was infested with monsters, making travels inconvenient.

There were seats at their viewing platform. They took a seat while waiting for the auction to start. The female attendant brought some of the refreshments out and put them on a small table beside their seats.

There were other VIP viewing platforms as well besides theirs. They could see them getting filled up as well. One of them which was three platforms away from theirs, was occupied by two hologram figures. Jack took notice of that particular platform because when the hologram appeared, the radar in his God-eye monocle registered two extra blue dots in his vicinity apart from Dylan.

Players? Jack thought with astonishment.

Chapter 259: The Auction Starts!

Could they be like Dylan? Getting into the auction through special means via a faction? Jack thought as his gaze stayed on the two figures. Coincidentally, the two holograms also wore concealment coats, which prevented Jack from reading their info. If it was not for the color from his radar, he would not be able to tell if they were players or NPCs.

While Jack was staring at them, one of them turned their hooded head towards him as well.

Uh, should I wave to express goodwill? Jack thought.

They ended up just sat there staring at each other for a good whole while. Before the other side lost interest and returned his or her attention back to the center stage of the auditorium.

Jack's thought didn't linger too long at the two mysterious players as well. If he and Dylan could get access to this auction, why other players could not? What fascinated him was the two players were hologram images, which meant that they were from another city of the kingdom. He wondered if he could get to know them so as to get information about the other cities.

Peniel was a good source of info but she probably only knew about the geographical locations of the other cities. Of what particular contents and benefits these cities provided for players, he doubted the fairy would know the details. Not to mention, this guide of him tended to be moody and bequeathed information only when she thought that he needed it.

While Jack was still in thought, a voice boomed from the center of the auditorium stage, "ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to our special royal auction. There will be many exotic items on offer throughout this auction. Either you are physically here, or attending from our sister facilities from other cities, all of you have the same chance to get the auction items here! All you have to do of course is having enough coins."

Jack looked at the source of the voice and saw a well-attired bearded aged male at the center of the auditorium stage. He was smiling mischievously upon his last remark.

"For those that were your first time here, welcome! You can rest assured that each of our exhibits has been appraised by top experts. So every piece will be a genuine article exactly as detailed in their explanations. You can check the detail data of each article by tapping at the red gem beside your seat when the article was being auctioned."

Jack looked at the armrest of his seat, there was a peculiar red color gem there. He at first thought it was just a decoration of the seat. He tried tapping at it. A holographic text 'empty' appeared and floated above the red gem. Guessed he had to wait till an auctioned item was brought out before it could serve its function.

The auctioneer continued with his introduction. He introduced a bit about the history of this auction event. How it started by the member of the royal family. It was just limited member participation at the time, before it grew bigger and a special venue was built to host the auction, which was the building they were in now. This event grew even more popular that its branch facilities were constructed in other cities, allowing nobles and rich people from the other cities to be able to conveniently join the auction.

After a while, he finally closed his lengthy introduction, "without further ado, let us begin what we have all been waiting for!"

The aged auctioneer motioned to his beautiful female assistant, who stood beside a veiled large object. She pulled the veil and revealed a plain-looking monolith. While Jack was wondering if the monolith was amongst the thing being auctioned, its plain-looking surfaces suddenly flared with bright runes. Several words of power floated out of the runes and formed a circular pattern, which then converged and created an image of heavy chest armor.

"Our first item of the auction is the Armor of Crest Fang, a level 45 super rare chest armor!" The auctioneer paused for a while before saying, "for those of you who had attended our auction, you

shouldn't find this weird, but I will explain for the sake of our newest attendees. As you can see, the item we display is not the real item, but rest assured under the reputation of the royal family that we have the real thing. This is a safety precaution implemented due to an incident in the past. You can check on the data of this rare armor by tapping the red gem beside your seat."

When the auctioneer didn't elaborate on the incident he mentioned, Jack turned to marquess Fernando, "what kind of incident was he talking about?"

"It was a blatant stealing while the auction was in progress," the marquess answered.

"What? Aren't there many guards around?"

"There are, but the thief was a high-level individual who used some kind of unknown magic to teleport himself away once he managed to snatch the item. That unknown magic of his even manage to bypass the confinement rune diagram in place here. The guards failed to even see his shadow and he was gone. Since then, such precaution was taken."

Jack was amused by the history, such an incident would be a sight to see. He then heard the auctioneer's voice again, "the Armor of Crest Fang will be auctioned with the starting price of 15 gold coins, the bid increment will be 2 gold coins."

Wow, 15 gold coins. So the high-level armor was sold in gold coins already. But then again, this is super rare grade equipment, such an amount should not be strange. He tapped on the red gem to check on the armor data. A holographic image appeared soon, showing a similar picture shown above the auction block except much smaller, with more comprehensive texts to describe the item.

The data not only showed the statistic of the equipment, but also showed its history. The chest armor had a physical defense of 255 points and a magical defense of 190. It was apparently produced by a famous advanced master blacksmith called Haestus who was at the moment close to reaching the rank of grandmaster.

The bid started, many of the NPCs seemed to be interested in it. Jack was tempted to bid himself, but it would just be a waste to buy a piece of equipment that he cannot use, he would need to be at least level 35 before he could equip the armor, so he restrained himself.

The bids kept going on fiercely, it was a good start for the auction. The bids started to slow down once they reached 35 gold coins. Jack was astonished, that was around half the private stock of his gold coin. It was finally sold to one of the NPCs at the price of 55 gold coins.

"What a waste, the fair market value of that armor should just be around 30 gold coins," he heard Dylan spoke up from his side?

"What's a fair market value?" Jack asked.

"It's an average price if you buy this piece of armor in a store," Dylan answered.

"But you can't buy a super rare equipment in a store," Jack said.

Dylan didn't reply.

"So how can you know its price if you can't buy it?" Jack didn't let the subject go.

Dylan was getting annoyed, he finally uttered, "I read the information from a journal in the Trade Association, ok. It depicted the average prices of most items, including equipment."

"It even has the price info on this Armor of Crest Fang?"

"No, it has the info of average price on super-rare chest armor. Of course, every armor is different, but it should be more or less within that price range."

"Wow, that is still impressive. So you know the price of every item then?"

"Not every item obviously, how big do you think that journal is? But the association should have records of almost everything. There are many journals in the association and I only have access to one of them, which cataloged the most basic items."

"They considered super rare armor as most basic?"

Dylan gave him a serious look before replying, "yes. Only you brutes valued those fighting equipment so highly."

Marquess Fernando had long since gotten used to the two's repartee, so he wasn't bothered by them. Yet he was also not so interested in the things in the auction, which had already proceeded to the second item, a super rare material. He gave a yawn to express his boredom.

The third item was a complete corpse of a Rare Elite monster. Jack was surprised that the corpse was intact. His understanding was that all monsters would disintegrate once they died. Peniel explained to him that there were tools that allowed the corpse from getting disintegrated. Such corpses of rare monsters were usually popular for academics who like to perform experiments on them. There were indeed many NPCs who bid on the corpse.

Jack was also getting bored. Though the auctioned items were interesting, he still preferred to go out questing and increasing his level. However, when the auctioneer announced the fourth item, he perked up.

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The fourth item was a technique book. One that was called Flash Step. It was a movement skill, something that Jack was lacking. It was an advanced skill eligible for any advanced melee class. From its description when Jack tapped the red gem beside his seat, it was shown that this skill allowed its user to move instantaneously within a short distance while leaving an afterimage in its user's original position that could confuse the opponent.

The starting bid was 3 gold coins with each bid increment of 1 gold coin.

When the auctioneer started the bid, Jack immediately lifted his hand and yelled 4 gold coins. Although the auction block was a distance away and Jack was not yelling particularly loud, the auctioneer could still hear him clearly. Jack assumed it should be another function of the rune diagram surrounding this hall, apart from for a security reason.

Another NPC soon outbid Jack. Jack immediately raised his hand again to bid for 6 gold coins.

"What are you doing?" Dylan asked.

"Can't you see? I'm bidding for the item."

"I can see that, but you are doing it with such low class."

"The heck are you talking about? I don't know that there are classy ways to bid."

"Of course there are. I've known you brutes are clueless about the art of auction," Dylan said with contempt. "I will teach you two methods to effectively win an auction. First, you can just throw a bid much higher than the increment. It can show the others that you are dead set on obtaining the item and dissuade them from continuing. Another is to not join the auction at the start and wait until everybody slowed down. This way you can see when the others are starting to feel reluctant to bid for the item, that's when you dive in."

"You talked as if they are a sure thing. In the end, isn't it just the matter of who has the more coins?"

"Of course it's about coins. But doing it my way and doing it your amateur way will have a difference in how much you end up paying for the auctioned item. My way can definitely save you some coins which will otherwise be wasted."

"Really?" Jack said skeptically.

Dylan didn't feel like deigning him with an answer.

While they were chit-chatting, the bids had started to slow down at 14 gold coins. When the auctioneer started hammering his count, "going once... going twice...", Jack shouted out, "18 gold coins!"

"F**k me! You just go and combined both my methods," Dylan cursed out.

It was effective though, no one was bidding anymore. The auctioneer hammered thrice and announced Jack as the winner. He could come and pick up the item at the counter once the auction was over.

"So, what's the fair market value of a technique book of an advanced skill?" Jack asked with a high spirit after winning the bid.

"10 gold coins," Dylan replied.

Jack felt his high spirit was doused by cold water. It meant that he had spent almost double the price of the skill's normal cost. But he didn't dwell on it, it was a rare opportunity to encounter an available technique book after all. Increasing his battle prowess was more important than his wealth in this world.

The auctioneer presented the next item which looked like a pair of gloves, yet the auctioneer called it a weapon. Jack checked out the information from the interface beside his seat. The hologram data appeared, it was written that the supposed gloves were called Fist Hammer, it was a level 40 Fist weapon.

'Fist weapon? I have never seen this kind of weapon used in this world before. Can a warrior equip it?' He asked Peniel in his mind.

"No, that was an exclusive weapon for Battle Monk class," the fairy answered.

'Battle Monk class? Wait... do you mean an elite class?'

"Yes."

'Which class can evolve to Battle Monk class? Is it Warrior?'

"No, Battle Monk class branched out from Rogue."

'Rogue? Well, I guess a battle monk would be a dexterity-oriented melee class, so it makes sense to come from Rogue. What's another class that evolves from Rogue? Is the other class still used dagger as the main weapon?'

"Another?" Peniel's voice was a bit condescending. "Are you assuming there are only two classes branching out of Rogue class?"

'Hm? Are you saying otherwise? How many elite classes can be evolved out of Rogue class?'

"Four," Peniel answered.

"Four?" Jack blurted out unconsciously.

Dylan who heard, commented, "what four? Are you placing a bid again? The bid is at 22 gold coins now, what are you yelling four for?"

"I wasn't talking to you," Jack said to him.

Dylan looked at Marquess Fernando, who shrugged, indicating that he was also not the person Jack was talking to. Dylan then used his index finger and made a circling motion near his ear, trying to tell the marquess that maybe their friend here had gone cuckoo. Marquess Fernando watched Dylan's gesture in bewilderment, completely not understanding what Dylan was trying to say with his expression. Was it some kind of an outworlder's gesture? The marquess wondered.

Jack in the meantime, was already back to conversing with Peniel within his mind, thoroughly unaware of his two companions' unsynchronized sign language.

'You are saying the available elite classes are twice the numbers available than when we change from basic to advance?'

"Yes, basic and advance are sort of the foundations, like a trainee or a cadet. The elite class is where you truly come to your own."

'Does that mean Warrior and Mage will also have four options when I can become an elite class?'

"Naturally," Peniel replied.

'By the way, you kept saying elite class in the past. At what level exactly can we change to elite class?'

"You can start your elite class trial once you reached level 30."

Level 30? Not too far then, Jack thought. He was already at level 20 now. 10 more levels to go.

Peniel could sense his thinking, she said, "the higher your level, the longer it will take for you to level up. Do not expect these 10 levels will be as fast as your previous leveling speed."

Jack was aware of the RPG mechanic where higher level requires more exp points hence longer time. He was not discouraged by Peniel's words. He went back to the elite class topic, 'tell me, what elite classes branch out from Warrior class?'

His interest in the auction was totally gone. Unless the item was something he could use, he totally ignored the auction.

"Warrior class can evolve into Berserker, Blade Dancer, Weapon Master, and Mage Knight," Peniel informed.

'what's the difference between those classes?' Jack asked further.

"Berserker is a melee damage dealer specialized in using axe weapon, the class can increase their damage output in proportionate to their remaining HP. Blade Dancer was a melee damage dealer specialized in dual-wielding sword weapons, they are the fastest amongst the other warrior's elite classes. Weapon Master is a melee damage dealer who has mastered all sorts of weaponry. The more weapons they use, the stronger they become. They can also channel inner energy into their weapons to boost their damage."

Inner energy? Did she mean some kind of chi as known in martial arts?

Peniel continued, "Mage Knight is a melee damage dealer who has learned the arcane arts, allowing them to cast spells that reinforced their fighting skills."

Mage Knight? He wondered if his peculiar dual-class trait could consider him as a mage knight already. In that case, he should probably avoid that class. He already had access to real magic from the Mage class, no point in becoming a Mage Knight just to be able to cast some more spells.

'What about Mage class? What can they become when they reach elite class?' Jack resumed his question.

"They can become Archmage, Elementalist, Summoner, and Warlock."

Before Jack could ask, Peniel had already gone on with her explanation, "you can see Archmage as a direct extension of a Mage. They are a versatile magic user that has a variety of spells for many situations. Elementalist is a mage that focused on the means of destruction. They can control the element of fire, ice, and lightning and unleash their destructive natures. That Fireball spell and Chain Lightning spell you have used before come from this class."

Hearing it, this class was already a very tempting one for him.

"Summoner is as its name implied. Their spells focused on summoning multiple beings. Give a summoner enough time, you will find yourself overwhelmed by their minions. A Warlock is a mage that has turned to demonic magic. Their infernal spells might prove troublesome. They are the class that has the earliest access to Chaos damage."

'Chaos? Isn't that the damage caused by my Storm Breaker's Overlimit skill? The one you mentioned is the least able to be defended against.'

"Yes, and if you check your stat window, you will find that there is no resistance to chaos damage. That's why it's so troublesome."