

World 301

Chapter 301: Human Hostiles

Apart from basic and elite monsters, he even found one special elite Earth Salamander roaming around in this part of the wilderness. Unfortunately, it was accompanied by several other Earth Salamanders. If it was alone, Jack would have taken it on.

The last time he fought with a special elite monster, the Ice Troll Sentinel. It was a whole ten levels higher than him, with the addition that the monster received buff due to the cold environment, while he received debuff from the cold. Now the special elite in front of him was only four levels higher, and it was not considered as a boss, and also without any apparent buff from its environment. He estimated with the improvements on his equipment and the repertoire of skills and spells in his possession, he should be able to deal with this special elite now, seeing as their levels were not too far apart.

But that was considering if he took the monster one on one. If he had to fight a gang with a special elite in it, he was not ready to take the risk to try to find out if he was strong enough already. So he avoided that group of monsters.

Peniel informed him as he traveled to higher-level areas, he would find more of the higher grade monsters in the wilderness. He roamed around the area to see if he could find a lone special elite monster so that he could test the limit of his capability.

The sun had set already at the time. He did not have trouble grinding at night, thanks to his Dragon's Eye skill. Yet, he thought he should not be too careless in this new area. He did not know if a different type of stronger monster might appear at night.

So after making another round, he was about to call it quits and used his Town Return scroll to return to the capital, but a peculiar sight caught his attention. He was not sure what he saw at first, so he concentrated to take a better look. There were several silhouettes in the shape of humans in the distance.

Were there players here? Could someone be so daring to brave this high-level area at this stage? Well, apart from him, of course.

Curious about it, he went in the direction of those silhouettes.

When he was close enough, he could see that they were indeed humans. There were three of them, all men. They wore some kind of leather clothing and appeared like rough lots. He was just about to greet them when he noticed his radar. The dots on his radar at the position where the humans were, were colored red.

Enemies? Jack was surprised.

They were not players. Unknown players would show up as blue on his radar. Black if they were enemy players. This indicated that those humans were NPCs, hostile NPCs.

Were they those NPC adventurers that Peniel had mentioned to him in the past? He did wonder why he saw no such NPC adventurers in the wilderness all this time. Peniel had informed him because the areas

that the players roamed around at this stage were too low-level. The natives of this world considered all those below level 15 as novices, while all below level 25 as cadets.

These novices and cadets usually trained inside the safety of the city and only ventured out once they reached level 25. That's why there was no such NPC adventurer in the low-level areas.

Could these three humans be such NPC adventurers? But why were they red on his radar? Did he somehow had done something that offended them?

During his confusion, one of these NPCs noticed him. This NPC said something to his buddies and they all looked at him. They then came at him.

"Careful, they are hostiles!" Peniel warned him.

"Are they natives?" Jack asked, referring to the NPC term for this world.

"They are outlaws," Peniel answered. "Similar to monsters, but in human form. They were no longer part of the civilization. They will attack anyone that came into their territory."

As if trying to prove Peniel's remark, the three men took out their weapons at the same time. All of them used blunt weapons. Two were holding clubs, while the other one used a two-handed hammer. Jack inspected them before they came close.

Minor Bandit (Basic outlaw, Human), level 25

HP: 9,800

Minor Bandit (Elite outlaw, Human), level 25

HP: 18,400

Jack returned their hostility in kind. He wielded his longsword and magic staff.

Jack started casting a spell. Once they came into range, the spell was completed and all three of those outlaws were hit by Ice Ring spell. One of the basic Outlaws was frozen, while the other two had their speed slowed as they continued onward.

Jack used Magic Shield to block the other basic Outlaw's attack and hit the Elite one with a Power Strike. The strike caused the elite Outlaw to stumble back several steps.

With only one basic Outlaw to contend with, Jack slashed at him while continuing to move around utilizing his footwork. The staff on his left hand shot range attacks at the elite Outlaw who had been pushed away. These hostile NPCs were rather dull in their attack patterns, unlike players. So Jack felt they were much easier to deal with after continuously fighting players who came to challenge him these past several few days.

The other basic Outlaw came at him once he was out of his frozen status. Together with the Elite one, they came towards Jack while still being afflicted by Slow status. Jack never stopped shooting range attacks at them as the sword on his right hand never stopped slashing at the first basic Outlaw.

When they had almost reached him, Jack stopped his range attacks and started forming runes again. He used Flash Step as the three of them converged, then he jumped several times back as three runes formed a spell formation on his magic staff.

He cast the completed spell and Arcane Turbulence took place with the three Outlaws at its center.

The three who were just freed from the slow effect of Ice Ring, were afflicted again by slow effect from Disorientation due to Arcane Turbulence spell. Their HP was continually eaten away by the torrents of energy from the spell. Jack aided the reduction of their HP by resuming to send range attacks. The first basic Outlaw perished first before the Arcane Turbulence spell ended.

With Jack's current ability, it was not difficult to deal with basic and elite creatures at level 25. He had been killing a lot of Earth Salamanders before, these Outlaws were not much stronger.

The second basic Outlaw soon succumbed as well. After he found himself alone, the remaining elite Outlaw used some sort of special ability. Black-colored tattoos manifested on his exposed skin which was not covered by his leather clothing. His speed and strength soon skyrocketed.

The sudden change in speed caught Jack unaware, but he still managed to parry the large hammer strike. He was thrown backward though. The elite Outlaw's hammer shone with a solid blue light. He swung the hammer even when Jack was far away. A blue hammer replica spun out from that swing and headed to Jack. Jack used his sword to slash at that replica. It broke apart after they touched, but Jack could feel as if he had hit a solid object.

The elite Outlaw swung his hammer again several times. Multiple blue hammer replicas rained at Jack. Apparently, hostile NPCs packed more attack variations compared to monsters.

Despite that, Jack did not find the battle too difficult. The hammer throws came at an arc and were not particularly fast. He weaved through them easily while sending his own range attacks. Once he was in a melee range, his damage output increased.

The elite Outlaw soon fell as well, his bodies disintegrated. Jack looked at the other two who he had defeated prior, their bodies were no more, only leaving behind loots.

"These outlaws are not like natives? Their bodies disappear after dying," Jack asked Peniel.

"Outlaws are no longer considered natives, as they are no longer abiding by the divine rules of the Gods and Goddesses. They are the same as monsters, so the same rules apply to them," Peniel explained.

There was a piece of paper amongst the dropped coins. Jack picked it up and found it to be a recipe for Basic Rejuvenation Potion. It was a recipe for Alchemist, so he did not use it. He asked Peniel what this potion did.

Her answer was, "it recovered 200 HP and 100 Stamina or MP in an instant, this potion had the same cooldown time as the basic healing potion."

"Does one potion cooldown time affect a different type of potion?" Jack asked.

"No, different potions did not affect each other. If you drink this basic rejuvenation potion, you can immediately drink a basic healing potion as well."

That meant stocking different types of potion would be an advantage, Jack thought.

He stored the recipe. He did not do alchemy and had no plan to dabble in it, so he would need to either give this recipe to someone or sell it. The only alchemist he knew was Bowler, he wondered what grade that guy was in alchemy now. The recipe said that it required at least an Advanced Apprentice grade to be able to concoct the potion.

He picked up the remaining loots and looked in the direction where the three had come from. Curious about it, he postponed the activation of his Town Return Scroll and walked in that direction.

Chapter 302: Summon From The Duke

He walked for some distance before seeing some lights. His Dragon's Eye passive ability allowed him to see farther and also clearer in the night. He could see some structures ahead. It looked like a small wooden fortress, which was constructed between a small rocky mountain and a forested hill. The lights he saw came from Outlaws patrolling around the fortress holding torches. The numbers were alarming.

"That is a bandit outpost," Peniel explained to him after seeing it as well. She had come out from her hidden dimension to take a better look at the structure.

"Bandit outpost?"

"Remember the monster settlement? This is sort of the same. The difference is that an outpost is populated by Outlaws instead of monsters. Another difference is that an outpost did not spring up randomly. There is normally only one in each region, and they will grow in size as time passed. From the look of it, this is a small-sized one that is closed to become a normal size outpost."

Jack crept closer to have a better look at the outpost.

"Are you going to try to pull the same stunt as that time with the monster settlement?" Peniel asked.

"You are going to be sorely regretting it if you do."

"Don't worry, I am not suicidal. I'm just going to check it out."

"I remember you said the same thing the last time. And you still went and attacked that monster settlement💎💎"

"Hehe."

Jack observed the fortress as he crept around it, but he kept a safe distance from it. If the rule governing this bandit outpost was the same as monster settlement, then he did not want to alert the sentries on the fortress. If he was caught, all the Outlaws inside would come swarming out.

There were multiple watchtowers around the perimeter of the fortress. Each watchtower had two Outlaws guarding it. It would be impossible to sneak into the fortress unnoticed. There were also random patrols around the vicinity of the fortress, similar to the lizardman encampment which he decimated in the past. He paid attention to his radar in order to avoid such patrols.

After finding no possibility to infiltrate the outpost, he started roaming around the terrain nearby.


"What are you looking for?" Peniel asked.

"To see if there are any environments around here that I can exploit, like the ravine in that Lizardman Encampment from before," he answered.

"I knew it! You are such a stubborn reckless outworlder. You really intend to try challenging this outpost. You perfectly personified the term of foolhardiness."

"Hehe, the loots I got from that monster settlement in the past were just too amazing. If this outpost was similar, then you can't blame me for being tempted. But don't worry, I don't see anything I can use like the ravine from last time, so I won't try to attack this outpost. I'm not crazy."

"I seriously doubt that."

"Come on, don't you C" His sentence was stopped when he heard a whistling sound, like something sharp cutting through the wind. His body recognized this sound as he swiftly ducked. He felt something grazed through his shoulder.

A thud was heard, he saw an arrow which was stuck on a tree nearby. He then turned to the direction where the arrow had come from. There were three people in the distance. One was holding a bow, he had been the one that had shot the arrow. He was in the process of nocking another arrow on his bow. Another two were running towards him, each holding a long polearm.

Jack was surprised. They were more than one hundred meters away. He had taken care to keep at least that distance from the patrolling Outlaw, he had never met a monster in the wilderness that could perceive from such a long distance.

Peniel seemed to detect his puzzlement. She said, "some monsters or Outlaws possessed a longer range of perception. That archer there must be a scout type that can see farther than his regular brethren. That's why he had noticed you."

"You only telling me now?!" Jack complained. He then heard a loud alarm sound from the fortress. Soon more torchlights filled the fortress.

"Crap!" Jack cursed. He turned around and fled. There was no way he could contend with the whole fortress.

The archer was still shooting at him, but the Outlaw's aim was not that good. With him running, the arrow had even less chance of hitting him.

Jack made an Inspect on the two Outlaws that ran towards him, and found out that they were basic Outlaw at level 30. It seemed that the Outlaws from the fortress were higher level than the three he met previously. This further added to the argument that he should not try to attempt raiding this fortress at this time. He ran as fast as he could.

Luckily those Outlaws followed the rule of monster settlement. They only chased for a limited range. They stopped chasing not long after and returned to the fortress. Jack panted as he looked at them returning.

"Still want to try attacking that outpost?" Peniel teased him.

"Some other time then," Jack replied as he took out his Town Return scroll. He finally activated it and was brought back to the capital.

Back into the safety of the capital, he felt more relaxed. It was late in the night already, so he headed back directly to Amy's Bakery to call it a day.

When he entered the bakery, Amy was there welcoming him, with a piece of envelope.

"What's this?" He asked.

"Someone came today and asked to give it to you," she answered.

Jack looked at the envelope, there was a wax seal on it.

Was it from the kingdom again? Jack thought. Perhaps a request for another special faction quest? He had been visiting Commander Quintus' tower every day, but for the whole week, he only got that one faction quest which gave him enough points to become a Baron. He was starting to regret picking the nobility branch of the kingdom faction already due to the scarcity of the quests.

He thanked Amy before going up to his room. Once inside his room, he tore the envelope open and read the letter inside. It was from Duke Alfredo. The letter told him to come to his estate tomorrow morning.

Had he made progress on those Fragments of Map? Jack wondered. Jack could not think of any other reason the Duke would call for him apart from that. Perhaps it's time to continue his chain quest again.

Early the next morning, Jack went directly to Duke Alfredo's estate. He was very eager to find out if the Duke had completed the fusion of those fragments. He was very curious as to where the map showed. Then again, if it was a location too far, then it would still be a long time before he could travel there. After all, he was only level 21 at the moment. He had not even reached the distance that allowed him to arrive in another town of this world.

He had asked Peniel how high of a level he needed to be in order to reach another town. Peniel had informed him that every town was surrounded by low-level areas. It made sense considering if there were high-level monsters nearby a town, the inhabitants would not feel safe as well. NPC soldiers patrolled the vicinity of a town and kept the monster population on a safe threshold.

It was the regions in between towns that were the problem inhibiting cross-town travel. The lowest that Peniel knew of these regions hold level 30 monsters. Unless Jack could sneak through these regions with stealth, Peniel advised against him trying to go to another town at this stage. Jack made an estimate that he might try the travel when he reached level 25 in one of his classes.

He passed by the library on the way, which was bustling with players. The librarians had even barred the place to stop people from entering as it was too full already. Jack was puzzled by the commotion. Little did he know that he was the cause of it.

When he was fighting the challenges of those small fries, no one really paid attention. But after his victory over Red Death, everyone had believed the story about him having two classes. Many guilds and independent players had gone into the library to search for information on how to gain the second class, with futile results of course. There was no such information inside the library.

Jack did not pay attention to that hubbub for long. He never needed to visit a library, since he had his own personal portable library with wings by his side. He continued onto Duke Alfredo's estate.

He arrived in front of the duke's manor before long. He knocked on the manor's door. When it opened, he was alarmed to see that it was Winston who had answered the door.

Chapter 303: Expedition

"There is no need for worry, the influence from the cult has been banished. I am my own self now," the butler informed Jack after seeing his alarmed expression.

"Really?" Jack asked. A hint of doubt in his tone.

"I assure you, master Storm Wind, that I will not try to kill you," Winston chuckled. "The Duchess had a friend who is a High Priest. She had cleansed my soul of the cult's infiltration. There is no more trace of that abominable presence within me."

"If you say so," Jack said. He entered the manor, but his gaze remained fixed on the butler. He still remembered the terror this guy exhibited when he was possessed.

The butler took him to the Duke's working room. Jack followed from behind with caution. When he arrived at the work room's entrance, he was surprised to find Commander Quintus and Captain Salem inside. He greeted the duke and the two military officials as he entered the room.

Duke Alfredo nodded to Winston, who then bowed and excused himself out of the room. He closed the door before exiting. Jack only allowed his gaze away from the butler after the door was closed.

Duke Alfredo smiled amusingly at him. He said, "he is no longer possessed, you know?"

"I don't," Jack said matter of factly. "I can't differentiate the him now with the him from last time when he was secretly possessed by that cult's cardinal."

"Fair enough, but please rest assured that he won't bring harm to you anymore," the duke said.

"How is the fusion of that fragments of map going? I assumed I being called here has something to do with that?"

"It does," the duke replied. "Tell me, Storm Wind. Do you mind following us in undergoing a long expedition?"

"How long?" Jack asked.

"Uncertain. The Shortest should be one month, but probably could last as long as six months. Depending on the smoothness of the expedition."

"You said following you, are the three of you will also go on this expedition?" Jack asked again.

Duke Alfredo nodded. "I will need a small contingent of troops for this expedition. I can't employ the main army, so I can only ask for favors from Commander Quintus and Captain Salem here for their private troops."

"How many exactly is this contingent you are talking about?"

"Captain Salem could only take one company, while Commander Quintus could take one regiment. So give or take around three thousand troops."

"Thr— three thousand?" Jack almost blurted out, then what the hell do you need me for? Instead, he asked, "I am only a level 21 Outworlder, I believe a single of your troop is at a higher level than me. I don't see the need for me to be included in this expedition."

In truth, the real point which concerned him was that, if he followed this long expedition, when would he have the time to work on his levels? Whenever they met a monster, he was sure that this small army would take care of it. Not to mention if the monsters would not already run away once such an army was sighted.

Then he remembered the time when he was with the cadet team during his initiation trial quest for entering Themisphere kingdom faction. At that time, he was appointed as a leader. If he was just a member, as what he certainly would be in this expedition, he doubted if he would get the share of experience whenever the army vanquished a monster.

While Jack was having his thought, Duke Alfredo answered his question, "Don't worry, you will just be a guest in our troops. We will not allow any harm to be brought upon you. The reason why I insist to bring you along is because I sense that your fate is somehow linked with these fragments of map. Otherwise, you would not have been able to collect all three of them. As you know, this concerns the cure for my wife, I will not leave things up to chance. There might also be something that only Outworlders can deal with when we arrived. So having one that I can trust will be more reassuring. You can just stay in the center of our formation and enjoy the ride along the way."

That was what I am worried about, Jack thought. I preferred you put me at the vanguard so I can gain experience for leveling. If this expedition lasted as long as you said it would be, wouldn't I be left behind by the others already when I returned?

After thinking for a while, he gave his condition, "I can join this expedition, but I cannot accept passive involvement. I want to be assigned a company of soldiers under my command, and I would like to have the priority in choosing which foes to take on when we met one."

The duke was slightly surprised when he heard Jack was eager to engage foes during the expedition. He imagined that might be a particular trait of Outworlders. He had received reports as well that most of the outworlders that had arrived in this world were all very active in monster-hunting activities. It was also due to their tenacity in hunting monsters that Commander Quintus and Captain Salem had the leeway to divert some of their forces for this expedition, as they had greatly reduced the pressure on the Kingdom's army in controlling the monster population within the vicinity of the capital.

"I think we can spare my men to be assigned to him," Captain Salem offered.

The duke nodded, "if you do not mind it, then we will do it that way."

"But if you sacrifice my men wantonly, I will demand responsibility from you," the captain warned.

"I will try to take good care of them," Jack said sincerely, then asked. "How many are your men?"

"A regiment of three hundred," Captain Salem answered.

Jack lifted his eyebrows. He was going to take command of three hundred soldiers? Now he seriously hoped that he did not mess up. But then again, the number of monsters he could crush with these soldiers was also encouraging. This expedition might instead end up beneficial for his leveling speed.

"By the way, where are we going exactly?" Jack finally asked.

"It's a place called Temple of Divine Squall," Duke Alfredo answered.

"Sounds impressive," Jack commented. "Is it a famous temple? How far is it?"

"It's a ruin, an ancient ruin to be exact," Commander Quintus took over the explanation. "It is located outside of our kingdom territory. It is in a no man's land area called Fulgur region, which serves as a border zone between our kingdom and another country called Verremor."

Jack did not know what to think. He had just been wondering about his plan on reaching another city a while ago, now he was told that he was about to join an expedition that would take him all the way out of this kingdom's territory. Talk about taking a giant leap!

"How far is it?" Jack repeated his question again. He did not understand the distance of this so-called Fulgur region since he did not know the geography of this world. He had been looking for a purchasable map in the shops around the capital, but there was none available, even in the shops of the noble district.

He had finally asked Peniel about it, she had answered that Themisphere kingdom viewed map as an exclusive property of the kingdom. Since common civilians would not be doing any travels due to the existence of the monsters, there was no need for them to possess a map. Only high-ranking adventurers and kingdom officials could acquire them, either granted from the kingdom itself, or from the more high-profile factions.

Peniel had told him that once he became a gold member of either Adventurers Association or Hunters Association, there should be an option to exchange his points for a map. However, the scope of the map might be limited. It might only show a region, or several regions within the Themisphere kingdom. To get a map of the whole country, it would require him to become a diamond rank. For a map of the whole world, Peniel had told him there was still no such map in her knowledge, as there were still many parts of the world that were still unexplored.

Of course, there were also some exceptions in some organizations where they would provide their members with a map in a more lenient way. For example, the Trade Association where Fairdeal Dylan was a member. Since their members performed much travel for their trades, they received a map much earlier than other factions. The information on their map was inputted directly into their map system, and was not transferrable. They could share a location's coordinates with their friends, but they could not share the detail of that location.

Jack wondered if he would be supplied with a map to their destination since they were going there.

Answering Jack's question, Duke Alfredo said, "in terms of timing, it should take us around two weeks to arrive at our destination. Considering if we don't encounter any complications along the way."

Chapter 304: Alien Entity

Two weeks, no wonder the duke said the quickest time the expedition took is one month. Even if considering only the travel time, going there and back again had already lasted one month. Not considering the time needed to explore the ruins, the process would take a longer time.

"That is also if considering we all use mounts," Captain Salem added.

"Mounts? What if I don't have any?" Jack said.

"You can purchase a mount easily near the city gate," Commander Quintus told him.

The duke was much more accommodable, "don't worry, you will be provided one on our departing day."

"Oh, that's good then," Jack said, completely not ashamed of being a miser.

"So when are we heading out exactly?" He asked.

"In the morning two days from now. You can use today and tomorrow for whatever preparations you need. The army will gather at the north gate, but I would like you to join me in my mansion here before we head out to the gate. Please be on time."

Jack then heard a voice notification informing him that he had completed the quest, Wait for duke Alfredo's news. He received tidbits of coins and experiences for the reward. And without pausing, the notification informed him that he had accepted the continuation of the chain quest, Accompany Duke Alfredo to the Temple of Divine Squall.

'Wait a minute, I was not given the choice to accept or refuse?' Jack said in his mind.

"Do you plan to refuse?" He heard Peniel's voice in his mind.

'Well, no, but...'

"Then why does it matter?" Peniel replied without giving him the chance to finish his sentence.

Now you also did not give me the choice to say my piece, Jack complained in silence.

"This expedition is also registered under Faction quest, you can come to my office to pick up the quest," Commander Quintus advised him.

Jack was grateful, it seemed like these high-ranking NPCs in front of him were trying to help him improve his Kingdom Faction's rank. Talk about playing favor. Well, he was the only kingdom faction member at this moment. If they did not regard him as a favorite, there was no one else available. Still, he could not help but think if there was something hidden under the layer of their supports there.

"Before you leave," Duke Alfredo said as he took out a strange gizmo with the shape of a tiny triangular pyramid.

"What is that?" Jack asked.

"The result of the fusion," the duke answered.

"Fusion?" Jack was puzzled at first, before he then said, "do you mean the fragments of map? They fused into that thing?"

That did not look like a map at all! Jack exclaimed in his mind. Where the hell was the logic in three pieces of torn paper combined into a piece of solid metal block like that?

Duke Alfredo touched a part of that gizmo and a holographic image appeared above. Jack looked at it and saw the image looked like a map, with some text details indicating some of the landmarks and names of the areas. In the center of that map was a small site layout with an octagonal shape.

There were four arms extended out from that octagon. Looking at the layout, Jack assumed those four arms were some kind of extension towers, like a minaret, similar to the Taj Mahal building from his real world. However, since Commander Quintus described the place as a ruin, he wondered how much of its past splendor was left on site.

A written text mentioning the name Temple of Divine Squall was on this octagonal layout, accompanied by coordinate numbers. This map floating in front of him was where they would be heading to two days from now.

Duke Alfredo deactivated the gizmo and the holographic map vanished. He then offered the thing to Jack.

Jack pointed at himself and asked to make sure, "you are giving it to me?"

The duke nodded, "the same precaution as with the fragments. Your outworlder's inventory bag would keep it safe if something happens. I believe this thing still serves another function apart from just being a map. It could be a key to enter the ruins as well."

Jack thought the duke's thinking was reasonable. He accepted the pyramid-looking gizmo. He inspected it when it was in his hand.

Memory of Elding (Special Artifact)

No explanation? He turned to his flying encyclopedia, 'do you know what this is?'

"No, never seen nor heard of it. I don't even know such an item exists. Something is fishy here..." Peniel answered.

'Don't be so hard on yourself. You have to admit that once in a while there are bound to be things that you are not aware of,' Jack tried to console her.

"No, you don't get it. I had the fountain of knowledge within me. There should be no item in this world that I don't know of... Unless it is an alien entity."

'what alien entity?'

"Something not of this world... Similar to that God-eye monocle of yours, and whatever it is that give you that second class of yours."

'Hm... Well, okay,' he thought as he stored the thing in his inventory

"That's pretty carefree of you," Peniel quipped.

'I have a principle. If it can't be solved, then there is no need to stress about it,' Jack replied.

However, there was one issue that he might solve. The issue of commanding three hundred personnel. He had the experience before in commanding a small adventurer party in past games, but such party usually comprised of ten people or less. He had no confidence in commanding a small army, unless such command could be spread and delegated.

"Am I allowed to bring other outworlders along in this expedition?" Jack asked.

The three NPCs turned to Jack at the same time, they then looked at one another. There seemed to be a tacit understanding in their eye contact.

The duke was the one who spoke up, "all right. I give you the authority to recruit your own people. You can have them go directly to the North gate where the army gathered in the morning two days from now."

"That's cool," Jack commented. "Will they be provided mounts as well?"

"No problem on that," the duke said.

"If you have no more questions, how about we head to my office tower?" Commander Quintus said.

Jack agreed with him and they make their way there. The commander again let Jack ride his mount with him to the place. At that place, he followed the procedure and accepted the faction quest, Expedition to Temple of Divine Squall.

Jack excused himself after signing on the faction quest. He walked himself out from the noble district. On his way, he sent messages to all the ones on his Friend list, except for those who only concerned themselves with their auxiliary jobs, such as Ellie, Master Chef, Fairdeal Dylan, and those that were of a guild, such as Silverwing and William of Wellington. All of them agreed to meet. He set a time for them to meet tonight at Raven's Den, their frequent tavern in Thereath business district.

While waiting for the night, he went and stocked up on potions, foods, and magic stones. He did not forget to stock up on Iron ores as well. They would be going on a long expedition, the army should have a mobile station that let them repair their equipment's durability, but he still preferred to have some stock of ores on hand just in case.

He also used the Blacksmith Workshop and upgraded all his equipment except for Storm Breaker, to level 31. Since he was already level 21, he could use level 31 equipment. He lost a decent quantity of ores due to several failed attempts though, even with the help of Runestone of Probability.

After he finished with his equipment, he still had enough amount of iron ores, which he used half to make Whetstones. The other half he left for the contingency of fixing his equipment's durability on the road. He created 28 Whetstones. With the help of the Runestone of Enhancement, 8 out of those 28 Whetstones were the improved version.

He also went to the Magic Scroll shop to stock on some scrolls. He purchased the ones which he had accustomed to, Magic Wall, Wall of Vines, Magic Bind, Wind Jet, Heal, and Regeneration. There was one Fireball scroll available, so he grabbed it immediately. He also bought some new scrolls, Haste and Group Haste.

He then went to the Magic Association shop to buy some more Disruptive Bombs. He had tasted the wonders of these bombs in action. With this tool in his inventory, he felt much safer on the road. He also bought another bottle of Reset potion. Unfortunately, there was no more Pyro Lynx Figurine in the shop.

Following Peniel's suggestion, he also bought several of a new kind of tool called Disarm tool, and also stocked up on lots of lockpicks.

He spent around thirty-five gold coins for all those purchases, bringing his stack of coins down again.

After done with all the preparation, he asked Peniel, 'you know the direction of this Temple of Divine Squall, right?'

Chapter 305: Gathering The Friends

"Sure," Peniel answered.

'Then you know the monsters we will be encountering along the way too, don't you?'

"What are you getting at?"

'Well, I thought if we can guess which monster we can hit on the road. Why not do the hunting quests at the same time?'

Jack sensed Peniel gave this matter some thought in her hidden dimension, before he heard her voice again, "I cannot say for sure the exact path that duke's expedition will take, but considering the large numbers of traveling units, I can make an educated guess. So yes, I can most likely know which monsters should appear on the way."

'Great! Let's go take the hunting quests then,' Jack said excitedly.

Inside the Hunters Association building, Peniel advised him to go to the Silver Hall directly. No need to take the Bronze Hall quest anymore. There are plenty of Silver Hall monsters that they could encounter on the road to the temple, so better take those high-grade ones for more amount of points.

Jack followed her instructions and applied for ten specific monsters. Peniel mentioned that though these monsters might not be the ones with the highest points they could meet on the road, they were the ones that they were most likely to meet.

These monsters were Flame Tiger, Tri-colored Cockatrice, Violent Ape, Vanishing lemur, Poisonous Giant Bee, Bewitching Spider, Giant Scorpion, Eight-legged Mare, Shadow Bat, Wind Elemental. All of them were grade B difficulty, except for Poisonous Giant Bee and Shadow Bat which were grade C difficulty.

There was still some time left until the rendezvous time at the tavern. He decided to go back to the noble district and headed to Commander Quintus' mansion. When he arrived, neither commander Quintus nor Lindsey was at home. But the steward allowed him to use the Training Ground after he paid with Merit points. He paid 20 merit points for two sessions of training, which lasted for six hours.

During this recent week where he filled it with monster grindings, adventure quests, hunting quests, and facing the challenges of all those players, he had upgraded another two of his skills. Parry and Magic

Shield had upgraded to their second star. The other skills' proficiencies had also risen steadily. With the help of his Hard-working Achiever title, the time needed for his skills to improve had also shortened.

After finished using his time at the Training Ground, he had only managed to upgrade another one of his skills to its second star, Swing. But his other skills' proficiencies had also increased greatly. Especially his Energy Bolts, it was not long before it would reach its second star as well. His Ice Ring was also about to arrive at its first star, because it carried over the proficiency from its past version spell, Mana Detonation.

Since it's almost time, he hailed a carriage that brought him straight to Raven's Den. When he arrived, Bowler and The Man were already there, or perhaps, they had been there all along. These two were known as this place's frequent patrons, after all.

Jack greeted them. The Man was level 21 already, same as him. Bowler was level 20. There were several of The Man's rough-looking crews as well there, ranging around level 19 and 20. He counted them, there were seven of them apart from The Man.

"These are all your men from Men of Solidarity who had passed their advanced class trial?" Jack asked The Man. He had asked all the ones he invited to bring along their friends who had become an advanced class as well. But of course, he also told them that the ones they brought should be ones that could be trusted as well.

"There are another two more, but they are tied up with some other matter at the moment," The Man answered.

Jack nodded, then gestured to them to follow him.

"We are not talking here?" Bowler asked.

"Too open," Jack explained to him. "We are going upstairs."

"To one of those VIP rooms?" Bowler was excited. He had visited this place regularly but never went into those exclusive rooms upstairs, on account of it charged an additional fee for each hour of usage. Jack, on the other hand, had been in one of those rooms before when Silverwing invited him to meet with the Wicked Witches people, when they were discussing about raiding the Giant Ants' Dungeon.

Jack called for a waitress and told her he would like to rent one of those private rooms on the second floor. He had even asked for the largest one available. Bowler and The Man could only gape when Jack made the request. The waitress required him to pay a non-refundable 2 gold coins first for such a room. That deposit would be for the first two hours. If he was still using the room after that two hours had passed, he would need to pay an additional 1 gold coin for each hour.

The waitress brought the group up to the second floor after Jack completed the deposit process. On the way, Jack messaged the others who had not shown up to go directly to the second floor once they arrived.

When Jack and the other entered this private room, Jack found it to be almost three times bigger than the one Silverwing had used in the past. There were ten of them including Jack, they did not take up even half of the room. The ones who were not here yet were only Fierce Flame, Saint John, and Jeanny.

His friend list was a short one, after all. They should have no problem fitting into this room. Unless of course, if they brought along too many of their friends with them.

They chatted inside this private room as they waited. Jack ordered ale for everyone, the waitress came in and brought his order not long after. The first one to arrive after they were in this private room was Fierce Flame. She had also reached level 21. There was again the small cub trailing at her back. The cub looked a bit bigger than last time.

The room got considerably livelier once she showed up. Considering all those in the room were male before she entered, it was entirely normal. However, those who dared to try getting too close to her got a surprise bite from her protector cub.

Saint John arrived after, bringing two people who Jack and the others also knew of, Pointy Tip and Weird Trap. John was level 21, Weird Trap had become a level 20 Archer, Pointy Tip was a level 19 Mage. Jack thought they were a team with a rather weird composition. They were all ranged-offensive classes.

Weird Trap noticed the little cub cuddling beside Fierce Flame, he immediately went to her. He started asking for advice regarding the pet taming process. He was level 20 already so he had gained that skill as well. He just not yet had the success in taming one. Considering Weird Trap was not approaching her with unsavory intention, the little Savage Wind Wolf did not show hostility. Much to the jealousy of the others from Men of Solidarity.

Bowler who was talkative all this while became considerably mum once John showed up. Combined with Men of Solidarity's silent and envious gazes at Weird Trap, the room turned incredibly hushed.

Jack was speechless by this turn of events, but he was even more speechless when John commented on it, "did I walk into a graveyard or what?"

His remark immediately received harsh backlashes from Bowler and the men from Men of Solidarity. However, despite those severe responses, he still shamelessly walked over and sit by Jack's side as if he did not hear a word of their scoldings.

"So what is this gathering all about?" He asked once he sat down. "I see you have collected quite a motley crew of duds here."

"Can you please not insult people every time you open your mouth," Jack said. "We are still one person short, I will explain once she arrived."

"She?"

"It's Jeanny. You know her already, don't you? He came with you last time at the Crestfall Plain."

"Oh, that lass. I was simply picking up any stragglers who were willing to follow me at the time. When she heard your name came up, she became very eager to join. I totally had no idea who she was at all. What's up between you and her anyway? You two seemed close."

"We do? That time was actually the third time I met with her. She was a good person to talk to. Otherwise, we are only simple acquaintances."

"Really? Hm... Well, if you say so."

"Are you trying to imply something?" Jack said with raised eyebrows.

"Nope, nothing at all," John replied. "You are paying for the drinks, right? Can I order anything? Or is there a limitation?"

Chapter 306: Recruitment

Jack let him ordered to his heart's content just to shut him up. It was another five minutes before Jeanny arrived. She brought four people along. All of them were the friends who had come with her to the Crestfall Plain before. They are Giant Steve, Viral Cora, Salty Trade, and the annoying Swellgoing.

Swellgoing was still flashing Jack a hostile gaze when he entered. Salty Trade and Swellgoing had also become advanced class, probably that's why Jeanny took them. Jack was disappointed to not see Trinity Dawn with them. She was said to be an expert, she would have been a good help if she could join.

Jeanny had also reached level 21, the same as Giant Steve. Viral Cora was level 20. Salty Trade had become a level 19 Archer, while that annoying Swellgoing was a level 20 Mage.

Everyone had improved. Jack felt slightly despondent, he still remembered when his level put everyone to dust. Now everyone had caught up already, and might even leave him behind if he slacked off.

"Why did you bring him?" Jack said to Jeanny once she got near. He was referring to Swellgoing. "I understand you brought him since he is an advanced class already, but didn't I also said that you should bring only people that are trustable?"

Swellgoing was obviously riled when he heard Jack's words. "Are you trying to pick a fight?!" He exclaimed.

"Did you already forget how I whoop your ass before?" Jack retorted.

"Please don't quarrel," Jeanny mediated. "He might be impulsive, but I trust him. You can trust him as well, you have my word."

"If it is your word. Fine, then I will give him a chance," Jack said.

"I'm here because I don't trust you!" Swellgoing exclaimed. "I don't know what scheme you have for sister Jeanny, but I will make sure you do not take advantage of her!"

Jack shot him an irritated glance, "don't push it, man. Don't make me kick you out of here. Just sit at the corner and be quiet."

Swellgoing was about to retort, but Jeanny stop him. "Go take a seat," she said to him. He grumbled as he followed her instruction.

"Trinity Dawn is not coming?" Jack asked Jeanny after.

"She was in the middle of a quest, but she will be free tomorrow. If you need her as well and she was willing, I will pass on the message to her," Jeanny replied.

"What about the other three that were with you at the Crestfall Plain? They were still at basic class?"

"They were taking their advanced class trials as we speak. I think they should have a good chance of passing. This is their second attempt after all."

"Can we start already whatever this gathering is for? Yours truly here does not have all the time in the world," John said.

"You can just piss off if so, no one forced you to stay!" Bowler snapped at him.

"Minor character should not make so much noise," John quipped back.

"Okay, everyone, please be quiet!" Jack stood up and clapped his hands, stopping the bickering of those two before it got out of hand.

He walked to the center of the room so everyone could hear him equally. Everybody was leaning forward as they anticipated Jack's words.

Jack cleared his throat before uttering, "anyone fancies a road trip?"

Everyone was silent as they stared at Jack. Some turned to the closest person next to them, unsure of what to make of it.

"Boss, you are such a lousy public speaker," The Man said.

"Friend, can't you at least give us an introduction and a content first before going into the invitation?" John added.

"I told you this is a waste of time," Swellgoing said to Jeanny.

"This is embarrassing to watch," Peniel joined in as more clamors were heard.

"All right, settle down!" Jack exclaimed as he pulled out his sword and staff.

The room quieted down after the gesture.

Seeing everyone got their cools again, Jack stored his weapons and said, "sorry, I was actually nervous myself. Never did this before. I usually did the joining instead of recruiting. All right, let's get to the point. I have a quest that requires me to go out far far away from this capital."

"How far?" Someone asked.

"Very far. Around two weeks travel from here."

"Two weeks? Are we going to another town?"

"Not really, but I'm sure we should see one or two on our way," Jack answered the question but at the same time he also asked Peniel in his mind, 'will we be passing any towns on the way?'

"There will be a couple of nearby towns on the way, just small ones though. I'm not sure if the route the army takes will be passing those towns. But considering it was the army traveling, they should stop by in at least one of this town to resupply."

Another town, Jack could sense the others' interest was piqued already.

Swellgoing on the other hand, was not impressed. He said to Jeanny, "don't listen to him, sister Jeanny. There has not been anyone that has made the cross to another town. Even the guilds still not yet succeed in this. There is no way he can travel to one. He is just making a false claim and is just planning to use us for his own quest. I told you he is not the type that can be trusted."

Jack gave the guy a sharp stare, "man, you truly are an annoying jerk. You have only met me on two brief occasions, and you talked as if you know me already. You are like those incompetent businessmen who like to spread bad rumors on your competitors' products just to tone down the competition. You choose to spend your time making trouble for others instead of using that precious time to hone your skills and crafts. If you feel so insecure, then you should work harder, rather than complaining about some imaginary competition which I am not even interested in."

"Who are you calling insecure?" Swellgoing felt humiliated.

"What are you two competing about?" Jeanny asked.

Viral Cora shook her head and muttered, "big sis, you are so oblivious."

"I need to ascertain several points first for this recruitment," John said as he lifted his hand.

"This is not a classroom, why do you lift your hand?" Bowler mocked.

"All right, everybody, pipe down! John, please say your mind," Jack immediately took hold of John's question. At least someone was staying on the main point.

John showed his forefinger as he answered, "first, what is the benefit for us to follow you on this trip. Second, how do you estimate the possible danger associated with this trip? Third, you said the travel to the destination needs two weeks, but how long exactly will your quest be? I don't believe we are to go back by ourselves once we help you reach that destination. Fourth, this trip will require us to stock many potions amongst other things, since we will be away from the capital and there is no guaranteed place to get a restock. Will you be supplying these necessary supplies for the trip? Fifth, what is the benefit for us in helping you?"

His palm with five fingers was exposed as his hand hung in the air, representing the five points he had just brought up.

"Dude, you mentioned the same point about benefit twice," Bowler said to him.

"I know. It is the most important point, so it has the right to be mentioned twice," John replied.

"I will answer the first slash fifth point together with the second point," Jack said. "You will get the chance to fight higher level and higher grade monsters along the way to get their experience and loots without the danger that come with such usual encounter."

His listeners seemed to be rather puzzled by his statement.

"Elaborate please," John said.

"The reason why there will be no danger when going against such monsters is because we will be piggy-backing with the army of Themisphere."

"Army?" They all said out in a chorus.

Jack then told them about the nature of his quest. That it was to accompany a high-ranking noble to a faraway ruin located outside the border of Themisphere country. The noble would be bringing a small army in this expedition. They could tag along as they make their way to the ruin.

"How the heck did you managed to get this kind of epic quest?" Giant Steve who had been quiet all this time spoke.

Jack showed them his Themisphere Nobility Faction Badge and said with a grin, "because I am a noble myself."

Everyone started using inspect on his badge and found out that it came with the title Baron. The crowd looked at him with wide eyes. Flame, Bowler, and The Man had known that he had joined the Kingdom Nobility faction, so they were less surprised. But the fact that Jack had managed to become a Baron was still astonishing to them.

Chapter 307: Quest Handout

"How the heck did you become a noble?" Giant Steve asked again.

Jack hide the fact that this quest was from his special chain quest. He chose to accommodate it as a kingdom faction's quest, which was partially the truth. He explained about the factions as he had explained the last time to Flame and the others. He told them that he had joined the kingdom faction of this country and thus how he had gotten this quest.

John lifted his hand again and asked, "I have a question. You said we will be safe since there will be an army protecting us, but doesn't that also mean we won't be fighting the monsters? Then how do we get the experience if we just stay at the back of this army? Since it was the army that killed the monsters, won't they take the loots for themselves?"

Jack gave a wide smile. He then narrated again his experience from the previous kingdom faction's quest, where he accompanied a group of NPC cadets to clear out the mine. He told them how he had been appointed leader and that he gained experiences from the slain monsters despite not attacking the monsters at all. He also told them about the NPCs' disinterest in the loots dropped by slain monsters.

"You said you are appointed leader," John said. "Maybe that's why you gained the experience, but what if you are just tagging along? The army won't be appointing you as the leader of the army, right?"

Jack gave him another wide grin. "As a matter of fact, they did. Well, not the entire army, of course. But they gave me command for a part of it, so I can order those troops around to kill monsters on the road."

Everyone was quiet as they tried to digest Jack's words. Viral Cora turned to Jeanny and said, "Big sis, you should have asked him to go on a quest together more often. He had all these interesting quests."

It was Bowler's time to ask a question, "But if you need to be a leader of the NPCs to get the experience, then what about us? They can't be giving each of us another portion of the army to command, can they?"

Jack was just about to answer when John beat him to it, "you are so dim-witted. If Storm Wind formed a party with us, he will share his gained experience with us."

Bowler was having an urge to scold John back, but he could not find the words to.

John had already turned back to Jack. He said, "that is the gain we get along the process. What about the benefit you offer to us?"

Ugh, this devil! Jack was hoping the lure of exp and loots to be enough for them. He could promise them some gold coins as payment for their help, but that would be his last option. There were eighteen of them here after all, with another six possible candidates to follow, two from Men of Solidarities, and the other four from Jeanny's friends.

He had 72 gold coins on him. Even if he used all these coins to pay them, each would only get 3 gold coins. He doubted that such an amount would be enticing at this point.

While he was lamenting about it, Jeanny spoke up, "I think the prospect of exp and loots gained from high-level monsters are benefits enough. There is no need for brother Storm Wind to give us another compensation. I think the fact that he invited us to join such a rare event is another benefit by itself."

Such an angel! Jack exclaimed in his mind.

"Well, if you say so," John said and leaned back. Jack was slightly surprised to find the man not pushing this issue further.

There was, however, another person who did. "Sister Jeanny, I know you are a kind person, but there is no need to be courteous at this time. He invited us to join, which means he needs our help. So it is natural for him to pay us."

Jack looked at Swellgoing and said, "I will be very happy if you want to leave right now."

"I am not leaving unless sister Jeanny is! I need to protect her from your nefarious intention!"

Jack was speechless with this guy. What nefarious intention? This guy's jealousy was truly out of control. Jack ignored him and talked to the others, "back to John's question. The third point of how long my quest will be. I'm not sure. The shortest might be one month, longest could take until six months." He copied the duke's answer.

"Six months?" Everyone's enthusiastic expression started to dim down again.

Ugh, honestly, these guys were so hard to satisfy, Jack complained in his mind. "It was just a probability, it should not take that long," he said to them. "Once we arrived at the ruin, we are just exploring it and then head back here. It should just be two months at most... I think."

"You did not sound too convincing, friend," John commented.

"Whatever. Now, who wants to join me in this expedition?" He decided to just throw the question out again. He had explained all he can. If they don't want to join, he won't force them.

At the time, everyone was suddenly making weird faces. Jack was puzzled by their displays.

They started to look at each other. One of them asked, "did you hear it as well?"

The person that was asked nodded his head. "You too?" He asked.

"What's wrong?" Jack asked in confusion.

John answered him, "friend, I think you just give us all a quest."

"Yeah, I'm recruiting you to join me on my quest."

"No, I mean, you literally giving us a formal quest. From the others' expressions, I think I can speak for all of us that we have just gotten a system notification of a quest to accompany you on this expedition. It even got experience and gold coin rewards attached to it. There is also an additional reward of a writ that allows passage into the noble district. It even said that other additional rewards are possible depending on our performance."

Jack was dumbfounded by the revelation.

"How do you do that?" It was Giant Steve who asked again.

"I did?"

"Yeah, this is some crazy shit! This is the first time I experience a player issuing a system quest," one of The Man's subordinates exclaimed.

"You do?"

Jack was completely flabbergasted. He had no idea what the hell was happening.

"It seemed that you yourself are unaware of this?" John asked him.

"You think?"

"The NPC that gave you the quest must have granted you the authorization. It was somehow triggered when you issued us the invitation."

Jack thought back to his conversations with the duke after hearing John's analysis. The duke did mention something like that when Jack asked him about recruiting other outworlders.

"He asked us before, remember? We did not receive a quest then," Bowler said.

"At the time, he had not yet explained to us the nature of this recruitment, maybe that's why the quest handout was not triggered," Jeanny offered her opinion.

"That's right, it will be weird if everyone receives the quest every time he threw out a nonsensical invitation like he did the first time," John added. "Only after he laid out the nature of the quest that this quest handout was generated."

"Have you people done analyzing the phenomena? So are you lots joining or not?" Jack asked.

"You have not yet say anything about the fourth point," John reminded him.

If they had not received a formal quest as they had declared, Jack might have offered to supply the potions and ores required for the long journey. He had the blacksmith mobile tools so he should have no problem repairing the durability of their equipment as long as he had enough ores. He could also cook

so he only needed to stock up on the ingredients. The potions and magic stones were the ones he might need to spend more coins to stock up.

But now that these people got a formal quest which meant that they would get a benefit when they completed it, there was no need for him to supply them by himself.

Jack gave them an answer, "though I don't know how much you people are offered, I believe the quest rewards are generous enough. Everyone should make their own preparation for a long journey if any of you decide to join. I can help with repairing equipment and cooking, but you will need to supply the materials yourself."

"I think that is fair, I can help with concocting potions, as long as you supply the ingredients as well," Bowler said.

"What a good brother you are," John commented, but with a derisive tone.

"I agree it's fair as well," Jeanny added.

"I can help with equipment repairing as well," Giant Steve said.

"So you are joining?" Jack asked again.

Chapter 308: League Of Champions

Swellgoing immediately spoke out his mind, "I think it is unwise, sister Jeanny. There is very little we know about the wilderness, it is unnecessary to take the risk to..."

"I have already accepted the system quest," Jeanny interrupted him.

Jack grinned at Swellgoing and said, "if you feel it is risky, there is no need for you to join and..."

"I have accepted it as well! If sister Jeanny is going, so am I!" Swellgoing announced with conviction.

"I have accepted as well," Giant Steve said.

"Me too," Viral Cora added.

"Well, then I guess I should not be left behind," Salty Trade said.

"Well, it does sound interesting. I will join for the sake of seeing the horizon of this world," John said, then he added, "for those who are cowards, it is okay to decline this quest."

"Who the hell do you call cowards?" The Man exclaimed. "If the boss needs our help, there is no need to ask, we will be the first ones to join! Any of you who do not accept this quest is no longer Men of Solidarity!"

"There is no need for you to rile us up, you know," Bowler said to John. "We are brother Storm Wind's best friends. We are sure to join if he needs our help, whether there is a benefit or not. Especially me, his number one best friend!"

"It was not my intention to rile them up," John replied. "I simply see it as an opportunity to throw them an insult."

Bowler ignored the guy. He turned to Flame and asked, "what about you?"

"I have already clicked the accept button once the quest showed up," Flame said.

"Hahaha, and you said you are his number one best friend," John laughed at him.

"Shut up! I'm clicking accept right now!"

"What about you two?" Jack asked John's two sidekicks, Weird Trap and Pointy Tip.

The two looked at each other before looking at John, who said, "hey, don't look at me. I told you before you have to make your own choices. Don't rely on me for every decision."

They looked at each other again. Trap said to Tip, "well, this seemed like a fun group. I think it will be more interesting going with them rather than stay here in the capital and redo the same dull activity every day."

"I agree," Tip said. The two of them then accepted the system quest.

"So I guess everybody had signed up?" Jack asked.

"I am pretty sure Trinity Dawn would be interested. Will the system quest popped up if it is me that gives her the invitation?" Jeanny asked him.

"To be honest, I don't know. But our departure is in the morning two days from now. So I can offer her the quest when we meet up then, or I can make time tomorrow for another meet-up again to offer her the quest. Just send me a message."

"All right," Jeanny nodded. "Sweet Talk, Bitter Rain, and Wondrouslife should also be interested to join. As long as they passed their advanced class trials. I see now why you are asking only for one who already gets their advanced class."

"Why is that?" Viral Cora asked.

"Because, little lass, if you have not, you will have to wait a possible of several months before going back to the capital and have the chance to apply for the trial again," it was John who answered.

Viral Cora glared at the man. She did not appreciate being called little lass. John completely disregarded her stare. He instead asked Jack, "where do we gather the morning two days from now?"

"We gathered at the North gate. You should be able to see the soldiers gathering at that place and you will know that you have come to the right place," Jack answered.

Exceeding Jack's initial expectation, everyone had ended up joining. It was all thanks to the system quest popping up, making this a formal quest. If not, he doubted that most will join. Maybe Flame, Bowler, and The Man would, seeing it as returning the favor for saving them before. The others had no such moral obligation.

Afterward, they chatted on some other less serious topics. Many of them were interested to know more about the factions, so Jack explained to them to the best of his knowledge. Peniel helped to cover the topic from behind the scenes.

Jack reminded them to buy an Amulet of Rebirth and equipped it, since he did not know the real danger that they might encounter on the way. Even though they had the army as their shield, some unknown occurrence might still happen. Bowler asked if he would wear the amulet as well, Jack replied that he did not need to. Everyone just thought of him being cocky, while the real reason was that he had a secret Immortal Soul inherent skill.

They ended up spending another three hours inside the private room. The drinks were on Jack so most of them capitalize on this by drinking without reservations. Jack did not mind, this small expenditure was nothing to him.

The next morning Jack woke up pretty late due to all the drinkings. It appeared that one could still get drunk in this game world. He had been thinking about what to do for today before he departed with the expedition. He had done the preparation required for the expedition. Spending the day for another monster grinding seemed dull. He had first thought about going to the Adventurers Association to see if there was any short quest, but one could never be certain with these quests. If he ended up not completing it today, he would have wasted it instead.

After some pondering, he asked Peniel, "you said there were many league factions, right? You mentioned as well that it is better to just concentrate on one or two factions?"

"Yes, trying to tackle all of them will just have you end up with mediocre achievement in any of them. Not to mention that there were many which you will not be able to join due to your class and auxiliary skills limitations."

"I understand. So, any particular one you want to recommend for me?"

"Most obvious choice should be picking a league faction that catered specially to your Warrior or Mage class. Apart from leveling up and technique books, the next favorite option for gaining new skills are from these League factions."

"All right then, let's try to join them today. What is the league faction most suitable for Warrior and Mage class?"

"You want to join both of them?" Peniel asked.

"Why not?" Jack asked back.

"Never mind. Your dual-class is an anomaly, so I guess you joining both should be okay. Anyway, the most privileged league faction for the Warrior class should be the League of Champions. They not only possess skills for Warrior, but also the skills for the other four classes that branched out of the Warrior class. So joining this faction will be beneficial as well in your future. A similar league faction for Mage class is called Order of Magi."

"All right, let's go there then," Jack said.

"Which one do you want to go to first?" Peniel asked.

"League of Champions, of course. Melee is still my main class," Jack replied.

He asked Amy and Samantha the direction to this league faction. It was nearby the edge of the business district bordering the noble district. Similar to the academies, but in a different section of land.

Although he still not yet explored the entire capital, he was more accustomed to this city already so he did not have too much trouble finding the place.

The building that housed the League of Champions was much more grand compared to the academies he had visited when he changed his class. Its building had a baroque style with twisted columns and a colossal dome top. Four sections extended out from the main building creating a sense of four separate buildings attached to it. A large sculpted cartouche decorated the top of its main entrance with League of Champions words chiseled on it.

Jack went through this main entrance and was greeted by a palatial hall. Sunlight went through the openings on the ceiling, granting the massive foyer an additional layer of grandeur. There were many NPCs in the foyer, but because of its large size, the place did not feel crowded. Several armed guards stood in attention in the four corners of the hall.

Jack looked around trying to identify a fixed station like a receptionist where he could ask for information about joining the faction, but he could not find any. At the opposite wall of where he came from was a row of arched openings that seemed to lead to another area, so he went there.

He went through the openings and came to a smaller hall. Inside there was finally a booth with manned staff which he could ask for information. It was a circular booth at the center of the hall. There were three staff inside the booth. One was talking with another NPC while the two others were unoccupied.

Jack went to one of the two free staff and asked, "good morning, I would like to ask about joining the League of Champions."

Chapter 309: Executive Recommendation

The staff asked for Jack's general information and recorded everything, similar to when Jack had applied at the Adventurers and Hunters Association. After verifying Jack's Warrior class, Jack was instructed to head further inside the building. He followed the instruction and came into a room filled with sitting NPCs. Jack was instructed to sit alongside these NPCs until his name was called.

The heck! Why did this feel like the complicated bureaucracy crap from real life? He complained in his mind. But still, he followed the rule as he sat down and waited.

It was around fifteen minutes before his name was called. He was brought into another large room that looked like a training room. There were several wooden dummies, two of these dummies were having a spar with two NPCs.

Someone with glasses approached him and said, "I am Dormu, your examiner. I was told you want to join our faction? You will need to pass through a series of tests for that. This will be the first test."

"A series?" Jack asked. "How many tests would there be?"

"Twelve," the examiner answered.

"Twelve?" Jack was confounded. "How long will these tests take?"

"Depends, but generally it takes around two to three days."

What? I did not have that time! Jack exclaimed in his mind.

'Hey, Peniel. Do you know it will take this long?' Jack asked in his mind.

"No. The test changes every while. I don't know every specific of factions' rules. These series of tests are probably applied under the new administration."

"Is there a way to shorten the tests to just one day?" Jack asked the examiner.

"No. Even if you perform excellently, you still need two days at least. You may only take six tests on one given day."

Jack was downcast. Guess he would just have to give up on joining this faction till he was done with the expedition, he thought.

When he was about to tell the examiner, a familiar rough voice was heard.

"I was wondering when you will show up here. I have instructed people to notify me immediately when your name popped out in the registry."

Jack turned to the source of the voice and found Gruff walking over.

"Gruff?" He asked with a puzzled expression. "What are you doing here?"

"What do you mean what am I doing here? I work here," he answered.

"Eh? Aren't you with the Themisphere kingdom faction?" Jack asked him in confusion.

"Aren't you the same? You are already a member of the kingdom faction but are still applying to join here. Being in a kingdom faction does not limit you from joining a league faction. It does limit your progress in the faction though. As for me, I am mainly an executive member of this League of Champions while being a partial member of Themisphere kingdom faction."

"Executive? How high is your position in this faction?"

"Why do you ask? Are you trying to have me lobby for you to allow you easy access into this faction?"

"Uh... Is that not possible?" Jack asked with an awkward smile.

Gruff gave him a stern stare. "boy, what kind of executive do you think I am...?" He said, then gave a wide grin, "well, that's exactly why I come here after seeing your name! Hahaha."

Jack paused for a bit before grasping what he said, "ahaha, you had me for a moment there."

The two of them laughed for a bit before a voice interrupted, "did you two take my presence here as empty air?"

Jack and Gruff turned to the examiner who was putting on a steely expression.

"Oh, come on, Dormu. Lighten up! The guy here only has one day, he will be going on an expedition with Duke Alfredo tomorrow. He will have no time to undergo the entry test," Gruff told Dormu.

"You know about it?" Jack said to Gruff.

"Of course I do, I was even asked to join as well. Unfortunately, my duties here render me unavailable, but my deputy, Bailey, will go on the expedition with you."

"Bailey was with this faction as well? I thought she was an instructor in the kingdom faction."

"She is both."

"You two are pretty busy, being in two factions and also serve as the overseers in the Warrior academy as well."

"Oh, you don't know? The Warrior academy was operated under the League of Champions. The day when you went to take the Warrior test, Bailey and I were coincidentally at the academy conducting the monthly audit. The person in charge of the class change test was here in the headquarter giving his monthly report, so I also handle his job for that day. So as you see, our first meeting was rather fated."

"Are you two done?" Dormu stood there with an annoyed expression. He felt as if he had been ignored as the two chatted. "If he has to go somewhere, he can just take the test when he comes back."

Gruff tried to persuade the examiner again, "come on, this guy here is a potential recruit. Do you know that the Royal Advisor himself has invited him to join our kingdom faction?"

"I don't care if the King himself invited him. A rule is a rule. Everyone should abide by it," Dormu was adamant.

"Really? Are you telling me that if the king asked you to bend the rule, you really will tell him no?"

"Well, I... that's not the subject here! He should either take the test after he comes back or he quit the expedition."

"You really are such a hard-shell person. Do remember that I have an executive right to recommend a recruit. The recruit recommended through such a mean would have no need to go through all these red tapes."

"I remember that such recommendation will also require the support of at least one other executive member, or the approval of the examiner, which in this case, me!"

"Don't make me go drag another executive member here, that won't go well for you," Gruff warned.

"I don't respond well to threat, you should know that," Dormu fired back.

Before things went out of hand, Jack decided to interfere, "how about this? I did the first test here following the regulation. If I pass this one test, you consider me as passing as a compromise to Gruff's executive recommendation. Will that do?"

Gruff gave Dormu a sharp stare. "Say yes," he said to the man.

Dormu seemed to be contemplating. He looked at Gruff after a while, who was still giving him the hard stare. Finally, he uttered, "fine, but he must pass the first test with a flying color!"

"You truly don't know how to back down, do you?" Gruff said.

"How will it be considered as flying color? And how is the test conducted, by the way?" Jack asked. He had been observing the two NPCs sparring with the wooden dummies while they were chatting. Interestingly, the fight only went back and forth in a linear manner. He noticed there were lines on the floor, creating lanes along the testing area. The two NPCs never seemed to go out from this lane.

As expected, Dormu explained that the first test was to force the wooden dummy to back off. The participants were not allowed to go out from the narrow lane they were assigned to. Even if their feet touched the line that separated the lane, they would be considered disqualified already. So one would need to fight against the wooden dummy without relying on their movement speed.

The participant would be considered to pass if they managed to push the wooden dummy five meters back. There was another line on the floor marking this five-meter borderline. Then there were another two lines behind it, marking eight-meter borderline and ten-meter one. To be considered passing with flying color, one must fight the wooden dummy while pushing them back to this ten-meter borderline.

Dormu explained that each passing of borderline would cause the wooden dummies' attributes to increase.

"Is everything clear?" Dormu asked. "Do I have to explain it all again?"

"Can you please give yourself a break and not insult our future prominent member?" Gruff said to him.

"You are pretty confident of him," Dormu said with a hint of mocking.

"And you sound like you are belittling him a bit too much."

"I simply never believe a person who is looking for a shortcut is anything but a dud."

Jack was walking towards one of the wooden dummies as the two were still quibbling.

"Can I start now?" Jack asked them.

"You can start anytime you want," Dormu answered. "the dummy will start moving once he received your first hit."

So it will not move if I did not attack? Wasn't that giving him a free first strike? Jack thought. But since the rule gave such an advantage, he would not let it go free.

He unleashed Life Burning Art from the get-go, a fiery aura enveloped his body. He then landed his max-leveled Power Strike squarely on the wooden dummy chest.

The strike hit with a loud boom. The wooden dummy was sent flying across the training room. Passing all the three line-boundaries, and crashing onto the wall on the opposite side of the room.

Chapter 310: Challenge System

Dormu's mouth was wide open as he witnessed the scene. The other two NPCs who were still heatedly in battles against the wooden dummies were also similarly shocked. One of them even ended up getting knocked out of the lane due to the temporary lapse in concentration.

Jack walked back to where Dormu and Gruff were at. "That should mean I pass, doesn't it?" He asked.

Dormu was still frozen.

"Be careful or a fly might fly in there," Gruff told him. He finally snapped himself back and closed his mouth.

"You... Is that... Did you max out your Power Strike skill?" Dormu finally got himself to speak.

It was highly unlikely for someone with a level 21 to max out a basic skill. Though it was possible, it would be like putting the cart before the horse. All the skill points would be wasted on that one basic skill while the other skills especially the advanced ones would be inadequately upgraded.

The examiner would not have expected that Jack had done that only because of the Container of Souls. His max-out Power Strike did not only increase his damage output, but it also increased the knock-back force of the skill. Combining with his exceptional strength stat boosted by the Life Burning Art. The dummy, which was at its weakest attributes due to it was still within the first five-meter limit, stood no chance to endure the skill.

"It is," Jack did not cover the fact.

"That is very unwise, to waste all that skill points of yours to level up that first basic skill," Dormu commented. "Such an act had shown that you are a short-sighted Warrior. I cannot see your future to be anything but a tragedy. You will only bring shame to our faction."

"Are you going back on your words?" Gruff asked. He was displeased by this examiner's stubbornness. "I still give you face as you are a dedicated worker with a disciplined personality, but don't think I cannot use my position to give you a hard time if I choose to."

"Hmph, I will never go back on my words. I simply state the precariousness if he is to enter our faction."

"I am the one who uses my executive recommendation on him, so you just let me worry about that."

"Fine! Here, take this token of approval. Gruff here will help to fill you up on the process. Now I have to get back to my work."

Dormu strode off once he gave Jack the token, and went towards the two other recruits. One had failed due to being knocked out of the lane, while the other was still struggling. He yelled at the failed one and chased him out as he vented his frustration on that poor NPC.

"Hard-headed punk!" Gruff cursed out before gesturing for Jack to follow him.

Jack followed him around as he completed the process of becoming a member of the League of Champions. He was given another badge to be added to his collection. He had expected the badge. Both neutral factions which he had joined and the kingdom faction gave out badges as a sign of their members, so it made sense that the league factions would do the same as well.

He inspected the badge and found it to be naturally called League of Champions Badge: Principales. There were two points indicated beside the badge's description, challenge points and glory points, both were at 0 points at the moment.

This was different, he thought. The Themisphere kingdom faction, the Adventurers Association, and the Hunters Association basically used a similar system. All three used only one type of point system to

determine the rank within that faction and for exchange on services or items. This one here had two kinds of points.

"Principales?" He asked Gruff about the word that accompanied the badge.

"That's your rank within this faction. It is the lowest rank. Every new recruit is a Principales."

He then asked Gruff about the two different types of points, to which the burly guy gesture for him to follow again.

Gruff took him to a large open courtyard that housed an enormous stele at its center. They approached the stele. On its surface were carved ten lines with intricate letterings.

Increase a level = 1 challenge point

Level up a skill from Warrior class or its branches 5 times = 1 challenge point

Obtain 1 star for skills from Warrior class or its branches = 1 challenge point

Defeat 100 Elite monsters/NPCs of the same level or above = 1 challenge point

Defeat 10 Special Elite monsters/NPCs of the same level or above = 1 challenge point

Defeat 1 Rare Elite monsters/NPCs of the same level or above = 1 challenge point

Defeat 1 Mythical monsters/NPCs of the same level or above = 10 challenge points

Defeat 1 Eternal monsters/NPCs of the same level or above = 100 challenge points

Execute skills from Warrior class and its branches against hostile monster/NPC 500 times = 1 challenge point

Receive a total of 1000 points of damage from hostile monster/NPC in a single combat = 1 challenge point

Jack read all the lines before turning to Gruff and asked, "so no quest to get points?"

"There is, but it will be rare," Gruff replied. "Also, only an executive like me can issue such a quest. We never do it if it is unnecessary, it was only done under special circumstances. Your main source for challenge points will be the tasks detailed here."

"What are these challenge points for?"

"To challenge, of course," Gruff said as if it was the most obvious thing.

"Yes, I can deduce its function from its name, but what am I challenging here?"

Gruff grinned and again took him to another hall.

Damn, this place was vast! Jack exclaimed in his mind.

Gruff brought him to an even larger open courtyard with a circular layout. Looking at the setting, he felt like he had come into the colosseum stage from his real life, with the floor still intact of course. Along

the circular wall were large roman numerals. He made a sweep and discovered there were one hundred of these numbers, from one until one hundred.

There were some NPCs near the wall, one of them did something in front of these numbers. A layer of light soon enveloped and they disappeared.

"Are they...?"

"They had gone to attempt a challenge," Gruff explained. "You paid with challenge points to attempt a challenge. Just now the guys stood in front of the number five, so he was sent to a level 5 challenge stage. There were one hundred of these stages. The lowest one at number one, while the highest and the hardest naturally is at number one hundred. You need the same number of challenge points to attempt the challenge. 1 challenge point for stage one, and 100 challenge points for stage one hundred."

"So that guy just now used 5 challenge points for the challenge," Jack said.

"Ain't you a genius," Gruff replied.

Jack ignored the sarcasm. "What is inside the challenge stage?"

"Battle!" Gruff exclaimed with zeal. "Random monsters, but the difficulty always corresponds to the stage level you enter. The higher the number, the more difficult the fight will be."

"What if we die inside?" Jack asked.

"You will be teleported out here. No harm will come to you, you will only lose the challenge points," Gruff answered.

"Do we get something for winning?"

"You get glory points."

Oh, so that's where the second type of points came in.

"What's the glory points for?"

"For exchanging with items and skills," Gruff replied.

So it still ended up as exchanging points for goods, Jack thought. Well, but in this way, he didn't need to spare his time especially to pursue the points here. He could just do other things while slowly amassing the challenge points. From the ten lines on the stele, those acts would be regularly performed even as he did other quests. He just needed to come back here once he had enough points to attempt the challenge. However, looking at the actions needed, it would take a long time to amass the points.

He made a quick calculation on his mind. If he were to challenge every stage, even if he never lost, he would still need a whopping 5050 challenge points! How long would it take for him to collect those points? He would need to defeat 50 eternal monsters for that! Heck, by his estimation, he could still only cope with a special elite monster of the same level at this time. Never mind that, he could only take things slowly.