

World 311

Chapter 311: Detecting Lies

Gruff continued his explanation, "if you win, you will get the same amount of glory points based on the stage level you are in. If you beat stage ten, then you get 10 glory points."

"So it's basically the reverse from the challenge points."

"That's right."

"Your status in this faction will be based on the stage number you are at. For example, I am at stage 79. All executives have to beat at least stage 75. Because of that, I'm still considered as a low-level executive."

He was at stage 79? Jack thought and decided to inspect the guy. He had never inspected him before despite meeting him a few times already.

Gruff (Rare Elite Human, Angusticlavian), level 65

HP: 790,000

Crap, the fellow was at the same level and grade as Duke Alfredo. His HP was even higher than the Duke, but considering he was melee-oriented while the Duke was magic-oriented, it made sense for him to have higher HP. No wonder he did not show any respect to Commander Quintus. The Anglusticlavian besides his grade must be his rank within this faction. Wait, he was this strong but could only reach stage 79? How difficult would stage 100 be?

"If I cannot beat the next level, can I repeat the same level again?" Jack asked.

"You can," Gruff answered.

He pondered a bit more before asking, "If the glory points gained are the same as the stage number, then it's better if I just repeat the same stage again and again. If I beat stage 1 a hundred times, I will get the same glory points as beating stage 100 one time. Considering the difficulty, if I am not too keen on getting a high position in this faction, this will be a better way to get glory points."

"You will be right, if the items and skills are all available for exchange from the start," Gruff said.

"They are not?"

"If they are, it will be stupid to implement such a system now, wouldn't it? As you said already, people will not find the need to challenge the higher stage if so. If you are still at the low stages, you will only get basic and advanced skills the most. Higher grade skills and items will be unlocked only if you have defeated higher stages. In addition to that, challenging the same stage level which you had defeated before can only be done a maximum of five times a day, so you can't hoard too many glory points that way."

"I see..."

"Apart from that, there will be other perks for beating higher stage levels, and you will receive benefits that come with the rank. What they are, I will let you find them out yourself."

"Well, alright then. Since I can't attempt any challenge at the moment. I guess I will take my leave first."

"Wait! What are you so in a hurry for? Don't you want to hang out with your pal here?"

"Elderly pal is a more correct term. Aren't you ashamed of acting like a youth here? I know you have something you want, just spill it out already."

Gruff gave him a wry face, before turning serious and said, "I need a favor, you can consider this as our League of Champions faction quest, you will be rewarded with challenge points upon completion."

"I thought you said such a faction quest is rare?"

"I did also say us executives have the authority to issue them now, didn't I?"

"What is it about?" Jack asked.

"I need you to visit a town called Thesewal. At there, search for an officer with the name of Guss. Listen to his instruction as my representative and complete the task that he gives."

Jack soon heard a voice notification of this faction quest. Apart from the challenge points for rewards, it also granted experience points and coins like other normal quests.

Jack did not accept the quest posthaste. Instead, he said to Gruff, "old man, did you forget already? I am going out on an expedition tomorrow. Where can I find the time to do this quest of yours?"

"Don't worry, you will visit this town during the expedition," Gruff replied.

"What?" Jack was confused.

"I know the route the expedition will take. The army will make a camp in this town before heading out to the Fulgur region. Thesewal is one of the fortress towns that defend our border, and it was one that is closest to the Fulgur region. The army will take a rest and resupply in this town before heading to the border."

'Is that true?' Jack asked Peniel in his mind, who also had the knowledge of the geography of this kingdom.

"In the route that I estimate the army will take, this town does happen to be there. I also believe that the expedition will make a stop at this place."

Jack then said to Gruff, "even if I visit this place, you don't think the army will wait for me to complete the task from this Guss person, do you?"

"It will take the army at least two days to resupply. You should be able to complete the task by then. Guss has told me that it is just an easy task that takes one to two days to complete at most."

At this time, he felt a tingling in his mind. At first, he wondered what it was all about, but then he somehow knew it was the trait of his Investigator talent. The NPC in front of him had just told a lie.

"The guy just lied," Jack heard Peniel said.

'Oh, you felt it too?' He asked.

"I was linked with you, remember? Pretty handy talent you have there."

'Not so reliable though, the description said I have the chance to detect lies. So it doesn't work all the time, only a possibility. It only happened now after so long since I got the talent. It can't be this is the first time a native lies to me, can it?'

"So what say you?" Gruff asked, unaware of Jack's internal conversation.

"You don't know what the task is about?" Jack asked instead.

Gruff shook his head.

"Will there be a penalty if I fail to carry out the task?" Jack asked again.

"No penalty. No, no. There is nothing to worry about. Even if you can't complete it in time, you should be able to continue again after you finish your matter in that temple you people are heading to. You can just go back to Theseval once you are free."

Doesn't sound so convincing, Jack thought. Still, there was no tingling, so he could be speaking the truth. Or this could be the case when the talent's ability to detect lies was not triggered. Such an uncertain ability, Jack complained in his mind.

After pondering for a bit, he had decided to just accept the quest. Though Gruff might be lying, it should not be anything ominous. The guy had been nothing but helpful since the first time he met him, with a tint of playfulness though. He had even gifted him the Shadow Bear Tasset which he still wore till now.

"Good lad!" Gruff declared after Jack's acceptance and smacked him on the back.

Motherf**ker! Did he forget he was a level 65 Rare Elite? Jack cursed in his mind as he bore the pain on his back.

He opened his quest window to take a look.

Go to Thesewald and listen to Guss' request

Difficulty: B

Rewards: 3 gold coins, 25,000 Experience points, 10 Challenge Points

B-level difficulty, should still be manageable, Jack thought. He had also done B difficulty quests from the Adventurers Association before. Although B level was difficult for his level, he could still manage it with his dual-class and equipment advantage. Perhaps he had been too apprehensive due to detecting Gruff's lie.

"Can I go now?" Jack asked him.

"You don't fancy a round of drink with this old pal of yours?" He asked back with a grin.

"Pass," Jack said, then added. "See you later."

Chapter 312: Order Of Magi

Jack did not waste time going to the second matter of the day, the Order of Magi. With any luck, he should be able to complete the joining process on both the prominent league factions of his classes by today.

But what if there was also a lengthy trial required for him to pass in order to join? He did not imagine there would be another NPC like Gruff there who could help to lobby him in. No point worrying about it, let's just go there first, he thought.

The direction that was given after he asked an NPC showed that the Order of Magi was located some distance away from the League of Champions. It was still in the business district, but contrary to the League of Champions, the Order of Magi was located near the border to the slum district.

Jack took a carriage as he was afraid that the entrance trial might take up a large amount of time, so it's better if he arrived earlier. Another good point about using a carriage was, there was no need for him to look around for the building. Even though he knew the general location, sometimes it still took some time to identify the correct building.

However, when the carriage dropped him off, he could not help but think that the carriage had made a mistake. He looked back to ask the coachman, but the carriage was already some distance away. He turned back again and looked at the building in front of him.

There was certainly a mistake! He thought in his mind.

The land in front of him was a ten by ten meters square plot with untended shrubberies. At the center of the plot was a small dilapidated hut.

"No way this is the place," he mumbled.

"Try asking the locals," Peniel suggested.

He went and asked a pair of passing women. They both pointed at the hut. Jack thought they were making fun of him, so he looked for another person to ask again. This time it was an old man with a walking stick.

"It is just over there! Can't you see the sign?" The old man said with a peeved tone. The direction he was pointing at was still the hut.

Jack had no choice but to go back to the plot with the hut. There was indeed a wooden sign in front of the plot, but it was slightly covered by the shrubberies. Jack removed the shrubberies covering the wordings and read that the name was indeed the Order of Magi.

'Could it be that they have moved? This was their old place?' Jack asked Peniel.

"How do I know?" Peniel talked back.

At that time, the door of the hut opened. Several men and women in classic wizard garbs came out. Jack looked at them as they passed by. He was still looking at their backs when they were walking away.

After a while, he turned back and looked at the hut. "can this really be the place?" He mumbled.

Just thinking about it won't help, he decided to just go in and see. Still, seeing the poor-looking place, he could not help but wonder if this was really the prominent Mage class' league faction that Peniel had recommended.

He asked her as he walked to the door, 'Peniel, are you sure you did not make a mistake when you asked me to join this Order of Magi? It certainly appeared unimpressive.'

"Are you questioning my information?" Peniel spoke back with irritation.

'Never mind, let's go in and have a look first.'

He put his hand on the knob and opened the door. It creaked heavily. He stopped halfway and shifted to opening it gently, afraid that the bloody door would break from its hinges.

When he peeked inside, he was taken aback. The inside was a large rectangular room that was empty of everything except for a table at the center of the room. The floor, walls, and ceiling of the room used a single color of beige. There was a man sitting behind the table, he was reading a tome when he noticed Jack coming in.

"Welcome," the man said.

Jack was stunned for a moment. He pulled himself out of the door and went in a circle around the hut. The hut was not more than five by five meters, but the inside room that he saw just now was clearly larger than that. Hell, it was even larger than the entire plot here.

He came back to the door and looked in again. The same view greeted him.

"Are you going to come in or not?" The man asked.

Jack finally stepped inside. This large empty room was the epitome of cleanliness. There was not a spot visible. Completely in contrast with the neglected yard outside. Jack surmised that this room must be a separate dimension from the outside. As befitting of a top mage faction. Still, did they have to pick such a run-down hut for a front?

Jack walked to the man behind the table. He was wearing a simple purple robe, complementing his hair which also had the same color. That purple hair of his was long and straight, neatly combed to the back. His face was clean and very handsome. Jack couldn't help a feeling that he had seen the man before. Which was weird, he would have recognized such a distinctive NPC if he had met him before.

As if to add to Jack's bewilderment, the man said, "we meet again, mister Storm Wind."

"What?" Jack was baffled. He searched his memory, had he truly met this NPC before? How could he forget? He decided to inspect the man, which came out as undetected, except for his name, Janus.

Shit, could an NPC wear an item that concealed information as well like his cloak?

Looking at Jack's puzzlement, Janus chuckled. "No need to worry about it. Now, what can I do for you?"

Fighting down his confusion, Jack said, "I would like to join the Order of Magi."

Janus gave him a polite smile before replying, "unfortunately, I can't accept you."

"What? Why?"

"Because you are a Warrior."

Jack took out his magic staff. "I'm also a Mage. I can do magic spells, I can show you."

Janus shook his head with a smile. "Doesn't matter if you can do spells. Your status is a warrior, so I can't accept you."

"Uh, is there no exception?"

Janus shrugged. "Unless you can become a mage," he said.

Jack was crestfallen. He had come all this way for nothing. He would need to find another league faction who was willing to accept him and supply him with spells then. As he was about to ask Peniel about the other league factions, a thought came to him.

Become a mage? He thought.

"All right, thank you for your time," Jack said to Janus.

He then walked out of the room. He came out to the poor-looking yard, went to the back of the hut amongst the thick shrubberies. After making sure that no one was looking, he used the Orb of Disguise and transformed into Unrivalled Arcaner.

"Now I am a proper Mage," he said.

"Good thinking," Peniel praised.

"Let's try this again," he said as he walked back to the front of the hut.

He straightened himself before he knocked on the door and walked in.

"Good afternoon!" He said loudly as he came into the room. "I heard this is a league faction that accepts members who are mages? Well, I am one. Can I apply to join?"

Janus looked at him from behind the table. The staring contest lasted for a while that Jack started to feel uncomfortable. Fortunately, Janus said at last, "certainly. You just have to pass our test to join."

Jack almost exhaled a relief breath but managed to stop himself. "No problem, I like tests. Give it to me, and we will be faction mates in no time!"

"Unbelievable. Do you really have to get so into character? There are no Death Associates members here!" Peniel said in his mind.

'This is called professionalism, lady,' Jack replied to the fairy's pestering.

Janus stood up from his chair and extended his hand. "Give me your hand," he said.

Jack gave his left one. Janus touched it. Strands of golden light streamed out of his hand and went into Jack's hand. Jack could feel a tingling feeling as he sensed the light coursed through his arm and up into

his brain. An image of a spell formation appeared in his mind. The spell formation consisted of five runes.

Janus let go of Jack's hand and sat back down on his chair. He said, "when you can form that spell formation in one second or less, you will be eligible to join our faction."

Chapter 313: Multiple Runes Formation

One second? Jack looked again into the image in his mind. You must be sh*tting me! He cursed in his mind. His record of casting the Barrier spell which consisted of only one rune was just a tiny bit below one second, most of the time it still took him a full one second to complete. This spell formation here had five runes, and the symbols on the runes looked more complicated than the spells he had encountered thus far. There were more lines on it, which meant he would need more time to complete each individual rune.

"The image will stay in your mind, you just need to think of the Order of Magi to summon the image again. You can take your time to practice. Once you can reach the required casting time, you can come back here to process your admittance into our faction."

It seemed like there was no way for him to become this faction's member today, Jack sighed in his mind.

"What is the spell of this spell formation?"

"It isn't a spell," Janus replied. "It was just a special rune designed for the admission test."

"Oh, ok." Jack was disappointed, he thought he had just gotten a new spell for free.

"All right, I will take my leave then," Jack said as he turned away and walked to the door.

"Hope to see you again, mister Storm Wind," he heard Janus said.

He turned around in consternation. The guy was already back to focus on his tome. Jack stood there with uncertainty before turning back again and walked out the door.

After he was out of the hut and closed the door, he started cursing, "Bloody hell! So he knew all the time I am Storm Wind. Then why the hell did he make me go through all the trouble of pretending to be a formal mage? Does he have to act so enigmatic?"

"I can still hear you." He heard a voice from behind the door.

"Oh..." Apparently, despite existing in a separate dimension, the soundproofing was not that good.

With the order of the day completed. He had nothing else to do. It's a bit late to start going outside for monster grinding. He thought about going to Commander Quintus' house again for training skills' proficiency, but then decided to just go back to Amy's Bakery and tried learning this spell formation that Janus had given him.

He went by Ellie's restaurant first to collect the weekly profit. Today was coincidentally the day the profit could be collected. Once he departed on the expedition, he would not be able to collect them for some time. This time he got only 19 gold coins for the profit.

Ellie explained that it was less not because the business was decreasing, it was because she used some of the income to purchase more registered recipes. Such recipes were safer so if player cooks decided to leave, they would not take the knowledge of the recipes with them, as the recipes were tied to the restaurant.

She mentioned that she had gotten access to these registered recipes via a league faction called House of Culinary. She and Bill had become members of this faction. Jack told her she had full authority to make the purchase. He did not mind a decrease in income for improving the restaurant.

After making sure with Ellie and Bill that everything was fine, he could leave without worry. He told them that he would be unavailable for quite some time.

Afterward, he went back to his room and started casting Janus' spell formation. He spent almost three seconds forming the first rune. Considering it took him six seconds when he first formed the runic symbol for the Barrier spell, this could be considered as an improvement already? He shook his head. No, he could not allow himself to be satisfied by such petty excuse. Three seconds for the first rune, to make five runes he would have wasted fifteen seconds. He had a whole fourteen seconds to improve, this would require immense training.

In the end, he spent sixteen seconds completing the spell formation for the first time. It was even worse than he had predicted. The spell formation quivered before disintegrating into small particles of light.

There was no cooldown for this spell formation, so he started forming the runes again.

He slowly got accustomed to the symbols of the rune, it took him less time as he got more familiar. Yet, the time it took him to complete was still around ten to eleven seconds. It was still far from the required casting time.

"How about you tried that multiple runes forming method that I mentioned in the past?" Peniel suggested. She had been flying around the room, bored with nothing to do as Jack was focused on his training.

Jack remembered again after she brought it up. It was a method that formed multiple runes at the same time. Since he had never tried before. He tested with forming two runes at the same time first.

It was sluggish at first, as he had to concentrate on two things at a time. The runes even fizzled before breaking apart while they were still half-formed.

"You failed," Peniel said.

"Duh," Jack stated. The lines he formed on the runes were all over the place, no wonder the spell formation failed.

He did not get discouraged. It was common to not get the best result on the first try. He repeated the process again. He ceaselessly continued casting the spell formation, two runes at a time. He still failed another four times. He finally succeeded in completing two runes on his sixth tries, but it took him five seconds to complete.

"Crap! This takes even more time than if I form them one at a time," he complained. He roughly spent around two seconds when he was casting a singular rune from this spell formation.

"You are just unfamiliar with it. If you can get used to it, you should be able to get a better result than a single rune forming," Peniel said. "That is considering if you truly have that multi-task trait that you claimed you have."

"Hmph! Don't you underestimate me, little lady," he said as he felt fire up.

"Show it to me, big boy!" She shot back.

Damn it, if someone was outside the room hearing them, they might get the wrong idea, Jack thought

He continued practicing until the night before he was disturbed by a message from Jeanny. At the time, he had shortened his simultaneous two runes casting to less than three seconds.

Jeanny told him that Trinity Dawn was interested to join the expedition, together with her other friends that had just passed their advanced class trial. They were waiting at Raven's Den. She also informed him that The Man was also there, and he had two of his subordinates whom he mentioned yesterday that would be joining as well.

Jack stopped his training and headed to that tavern. A bit of fresh air would be good. He was not making such a big leap of improvement anyway. One second for all five runes, he wondered how long it would take for him to get there, if ever.

Jack met with them in the tavern. The two of The Man's subordinates were level 19 Knights. Trinity Dawn was already level 21 as well. The other friends of Jeanny were Bitter Rain who became another mage at level 19, Wondrouslife who had become a level 19 Archer, and Sweet Talk, a level 19 Fighter. Huh? A Fighter? Jack inspected her again to make sure he was not mistaken.

Jeanny saw her confusion and explained that she had still failed her trial, which was a pity. She was very eager to join as well. She even expressed if she could just join even if she was still a basic class. Jeanny talked her out of it. It would be a pity if he kept on leveling up but was unable to change her class due to having no access to the academy. He would have lost all those potential attribute points.

She expressed again how that she didn't want to spend her time alone in the city while all her friends were somewhere else. Jeanny advised her that it was only temporary and that her top priority at the moment was to focus on becoming an advanced class. They would come back again after the expedition was over.

Jack tried to console her as well by saying, "don't worry, you might not need to wait so long. The road is dangerous. Some of us will most likely die and they will be revived in this city. Then you can hang out together again."

The others gave him a weird stare.

"You have a really strange way to cheer people up," Viral Cora said.

Jack accompanied them for a while and bought them all a round of drinks before he excused himself. Before he left, he reminded them to not be late the next morning.

He went straight home and continued his rune-forming practice. It took him a while but he finally managed to complete the dual runes in almost two seconds.

He decided to try doing it with three runes at the same time. As expected, it failed. Doing three runes at the same time was way harder than two. He kept on failing even after ten tries. Even when he slowed it down, it was still extremely difficult to concentrate on three things at the same time.

"This is hard!" He exclaimed.

"Hey, don't stay up too late," Peniel told him.

He looked at the time and realized it was past midnight already. He quickly decided to stop the practice and went to bed. He had told the others not to be late, it would be unseemly if he was the one that was late.

Before his mind went to sleep, he wondered how fast it would be if he cast the Arcane Turbulence spell which had three runes using the multi-runes forming method. The runes of that spell were more simple than this spell formation from Janus, so in theory, he should be able to form them faster. He felt eager to test them out, but he calmed himself down. It would be bad if he caused damage to the room.

Chapter 314: Princes Of Themisphere

Good thing he did not oversleep. Well, the real reason was because he had a flying talking alarm that pestered him till he woke up. He was thankful to the fairy, it would be bad if he made the Duke wait for him.

He had a quick breakfast and bid goodbye to Amy and Samantha. He informed them that he would be on a long quest, so he would not be coming back to stay at this place for a while. Amy showed a worried face. Jack pat her head and told her not to worry. Samantha gave him a few pieces of high-quality bread which could restore health better than the bread he first got in the tutorial period. He accepted them with gratitude.

He ran to the noble district. He was not late so he did not hail a carriage.

When he was about to arrive at the Duke's estate, he noticed two men were in front of the entrance to the estate. He recognized one of them and he tensed up right away.

The man was Warren, the magistrate who was also the father of Walter, who he had chopped an arm off.

Did he seriously still try to capture him? Jack thought as he quickly paid attention to his surroundings, expecting soldiers to come out to surround him.

"Look at him. Like a thief who has been caught stealing," Warren mocked.

The man beside Warren chuckled, then said to Jack. "Don't worry, we are not intending any harm to you. I'm just here to see the outworlder who has been so brave as to provide his support to my youngest brother."

"Hm?" Jack did not understand what the guy was saying. He paid attention to the guy.

He looked very well dressed. He wore a royal mantle with intricate embellishment. He was tall and had a broad frame, Jack did not doubt that behind that fancy clothing was a muscular body. His jaw was

square and his face had a natural stern expression. His eyes constantly expressed disdain for his surroundings.

Jack inspected the guy.

Therribus (Rare Elite Human, Crown Prince), level 55

HP: 610,000

Crown Prince? Jack was flabbergasted. He then thought of when the guy mentioned his youngest brother. Did he mean Alonzo?

Warren who was displeased by Jack's lack of response, scolded him, "you are in the presence of royalty, outworlder! The one standing before you is the crown prince of this kingdom. Hmph, I bet a barbaric race such as yours know nothing of ethics. Why have you still not bow down?"

Instead of bowing, Jack fired back at the magistrate, "last time you got chased away by the younger brother. Now you ask for help from the older brother. Such a nag! Who was even blind enough to appoint you as a magistrate anyway?"

"You... scoundre!!! Are you so eager for us to deal with you here!" Warren's face was red with fury.

Therribus waved for him to calm down, but Jack could see a hint of anger in his eyes. "As a matter of fact, I was the one who put him in his position. You certainly are as brave as they say, or maybe just plain dumb. Did anyone ever call you dumb?"

"As a matter of fact as well, some did. Though I don't know why they made such a big deal about it. I still kicked their asses though."

"So, are you saying you are going to kick my ass as well? Considering I've called you dumb."

"I don't know, would you like me to?"

"You insolent prick! How dare you show such disrespect to the royal family!" Warren could not stand Jack's manner. "We will skin you alive!"

"You outworlders think yourselves are special? You people are nothing but weaklings who trespassed into our territory! You do know that you are so weak at this moment that we can kill you with ease, don't you?" Therribus warned.

Jack was in fact well aware of it as well. Though he was mouthing off against the two, his heart had been beating furiously. His nerves had been on full alert, ready to spring the moment it was needed. He could only do his best to run away, even if he thought it was futile.

"But as I said, we do not come to harm you, at least not today," Therribus continued. "You are under my youngest brother's banner, it will look bad if I hurt his retinue in broad daylight. Still, mark my words, since you are on my youngest brother's side, that makes you my opposition. You take care not to let me catch you, I will make you suffer more than a simple death and forced you to eat back all the words you said today."

After those threats, the crown prince turned around and left. Warren continued staring at Jack hostilely for a bit before turning and followed after the crown prince.

Jack exhaled a breath of relief after seeing they turned their backs. He could feel the cold sweat on his forehead.

'What the hell was that all about?' He said in his mind. 'He said he is Alonzo's big brother, but he said also as if he was his own brother's enemy?'

"Probably rivalry within the royal family. Such things are common when it comes to royal succession period."

'Is the king of this kingdom dying?' Jack asked.

"Don't know. He was pretty old already by now. Many haven't seen him in years. Rumors are he is sick. Probably that's what sparks this royal rivalry."

Rivalry for succession? Things do tend to get ugly for a kingdom under this condition. Jack suddenly thought back to the time when he first learned about Alonzo's identity as a prince. Alonzo had told him that many others might balk after learning his identity.

"Shit! So this is what it was about?" Jack cursed out. He felt down, how did he unknowingly get sucked into the conflict between these royal princes?

"What was about what?" Peniel did not understand Jack's words.

Jack didn't bother to explain, he instead asked her, 'Peniel, if a fight broke between them, and the crown prince wins the throne. What will happen to me and my status in the kingdom faction?'

"You probably will get labeled as a traitor due to your connection to the prince. All your status in the faction gets revoked, and if you are lucky to escape the guards, you will become an enemy of the state in this kingdom."

"F*CK!" He cursed out even louder this time. Warren who was not yet far turned his head back due to the shout.

As he was lamenting about his uncertain fate in this kingdom, he noticed the duo of crown prince Therribus and Warren stopped their walks after meeting with another two persons. Jack was surprised to recognize one of those two persons.

What was she doing here? He thought in his mind.

"What are you doing here?" Therribus' voice sounded as he addressed the person he passed by. Jack was still within earshot, added with his curiosity due to seeing the woman, he walked closer to listen to their conversations.

"Don't be so unfriendly, brother. We might be competitors, but we are also brothers of flesh and blood. There is no reason for us to not be civil," replied the person to who Therribus was talking. He was smiling and gave people an impression of cordiality. Jack inspected this new NPC.

Rhemos (Special Elite Human, second prince), level 50

HP: 210,000

Another prince, f**k! Jack cursed out. He was in full witness of the royal family drama.

Chapter 315: Turning Down A Royal Recruitment

"Cut the crap," Prince Therribus said. "We both know what kind of vile person you are under that smile and friendly face. Don't think your ploy will work on me, little brother. I will crush all the trickeries you have with my strength. Power is the most important to rule this kingdom. Your petty schemes will only bring ruin to us."

Rhemos laughed at Therribus' antagonistic words, "Still as haughty as ever, you should learn to work with others more, my big brother. You and your people saw outworlders as nothing but nuisances. Our father knows instead their potentials. You should learn from him if you want to be a capable king."

"I will do things my own way, don't you dare give me a lecture." Therribus' eyes then shifted to the red-haired female who stood beside his brother, and spat, "hmph! Another one of those outworlders."

"Don't be like that, let me introduce you. This is Red Death from Death..."

"I don't give a shit who that outworlder is!" Therribus cut Rhemos' words curtly. He then walked away without any further word. Warren trailed behind him. He was timid all the time. After all, they were talking to another prince this time.

When they were out of earshot, Warren said to Prince Therribus, "Should I arrange someone to disrupt the third prince's expedition?"

"No need to concern yourself with them. That greenhorn is never my opponent. It is that devious Rhemos we should be wary of. We don't know what he is up to, but he did seem to have involved himself a lot with those outworlders lately. Send someone to find out more about their intention!"

"Yes, sire."

"Now that the majority of the third prince's forces are going out. We can maneuver more easily in the capital. Use this chance to sway those that are still on the fence, and focus our force to reduce the second prince's influence. If you see an opening on his supporters, take them out!"

"What about the third prince's supporters? With their main force out of the capital, isn't this the best time to deal with them?"

"His remaining supporters who stay here are insignificant, they won't affect the big picture. There is also another matter you might not be aware of."

"what is it, Your Highness?"

"Although the royal advisor doesn't show it, he was actually supporting the third prince in secret. If we make a move on the third prince's remaining supporters during his absence. He might as well use this chance to go against us. Just focus on the second prince."

"I will do as you command... About the third prince himself, are we really not doing anything about him?"

Therribus chuckled, his face revealed an ominous expression. "I have prepared a present for him in that expedition of his. Whether he can survive or not, that will depend on his luck. It doesn't matter, even if he comes back safely. By that time, I would have held the majority of influence in the court. Dealing with him will be a piece of cake. You will have your chance to take your revenge on that outworlder when the time comes. Do not let your mind be clouded by revenge. Focus on the task at hand!"

"Your Highness is truly the wisest," Warren praised with reverence.

Rhemos who watched his brother go was still smiling despite his brother's sharp words.

Jack took this chance to greet Red Death, "Hey, you. Fancy meeting you here. What are you doing here anyway?"

Red Death turned to him. Why the hell was this guy acting so friendly? Did he forget already that they were enemies?

"None of your business," Red Death replied sharply.

"All right then, nice meeting you," Jack said.

"No, it's not," Red Death said back.

"Wait! Friend of Red Death," prince Rhemos called to Jack before he left.

"He is not my friend," Red Death clarified.

"I really am not," Jack agreed.

"Okay then, not-friend of Red Death. I am Rhemos, the second prince of Themisphere, as well as one of the legal contenders to the throne."

"Good for you," Jack commented.

"I heard you are going on an expedition with my little brother."

Alonzo was joining? Jack was taken by surprise by this revelation. The Duke did not mention anything about this.

"I must say, I question the wisdom of your choice," Rhemos continued. "Out of the three potential candidates, why did you choose the one that is most unlikely to succeed the throne? How about this. Come over to my side, I will make it worth your while. I am a friend to the outworlders, as you can see on my relationship with your friend here."

"He is not my friend," Red Death repeated.

"I really am not," Jack also restated

"Fine, fine! Now, back to my proposition, what say you?"

"That big brother of yours just now called you a two-faced liar," Jack said.

"No, he did not," Rhemos responded.

"I know, I simply summed it up. It's a hassle to repeat all the bad things he said about you."

Rhemos' smile which was all-friendly all this time became slightly crooked.

"You certainly know how to piss people off," Red Death said to Jack.

"Oh, lady. You clearly have not met Saint John," Jack uttered.

Rhemos quickly recovered his composure and said, "are you saying that you are rejecting my kind offer?"

His face was still smiling, his voice was still friendly, and yet, Jack could not help but sense a tinge of threat in his tone.

"I advise you to think through carefully," he continued. "Out of the three successors to the throne. One is a weak fledgling, another is an anti-outworlder, only I can provide your kind with a prosperous environment to grow. Even if you do not do it for yourself, do it for your people."

"Damn! You really know how to persuade," Jack exclaimed.

"So, you will reconsider my proposal?"

"Uh... Still no, sorry."

Prince Rhemos' eye twitched. He had given this outworlder quite a face, but the guy just kept on making fun of him.

"It will be too late to regret it later, mister..."

"His name is Storm Wind," Red Death informed.

"Mister Storm Wind. I recommend you rethink your political position in this kingdom. If the tree you rest under falls, you will fall with it. You will have no place to stand within this kingdom. Mark my words, I don't give any mercy to my adversaries. Those who stand on my opposition will be considered as rebels once I sit on the throne, and they will be hunted down by the full force of the kingdom."

"You talked differently from your brother, but he gave me the exact same threat just now," Jack said.

"Apart from whether you are trustable or not, there is also another reason why I can't join you. You see, I and this girl's group aren't exactly on a friendly term. So if we are to work with you, doesn't that make it awkward? So I'm sorry, I have to turn you down. Anyway, good talk! I gotta go now, I am late already."

Jack walked away from them, but he did not turn around. Instead, he walked backward. This was a level 50 special elite he just agitated. Although he doubted this prince will attack him in a fit of rage, it was still better to be careful. Although he did not know if the prince truly decided to attack him, whether it would make a difference if he saw the attack coming or not. Again, this was a level 50 special elite after all.

Fortunately, the prince kept his civility. Jack still watched them as he finally arrived at the gate to the Duke's estate. He quickly ran inside once the gate was within reach.

Rhemos' stiff smile slowly disappeared. Such a disrespectful Outworlder, if he was not someone with good self-control, he would have killed that fool outright.

"That guy is your enemy?" He asked Red Death.

"He is."

"Hmph, all right. I will help you deal with him once I ascended the throne. He was under my young brother's camp, so I can't do anything to him in the open at the moment. You just make sure your guild did your part in helping me deal with my older brother, and I will give your guild special privilege within this kingdom once I am king!"

Chapter 316: Meeting The Royal Advisor

"Don't worry, Your Highness. That is also our wish," Red Death said.

He then turned to where Jack had gone to, "however, Your Highness. I will suggest not to take that outworlder lightly. It will be better if we deal with him now before he grows even more."

"Hm... You almost sound like you are scared of him."

"I believe Your Highness is just imagining things..."

Prince Rhemos seemed to be in deep thought for several seconds, before he said, "there is no need for me to deal with them directly. He is going on an expedition with my youngest brother. And I know where they are headed too. I can borrow another force to deal with them. Haha, probably the lots of them will be wiped out before they even arrive at their destination."

The second prince laughed as if he was truly pleased with his ploy. Red Death had no idea what the prince was scheming at, but he could imagine Storm Wind would not have a smooth journey in their expedition. Although it was a pity that she could not defeat the man herself, it would be for the greater good of her guild.

"Where are they heading to anyway?" Red Death asked. "Their expedition sounds important. Will they affect our plan in some way?"

"They are heading to some ruins. They are trying to get a cure for the curse that is afflicting Duchess Isabelle."

"Duchess Isabelle? Who is she? Is she someone important?"

"She was," Prince Rhemos said. "In the past, she was the main advisor to my father the king, and also this kingdom's strongest sorceress. Her words carried much weight in the court. No one would dare to cross her. She was also the sister to Alonzo's mother, our father's concubine. A whore who thought that her son could compete with us, the true heirs."

Red Death could see Rhemos' face twisted into a warped expression that contradicted his previous friendly mask when he was talking about Alonzo's mother. She said, "if she was so powerful, won't it be dangerous if we allow their expedition to succeed?"

Rhemos chuckled. "They won't succeed. There is no cure to the curse."

"How are you so certain?"

"Because the God's apostle who gave me that curse assured me of it."

He was the one that applied the curse? Red Death thought after hearing it.

"Let's go, there is no point for us to linger here any longer," the prince said and started to walk away.

Red Death turned to look at Duke Alfredo's estate. when she saw Jack, she was equally baffled by his appearance here. Although the second prince had told her that there was an outworlder in his younger brother's camp, she did not expect him to be Jack.

There were very few players who had managed to enter the noble district. Most did because of special quests, the way she did. On her part, her quest was especially special. As it was a high-difficulty guild quest that could affect the fate of this kingdom.

This quest had been the one that was discussed with all the other guilds who agreed to join their coalition and was bound into its secrecy using the Shackle of Vows. His guild had resolved to take in the manpower of the other guilds to form the coalition, not only to monopolize more areas for monster grinding, but also to have sufficient forces to work on this quest.

If this quest was completed and they managed to help the second prince in succeeding the throne. Their guild would receive special protection from the newly crowned king and could truly become the dictators amongst the player community. No players would be able to defy them then.

Hence, when she saw Jack here, she could not help but felt a bit of worry. After all, that guy had always been a thorn on their side. What if he was also on a special quest that was in opposition from theirs? The second prince told her that Jack was under the third prince's banner. What if his quest was to aid the third prince into succeeding the throne? Then there would be only one victor amongst them.

She was already in the process of compiling a report. She would need to send it to Scarface as soon as possible to let him know about this new development.

While Red Death had mistakenly thought that Jack was here on a quest. Jack had also misunderstood Red Death's purpose in the noble district. He thought the woman was the same as him, that she had become the next player after him to join the Themisphere kingdom faction.

As befitting of a well-known top expert, he really could not underestimate her. Jack continued with this misunderstood thought. Maybe he indeed should have killed her in that duel? No. It was also due to the presence of opponents such as her which served as pressure, that he could continue to force himself to improve.

The Duke's mansion came into view as he continued thinking. There was a crowd in front of the mansion. The beautiful garden was nowhere to be seen, covered by the people. Though it was a mass, the crowd was still organized. Rows of soldiers lined up with their backs to Jack. Commander Quintus appeared to be giving a speech beside Duke Alfredo.

He could see Prince Alonzo by the side, so he truly was joining the expedition. His level was 25 now, but another surprising thing was he was now a special elite grade. Jack surmised this was his real grade, the basic grade he exhibited when he first met him should be his disguise using some method.

There were two people in extravagant clothing beside him. A middle-aged man in a fully decorative cloak and a royal Tudor hat. This person was holding a long scepter in his hand. The other one was a woman in a royal dress and an antique velvet hat. From their appearances, Jack assumed the status of both was not any lower than the prince.

Jack did not want to disturb the speech. He stood waiting by the side in silence. He noticed somebody approached him and turned to see that it was Lindsey.

"You are joining the expedition as well?" Jack asked, surprised to see her here.

"No, I am still a cadet, so I'm not allowed to join," she answered.

"Alonzo is also one, but I heard he will be joining."

"He is special. The Duke thought him joining the expedition would be a good learning experience for him as a prince. Oh, and you should really address him as Prince Alonzo from now on."

"Uh, kind of difficult to spell," Jack expressed.

Lindsey chuckled. "I am just here to send my father off. I don't know how long I can see him again, or if he will come back..."

Jack suddenly felt uncomfortable seeing Lindsey's sad expression. Heck, why was she so melancholy? The conversation had just started and she had to immediately talk about the sad part.

Urgently feeling the need to lift the girl's spirit, Jack exclaimed, "don't worry, your father will definitely come back. I will protect him and make sure he is safe!"

Lindsey's sad eyes turned to him and blinked two times, before she laughed and said, "more likely he will be the one protecting you."

Jack only realized he had blurted out absurd commitment, trying to protect a level 60 while he was only a level 21 adventurer. Well, at least the girl was cheery again.

After the speech was done, the soldiers turned around and reshuffled their formation into a long column to fit the width of the road, ready to leave once the commander gave the command. Duke Alfredo and Commander Quintus came to where prince Alonzo and the other two were sitting, and chatted with them. The Duke saw Jack and waved for him to come over.

Jack approached them together with Lindsey. Commander Quintus noticed her daughter and took her to another place to talk.

Contrary to expectation, it was the middle-aged man with the funny hat who spoke to him first, "so you are that outworlder called Storm Wind. I have been wanting to meet with you for some time. I'm glad that we can finally meet."

Jack looked at him, he had that kind of face that seemed to always bear a smile, like that of Silverwing and that snake prince Rhemos. Such a person was either genuinely friendly or had an ulterior motive. Taking a hundred and eighty degrees approach from when he was dealing with Rhemos, this time he embodied the belief that everyone was innocent until proven otherwise. Jack took that friendly gesture at face value and gave an equally friendly reply, "I am honored that such a revered noble such as you are willing to allow yourself to fraternize with me."

"How do you know he is a revered noble?" Jack heard Peniel's voice in his mind.

'Are you kidding me? Why don't you look at his fancy clothes?'

"You even have a way with words. Good, good," the revered noble praised.

"Only if I have to," Jack said. "If you don't mind me asking, who might your eminence be?"

"I am the royal advisor, Mason."

Chapter 317: Escorting Quest

Jack was half expecting the person to be the king of this kingdom himself. But then again, the king was sick if according to the rumors, so it was not possible for the big man to be here. Still, the royal advisor was the next best thing. He was the one who had sent Jack the invitation letter to join the kingdom faction, so in a way, Jack owed him a favor.

Jack did not forget to express his gratitude, "it is an honor to finally meet you, My Lord. I have to thank you for the opportunity you have granted me to join this kingdom faction."

"I only did it because you are worthy, as you have proven yourself to be. The Duke spoke highly of you, as with the Commander and Prince Alonzo."

"We meet again," prince Alonzo took the chance to greet Jack at this time.

"I heard you will be joining the expedition as well?" Jack asked.

"I am. I hope we can work together again."

"You will only be in the expedition as an observer, you cannot get into any dangerous activity," the woman with the fancy hat said to Alonzo.

"Sister, don't worry. I will take care of myself," Alonzo said to the woman.

"Let me introduce you, this is Sindral, princess of Themisphere," Mason introduced.

Great, was he going to meet all the royal lineage of the kingdom today? Jack thought. He had met three princes and one princess in this single morning. He wondered if the king had any other offspring. But based on Rhemos's words, there were only three candidates to the throne, so he guessed a princess was not eligible to inherit the throne in this kingdom.

"It is an honor to make your acquaintance, Your Highness," Jack said with a slight bow.

Sindral smiled warmly at the gesture, she said, "please take care of my brother, sir Storm Wind."

"I will do my best," Jack replied.

"By the way, I met your brothers outside just now," Jack said to Alonzo.

Alonzo seemed to be taken aback by the news. He asked with an uneasy expression, "Did they say anything to you?"

"Your big brother threatened me. Your second brother tried to recruit me, using threats," Jack replied.

Alonzo said with an apologetic face, "forgive me, you shouldn't have been involved in my trouble."

"I'm sorry you have to witness the ugliness of this kingdom," Mason also added. "The king's sudden deteriorating condition had brought about a sudden vacuum in power. The first and second princes took this chance to assert their dominance. Sigh... I tried to maintain stability as much as possible, but it seemed that internal strife is difficult to avoid. Unfortunately, the third prince is still young, his personality is the better one amongst the three siblings. He would have been the best candidate otherwise. If my position does not require me to be impartial, I would have openly shown my support to him."

"If we are talking about the best candidate, it should have been sister Sindral here," Alonzo said. "It's a pity that this kingdom doesn't accept a queen as its ruler."

"Well, if you think so, maybe you can change that rule when you become the king," Sindral teased.

"Becoming a king... I really can't see something like that happening..."

"You are too pessimistic, brother. That is your only flaw. As a prince, you should be more confident."

Alonzo nodded as Princess Sindral counseled him. Jack could see that Alonzo looked up to his sister. While the two siblings were still talking, Mason came closer to Jack and said to him, "if you don't mind, can you come with me for a moment? There is something I need to talk with you about."

Jack turned to the Duke. "We still have some time, go," the Duke said.

The royal advisor took Jack a little distance away out of earshot from the group.

"I would like to give you a task," Mason said to Jack. "Despite Prince Alonzo being the weakest amongst the candidate, he is still a legitimate heir. Which made him a threat to the other two princes. Though they won't focus their attention on him as they have each other to contend with, it still won't guarantee that they will not do anything that will harm him. Even during this expedition, they might do something. Hence, I want to ask of you to watch over Prince Alonzo."

At this time Jack heard a system notification, "you have been offered a kingdom faction quest, Escorting Prince Alonzo, do you accept?"

'Another kingdom faction quests?' Jack exclaimed in his mind. 'If I accept, won't that mean I have two kingdom faction quests? I can have two at one time?'

Peniel who heard his mind answered, "If it was a general faction quest issued out for the public, you can only take one at a time. But if it is specifically given to you, you can have more than one."

"I know it is a high responsibility, but please consider it as a favor for me," the royal advisor added when he saw Jack did not reply.

"I'm just a low-level outworlder, why didn't you ask this of the Duke?" Jack asked.

"They will naturally protect the third prince, they are under his camp after all. But still, they have duties that will take up much of their attention. You outworlders, on the other hand, had the reputation of fiercely accomplishing tasks that were given to you. So I considered my request to you as an extra layer of protection for the prince."

By that reputation he must mean our passion in completing quests, Jack thought. Well, dealing with quests was the main bulk of RPG games after all.

After giving the matter some thought, Jack agreed with the request. Alonzo could be considered his NPC friend. If he was in trouble, he would not just look the other way. So whether he got the quest or not, he would still protect the guy, then might as well accept the quest.

"Thank you, you have given this old bone much relieve," Mason expressed his gladness. "I must warn you though, you need to be vigilant. I doubt either the two other princes had stayed idle after learning of this expedition. The third prince might be tightly protected by his retainers all the time in this expedition, but still, he was out there. Anything can happen. I implore you to remain alert on all possibilities."

"Don't worry, I'll keep my eyes and ears open," Jack said.

At the time, the Duke approached them. "We should head out, it's getting late," he said.

Mason nodded and said to Jack, "go. May the Gods and the Goddesses watch over you and the others in this expedition."

The Duke took Jack to the head of the column formation. Commander Quintus was already waiting there. Jack did not see Lindsey, perhaps the father and daughter had said their goodbye.

The Duke handed a small item to Jack. Jack accepted it and checked it to be a wooden whistle.

"Your mount," the Duke said, and then he turned to his ready troops and yelled out a command, "mount up!"

All the soldiers took out a similar whistle and blew on it. Blue light flared beside each of them and was soon replaced by an adult horse complete with saddle and bridle. Jack used Inspect on the whistle on his hand.

Stallion Whistle

Summon an uncommon steed

Jack blew on it and a large black color stallion emerged beside him. Its mane was also black but had an attractive shiny quality.

Cool! Jack thought as he admired the horse beside him.

"Am I allowed to keep this? Or I have to return it after the expedition is over?" Jack asked the Duke.

"Since you are part of our faction, you are allowed to keep it. Your friends who joined, on the other hands, will have mounts lent to them which must be returned after the expedition is over," the Duke answered.

Jack then saw the Duke and the commander brought out their whistles and blew on them to summon their steeds. The Duke steed was more impressive as it was larger and had red skin with an equally flaming mane. It huffed with an aggressive manner but when the Duke placed his hand on it, it behaved like a docile kitten. Jack assumed that steed was probably a rare grade one.

The three of them mounted on their horses. The Duke looked back on the ready troops and gave a hand signal to begin marching. They then marched following the Duke's pace.

Jack felt honored to be allowed to march at the head of the formation beside the Duke and the Commander. When they came out of the noble district and into the business district. The players who saw the march were especially baffled when they saw a player at the front part of the marching troops.

Ah, this was a bit too eye-catching, Jack thought. But then again, he had also been making quite a wave in the past week, so low-profile was no longer feasible for him.

Chapter 318: Leadership Skill

When Jack came out of the North Gate, he could see rows of soldiers in a neat formation covering the empty field outside. He had heard of ancient armies with millions of soldiers strong, still, seeing three-thousand strong army was already mightily impressive to him. There were NPC soldiers everywhere he looked at.

Most of them were around level 25 to 35. Several more elite squads had level 35 to 45, with each squad leader possessing a level of 45 to 50.

Amongst the leaders organizing the army there, Jack recognized Captain Salem and Lieutenant Bailey. He could also see his friends flocking together at one side of the army. They looked completely out of place.

Many of the other players who stood in the distance were watching this unusual event. They were especially stumped when they saw a group of players next to the army. Some of them thought that it was a special event that they could exploit and tried to approach as well. But the soldiers chased them away. Some even tried to protest that there were players over there, only to get additional scoldings from the soldiers.

"Your Grace, I will go there to coordinate with my friends first," Jack said to the Duke.

"All right. Don't take too long. Take them to me when you are ready, we will be at the center of the army."

Jack nodded. He then steered his mount to head over to where his friends were at. He was marching at a steady pace all this time following the troops' slow march, when he urged the stallion to go faster, its sudden increase in galloping speed almost threw him off. Luckily, this was not the first time he rode a horse in a VR game, hence he was not flustered. Still, the sudden spike in speed caught him slightly off guard. So an uncommon steed could produce such speed, he thought in his mind.

When he arrived at his friends' place, he could see the awe in the glints of their eyes.

"Damn, boss! You looked like a general when you come out of that gate with the troops," The Man exclaimed.

"Ah... such a shame. Why is there no camera function? I would have taken a picture of you then and post it on the forum," Bowler said.

"What forum?" Flame asked.

"I'm just saying," Bowler replied.

"That's a cool steed, boss. Where do you get it?" The Man asked.

Before Jack could answer, John had spoken first, "such uninformed lots." He then revealed a whistle and blew at it. A white horse materialized beside him.

"You can buy mounts at the stable nearby the city gate. There is even one not far from here. You people need to explore more all the facilities available in the city. You guys are seriously lacking if compared to me and Storm Wind here."

"Uh, actually, my steed was given by the leader of the army here," Jack said.

"Well, ain't you lucky," John commented.

"As a matter of fact, all of you will be provided with one for this expedition," Jack added.

"Hahahaha!" Bowler was laughing as hard as possible after hearing it. "Look at you acting so smart. Who is the fool now for wasting his coins to get a steed when they can get one for free?"

"Um, I probably need to clarify. The mounts given to you for this expedition are only temporary, you need to return them once the expedition is over."

"Hahaha," John laughed back at Bowler.

"Hey, we are a few people short," Jack said after looking at Jeanny's group.

"I'm sorry, please wait a few more minutes," Jeanny said. "They are still settling things at the bank."

"Bank?"

"Yeah, bank. It's a place where we can safely store things," John explained. "You never go to one?"

"Why need one? We have our personal inventory bag which is safe enough for storage."

"Friend, we are going on a long expedition. There might be a lot of things we will acquire. How much can a 5 cubic of volume hold? By emptying our storage bag, we can make sure to have the maximum space to store our finds."

"Oh," he muttered as he came to a realization. He never had to worry because he had that Large Bag which provided an additional 100 cubic of space. No wonder Peniel never bothered to inform him about this Bank function.

"Speaking of the devils," Jeanny said as she looked behind Jack. Jack turned over and saw the missing members approaching.

Jack made another headcount, there were twenty-three of them not including himself. He then sent them a party invite.

"You won't be able to fit them all," he heard Peniel's voice in his mind.

'Oh? What do you mean?' He asked, but he got his answer soon, from a system voice when everyone was clicking the accept button, "party limit reached, cannot add additional members."

"Party limit?" Jack was puzzled.

"What is your leadership level?" Jeanny seemed to understand what's wrong, she was amongst the one that could not join the party as it was already full.

"Um, basic apprentice," Jack answered. He never paid attention to that auxiliary skill.

"What? You still dare to act like a leader with such low leadership level? Hand over the leadership to sister Jeanny here, stop embarrassing yourself!" Swellgoing uttered.

Jack looked at the man sharply, he had the urge to kick him again.

"Stop your rudeness," Jeanny reprimanded him. This rebuke had in fact saved the fellow from another ass-kicking. "Mister Storm Wind was the one who invited us, it is only natural that he is our appointed leader."

Then to Jack, she said, "however, it is still a fact that your leadership level is terribly low. Do you not know that the limit for a leader with the most basic leadership level to form a party is twenty members?"

"Uh, I don't," Jack replied.

"Then how about this, we have a player with the highest leadership member to be the system party leader. This is just a formality due to the system. We will still follow your order naturally," Jeanny offered.

"I never care too much about who is the party leader anyway," Jack uttered. "Okay, everyone! Say out your leadership level."

Everyone started to state the leadership level. Interestingly, there seemed to be a distinct divide between the group. Bowler, Flame, John, and his two friends were all still at Basic apprentice, same as Jack. The Man and his underlings were at Intermediate Apprentice. While the lots under Jeanny had some at Intermediate Apprentice and a few at Advanced Apprentice. Jeanny had the highest grade amongst them all, at Basic Expert.

"How did you get such a high leadership skill level?" Bowler asked with awe.

"Heh, now you see how great our big sis is, right?" Viral Cora exclaimed with pride.

"What are you so proud of? You are still at Intermediate Apprentice," Bowler said.

"I am still at a higher leadership level than you!" Viral Cora retorted.

"Cora, don't fight," Jeanny said. She then explained to the others, "from my experience, the leadership skill increases in proficiency if you are in a party. The amount of proficiency increased is higher when you are the leader of the party. I have always been questing with the others in a party all this time, and I was thankfully always been appointed as the leader of the party, so my advancement of this auxiliary skill is faster than the others. At my current Basic Expert level, I can form a party with a maximum of fifty members."

"Fifty? Wow! That's a sharp increase from the pitiful twenty members," Bowler commented. "Guess I will have to spend more time in a party from now on."

"No one will want you to be the party leader even if you have a high leadership level," John said.

"Why do you always trying to pick a fight with me?!" Bowler yelled out.

Jack ignored them, he instead asked Peniel in his mind, 'Is that so?'

"That's about right," Peniel answered.

'What is the maximum member allowed if we reached the highest Advanced Grandmaster leadership level?'

"Two hundred members."

Jack could not imagine taking command of a party of two hundred members. It would be such a mess. It was precisely that worry that had caused him to look for player friends for this expedition, the troops he was in charge of were three-hundred in number.

"I am not getting commanded by a woman!" The Man shouted out.

"You got a problem with women?" Flame asked him with a glare.

"Uh, sister... You are different," The Man said.

"Dude, be more flexible, will you. As she said, she is the leader only because of system requirements. Big bro Storm will still be the one that gives out orders," Bowler said.

Yep, it's a chore to ask a bunch of twenty-something people to work together, much less two hundred, Jack thought.

Chapter 319: The Expedition Begins

Jack gave his blessing for Jeanny to form the party. After everyone was included into Jeanny's party, Jack said to them, "come on, I will take you people to meet the Duke."

The bunch of ragtag followed Jack towards the center of the army formation. Their disorder march and jabberings, especially from Men of Solidarity lots, made them seem completely in contrast with the orderly army around them.

There was a row of elite guards around the center of the army, they were amongst the ones that had marched with him from the Duke's estate. These elite guards were average level 50 elite humans. Jack assumed them to be the elite force in charge of the duke's and the prince's safety.

These elite guards parted way when they saw Jack approached. They still maintained an alert stance though. Jack surmised most of them were still mistrustful of outworlders.

The Duke saw them come and bid them with a warm welcome, Prince Alonzo was there beside him. Jack introduced the duke and the prince to his friends. Then he introduced his friends to the two nobles, since there were too many names to introduce, he simply said, "this is Storm Wind's gang. They are very honored to join this expedition."

The others threw Jack a glare. Who the heck do you call Storm Wind's gang?

John came out shamelessly and made himself known, "this lowly one is called Saint John. It was a pleasure to be in the presence of the exalted prince of this kingdom and Your Grace, the Duke. I have heard a lot of great things about you and I hope I can provide more services to the two of you in the future."

Bowler was not to be beaten by John, he immediately came out and also tried to curry favors from the two nobles.

Jack had the urge to kick these two shameless people, but then he thought about the power struggle between the princes. He secretly snickered at them. They would not be so enthusiastic if they found out what they got dragged into by associating with the third prince.

The Duke did not dwell long on the introductions. He called Captain Salem over and told them that they would be with his unit, which as agreed would be under Jack's command. Captain Salem would stay with him to be his liaison. The Duke advised the others to stay within Captain Salem's company and not to wander around.

Commander Quintus came by and added sternly that if they strolled around and disrupted the army's orderly march, a punishment would be administered. The warning brought this ragtag group to attention.

The Duke then called out for the ones that not yet had a mount and distributed to them a whistle for each. They happily received those whistles and blew on them. Steeds materialized all over. However, their steeds were not as impressive as Jack's. Jack presumed that they were all only of the common grade.

The Duke informed them again that these mounts were only loans, they would have to return them once the expedition was over. A penalty would be applied if they failed to honor it. Another thing that the Duke informed was that their steeds could die, so they were warned to unsummon those steeds when they engaged in a battle. If the loaned steeds died, they would have to pay the full price of those steeds.

The Duke then sent them off to where Captain Salem was. Jack looked at the three-hundred soldiers in the Captain's company. They had an average level of 30, each of them wore an expression that displayed their disciplined nature.

Captain Salem organized them into attention and introduced Jack to them. He let them know that Jack would be their acting commanding officer in this expedition. Everything he said would be as if he was the one that gave them. The soldiers showcased their disciplines by giving Jack an official salute.

"At ease," Jack said, slightly uneasy to be suddenly in command of such a force.

At this time, he noticed a nearby lone blue dot on his radar. Blue? All the ones who had joined Jeanny's party had all changed color to green dots, even the ones not on his Friend list. Why was there still a blue one? He looked over and found that he did not recognize this player. How did an unknown player end up in the army? He remembered the army chased away those players that approached without permission.

"Who is that?" Jack asked Captain Salem.

The Captain looked over and seemed to remember something.

"He is another outworlder who will join this expedition," the captain said. "He was a member of a league faction called Cartographer Society. He was on a quest entrusted by that faction to join our expedition. He was just tagging along to chart the details for his map along our route."

There was even such a map-making faction in this world? There were really too many factions out there. Just as Peniel said, it was not possible to experience everything of this game-world, one needed to make a selection and focused on it.

Since it was a fellow player, Jack decided to head over and greet him. He inspected the man on his way.

Sunset Walking (Healer, level: 20)

HP: 350/350

An advanced class, not bad. Jack thought. To take on a quest to be sent so far away from the city all by himself, the guy had to have enough confidence for that.

That player healer was astonished himself when he found out the one coming towards him was not an NPC, but a player. He had seen this person in the distance hanging around the leaders of the army. He thought at first the man was an NPC as well.

"How do you do? I am Storm Wind," Jack introduced himself. He was wearing Cloak of Shadow, so he knew the other side won't be able to inspect him.

"I am Sunset Walking," the healer replied. Despite his consternation, he still kept a calm outer appearance.

"I heard from the captain that you are from the Cartographer Society, tasked to follow this expedition. There are several other players there as well, they are all my friends. Since we will all be in this expedition, care to join us?"

Sunset Walking seemed to ponder for a bit on Jack's offer. Jack could see that he was an independent player, unaffiliated to any player's guild. Such a wary attitude when someone invited you was normal for an independent player, so Jack let him took his time to think.

He probably sensed Jack's sincerity, so he accepted the offer. Jack took him to where the others were gathering. The others were similarly surprised when they found out there was another player in this expedition.

After a round of chat, they found out that Sunset Walking was a rather easy-going person. He said that he was an avid traveler in the real world. Hence, he had joined the Cartographer Society, which often time handed out quests that allowed them to travel with NPCs to other towns.

So it was similar to the Trade Association which Dylan was part of, Jack thought.

John was especially friendly to the new guy, which Jack found to be especially uncharacteristic of him. After making another observation, he found out the reason. Out of all the players he had brought along, there was only one healer, which happened to be Bowler, someone that John was not getting along with. Well, as a matter of fact, the annoying fellow did not get along with anybody.

So, this guy was befriending the new healer in the group as a precaution. After all, in any RPG game, when one was in a pinch, one would want a healer by their side to keep one safe.

As Jack and the others were chatting and getting used to their place in the army, they saw the soldiers started to reshuffle their formation.

"We will be departing," Captain Salem informed Jack. Then he started yelling commands to his company and arranged them into a formation in conjunction with the other units within the army. Their position was roughly at the center front of the formation.

Everyone summoned their steeds. Jack and the others followed suit and mounted theirs. When the front part of the army started moving, they also had their steeds walked forward.

Jack looked back at the capital, which was getting smaller as they put distance. It might be some time before he saw that city again.

Chapter 320: The Master

In a city called Theneward, another metropolitan city of Themisphere kingdom which was not any smaller than the capital Thereath, two men in hooded full-body coats were walking down the street. The players who noticed these two found that they could not see any information of the two, except that those two were players like them.

The two went into a stylish tavern consisted of multiple floors and a cupola on the top floor. The cupola's walls were made of see-through glass that allowed the occupants to enjoy the view of the city.

At the moment, the whole room of the cupola was booked, so there was only one table that was occupied. A single man was enjoying his wine as he savored the beautiful scenery of the city. On his right eye was attached a rectangular glass device which Jack would identify as God-eye monocle.

He heard footsteps as two men with black coats came up the stairs. The two men removed their hoods, revealing one as a middle-aged man while the other was a young one. The middle-aged man also had a God-eye monocle on his right eye.

"GraphicZ reporting in," the older male announced.

"Soundeffect reporting in," the younger one said next.

"You are late," the man on the table said as he continued to sip on his wine while gazing at the scenery outside.

"I'm sorry, Sir Gridhacker, it costs us some hardships to get here from Thenident," GraphicZ answered.

"Are you going to give me another excuse again after failing to acquire the fragment from the auction?" Gridhacker said, he finally turned and looked at the two as he put down his cup on the table. "Do you want to go back to Master and informed him about your failure?"

"No, sir! We are currently gathering information to find out about the player who had gotten the fragment. We will get it back, sir!" GraphicZ said with anxiety.

"Please trust us, sir! We will not fail!" Soundeffect added, his face was filled with dread.

The two males in coats were half-bowing to express their respect. Gridhacker left them in that position for a while before he uttered, "sit."

The two exhaled a relieved breath and took the two prepared chairs.

"There is no need anymore for you two to look for the fragments," Gridhacker said.

The two looked at each other before asking, "why is that, sir?"

"Because I have found out its whereabouts."

"You have?" GraphicZ said with surprise.

"As expected of one of the administrators, nothing is impossible for one such as you," Soundeffect praised.

"There is no need for bootlicking," Gridhacker said. "I only found out about this due to luck. Do the two of you want to know about it?"

GraphicZ and Soundeffect nodded simultaneously.

"As you know, I was here for other business of dealing with the top guilds. One of which is the Death Associates. Now this guild here had regular contacts with their mates in Capital Thereath, which is the place where the two of you mentioned to be where the player who has outbid you is located. The guild's co-leader, White Death, had given me two pieces of interesting news regarding that capital. Just yesterday, there has been a movement by a small part of the kingdom's army. This army is supposed to be moving to a ruin called Temple of Divine Squall, located in the Fulgur region. The move is supposed to be a quest to find a cure for a Duchess of the Kingdom. Due to this unusual event, I had submitted a report to the Master. He informed me that this is a quest precipitated by the fragments coming together."

"The fragments have been assembled?" GraphicZ said, astounded.

They had been having troubles getting on even one, despite using the NPC force, the Cult of Phobos. From the last intel this cult had gathered for them, out of the three fragments, one was still in the hand of the cult's defector, which they are still chasing. Another was still with Duke Alfredo, the cult had

trouble infiltrating the duke's mansion again after their last failed attempt. The last fragment was suspected to be with a member of the Trade Association, one that they lost in the auction. The cult had sent its members to ambush this association's member, but they had lost contact with the agents they sent. GraphicZ did not expect someone to have already managed to collect all the fragments in secret.

"Master was certain of it," Gridhacker replied. "Hence we have been tasked with a different mission now."

"Which is?" Soundeffect asked.

"Why of course, we are heading to the Temple of Divine Squall."

"You mention two news just now, sir. What is the other one?" GraphicZ asked.

"The other one is less important, nevertheless, we will deal with it when we have the time," Gridhacker said.

"Which is?"

"White Death has informed me that their guild members in Thereath encountered someone that possessed two classes."

"Two classes...? Wait! That means that person is amongst the ones who stole from Master!"

"Precisely. We will look for this person once we finished dealing with the quest from the fragments."

"Such a pity. It was all because of that girl!" Soundeffect exclaimed. "If it was not because of her, Master wouldn't have activated the machine prematurely. We end up having to go through so much trouble to gather up everything."

"There is no use to make an issue out of something that had already happened," Gridhacker said. "Focus on the task at hand. We will depart in one hour. If you have something that needs taken care of, do it posthaste."

"The Fulgur Region is far away from here. It will be very difficult for us to make it before them," GraphicZ said.

"Don't worry, I have made preparations for that," Gridhacker said as he picked up his cup of wine and returned his gaze to the outside view. "For the glory of the Master," he uttered without turning back.

"For the glory of the Master," GraphicZ and Soundeffect uttered similar words.

An army of three thousand soldiers was traveling on mounts through the open grassland. Many of the monsters were scared away by the crossing troops. There were still some occasions where the monsters engaged the army, but it was due to the monsters themselves had also grouped together in large numbers. Still, such occasions were rare. It had only happened twice since the army departed from the capital yesterday.

Jack was within the army. He did not dare to look at the others as most of them were wearing sour looks.

As usual, it was Bowler who finally could not help keeping his thoughts in. He spoke out, "bro, where is this abundance of experience points you said we will get for utilizing the army? I have not gotten even a single point since yesterday."

Jack had commanded the three-hundred-strong company to the front of the formation so his troops could get into action, but most of the monsters did not even dare to approach. On the two rare occasions where battles had happened, it had happened at the other side of the army.

First, it was on the right side. He had commandeered his troops to head over to engage. But unfortunately, it was already over by the time they got there. The second time, it happened on the far left side. The result was the same, everything was over already when he arrived there. He even got scolded by Commander Quintus due to the reckless maneuvering of his troops all over the place.

Crap, this was completely not according to plan, Jack lamented in his mind.

At this time, John called out, "leader, come here."

"What is it?" Jack said grumpily as he went over, he was not in the mood. If this guy made an annoying comment, he would teach him a lesson.

"There are several things I need you to convey to the Duke or the Commander," John said. "I believe it should solve our dilemma of not getting experience points."

"Oh? You have a plan?" Jack said, his hope ignited.

"Of course I have a plan, did you only know me yesterday?" John said.

"Why are you only saying something now?" Jack complained.

"Do you think me omniscient? I need to look at the problem first before I can think of a solution."

"Stop arguing," Jeanny came to mediate. "Please share your thoughts with us then, John."

"Sure thing. See, a beautiful lady does know how to appreciate an innovative thinker like me, unlike some brute."