

World 361

Chapter 361: Triggering A Spark

"Watch your tongue! They are our comrades. Our commander trusts them, so should we!" Another soldier countered.

Jeanny noticed that this soldier was amongst the ones that used to be in the vanguard troops under her. Those that stood behind that soldier and supporting his argument were mostly also from the vanguard troops. These soldiers had fought with them since the start of the expedition, so they were more in support of the presence of the outworlders.

The opposing side, on the other hand, was probably consisted of soldiers taken from amongst the main army. Although they were not originally anti-outworlder, the current stress and desperation had caused them to look for something or someone to blame. Outworlders were the easiest target at the moment.

It couldn't go on like this, Jeanny thought as the heated arguments raged on. It might turn into a physical brawl if they were left as they were.

She looked around, most of everyone was crowded here with tense faces. A team was defending the entrance with a backup team to take over when their HP was getting low. She climbed to a higher ground where he could better see everyone, and everyone could see her.

She hit her spear onto a rock to draw everyone's attention and called out, "all of you, listen!!"

The arguing soldiers stopped and looked at her in confusion. The one that had been saying bad things about the players gave a look that said, 'what is this b*tch doing?'

Jeanny did not mind the expression, she waited until everyone was quiet and gave her their attention. "I know everyone here is on edge, I know many of you blame us, outworlders. You maybe right, you maybe wrong, but none of that matters right now. Even if you put the blame on us, your problem here will not be resolved. Understand that we are all trapped here with you and are sharing your fate. Now I have a solution that can get us out of here, but I will need for you all to listen!"

She gave them a slight pause as she observed their faces. Those who were antagonistic seemed to wear skeptical expressions to her claim, but their militaristic discipline kept them from being unruly.

'I hope you really had a good plan to break us out, Storm,' Jeanny said in his mind.

"You are right to be frustrated. After all, we are foreigners," Jeanny continued. "We are not the natives of this world such as you. We don't know why we are called upon this world. I hope there is a reason, but I know not of such reason. And I can tell you that even if we want to, we can't leave this world. So whether you like it or not, you are stuck with us. I can't say for all the outworlders, but I can tell you this, me and my friends that are in this expedition, we want to be a part of you, a part of your world. We will work for it, we will prove to you that we deserve to share this world with you, but we will need you to give us a chance."

"I grew up in a family who used to travel around. I was brought by my parents to move around constantly. From one place to another. I have always been greeted by one stranger to another. I can tell

you that I understand how it feels when you are forced to make friends with someone unknown to you. I know how scary it is to have to work with someone you don't know. The inconvenience of trying to learn if these strangers truly have the same best interest as me."

"I can tell you that if you do not give these strangers the chance, you will just be pushing them away, and making them as everything you are afraid them to be. I am asking you to not push us away. At least for the ones that have come with you on this expedition."

She gave another pause again, those antagonistic soldiers seemed to soften a bit.

"I thank you for have come with us till here. Now, I ask you to trust us one more time. You all know that our scouts have not found any other exit from this place. And we can't stay here defending this place, we won't last that long. We have to break out!"

One of the soldiers finally could not keep his silence anymore, "how do you suggest we do that? Going out will just be a death sentence for us!"

"I have someone on the outside, they are making the preparations now. They will create a distraction to draw away the orcs' attention. At that time, if we force our way through, we will be able to break their blockage."

"And what good will that do us?" Another soldier asked. "We will just be getting surrounded by them again."

"My friend out there has prepared a way to stop the orcs for a while. He will also be able to keep these orcs at bay as long as we continued running."

The soldiers looked at each other, Jeanny knew they were not convinced. After all, the plan sounded vague. She herself was not truly convinced, but her job now was to exude confidence that will move these people to action.

"There are many details that I know you would like to know, but we are running out of time! We need to make our preparation now if we are to go through with this plan. I ask that you trust me. I swear by the God of my world and the Gods and Goddesses of this, that if you give me your trust, I will bring you out and back to the main army! You will bring the honor back to the capital, as someone who fought through an encirclement of the orcs army and live to tell the tale. Now, are you with me!?"

There was a long silence after the question, yet Jeanny continued to hold an expectant and confident gaze as she stood tall on the higher ground.

Finally, one soldier stood out. "You can count on me!" He exclaimed.

Jeanny noticed that he was the one who was in an argument on behalf of the outworlders. As the first spark was triggered, several other soldiers that were with him started to come out as well and declared their stance to follow Jeanny's plan.

The soldier who had been antagonistic to the outworlders had a complex expression. But he soon decided and came out as well. "I am in," he said. The others behind him followed suit. Soon all the soldiers had one voice.

Jeanny gave them a slight bow, "I sincerely give you all my thanks. Now, let us prepare!"

At the outside, Jack had relayed his plan to the others. During this brief respite, everyone had also recovered themselves using recovery potions added with the help of the two healer soldiers. They had also made sure their mounts were fully healed. They were now simply waiting for the news from the other side.

"We are ready, waiting for your cue," Jack soon received Jeanny's message.

"Great, wait for my cue," Jack replied.

He then looked at the others, "it's showtime." Then to the prince, he asked, "are you ready?"

Prince Alonzo nodded, "I will do my best."

Jack could see the resolute expression from the prince. The prince had always been the obedient type, but he also had the energetic temperament of a young adult, which had caused his eagerness to join the shock troops. Jack could see that he had matured a lot from the incident today. Men had lost their lives because of him, and this would happen again in the future. The prince could see now that this was his fate that came with his station.

"All right, let's go!"

Ten of them rode out, including Jack and the prince, leaving eight who stayed behind in hiding. The ten had their mounts galloped at full speed towards the orcs army.

The orcs who were making preparation to send another wave into Barren Rocks, noticed the incoming humans. The leader who was a hulking orc carrying a giant crossbow on his back, huffed with a sneer, "what are those clowns doing?"

The other orcs started to laugh with ridicule hearing their leader's comment. A team of ten people rushing at an army of at least nine hundred did appear comical.

"Send a squad to intercept them!" The leader said lazily before turning his attention back to organizing the units to wear down the human troops inside.

A squad of twenty orc soldiers came out to engage the ten incoming humans. Seeing this orc squad, the ten humans steered their mount sideways, avoiding the squad while still heading towards the orc army. The orcs at the perimeter of the army looked in confusion as they saw this small human team ran perpendicular to them, as a squad of their teammates chased after this team.

Those with good eyesight suddenly exclaimed. "Hey, isn't that the human's prince?"

Chapter 362: Breaking Out

The others gave more attention to the small human team once they heard it. "It really is the prince!" Another said. The prince's image had been circulated among the army, as he was their main target, so almost every orc in this army knew what the third prince looked like.

This news soon reached the leader with the giant crossbow. "Chieftain Jomo, should we send more people to chase?" His aide asked.

Jomo Sharpstone, who was the leader, made another huff. "Of course, we are! But we are not sending everyone. I will go myself and bring half of our men to spread out and encircle the prince's team. You will stay here with the remaining half and continued the pressure on the humans inside."

"Your order will be carried, mighty chieftain," the aide said and immediately went to gather the orcs.

Jack had been circling around not far from the main team playing cat and mouse with the pursuing team. As part of the shock troops who were responsible for the ambush on the enemy's supply carts, they had the fastest mounts, so the pursuing team could not catch up to them. Soon he saw many orcs came out and went after them.

"Bait is taken, let's ride!" he said to the others and they increased their pace. They went eastward with the pursuing orcs hot on their heel. The orcs fanned out. There were also those with fast mounts in the orc's teams. These teams took positions at the two furthest sides, trying to flank Jack's group from both sides.

Jack could not produce any complicated plan like John, his plan was a simple bait and lure plan. Though it was crude, it was still effective though since now the orcs guarding the entrance was just a bit more than Jeanny's troops.

When he thought that he had lured the orcs far enough, he sent a message to Jeanny, "do it now!"

Jeanny, who had been waiting for the cue, gave the signal to go. The ones that were still fighting with the orcs at the entrance immediately broke away and retreated. As they retreated, they gave way to a charging army from behind.

The advancing orcs were stunned by this revelation. They were just a small squad that was tasked to exhaust the enemy. They did not have the number nor the power to block such a powerful charge. The ones that could dodge, jumped to the side, while the ones who couldn't get trampled by the mounts.

Jeanny had arranged for the front of the charging army to be officers with the highest level and HP. Each of them was equipped with a long weapon such as spears or polearms. Those that originally did not use such weapons exchanged the weapons with their fellow soldiers who did. The long weapons allowed them to deliver a powerful hit to their enemies to unbalance them before their mounts crashed into them.

The mounts that these high-level soldiers rode were also one with the highest HP. Jeanny had made sure to have all their mounts healed to max HP before charging out. There was also a team of healer soldiers behind these vanguard soldiers. They were to continuously use their heal spells on the vanguard's mounts. Jeanny had asked them to ignore the soldiers and focused on the mounts. The soldier's high HP should allow them to sustain damage long enough, but if they lost their mounts, they would be sitting ducks.

The vanguard soldiers formed an arrowhead formation as they charged out. The orcs that formed a line to barricade the entrance were taken completely by surprise. They had continued to send waves of teams into the entrance to give the humans inside the illusion that they were still at full strength. They never thought that the humans inside would decide to break out once half of their forces left to chase after the human prince.

The orcs were not all clustered at the entrance. Many were at the sides building up camps. They thought they would be having a long siege. Therefore, the force directly in front of the entrance was thinner than expected. The charging human army managed to punch through into the open.

With the orcs' barricades cleared, the human soldiers following poured forth with little resistance. The orcs could only attack them from the side, but such attacks did not hinder their movements. Jeanny had also arranged so that both sides were comprised of heavy armor soldiers, their mounts were also arranged so they were only slightly less than the vanguard units.

The three hundred human units soon rode away from the orcs army who watched in stupefaction. The chieftain's aide who was left in charge was bellowing at his underlings in rage. The cry brought them back to sense and everyone immediately summoned their mounts as they gave chase.

"Go north! We will join you soon," Jeanny received Jack's message.

Jack's team had made a turn northward as Jeanny's troops charged out from the entrance. His turn brought him close to the one side of the orcs' troops who fanned out.

When these enemies got close, some of the human soldiers started tossing out small balls at the approaching orcs. These balls exploded on impact and created paralyzing fields around their areas of impact. These were the Disruptive Bombs, which Jack had distributed to each of the soldiers in this baiting mission.

Any orcs that came near were stopped by these disruptive bombs. The damage was nothing for these NPCs, but it stopped their movements and allowed Jack's team to put distance. Jack and the single mage remaining in his team were also casting Arcane Turbulence and put them at their heels. Those chasing after and came into the areas of these two spells got their movements slowed.

Jack heard a loud roar of rage from afar.

"Watch out!" He heard Peniel's shout.

Coupled by Peniel's warning and his intuition, he turned his head and looked in the direction of the roar. He caught a flash and immediately activated Dragon's Eye out of instinct. The slow-motion of his vision allowed him to catch the sight of a spear flying straight at them. From its flight path, it was heading at the prince.

He was directly beside the prince, Jack urged his steed to the side and saw in slow motion as his steed slowly bumped with the prince's. It altered their path slightly to the right. He was now in the spear's path instead. He bent his body down as he saw the spear slowly went past him. He could see crackles of electricity following the spear as it flew past. This was no ordinary spear throw, it was sent with a skill's effect. He had no doubt that he would be a goner if it hit his body.

As if to prove the case, the spear that had missed Jack and the prince, impaled an unaware level 35 soldier who was riding in the front. The single hit drained out the soldier's entire HP. The soldier fell lifelessly to the ground. There was nothing they could do but continued riding forward.

Jack looked back to the origin of the spear and saw from a far distance a hulking orc with his hands on a very large crossbow.

Crap! That spear was a crossbow bolt? Jack exclaimed in his mind.

But it appeared that the orc could only make that one shot with the deadly skill. He was also standing on his feet on the ground, meaning he could not shoot that giant crossbow while mounted. So they would soon be out of the range of his shot.

Jack continued to look back at that orc as his steed continued to run forward just to make sure. Luckily it was as he had expected, that orc did not fire a second bolt from that giant crossbow.

The orcs continued to chase after them as they fled. They soon saw Jeanny's army. Jack's team joined with theirs.

"Continued running North!" He yelled. "Oh, and don't trample the eight in front!"

"What eight?" Jeanny asked, but he soon saw eight figures in the distance. They were standing at a fixed interval, around fifteen meters from each other. Jeanny immediately bellowed to the soldiers and made sure they steer clear from those eight.

As they passed through, Jeanny saw that those eight were human soldiers as well. They continued to stand there as they waited for the orc army who was chasing from behind.

What are they doing? Jeanny thought with puzzlement.

When the orc army was close, these eight each unfurled a scroll. A long wall of plants soon sprouted out where they stood. Each wall was fifteen meters long. Since they stood at an interval of fifteen meters from each other, the resulting eight scrolls created a wall with a total length of a hundred and twenty meters.

Jack had given all eight of his magic scrolls containing the Wall of Vines spell to these eight.

Chapter 363: Endurance Contest

The orcs that were rushing forward were too fast to halt their advance. They soon crashed into these walls, which then tightly bound them and held them in place. The others at the back continued to crash forward, but the wall held on. It was bulging forward due to the forward pressure, but more and more vines came out to hold and bind the orcs.

The eight soldiers that had used the magic scrolls immediately mounted up and chased after the human army once their tasks were done.

The orcs army at the back tried to circumvent the long wall to continue their chase, but they had lost their momentum. The human army had gone far away.

Jack and Jeanny continued to urge the troops to go at high speed. Ignoring the fact that they kicked up a large dust cloud that exposed their positions. It was difficult to hide in the desert anyway. Their footprints on the sand made them easily tracked by the enemy. Unless they had decided to divide into many teams and made their enemies confused about which track to follow, like what the cavalry reserve troops had done when they tried to flee.

Jack continued to give direction to the troops. He watched on his radar if any enemies were approaching, and took a different direction. Many small squads started chasing them already, but Jack snaked around with the help of his radar. Their pursuers soon bundled into a large group that combined with the still-chasing left-wing of the orcs army.

Getting back to the main army might be difficult, but not impossible as long as they could continue to avoid any hindrance and put their pursuers at their back. Even if the orcs formed a barricade, it will be a thin one since they would need to cover a long line. They were only expecting the prince to be in a small splinter group. If they charge through with their current three hundred man army, that barricade was as good as none existent.

He contacted John to ask for an update on the situation of the main army.

John told him that several of the cavalry troops that separated had joined back with them. The enemy was now trying to copy their tactic and aiming for their supply carts. They were now forming a turtle-shell formation encircling their supply carts and were just playing defense.

From the clash at the start of the war, the orcs had suffered many casualties due to their disadvantageous position. And later they lost many of their mage and healer units again due to the charge executed by the cavalry reserve troops. If not for the prince's presence being exposed within that cavalry troops, the human army would have reaped more. However, due to the orc's main army shifted their focus to chase after the prince, their main army instead received a heavy blow and suffered even more casualties.

In total, the orcs had lost close to half of their army at around 3000 casualties. While the human army lost almost 1000. The humans who were now defending the supply carts were around 1500, the ones with Jack numbered 300, the rest were scattered around the battlefields. The orcs that were sieging the human main army numbered over 2000, while the ones chasing after Jack's group were around 1000, with the others roaming around the battlefield looking for stragglers.

John said by his estimation Jack and the others had managed to destroy around 70% of the orcs' supply carts. They would not be able to maintain a prolonged battle. He was confident that the orcs would just insist on this war for another one day before they had to retreat, two days at most.

He also told Jack that he better not tried to reconvene with the main army at this time. The orc's main army was currently encircling them. Even if Jack could charge his troops through these orcs, they could not break their defensive formation to let Jack's troops in.

"So what do you suggest us do?" Jack asked.

"Keep running," John simply answered.

"Ugh... what about if we harass the orcs encircling you? We attack their main army from outside while you attack from inside. We should be doing enough damage to them."

"Well, if we both attack, that might be the case. But it will most likely be you attack, we still defend. We can't afford to break our defensive formation just for you. The goal now is not to trim their numbers, it is to last longer. So stop trying to be a hero and go play tag with those orcs chasing you."

'Play tag your *ss!' Jack cursed in his mind. Did he just expect them to continue running for the whole day and the whole night?

Yet, that was exactly what they did. They continued to run. The players were less troubled since their game bodies were less affected by physical fatigue, but they still felt mentally tired and sleepy. The NPC soldiers were the other way around. Their regular military training allowed them to stay focus even if they forgo sleep the entire night. Their bodies, however, were prone to tiredness, as with the case of their mounts. A constant fight and running the entire day had sapped their stamina.

Jeanny could see through their tiredness, even though their pride as a soldier prevent them from showing it. She discussed this with Jack quietly. They saw that the orcs were also affected with the same problem, they could not continue to chase after them non-stop, hence their chasing speed was slowing down. They adjusted the soldiers marching speed to match with their pursuers, so they slowed down as well when the orcs slowed down, to preserve stamina. Jack made sure though, that their distance would always be outside the range of that fearsome giant crossbow.

Another thing that they noticed was the number of the orcs chasing them had reduced. Probably to only twice their size. The others had broken off to another place.

The fact was Hubesi who led the main army had sent a messenger to Jomo to call the left-wing to return in aiding the siege on the enemy's main army. If not for the prince who was right ahead of him, Jomo would have led all his troops back. He kept 600 units in the chase, twice the number of their preys, while the other 400 he sent back to aid the main army.

Jomo had tried to use a trick to get to his prey. When they arrived at a landscape where there were large sand dunes, he had instructed a part of his troops who still had enough stamina, to break away to behind the sand dunes and attempted a flank.

In order to mask a part of his army breaking off, he had his army made a mad dash which kicked up a large dust cloud. The cloud masked the platoon which had separated. Jomo then had the main army go at an angle that forced the human troops in a direction that would have them closer with the platoon that was creeping behind the sand dunes.

But Jack laughed at the attempt, all because he could see their movements easily from his radar. He simply led the troops at an angle away from both the orc forces.

Jomo was morose, he had tried several other maneuvers, but the opponents continued to move in the direction away from his expectation. In the end, he could only chase after them in a straightforward and unambiguous manner.

Jack continued to have the troops matched pace with their pursuers. If they stopped to rest, they stopped as well. It was not like he was trying to lose them. They could not get too far away from the main army as well, after all. So they just went in a large circle around the desert with the main army at its center, all the while playing a cat and mouse game with the orc pursuers.

This continued until the next day. Both the humans and the Orcs were unmounted now, most of their mounts were too tired to move already. They walked slowly with blank expressions. Their eyes were listless as their feet continued to move like an automaton. Viral Cora who had been constantly complaining the whole night had also stopped chattering, she probably was too sleepy to talk now.

Jack was still fine since he was used to spending a day or two without sleep playing games during special occasions where the developers handed out quests or rewards for a limited time. The others though, were not faring so well. By the look of it, the players might succumb to their mental fatigue before the soldiers.

Now it was just a contest of endurance with their pursuer. Who gave up first would be the loser.

Before noon, Jack finally received the message he had been waiting for.

"Hey, expert. I see that you are still alive? Come back to the main army," John's message said.

Chapter 364: Reconvene With The Main Army

Jack did not mind the guy's insensitive comment, he was just glad that this would be over soon.

He heard some drumming sound in the distance. The orcs started to move away after this drum sound was heard. He assumed the sound contained some messages that only the orc understood. This must be how they communicated in the field, since they didn't have instant communication system like the players. That sound just now must have called for them to regroup with the main army.

As the orcs left, they also headed in the same direction, making sure not to get too close with the marching orcs.

When they arrived back at the place where the main battlefield used to take place. They saw both armies were lining neatly opposite each other. Jack and the others joined back with the main army. Bailey was there, she went to receive Prince Alonzo. She had managed to break free from Hubesi and the other orcs after providing enough time for the prince to escape. She had been searching around the battlefield in vain for the prince before regrouping with the main army and was told by Captain Salem that the prince was safe with Jack.

In the empty space between the two armies, the leaders of the Humans and the Orcs stood facing each other and appeared to be conversing. The players went forward to the front of the army to where John and Captain Salem were standing.

"What are they doing? Having after-war chats?" Jack asked John.

"Something like that," John replied simply.

'Should have known to not ask this a**hole,' Jack grumbled in his mind. Captain Salem was more considerate. He told Jack that both parties had decided on a ceasefire. The leaders were discussing the terms and agreeing on non-aggression for a determined timeline.

"There is such a thing?" Jack asked.

"Apparently there is, it's their culture. At least for the humans and orcs," John commented.

"Good thing there is no casualties amongst the duke's and the others," Jack said, but he could see most of them had their HP less than half already. "I was worried there will be some that die, considering they fought for entire day and night."

"They only fought to prevent the other from interfering with the battle of the army," Captain Salem explained. "They were not really serious to fight to the death. There was also Laurent present, it would be difficult to kill someone if the High Priest intends on keeping the said person alive. That Overseer beside the Warlord is also a Master Shaman, his healing prowess was not low either."

"I thought they were fighting separately?"

"They were at first," John said. "But when the High Priest started healing the others that were low in HP, the Orc Master Shaman did the same as well."

"Anyway, glad the war is over. It is really over, right?" Jack asked.

"Looks like it, for now," Captain Salem said.

"Great, I was sleepy as hell," Jack said, he looked to the side and saw some of the players were already lying down on the sandy ground, uncaring of the soldiers around who gave them weird looks.

"Oh, so you guys haven't slept? I had a really nice sleep last night inside the defensive formation," John gloated.

Jack completely ignored the guy as he asked Captain Salem, "so how long will this peace talk last? Can I go to the back and assembled my tent first?"

Before Captain Salem could reply, a thundering voice suddenly resounded, "Who is the outworlder that killed my son! Show yourself!!"

Jack looked over and saw that it was the aide of the Warlord who had made the shout, the one that they called the Overseer and Master Shaman.

"I'm Badu Thickskull, Overseer of the army of Warlord Abasi Raretooth! I demand the outworlder who was with the Prince to show himself! You have the guts to kill my son and yet did not dare to show yourself? Coward!!"

An orc came over to the Overseer's side, he then pointed in the direction of Jack. Badu's eyes stared straight at Jack as he shouted, "you? Coward! Are you the one that killed my son? Are you so coward to deny it?"

Jack was stumped by the sudden allegation. He yelled back, "the hell! Mister, I don't even know who your son is!"

"My son is Wangombe Thickskull! You killed him when you are with the prince!"

Oh, Wangombe. Now he remembered. It was that Grunt orc who he had killed together with the Captain of his team when he was saving the prince.

"Oh, that piece of crap is your son? I'm sorry! I was saving the prince at the time, I have no choice but to do it," Jack said.

Jeanny rolled her eyes at him. Do you have to apologize and insult people at the same time?

John, on the other hand, gave him a thumb up.

Hearing Jack's words, Overseer Badu roared with rage. He made a lunge forward, but both Duke Alfredo and Commander Quintus came and stood on his path.

"Badu, Stop!" Warlord Abasi stepped in.

Badu stopped, but his body was still trembling with rage.

Commander Quintus said, "death is common on the battlefield. It is not just that outworlder who killed your son, my soldiers play a part as well. Your son had also killed many of my soldiers. Are you to deny his honor like this?"

"Do not teach me about honor, human!" Badu roared. "I have no problem with your soldiers. As you said, this is war. It is our duty to fight. But these outworlders are different! They are outsiders! They know nothing of our honor!"

Warlord Abasi said to Duke Alfredo, "duke, give me that outworlder, I will promise you support of peace from our clan against your kingdom, and I will send you conciliatory gifts when I get back to my clan."

"I am sorry, those outworlders are our comrades. We are not going to sell our comrades," the duke replied without hesitation.

"Hmph! Are you saying they are worth our wrath? They are just weak outsiders!"

"Let me tell you, these weak outsiders are the reason that you failed this war. It was thanks to their plan and their cooperation that we managed to beat you back despite your superior number."

Warlord Abasi frowned when he heard it. The duke didn't sound to be lying.

Badu was unwilling, he yelled, "I don't care! If you don't give me that outworlder, I'll—"

"Badu, control yourself!" Warlord Abasi called out.

"But...!"

"There will be time for revenge, now is not the time."

Badu gave a death stare at Jack, he knew it would not be possible to take his vengeance now. After all, he was also the one that had reasoned with the warlord to stop the war. With the supply carts they had at the moment, it was only enough for a return trip to their nation. If they insisted on continuing the fight, they would be left with the decision to go all out against the human army and hopefully steal their supply carts when they defeated the human. There was no reason for this desperate do-or-die option.

Not to mention the probability of winning was also not that high. The supply carts not only housed water and food, but also recovery potions. Natives didn't have the magical space bag like the outworlders, so they had to carry the potions physically on their belts or backpacks. The army had been fighting with limited recovery potions and they had also lost a significant amount of healers due to the charge by the human cavalry reserve troops. So even though they still outnumbered the humans, the chance of victory was actually rather low.

That was of course before he learned of his son's demise. Now he wished he had counseled the warlord to continue fighting. He roared loudly before turning away, pushing all the orcs that were in his way.

'Great, now I got another high-level native enemy. Is this luck stat of mine really working?' Jack complained in his mind.

"With your personality? Even triple your current luck stat will not be enough to avoid more enemies," Peniel commented.

Warlord Abasi gave a last look and said, "I congratulate you on your victory, Duke Alfredo. The glory this time is yours. Do understand that I will claim it back for my honor." He then turned around and left.

"Wait!" Duke Alfredo called out.

"What is it? Our conversation should have finished," Warlord Abasi stopped and said, but didn't turn back to look at the duke.

"Our army's movement. You should have found out about it from someone. Can you let me know how you come to this information?"

Warlord Abasi snickered and said, "your second prince." He then walked away. There was no need to protect the second prince, he was not an ally after all. Let the princes of Themisphere fought amongst each other. That should weaken the country enough to allow an opportunity for an invasion.

The orcs started to retreat in an orderly manner. Warlord Abasi came to the side of the fuming Badu.

Badu noticed the presence of his liege, and said, "I'm sorry, my lord. This rage has taken over me. I find it hard to control it even with this age of mine. I'm truly ashamed."

"There is no shame in it," Warlord Abasi said. "I will carry this vengeance with you as well, Wagonbe was also a part of my army after all. But as you see, that outworlder is protected by the Themisphere kingdom. We can't do anything to him if he continues to stay inside the kingdom. One way to solve that is to invade their country, but in order to do that, our Raretooth clan has to become the first clan, our chief becomes the grand chief. I will do all I can to make that happen, and then we will both get our revenge, my humiliation here, and the loss of your son."

"I will put everything in me to support that into reality, my lord," Badu said passionately.

Warlord Abasi had a moment of silence before he said, "there is probably a need to change our nation's policy once we are back, I will talk with my father, the chief, once we are back."

"What policy is that, my lord?"

"We should stop disregarding our nation's outworlders."

Chapter 365: Atonement

Commander Quintus reorganized the army once the orcs retreated. Multiple tents were erected. Everyone needed to rest after the long fight. Especially the ambusher troops which had been constantly chased around all night. The main army still had the chance to rest yesterday night since they could alternate between the ones who rested with the ones who defended. The orcs' main army had also done the same.

Jack took out his small camping tent, he did not intend to wait for the army to finish setting up the tents. However, before he could get into his tent, he heard a commotion. He looked over and saw Samuel kneeling down in front of the Prince.

Jack walked over and found that Samuel had just found out about the matter with Ronnie. He was the one who had recommended Ronnie to become one of the Prince's personal guards. He had been so confident when he vouched for him, but the guy turned out to be a traitor.

"I have gained the intel directly from that traitor, Samuel. I know you are not aware of his treachery. You are not at fault," Prince Alonzo said.

"No! My unawareness of his treason itself is a sin! I should have found out before he does any damage, but instead, I did not. I thank Heaven for not allowing his mission to succeed. If that had happened, even killing myself a hundred times will not be enough for atonement. Now, I will only need to die once to atone for this sin!"

He pulled out one of his two tomahawk axes, he put it in front of his neck to slash it.

Jack did not know when an NPC wanted to commit suicide, they would just require one slash by themselves, or they had to hack themselves repeatedly until their HP reach zero. If it was the latter, it would be rather comical.

Still, he didn't wait to find out. In his half-sleepy state, his hand instinctively slashed out with his Storm Breaker. A crescent light hit the tomahawk axe that was just about to dig into Samuel's neck. Jack's attack was nothing for this high-level NPC, but the impact was enough to halt Samuel's attempt.

"What is the meaning of this?!" Samuel looked at Jack angrily.

"What a drama queen, uh, I mean, king," Jack uttered, drowsily. "If you really want to atone, giving your death is worthless, that is the easy way out. You should instead give the prince your life! You should work your whole life for the prince to make up for this sin that so bothered you. That will be more beneficial to the prince, rather than you just leave now and let the prince fend for himself. Now, since you already decided to give your life and death to the prince, then you have to wait for his permission first before you kill yourself."

Samuel's angered expression turned complex after hearing Jack's words. Despite his emotional state, he appeared to be seriously contemplating Jack's words.

"What mister Storm Wind said was right," Commander Quintus added. "You have served under me for a while, Samuel. I never pegged you for a coward who will choose the easy way out."

"I am not a coward!" Samuel exclaimed.

"Then give your fate to the prince to be decided."

"I...," Samuel prostrated himself. "My prince! I give you my life. Please decide what you wish to do with me. I will adhere to your command!"

Prince Alonzo looked at the prostrated officer. He closed his eyes for a while before opening again and said, "in this war, I have also done mistakes. If I didn't act as I did and forced myself to join the cavalry charge troops, things should have gone as planned. Instead, many soldiers had lost their lives because of

it where they would be otherwise still alive. Even though I was not the ones that killed them, I also bear such sin and responsibility to make up to them."

The prince stared at Samuel sharply, "I declare that you are to keep your life and use it to help me bring balance and stability to our kingdom. Now that we know that this war was brought forward due to my second brother's scheme, and my first brother had sent an assassin on me, I can't pretend to not vying for power with them anymore. With all of you who are willing to support me, I will strive to become the king that deserves all your efforts!"

Jack could see the officers and the soldiers who heard the prince was rather motivated by his speech. That young prince was now giving more of the vibe of a monarch compared to the previous. This cadet had truly grown after this ordeal. Even his level had increased another level again to 27.

Jack was however too tired to think about it all, he slowly walked back to his tent.

"Storm Wind!"

Jack looked back when his alias was called. Samuel was the one who had called him. "Thank you..." he said.

Jack simply smiled and waved at him, he really was very sleepy. Before he entered his tent, he saw Jeanny who should have been equally tired as him. She was calling those that had lied on the sandy ground, to wake up and go sleep in the large tent the military had erected.

Such a responsible leader, Jack thought as he headed inside his tent.

The army ended up spending the whole day and another night to rest. There were plenty that had been wounded in the war. The healers were hard at work to heal them to a stable condition.

After Jack woke up, he had gone around the battlefield where he had led his team in ambush. He wanted to check if there was still any loot lying around, which only drew a mocking laugh from Peniel. She reminded him again that dropped loots only lasted for three hours. Even if he went directly to search for the loots when the orc army left, he would still not find any loots left.

He spent the remaining free time practicing spell formation. He also leveled up his Storm Breaker. He fed Ronnie's Venomous Viper sword to it, bringing it up directly five levels, and used its poisoning ability.

Storm Breaker, level 35 (rare one-handed sword, bound weapon)

Physical damage 195

Attack speed 3

Cannot be destroyed

Bound to Storm Wind

Dexterity +6

15% chance to cause Poison status effect on each attack

Overlimit: Release the weapon's hidden power that adds an additional 200% damage as chaos damage, increase weapon range by 2 feet, and decrease target's defense by 70%. Duration 120 seconds.
Cooldown 8 hours

He had also used his gemstones for runecrafting. He had four gemstones in his bag, emerald, amber, diamond, and amethyst. The emerald and amber were useless for now since their elements were wind and earth respectively. He took out the uncommon diamond and rare amethyst gemstones.

Amethyst was of lightning element so it was compatible with both his Runestone of Probability and Runestone of Luck. Peniel explained to Jack that Diamond was a special gemstone that had no element, and was compatible with all elements, making it the most valuable of all gemstones. She also explained that the uncommon compatible gemstone would give 50 elemental energies, while the rare one gave 200 points. Meaning these two gemstones had a total of 250 elemental energies if he used them on Lightning-based runestone.

His Runestone of Luck was of Rare grade and required 1000 elemental energies to upgrade to Super Rare. So he would not be able to upgrade it at this time. He decided to use the rare amethyst on Runestone of Probability and the uncommon diamond on Runestone of Luck. After injecting the energy, the runestone flared up and upgraded from Uncommon grade to Rare grade.

Runestone of Probability (rare runestone)

increase approx. 25% success chance to auxiliary jobs.

Elemental energy required for upgrade: 110/1000

There was another surprising event after the orcs retreated and the war ended. Same event but happening to two persons. The first person was John, he announced that he had received something called a talent after the war ended. The talent was named Strategist. It increased his Intelligence by 10% and all NPCs under his command received an additional 20% damage and stamina or mana.

Hearing his claim, Jeanny said that she also received one. Hers was called Motivator, it increased her Wisdom by 10%, and all NPCs under her command received an additional 20% defense and HP.

Everyone joked that they should form a joint command army then. Their combined bonus would give an all-around upgrade to the NPC's prowess. Jack, on the other hand, was feeling glum. Although their talents only give a boost to one stat while his was two, the ability it gave sound much more useful compared to his. His Investigator talent only gave him an unreliable ability to detect clues from the environment and lies from NPCs.

Still, he was happy for them. Those talents they got do indeed suit their persons.

Chapter 366: Like A Hero

In the morning of the next day, they resumed the expedition again. Since the army had decreased in size, they could not afford to have three vanguard troops as previously. Commander Quintus only spared Jack two hundred soldiers to be used as vanguard troops, with numerous individual scouts which spread out around the main army for early detection in case the orcs decided to return. Although a ceasefire agreement was reached with the orc army, they still couldn't afford to be careless.

With only one vanguard troop, the experience gathered was less rapid, but still more abundant than if they did monster-grinding normally. Before the expedition resumed, Jack thought that he had caught up in level with the others after killing Wangombe. Only to find out dejectedly that the others had reached level 28 in the war, still placing the others ahead of him.

Jack did not see an increase in the soldiers' powers despite John and Jeanny's talents. He thought probably because the commander had appointed him as their leader instead of those two. So, their talent's effect was not triggered.

The monsters they encountered were still mostly Giant Scorpions and Flame Tigers. Only when Captain Salem informed him that they were close to their destination that they met the last monster in Jack's Hunting quests, Tri-colored Cockatrice.

The monster looked like a giant rooster with scaly skin, a lizard tail, and bat wings. Its lizard tail was green in color, its scaly body bronze, while its rooster head was red. Thus, the three colors in its name.

It could not fly though despite the wings, so it's easier to organize the soldiers against them. Flying monster would just fly over the formation, making the formation useless. However, the fights were still tough. Apart from these monsters having an average level of 40, after being sufficiently damaged, these cockatrices would unleash a projectile attack from their eyes that paralyzed the ones that got hit. The paralyzed soldiers would be immobile and open for attacks.

Luckily, the cockatrices could not use this attack often, so another soldier just went up to cover for his paralyzed comrade. Nevertheless, these cockatrices liked to attack in a large number, so if they all used these paralyzing attacks at the same time, it still caused a headache since a large number of soldiers would be incapacitated for a duration.

They continued to advance at a steady pace while obliterating the Tri-colored Cockatrice. Soon, the outline of a structure could be seen in the distance. Was it another mirage? In the two days since they resumed the expedition, they had seen such images twice, and both times had proven to just be mirages.

When several small ruins were seen in proximity, they then exhaled a breath of relief, it was no mirage. When Jack opened his Map interface, he could see the large structure they saw in the distance had the name written, Temple of Divine Squall. They had finally arrived.

The large structure in the distance was not the only ruins. There were lots of small size ruins spread out with the temple at its center. The layout made it seem that this place was most likely a bustling town in the past. Now, there were only ruins left, roamed by monsters. The vanguard troops continued onward as they cleared out the monsters and made their way to the temple.

Suddenly, three strange-looking monsters blocked their path. It was unlike the Tri-colored cockatrices which they had been fighting all this time. These new ones looked more like a giant lizard than a rooster. Jack used his God-eye monocle to scan them.

Ruin Basilisk (Elite monster, Magical), level 45

HP: 92,000

"Warn the soldiers to not look at their eyes when they started to glow," Jack heard Peniel's urgent sound.

Jack was puzzled, but he trusted the fairy enough to immediately relayed the command. However, it was too late for the ones at the front. The basilisk's eyes were already shining brightly even as Jack gave the command. The ones in front who were staring directly into the creature's eyes felt their bodies stiffened. To their comrade's horror, their bodies slowly turned into stone.

'Is that stone effect permanent?' Jack asked Peniel.

"For the native, it is as long as the battle is still ongoing. They will turn back if you kill the Basilisk," Peniel answered. "For you outworlders, you will be petrified only for a certain duration of time."

Not that he planned to send players against these monsters, they were still too low-level for these monsters. Jack proclaimed to the soldiers that the ones who turned into stone will return back once they could kill those three basilisks, this motivated the soldiers into action.

"You know, I have always been wondering. How do you know about all this seemingly new information?" John asked from the side. The other players nodded in agreement.

Jack replied truthfully, "I heard voices in my mind." Which the others just treated as he did not want to tell them how he knew what he knew.

These basilisks' level was higher than the average soldiers in the vanguard troop. Hence Captain Salem took to himself to engage one of the three. The other two were handled by another two Knight Lieutenants while the others gave supports.

The Battle was troublesome as the basilisks could use their petrifying gaze quite often. Every one minute their eyes would start to glow and the soldiers would have to look away to dodge the gaze's effect. But this caused an interruption in their assaults and created an opening for the basilisks.

At one time, the basilisk fighting one of the Knight Lieutenant swept its thick tail onto the lieutenant when he turned away to avoid the petrifying gaze. The lieutenant was smashed heavily and flew far away. This allowed the basilisk to charge into the other soldiers and created havoc. Several casualties resulted before the lieutenant came back and stabilized the situation.

The monsters' scales that covered their bodies also had magical properties that absorbed most impacts. Causing the damage delivered by the soldiers to be nerfed.

The battle took a long time, long enough for the main army to catch up. They had just managed to get the three basilisks to half their HP. The other elite soldiers from the main army came and lent a hand. The situation turned better after their assistance.

As they thought the situation was already under control. A large shape jumped onto a nearby ruin. It was another Ruin Basilisk, but this one was at least three times the size of the ones they were fighting, whose size was already bigger than a normal car.

Ruin Basilisk (Special Elite monster, Magical), level 55

HP: 230,000

It was a special elite version, so high a level some more, Jack exclaimed after he inspected the monster.

As it made itself known, its eyes glowed.

"Look away!" Captain Salem instructed.

They did so, yet the glow was reacting differently. It shot out and rained on an area. The soldiers within that area instantly turned to stone despite not looking at the creature.

"Shit! This one is different!" Bowler shouted.

The special elite ruin basilisk's eyes glowed again.

"What? No cooldown?"

As they looked with despair at the eerie glow, a soothing blue breeze swept through the crowd. The eerie glow of the basilisk clashed with this soothing breeze and was dissipated. Jack turned and saw Laurent floating forward.

We are safe!

As Jack was watching Laurent's figure as if a saint gliding through the air, a large yellow spear shot out from behind him with lightning speed. Jack turned back in time and saw the magic spear stabbed at the giant Ruin Basilisk. The spear detonated and created a shockwave that thrown the giant body tens of meters back, destroying all the ruins in its path.

Another figure flew forward, overtaking Laurent as he put himself in front of the giant Ruin Basilisk. Duke Alfredo had arrived, and he alone was more than enough to deal with that monster. It was much weaker than the rare elite Grim Sand Drake after all.

They are doomed! Jack exclaimed as he saw the duke waved his hand. Several crimson chains shot out from the ground and bound the three ruin basilisks who first appeared. They were already at disadvantage dealing with so many soldiers. Now that their movements were bound, they were just target practices.

Laurent cast a spell. Soft light descent from the sky and covered the ones that had turned into stone. The stony surface slowly peeled off and revealed healthy skin. All the ones that had been petrified soon were back to normal again.

"Yeah! Go, go, Sir duke! You are amazing, Mr. Laurent!" Bowler was shouting his throat hoarse.

Seeing these two incredible natives saved the day, the players couldn't help their desire to get stronger soon. They too yearned for the day where they were able to swoop in and saved the day like a hero.

Duke Alfredo's magic power rained down on the giant Ruin Basilisk with a colorful display. His spell was further boosted by Laurent, causing the already powerful spell to become more destructive. The rate by which the giant Ruin Basilisk's HP went down was even faster than the three smaller ones.

Chapter 367: Temple Of Divine Squall

When the giant Ruin Basilisk died, the other three were already in critical states. Duke Alfredo turned to the three and was about to cast his spell when Jack promptly shouted at him, "Your Grace, wait! Just let us finish these three. There is no need for you to trouble yourself!"

Duke Alfredo chuckled and said, "it's no trouble." Three spears of light impaled the three basilisks and sent them to their graves.

'@#&!' Jack was peeved. He was not really worried about troubling the duke, he simply didn't want the duke to shave away the exp points. When the giant Ruin Basilisk died, the players received no exp at all as they didn't involve with the combat in any way. While for the three smaller basilisks, even though the soldiers under them contributed the most in chipping the monsters' HP, the final blow still generated a large portion of the exp points. Now that the duke was the one dealing the killing blow, it was similar to taking away half of their income.

Out of the two days journey, in addition to these three ruin basilisks, many of the players had reached level 29, with the remaining still at level 28. They were only one level away from reaching the level where they could attempt their Elite class trials.

Jack himself still stayed the same, at level 27 Warrior and 26 Mage. For the dropped loots, they distributed equally among themselves as usual. Same as previous, Jack's gains were primarily on the souls. Even for the giant Ruin Basilisk which he got no exp from, he still received its full souls. There were 72,112 souls inside his container. Not as great as what he got from the war, and far from what he got from the Grim Sand Drake, but he could not expect every monster to give a crazy amount as that drake.

He used 70,000 souls to level up Sword of Light to maximum, and Arcane Turbulence to level 5.

Sword of Light, level 20/20 (Active skill), star: 1

Sent sword energy in a linear direction, sword energy deals 600% physical damage, 30% added Critical Chance.

Range: 10 meters

Cooldown: 2 minutes 54 seconds

Stamina: 70

He might be the only player in this game world that had so many skills and spells maxed out already at this stage. The others could only level up theirs by using free points from level up or Skill books which were very rare. They had also got a few of these skill books from the minions killed during this expedition. At that time, Jack showed no interest and just let them bid for it amongst themselves. The others thought that he was being magnanimous for not fighting for the books.

Some of Jack's spells had also upgraded after repeated usage. His Mana Bullets and Energy Bolts had reached the third star. His Power Strike which was originally at the head start had lacked behind since he mostly only used ranged attacks to support the soldiers during this expedition.

After the ruin basilisks were disposed of, they did not meet any more opposition on their way to the temple. Before long, they arrived at the outside of the temple. It was more like a ruin rather than a

temple. Most of its walls and roofs were gone, but at least it still looked like a structure, unlike the Starlight Ruin which he saw in the past that completely had no roof anymore.

Commander Quintus organized the soldiers to station around the huge structure and sent out several scouts to the perimeter to watch in case the orcs returned. Duke Alfredo led a small team to begin an investigation into the temple. He was most eager to complete this expedition. All the outworlders were included in this team.

The inside of the temple was strangely empty, devoid of monsters, as shown by Jack's radar. 'Probably they had been scared away by the huge army?' Jack thought.

They continued to proceed through the empty hallway until they reached the main hall which was surprisingly fully intact. At one side of the hall was a large stage which should be where the orator made their speech. But instead of a preacher, there was a strange-looking opening on the wall behind the stage. It looked as if silvery liquid material was constantly moving around on the vertical surface.

Most of the players recognized that energy portal.

"Dungeon entrance!" Giant Steve exclaimed.

"Dungeon entrance? We call it outworld gate," Duke Alfredo said. "Mostly because it can only be entered by outworlders."

The duke then instructed his men to spread out and searched through every inch of the temple for clues on the duchess' cure. Jack and the others went and studied the dungeon entrance.

"So, is there anyone who volunteers to go in and take a peek?" John asked.

"Why don't you go in yourself?" Bowler said.

"The main character doesn't do that, we usually give that job to the expendable side characters."

"I curse your mother for side character!"

"Now, now, be civil and leave parents out of our quarrel."

Jeanny ignored the two's squabble. He said to Jack, "it shouldn't be dangerous for a peek, right? The dungeons we have encountered showed that we can just come back out again from the same place we enter. If it is too dangerous, we can just immediately hop out."

"There is no guarantee that every dungeon is the same," Jack said, inside his mind, he asked Peniel, 'is that, right?'

"Yes. High-level dungeon's entrance has the chance of serving only one-way," Peniel answered.

"Still, we won't achieve anything if we don't give it a try," Jeanny said.

"True. All right, let me be the one to test the water," Jack offered.

Bowler, who heard, immediately said, "bro, there is no need for you to take the risk."

John immediately concurred, "that's right, you should leave the task to side characters."

Bowler turned his glare at John, which John gleefully ignored.

While they were conversing about what to do, the duke came over to Jack. "How is the search, Your Grace?" Jack asked.

The duke's face was glum. "My men have returned. They found nothing. I have instructed them to repeat the search, but I have little expectation..."

He seemed to struggle before he spoke, "It seemed that this outworld gate is the only significant thing in this temple. I'm afraid whatever it is that we are searching for will be inside it. Unfortunately, we natives can enter this gate. I'm terribly sorry to put this on you, but will you do me a favor and go in to take a look?"

At that time, Jack heard system notification that informed him that he had completed part three of the chain quest, accompany Duke Alfredo to the Temple of Divine Squall. He received decent exp points and coins. Another notification soon popped up of part four of the Chain Quest, enter the dungeon to search for Duchess' cure.

Jack was silent while he conversed with his trusted fairy, 'I will lose the protection of the army if I go into that dungeon. Do you think there is a chance that I can complete this quest?'

"If it is a bona fide SSS quest, I would say no chance in hell. But then again, remember when I told you I'm not too convinced that this is an actual SSS quest?"

'So it's a gamble then?'

"What's to worry about? It's a dungeon, you will only lose 1 level, even if not considering your Immortal Soul. You have taken a much more ridiculous risk when you were facing that Grandmother Spider and Grim Sand Drake."

'That's true. All right then, it's decided!'

Jack accepted the quest, "it will be my honor, Your Grace."

Duke Alfredo clapped Jack's shoulder as he looked at Jack in gratitude. The others looked at the two in envy, how the heck did Jack managed to befriend a high-ranking NPC to this extent? At the same time, Jack also received another notification. His Influence skill, an auxiliary skill under social jobs, had upgraded to Intermediate Apprentice.

Peniel had explained to him that this particular skill was gained by getting to know and increase the affinity with influential natives. In which Duke Alfredo, Prince Alonzo, and such, clearly fell into this category. The effect of this skill, however, was vaguer. Peniel described it will increase the earned reputation and affinity, and influence natives' viewpoints and reactions upon him. The later part was oddly similar to the effect of the Diplomacy skill.

With this, all his Social auxiliary skills were in intermediate apprentice grade. Jack didn't care though, these auxiliary skills were just sideshows for him. If they increased, it's good. He would not specifically try to strive for them.

"Okay, you lots. Make your preparation, we will be going in," Jack said to the others.

"Wait a minute! He only asked you. Why do you drag us also?" John protested.

"That quest that you got from me, is it completed already?" Jack asked.

"No. It required us to help you complete this expedition. Clearly, reaching this place is not yet considered complete."

"Still want to see if I can boot you out of the quest?"

"Give us a minute to prepare!"

Chapter 368: Traps

While the others were preparing, Duke Alfredo gave something to Jack. The description of it was an alert beacon, it would let the surrounding expedition soldiers notice his position and come to his aid.

'Ain't this similar to the Themisphere Beacon stone that is still inside my bag?' Jack thought.

Duke Alfredo said, "of course this thing is useless when you are inside. But there had been stories that tell about the exit of Outworld gate to be different from the entry point. So in case you find yourself in another part of the ruin when you come out, use this beacon to let us know your position."

"Thank you," Jack said. If possible, he was not planning to use it though. In that way, he might get another beacon stone that could summon the surrounding native soldiers. He already had a plan of what to use for the first beacon stone, but it had to wait until he was back to the capital.

While everyone else made their own preparation, he also made his. He took out an enhanced whetstone and ate a sweet dumpling. Boosting his base attack by 30%.

Once everyone was ready, the players stood in front of the silvery portal gate. Duke Alfredo and Prince Alonzo stood to the side, bidding them good luck.

Jack looked at his friends. "Ladies first?" He asked.

"Ladies my ass! You are the one with the quest. You go first!" Viral Cora uttered.

Jack shrugged, he was just teasing them. He did plan to enter first. Without further ado, he stepped into the silvery liquid-like surface. The experience he got was roughly the same as the last time he entered a dungeon, although it was longer this time. When he came about. He was in a stony hallway.

'Huh? Am I just being transported to another room of the temple?' He thought. The reason he thought that way was because he had passed through the same-looking hallway before when he was walking with the duke to the main hall.

"It's not the same," he heard Peniel's voice. "Look, there were no climbing vines in sight. And the lighting apparatuses were all still intact and working."

'You don't mean...'

"Yeah, I think this is what the temple looked like when it was still in its heyday."

'Hm? That's odd.'

"What is?"

'My radar... It's empty.'

At this time, the air next to him trembled, then it rippled as if it was a surface of the water before Jeanny popped up out of thin air.

"Hey," she said to Jack, then looked around alertly, her spear in her hand.

"We are safe here," Jack told her. Well, if his radar was correct, then he could say there was no danger here at all. But he remembered several times already when his radar was acting up. From the undetected Swamp Croc to the time where its range was severely limited in the cave with the ice mana site. Probably this time it was a situation where it was completely incapacitated.

Several more ripples appeared in the air, and more players popped out. In a matter of seconds, all sixteen players were standing in that empty hallway. They looked around before realizing that there was no gate for exiting.

"F*ck! Who was the one that said this dungeon might not be like the other dungeons that have an exit at the place we enter? See how we have been jinxed?" Bowler cursed.

"I did," Jack announced.

"Well, if it's you, then it's ok."

Everyone rolled their eyes at Bowler.

"Which way?" The Man asked. They were in the middle of the hallway, there were two opposite paths stretching out. The dungeons they had gone to or heard from others, always had one direction to go after they entered. Hence, everyone was at a loss here.

After a few moments of silence, Jack said, "this way," and started walking.

"Oh? Is there something that made you pick this direction?" Bowler asked.

"No. I saw that everyone had no idea. So I just simply pick one," Jack answered.

Everyone was speechless hearing his reason.

"A wrong decision is still better than no decision. Come on, or do you want to rot here thinking yourself till eternity?" Jack said, then continued his walk.

Jeanny walked after him, John trailed not far behind. The others soon followed.

The hallway was very long. They went for quite a while. 'Is this really the temple in its past? I don't remember the hallway in the temple ruin is this long.' He asked in his mind.

"You can't really consider this place as the real Temple of Divine Squall," Peniel replied. "A dungeon is a separate world. It was created using the real world as the model, but it's not exactly the real world. So there is a possibility this place is even bigger than the real Temple of Divine Squall."

Jack suddenly stopped in his track. The others who were walking behind bumped on him before they stopped as well.

"Why do we stop?" Jeanny asked. There was nothing in front. The hallway was still going straight ahead without any turns.

Jack was staring down on the floor. The reason he had stopped was because there was a red marker in his God-eye monocle. He thought that his monocle had been incapacitated, turned out it was not the case. But the marker only appeared after he was so close. If he took three more steps, he would have stepped on it.

'Is that what I think it is?' Jack asked in his mind.

"Yep, it's a trap."

'Luckily, we were walking, not running. So, what should I do?'

"Remember the Disarm Tool I asked you to purchase? Use it on that trap."

Jack took out the tool and knelt down in front of the floor that was marked. The red marker enveloped a large area of the floor from wall to wall, so they would be sure to step on it if they wanted to pass. It was also too wide to attempt a jump.

Peniel gave him instructions on how to use the tool. The others observed him in fascination. After Jack did everything as instructed, what looked like a loading bar appeared. But after he looked closer, it was a time bar, and it was decreasing rapidly.

"Listen carefully, you should soon hear some faint click sounds now that you are interacting with the trap. You have to trigger the tool at the same time you heard the clicks. The full sequence consists of several of the clicks, the sequence will repeat until you successfully disarm the trap or the time limit expired. You need to successfully trigger the full sequence before the time limit expired to successfully disarm the trap."

Damn, so complicated, Jack complained as he tried hard to hear the faint click sound. The others were talking among themselves discussing his weird behavior, some who knew about traps told the others, while a few were asking Jack what he was doing.

"Hey, shut up! I'm trying to concentrate here!" Jack yelled. The others were startled but realized the seriousness in his tone, so they complied. They looked on in silence as Jack was doing something to the empty tile in front.

The time bar expired, he failed.

'Shit, are all traps so difficult?' Jack asked Peniel.

"It is difficult because the grade of the trap is too high and your skill grade is too low. From my estimation, I think this one should be of advanced expert grade."

In that case, then this will be difficult. As his Detect and Disarm Trap skill was still of the Basic Apprentice grade. It's a good thing that he still received proficiency despite failing, the same as lockpicking.

Jack turned and saw that the others were still staring at him in silence. He explained to them what he had just done, and then asked, "anyone here with high grade Detect and Disarm Trap skill?"

"There is a trap in front?" Weird Trap asked.

"Yes, what is the grade of your Detect and Disarm Trap skill?" Jack replied.

"Basic Apprentice."

"Crap. Shame on you! You disgrace your name."

"Bro, you have a storm in your name, I don't see you using any lightning or wind skill."

"Wait and see!" Jack said, then asked the others, "anyone?"

"Mine is Advanced Apprentice," Viral Cora uttered. "Is that high enough?"

"Mine is also advanced apprentice," Sunset Walking said.

Jack looked at the others' expressions, then said, "it appears you two are the highest. Do you have any disarm tool?"

"I have twelve, leftovers from when I prepared them for the traps on a quest," Viral Cora answered.

"I have thirty," Sunset Walking informed.

"Ok, I have forty-nine. If you guys need more later, you can take mine." Jack decided to not use this chance to increase his Detect and Disarm Trap skill proficiency. Now is not the time for an experiment. They could not go out to restock the Disarm Tool. If they ran out of the tool, they will need to trigger the trap to pass through. He doubted the penalty of an advanced expert grade trap would be light. Better to give the tool to someone with a higher chance of successfully disarm the trap.

Chapter 369: Running

Viral Cora approached the place where Jack was kneeling before. "There is a trap in front? Strange, usually I can detect one from around five meters away."

"This one should be an advanced expert grade trap, so it is more difficult to detect. Try going nearer," Jack said.

"Say, what is the level of your Detect and Disarm Trap skill?" John asked Jack.

"Beginner Apprentice," Jack answered.

"Then how come you can detect it while that lass there who has a higher level skill can't?"

"I also have a Talent. It is called investigator. I can detect clues and stuff from the environment. That might have been the reason," Jack explained. He might not be wrong. He honestly did not know if the trap marker came up due to his talent or his God-eye monocle.

"Found it!" Viral Cora proclaimed. Jack saw that she was only a few inches away. She needed to slowly get so close in order to notice the trap. If she did not already know that there was a trap there, she would have stepped on it before she found out.

"Looking at how close she needs to notice it, that trap might instead be a basic master grade," Peniel said. "Your forty-nine remaining disarm tools might not be enough to disarm all the traps in this dungeon, I don't think there is only one trap here."

'Damn! Why didn't you ask me to buy more?' Jack complained.

"How do I know you will just barge into a place with such high-leveled traps?" Peniel retorted.

Everyone watched on as Viral Cora attempted on disarming the trap.

"So difficult!" She exclaimed, it looked like she had failed as well. "The time bar is so short and there were so many clicks in its sequence. I have no confidence to disarm this."

"Just try your best," Jack said.

"You can do it, Cora," Jeanny encouraged.

"Don't worry, we can just throw Bowler to trigger the trap in case you fail," John added.

"I will throw you first!" Bowler shot back.

The others gave her supporting words as well, she looked back to the trap with determination and went back to work. The second time, failed. Third, failed again. She kept on failing until her tenth disarm tool when she suddenly exclaimed, "yes!" Startling everyone.

"You succeed?" Salty Trade asked.

Viral Cora winked at her with her fingers forming a victory sign. "The proficiencies awarded are so generous. A couple more and my Detect and Disarm Trap skill will increase a level," she said.

"Um, no worry, you will get your chance," Jack said. He had walked ahead when Viral Cora showcased her victory sign. He again detected another trap not far ahead.

After he told everyone, Trinity Dawn asked, "how about we take that other route back there? Maybe it is better the other way?"

"Yeah, it appeared that you really have taken the wrong decision," Weird Trap said.

"I doubt that," Jack responded. "Notice that we haven't met any monsters yet. I think this dungeon is instead full of traps. So even if we go the other direction. I'm pretty sure that we will encounter traps as well."

"Are you sure? Maybe we should still go and take a look."

"Go ahead. We will stay here and work on the traps in the meantime."

"Uh, easy for you to say. Only you have managed to detect the traps... Okay, let's continue this way and disarm the traps."

Viral Cora only got one more Disarm Tool left. Not so much chance for her to succeed in one try. She failed as expected, so Sunset Walking went and took over the job. Surprisingly, Sunset succeeded in just three tries. Everybody congratulated him for that, including Jack.

"How odd," Jack heard Peniel's voice.

'About what?' Jack asked as he continued forward to detect more traps.

"Well, we can't see the time bar nor the clicks which he had to respond to, but I've been paying attention to when he triggered his Disarm Tool. The frequencies by which he triggered it were less crowded than when you or that girl did it. The only reason I can think of is that his skill level is much higher. The higher the level of Detect and Disarm Trap skill is, the longer the available time bar and the fewer the clicks that are needed to be triggered within one sequence. If you are an advanced expert grade disarming a basic apprentice trap, you might only need to trigger only one click to successfully disarm the said trap."

'So, you are saying that he was lying about his skill level?'

"I'm pretty sure he is. I just don't know why," Peniel replied.

'Probably he is just shy. Maybe he is afraid that we will expect too much from him if we know his skill level is so high.'

"Probably. I never understand the way you outworlders think anyway."

Jack found another, and Sunset disarmed it in four tries this time. The next one in just two times, and so on. By the time they finally reached the end of this extremely long and straight hallway, Sunset only spent twenty-four out of the thirty Disarm Tools he claimed he possessed.

The hallway although stopped going straight, it continued on in different directions. They arrived at an intersection that went to left and right.

"Crap, we are still going? How long will this be?" They looked to the left and right, the hallway was again very long that they couldn't see the end on either side.

"So, which way now?"

After a moment of silence, Jack turned to the left and said, "this way."

Instead of asking why he picked that route, they simply followed.

After walking for a while, they strangely did not encounter any more traps. But they noticed that the floor of this hallway was slightly sloping. Wherever they were heading to, it was going downward. They continued for a few minutes until they heard a rumbling sound from behind.

"What's that sound?" They looked back the way they came. The lighting was not so bright, so they had trouble looking too far. But Jack's Dragon's Eye allowed him to see something that was moving in afar, and it was heading their way.

After squinting his eyes to see clearer, he finally realized what it was.

"Shit! Everyone, run!!" He shouted, then started running. Everyone was confused by his reaction. Several that trusted Jack unconditionally like Bowler, Flame, and The Man ran after him even though they were puzzled as well. The others looked behind at the dark abyss in the distance. Not long after,

they saw a huge round ball rolling out of the abyss, towards them. The ball was so large that it covered the entire hallway, there was no space to slip by.

"Son of a...!" Giant Steve didn't finish his curse as he turned back and ran as fast as he could.

Everyone was now running. The slowest one was the mage who had the lowest Dexterity, one of which was John. He took out a magic scroll and activated it. All of a sudden, his movement speed increased. He passed through the others.

"F*ck! How selfish can you be? Can't you used the group spell one?" Giant Steve shouted.

"Sorry, friend. The single target one gave more boost," he replied.

"I have a Group Haste scroll!" Jeanny announced and used it. Everyone's speed increased. But the rumbling sound that was getting louder informed them that the ball was getting closer despite their high-speed run.

Giant Steve looked back and saw how close the ball was. The gigantic ball looked even more dreadful from up close. He could see the rough and uneven texture of its surface as it rolled.

"Over here!" He heard someone shouted. He looked back to the front and saw Jack was waving at him from an opening at one side of the wall. Everyone immediately ran towards that opening.

Knight and Mage were the two slowest classes, Giant Steve and Trinity Dawn were at the rear of the group. They made the last leap at the opening as the ball was about to reach them. They looked back after falling to the ground and saw the huge ball passed by the opening. The passing ball caused a tremor which broke the roof of the opening, stones and rocks fell and sealed the opening. Darkness covered everything as they were cut off from the hallway where they were running a moment ago.

There were none of the magic lamps inside here. Everyone cannot see anything in the complete darkness. Suddenly a bright light shone and illuminated the surroundings. Everyone looked at the source of the light and saw a small shining ball above Jack.

"Is that a spell?" Trinity Dawn asked.

"Yeah, it's called Illumination," Jack replied. "You can buy it from a store called Magic Association Shop in the noble district in the capital. Once you people completed this quest and gained the writ to enter that district, you can buy it there. Save you from using a torch."

Chapter 370: Monsterless Dungeon

"What was that just now?"

"Looks like a trap mechanism."

"But we didn't trigger any trap, right?"

"None that I know of."

"I felt like I am in one of those old movies where the main character was a tomb-raiding dude with a hat and a whip."

"Where is Sunset?"

Upon the last comment, everyone started to look at each other. Indeed, everyone was accounted for except Sunset Walking.

"Did he get left behind?"

"If he did, he would be run over by that giant ball already."

Everyone started to open their Party system. Sunset Walking's name was still in their party, meaning he was still alive. Jack could see on his radar a lone green dot away from their position, but he saw no path in that direction.

"Hey, Sunset. What happened to you? You ok?" Bowler sent a message in the party chat.

"I'm fine. I had ducked into another path. You guys go on ahead. We should be able to meet again if we continue forward," sunset replied.

"Let's continue forward then, no point hanging around here," Jeanny agreed with him.

They observed their surrounding. It appeared to be another corridor. A short one though, they saw it turned not far ahead. Since the place they came from was already blocked, they had no choice but to go forward. They heard some whirring sound in the distance, like the hum of machinery. The corridor took them through several turns before they came out to a slightly large room. What they saw in the room alarmed them.

Four continuously spinning pillars were moving back and forth along straight groovings on the floor and the roof. They wouldn't be alarmed if the pillar was simply spinning as they moved, the problem was on these pillars were attached several long blades that slashed around at high speed as the pillars spun.

The width of the room was not that wide, the blades of the spinning pillars crossed each other. The blades were positioned at different heights along the pillar, so one blade didn't clash with other blades. When the pillars aligned with each other, there would be no space available to slip by. Luckily the speed of those four pillars was not the same, so there were still windows when they were apart from each other, allowing a limited passage if one wanted to pass through to the other side.

They observed the room, there was no other way out except the other side through those spinning pillars with blades. The other side was around fifty meters long. Even the slowest spinning pillar covered that distance in ten seconds, while the fastest one only took five seconds.

They looked at the situation with apprehension.

"What the heck kind of dungeon is this?" The Man finally asked after a long silence.

"Apparently, it is the kind without monster but full of traps and machinations that we need to go through," John said. "The worse kind, since we got no exp exploring this dungeon unless we clear it."

Jack lamented the fact that he had wasted his enhanced whetstone and sweet dumpling.

"What do you think the damage we will receive if cut by one of those blades?" Someone asked.

"How about you go test it out?" Another offered.

"Let's throw a dice and decide who goes first."

"No need," Jack said, he had been observing the movements of the pillars in correspondence with each other. After observing several cycles, he felt that he had grasped the timing. He made some internal countings and dashed forward once the window arrived.

The others looked with wide eyes at Jack who rushed into between the spinning pillars without hesitation. They saw him moved, then stopped as he waited for the adjacent pillar to pass, then slipped in and ran again. The process repeated several times as he ducked in and out from one pillar to another. After a while, Jack came out to the other side.

"The son of a b*tch really made it..."

Jack looked back and yelled at the ones still on the other side. "It's very easy, right? Do you guys memorize the way I did it?"

The others were quiet for a beat before most everyone shouted back.

"Easy your mom!"

"Who the heck can memorize all that from a single viewing?"

"How did you do it?"

"You come back here and explain to us!"

John came forward and said to them, "all right, all right, settle down. The path he took was actually rather effective. Now, I will copy it and let you guys see as well."

"Wait!" Almost everyone went and grabbed him before he entered the pillars formation.

"What?" He uttered with dissatisfaction due to their interruption.

"Don't take us as the same as you who can memorize it with a single viewing. Here! Write it down and describe the sequences to us!" They took out a stack of papers and a pen.

"What are you people, first graders?" John mocked, but he still took the pen and papers and started writing.

He made some drawings as he described the path to take, the timings, and during what position of the pillars was the best time to start. He also advised them that the process would more or less be affected by their dexterity stat. Those with slower movement speed would have a narrower window on each sequence, while those with higher might need to slow down and not rush ahead at some parts.

Jack was waiting for them in boredom, so he started playing with casting his mage spells again to increase his proficiencies.

"So, everyone understands already?" John asked.

"Um... sort of."

"All right, I will go and let you people see. Please pay attention. I'm not coming back here and do it again," John said.

Everyone watched intensely as John walked into the pillars formation, and he literally walked. Contrary to Jack who dashed in and out between the pillars with speed, John appeared to take a leisurely walk amongst the pillars. The cycles it took for him became more and thus resulted in a longer time, but in the end, he still managed to pass through to the other side.

"Damn it, do you have to act so cool?" Jack said to him once he arrived by his side.

"Friend, being cool is my second nature," he replied, then turned back to the others and called out, "It's very easy, right? Do you guys memorize the way I did it?"

Motherf*cking assh*le! He was copying what Jack had said to them before. The ones with range attack had the urge to throw some attacks his way.

"If being cool is your second nature, being damn annoying is surely your first nature," Jack commented.

"All right, I will give it a try," Trinity Dawn exclaimed.

She followed the way John did. With a slower pace but more cycles, but she did not have it as leisurely as John. At some parts, she had to dash due to near-miss. But in the end, she still made it safely to the other side.

Jeanny went next, then Fierce Flame, The Man and the others followed suit. In the end, there were still accidents. One of The Man's underlings missed one of the timing windows and panicked. He ended up being shredded by the blades. There was no damage number or scream of pain. He just simply killed with one touch of the blade.

His friend that was going next after him, another of The Man's subordinates, was terrified by the sight. Going in with an unsteady heart, caused him to make a mistake even earlier and followed his predecessor.

"Calm down!" Jeanny called out from the other side.

The rest steadied their minds before making the attempt. They passed through one after the other. The last one, Viral Cora, went through the sequence fluently. He had almost reached the end when she missed the timing.

"Watch out!" Jeanny called out to warn her. The spinning pillar was rushing at her back. To her surprise, she made a close dodge, but the sudden evade caused her to trip. She fell as another pillar was coming at her. She looked at approaching spinning blades in horror.

She had already resigned herself to fate when she felt her body getting dragged away. Before she knew it, she was already outside of the pillars formation beside the others. She looked up and saw Jack who was still holding her body.

"Phew, luckily managed to make it," Jack said.

"What was that just now? Was that a skill?" Someone asked.

"Yeah, it is a skill called Shooting Dash. At my current skill level, It allowed me to dash at high speed two times covering 7.25 meters in each dash."

Since Viral Cora was very close to the finish line when she lost her footing, it was within the range of Jack's Shooting Dash skill. He used the first dash to reach her, and then the second dash to drag her to safety, creating a swift V-pattern movement.

"How the hell did you manage to get all those awesome skills and spells?" Giant Steve asked.

"There is no need for envy," Bowler said to him, then to Jack he said, "bro, you wouldn't mind sharing with me tips and clues on how to get new skills and spells, right?"

"I'm just lucky," Jack told them. "But if any of you are in a league faction already, you should try to perform well. They are a good source to acquire new skills and spells," Jack told them what Peniel had informed him before.

"Thank you!" Viral Cora uttered to Jack, she was sincerely grateful.

"Don't mention it. We are friends after all," Jack replied.