

World 431

Chapter 431: The Wizen Old Man

"Face? Oh, right! Forgive me," the fake grandpa with the terrifying face said after being reminded. His one hand swiped in front of his face and a more normal face of an old man appeared. The old man gave him a big smile.

Jack didn't respond in kind.

"What the hell, old man! Do you get off from scaring a younger man like me?" Jack scolded.

The old man gave him a wry smile, "young man. It is called a test of courage. In order to test your courage, of course, it has to be something that frightened you. All this is constructed from the images in your memory. It is simply manipulated to become something that is most likely to terrify you."

"What is the requirement for me passing?" Jack asked. He didn't really understand how he had passed the test.

"When you decided to overcome your fear and faced it instead of running from it. Or in your case, punch at it, I might say," the old man replied.

"Pretty simple," Jack commented.

"Is it? But very few can pass this test. It is not easy for someone to conquer their fear and face them head-on."

"How do you fail this test then?"

"If you continue to run till insanity, or if you are overwhelmed by terror and completely froze up."

"Oh? That makes me curious. What if I froze up and stopped running?"

"The apparition will capture and consume you."

"Uh... What happens if it consumes me?"

"What happens if a monster consumes you?" The old man asked back.

"Hm..." Jack nodded in understanding. "So, what is this place exactly? I thought I was back to my real world already and all that had happened before was just a dream."

The old man chuckled. "What an irony. It is this one that is a dream."

"What? Are you saying I am in a dream?" Jack uttered with a surprise. "So you are just a figment of my imagination?" Jack added as he used a finger to poke at the old man.

"How rude!" the old man said as he swatted Jack's hand away. "You are one impolite lad. I prefer it when you are just running around fleeing from your imagined horrors."

"If you are not a part of my imagination, that means you are the one that manipulates my dream into scaring me. I am already polite enough to not hit you for all that horror I experienced just now," Jack countered.

"Kid. Did you forget already that you punched me not long ago?"

"That doesn't count. That is for passing the test. Now since we are speaking about the test, what the hell is this test for? Does it allow me to leave the valley?"

"It got nothing to do with this valley. The point of this test is for you to qualify for the next test."

"What the hell? Why is there another more test? I'm not interested! What do I get from it anyway?"

"Even if you want to, you can't take the following test. Your level is too low. You will need to be level 50 to proceed."

"What? You forced me into this non-consensual test and now are telling me that this test is pointless since my level is too low? Are you kidding me?"

"Don't be too agitated, young man. You can come back when you are level 50, we can continue then with your next test."

"Don't be absurd, who wants to return to this horror house anyway? And who the hell are you, old man?"

"Hmph, if I am my real self, I would have taught that disrespectful mouth of yours a lesson. My name is Majus. Though I am actually just a part of the consciousness from my real self, left behind to oversee this trial site."

"So you really are a figment of imagination, except not mine. Okay then, sir Majus. What can I do to leave this dream world?"

"I can send you out now if you no longer have any questions."

"In that case, can you help me escape the valley outside this dream world and go back to the plateau up above?"

"I cannot, you have to find a way up yourself."

"Fine. How about you point me the way for leaving this valley? So I can walk myself back up."

"In my knowledge, passing the next test is the way to leave this valley."

"What the...! Are you saying I am trapped here until I am level 50?!"

"No, I am saying that you should be able to leave if you pass the..."

"All right, all right! No need to repeat! Bloody heck!"

Jack was morose. He was glad that this game world was not a dream, but he was not keen on spending his time here grinding monsters until he was level 50. He would rather this be a dream and go back to the real world if it was so.

"By the way, what's the point of these tests anyway? Why did the next one need me to be level 50 before taking it?"

"Because you need to be at least level 50 before you can become a special class."

"A special class?" Jack thought for a bit before remembering. Wasn't that the next class upgrade after elite class which Peniel had mentioned before? He did remember Peniel mentioned as well that one needed level 50 for that. But then he thought of something.

"Wait! To become this special class. Do I need to be an elite class as well?"

"Yes, you will need to be an Archmage."

Mother f*cker...! Then didn't this mean he was trapped in this valley forever? He couldn't go back to the city to upgrade his class, he couldn't pass this test if he was not of Elite class, and he couldn't escape this valley if he didn't pass the test. In other words, he was f*cked...!!

"What's wrong, lad? You seemed agitated," Majus said.

'You think?' Jack responded in his mind, but he calmed himself. There was sure to be another way out. He just needed to find it. This old man was only a leftover existence from a powerful mage, put here to run this test site. He probably didn't know everything about this valley.

With that resolution, Jack said to the old man, "Okay, I'm ready to leave."

"All right. When you reached level 50 and is an Archmage. Come back here again, we will pick up where we left off."

Jack didn't reply. Majus also didn't expect one. He stretched both his arms and the room where they were in started to distort.

"Oh, almost forgot to mention. There is also another reward waiting for you once you wake up. It's for passing this test," Majus said.

Jack was about to ask what the reward was, but he felt his entire vision spun abruptly. He was overcome by a severe sense of vertigo. He thought he fainted. When he opened his eyes, he was on the floor, lying on his back. He saw Peniel floating above him, her face full of worry.

"You finally wake up!" She exclaimed with relief.

Jack sat up, he felt some migraine on his head. There was also some liquid on his face.

"I've tried to wake you up several times," Peniel said. "I tried to pinch you, I slapped you, stepped on you, kicked you. Even splash some water on you. Nothing works. You continued sleeping."

'Ah... That's why my head was wet and hurt,' Jack thought. He then stood up. There was a light appearing in the middle of the room, then a gold-colored treasure chest appeared.

"Ah, so that is the reward," Jack uttered.

"Reward for what?" Peniel asked in confusion.

Jack recounted about the dream he had, which later he found out to be the test of the quest he received when they entered the cave down there. He also informed her that there was no exit in this place to the plateau above, they would need to look for another way out there.

"Well, considering the S difficulty of the quest. Getting a gold treasure chest is normal," Peniel commented. "So, what are you waiting for? Let's open it. Luckily, you have stocked up on lots of lockpicks already."

After his last experience with the last gold treasure chest in the Temple of Divine Squall, Jack had stocked up even more lockpicks after returning to the capital. He currently had possession of 1000 lockpicks inside his bag!

Yet, at the moment, Jack was not looking at the gold treasure chest, because a marker had appeared on his God-eye monocle.

'Odd, the monocle didn't show the marker at that place when I first came up,' Jack thought. He walked over to the place. Peniel also came over.

There was nothing unusual about the wall in front of him, but the monocle said otherwise. Jack brandished his Storm Breaker and hit on the wall. A damage number appeared. With that affirmation, he continued his attack on the wall until its HP bar was depleted. The wall crumbled.. Behind it, he saw a black horse that was enshrouded with raging flames.

Chapter 432: Nightmare

When he saw the blazing horse, its two fiery eyes also met with Jack's. For a single instant, all the horrors he had experienced in the dream test just now came flooding back into his mind. He took a step back unconsciously. A cold sweat rolled down his forehead.

He dismissed the sudden spooky feeling that gripped his heart, steeled himself as he took out his Storm Breaker and magic staff.

"Wait!" Peniel shouted. "That is not a monster."

"It's not?" Jack asked. "It looks perfectly like one."

Peniel didn't answer, she instead flew into the room behind the crumbled wall. Peniel's existence never drew a monster's hostility, most of the time monsters acted as if not aware of her presence. This flaming horse, however, stared at Peniel as she flew around, but didn't show any hostile intention. It still huffed though, when Peniel got too close.

Seeing that the horse didn't show any intention to attack, Jack stepped into the room as well. His weapons were still ready in his two hands just in case. The flaming horse turned to him when he entered, yet stayed at its station.

Jack could now see that there were multiple interconnecting runes drawn all around the floor where the horse was standing, even the wall and ceiling were covered by runes. It was a rune diagram. As Jack was observing the room, Peniel flew to the front of the horse.

It was sometime before Jack's attention was back to the flaming horse, Peniel was still floating in front of it. Her mouth was closed and no sound came from her, but from her gestures, Jack felt that she was actually communicating with that black horse. The black horse itself was not moving nor showed any expression on its face, but the flame that coated its body swayed unnaturally as if making gestures as well. The longer Jack observed the horse, the more he was convinced that the flame was as much a part of the horse's body as its limbs.

Jack didn't interrupt the two. After a while, Peniel turned back and flew back to him. "I think I find a way for us to get out of this valley."

"Oh? Did the horse know the way? So, where should we go?" Jack asked.

"The horse is the way," Peniel replied. "Oh, and don't call her a horse. She can take offense. She is a Nightmare and her name is Pandora."

"A what mare?"

"A Nightmare. She is a unique grade steed. Although she can't actually fly, she can glide through the air. Most importantly, she could gallop through any surface, including the vertical surface like this valley's wall outside."

"I see. If I rode her, then she can take me back up there!" Jack exclaimed.

Peniel nodded, "you are in luck. This kind of steed does not usually accept having a rider. Usually, there is a difficult quest attached which you have to complete before you are being accepted as their master. This one, however, was in special condition."

"What special condition?"

"She was trapped. See the rune diagram strewn all over this place? It was a spell designed to hold the Nightmare in place and harnessed her energy."

"Harnessed her energy? For what?"

"You said before that you were being tested with fear-inducing illusion in your dream, right? It was most probably done using the energy from this Nightmare. She had the psychic ability to instill fear inside someone's mind."

So that's why he felt like he did the first time he laid eyes on this Nightmare, Jack thought.

"I see. So in return for us freeing her, she agrees to be my steed?" Jack asked.

"In return for that, she agrees to be in your service for one year. After that, she will have her freedom," Peniel replied.

"Oh? Just one year?" Jack said with a slight disappointment.

"What do you expect? Do you think getting a Unique grade steed is easy? It was already generous of her to be willing to give you that long."

Jack didn't disagree. In fact, even if this Nightmare only agreed to bring them up there into the plateau for the condition of her release, he would still take it. After all, his priority at the moment was to escape this valley. A one-year lease on a unique steed could be considered a bonus already.

"All right, so how shall we free her. Do I hit this rune diagram to destroy it?" Jack asked.

"Don't be ridiculous. It was not that simple," Peniel said. "On best occasion, a reckless interruption on the diagram can cause its energy to backlash at you. With this diagram's level, that backlash energy will most likely kill you."

"That is on best occasion? What about the worst occasion?"

"The mana that supports this diagram becomes unstable and it exploded. The energy released by the explosion for a diagram of this scale will most likely destroy half of this valley."

Jack blinked a few times after hearing the explanation. "Uh, then how do you suggest us freeing her?"

"I have to study this rune diagram more, find out its weak links. It will take some time."

Jack nodded. "Anything I can do to help?"

"Since you can't sense mana yet, there is none. Just go lockpick on that treasure chest or do something. I will call you once I have a result," Peniel said. She then flew away to start studying the rune diagram without waiting for Jack's reply.

Since there was nothing he could do, Jack didn't stay around. He would just disturb her if he loitered around this room. Before he went out, he gave the Nightmare a glance again. The Nightmare was also watching him. When their eyes met, Jack felt that irrational fear again. Not as intense as when he was facing the God of Fear, but a similar kind of unsettling feeling. He was sure then that the horror he had experienced in his dream not long ago did come from this steed.

He had a thought, since they were freeing this Nightmare, wouldn't that be considered stealing from that Majus old man. Would he come out to intervene them? That old man said he was only a leftover consciousness that oversaw the trial. Could such an apparition have the power to stop them? But no choice, there was a way to escape this valley in front of him, Jack would not let this opportunity go. He would deal with the old man if he appeared.

He came to the gold treasure chest that was still sitting in the middle of the outside hall. As usual, he took out his Enduring Lockpick first to exhaust all its lockpicking chances, before he continued by using normal lockpicks.

Since he had dealt with a gold treasure chest before, he was not too flustered when he experienced too many failures. He spent hours as the lockpicks continued to break one after another. His proficiency was already more than halfway to the next grade when he opened the last treasure chest. When he had wasted more than two hundred lockpicks, his lockpicking skill increased to Basic Expert.

In the end, he used 389 lockpicks before he heard the chest clicking and notification of success. He realized then that he had been lucky to open the previous gold treasure chest with less than three hundred lockpicks. He didn't forget to summon his Runestone of Luck before the chest opened.

The same brilliant and exaggerated display of golden light like last time appeared when this golden chest's lid swung open. Jack turned his gaze away and waited until the blinding light dissipated before he turned his head back again.

He could now see the content of the chest. There were eleven items, the quantity was rather generous. This must have been due to the help of his luck boost. Amongst the eleven were a pouch of coins and a pouch of mana cores, two standard items that were mostly present when acquiring loots. Their contents were 62 gold coins and 39 mana cores, less than the previous gold treasure chest, but he didn't mind since this chest gave more items.

The remaining nine were two rare medium armor equipment, one super rare medium armor helmet, one rare ruby, one rare tent, one rare material. The last three were a small-looking pebble, a strange-looking seed, and a gem-like stone, the aura the first two exuded was rather imposing.

He threw inside his bag the pouches, rare equipment, and rare material without bothering to take a closer look. For the super rare helmet, he was disappointed. He already had a super rare headpiece. In the end, the luck was still not good enough to help him get the piece that he hoped for. He inspected this super rare helmet.

Golden Knight Helmet, level 30/60 (super rare medium armor)

Physical defense: 80

Magical defense: 65

Durability: 50

Strength +8

Endurance +6

Damage is reduced by 20% when HP is below 50%

He was in a dilemma. This Golden Knight Helmet looked much cooler than his Golden Noble Headband, but the stats and abilities in his opinion were lacking compared to the headband. After some pondering, he decided to keep wearing his headband.. In the end, he was still a gamer to the core. Stats and effects still took priority before aesthetic look!

Chapter 433: Two Tiny Unique Items

For the Ruby which contained fire element, he used it on the spot to upgrade his Runestone of Enhancement.

Runestone of Enhancement (rare runestone)

Approx. 15% chance of increasing the effectiveness of products made from artisan jobs. Elemental energy required for upgrade: 120/1000

Now all the runestone he possessed were rare grades already. He then looked at the tent.

Camouflage Tent (rare item)

Monsters below level 50 will not be able to perceive the tent.

Possesses a shield with 5,000 HP. If HP is depleted, the tent will be destroyed and not usable anymore. HP will regenerate when inside inventory.

'Finally, a decent camping tent!' Jack exclaimed in his mind. He did not have to keep on asking Peniel to keep watch anymore. Though the fairy no longer grumbled from the request, he still felt bad about it every time.

There is no alarm system for this tent, but if a monster hit this tent's shield, he was pretty sure he would wake up. He was not those heavy sleepers that could sleep through an earthquake.

After storing the tent, he finally checked the most enigmatic items from the chest. All three of them were very tiny, but the aura of two of the three told him that they were the best items amongst the chest's contents. He inspected both of them back to back.

Talent Pill (Unique consumable)

Stimulate the creation of Talent

Demon Weed Seedling (Unique consumable, Disaster item)

Summon Demon Weed blight to the surrounding area

"Both are unique grades?!" Jack was astounded. The boost of his luck grade was truly unnatural. He remembered Peniel mentioned that gold treasure chest only had a small probability to produce a unique grade item. Now he got two instead.

However, both were consumable items, so they would disappear after a single use. The description of these two items was not really that explanatory. He could make a guess based on those short descriptions, but he decided to wait for Peniel first before attempting to use them. Otherwise, he would get scolded again like the last time when he immediately used the Lightning God Sphere.

The last item, a gem-like stone, though pretty, didn't radiate any aura. It felt like a common item. Jack used his Inspect.

Chris Memory Stone (Common item, cannot be discarded)

Please give this to Mae Ligna

"What's this?" This is the first time he saw an item's description that asked to be given to someone. Was it a quest item? Mae Ligna, such an unusual name, was she a native? The stone said that it cannot be discarded. Jack was tempted to throw it away and see if it returned, but he decided to not play with it. He just put it into his inventory.

After finished organizing the loots, he stood up and walked to the room with the Nightmare to see how the fairy was doing. It had been hours, he didn't realize that analyzing the rune diagram required so much time.

When he almost reached the opening, Peniel flew out.

"Are you done studying the rune diagram?" Jack asked her.

Peniel nodded, but her expression was not happy. "It is more complicated than I thought. With your ability, it might be difficult to attempt unraveling the diagram."

"That difficult?"

"Almost as difficult as you casting that five-rune spell formation test from Janus within one second."

"Uh, that is indeed very difficult."

"Yeah, if you have mastered the multiple-rune casting method, things might be different. But look at you, you still have trouble casting four runes together. Even when you do three runes, you still wasted so much time. Do you still dare to say that you have that multi-tasking talent? What a joke!"

"There is no need for you to be that condescending," Jack complained, but then he seemed to realize something. "Say, that multi-tasking could be a talent, right? What if I have something that can stimulate the creation of a talent?"

Peniel looked at him in disdain. "Although there is something like that, do you think it is something that is easy to find? You can just dream on!"

"What is that thing called?"

"Why do you ask? I will tell you when you find it. Which is unlikely."

"Let me guess, is it called Talent Pill?"

Peniel raised her eyebrows in a surprised expression, "huh? How do you know?"

Jack was grinning from ear to ear when he took out the Talent Pill from his bag, "cause I have one here!"

Peniel's eyes were wide, "where do you get that?"

"Hehe, where do you think?"

It took Peniel a bit to realize, "oh, that gold treasure chest. How coincidental."

"So, we should be able to solve our problem with this, right?"

"Not necessarily. This is just the first step. This pill only acts as a catalyst to draw out your hidden talent. There is no certainty that you will succeed."

"In other words, I might draw out a different set of talent. There is no guarantee that I can draw the multi-tasking talent?"

Peniel rolled her eyes, "Are you that confident in yourself? Do you think you have many hidden talents? It might be the case that you think you have a talent, but in actuality, you don't have any inside you, then you will pull out zero. In other words, this Talent Pill will be wasted."

"Aren't you looking down on me a bit too much? How can I have no talent?" Jack protested.

"Well, only one way to find out. Eat that pill then," Peniel said.

"Oh? Do I have to literally eat it? Isn't there any interface asking me to activate it like other items?"

"There aren't. You have to eat this one like when you consume food."

"Okay then," Jack was about to put the small pill into his mouth when Peniel added, "wait! There is a way to increase the probability of you getting a particular talent if you do have it."

"Really? How?" Jack asked.

"Focus your mind on the talent you are targeting. You can try doing a multi-runes casting as you eat it, that should put your mind frame into the condition. If you truly have that multi-tasking ability, some kind of a talent relating to it should be drawn out."

Jack contemplated Peniel's words. He closed his eyes to steady his thoughts. He then took out his magic staff. He started casting a spell. It was a simultaneous three-runes forming, but he didn't eat the Talent Pill yet. The spell formation was completed and two identical Jack appeared by his sides.

As he put his mind to control his two copies to perform several random moves, he started casting another spell. It was a simultaneous four runes now. During combat, he had only cast the maximum of simultaneous three runes all this time. For four-runes version, he could still do it but very slow because he needed to concentrate heavily on the spell, so he never used it during combat.

Now he was casting the spell, Myriad Ensnaring Chains, which had four runes. He needed to close his eyes as he was fully concentrating. He was basically doing six things at a time if added his two copies. When the runes were still half-forming slowly, Jack put the Talent Pill into his mouth and swallowed it. He couldn't spare another thought for chewing the pill, it's a good thing the pill was small enough for direct swallowing.

He didn't let go of his focus even after the pill entered his stomach. He continued to focus on casting the spell. Once the spell formation was formed, he placed the spell at a random corner. Three crimson chains appeared and waved around aimlessly.

He heard a notification voice, "You have unlocked a hidden talent, Hundred Synchronous Thoughts."

"Success!" Jack exclaimed gleefully.

Peniel who heard the notification voice, clapped her hands with equal happiness. "Yes! Amazing. That was totally unexpected."

Jack gave her an irritated look that said, 'what the hell do you mean by totally unexpected?'

"Give it a try!" Peniel said enthusiastically. She didn't pay any attention to the look Jack gave her.

Jack was eager to try as well. His spell with the most spell formation was the Myriad Ensnaring Chains. That spell was still in cooldown, so he chose one of the spells with three runes. He cast Arcane Turbulence.

The three runes formed rapidly at the same time. Jack was surprised himself. It was like he could think clearly on multiple topics at the same time. In fact, he was even controlling his two copies to perform complex martial art moves at the moment the spell formation was forming. The three runes were completed in a bit over one second. It was the same time as if he was casting a single rune spell. In other words, his speed of casting three-runes formation was the same as when he cast a one-rune spell.

He threw the spell in a random corner. Getting addicted to the feeling, he tried another spell again. Magic Bind which also needed three runes. This spell was also cast with very fast speed, but since there was no target, the spell just fizzled. He tried to target the spell at Peniel just for a joke but she was unable to be targeted.

"Awesome!" Jack exclaimed. "Today is the birth of Storm Wind, the world's fastest-casting mage!"

Peniel gave him a smirk. "I remember there were others who could cast a single rune in less than one second. You are still lacking compared to them if we talk about pure casting speed."

"You are such a downer," Jack complained.. He then took out the other unique item that he had acquired, the Demon Weed Seedling. "Do you know as well what this thing does?"

Chapter 434: Liberating The Nightmare

"Where do you get this item?!" Peniel exclaimed.

"Lady, do you have to ask the same question twice?" Jack asked, but he sensed a tinge of fear in Peniel's tone.

"Do not, under any circumstances, use this item!" Peniel said. Her expression was serious.

"Oh? Why? It was a unique grade item. Isn't it supposed to be a powerful item? Why can't I use it?"

"It is indeed a powerful item, but it brings no benefit to the user."

Seeing Jack's confused expression, she explained further, "See its category as a disaster item? When you use this item, it will summon a blight that will spread out in a very large area. Everything that is within this area will be destroyed by that demon weed, including the summoner."

"Including the summoner? Then this is just a mass destruction weapon, what good is it for me?" Jack exclaimed.

"Ain't that what I have just said?" Peniel said. "Just keep that thing in a safe place. Don't let others lay their hands on it. It will create a disaster otherwise."

'The safest place is in my storage bag,' Jack thought as he put the Demon Weed Seedling back into his bag. He then showed Peniel the last unknown item, Chris Memory Stone. "What about this thing? Do you know?"

Peniel stared at it for a while. She then said, "I have no knowledge of this stone. It is most probably an Alien Entity."

'Alien Entity?' Jack was intrigued. But since no information was known about this thing, he just store it inside his bag as well.

He then followed Peniel into the room with the Nightmare. Learning from their previous encounter, Jack avoided eye contact with the steed.

"Okay, now since you cannot yet sense the working of mana, I will be your guide here," Peniel said as he flew to one side of the room. "See symbol like this? It is spread out all over the rune diagram."

Jack looked around, there were indeed lots of that same symbol strewn out all around the room.

"They will be the keys, you need to move in the direction that I instructed. It's a good thing that you had a high pool of MP and HP."

"Why is it a good thing?" Jack asked with a confused expression.

"Because moving this symbol will require MP. Once it is exhausted, it will consume your HP instead. And you can't stop once you start. Stopping will cause the backlash or explosion I mentioned before."

"So no do-over? I have to succeed on my first try?"

"Yes. Do you have confidence?"

"How can I have the confidence in something I have never done before?" Jack replied. "Saying yes will just be boasting."

Peniel shrugged, "it's this or we roam around the valley searching for another way."

The Nightmare huffed and stomped with one of its front feet several times, Jack interpreted that gesture as the steed was protesting them for thinking about trying another way. It appeared that she was eager to be freed of this place. It also appeared that the steed understood their language.

Peniel confirmed this by saying, "she was saying, 'just give it a try, you chickenshit.'"

"Well, it's good that only you talk nightmare language. The next time she said something bad about me again, there is no need to translate it. Okay! No pain, no gain. Let's do this! So, how do I move this symbol?"

"For this first one, you need to place one of your hands on it."

"Can I still cast a spell or drink a potion once the process starts?"

"No, you can't," Peniel answered

"In that case," Jack took out his magic staff and cast Heightened State, increasing his MP recovery. He was thinking at first to drink a Basic Regeneration Potion, but the effect of that potion lasted only one minute. He doubted his MP would be depleted already in one minute time. His full-leveled with two stars Heightened State skill increased his MP recovery by 60% for six and half minutes.

"Okay, let's do this," Jack said again. This time with more wariness in his tone. His hand moved to touch the symbol indicated by Peniel. The symbol lighted up with blue energy, Jack felt as if his hand was burning and something was being sucked from the touching point. He noticed his MP started going down. The rate it was going down was pretty fast despite his Heightened State.

"So fast!" He exclaimed.

"Yes, we need to be quick. Now grab that symbol and moved it to the center here," Peniel uttered as she flew next to the Nightmare and pointed below.

Jack made a grab with his fingers, and he could literally felt the symbol as if it was a solid thing. He made a shift and the symbol followed, there was a blue energy thread that linked it to the rest of the diagram.

When the rune he was grabbing was moved to the place Peniel indicated, a numerous bunch of blue energy threads shot out, linking all the other runes that had the same symbol.

Peniel flew around again as she was talking, "now you can move the other runes using your mind. Move this, this, and this, over to here, here, and here respectively."

Jack used his mind to move the symbols as instructed. They followed his thought. He was used to making spell formation using his mind so he was not too foreign with this process, they were roughly similar. As he followed Peniel's instruction, his MP bar continued to reduce. The more time passed, the more complex Peniel's instruction grew. He had to move six symbols at the same time now.

As time continued to pass, he was now moving ten symbols at the same time. He noticed that he was also moving the same symbols that he had moved previously. He did not question Peniel, he just followed the fairy's instruction to the letter. His MP bar was already gone not long ago, the process was now consuming his HP bar.

The complex shift and re-shifting of the diagram continued. Peniel was flying as fast as possible to indicate the repositionings as Jack followed her with his mind as he moved the symbols. Peniel was right, if his multi-thought ability was not boosted by his new talent, his mind would have been spinning with headaches already performing the current process. At the moment, he could still keep up without making any mistakes. However, his HP bar was below half already. This was now a race to see if he could finish unraveling the rune diagram before his life was sucked clean. He tried not to think about it, worrying would just disturb his focus and caused a failure.

When his HP was less than 20%, Peniel shouted, "final sequence!"

It was twelve symbols at the same time now. Jack concentrated, he could not afford to make a mistake at the final moment. The twelve symbols were shifted and placed at instructed new positions. They rested at their new post one by one in a rapid manner. But when it was the last one, Jack felt a weird feeling. There was a tinge of redness in the last symbol's aura and a sense within the energy link that the place he was about to insert was not the correct one. He sensed another place several inches away which exhibited a blue aura that was more in conjunction to the link with the symbols he currently felt inside him.

The feeling lasted for an instant. Peniel was shouting for him to place the symbol, the window for the symbols to be placed in between the others was only a short moment. Too long apart and the whole process would fail. He hesitated for a breath before making a decision. He shifted the symbol and placed it at the position where he sensed was more in rhythm with the symbol's aura.

"What are you doing?!" Peniel was shouting in distress.

The symbol was placed and hum was heard as the whole diagram flared with bright light. Peniel was closing her eyes and covering her head expecting a backlash. Jack just stood there unmoving. If there was a backlash, shielding himself won't make a difference.

The light and the hum slowly dissipated. The diagram on the wall was also fading. Peniel opened her eyes and saw the surroundings in confusion.

"It works? How?" She asked.

"Do you want it to explode instead?" Jack asked in a sarcastic tone.

Peniel glared at him and said, "Why do you not follow my instruction for the last symbol?!"

"If I did, we really will have failed already," Jack replied. He then recounted the feeling he had when he was placing the last symbol.

"That's... No, not possible. You are still an advanced class..." Peniel said, more to herself. Her tone was agitated.

"What are you mumbling about?" Jack asked with annoyance.

"What you describe just now is you sensing the mana flow," Peniel said.

"Oh? So that's what it is? So I can also sense mana now?"

"Can you sense any mana in this room now?"

"Why should I sense any? Isn't the rune diagram gone already?"

"Mana always exists around us. It's just about how thick or how thin its density, how violent or how calm its flow. If you don't sense anything now, that's mean you can still not sense mana."

"Really? Then that feeling I sensed before was not mana?"

"Don't know. Might only be a fluke."

"That fluke had saved us from failure," Jack exclaimed. At that time, he realized the Nightmare was no longer at her initial position. She had always stood at the center of the room all this time. Jack turned around, and found that she was right behind him.. she was rearing up with her two forelegs high in the air, her hooves soon crashed down on Jack.

Chapter 435: Returning To The Plateau

Jack hastily put up a Magic Shield to block. 'Damn this double-crossing psychic horse!' he still had the time to curse inside his mind.

But the expected impact did not arrive, even after he heard a loud crashing sound. He looked again and saw the Nightmare was back to standing on her four legs again. Underneath her two front hooves and right in front of Jack, was a cracked floor. This floor soon crumbled. His God-eye monocle beeped and gave a marker that indicated a valuable inside.

'Something is hidden down there?' He thought.

"She said a gift for freeing her," Peniel said, indicating Pandora's thought.

"Tell her to please warn us first the next time, I almost had a heart attack because of her," Jack said.

"You tell her yourself, she can understand you," Peniel replied.

Pandora huffed, showing some kind of acknowledgment.

Jack bent down beside the hole on the floor. There was some kind of oval thing inside. Jack reached down and took it out. It was an egg-shaped thing.

Therras Beast Egg (Unique consumable)

Contain infant Therras Beast

'Therras Beast? Isn't that the fearsome monster I faced down there? This is its egg?' Jack then turned to Peniel. "Is this what I think it is?"

"What do you think it is?" Peniel asked back.

"This can be used to acquire a Therras Beast pet?"

"You classes can't."

"Hm... then maybe I should give it to Flame."

"You are just as I feared. This is a unique item, for goodness sake. You don't just give it away! And also, she cannot use it as well unless she chooses the Beast Master class as her elite class. This Therras Beast is classified as a medium-sized monster, normal Archer can only tame a small-sized monster. Keep it first! Don't just give it away."

"But it was pointless for me to keep it if I can't use it."

"There are other uses for it. Just keep it first, I will let you know when an opportunity comes up."

"Okay," Jack said as he stored the egg.

"Why are you grinning?" Peniel asked after seeing Jack's face.

"I just find it funny. Didn't you notice I just got four unique items in a single day? It was like unique grade items were losing their rarity."

"You are just lucky. Anyway, the two unique items you got are something you can't use, while the fourth one is only on lease."

"Yeah, talking about the one on lease," Jack looked over to Pandora, who was still standing there silently.

"So... I just jumped over to her back? She won't throw me over, right? And is all that flame safe? Don't tell me I will continually receive fire damage as I sat on her?"

Pandora huffed again as she stomped her foot.

"She said you will get burned if you try to sit on her now. She said wait," Peniel translated.

The flame around the Nightmare's body started to roll around unnaturally. A part of it lashed out. That tongue of flame surprised Jack that he retreated one step. The tongue of flame coiled on the ground near Jack and then rolled rapidly, creating a tiny whirlwind of fire. The Nightmare vanished as the small whirlwind stopped, the flame receded as it revealed a small red-colored whistle.

"That is..."

"Yes, that is the proof of bond with her. You can only ride on her safely if you use that whistle," Peniel explained.

Jack picked the whistle up.

Pandora Whistle (Unique steed)

Summon a Nightmare steed

Duration: 11 months: 23 hours: 59 minutes: 54 seconds

Jack was happy when he read the Unique word in the description, but then was kinda sad when he saw the duration indicator. Still, a limited unique steed was still much better than the other steeds available to him at this stage. Probably in one year's time, he could find one as good as this one for replacement.

Jack blew on the whistle. The ground beside him exploded into a pillar of fire that soared to the ceiling of the room. Inside the pillar of fire was a shadow of a horse that was rearing and a high pitch neighing sound was heard. The horse stomped down and the flame was blown apart, revealing the majestic Pandora once again.

'Damn! That was one cool summoning animation,' Jack thought. He couldn't wait to see the expression of his friends when he called this Nightmare out in front of them.

Jack approached the steed carefully, there were still tongues of flame roiling around the Nightmare. He was afraid at first to be burned by this flame. But as he approached, he didn't feel the heat that should have come with it. The frightening aura that it exuded every time they crossed eyes in the past was also no more.

Feeling that the steed was not rejecting, he jumped on her back. "Okay, let's get out of this valley!" Jack declared.

Pandora reared up again and gave a loud neighing, Jack was surprised by the sudden move that he quickly grabbed at the steed's fiery mane to avoid falling over. The fire was as if a physical thing that Jack could grip tightly on. The Nightmare didn't seem to give it a mind.

Pandora then shot out of the room and went directly to the big hole on the wall that opened to the outside.

"Wa—wait! There is no footing outside...!" Jack yelled, but the Nightmare seemed to ignore him.

She jumped out of the hole into the foggy air. Jack looked down and saw the ground was very far away. He had the unreal feeling that he was flying when he looked down there and gripped Pandora's fiery mane tighter.

When he thought they were about to fall all the way down there, a fiery platform appeared under the Nightmare's hooves. The nightmare stepped on this illusory platform before pushing itself back in the direction of the wall. When his hooves touched the wall, it started to run upwards at a very high speed as if the vertical wall was flat ground. A trail of fire was created along the path the Nightmare was running on.

Jack continued to grab on the steed tightly, afraid that he would fall to his death again if he let go.

As the trio left the cave hall, an illusory image of the wizened old man in Jack's dream who called himself Majus appeared. He observed the ruined room where Pandora used to be confined.

"Ah, that rude kid actually take away the power source for the test... How am I supposed to test another candidate if they appear?" Majus mumbled. But then again, there were not many candidates appearing here. He was placed here only to oversee the test, he couldn't do anything about the theft.

"The kid even took the Therras Beast egg. If the one below died, I will have no spare to replace it," Majus sighed. "Well, nothing I can do about it. Hopefully, that kid returned again to continue the trial, so I can berate him."

Jack was still hanging tightly on Pandora as she galloped along the vertical cliff wall.

'Did I really fall that far?' He wondered as they continued to climb up. The wall seemed unending. He was very eager to get over this thrill he was feeling from riding a flaming horse up a vertical wall. It was like he was on a roller coaster ride that he never asked for.

The fog finally gave way and he could see the blue sky. The end of the cliff wall was in sight. Pandora continued running at high speed, she ended up jumping out from the edge of the wall and floated high in the air. Jack felt the feeling of weightlessness before gravity pulled him back down with the speed. He dropped down from almost twenty meters in the air to the ground, he felt as if his heart was leaping out from his chest. He grabbed Pandora tightly and was actually laying himself flat on her back to prevent him from being thrown off.

Pandora landed with a bang before bouncing off a few times to a stop. She stood there majestically as she glanced back.

"She wants you to know that she was expressing disdain at the moment," Peniel said. Peniel was clinging to Jack as they rushed up, but she was not that flustered with all the speed. She was used to defying gravity anyway.

Jack climbed down from Pandora to catch his breath and stretched his body to calm his taut nerves. He gave a glance at the Nightmare and tried to see what kind of a face this Nightmare made when she expressed disdain, but couldn't see any difference.

Jack gave her a dignified expression and said, "Well, I admit you are fast but don't you look down at me yet! It was because I never experienced running on a vertical surface. Do it several more times and I will get used to it."

Pandora gave a neigh.

"She asked if you want to do it some more times again then?" Peniel translated.

"Uh, maybe another time..." Jack replied.

Chapter 436: A Familiar Back

As they enjoyed the fresh air after escaping the damp and dim valley, Jack was looking around with vigilant.

"What are you being so nervous for?" Peniel asked. "Pandora was just teasing you. She was not eager to go back down to that place as well."

"No, I'm nervous about another thing," Jack replied. "I'm not worried when we are at the bottom of the valley, but now that we are out, I'm worried that the assassin will come again. He can track my position, can't he?"

"That was before you died. Since you have died once, his assassination should be considered completed and the mark should disappear. He had probably gone back to collect his reward. Furthermore, a VIP mark only lasts a short three days, because it required powerful magic to track a target. If one wants to prolong the VIP mark status, one will have to pay more coins."

"Oh?" After a thought, he then understood that Warren should not be aware of his Immortal Soul. He must consider him like the other Outworlders who would lose everything once they died in the wilderness. Anyway, he did not want to hang around here to find out.

"Where are we?" He asked Peniel.

"We are some distances away from where you fall, but this location actually placed us closer to the city of Themetus that I mentioned before. You will only need six hours of riding if from here. Wait, if riding with Pandora, you should only need two hours."

"Oh? She is that fast?" Jack said with a surprise.

Pandora who was having a leisure gait enjoying her freedom, looked back upon Jack's remark. She then gave something that looked much like a scoff.

'Damn, this steed got a bragging personality,' Jack said in his mind.

"Which direction is that city?" Jack asked Peniel again, to which she answered by pointing in a direction.

"You want to head there now?" She asked.

"In a moment, I want to check how the others are doing first. It has been a week after all."

Jack opened his Friend list and sent a message to John, asking him how the guild was doing and if everything was all right.

He received John's reply soon after, "friend, you just asked me yesterday. Please don't be like a nagging old mother. We are not small children that need your constant attention."

Jack looked at the message with a creased brow. He read it again to make sure he didn't read wrong. Peniel could also see his messages.

"Yesterday...?" He was pretty sure that he had spent one week down there in the valley. Unfortunately, there was no calendar in the status window. One had to manually keep track of the days.

"Can it be..." Peniel looked back at the gorge again.

"You make any sense out of this?" Jack asked her. "Or probably this John was just messing with us. He did like to mess with people."

With that thought, he sent another message to Bowler and Jeanny, asking them how long ago he had left. Both replied by first asking him if something happened to him? Why did he lose track of time? Before they answered his question, which was only a bit more than two weeks ago.

With that confirmation, he knew that John was not messing with him. No way Jeanny would go along with the prank, and although Bowler could be playful, he would not join hands with John to mess with him.

"One day?" Jack asked. "If what John said is true, then our one week inside that valley was only one day out here. Is that possible?"

"I think that can be the case," Peniel said. "No wonder the mana flow down there was very slow. That valley although not a separate dimension, can be considered as a different world from up here. No wonder I couldn't fly back up here."

"Then how come Pandora can run her way up?"

"She is a Nightmare, they are known to be able to travel through dimension. Her kinds were said to come from Hell, after all."

"Never mind that. I don't plan to go back down there anyway. It's good then if only one day has passed since we fell. Let's go to that Themetus city, I'm eager to become an elite class already!"

He was thinking at first of using the Town Return scroll to return to Thereath but decided against it. He was close to another major city that should have outworlders according to Peniel, so he wanted to go there and take a look.

Jack called Pandora over to ride her. She had been having a light gait all this time. When she heard Jack's call, she stopped instead, but she also didn't come over, she just stood there. Jack was confused at first before realizing what was happening.

'F*cking arrogant horse!' He cursed in his mind. He walked to her before climbing onto her back. Though Pandora had agreed to let him ride her, she did not truly accept him as her master, hence she didn't feel the need to go at his every beck and call.

While Jack was annoyed with his new steed's attitude, he did not dare to antagonize her as well. He still needed her cooperation, after all, he didn't have any other steed at the moment. He said gently to her, "mam, do you mind going in that direction?"

Pandora gave a snort, flames shot out of her nostrils. She neighed and reared up before she ran forward.

"Do you have to always do this before you run?!" Jack complained as he grabbed her fiery mane tightly when she reared up.

The speed that she exhibited was so unexpected that Jack would have fallen over if he didn't have a strong grip. Her speed was very much different from when she was running up the vertical wall. Jack felt like he was riding a bullet train, except that he was not sitting inside the train, he was sitting on top of the train instead.

Having difficulty speaking, Jack mind-talked with Peniel who was clinging on his shoulders, 'you better tell her which way to go. Otherwise, if she just goes straight, she might bump into a strong monster.'

'No worries, just let her go straight,' Peniel replied.

'What? Didn't you hear what I just said, what if she...'

'I heard you. There is no need to worry. No monsters will come near her. In fact, the monsters on her way will give way to her instead.'

'Really? She is that strong?'

'It's not about strong. A steed won't join any of your fights. The reason why the monsters will give way is because she constantly projects a psychic beacon that instills fears in the monsters when she travels. Unless there is a mythical monster, most will make way for her. Even a rare elite monster has to be around level 70 before it can resist a Nightmare's fear aura.'

'That's awesome! Doesn't this mean I can travel almost anywhere now?'

'Now are you aware of how valuable a unique steed is?'

'Yes, yes. I am completely aware now. Sigh, if only she can be my permanent steed.'

'It is not impossible, but that will have to depend on you.'

'How do you mean?'

'For a start, you have to make her like you first.'

'Ugh, she didn't seem like one that is easy to please.'

As they continued at high speed, Jack noticed a lone blue dot on his radar.

'A lone player in the middle of nowhere? Quite a ballsy one,' he thought. Out of curiosity, he tried to steer Pandora over.

"Mam, can you go over there?" He shouted under the high wind while tugging Pandora's mane in the direction where he wanted to go.

Pandora neighed loudly but still changed direction to where Jack steered. Jack could swear he felt an annoyance in that neighing tone. So much for trying to please this steed.

"Want to be a busybody again?" Peniel teased. Jack didn't reply.

When they were close, Jack saw that the place was a small hill. There were not many monsters, or most had been scared away by Pandora. Jack urged Pandora to stop at the foot of the hill. The blue dot on his radar was on top of this hill. It was staying still, didn't seem like it was grinding monsters. Maybe it was gathering resources like foraging or mining? Jack climbed down from Pandora and unsummoned her. He decided to approach on foot.

As he went up, he felt the place was rather serene. As he was getting near to the location of the blue dot, he noticed a small wooden hut in that location.

'A house? What is a structure doing here in the middle of nowhere? Is the one there in some kind of a quest?' He wondered as he continued to approach. He was walking stealthily to avoid being discovered. He didn't know who the person in front of, better to take a better look first.

When he was close enough, he finally could see the one indicated on his radar. It was a man, a large man with white hair and a naked upper body full of muscle. His lower body was covered by loose pants. He was sitting cross-legged in the middle of the courtyard in front of the hut. His back was to Jack.

"That's... no way, can it be such a coincidence?" Jack whispered.

"What is it?" Peniel whispered back.

"I recognize that broad back anywhere."

Chapter 437: Mana Sensing

When Peniel was about to ask again, Jack gave him the sign to be silent. He then crept out slowly towards the sitting man.

Peniel was puzzled. Did Jack plan to ambush that man? From the way he snuck over with stealth, it looked like that was indeed his intention. However, he didn't take out any of his weapons.

Jack continued to creep slowly while paying attention to the motionless man. When he was around five meters from the man, he grinned. With his current Dexterity, he could land a sneak attack in an instant from that range even without using any skill.

He lunged. His two hands were put forward, ready to grab the sitting man. Before he knew it though, he was losing gravity. When he was back to his sense again, he was looking at the sky.. He realized then that he was lying on his back on the ground.

"Afei?" Jack heard a deep voice. He looked up and saw a man with a hardened face framed by a hipster beard, the face looked ancient yet had very few wrinkles. His brows were thick and white, the same color as his hair and beard, portraying his late age. The muscles on his body, on the other hand, show no sign of old age. His body was even more fit than a standard bodybuilder.

"Unbelievable, I still cannot sneak on you," Jack said as he got up.

"What are you doing here? And what's with all that getup?" The old man asked.

"I should be the one that is asking you. What are you doing out here all by yourself? Half-naked some more. Don't you have any armor?" Jack said as he inspected the man.

Domon Fei (Warrior, level: 19)

HP: 480

'He was using his real name for alias, but what's this with still being at level 19? So low! How did he survive out here?' Jack thought after seeing the data.

"Young man, is that how you talk to your gramps? It seemed that you have become more unruly ever since you went off and live by yourself," Domon uttered.

"Gramps? He is your grandfather?" Peniel said with surprise as she flew closer.

Domon looked at the fairy, he then said, "lovely meeting you, miss. Are you a friend to this no-good-grandson of mine?"

Peniel, who heard him, brightened up and said to Jack, "see! A real gentleman does not call me a pet!" She then turned back to Domon and said, "it's a pleasure meeting you as well, good sir. I help your no-good-grandson here to know more about this world. He is clueless if not for me."

Ignoring the fairy, Jack said to his grandfather, "Are you not surprised seeing her?"

"Why should I? I've seen many strange things after arriving in this world. She is not that strange compared to the others."

For a non-gamer and conservative man like his grandfather, Jack must say that his grandpa's bearing towards this game world was pretty cool.

"So, again, what are you doing here in the middle of nowhere?" Jack repeated his question.

"What do you mean what I'm doing here? I live here," Domon replied.

"Li-live... here?" Jack had trouble following. "What do you mean you live here? This is the wilderness, don't you get attacked? Or do you have some kind of a high-grade tent?"

On the way up here, Jack had seen some of the monsters around here were not too high-leveled, considering this place's vicinity to a city, they were around level 21 and 22. Still, without a tent with good functions, how can one sleep properly amongst all the possibilities of a monster ambush?

"What tent? Why should I use a tent? Didn't you see a hut there? I'm living in that hut," Domon said.

Jack looked at the wooden hut, it looked crudely constructed. "How did you come across this hut? Is it from some kind of a quest that grants you a safe accommodation in the wilderness?"

"Young man, I only understand half of what you are saying. Don't treat me like your friends who you spent time in whatever modern gizmos you like to play with. As for this hut. It was here because I built it."

"Bu-Built...? How did you build it?"

"What do you mean how I built it? With wood and saw and hammer and nails, of course. You never saw a carpenter builds something?"

"I... uh... okay, never mind about the hut then. What about ambush from monsters? I doubt they leave you alone just because you lock your hut's door, do they?"

"Those things that attack whenever you come near? They did attack at night from time to time, but I beat them back. You think these things are a match to your gramps?"

"I can hardly imagine anything that is a match to you, but still, you will be vulnerable in your sleep."

"Have you ever managed to sneak attack me even when I'm asleep?" Domon asked.

"Um... never," Jack said.

"So why ask a stupid question?"

"Wait! You can detect an ambush? Do you have a tool?" Peniel barged in after hearing their conversation.

"What tool?" Domon asked back.

"My gramps here have some kind of a sixth sense. He can detect all kinds of attack, even when sleeping," Jack said.

"It's not a sixth sense. It's the perception of chi. I trained you as well, you just never really put your heart into it."

"Just now, when he tried to attack you from behind. Did you sense him as well?" Peniel asked.

"I sensed him from a mile away, I just didn't expect him to be my no-good-grandson."

"Can you please stop already with that no-good adjective?" Jack complained.

"Can I ask for a demonstration?" Peniel asked.

"A demonstration? Of what?" Domon asked back.

Instead of answering, Peniel flew a distance away and called Jack over. Jack came with puzzlement. "Can you please turn around, sir?" Peniel said to Domon.

"Oh? Do you want to try to sneak attack me again? Heh, have at thee!" Domon turned around and put both his hands on his waist.

"It won't work, you know," Jack said to Peniel.

"Use your magic range attack," Peniel said.

"Oh, right!" Jack said with realization. He always thought his grandfather's ability to detect someone's attacks was actually more to that his gramps had very inhuman senses, like his hearing or smell, so that he could hear someone's footsteps or felt the air vibration no matter how small. But a pure magic attack had no such thing. He grinned and pointed his magic staff on his grandfather's back.

He didn't use spells, afraid of killing his gramps due to his high damage and the absence of armors on his grandfather. He also turned off his Rapid Dazing Staff's burst attack. A small ball of energy was shot at a high speed towards Domon's back.

When it almost hit, Jack was full of anticipation to have finally been able to sneak hit his grandfather, only to see Domon swiveled around on one leg. The magic ball passed by just a few inches from Domon's body.

"That's demonstration enough?" Domon asked.

Both Jack and Peniel had their mouth gaping. Both were surprised for different reasons. For Jack, his thought was, 'damn! That ability is way better than this radar of mine!' As for Peniel, she exclaimed, "you can sense mana?!"

"Mana?" Domon raised his eyebrows. "I have no idea what this mana you are referring to, miss. What I sensed is the chi. It's the energy around us and inside us."

"That's mana," Peniel said.

"That's chi," Domon insisted.

"Okay, mana, chi, whatever, it's just a term. Grandpa, teach me that ability!" Jack declared.

"I already tried teaching you. You just never paid attention. You spent too much time on those useless games."

'Those useless games had been the ones that helped me survive here,' Jack grumbled inwardly. "I never thought that chi-sensing thing is real. I thought it was only mumbo-jumbo you made up to enthrall your students."

"Wait, wait! First of all, how can you sense mana? Or chi, whatever you call it. You are still an advanced class," Peniel said.

"What class?" Domon was at a loss.

Jack understood the fairy's meaning, "Yeah, you kept on saying that I have to be an elite class to have this mana-sensing stuff. Why is it so? Why can't we sense this mana when we are not yet an elite class?"

"Because only by becoming an elite class that one had the body more in tune with mana, hence will be able to sense it. That's common sense."

"That's your common sense, doesn't mean it has to apply to us outworlders, right? Okay, that's not important. Let's train! By the way, speaking about class. How do you become a Warrior class? Considering your illiteracy to the game system."

"What warrior class?"

As expected, his grandfather was still at a loss about this world despite living several months here already. Jack then spent almost an hour trying to explain all the basics of this game world. Luckily, his grandfather was not as thick as Bill. Though his grandfather was not accustomed to gaming concepts, he still grasped the basic underlying of it.

Chapter 438: Training

Regarding the class itself, Jack had to describe the trial process when one was taking a Warrior class before his grandfather responded with acknowledgment, "Oh, so that's what it was about? I was just going to the city to buy more lumbering axes because they were so easy to get broken when I was chopping the trees for the hut. Someone I know recommended me to go into this building where I was offered to do what they call a test. It seemed like a good exercise so I go through with it. They celebrated after my success although I still have no idea what they are celebrating for. It was just a simple exercise."

'A simple exercise...' Jack was getting downcast hearing his grandfather's statement about the Warrior trial. He remembered he struggled a bit when he took the trial despite his superior attributes.

"Okay, let's put it this way. I will teach you all about this game world and help you level up while you teach me martial arts and how to sense mana," Jack said to his grandfather.

"Teaching you martial arts has been what I've been trying to do since you are little. There is no need for you to do something in return for me," Domon replied.

"But you will need it. You are still level 19, for goodness sake. You will get swallowed up if you meet a strong monster."

"Haha, I welcome the challenge any day!"

"You are still treating this as if this is the world from before. I tell you, with this world's rule, even I can beat you senseless now."

Domon raised one eyebrow at his grandson, "Oh? Is that a challenge?"

"I'll show you what I mean!" Jack said as he lunged at his grandfather. Domon leisurely raised up his hand, but Jack increased his speed. Domon was slightly surprised by Jack's sudden increase of speed to superhuman rate, but he was not flustered. He had dealt with an opponent faster than him before, he was just surprised that his grandson could display such speed.

Domon was ready to receive Jack's attack, but Jack suddenly stopped. Domon was not fooled by Jack's image in front of him since he could sense mana, he knew Jack who had used Flash Step had now turned up behind him. He swiveled back just as Jack was throwing a punch at him. The assault had been abrupt so he had no time to dodge, he responded by catching Jack's punch. But to his surprise, he couldn't stop Jack's punch. His grandson's punch continued onward and struck his body. He was thrown backward.

He balanced himself with a few quick backsteps so he didn't fall over from the force of the punch. He stopped after much effort. He didn't say anything but looked at his grandson with a serious expression.

"See what I mean?" Jack said after driving his grandfather back. "In this world, your strength and speed are governed by different rules. It's not something that you achieved through basic training like you used to. You gained this strength and speed by killing monsters and leveling up. The higher your level, the stronger you become. All your techniques are useless unless they are backed by sufficient strength and speed, this is also what you have taught me before. That's how you keep pushing your students to never skip their daily basic training. But in this world, we can skip exactly those basic training by killing monsters."

"Hm... such an undisciplined world," Domon mumbled, then to Jack he said, "come at me again."

"You are still unwilling to accept loss?" Jack said. "Fine! I will beat you until you have no excuses."

Jack rushed towards his grandfather again, who stood his ground, but Domon was now assuming a ready stance, unlike his previous leisurely attitude. Jack combined footwork with his fast speed to confuse Domon. Once he saw an opportunity, he punched out from Domon's flank.

Domon expertly twisted his body just as Jack's punch was about to connect. Domon's arms moved following the momentum and slapped Jack's arm from the side, redirecting the force. At the same time, he kicked at Jack's leg.

By the time he knew it, Jack was again on his back looking up at the sky.

"If I cannot beat your strength and speed, I will simply use them against you. The way you used them are simply too crude," Domon said to his now lying-down grandson.

Jack sat up, then said, "teach me then."

"Hm, never see you this enthusiast in learning martial arts. Are you truly my grandson?" Domon said.

Jack gave him a wry smile, "I tell you a lot of times already in the past. I was not interested in focusing on learning martial arts because it just takes too much time. And for what? The best achievement I get will only be the world championship. The money reward for being a champion is also not that great. Extremely high demand of time with high effort but low reward. Why do I have to bother with it?"

"Martial art is not about money, it's about..."

"The way of life! I know, I know. You have said it to me a lot of time already," Jack cut his grandfather's words. "But it's not the life I choose. I can't stand such a serious life, you know."

"Then why do you want to learn it now?" Domon asked.

"Look around you. The modern life of our past world has rendered martial arts obsolete, but in this world, it has found new meanings. One with martial expertise can perform much better and reap more rewards in this world."

Domon sighed. "In the end, it is still a materialistic drive. If you are not my grandson, I would have slapped you back and forth for that."

"It is because I am your grandson that I am used to be getting slapped by you already. Don't forget all those forced training you gave me when I was a kid."

"Okay, cut the crap. Let's start training you then. To make your senses become more sensitive with Chi...", Domon glanced at Peniel a beat before continuing, "... or mana, you will need quite an amount of time. It's a good thing that this world's chi... mana, is much denser than our world. It should be easier to train your senses to become susceptible to them. It's a good thing as well you have had the basic training when you were a kid, so that should help as well."

Domon then proceeded to instruct Jack in more details. The training was more like a meditation. Domon taught Jack to arrange the rhythm of his breathing and to configure his state of mind to become one with the world. Jack spent the rest of the day getting accustomed to this meditation training. Peniel flew around the place in boredom.

"You just continue to do this every day, you should be able to sense mana soon," Domon said when the sky turned dark.

"How soon?" Jack asked.

"Depends on your talent and hard work," Domon replied.

"A simple 'I don't know' is fine," Jack said.

"Let us continue with martial art training then, I will teach you the tiger claw and dragon punch."

"Wait, wait! I'm not interested in unarmed style. Teach me the sword style, dual-sword style."

"Dual?" Peniel came flying down after seeing them no longer meditating.

Jack nodded, "I am going to pick Blade Dancer as my elite class."

"But then you can't use your magic staff," Peniel reminded.

"Actually, not really," Jack took out his Storm Breaker before it disappeared and was replaced by his Rapid Dazing Staff, then it disappeared and was replaced again by his longsword. "Due to the game system, I can switch weapons in an instant. It's a hassle and can be distracting when I'm in an intense fight, but ever since getting the talent Hundred Synchronous Thoughts, it is easier for me to focus on two things at the same time. So this weapon switching will not be hindering my combat rhythm. But of course, this meant that I won't be able to cast spells when I am slashing with two swords. It's a pity, but I'll get over it."

"Well, actually, it's not impossible for you to still be able to cast a spell when dual-wielding a sword."

"Really? I thought I will need to wield my magic staff to cast spells?"

"You do. What I meant is, there is a way. But you will have to choose the Archmage for your second elite class."

"Oh?"

"What do you plan to choose for your mage's elite class anyway?"

"I originally wanted to become an Elementalist, going full offense in combination with Blade Dancer. But no worries, probably it's fate. That old dude underneath the Valley of Tempus also said that the trial there is a Special class for Archmage. So if I choose Archmage, I already have a clue as to where to go once I reach level 50."

"Now that you mention it, what is the special class inside that valley anyway?"

"Uh, I didn't ask..."

Chapter 439: Formless Flowing Sword Style

Jack had many equipments inside his inventory, courtesy of the expedition and the journey till here. He took out two random swords and gave them to his grandfather.

"I'm going to teach you the Formless Flowing Sword style," Domon said.

"Impressive name, but you know I never care about names. Show me," Jack said.

"You are still as impatient as I remember when it is something to do with martial arts."

"Can't blame me. I don't exactly have fond memories when it comes to martial arts. You should be able to guess why."

"Do you still want to learn or not?"

"Yes."

"Then apologize first for all your rudeness just now."

"I'm sorry."

"All right, now be quiet. Just pay attention and listen," Domon said as he assumed a stance with the two swords on each hand. "As you know, I always prioritize building one's body foundation first before teaching any of my students an actual martial arts technique. It's because, without sufficient strength or speed, no technique is useful. But as you said, there is no need to train such a thing here, and I see that due to this world's rules, your body's foundation is way more than sufficient already to learn this technique."

He started to move around slowly as he continued to speak, "The Formless Flowing Sword style consisted of four phases. Each phase increased in complexities and variations. The first phase has twenty-four slashes, the second phase contains forty-eight, the third phase gives you as many as ninety-six slashes. At the highest phase, you are no longer bound by the style, it became formless and unstoppable."

While speaking, Domon moved in a fluid motion as the two swords in his hands spun around. Each slash was like a flowing river that had no gaps. Sometimes fast, sometimes slow, but the rhythm never seemed to break.

"Every slash in the style was not fixed, it can be combined in many different ways, creating endless variations, granting unpredictability. If your mastery can reach the peak of this style, your opponent won't be able to resist your attack. One strike will lead to another, and another, without stopping until your opponent relents and loses their defense. Each slash is hard and powerful, but can also be soft and flexible."

Jack's eyes were transfixed by Domon's movements as he recorded every detail of the movements. He knew that his grandfather was a grandmaster when it comes to martial arts, but only now did he appreciate his skill. He was captivated as his grandfather continued to demonstrate the Formless Flowing Sword style with gracefulness.

When Domon stopped, Jack was silent. That one demonstration had so much information but also too short, his mind was still processing it.

"Now, you give it a try," Domon said.

Jack stood without any word and assumed the starting stance. Peniel was rather surprised. She was expecting another wisecracking comment from the guy before he tried to practice the style.

Jack spun his swords around, trying to imitate what his grandfather did just now.

"Your talent in martial arts is always there, but you are still too crude. Don't just try to imitate me. The essence of the style is in its flowingness. The way my body moves and the way you move are different. You will instead ruin the style if you do it exactly as I did. You have to find the harmony of movements that is compatible with your own body. Become one between your body and your swords, treat them as an extension of your arms instead of mere weapons. Guide them to move with the flow instead of telling them where to. Feel the energy. Feel the flow."

Though he repeatedly mouthed off to his grandfather, Jack was not a hardheaded and rebellious kid. Each of his grandfather's words was taken in by him with earnestness. His body continued to move as he

focused his mind and heart in feeling the energy generated with each stroke and worked in a way that had that energy continued on without pause.

"Don't forget about your footwork. This style is not just about slashing. How you place and move your position is also important," Domon continued to offer advice as Jack practiced.

"Your dominant hand's slashes are heavier than your left. You need to balance them. One should not be more than the others. You need to be able to alternate between them with ease. Otherwise, it will be easy for your opponents to predict your patterns."

Before he knew it, hours passed. When he decided to stop, he felt that he was still far from grasping the essence of the style. But yet, he also felt that he was on the right track. This was confirmed by Domon as he said, "you did well for the first time practicing this style. I must say your past training does help some. But you are still far from even mastering the first phase of the style, you need more time training."

Jack nodded, he thought so as well. It will not be easy. The problem was that this kind of training ate up time, not something that he could see a result in a short time. That was one of the reasons why he decided to let go of learning martial arts in the past. He was thinking about how he should go about balancing the practice of this style with his leveling activity.

"It's quite late already, let's rest for the night," Domon said.

"Wait! Before that, let me help you in return," Jack said.

"Hm? What's there to help?" Domon asked.

"Don't act so cocky like that. Remember that this world has different rules. As you said, without sufficient foundation, no technique is useful. Although your foundation can be said the peak in our past world. In this world, you are extremely lacking. Remember how you are unable to stop my punch?"

Domon did not reply but he didn't refute Jack's words either.

"To be able to increase your foundation, you need to level up. To do that, you need to kill the monsters around. I think you have done that before, but judging at your level, I'll say you do that very rarely. We will start doing that more often tomorrow. Apart from that, you need to wear equipment, they will boost your foundations."

"Equipment? Do you mean like all that armors you are wearing? No, thank you. I won't be able to move with all that clunky things on my body."

Jack rolled his eyes at his grandfather, "that's why I said you are still treating this world the same as our previous one. Do you see my movement as rigid?" Jack said as he did a triple roundhouse kick.

"The armor in this world adjusts to our body, so you will never find one that is not your size. And although it looked rigid, it didn't hinder any of our movements. They are magically flexible to allow any movement you want."

Domon rubbed his beard, the old guy seemed to struggle to understand this strange logic.

"Just try it first, okay? Do you have any equipment?" Jack asked.

"I have a few inside my magic pocket," Domon answered.

'Magic pocket...,' Jack was trying to halt the giggle that was fighting to get out. "Take it out for me to see," he said.

Domon took out all the equipment inside his inventory. Jack was rather speechless seeing the collections. Mostly only common and uncommon equipment, and all of them were low-level ones.

"Let me take that trash for you," Jack said as he collected all of them and stored them inside his inventory, in return, he took out a set of rare grade medium armor. He continuously fused equipment he had gotten in his travel, therefore he had a decent amount of rare grade equipment.

"Equip them," Jack said.

Domon picked one up and said, "they looked difficult to wear."

"Ugh, you are hopeless. Try to interface with them, you can equip them with a simple click."

"Inter-what," Domon asked, clueless.

Jack gave him an example. Once his grandfather managed to equip one, he easily equipped the rests.

"Not bad," Jack said after seeing his grandfather in full medium armor getup.

"Yes, you are quite dashing, sir," Peniel added her compliment.

"Thank you, kind lady," Domon responded to Peniel, then he said to Jack, "Although I need to say, I don't like this helmet, looks rather inelegant. I prefer yours."

Jack had given his grandfather the Golden Knight Helmet which he found cool-looking but not wear because his current Golden Noble Headband provided a better bonus. He must say that his and his grandfather's understanding of aesthetics was contradictory.

Domon gave a try by performing several complex martial art motions.

"What did I say, believe now?" Jack said.

"Acceptable," Domon commented.

"Now let us take a look at your status window. I bet you haven't allocated any of your free points."

Before his grandfather could ask what was a status window, Jack explained to him in length. It took some time, but in the end, Domon managed to grasp the basics of it. He was old-school yet not stubborn. As expected, Domon had a tonne of free attribute and skill points. He ended spending them all into Strength and Dexterity equally since those were the stats he had more understanding with. Once he did, he could see his power and speed increased.

"I must say, this world rules are truly convenient, too convenient actually. You must not let this kind of easy attainment dulled your will. True power comes from continuous effort and disciplined labor."

"I completely agree," Jack said. He had learned long ago that debating his grandfather's lecture would simply prolong it to no end. "Now, about the skill points..."

Chapter 440: Master Blacksmith Tools

Jack then proceeded to teach him the battle skills and how to allocate the points. When Domon tested one of the skills by striking a large rock with Power Strike and watched it cracked, Jack could see the fascination in his grandfather's eyes. 'see, now you feel the thrill of gaming,' Jack said in his heart.

"A very convenient way of delivering an attack. It just needs a thought. Too effortless. Fei, you must not let this diminish your technique, this..."

"Yes, yes, I will brush up on my martial arts. Didn't I ask you to teach me already? I must say, I am pretty impressed that you managed to survive all this time without utilizing your battle skills."

"Hah, you think your gramps can be taken down that easily?"

"No, but still, if you want to progress in this world, you need to level up and collect more battle skills. Tomorrow, I will go to take the trial of my elite classes. After that, I will help you grind monsters to level up.."

"Um, actually. I advise you to take the test later," Peniel said.

Jack looked at her puzzlingly, "why?"

"Originally I wanted to let you experience the test yourself first, but I must say, if you take the test now, your chance of passing is not too high."

"Really? Even with my exceptional gears, attributes, and battle skills?" Jack asked.

"Although each class' trial is different, there are some underlying similarities. For the melee class in which Blade Dance falls under, you will not be using your gears. You will be given standard gears and all your battle skills are neutralized, so you can only perform standard attacks. That way, one can only depend on his personal expertise. Your dual-class attributes will give you some advantage. But even with them, I say you still have a chance of failing. Elite class trials are much harder than the advanced class, not everyone can make it through. Ones with average ability usually wait until they were very high-level and stocked up enough attributes to stand a chance."

"But it's not impossible, right? I should still give it a try. Failing will just be reduced by one level or being barred for several days, correct?" Jack asked.

"That's true, that's why I didn't say anything before as I wanted to just let you give it a try. However, unlike the advanced class, passing the trial of the elite class on your first try will give you an extra boon. I suggest you try your best to increase the chance of succeeding before you attempt the trial. And at this moment, there is already a way for you to increase the chance of passing."

"Really? What is that way?"

"Mana sensing. And if you can master the-whatever style your gramps taught you just now..."

"It's Formless Flowing Sword style," Domon reminded.

"... yes, that style. If you can master it, you should have a sure chance."

Jack gave it a thought. Since Peniel said it's best if he could pass the trial on his first try, then he should try his best to do that. But as his grandfather said, learning to sense mana might take a long time. He was not willing to wait that long and let his level be stagnant until he acquired the ability to sense mana. He bet he was already behind the others now in terms of level. If only he had more time.

More time...?

A thought came to him. After some pondering, he asked Peniel, "Can Pandora carries another person on her? Will that person be burnt by her flame?"

"If it was someone you give permission to, then she can take one passenger with you. Why suddenly asked about that?"

Jack grinned, "we are going back to the Valley of Tempus."

Peniel was about to ask why, but then she also realized. "You want to utilize the time difference down there to practice?"

"Yes. I've spent enough time gathering exp for that Lightning God Blessing, I can't waste more time. Since there is such a magical place down there that distorts time, might as well use it."

"But there will be that shadows creature constantly appearing. You will end up leveling more."

"Not really, we will leave the shadows for him," Jack said as he pointed to his grandfather. Domon was rather puzzled about their conversations, but he didn't interrupt them. "That way, I can train and he can grind to level up. Hitting two birds with one stone. Ain't that outstanding?"

"Hm, I guess that can work. But we still don't know much about the valley. There might be some other rules we are not aware of. We need to be careful down there."

"Don't worry, we will just run up with Pandora again if anything crazy happens. But before leaving to the Valley tomorrow, we still need to visit the city first."

"Why?"

"To upgrade his equipment," Jack said and pointed to his grandfather again. "Although he was now wearing all rare grade equipment, they are all still low level, I should increase them all to level 29, the limit in which he can wear. That way, he will be able to grind better. Too bad my mobile blacksmith tools are lousy grade, otherwise we can go directly to the valley."

"Blacksmith tools?" This time Domon interrupted. "Is it like a small hammer and anvil?"

"Yes," Jack answered, looking at his grandfather.

"I have such tools in my magic pocket as well."

'Can you please stop with the magic pocket already?' Jack thought as he said, "I also have one set, but as I said it's a lousy grade, the one that we need is..."

He stopped speaking when he saw the one taken out by his grandfather were slightly larger and much better looking. His monocle also marked it with a yellow color. He used inspect on them.

Master hammer (rare Blacksmith tool)

Combined with a mobile anvil, allowed for Blacksmithing process without a forge

Master mobile anvil (rare Blacksmith tool)

Combined with a hammer, allowed for Blacksmithing process without a forge

Success rate increased by 30%

"Whe—where did you get this?" Jack stammered.

"It dropped from one of the creatures I defeated," Domon replied with a shrug. "You just take it if you like it so much. I have no use of it anyway."

"Well, guess there is no need to visit the city then," Peniel commented.

Jack nodded. "Okay. Gramps, take off your armors. I'm going to level them up first."

"First, you asked me to wear them. Now, you want me to take them off. Make up your mind already," Domon said.

"Just give them to me first. I will make them stronger so you can benefit from them more."

Jack then started setting up the anvil and hammer with his grandfather's armors and started working. He had stored up plenty of iron ores and steel ores since he came back from the expedition and had been using the Transformation Prism to fuse the excess one to better grades, so he had no shortage of ores for upgrading. Domon watched his grandson worked while he chatted with him to catch up on the lost time between them.

In the midst of their chats, Domon thought of something and said, "since you know so much about this world's rules. What is a talent?"

"Why? Do you hear a voice in your head that said you get one?" Jack asked back.

"As a matter of fact, yes. Not so long ago. After I finished teaching you the mana sensing and Formless Flowing Sword style."

"Really, what is your talent called?"

"It's called Instructor. What does it do?"

"I'm not sure. Try looking into your status window, there should be a section called talents."

Jack saw his grandfather stared into the air, he must be opening his status window. His arms were going up and down as if working with an imaginary screen. Jack was fighting to hold down his giggle again. His gramps was still not used to working with the status window with only his mind. He couldn't imagine how comical it would be if his grandfather had chosen a magician class and tried to draw the runes of a spell formation. Perhaps he would be like a conductor in a concert.

From his grandfather's expression, it appeared that he had found the section he was looking for. After a while, he said, "it said here that Instructor gives me 10% wisdom and every... I don't know what's the correct way to say this word with three capital letters..."

"NPC?" Jack made a guess.

"Yes, what is that?"

"Non-player character."

Domon tried to understand Jack's words for a while but then decided not to. He continued, "it said that each of these NPCs under my command will have their battle skills increase by one level. Oh! I forgot already if I don't see it here. I also got a talent the last time I built this hut."