

World 491

Chapter 491: SSS Chain Faction Quest

"An outworlder?" Jack was startled by the revelation.

"I cannot identify the ambusher because he or she was wearing a face mask, but my Inspect showed for certain that the ambusher was an outworlder. A level 32 Assassin," Alonzo said.

Jack thought back to Claudius' comments when they met outside. He felt weird at the time, but now he understood.

"At this time, you are the only outworlder with the sufficient rank to access the training cave," Mason said to Jack. "But the nobility faction didn't register you using your points to access those caves. Additionally, we have checked, you are not in Thereath at the time when the ambush took place."

"So, I was a suspect?"

"Don't be offended, Mister Storm Wind. A royal prince had been attacked, every action needs to be taken. Otherwise, some other parties will start asking questions. It is better if we collect all the facts first before those unwanted parties used the information for their own purposes."

"Don't worry about it. I will also think of myself as a fair suspect under those circumstances. But you mentioned the entry record to the training cave area was destroyed. I doubt an outworlder has the resources to achieve that."

"That's true. Not to mention as well the murdered guard was a level 40 elite. I doubt a level 32 outworlder could have done that without attracting attention from the guards at the other training caves nearby."

"So, you mean he is working with an insider? A native in the kingdom faction?"

"I have no doubt that is the case. And I must say, this insider is a powerful person. Not everyone can have access to the record and leave without a trail."

"I can venture a guess," Prince Alonzo gave his thought.

"The second prince?" Jack asked.

"He is the only one who wants me dead and working with an outsider as well," the Prince replied.

"I agreed," Mason said.

Princess Sindral, who has been silent, appeared very upset as she said, "How can he be so vicious! We are still siblings, after all. Is getting the throne so important to him?"

Mason sighed, "Power can cause people to go blind. One can even sacrifice their own family for it. Unfortunately, the king's health isn't getting any better. I fear the situation in this kingdom will just get worse."

"Actually, I have some doubts," Jack said.

"About what?" Commander Quintus asked.

"The assassination attempt..."

"What about it?"

"I'm not sure if I should say this yet, but there is still too little to go on. I think there is something more to the incident. I mean, the perpetrator had planned so well for the ambush that both the outworlder and the records are gone without any trails. Yet, their primary objective was not achieved.

"Don't get me wrong, I'm happy you are safe," Jack said to Prince Alonzo. "Still, I think if they can cook up a plan that makes them escape so effectively, they should have made a plan that ensures their assassination is successful. For example, use a much stronger poison that can kill with one strike? Or a poison that is incurable, I don't know if those kinds of poison exist. It's just examples. For them to fail their primary objective seemed like a letdown for such a well-crafted plan."

"You mean... their objective is not to take the prince's life?" Mason asked.

"As I said, there is still too little to go on. I simply put this out to not let us jump into conclusion hastily," Jack said.

"I don't understand, what else can the reason be?" Princess Sindral uttered.

"Well, one that I can think of, probably to put more hate into us, outworlders? I think there are a decent number of kingdom officials who dislike us. I've met a few of them already, after all."

Mason contemplated Jack's speculation. While princess Sindral said, "An act of one outworlder should not reflect the others. Why are the outworlders be the target when just one of them committed it?"

"I agree. One bad apple doesn't spoil the whole bunch," Jack said.

When he noticed the others' weird faces, he said, "sorry. It was a lyric from a song where I came from. It means the act of one person shouldn't be a judgment for the rest. However, a mass that already has hate inside them will do just that. They will simply incorporate this one person's sin as the sin of the whole. It is difficult to reason with such a mass. As for the ambusher, I suspect he or she was not privy to the real objective as well. We, outworlders, do tend to be too passionate about completing quests without considering the full picture. The ambusher could just be doing such a quest."

"If your theory is true, then the crown prince can also be a suspect," Prince Alonzo said. "He has the most dislike against outworlders, after all."

"As I said, nothing is certain. We need to know more first before coming to a conclusion."

Mason nodded at Jack's words, "I'm glad we have this talk. Otherwise, I might have missed some details in our investigation. I will instruct my men so they don't dismiss any clue that might point to the crown prince. It was indeed the right choice when I decided to send you an invitation into our kingdom faction."

"I'm also glad about that decision," Alonzo said as he tried to sit up. Princess Sindral told him not to, but he insisted, so she had no choice but to help him sit on his bed instead.

"Mister Storm Wind, I have a favor to ask," the prince said.

"Your Highness, if you need any help, just ask. I will help if it is within my power," Jack replied.

"I'm glad to hear that. Though I'm afraid this request may be a bit hard."

"Do you want to ask me to investigate this incident? I did admit that if we find out the culprit, the powerful person behind it might not be happy with me, but I'm not afraid."

"I commend your courage, but that's not the favor I'm asking. Though I've no doubt you will need the same amount of courage if not more... Do you know, when I first meet with you, I had no thought at all about this power struggle. I don't care about who ascended our father's throne, whether it was Therribus or Rhemos. In fact, I have no thought at all to compete with them. I just hope that I can live my life peacefully, even after one of them becomes the king. I thought that if I show no intention to compete with them, they will leave me alone. But, I know now that is simply a delusion. No matter what I do, peaceful life is not a possibility."

Jack could sense the sadness in the prince's voice. He felt sad about this situation as well. He had no brother nor sister, but he knew that siblings should support each other, not trying to kill each other. Did power corrupt this much? History, unfortunately, informed so.

"I've come to this decision during the expedition, but I will state it again," Prince Alonzo uttered. "I will do all I can to vie for the throne, and when I do, I will honor the wish of my father to maintain the stability of both this kingdom and the relationship with outworlders. Therefore, Mister Storm Wind, I ask this of you. Are you willing to help me in my pursuit to secure the throne?"

Jack was surprised by the request. He was glad that the prince ask for his help, but he didn't think that the prince would value him this much to consider him an important asset in the battle for the throne."

Before his surprise waned, he was given another surprise again by a notification voice, "You have been offered an SSS grade chain kingdom faction quest, Throne of Themisphere. Do you accept?"

'F*ck me! Another SSS quest? Hey, Peniel! Do you think this one is genuine?' Jack sent his thought to Peniel who was sitting on his shoulder.

'Considering it involves the fate of a country, I think it is,' Peniel answered.

'What do you think? Do you think a genuine SSS quest will be too difficult for me?'

'I think so. But a genuine SSS chain quest will also take a long time. As I said before, the SSS grade of a chain quest reflects the overall difficulty, not its individual quest. Considering you are now an elite class, you should be able to tackle those first few individual quests. Its difficulty will approach SSS grade at the end of the chain quest.'

Jack pondered about the information. Prince Alonzo was assuming Jack's silence as he was still considering his request, he said, "if you are unwilling, I totally understand. Don't feel bad about it. This is my problem, after all. I will still consider you as my friend."

Hearing the prince's words, Jack made a resolution.. He stood up, knelt down, then declared resolutely, "Your Highness, I will give my all to help you in becoming the King of Themisphere."

Chapter 492: Blacksmith Haestus

Prince Alonzo's pale face, upon hearing Jack's pledge, brightened considerably. "Good! I'm extremely glad for your support. Please stand up!"

At that time, Jack heard another notification, informing him that his Social skill, Influence, had upgraded to Advanced Apprentice. Earning a prince's gratitude must have pushed that skill's proficiency by a great deal.

Jack said as he stood, "However, I must say, I'm just a weak outworlder. I doubt I can cause any ripple in your power struggle."

"I disagree," the prince said. "If I remember correctly, when we first met, you are still level 18, even lower level than me. Now, even though I have improved, you have improved much further at level 32, while I'm now lower level than you at level 27."

"I agree. The rate by which you outworlders is improving is scary," Commander Quintus said.

"Perhaps that is the reason that Therribus opposed your kind so much," Prince Alonzo said. "He was afraid of your kind. In that case, I'm afraid he will do something drastic if he sees outworlders keep on improving at this rate."

"I will keep an eye on him. As long as the king still draws a breath, he won't be able to do much," Mason said, then to Alonzo, he said, "you just focused on improving your influence to secure a strong enough position to contend against your two brothers."

Alonzo nodded. "In that case, I already have a target in mind. Mister Storm Wind, I would like to give you your first assignment. I have tried to approach and gained support from the Blacksmith Circle. I have made some contacts with them and provided them with rare materials. I would like you to head over to their base and give them this gift I have prepared."

A maid brought a miniature treasure chest to Jack. While receiving it, Jack asked Peniel, 'Blacksmith Circle?'

'It's another league faction. Those that had high proficiency in blacksmithing can become its members.'

"The other two princes didn't put much attention to the Blacksmith Circle, they think it is just a small faction," Mason added. "But this faction is not to be underestimated. It provides almost half of the kingdom's weapon supply after all."

"Yes, Royal Advisor Mason has been the one that proposed for me to get close to this faction. Now I am close to asking for official support," Alonzo said. "Inside this chest is also a letter. Please give it to a Master Blacksmith called Haestus. He is the one I have made contact with within the faction and is also one of the top echelons of the faction. I have been planning to head there myself, but as you see I am in no condition to travel. I've postponed this matter long enough. I wish you to represent me in sealing this cooperation with the Blacksmith Circle. Once he signed the letter, please bring it back."

'Uh, I'm not exactly a negotiator type,' Jack thought. But what could he do? He had declared so passionately just now to help the prince. If he declined the first task given to him, that would be

embarrassing. He would just do his best, as usual. He stored the miniature treasure chest into his inventory and said to the prince, "I will head over right away."

He heard a notification voice telling him that the chain quest, Throne of Themisphere, had been updated.

"I will be counting on you," Prince Alonzo said.

Jack nodded. He then said, "There is one thing I think I should inform you all. This is about us outworlders. Although my theory had Prince Therribus as a possible culprit, we could not rule out Prince Rhemos as well. Previously, I've seen Prince Rhemos hanging out with an outworlder who is a part of a coalition."

Jack told them about the coalition and the name of the guilds that were part of the coalition. He advised them to be careful when dealing with outworlders who were part of this coalition.

"Unfortunately, I can't ban them from joining," Mason said. "Each prince or high official like me has the right to recruit someone into our kingdom faction. I believe Prince Rhemos must have invited many outworlders from this coalition you mentioned. But thanks to your information, I will pay attention to them. Make sure they don't do anything suspicious."

"Talking about outworlder guilds, I understand you also in one, right?" Prince Alonzo asked Jack.

"Yes, it's called Everlasting Heavenly Legends."

"Give me the names of promising members. I will invite them into our kingdom faction as well."

"Great!" Jack said. If the other could gain merit points and reached Viscount as well, they could exchange their merit points for the guild bonus. They didn't have to rely on him alone. He immediately informed them of the names of Everlasting Heavenly Legends' core members, except for Dylan. For the regular members, he didn't trust them enough yet.

"Jeanny?" Commander Quintus commented after seeing the list of names. "She is already a member of our faction."

"She is?" Jack was astonished. Jeanny never mentioned it.

"She is of the Military branch. A rather promising one, I might say. I didn't know she is your friend."

"Great. If you have anything that requires large numbers of workforces, you can contact her. She is the leader of my guild."

While Jack continued to chat with them, he asked them for directions to Blacksmith Circle. Contrary to his expectation, this faction was not located inside the capital. Their base was in the wilderness. More correctly, their base was at the other side of Mount Thenias which the capital was leaning on. Mason gave Jack the coordinates to the place.

Mason explained that the Blacksmith Circle built their base there to utilize the mountain's heat in forging their weapons and armors. That side of the mountain also provided many ore mines which they used to craft equipment.

Jack informed them in that case, he would head there tomorrow morning. He planned to rest inside the capital tonight.

After chatting about a few more things, Jack excused himself. Prince Alonzo asked him when he stood from his seat, "I believe you will be staying in Amy's Bakery?"

"That's my plan," Jack answered.

"Samuel will accompany you to the Blacksmith Circle. He will wait for you in front of Amy's Bakery tomorrow morning."

"He will?"

Samuel, who heard, immediately protested, "Your Highness, no! I need to protect you. My life is already yours. When I heard about that second assassination attempt, I've made up my mind. I'll stay by your side no matter what. No assassin will ever get near you again before going through me!"

Prince Alonzo gave Samuel a grateful expression. "I understand and appreciate your devotion. However, as you can see, I am just laying here all day. I'm fully protected within this castle. There is no need for you to continue standing guard. You will help me more by protecting Mister Storm Wind in his task. You can return to me again once the task is done."

"But..." Samuel was still hesitant.

"Samuel, this is my order. I hope you will abide by it."

"I... I obey," Samuel said as he bowed.

"Good," Prince Alonzo said. He turned to Jack and said, "he will meet with you tomorrow morning. I wish you luck."

"Thank you. I pray that Your Highness will recover soon."

Jack exchanged farewells with Royal Advisor Mason and Princess Sindral as well. Commander Quintus also excused himself and left with Jack. When they came out of Prince Alonzo's bed-chamber, Claudius' squad get into formation and followed them as they left.

During his walk out of the castle, Jack checked the new quest on his Quest page.

Throne of Themisphere (Chain kingdom faction quest)

Difficulty: SSS

Rewards: ???

Support Prince Alonzo in ascending the throne.

Part 1: Gain support from Blacksmith Circle

Difficulty: S

Rewards: 500,000 exp, 30 gold coins, 3000 merit points, additional rewards possible

Meet with blacksmith Haestus and form an official alliance with the Blacksmith Circle.

'The description is more detailed this time, probably this is how a proper chain quest looks like,' Jack thought. It was as Peniel told him, the difficulty of the individual quest was lower than its parent quest. S difficulty still sounded difficult, but now that he was an elite class, supported by a level 55 Special Elite native, he should be okay. Though he didn't understand why negotiating with a group of blacksmiths would have an S difficulty.

The exp points and gold coins were nothing much for an S difficulty quest, but the merit points were generous. He could request Imperial rescue two times with those many points.

As Jack and Commander Quintus walked through the palace courtyard with squad escort behind them, three figures were watching them from a balcony far above.

"I thought you said you have taken care of him?" Prince Therribus asked.

"I... I did," Warren replied with a nervous tone. "The Assassin Guild has confirmed his death. He is an outworlder, it is normal for them to come back to life. He is just a low-level weakling now, there is no need to concern about him."

"Is he?" Prince Therribus turned to the third person who was Lord Commander Claudius.

"I can't inspect his level," Claudius replied. "He must have worn something that blocked others' Inspects. However, from his aura, I'm pretty sure he is an elite class. No way he is a low-level outworlder who just revived from death."

Prince Therribus turned to Warren, who was now getting more nervous under the stare.

"I... I don't understand... I will demand an explanation from the Assassin Guild. I've paid a lot for his life!"

"Hmph, never mind. He must have used a tool to escape death. He is just a minor ant, no need to bother with him. Let's focus instead on Rhemos. I heard he had recruited a lot of outworlders to help him in doing tasks to secure more influence."

"They were just minor setbacks, Your Highness. Our camp is still stronger," Claudius said.

"Nevertheless, he will be more dangerous if he continued at this pace. Do not underestimate that brother of mine. Go and find out about these outworlder forces that had given their supports to him, then formed secret death squads to hunt those that are carrying Rhemos' orders out there in the wilderness.. It's time we start showing these outworlders what it means to oppose us."

Chapter 493: Grand Healer Andrea

"Oh, I forgot I still have this quest!" Jack said while reading his Quest page.

"Something's wrong?" Commander Quintus asked after hearing Jack's sudden exclamation.

"Do you know which way to the infirmary run by Healer Society?" Jack asked instead of answering Quintus' question.

"Open your map."

Jack did so. Commander Quintus soon sent him a set of coordinates.

"It's in the slum district?" Jack was surprised. Most of the League factions he had known operated out of the business district.

"Yes, they chose to build there because more people needed help there," Quintus explained.

Jack thanked the Commander, he then asked another question, "Say, Commander, do you mind teaching me that move you did when fighting the Grim Sand Drake? Where you split into many shadows to attack?"

"Do you have 100 gold coins and a Basic Master Scrollmaking skill?"

"Uh... the coins I have, but I'm no scrollmaker," Jack said.

"Then we can talk again after you have found one who is willing to help you," Commander Quintus replied.

"Doesn't the kingdom has high-level scrollmakers? Can't you ask for their help? I can pay more coins," Jack had not given up.

"Tell you what, do a couple of assignments for the prince, and I will consider asking."

Jack guessed that's the best he could get at this time, he said goodbye to Commander Quintus and rode Pandora towards the slum district. He kept her in a light gait to avoid trouble with the city guards. When he passed by the noble district gate exit, the guards there eyed him with suspicion.

"She won't run, she will just be doing a light walk," Jack told them.

But even Pandora's light gait was almost as fast as the ordinary steed's running speed. Jack arrived at the coordinates given by Commander Quintus within a short time.

On the way, Jack was still wondering about Prince Alonzo's second assassination attempt. Even though he thought that there was a deeper plot under that assassination attempt, it was not impossible to have the coalition's involvement there. He thought about contacting Cleo to ask her but he realized she was not on his Friend list.

He wondered if she would agree to add him as a friend if he asked the next time they met.

He thought as well about changing into Unrivalled Arcaner and went to Death Associates' base to collect some information, but then decided not to. The Royal Advisor had said that he would take care of the investigation. He should leave that matter to him. Prince Alonzo had given him a quest to take care of, he needed to focus on that.

The infirmary in Thereath was larger than the one in both Themetus and Theseval. Its large size made it a contrast to the other small houses in the slum. Yet, its façade was simple, expressing humility to blend in with the other slum structures. The one in Themetus looked much grander than this one.

Jack unsummoned Pandora and went into the infirmary. The place was more hectic compared to the other two infirmaries he had visited. As Commander Quintus had said, there seemed to be more people in need of healing in the slum district.

Jack looked around trying to find a healer who was free enough for him to ask for the Grand Healer, but he saw none. Even the receptionist was busy handling the questions of several people at the time.

Since there was no one he could disturb, he started walking around. He figured the Grand Healer should work in a separate office, probably on a higher floor, like that prick Girolamo in Themethus. So, he started looking for stairs going up.

While he was searching around, someone approached him, "Excuse me, do you need help?"

Jack turned to a mature woman whose beauty was still not diminished by time. She was wearing a dirty healer robe. She must have treated a lot of patients. Since she had taken the time to talk to him, Jack was not going to let go of the chance.

"I'm looking for the Grand Healer, can you point me the way?" Jack asked.

"The Grand Healer? What business do you have with her?" She asked.

"Her?" Jack used Inspect on the woman.

Andrea (Rare Elite Human, Grand Healer), level 55

HP: 560,000

'She is the Grand Healer? What a coincidence!' After knowing the woman's identity, Jack took out Girolamo's parcel from his bag. He presented it to Andrea and said, "The Grand Healer in Themetus asked me to deliver this to..."

Jack's words trailed off when he noticed Andrea was not paying attention to him. She was instead staring at his shoulder, Jack turned and saw that it was the shoulder where Peniel was clinging to.

"You have a High Fairy familiar? Borrow her to me for a while, please!" Andrea exclaimed.

"How rude! Sister, I'm not something to be borrowed," Peniel protested.

Jack instead asked, "What's in it for me?" Which awarded him a punch on his cheek.

"Ouch! I'm just joking!" Jack uttered.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean disrespect," Andrea said to Peniel. "Can you please lend me your help? I will truly appreciate it."

"What kind of help?" Jack asked, still massaging his cheek.

"Follow me please," Andrea said.

The Grand Healer seemed to not notice Girolamo's parcel after seeing Peniel. So Jack just stored the parcel first. He followed her to a quiet hallway and then down into the basement. They went to several doors that had locks and latches. On the last door, Andrea even had to perform a rite which caused the runic symbols around the door to brighten.

Jack assumed that was some kind of protective rune diagram, Andrea might be using some kind of passcode spell to allow them to enter. Which caused him to think further, this room the Grand Healer

was taking them into, seems like an important place. Was it okay for an outsider like him to be brought there?

As if sensing Jack's question, Andrea said, "I don't usually bring outsiders here, but we are in a hurry."

They came into a large circular room. At the center of the room occupying much of the floor space was a pool. The walls around were filled with rune diagrams. Above the pool, hanging from a ceiling was some kind of a metal chandelier, except without any lighting source.

Andrea went to a cabinet at one side of the room and searched for something inside. Jack just stood beside the pool. He waited for Andrea to explain everything. He looked at the water inside the pool, though it looked clean, Jack felt somehow it was rather murky as well.

Andrea came back. When Jack thought she would explain things, she cast a spell formation. Her body then floated up to the metal chandelier above. She inserted a large pale stone into the metal chandelier.

'Peniel, when will I get the flying spell?' Jack asked.

Once you get to the second rank in Order of Magi, there should be a spell for exchange there.

Andrea soon floated down to Jack's side. "I'm sorry, let me explain," she said.

"As you saw on the floor above, things are a bit chaotic. We have run out of holy water and were just relying on our healing spells. It was simply insufficient to accommodate our needs for tending a large number of patients."

"This is the place where we produced our holy water," Andrea indicated the pool. "We need a holy magic stone to purify this water and turn them into holy water. Sadly, delivery had been delayed. Damn those slow delivery people! There is, however, another way to purify the water, albeit short term."

'Holy water?' Jack asked Peniel in his mind.

'It's water blessed with holy essences. It can be used to aid in healing, not as effective as a healing potion, but it's cheaper. It is also a potent weapon against Undead, Darkness, and Demon creatures.'

"Let me guess, this other way you mentioned need a high fairy?" Jack asked Andrea.

"Yes. Any magical creature with an affinity to healing spells will do, but a high fairy is perfect. I implore you for the people suffering up there to show some compassion and grant us your aid."

Jack was just about to ask 'what's in it for me?' again, but hearing such a plea and for such an honorable cause, he found himself unable to ask for benefit. He asked instead, "What will she lose? I won't agree if she needs to sacrifice something. I enjoy helping people but not at the cost of someone dear to me."

Peniel's cheeks were getting red hearing Jack's words.

"She won't lose anything. Aside from the fact that she won't be able to use her healing spells for the next one or two days. I only need to absorb a bit of her spiritual essence to power up that exhausted holy magic stone." Andrea pointed to the pale stone at the center of the metal chandelier.

Jack turned to Peniel and asked her, "what do you say?"

"Up to you. It is you who I can't heal for the next one or two days," Peniel replied.

"Hm... I don't think it's a big deal. It's not like we are going to a dangerous place. We will simply be going to a faction's base tomorrow. All right! In the name of all that is good, let's help this lady in need," Jack declared.

"Wonderful!" Andrea exclaimed. "Now, all you have to do is float below that holy magic stone and above the water."

Peniel flew over. Andrea then chanted something, Jack saw spell formations appear around Peniel. A thick green light enshrouded her body. She disappeared inside that green light. Jack was slightly worried watching it. The green light slowly flowed into the magic stone above.. The magic stone's pale surface was gradually replaced by shiny white color.

Chapter 494: Support From The Healer Society

Andrea did another chant and the holy magic stone radiated a ring of white light. This ring sent down tiny droplets of lights onto the pool. The water on the pool, upon receiving the essence, became more clear and transparent. The murky feeling that Jack felt from before was gone.

The process continued for some time. The green light that shrouded Peniel soon vanished and she was visible again. Jack didn't see anything wrong.

"It's done, you can return," Andrea said to Peniel.

When Peniel returned to Jack's side, Andrea said, "I thank the both of you. I'm extremely grateful. We are truly in a bind. Now, we can hold out until we receive our delivery. By the way, what's your purpose here? You said you were looking for me?"

"Yes, I have this parcel for you," Jack said as he took it out.

Andrea received it. She was opening the package as she asked, "where is this from?"

Jack heard notification that his delivery faction quest had finally been completed. He heaved a relief, he thought for a second that he would be given another parcel again. Jack answered Andrea's question, "It's from the Grand Healer Girolamo from Themetus." At the same time, Andrea had finished unpacking and the thing inside was a magic stone with brilliant white color.

Jack looked at the magic stone in Andrea's hand, turned to the magic stone inside the hanging candelabra above that was still raining tiny lights onto the pool, then back to the magic stone from Girolamo again. His eyes twitched upon recognition.

'Don't tell me that is...'

Andrea looked up and rubbed her temple.

'Damn! It truly is. You are really too hasty, woman. So all that ceremony just now was unnecessary...'
Jack cursed inside, but he maintained his cordial expression outside.

It seemed that Andrea was also having the same thought. She put the holy magic stone aside and smiled warmly at Jack.

"I thank you for having delivered the package and thank you both again for the help just now," she said.

"Isn't that..." Peniel was about to comment on the holy magic stone.

'Peniel, hush! Don't say anything!' Jack stopped her telepathically.

Peniel was confused but she didn't say anything. Jack and Andrea continued to smile at each other as if they were the best of friends.

"You have helped me with my predicament. Here, let me reward you with small gifts," Andrea said as she fished out ten small bottles and filled them up using the water from the pool. He handed those ten bottles to Jack.

Jack received and inspected them.

Holy Water (Uncommon consumable)

Use on non- Undead/Darkness/Demon: Recover 2 HP each second and +30% resistance to all status effects for 2 minutes.

Use on Undead/Darkness/Demon: Inflict 500 damage, afflicted creature loses all recovery ability and is weakened for 2 minutes. Cooldown: 2 minutes

"Oh? It has different effects depending on the type of creature it was used on," Jack said after reading the description.

"Well, since our matter is done, can you please leave? I need to lock this place up and harness more of this holy water for my healers above."

'There you are, being hasty again,' Jack thought, but he didn't mind. He never planned to spend a long time here anyway. He only wanted to complete his delivery quest. But as he was about to go out the door, a thought occurred to him.

He turned around. Andrea was right behind him, giving him a face that said, 'Why are you still here? I'm in a hurry.'

"If you don't mind me asking, lady Andrea. What is your thought of the political situation of our kingdom?" Jack asked.

"Hm? I never involved myself much in politics," Andrea replied.

"But I'm sure you are aware of it. Do you know that we have three candidates to replace the current king? Do you have any thoughts as to which candidate you will be supporting?"

"Three? I only heard of two, prince Therribus and prince Rhemos. Both of which if I'm allowed to say, is not to my liking. Anyway, the kingdom never sends us any aid, so I never see why we should involve ourselves with them."

"There is a third candidate, Prince Alonzo. He was the smallest heir to King Themos. But he was also the most benevolent. He liked to help people and treat others fairly, much like you! I bet you will like him if you meet him, and I bet he will love to help you in your cause. He will very much approve of what you are doing here, helping all these people in the slum."

"Well, if he is so supportive, I bet he won't mind giving us some funds, would he? We are always in need of coins as we are doing most of our healings in charity, after all."

Jack paused for a bit. He gritted his teeth as he fished out 100 gold coins. "Consider this as a token of goodwill from Prince Alonzo. If you don't mind, maybe you can arrange some time to meet up with the prince? I can help set up the meeting. If you can, please also help to send out good words about Prince Alonzo to your patients, and how he supported this infirmary."

Andrea looked at the coins in Jack's hand for a bit before deciding to accept them. "I will have to discuss further with our faction's leader about giving our official support. I will accept these coins as goodwill and agree for a meeting."

"Great!" Jack said. At the same time, he heard a notification voice that his Chain faction quest had received an update and he received 1000 merit points. He quickly opened his Quest page.

Throne of Themisphere (Chain kingdom faction quest)

Difficulty: SSS

Rewards: ???

Support Prince Alonzo in ascending the throne.

Part 1: Gain support from Blacksmith Circle

Difficulty: S

Rewards: 500,000 exp, 30 gold coins, 3000 merit points, additional rewards possible

Meet with blacksmith Haestus and form an official alliance with the Blacksmith Circle.

Completed Hidden Part:

Open a negotiation to gain support from Healer Society

Rewards: 1000 merit points

It was as he had expected. The influence that Prince Alonzo required is not only support from nobles and military personnel, but also factions. Just as how he was tasked to gain support from Blacksmith Circle.

"Is there anything else? I still have many tasks to attend to," Andrea said. Her hastiness attitude returned.

"Another thing. If you need any help in delivering again, you can send a request to my guild. I guarantee my guild will carry out your request with haste," Jack said.

"Really? Because the last delivery was not so satisfactory," Andrea said while giving Jack a side-eye.

Jack smiled wryly, "no worry, our guild members are professionals and will carry their tasks with utmost priority."

"Where is this guild of yours then?"

Jack opened his map. Andrea recorded his Guild Headquarters' coordinates.

"You don't have a representative inside the city?" She asked. "But this distance is not far. It's still okay, I guess. I will send a request if we need something."

Jack thanked her and left the building. He thought about Andrea's question. Maybe they did need to buy land inside the city to construct Guild Base. To allow the natives easy access to them if they want to hand out guild quests. His Influence skill had improved so it should help the guild in attracting special guild quests not available in the Guild Associations.

Jack summoned Pandora and went back to the noble district again. Since Duke Alfredo was in isolation and he doubted he would be allowed entry if he went to the palace by himself, he went to Commander Quintus' mansion instead.

Luckily, the commander was at home again. Jack informed him about Andrea and the Healing Circle's willingness to open a discussion for showing their support to Prince Alonzo. Commander Quintus applauded Jack for his initiative. He said he would talk with the prince first thing tomorrow and they would send a representative for a further talk with that faction.

While Jack was there, Jack asked if he could just submit a completed faction quest there or if he should go to the commander's tower to do that. The commander said he could process his request there, and took him to his home office.

On the way, Jack asked what about the outworlders who were recruited by Prince Rhemos' side. Did they also take their kingdom faction quests from the commander's tower? The commander answered that there were different processing centers handling faction quests. The commander warned Jack though, to just use his tower. The other centers were under other princes' camps so they might not be friendly if Jack went there.

After submitting the faction quest, Jack received a standard reward of 50 merit points, and then,

Completed all deliveries: 500 merit points

Take too long a time to complete deliveries: deduct 400 merit points

He had been sent all over the country for this delivery quest and all he got was a friggin 150 merit points? He would have cursed his heart out, but it was due to this quest that he managed to earn Healer Society's trust and hook them up with the third prince's camp. So, he did not complain.

Now that he learned the chain faction quest granted much more merit points upon completion, he decided to just focus on it.. He did not take another random faction quest.

Chapter 495: Distribution Of Power

Seeing the success in gaining support from a faction unrelated to his current quest, Jack was motivated to try another. He was a member of the League of Champions and Order of Magi. The only high-ranking member he knew in the League of Champions was Gruff, but that a*shole had been avoiding him, so he guessed that faction was out.

On top of Pandora, within a short time, Jack was back to the Order of Magi's hut again. Today he had been going back and forth to the same places within the city. Very busy day indeed.

He went into the hut and saw Janus, or at least one of his copies, behind his desk as usual.

"Greetings, Mister Storm Wind. Back again so soon?" Janus greeted Jack with an amiable smile. "You know I can't let you in if you are not using your archmage persona, right?"

Jack looked at himself, he had forgotten to transform. But never mind, he was not planning to go in anyway. "I'm here in an official kingdom business," Jack declared, trying to act as official as possible.

"I'm representing the third prince to ally with the Order of Magi," Jack continued.

Janus just stared at him, with that mysterious smile of his while twiddling his long purple hair. He finally said, "I'm sorry. We have already thrown in our support for Prince Rhemos."

"What? Why?"

"What do you mean why? He has a good relationship with us and he donated a lot of coins to us each month."

"Really? How much is his donation?" Jack asked, prepared to take out his coins if needed.

"1000 gold coins each month," Janus replied.

'Ugh...' Jack's mind which had delved into his storage bag, came out again. What was he thinking? Trying to compete financially with a kingdom's prince? He bet Rhemos could easily increase the donation if someone tried to compete with him.

Since it was no longer possible to rope in this faction, Jack turned back dispiritedly.

"Oh, by the way, if you are trying to ask League of Champions, you better not waste time," Janus said. "They are already in support of Prince Therribus."

Jack came out of the hut with despondent feeling, but he soon cast aside that down feeling and looked to the front with determination.

"You sure recover quickly," Peniel commented.

"This is just a small setback. I should have guessed all the prominent factions should have been approached already. Which meant we are only left with those smaller-scale factions or less-known factions. Unfortunately, I don't have many connections to those. Well, no need to worry about it. I will just focus on the task at hand."

The sun was setting, Jack thought he should return to Amy's Bakery. He would be heading out early tomorrow morning and he was sure Amy would have a lot of things to ask again during the evening, so he returned early. But before that, he went around the city shopping for Iron and Steel ores.

Although the guild warehouse would collect ores for him, those were going to be used for guild purposes. He could not be selfish and take advantage. He would buy the ores for his own uses.

During his shopping around, his Hagglng skill increased to Advanced Apprentice. He now got more discounts when buying goods.

When he arrived at the street where Amy's Bakery was on. He caught sight of several players he knew. Considering this was the street where most guilds constructed their bases, it was not strange.

One of these players approached him. "Brother Storm Wind, how do you do?"

"I'm fine, thank you. Sir William is a busy person, I'm honored you spend the time to greet me," Jack replied.

William of Wellington, the acting leader of Saint Edge in this capital, now a Druid, smiled at Jack's sarcasm. "If you are bitter of how we didn't lend a hand during the coalition attack. It's perfectly understandable. If you allow me to explain, we are tied up in our own matters at the time. The next time the coalition tries something, I promise we won't just sit back."

"Well, I always thought that action speaks louder," Jack said.

"You prick! Can't you see our leader is giving face to you?" Radiant Phoebe, who was behind William and had become a Paladin, said.

"Do you want to have a second round with me?" Jack asked.

Radiant Phoebe's face was red with anger. But Jack's name had spread in a not so peaceful way since the last time they met. Although she was unsatisfied, she did not dare to accept an open challenge."

William simply laughed the situation off.

"I see that you are unsatisfied with how we have handled the relationship between our guilds. I have no excuse. Please accept my sincerest apology."

Jack waved him off, "I never hold it against you. It's your choice if you want to help us or not. I don't get discontent about it. But of course, when you need help, we also have no obligation to provide aid."

"That is understandable. I just wish that we don't become enemies."

"I've already got more than enough enemy to contend with. I will thank the Heavens if I ain't given more."

William laughed at the comment, "Your latest feat has already spread far and wide. I truly admire you. The presence of coalition members had greatly reduced in this capital as the three big guilds pulled their members to defend their Guild Headquarters. The others pretty much cowered without the three heads. If they know you are having a leisurely walk in the capital, they would have cursed until kingdom come."

"They still have members in this city, they could have easily reported seeing him in the capital," Radiant Phoebe reminded.

Jack shrugged, "well, maybe I'm just pretending. Maybe when they thought they are safe and allocated their people elsewhere, that's when I strike."

"They must be having a headache because of you," William said.

"Serve them right. How about you? Have your guild gotten a Guild Headquarters as well?" Jack asked.

"We have," William exclaimed. "It's in a region around a city called Vacharest."

"Impressive," Jack said, while in his mind he asked Peniel, 'Is this Vacharest far?'

'It's not only far. It's in another country. That city is the capital of Sangrod Empire, the one ruled by the Vampire race,' Peniel answered.

"Sa-Sangrod Empire...?" Jack blurted out.

"Oh, I didn't expect Brother Storm's knowledge of this world's geography was so extensive. You even recognized that the name of the city is from Sangrod Empire."

"How did you get a Guild Headquarters in another country?" Jack asked.

"Truthfully, it's not exactly us. It's a splinter of Saint Edge guild who was active in Vacharest," William explained. "Just like how Death Associates managed to contact their missing members in another town during the first month when we arrived, we have also managed to contact our other members in Vacharest. They have even more of our original members there, including the true leader of Saint Edge."

"So your guild here and the one there are still considered separate guilds?"

"Yes, once we have players that can cross country, we will merge our two guilds into one. We consider the one over there as the true Saint Edge guild. They will be focusing on the Guild Headquarters and guild reputations. We here focus on gathering resources like coins and items. Since when we merge, only the resources are combined. The guild reputations only follow the highest one, while for Guild Headquarters, one guild could only have one."

"How do you know all that?" Jack asked. He had known about this info as well, but it was because of Peniel. For Saint Edge to understand so many meant their information-gathering capability was notable."

"We have our way," William replied with a smile. "But from your expression. It seemed that you have also known about this info. I should be the more surprised one, Brother Storm Wind."

"Do you know any other prominent guilds who have also gotten Guild Headquarters?"

"Aside from you and the three big guilds. White Scarfs had just gotten theirs..."

'They are?' Jack sent a message to Silverwing, asking him.

"... Black Cloak as well, and Crowd of Sins from the coalition. Aside from this, I don't think there are others yet. A country's regions are limited after all. I don't know how many regions are in this country. Once every region has their Guild Headquarters, the next guild who wish to have one will have no choice but to invade the existing ones."

'There are eleven regions in Themisphere,' Jack heard Peniel telling him telepathically. Based on William's and Peniel's information, there were still four more regions free for grab. After all eleven were

taken, the distribution of power was pretty much set. Other guilds who wish to get a Guild Headquarters would have to, as William said, go the violent way."

At this time, Jack received Silverwing's message, "Yes, we have just conquered the Bandit Outpost an hour ago. I was just about to inform and thank you for the info you have provided."

'An hour ago? Which means Saint Edge has a spy inside White Scarfs.' Jack thought. But such a practice was common amongst the big guilds.. The difference was if the spy was amongst the common members or their core members, as the incident last time with Grimclaw.

Chapter 496: Being Tailed

"Well, I wish you luck to regroup with your guildmates in Vacharest as soon as possible," Jack said, trying to end their conversation.

But William had another issue to discuss, "Wait! Brother Storm Wind, if you can spare a bit more time. I would like to ask how you have managed to cross country to Verremor."

"I did?"

"Everyone already knows that your guild has Orc members. The same case as for our guild in Vacharest, we won't be able to join them if neither of our members crossed countries and physically arrived. We can't add them as friends as well because there is a distance limit for sending Friend requests. We can't send it via long-range communication, hence we can't invite them into our guild. How do you do it with the Orc members?"

Jack smiled and replied, "we have our way." Returning William's words to him.

Radiant Phoebe's expression was colorful due to Jack's response but she kept quiet. William's face remained smiling. "I guess I deserve that," he said. "I do hope we can build a better relationship in the future."

"I do hope so as well," Jack replied. "If you will excuse me."

William didn't stop him this time, so Jack left the two.

When Jack was out of earshot, Radiant Phoebe asked, "Are we going to let him treat us lightly like that?"

"To be respected requires strength. He has that at the moment. We can afford to be haughty in the past because of the strength of our guild. If we want to return to our glory, we need to reclaim our past strength. Reunite all our members. When that time comes, perhaps then we will show him what it means to disrespect Saint Edge."

Before Jack entered Amy's Bakery, he took this week 38 gold coins profit from Ellie's restaurant. Entering Amy's Bakery, he was awarded 25 gold coins profit. Not enough to cover the expense he had spent on Healer's Society, but at least it's something.

He spent the night chatting with Amy and Samantha before having an early rest. He did not forget to train his mana sensing before sleeping. Nowadays, he had always spared one hour before sleeping to meditate. His mana sensing was still a far cry from his grandfather's level, who could detect movements

that caused no damage. Without attaining that level of expertise, he could forget about learning mana manipulation.

The next morning after waking up, he also spared one hour to train Formless Flowing Sword style and Eight Diagram Illusory Steps, with the emphasis on the latter, because he was still not proficient enough to use this martial art in a real fight.

When he came out of Amy's Bakery, Samuel was already there standing by.

"Have you been waiting long?" Jack asked.

"Long enough," he replied.

"Excellent! Let's go," Jack said.

Samuel was not sure if that was supposed to be mocking or what? He kept quiet and followed Jack.

Looking at the coordinates provided by Mason, it would be closer if they exited the capital from the East gate. On the way, Jack made some small talk with Samuel, asking him how he adjusted to his demotion to Knight Lieutenant. Samuel replied with an irritated tone that he never cared about ranks.

Jack didn't mean to ridicule the veteran warrior, he was simply looking for a topic to talk about. The last time his Diplomacy skill had leveled up before his Influence skill. This time, it was still at Intermediate Apprentice while the latter had increased to Advanced Apprentice. He figured he should talk more with natives to level up this skill. He had expected it to level up last night when he talked a bunch with Amy and Samantha, but it remained the same till now.

Jack continued to try to talk of something with Samuel, but the guy was not a talkative partner. Or maybe Samuel still disliked him as to how he was during the expedition. So Jack gave up and just walked in peace.

When they arrived at East city gate, Jack summoned Pandora while Samuel called his steed, which was an uncommon grade. Samuel was rather astonished seeing Pandora. Even his steed felt rather intimidated by the aura and refused to stand near the Nightmare.

"You ready?" Jack asked Samuel, who nodded.

"Okay, let's depart!" Jack declared and had Pandora run forward.

"Stop! Stop!" Jack heard Peniel shouting beside him.

"What's wrong?"

"Do you expect an uncommon steed to be able to catch up to Pandora's speed?"

Jack realized the problem and had Pandora stop. He looked back and saw Samuel in a distance struggling to catch up.

"Aw, hell..."

In the end, he could just have Pandora run with a trot to adjust to Samuel's speed. Jack felt like grumbling. This Knight Lieutenant was sent to aid him, but why did it feel like this native was weighing him down instead?

After a while on the road, he approached Samuel, whose steed turned away when Pandora tried to approach. Helpless at the situation, Jack climbed down from Pandora and approached Samuel on foot. He had a brief talk with Samuel before they then galloped in different directions.

Jack continued alone with Pandora at a light walk.

The reason that Jack had sent Samuel away, was because he had noticed from his radar some blue dots were following him. If it was white dots that represented natives, he would have galloped away at full speed or stayed near Samuel. But if they were only players, he had no reason to worry.

It was normal to have many players roaming the vicinity of the capital, but this group of blue dots had constantly stayed behind him for a long while already. After he broke away with Samuel and went in another direction, these blue dots also changed direction and continued to follow him.

Samuel had protested at first when Jack asked him to move away. He pointed out that it was the prince's order for him to protect Jack, he couldn't walk away when enemies were coming. Jack told him that if he did not go, those outworlders behind won't take action. He assured him not to worry because, amongst outworlders, he could be considered the strongest. Samuel jeered at Jack's remark.

In the end, Jack managed to persuade the veteran warrior to leave him. Jack told him to wait for him at their destination, Blacksmith Circle.

'Why haven't they taken action yet?' Jack thought. He had been walking by himself for a long while already, yet the blue dots simply continued to follow and not approach.

Jack decided to climb down from Pandora and see if that will make a difference. He unsummoned the Nightmare and then looked for some random monsters to kill, pretending to be grinding for exp.

'Still not coming? Damn it! I don't have all day,' Jack complained inside after killing all the monsters in the immediate area.

"Why not just go over and ask them what they want?" Peniel suggested.

"Hm, you are right," Jack said with a calm tone, but actually felt sheepish for having played pretend with his supposed pursuers. He should just go over from the start and beat the answers out of them.

As he was about to head over, a distant explosion sound was heard. Jack felt sudden danger but before he could react, he already felt an impact at the side of his head. He received a critical hit with 702 damages.

'Gunshot!' He exclaimed. Only a gunshot attack could render his mana sense ability redundant, because the attack would already hit the same time he sensed it.

Luckily this world followed game world rules, where a fatal hit didn't always mean instant kill. Otherwise, he was already a dead man. He quickly took out his magic staff and cast Magic Shield in the direction where he had felt the impact from, and promptly rushed over. Another gunshot was heard as the bullet crashed into the shield. The shot was not strong enough to bypass his shield's defense.

Jack looked at his radar, the blue dots that were following him had now changed to black, proving that this group was in the same party as the Gunner. They were currently rushing towards him. The black dot who was supposed to be the gunner was in a different direction, on top of a small hill not far away. 'Why did they spread out like that?' Jack thought.

There were a few other blue dots spread around. He didn't pay attention to these other dots because it was common to have other players grinding monsters in the vicinity.

'Eh? There was another black dot behind,' Jack thought as he observed his radar. While he was pondering about this other black dot, another gunshot sound was heard, from behind! He was hit again in the back of his head and received another critical hit. But this one produced much less damage at 389 damages. Still, two hits already took away almost half his HP. He could not afford to suffer another critical hit.

"Peniel, heal!" Jack shouted.

"Heal your head! Do you forget already I lost my healing ability probably until tomorrow?" Peniel reminded.

"Shit!"

Chapter 497: Yellow Death

Jack made zig-zag moves to make himself a harder target to hit while taking out recovery potions to drink. The players that followed him before were already enclosing. He could see them now. There were six of them. Eight if considering the two gunners.

This team had positioned themselves in a triangle with Jack at the center before executing their attack. That's why they had taken some time before taking action. With two gunners attacking from a distance and six players attacking from proximity, they could continue to wear and hinder Jack's movements, allowing the two gunners to land hits whenever possible.

"Good strategy!" Jack exclaimed to them.

"You still have the mood to chat, you are as laid back as was reported," uttered the lead melee who approached.

Jack made a quick Inspect on the six of them, five melees and one ranged player. The lead who just talked was a Berserker. The ranged player was an elite class as well, Hidden Weapon Specialist. The others were still advanced class, two knights, one warrior, and one rogue. All of them were level 32 and were from the Death Associates guild.

'Four elite class! This team meant business!'

While dealing with the six and at the same time continued moving to evade gun attacks, he asked Peniel telepathically, 'what's the range of those gunners?'

'Gunner boasted the longest ranged attack. Their standard attack can hit until 80 meters away. But gunners had a standard skill called Shooting Stance, at level 1 the skill increased the range by 30 meters and additional 10% damage to every gun attack. The gunner has to get into a crouching position to

activate this skill, moving away will end the stance. Aside from that, if gunners pass their trials on the first try, they will get Snipe skill. At level 1, it deals 300% physical damage at a range of 120 meters, this is not considered adding the shooting stance yet. That first hit you received should have been done by this Snipe skill.'

'Meaning the first gunner was more of an expert,' Jack thought. Although he was not an expert on firearms, he was pretty sure that real-life firearms provided more range. But he guessed if gunner class in this game-world could shoot as far as its real-life counterparts, it would very much provide an unbalanced advantage to this class.

'What is the cooldown of that snipe skill?' Jack asked Peniel again.

'Three minutes.'

Jack decided to not drag the battle more, he had gauged this team's skills. Although all of them were experts, especially the elite classes, they were not ones he could not overcome. He was having trouble simply because he had been placed in a disadvantageous position.

"Your strategy although good, doesn't work on me," Jack said as his magic shield disappeared. A spell formation with three runes was formed rapidly and two identical Jack appeared. The two copies ran in opposite directions, each towards one of the gunners who was still shooting from the distance.

He then replaced his magic staff with Whirlwind Falchion and performed Formless Flowing Sword style. Although he had not mastered enough Eight Diagram Illusory Steps to be used in a real fight, it still improved his footwork. He continued to move around as his swords danced between his opponents. He received a hit or two from the guns from time to time, but it was not so often that his Superior Body Recovery could still cope with.

The Hidden Weapon Specialist Threw three flying daggers at Jack. Although he dished out as much dagger as Anotherday in one throw, all the daggers flew on the same trajectory and targeted the same spot. It was clear that this Specialist was not at the level of Anotherday. Jack easily swatted all daggers in a single slash.

The Berserker on the team had activated his berserk skill, increasing his attack speed and movement speed, but he still couldn't break through Jack's swordplay despite the interference from his teammates and the two gunners.

Both the Berserker and Hidden Weapon Specialist didn't use Heavy Cleave and Boomerang skills respectively. This informed Jack that the two did not successfully pass their elite class trials on the first try.

Even though the six failed to corner Jack, Jack also failed to kill any of them. Their cooperations were very good. It was clear that they were used to working together. The two Knights were also good at using their Enhanced Block skill timing, blocking Jack's attack which should have hit them in a wide area, like Shredding Fang and Blitz Slash. They were quick to cover each other to allow their teammates to consume recovery potions.

While he continued to fight with the six, his two copies were getting closer to the two gunners. One was arriving at a row of trees and shrubberies which was where the second gunner was hiding in. Jack knew

the location of the gunner from his radar, but his copy did not show on the radar, so he could only estimate whether his copy had gotten close or not. His copy still needed to look around to find the gunner.

The first gunner on the small hill, instead, was already in sight. This gunner was taking a position at its top as he continued shooting with a weapon that looked like a long rifle. He fired at Jack's copy when it got close, but the bullet simply passed through.

When the copy was close enough, Jack made a switch and immediately did an Inspect before lunging at the gunner.

Yellow Death (Gunner, level: 33)

HP: 1540

Yellow Death? This was the person Red Death had warned him about, Jack thought in the middle of his attack. Yellow Death who saw Jack approaching, had a magic scroll in his hand. The scroll was activated and he vanished in a flash of light as Jack's two swords swung down.

Although there was no visual cue of where Yellow Death had disappeared to, Jack's mana-sensing ability felt a thread of energy heading into a direction. Jack looked over and saw Yellow Death materialized some distance away in that direction.

'It's the teleportation magic scroll,' Peniel informed Jack.

Jack guessed that Scarface had informed this Yellow Death about his Body Double skill, as that man had experienced Jack's skill himself. But the last time Jack exhibited this skill to Scarface, it was still without any star proficiency. His copies vanished after the one switch. This time, he could still switch a second time.

Jack's second copy found the second gunner at this time, who was a woman. Even though they should not know about Jack's ability to switch the second time, Jack still took precautions. He controlled his second copy to make an attacking move. The second gunner turned out also had a teleportation magic scroll. The second gunner used the scroll and vanished away.

'Peniel, how long is the cooldown for the teleportation spell?' Jack asked.

'Two minutes,' Peniel answered.

That meant they couldn't use the scroll anymore for at least two minutes. Not to mention magic scrolls had become very expensive, he doubted the team have many such scrolls.

The team at the center, who realized that the Jack there was only an image, broke into two smaller teams and came to the two gunners' assist. Jack ran to Yellow Death as three of the center team players went and joined Yellow Death as well.

The three were the Berserker, Knight, and Rogue. The Berserker still had his Berserk skill active, his black tattoo was all over his body. However, the situation was different now. Before, Jack was pincered from different directions. Now, his opponents had been halved, and his four opponents were all in front of him.

Jack easily used the three melee players as cover from Yellow death's shots, all the while hacking at the three melees.

The Death Associates' team soon found out how difficult to fight against Jack in a normal situation. Jack's sword art combined with his skills quickly claimed the Knight and Rogue's lives. But as Jack was about to finish the remaining two, he felt attacks coming from the back.

Jack quickly rolled away. He saw then the two players he had just killed were still alive, albeit with very low HP.

'Sacrificial dummy again? This team is truly a big spender!' Jack thought, but he suddenly realized something. Perhaps all these teleportation magic scrolls and sacrificial dummies were actually to counter his most devastating move, Lightning God Barrage.

Jack grinned. Do you think I need that move against small fries like you?

He switched place for the last time with his copy and his Body Double spell ended. He had brought his copy who was originally at the center to Yellow Death's back. He was about to slash at the guy when Yellow Death suddenly swiveled and shot Jack point-blank.

Jack still managed to cross his two swords to block the bullet, but the impact sent him back some steps. With this one-shot, Jack was reminded to not underestimate ones with the name Death in their alias. He didn't think the man had the ability of mana sense, but his situational awareness was commendable.

Yellow Death, who had just pushed Jack's back suddenly displayed a surprised expression. "What?!" Then he looked at Jack, "You...! You trick us!"

Jack had no idea what he was spouting.

Chapter 498: Arriving At Blacksmith Circle

Jack heard screams from the row of trees, where the other half of his opponents were. 'They were fighting another person?' Jack thought in surprise.

Jack didn't stop just because of this unexpected development, his body continued to move for the offense. Yellow Death also didn't stop shooting, but his mouth which was silent all this time had started to spout nonsense, "How dare you ambush us! Using number against us."

Jack was incensed. 'Ambush? Number? You are one to talk!' Jack didn't scold back, however, he decided to just end this ruse. His Whirlwind Falchion was replaced by Rapid Dazing staff, five runes were formed simultaneously. The spell formation completed and ten crimson chains shot out.

His four opponents were nearby each other so all of them were within the area affected by Myriad Ensnaring Chains spell. The Berserker, Knight, and Rogue were caught off-guard and easily seized by the chains. Yellow Death was a bit further, he continued jumping backward as he shot at the chains that were coming at him.

Jack was slightly impressed. Yellow Death's accuracy during movement was not that far from the kung-fu fighting cowboy he had fought in the past. After several near-capture, Yellow Death managed to escape the Myriad Ensnaring Chains' AOE radius.

Although he managed to save himself, Yellow Death could only watch helplessly as Jack dished out attacks on his fellow teammates. He tried shooting at Jack, but Jack's fast movement made him hard to hit. Not to mention Jack's high HP and high recovery made a few successful hits to be ineffective.

Seeing that the mission was lost, Yellow Death decided to cut the loss. He summoned his steed and ran away as his three teammates fell.

Jack looked at the fleeing Yellow Death and smirked, "You people should have studied more about your prey before starting your hunt."

After finishing with his three opponents, Jack blew his red whistle and Pandora appeared. He climbed onto her, but before he gave chase, he turned and looked at the row of trees where the other half of Yellow Death's team was supposed to be. The shouting from that side had ended. He saw a figure come out of the tree.

Samuel?

"Didn't I ask you to wait at our destination?" Jack shouted at him.

"I take order from the prince, not you!" He shouted back.

Jack didn't talk further, he set his sight on Yellow Death who was getting further and had Pandora start galloping.

Yellow Death was waiting for the combat status to end, so he could use the Guild Return scroll to teleport back to their Guild Headquarters. He had organized this strike team under the order of White Death. Scarface had adamantly opposed this mission but White Death was not interested to listen to the excuse of a failure. Yellow Death had the same thoughts, at least until this moment. He never expected a single player could be so unreasonably unbalanced in comparison to other players.

And what of that native that was with him? It didn't look like that native was his companion. Yellow Death had seen White Death's native companion, so he knew a companion could be summoned at will. This native was more like tag-along due to a quest. Yellow Death had waited until the two separated before he had his team take action. He didn't expect the native to circle back to them.

The Guild Return scroll was ready in Yellow Death's hand, he would activate him the moment he was out of combat. Strange, he should be far enough to be considered out of combat. His steed was a rare grade, after all. He heard approaching galloping sounds. He turned back and saw something that made his heart jump.

Jack, who Yellow Death was trying his best to flee from, was coming with a very fast speed on the back of a horse that was on fire. Yellow Death had heard a report about Jack appearing during the Guild Headquarters battle on a flaming steed, and the report indicated this hellish steed to be very fast, but he never really put such a report in mind. In his thought, his rare steed should not be slower. Yellow Death never imagined the fire horse's speed to be so abnormally frightening.

Once Pandora came by Yellow Death's side, Jack said to him, "The next time you guys want to form a team to take me down, better make sure it was the full team of the Mighty Transforming Death Rangers."

Yellow Death was confused at first hearing Jack's words, before he cursed inside upon realization, 'Damn it! Did he just liken the top members of Death Associates to a children's television series?'

Yellow Death aimed his rifle and shot at Jack, who blocked the shot using Magic Shield.

"Mam, some help?" Jack sent his thought to Pandora, who snorted. Her psychic attack caused Yellow Death's mount to rear up in a panic.

Yellow Death, taken by surprise from losing control of his mount, was thrown off from its back. He was in the middle of making another shot, which now veered off target.

Jack jumped from Pandora's back at this time. He brandished his two swords and performed a burst of twenty-four rapid slashes which all landed on Yellow Death before he even hit the ground.

The attack should have killed Yellow Death, but he landed on the ground with a sliver of HP. Jack had expected the guy to carry a Sacrificial Dummy as well, same as his teammates, so he was not surprised by this. He instead followed up with another thrust before Yellow Death could get up. His sword sank into Yellow Death's throat, his HP dropped to zero.

Jack saw the guy wearing Amulet of Rebirth though, same as his teammates. Yellow Death's body disintegrated without leaving any drops.

"Well, at least this causes them to spend more coins when buying their next Amulet of Rebirth," Jack muttered. "But they are truly spendthrift. I understand about the amulet, but they even wasted so many Sacrificial Dummy. That was supposed to be rare, right? I haven't even seen one myself."

Peniel answered, "They probably found a place that can give them supply. Some league factions provided it, but it still is not cheap."

"Then they are just dumb to throw those resources at me. Well, it good for me though, in this way I make them squander their funds."

With these enemies vanquished, Jack went back to Samuel.

"You are not that popular amongst your own kinsmen, are you?" Samuel commented after Jack arrived.

"What are you saying? I am very popular. These just now were simply the rotten eggs of our kinds," Jack replied.

Peniel who was on Jack's shoulder shook her head at Samuel. Jack looked at her and she turned away pretending to gaze at the distant scenery.

The two then continued their journey towards Blacksmith Circle.

During the journey, Jack received a call from John, "Expert, are you free?"

"I'm not. Why?" Jack answered.

"Should have guessed. Do you remember the gigantic beehives we passed by during the expedition? Well, Jeanny and I are organizing a raid on that monster settlement. Peniel informed us the rewards of such a place were abundant. Considering our levels and numbers, we should be able to take on that place."

"Oh? You are no longer afraid of the coalition's attack?"

"They seemed to have been scared by you. Their activity had significantly dropped in Thereath. So Jeanny and I thought this is the perfect time to develop while their attention are away. That's why we are targeting that monster settlement."

"Well, I'm in the middle of something here. I'm afraid I can't join."

"Fine. We will go by ourselves. I've told Jeanny that with sufficient manpower, I should be able to successfully raid that monster settlement, but she insisted I ask you first."

"What about my grandfather?"

"He is coming with us."

"Then I guess you all should be fine."

"Hey, hey! It will be fine because I will be there, not Domon. You better make sure not to think otherwise!"

"Considering your confidence, I am sure you will do swell."

"Of course we will! You better contribute more to the guild. Otherwise, we will demote you!"

'A*shole! Ain't I contribute already by causing the coalitions to back off?' Jack thought, but he didn't argue with the guy.

Since he had to adjust his pace with Samuel, Jack spent another hour before they arrived at the building where Blacksmith Circle was supposed to be. It was a unique structure that seemed to be carved out of the mountain itself.

The stone color of its walls was the same as the mountain. If it didn't have straight edges that characterized artificial structures, Jack might not notice that there was a building there. The entrance was a large doorless hole that opened up to a wide hall. Entering this opening was akin to entering a cave of a mountain.

Jack and Samuel stood in this wide hall and looked around. The walls around were filled with beautiful murals that seemed to be handcrafted. Jack had no idea what stories were told in these murals, but Samuel appeared to be paying respect to it.

"These murals told the stories of our kingdom," Samuel explained.

"Uh-huh," Jack nodded, trying not to offend the guy despite he had no interest in the history.

"Who is there?!" A rasping voice was heard as a very short man appeared from the hallway that went deeper into the structure.

Jack looked at the man. His stature was short, however, he was by no means young. His face was matured with a beard covering most of his face. His body was thick. His limbs were short but sturdy and muscular. He was wearing work clothes that were dirty and disheveled.

'A dwarf?' Jack thought after seeing the man.

Chapter 499: Joining The Blacksmith's Training

Grenmir (Elite Dwarf, Advanced Master Blacksmith), level 30

HP: 39,000

Jack's Inspect confirmed the race of the man in front of him. The level and grade of this dwarf were low, but his blacksmith grade was high. An advanced master, that alone deserved respect. Jack wondered how long it would take for him to reach this stage.

If he didn't remember wrong, the one they were coming to meet, Haestus, prince Alonzo mentioned as also a Master Blacksmith. Jack wondered if there were a lot of Master Blacksmiths in this place.

"Greetings, good dwarf. We are here to meet Haestus," Jack said with a polite tone.

The dwarf spat, "well, good human. What business do you have with him?"

'You shouldn't have addressed him as a dwarf. It was rather impolite,' Peniel said to Jack telepathically.

'It was?' Jack was perplexed, he had no idea about the custom of this world.

'You can address their race in general as a dwarf, but you shouldn't address them in person as one. You should just say their names, or simply sir or mister in case you don't know their names,' Peniel explained further.

When Jack was thinking about how to properly answer the dwarf's question, Samuel spoke out.

"Greetings, Sir Grenmir. I'm sorry if our Viscount here failed to show proper etiquette. He is an outworlder, as you see. We are sent here by the third prince of Themisphere, Prince Alonzo, on an official matter regarding our alliance with the Blacksmith Circle."

"The prince should have chosen a better representative," Grenmir grumbled.

'Ugh, this is great. We have just arrived and I've f*cked things up. I am never the negotiator type, I wonder why the prince gives this task to me,' Jack complained in his mind.

Grenmir continued, "Unfortunately, Haestus is indisposed today. He will meet with you tomorrow morning."

'Luckily, only one day of waiting, so I don't have to waste too much time,' Jack thought. He waited for Grenmir to invite them inside to spend the night, he was eager to look inside Blacksmith Circle while waiting to meet Haestus tomorrow. Yet, the dwarf was mum. Samuel also kept quiet, he was only an escort, after all.

'Don't tell me he wants us to camp outside, right? We are royal representatives, for God's sake,' Jack thought.

"Um, if I am so bold to ask. Does Sir Grenmir mind if we stay inside waiting for Sir Haestus?" Jack finally enquired.

"Normally, I will have invited you in, but I don't like you. So there is my conundrum," Grenmir replied.

#%@*

'Dwarf race is known for their directness,' Peniel said in Jack's mind.

'Well, then, I will be direct as well,' Jack said in his mind. He then said to Grenmir with a bow, "Sir Grenmir, if I have offended you, I sincerely apologized. As Sir Samuel here had said, I'm an outworlder and I am not so clear on the etiquette. I humbly asked your forgiveness."

Jack maintained his bow. Grenmir finally said, "I guess you are not so bad. All right, come in."

Jack and Samuel followed the dwarf into a very long stone hallway. The lighting was rather dim. As they were walking, Grenmir said, "Oh, right! Almost forgot. Please walk right behind me. At the same path where I walked through."

"Why is that?" Jack asked.

"Because this hallway is full of traps. It is our defense against trespassers and monsters who wandered in here. We are in the wilderness, after all. If you are not careful, you won't make it to the other side alive."

"What the hell! Why didn't you turn the traps off?!" Jack exclaimed as he hurriedly shifted his position to be directly behind Grenmir. Samuel did the same.

"Hehe, it's a hassle to turn the traps off. Just pay attention to follow my path," Grenmir said with a grin.

As they were walking, Jack's monocle started pointing out the traps. The dwarf was not joking.

After a rather long walk, they finally came out to a hall, there were several sentries there. Jack scanned them to be average level 50 elite humans. They saluted Grenmir and checked Jack and Samuel's identity, before letting them further in.

They came out into a very huge cavern hall. It seemed like the place was built inside the mountain itself. Far below, Jack saw what appeared to be factories with many people working. There were many forges. There was even a river of lava. The forges seemed to draw the fire from the lava itself.

Grenmir brought the two walking down a long set of stairs leading to the factory floor below. Jack was amazed by the view as he climbed down the stairs.

When they arrived down there, it looked more hectic. It was what Jack expect to see in real-life factories. Everyone was busy with their tasks. Many raw materials were piled at one side while completed weapons were piled at another. There were also people transporting these materials and weapons around the factory floor.

The two continued to follow Grenmir as they marveled at the production process. Grenmir then took them up the stairs again into a room at the mid-height of the cavern hall. Jack looked back and saw another path from where they came from up there. They could have taken that shortcut, but Grenmir had taken them down to have a sightseeing tour. Not that he complained about it, he would have asked to go down to have a look if Grenmir had taken the shorter path.

Inside the room, there were hollow openings on the wall which act as a window that looked out to the production floor. This seemed to be a waiting room as well as a monitoring room. Grenmir invited them to sit on a stone sofa before asking a human maid to prepare some beverages for their guests.

"If you want to just wait until tomorrow. I can have people take you to our available guestroom. You can rest there until tomorrow," Grenmir offered.

Jack thought for a bit before asking, "do you mind me watching the blacksmiths at work? As a matter of fact, do you mind if I do some blacksmithing work as well?"

"You are a blacksmith as well?" Grenmir asked.

"Basic Expert," Jack proclaimed rather proudly.

"So low?" Grenmir said with a ridiculing tone.

"Esteemed sir Grenmir," Jack said, afraid to use the wrong addressing words again, "in my defense, I just started blacksmithing four months ago." 'If include tutorial period,' Jack added in his mind.

"Really?" Grenmir lifted one of his eyebrows. "Well, I do hear you outworlders are a fast learner."

"We are," Jack nodded.

"Evidently, low profile is not one of your kind's quality though," Grenmir satirized. "Well, I am curious about your outworlders' works. However, I can't let you roam around by yourself and use our equipment as you please. You can, however, join me in the training class I oversee."

"You are a trainer?" Jack asked.

"I am a trainer specifically sent by our base in the Republic of Palgrost. That is where our faction originated from," Grenmir declared.

'The Republic of Palgrost is the country ruled by dwarven race,' Peniel explained.

'I remember,' Jack replied.

"What about you?" Grenmir turned to Samuel.

"I'll pass. Blacksmithing is not my thing," Samuel answered.

Grenmir nodded. He had the maid show Samuel to the guestroom. He then asked Jack to follow him. The two walked along the cliff overlooking the factory floor again, with stairs going up and down occasionally. Finally, Grenmir turned into one of the many cave openings on the cliff.

They went into a room with neatly rowed forges at one side of the room. Three humans were seen working on the forges. When they saw Grenmir enter, they stopped what they were doing and saluted him. They all addressed him as a teacher.

Jack scanned the three. Two were level 28 basic humans, intermediate expert blacksmith. One was a level 35 elite human, advanced expert blacksmith.

"Everyone, this is Storm Wind. He is an outworlder, and he will be joining our training today," Grenmir declared to the others. He then said to Jack, "go to one of those empty forges."

There were six forges in that room, three were unoccupied. He took the one beside the level 35 elite human, which was a woman with curly blonde hair by the name of Kirsí. Her attires and face were covered with soot, but Jack noticed she was rather pretty and young.

Jack arrived at the forge and found out that the equipment there was of the rare grade. He inspected the other unoccupied forges, they were also rare grades. 'They are indeed a top-notch faction,' Jack thought.

"All right, we will begin with today's theory lesson first before diving into practical ones," Grenmir said.

'A lecture? I am interested in doing some blacksmithing work, not attending a school,' Jack complained in his mind, but he didn't dare disrupt the lecture.

Chapter 500: Haestus' Request

Grenmir started to talk about the blacksmithing process. Since Jack joined them in the middle of their curriculum, he had no context about what Grenmir was yapping about. Jack was starting to regret joining this blacksmith training by this time. He wished he was with Samuel inside the guestroom and just trained his martial arts or casting spells. Instead, he was stuck here listening to things he had no idea about.

But soon the lecture touched a subject Jack knew. It was about materials. Grenmir described that there were unlimited blacksmithing materials out there, but the ores served as the basic materials that every blacksmith had to work with. These ores were not only used for upgrading equipment levels but were also the standard materials used in the creation of new equipment.

There were two different ores for every grade. Iron ore and Steel ore were the common ones, which Jack most used to. They were also the only ones that could be bought in the shop. Uncommon ores consisted of Copper ore and silver ore. Rare grade had Gold ore and Black Iron ore. At Super Rare were Titanium ore and Mithril ore. Unique ores had Adamantine and Magicite ores, these were the highest grade his Transformation Prism could create by fusing the lower grade ores.

The highest Legendary ores were Astral ore and Orichalcum ore. Any mining deposit discovered for these legendary grade ores could trigger a war between nations. Currently, the only known mining place for these two legendary ores was in the Republic of Palgrost, which was also the homeland of the dwarfs. To avoid conflict, the seven great countries had signed a treaty for joint custody of these mines. The ores mined from here would be divided equally amongst the seven of them.

After finishing the subject on ores, Grenmir informed everyone that it was time for practical training. Jack was elated to hear that. But at that time, he also received a notification that due to Grenmir's lecture, his blacksmith's proficiency had increased by 10%.

He was surprised. After reaching Expert grade, it took an awful lot of proficiency to increase the level. Some players had focused only on their blacksmith skills, but even for them, the highest level they currently had was the same as him, at basic expert. Although the progression of their proficiency bars was much higher than him.

The highest player in his guild who focused on blacksmithing skills was at 70% proficiency. Jack himself was only at 12%, despite he had done a lot of leveling up on the guild's equipment for core members. Now, by only hearing Grenmir's lecture for a short one hour, he had gotten a 10% increase, putting his proficiency bar at 22%. This was an unexpected boon. He suddenly wished Grenmir would give another lecture again.

The practical training was crafting uncommon equipment. Grenmir gave them a set of items. A 3D hologram appeared above their work table as it displayed the recipe and its crafting process. The only equipment Jack had crafted was his previous Blood Guard Scale Armor. The process was similar to the last time he crafted that rare armor. He had to hit the materials in a rhythm as demonstrated by the hologram display until they became the appropriate shape, before combining the parts together.

Grenmir walked around giving his advice to each of his students, including Jack. They didn't just work on one uncommon equipment, their work tables continued to spew up new recipes once the previous was completed, with Grenmir supplying the materials. The finished products were of course taken by the dwarf as well. The recipe of the equipment he had crafted did not register in his known recipe list. All Jack got for working here was skill proficiency.

Jack lost track of time. They had been working on three rare equipment already by the time Grenmir concluded the training. Jack saw that his proficiency was at 62%, catching up to the best blacksmith in his guild. He didn't forget to also use his runecrafting every time he worked on the recipe, increasing its proficiency as well.

Jack wondered if he was allowed to join this training again. He asked Grenmir about it, to which the dwarf answered that this was a one-time bonus. If he wished to receive Grenmir's training again, he would need to join the faction and worked up to a high enough rank for that.

Hearing that, Jack aborted the thought. He didn't have the time to tackle another faction. He was not that eager to become the best blacksmith anyway. He simply thought if his blacksmith grade was higher, it would help him save more materials when leveling up his equipment.

When the class was dismissed, Jack approached Grenmir and asked him if there was a way for him to purchase or request the crafting of super rare equipment. Again, Grenmir replied that it was possible if he joined the faction and got a high enough rank.

Giving up on trying to get more benefits, Jack retired to the guestroom. Samuel was already sleeping on the bed. They were given a room with windows that opened to the outside. Jack looked out and saw that it was late at night already. The blacksmith training did last for a long time.

Jack didn't skip his meditation training just because it was late already. He still spent one hour meditating to sense the flow of mana. He realized during his meditation that the structure he was in was not a normal building. Mana flowed strongly within these walls. There were also some hidden rune diagrams spread around the outer walls, probably for protection purposes.

The next morning, he woke up at the usual time. Samuel was already up as well. A maid brought breakfast into their room. Jack did his routine exercise in practicing his Formless Flowing Sword style and Eight Diagram Illusory Steps.

"That is some peculiar training you do," Samuel commented. "Is that outworlders' way of combat?"

"It's what we called martial arts," Jack explained without stopping his practice. Samuel continued to watch him with interest.

The same maid came again later and informed them that Haestus was ready to meet with them. Jack and Samuel followed the maid, who brought them to a large grand hall with an enormous oval table. Jack saw Grenmir sitting before this oval table with two other persons. The curly blonde-hair woman who was next to Jack in yesterday's training, Kirsí. Jack could see now that she was indeed a beauty, her face was no longer covered with soot. The other one was a tall bald man with a thin beard.

Jack used Inspect on the bald man and found that he was the person they were looking for, Haestus. He was a level 50 rare elite human. His Blacksmith level was at Basic Grandmaster, one step higher than Grenmir and higher than what prince Alonzo mentioned. Did this blacksmith increase his blacksmith's level recently?

"Greetings, Sir Haestus. My name is Storm Wind. I represent Prince Alonzo to form a formal alliance with Blacksmith Circle," Jack announced in a proper manner.

"Hm, you are more polite today," Grenmir commented.

'Damn! This dwarf still carries the grudge from yesterday,' Jack thought.

Haestus chuckled. He said, "Grenmir told me about you joining his class yesterday. He spoke rather highly of you. He commended your concentration in working on the task at hand. You made very few mistakes in yesterday's practical training."

"Hey, that was supposed to stay between us!" Grenmir complained.

"Don't be so stingy with praise. It will motivate your students better," Haestus said.

"He is not my student," Grenmir said.

Haestus laughed. He then said to Jack, "I believe you have something for me?"

"Yes," Jack took out the miniature treasure chest in his inventory and handed it to Haestus, who opened and studied its content. There were various rare materials and a rolled-up letter inside.

"I valued the third prince's generosity," Haestus said. "To be honest, the first and second princes had also approached us recently, but I had expressed my neutrality to them. Firstly, because I don't like those two. Secondly, my deals with Themisphere had always been with the Royal Advisor Mason, and Mason highly recommended Prince Alonzo. I thought at first the third prince was still too young and too weak, but after meeting him a few times, my opinion had slightly changed. Especially our meeting the last time after he returned from the expedition with the Duke, I can see he had matured. I heard about the assassination attempt, how is the third prince doing?"

"He was weak, but his life is not in danger. He will return to health again soon," Jack answered.

"Good."

"So, you will sign the letter?" Jack asked, indicating the letter inside the miniature chest.

"Well... I would love to, but..."

Jack sighed. Should have expected there would always be a but...

"Don't get me wrong, I've talked with our faction's other upper echelons. We are mostly in agreement to support the third prince. However, at the moment, I am preoccupied with our own crisis. Of course, if the third prince's champion was to help us with this crisis, we can expedite on validating this cooperation agreement."

Jack raised his brows. "What kind of crisis?" He asked.

"Slaying a rare elite monster underneath this facility," Haestus replied.