

World 541

Chapter 541: Saving Leavemealone

Jack used his sword art and illusory steps to contend against the three hellhounds. Each of them was a level 34 elite. Not a big deal for him, but he also had to deal with Master's ranged magic attacks.

Jack had cast Barrier mid-way to help him cope with Master's ranged attacks while he fought the hellhounds. He had no problem casting magic while slashing now since he used Magic Weapon. He also stole some ranged magic shots at Master, but Master also had Barrier on. Considering Master's HP, his Barrier could withstand even more hits than Jack's.

Jack was distressed by Master's arsenal of non-standard spells. There was a magic arrow spell that could change direction several times. He had dodged the arrow two times but the arrow still came back at him and finally stabbed him on the back.

When Jack tried to force his way into melee. Master cast a spell that created a small twister that picked his body up and threw him away.

In the direction where he was thrown, a large earth hand come out of the floor. This was the spell that Master had used in their first encounter. This time, though, Jack failed to dodge as he was helpless in the air. The Earth Hand grabbed him, its fingers immediately tightened around him.

When Master thought he had successfully secured his prey, three shadows jumped out from where the stairs were. Three Jacks ran towards him from different sides. The Hellhounds separated and each pounced at one of these three new Jacks. The three Jacks both executed Charge. All copies went through the hellhounds as if air.

"Body Double?" Master looked at the real Jack who was still inside the Earth Hand's grip. Jack had cast this spell before he jumped out to save Wilted Tree from Motherboard's invisible assault.

Master knew Jack could change position with these copies at any time and there was nothing he could do against these copies. So he floated past his flame ring and landed in front of Leavemealone. If Jack wanted to save Leavemealone, he would come here and change place with one of the copies sooner or later.

The fake Jacks ran past the flame ring without any harm. The hellhounds followed closely, but they stopped before the flame ring. Master ignored the copies but instead paid attention to the real Jack in Earth Hand's grip. Soon, he saw the real Jack turn corporeal and slip from the grip as if his body was air. Spells were useless against a copy, that's when he knew Jack had changed position.

The moment he noticed that, he cast a spell. Fifteen spears made of light stabbed out from under the ground around him. Each five of the fifteen spears hit one of Jack's copies. Ten spears stabbed right through two copies, while the ones on his right hit the real Jack and pushed his body up. Damage numbers appeared.

Master frowned, the damage was much less than he expected. This was a rare elite spell learned from a technique book. With his high intelligence and high staff's damage, each of these spears carried devastating power that could deliver around 1000 damage. Five of these spears hit Jack. Even with his

high attributes, defense, and HP, the spell should already claim his life. Master had prepared to use a runic rope to tie him up once he rebirthed at this spot, but the damage that Jack received was only around 400 each spear. Combined with the previous flame ring's damage, Jack's still had one-fifth of his HP left.

While Master was puzzled, he noticed another surprising detail. Jack's skin which was not covered by armor, was yellow and hard. Upon closer observation, Master realized it was golden scales that covered Jack's skin.

"You...! You have taken my gold dragon bloodline?!" Master uttered with fury.

"Heh, it is not yours to begin with," Jack said and executed Cross Slash. At the same time, Peniel used Fast Heal on Jack and brought his HP to a safe level again.

Master erected Magic Shield in time. Master's five class attributes allowed him to not get staggered from the impact, but Jack followed with Flame Strike. Master used Knight's skill Endure to resist the knockback force, he skidded a little. His other hand cast Magic Bind.

The magic ring hit Jack but it simply went through Jack like it was nothing there.

Master realized something and looked back. Jack had changed place again with the copy that had slipped behind. Master's one hand replaced his staff with a sword and he used Power Strike. But unexpectedly, Jack disappeared when the sword almost hit.

'He has upgraded that spell's proficiency to the second star?' Master was astonished. He was not puzzled if someone leveled one's skill to the maximum. There were several ways to achieve that. But to increase a skill or spell's star proficiency, the only way was to repeatedly use it. Even with the help of a Training Ground, he still didn't expect one would be so diligent as to upgrade so fast. He certainly didn't expect Jack's game maniac habit. Jack had been relentlessly practicing all his available skills and spells whenever possible.

When Master was using Power Strike, the other Jack had arrived before Leavemealone. Jack activated Adrenaline Rush to increase his attack speed and did several quick slashes. After mastering the Formless Flowing Sword style, his sword slash was accurate even at high speed. The strappings that bound Leavemealone were undone.

Master had cast another spell and Jack's body was enveloped by a raging fire. It was the Immolation spell that he had used on Peniel before. When Master wanted to follow up, he felt a hard impact on his stomach and had to take one step back despite his Endure skill was still active.

He turned and saw Leavemealone had stood up. There was a glowing runestone above him. Leavemealone's fists suddenly turned blurry as he delivered an unending flurry of punches.

Master's two staffs formed Magic Shield to block the Infinite Lightning Punches.

"Wilted, escape portal!" Jack shouted.

Wilted Tree had been chasing Motherboard. His intervention had caused Motherboard to stop playing his violin, thus canceling the buff the song provided. Motherboard had been fencing with Wilted using her rapier. Hearing Jack's yell, Wilted saw that Leavemealone had been freed.

"Let's finish this man first!" Leavemealone shouted as he summoned his Fire God Barrage. Twenty balls of fire came out and rushed at Master.

"Yeah, let's finish him!" Jack cast Myriad Ensnaring Chains. Twelve crimson chains came out and restricted Master's movement as twenty fireballs approached.

"Annoying vermins! You should all know your places...!!" Master uttered as a large bead appeared on his hand. When he crashed the bead, a shockwave radiated out and the chains binding him were obliterated.

Jack was shocked witnessing it. Whatever tool Master had used, it was much more powerful than his Liberty of Movement. Master's tool not only freed him from binding but also destroyed the binding spell.

Master then took out another tool. When it was used, a prismatic shell appeared around him. Leavemealone's balls of fire slammed onto this shell. Explosions of fire continued until all twenty balls were exhausted.

"Shit! He is still fine!" Jack said. He could know this from his Mana sense ability. Not only that, he could sense another person was coming up the stairs, fast. The aura of this person was dangerous. Jack did not doubt it was that Wong fellow.

"Over here!" Wilted Tree shouted. Jack turned and saw a silvery round portal beside her. Mazin had come to her side as it repelled both Motherboard and Master's avatar, assisted by Jack's rock golem. The Flame Salamander had been defeated by the two golems.

"We have to go! His divine treasure skills will be coming off cooldown soon," Jack said to Leavemealone and dashed towards Wilted Tree. Leavemealone didn't insist to continue fighting, he followed Jack.

The flame ring's duration had finished, the hellhounds came again to block the two's advance. Jack with his Gold Scale Armor still active, took the tank role while slashing the three with his sword arts. Leavemealone supported from his back with kicks and punches. The three hellhounds were easily pushed back.

"None of you are leaving!" Master bellowed. Jack, Leavemealone, and Wilted Tree received a headache when Master's voice reverberated in their minds. Master again cast two spells simultaneously. However, this time, the two spell formations merged with one another after forming mid-way.

"It's a combination spell!" Peniel exclaimed.

"Combination spell?" Jack looked back just as Master's spell took effect. Master's Mind Blast had caused his movement to slow down. A thick whip formed with raging fire lashed out. Jack used Magic Shield to block the whip, but the whip rolled around the shield and coiled around Jack's body.

Jack received fire damage while getting tied. Master made a pull, Jack planted his feet down to resist. Leavemealone grabbed at the fire whip, receiving fire damage himself, and helped Jack resist the pull. The hellhounds had come back to harass them again. The two men were helpless against these hounds as they had to resist Master's pull. Master's five classes' strength attribute was no joke despite four of them being magic class. Peniel cast Healing Field to keep the two alive from the hellhounds' assaults.

While they were playing tug, a sudden roar was heard accompanied by flapping sounds. Not long after, a gargantuan gold dragon appeared beside the top of the tower.

"You wretched betrayer, taste my flame!!" Syndrillis' voice thundered as a thick stream of golden fire spewed out from her maw at Master.

Chapter 542: Preparing Disguises

Seeing the incoming fire breath, even Master did not dare to slacken. Another tool same as the one he used to block Leavemealone's Fire God Barrage was in his hand again. The same prismatic shell enveloped his body. But due to that, his enhanced flame whip was canceled. Jack came free.

Without further ado, Jack and Leavemealone rushed to the silvery portal. Wilted Tree was using two guns in her hand to repel Motherboard from coming close. The second gun looked more like a miniature cannon, the shot was louder which Jack thought should be more powerful but with a slower rate of fire.

Mazin was protecting Wilted Tree from Master's avatar. Jack's Rock Golem was assisting Mazin but Jack ordered it to come and take care of the hellhounds.

Motherboard saw the precariousness of the situation and took something out. Jack assumed it was a throwing tool. Whether offensive or supportive, Jack didn't want her to throw that thing in her hand. Jack's Wind Slash shot out. The extremely fast energy wind cut at Motherboard's hand which was holding the tool. Motherboard didn't loosen her grip but she staggered as tremendous damage number appeared on her. She survived though.

"Let's go!" Jack called out while Motherboard staggered. He took the lead and jumped inside the silvery portal, followed closely by Leavemealone. Wilted Tree didn't dally, she jumped into the portal as Mazin reverted to a metallic ball and returned to her hand. Only Jack's Rock Golem stayed back and continued to block the others.

After Wilted Tree disappeared into the portal, it vanished, just as one of the hellhounds jumped and attempted to follow in. The silvery portal was placed at the edge of the tower's top, so when it disappeared, only empty space was there. The hellhound which tried to follow Wilted into the portal, plunged to the ground far below.

Jack's rock golem stopped moving once the portal disappeared. It then crumbled into heaps of rocks.

Syndrillis, who saw her rescuers had escaped, stopped her fire breath. She stared at Master who was still protected by the prismatic shell.

"Hmph! I will deal with you and your lots once I fully recover," She said and then turned back and flew away. Even with her current weakened condition, she could still easily take care of Master, but she didn't know how many of those protective tools Master possessed. She also felt a couple of strong presence flying at high speed to their location. It must be those cult's heavy hitters. She did not want to take the risk so she left.

Wong came up soon, seeing the devastation and the absence of Leavemealone, he could surmise what had happened.

"I'm sorry, Master. The dragon is too strong for us, we can't hold her," Wong said.

"It is expected. I've summoned the cult after hearing the dragon's roar. They still took their sweet time here. I might need to talk with their God again," Master said.

"I will head out again to chase that boy with the Fire God Blessing."

"No. We have wasted enough time looking for them. Now with the dragon free, our time frame is limited. It will be difficult to trap her again now that she knows our intention. We should gain as much foothold as we can during the time she is recovering. Once this country is ours, we will proceed to the others. When this whole world is ours, there is no place those rebellious boys can hide. The divine treasures will still be mine in the end. The same goes for your traitorous student. Go and help the others in this nation's conquest!"

Wong gave a respectful nod and went away.

In a deserted warehouse inside a city, a silvery portal appeared. Jack, Peniel, Wilted Tree, and Leavemealone came out of it.

"Phew, finally we are safe!" They turned to the voice and saw Carnelia appearing.

"You chickenshit! So you are hiding this whole time?" Peniel scolded.

"Of course I am! Do you think I am a familiar like you? There is nothing I can do anyway even if I come out," Carnelia retorted.

Jack ignored the two fairy's bickering. He asked Wilted while returning her orb of concealment, "Where are we?"

"One of the main cities in Liguritudum Realm," Wilted Tree answered. "We are not out of the woods yet. As long as the two of you are still inside this country, you are at high risk. This is the World Maker's turf after all. Unfortunately, my escape tool can only bring us this far."

"Then let's go to the Zone Portal. We can teleport back to Themisphere or Sangrod," Jack said.

"I have no problem with that. The two of you, on the other hand, will have trouble."

"How so?" Jack asked.

"Because of your races," Peniel stopped her quarrel and came to answer. "Remember when I said Liguritudum's political relation with Themisphere is not harmonious? The same goes for Sangrod. If the guards see any human or vampire on the street, they will be captured."

"Oh, blast!" He then look at Wilted Tree. "I don't suppose you have another of that disguise tool that allows you to change into that Ethereal woman? If we can use that to change our races, then we can use the portal zone."

"I have, but only one," Wilted Tree replied.

"You have? But I thought when you are still Motherboard, you said you can't show me your real self because you won't be able to change back? I thought it was because you no longer have another disguise tool."

"I can change back, but I will lose the connection with Motherboard who was still in captive. I won't be able to hijack her messaging device anymore. For the hijacking, I need to set the disguise tool with another device that I left near where she was held captive. If I use another disguise tool, it was not linked to that device."

"Oh... but still, one is not enough. There are two of us."

"That's right..."

The three were silent as they tried to think of a solution.

"Sigh, too bad your Orb of Disguise is still rank 1," Peniel said. "If it is upgraded to the next rank, you can use it to set up a second disguise. The second disguise can allow you to choose a race."

"You have the Orb of Disguise?" Wilted Tree asked, surprise in her tone.

"Yes, but as she said. It's useless, it is still in rank 1. I don't have the material to upgrade it," Jack said.

"None at all? Not even one magic crystal?" Wilted asked.

"I have not even seen what a magic crystal looked like, lady," Jack answered.

Wilted seemed to be pondering, before she sighed and said, "Ah, hell... Just take it as a contribution to foil Master's plan." She then took out three shining crystals and one very brightly-lid gem. The gem seemed to be floating on her hand by itself.

"Are those..."

"Yes, it is exactly the materials needed to upgrade that orb of yours. Three magic crystal and one divine gem."

"How the hell did you collect all these materials?" Jack asked with amazement.

"I have my way. Hurry up and upgrade it already before I change my mind!" Wilted ordered.

"... By the way, do you have another divine gem and ten more magic crystals? My Lightning God Blessing also need those."

Wilted's mouth twitched hearing Jack's words, her eyes were giving him a hard stare.

"I apologize! Please ignore what I have just said!" Jack hurriedly said. He accepted the materials in Wilted's hand and said, "Thank you, lady! I will pay you back once I get my hands on these materials."

"I will consider us square as long as you don't get yourself caught again by the World Maker," Wilted Tree said. She then turned to Leavemealon. "As for you, take this disguise tool. Use it to set up a disguise. Remember to choose Ethereal race during the selection."

"It's okay, I will guide him," Carnelia said and then gave Leavemealone the instruction on how to use the tool.

Jack took out his Orb of Disguise. He heard a notification telling him that upgrade materials were detected, He was asked if he wanted to use the materials for the upgrade. Jack confirmed. The four materials flew into the orb and dissolved into it.

He then heard another notification that his Orb of Disguise had been upgraded to rank 2. He could input a second disguise format, but he saw no interface appearing for him to do it.

Jack asked Peniel, "Do I have to use Magic Furnace again to do the disguise setup?"

"Yes, we have to go to a facility with a Magic Furnace," Peniel answered.

Jack looked back and saw Leavemealone seemed to be doing the setting up. "Why can he do it here?" He asked.

"The one I gave him is a consumable where you can do emergency setup," Wilted answered. "The variety of look he can choose is much more limited unless one has a base image to copy, like what I did with Motherboard. For a permanent disguise tool such as yours, a magic furnace is needed."

"Do you know where I can find this facility?"

"The Mage Academy here has one such facility."

"Shouldn't that be a problem as well? I have a concealed coat to hide myself on the way there, but won't the caretaker of the academy check my identity before allowing me to use the facility?"

"I am a member of the Order of Magi, I can plead for them to allow you the leniency... hopefully."

"Oh? I am also a member," Jack said, showing her badge.

"That's great! This should make things easier. Mage Academy is operated under that faction, they should respect this faction's members despite the political situation. We will go after Leavemealone finishes his setup."

"I'm done," they heard Leavemealone's voice.. They turned and saw an ethereal standing there instead of a vampire.

Chapter 543: Second Disguise

Jack put on his Concealment Coat with the hood up before following Wilted Tree and Leavemealone out of the warehouse. The buildings in this town were rather unique. They didn't seem to be made of stone or wood. Instead, it looked like some sort of translucent material. The walls appeared constantly changing as different lights hit their surfaces. The entire place appeared surreal due to it. Jack found it to be truly distracting, he couldn't imagine how the people here got used to it.

Most of the roofs were shaped like mushroom-shaped domes, adding another weird vibe to the town.

Jack tried not to look around too much, he would attract attention otherwise. Aside from the concealment coat, he also wore a facemask for good measure, the one he used to infiltrate the noble's house in Transviste.

Both he and Wilted Tree paid attention to their radar. If there was a group of white dots traveling together, that should be a patrol. They would then go to a corner and stay out of sight until the patrol passed.

This city was not as crowded as Thereath or Tranviste. Wilted explained it was due to the unstable political situation. Civil war was brewing and everyone didn't feel like going out much.

Jack asked her if the civil war was caused by the power struggle between princes. He had heard Master saying something about helping the prince to secure the throne. He wondered if this place was the same as Themisphere. He figured if things went out of hands between the three Themisphere's princes, a civil war might happen there as well.

Wilted Tree informed them that Ethereal royalty mostly had only one offspring, this was a tradition to avoid a power struggle between the ruler's descendants. The current royal family was the same. The ruler only had one prince.

"Why is there any civil war then?" Jack asked.

"Because the prince can't wait to take the throne from his father. Or more accurately, he has been incited," Wilted answered.

"By Master?"

Wilted nodded. "The prince personality had always been an ambitious one, contrary to his father who valued peace. Master has made use of the prince's nature to start a rebellion. Once they won, they will then mobilize their forces to invade other countries."

"Are you serious? Is he planning on world domination?"

"Yes. But his end goal has always been to stand on top of all. This conquest is a way to make him easier in getting all the divine treasures."

"Can he truly become a God by collecting all divine treasures? How does he get all this information anyway? On that matter, how do you?" Jack asked.

"... we will talk about that once we are at a safe place outside this country," Wilted replied.

It's a good thing that the warehouse the portal brought them to was not too far from the Mage Academy, so they didn't have to travel long.

"You have to wait outside," Wilted Tree said to Leavemealone. "Only magic-based class can enter inside, but don't wander around."

Leavemealone just shrugged and leaned on the wall of the building.

Seeing his nonchalant attitude, Wilted said to Carnelia, "watch him!"

Carnelia gave a salute and said, "Yes, ma'am! He won't leave my sight."

Jack wondered if Peniel could act that obedient to him.

After entering the Mage Academy, a sharp voice addressed them. "No concealing within this hall. Take off your hood and mask!"

An ethereal with a ceremonial robe floated to them. This time, Jack couldn't tell if this ethereal was a man or woman. Its robe was too large to show its body shape. Even its voice, though extremely clear

inside his head, sounded like the voice of both man and woman. This ethereal had long and neat hair but Jack could not tell its gender just from its hair.

Jack was hesitant for a second. Wilted gave him a nod. He then took off his cover.

"A human?! What are you doing in this country?" The ethereal mage asked.

Wilted took the initiative to answer while showing his Order of Magi's badge, "Forgive our intrusion, great mage. I'm a member of the Circle of Magi, we would like to ask your permission to use the magic furnace."

"Wilted Tree, Novice rank of the Order of Magi," the ethereal announced after taking a glance at Wilted's badge. "It is, of course, no problem to let you use the facility. He, however, I have to ask to leave. Our order will get into trouble with the authority if we harbor a hostile race."

"He is also a member of the Order of Magi," Wilted quickly said.

Jack hurriedly took out his Order of Magi's badge after hearing Wilted's word.

The Ethereal laughed. Jack thought the laughing sound was rather strange, considering he couldn't discern if the voice was of man's or woman's.

"Unless he is of the Adept rank, I still need to ask him to... Storm Wind...?" The ethereal mocking tone suddenly stopped after seeing Jack's badge.

"Yes, that's me... Does this mean I am not allowed in?" Jack asked worriedly.

The ethereal was silent for a while, before saying. "Go in. Don't dally. Make it quick!"

Either Jack or Wilted was a bit confused by the ethereal's sudden change of attitude, but they happily took the win. They thanked the ethereal and hurried over to the room with the Magic Furnace. The ethereal didn't accompany them. The layout of this Mage Academy was almost the same as others, so Jack had no trouble finding the place. Additionally, Wilted Tree seemed to be very familiar with the place as well.

"Do you know what that was about?" Jack asked. "For a second, I thought he... or she was going to throw me out."

"I have the same thought too," Wilted replied, equally confused.

Once they were inside the room with the Magic Furnace, Jack took out his upgraded Orb of Disguise. Since he had done it before, he didn't need any guidance. He paid the magic stone fee and started to work on his disguise setting. The only difference this time was there was now an option to choose a race. He, of course, chose the ethereal race.

In the class options, he could choose any class. But if he chose a class which he had no skill of, his disguise could easily be found out. So he preferred to choose between Blade Dancer or Archmage. His Unrivaled Arcaner was already an Archmage. When his mage class upgraded to Archmage, his Unrivaled persona also received an update to its status. After a brief thought, he decided to have this ethereal disguise using his main class, Blade Dancer.

The rest of the setup was only appearance-wise. He had no idea what good-looking was for an ethereal race, so he simply tried to make it as cool-looking as possible. He added a long scar that went from his forehead through his left eye all the way to the side of his mouth.

For the hair, he used a dreadlock hairstyle. He was grinning while working on the look.

"Why is he smiling?" Wilted asked Peniel.

"He does that often," Peniel replied. "I have long since stopped asking why."

He didn't forget to modify his Storm Breaker look. Though he already look different as an ethereal, he still decided to be prudent and changed the look of his armor. There was an option to have the armors follow their original looks or modify them. If he modified, even if he changed armor, his disguise look would still use the modified version, meaning they would always look the same following his current setup no matter what armor he wore. He chose the most badass and cool-looking armors.

The last thing to do was to give his second disguise an alias. Jack thought for a second before inputting the name.

After finishing, Jack took back the orb. He activated his second disguise. A battle-hardened yet also punk-looking ethereal appeared before the two women. The two stared at him in silence, not sure what to say about it.

"Impressive, isn't it?" Jack asked after letting them observe for a while, assuming their silence for awe.

"I... I'm not sure what to say...," Wilted finally said something. "Do you want people to be afraid of you, acknowledge your youthful spirit, or are you trying to make some kind of a statement with that look?"

"Um... I'm actually just trying to make it look cool," Jack said. "Anyway, the only statement that I make with this disguise will be my alias."

"What alias do you use?" Wilted asked. She couldn't see it since this disguise was also wearing Cloak of Shadow.

"Master Slayer!" Jack announced loudly.

"That... Wouldn't that simply asking for World Maker's attention?" Wilted uttered, facepalming her forehead.

"Not a problem, they can't inspect my name."

"If you go into an establishment, your name will be registered there. They can easily find out about your name."

"Let them come! Save me the time from finding them."

"Did you forget already that we just struggled to escape from them?" Wilted uttered, exasperated.

"I admit that Master is a bit overpowered, but with time and preparation, I don't think he is unbeatable," Jack said with confidence.

Wilted Tree's mouth twitched.. "If you get captured again, I will save you, and then I will kill you myself so the Lightning God Blessing moves to a random SSS quest," she threatened.

Chapter 544: The Truth About The World 1

When Jack came out of the room, the ethereal mage with no gender looked at Jack's new appearance and said, "You make a disguise. Good. But refrain from going into the city hall, they had a spell that dispels any camouflage and disguise."

"Thank you for the warning," Jack said. "We will just be heading to the Zone Portal."

The ethereal mage nodded. "Good luck to you."

"Thank you again for letting us use the facility. We will take our leave," Jack said.

Wilted also thanked the ethereal. The two then left the building. Leavemealone was still at the last spot they saw him. The three then headed to the Zone Portal, with Wilted taking the lead since she knew the way.

More soldiers were guarding the Zone Portal here compared to Themisphere and Sangrod, probably due to the country's current volatile situation. Luckily, the inspection was only physical. No Dispel Illusion spell was used.

"Where do you two want to go?" Wilted asked.

"I doubt he had registered any teleport link in Themisphere country, so I think we should just go to Tranviste," Jack said while pointing at Leavemealone. He then asked Wilted, "have you established a link to Tranviste?"

"I have," Wilted answered. "All right. Let's go there."

She activated the portal and the three of them passed through.

They came out into a town with a dark bleak sky. Jack recognized the place, they were in Tranviste already.

"Let's go to the tavern," Wilted said. "I've visited here before but not really familiar with the place, do you know the way?"

Leavemealon who was being asked, replied in his usual stoic manner, "This way."

Jack found the tavern to be not as large as Raven's Den in Thereath, but this place also had some VIP rooms they could rent. Wilted went ahead and asked for one. Before long, these three players with different races and two high fairies sat inside a closed VIP room.

"So, what is the deal with this World Maker group? How come they know so much of this world? How come you do? You do know why we are getting pulled into this world, do you not?" Jack asked.

Wilted Tree nodded.

"Are you going to tell us everything now?" Jack asked.

Wilted was silent. She looked at Jack then at Leavemealone. The vampire was quiet but his expression said that he was interested as well.

Wilted sighed. "I'm not sure where to start..."

"Well, for the starter. How about telling us if we are all in some kind of involuntary mass simulation world? Are you going to offer me the red pill or blue pill now?"

Wilted laughed. "You are truly good at making light of a situation. No, no red pill or blue pill. We are not in a virtual world."

"In that case, we are in another world that possesses similar kind of rules as our RPG games?"

"Well... That is also inaccurate."

"Hm? Then what is?" Jack asked, confused.

"We are not in a different world, but also not in our world," Wilted answered.

"Lady, I did puzzles as my pastime, so I enjoy riddle, but that is in the condition that the riddle has a proper clue and answer. If a riddle is one just for the heck of it, it will just annoy the hell out of me."

Wilted thought for a while before saying, "Do you know what is a phase change?"

"We are doing science now? Yes, a phase change is when a material change from one state to another," Jack answered.

"Yes, like water to gas, water to ice, and vice versa. Now, imagine if somehow you can do it on a larger scale, extremely larger scale, and also not just a change that was caused by heat."

"Wait... Are you telling me... Someone has changed our world?"

"Not just someone, it was Master."

"Master? That a*shole?!"

"His real name is Apollyon. He was a genius scientist that is renowned in the scientific community. He has secretly created a machine that can literally create a new world. But same as the phase change principle, although a material change, its matter remains the same. The machine that Apollyon has created, uses our original world as its base matter and also its source of energy. So, rather than creating a new world, the more precise term is probably re-imagining the world."

Jack and Leavemealone were both quiet for some while. Wilted let them be, they would need to take in the information slowly.

"So... Are you saying our old world is no more?" Jack finally asked.

"Is there a way to reverse the process?" Leavemealone added.

"I don't know," Wilted answered. "I'm no scientist. I only know the basic concept. If there is a way to reverse the process, the only way is to find Master's machine first. But after he activated it, only he knew where it was hidden."

"What is your role in all this?" Jack asked Wilted Tree.

"I came into the picture because Master, or rather, Apollyon, despite all his genius, understands that he lacks something crucial in making a new world."

"And what is that?"

"Imagination. If he was left to re-imagine the world in his image, we would probably be living in a desolate world with nothing at this moment. Even with that God-complex of his, he did not want to live in such a world for himself. So he approached us."

"Us?"

"Do you realize this world is based on Trigitech's newest game, Second World?" Wilted asked.

"Yeah, every gamer knows that game. I am lining up to play the beta test when all this shit happened." Jack answered, then turned to Leavemealon. "You know that also, right?"

"... I have never played games before," Leavemealone answered.

"You have not?" Jack said with a surprise. "Heck! You could have fooled me, with how good you are."

"That has got nothing to do with being a gamer. I am a professional martial artist. I am on my plane off to participate in the world tournament when the world change."

Jack turned back to Wilted Tree. "So, you are someone in Trigitech?"

"I am the co-lead designer of the Second World game. My partner and I spent years designing the game from the ground up."

"Why would Master... Apollyon looked for a game as the basis of his new world?"

"Where else can he find a more detailed base for a new world? Out of all the media, games had been the most detailed one can glimpse a different world. The work and details that are put into creating a world for a game are massive, even the grass on the ground is created in detail. Second World had been the cream of the crops, the funds and workforces that Trigitech provides us is more than any other games that had ever been made. Their command is simple, make a world with as many details as possible."

"But what's the point? That Apollyon doesn't sound like a gamer, why did he want to exchange the real world where he is already renowned and respected, with this world that is based on games?"

"Because the original world was not enough for him. He wants to live in a world that came to be because of his doing. His arrogance demands that much."

"I see. That's why he named his guild World Maker. Such a prick. Did he care not of others who got their lives turned upside-down due to the world-changing?"

"That's just how he is. He doesn't care. Another reason for him to live in this world is that he wants to be a literal God. Being famous and respected in the previous world is all well and good, but he is still just a human, and he can't live with that. He desires to stand above all and have everyone act as he commanded."

"I know the game-worlds can give us normal humans some abilities that make us feel as if we have become superhumans or Gods. But if everyone is the same, then there are no Gods. He will just be an average person. Stronger maybe if he works harder, but I wouldn't consider a level 99 player as God if I can also reach that stage sooner or later."

"That's why he is after the Divine Treasures," Wilted Tree said.

"What? You designed a game that allows someone to become omnipotent by collecting those treasures? Who will want to play anymore if someone becomes a literal God and can trounce others anytime he wants?"

"We don't! As game designers, we understand that balance is the key to allowing players to enjoy. You can get ahead of others with skill or maybe some real-money advantages, but we will always try to keep the game balanced for everyone as much as possible. We certainly never designed a game that one player can become a God that tramples over others."

"Then why collecting Divine Treasures gives him the power to become one?" Jack asked.

"Because he tampered with our game design," Wilted Tree answered.

Chapter 545: The Truth About The World 2

"Tampered? Why did you let him do that?" Jack asked.

"We didn't!" Wilted replied rather strongly. "It was the owner of Trigitech company that gives him the power, but we never permit him to do anything to the game. He approached the company and offer them his machine which he said can revolutionize the gaming world. It will make all the gamers feel as if they are playing in a real-world, a second world instead of a virtual reality construct. His credential as a respectful scientist and the vouch from the company owner's only daughter, persuaded the owner to give him access to the game's core data. We have strongly opposed the decision because we don't want a stranger to meddle with our creation, no matter how well-respected that person is. But in the end, we are still just people working for the company. A middle-ground was taken, Apollyon was allowed access but he was not to tamper with anything in the programming. He said he wouldn't do that, he just wanted to study the game so that it will work better with his machine."

"Let me guess, he didn't keep his promise," Jack said.

"He never intended to. He did it rather discreetly though. Although he was not a programmer, he was genius enough to learn to hide his meddlings. No one notice anything strange until I accidentally found some irregularities. I didn't link it to Apollyon at first, I thought it was just some bugs in the system. I share this finding with my partner, the chief designer. He was the true genius that had created this Second World, I simply aid him a little."

Jack felt sadness from Wilted's tone when she mentioned her partner. Jack assumed their relationship was not shallow, but why was she sad? Her next words revealed the reason.

"Unfortunately, not long after that, an accident happened. It took the life of my partner. He had fallen from the rooftop of Trigitech's main building. I had my doubt, though. He never went up to the rooftop. Some people even said he had committed suicide, but I don't believe it. I know him. He was not a person

who gave up on his life like that. He was so eager to see the Second World game launched, there was no way he would commit suicide. And the incident happened too close to when I tell him my findings."

"You think Apollyon had something to do with that?" Jack asked.

"I do not doubt it! The life of others is nothing in the eyes of that devil!" Wilted replied with anger.

"Anyway, I didn't suspect Apollyon right away that time. The talk about my partner committing suicide caused me to look through his logs. It turned out he was following up on the irregularities I've found. That's when my suspicion started. I picked up from where he left off. But after what happened to my partner, I tried to be as discreet as possible and erased any traces that I might leave. After some time, I finally found some tampering inside the program, especially where it got to do with the Gods and Goddesses and the Divine Treasures. There were also a bunch of new items inside that were not supposed to be in the game."

"The alien entity?"

"That's what you called them? Well, those Second Soul Remnants were one of them. The traces of all these tamperings came from the access we have given to Apollyon. That's when I knew he had planned something more than what he had shared with us. However, at that time I still didn't understand why all these temperings in-game were worth something that caused my partner's life. I didn't dare to go to management because of how close Apollyon was with the owner and his daughter. If I have to get to him, I needed more proof. All I got then was his tamperings with our game, nothing to link him to the death of my partner. But, I was so sure of my suspicion of Apollyon that I started digging deeper and even broke into his office. It was illegal but I didn't know what to do then."

"What did you find?"

"I managed to hack into his computer and that's when I found some files describing his machine. However, those files were only his old files on what he was trying to build. He was careful enough not to keep the newest files about his secret machine, but I could roughly link what he was trying to do then and why he approached us. Yet, what I had then was just conjectures, I couldn't bring them to the authority as evidence. So while I continued trying to gather evidence, I worked secretly through the program to undo what he was doing."

"What is he trying to do anyway? Why he tampered with the game?"

"As mentioned before, he was not content with just living in a world of his doing. He needed to be a God in it as well. He found a way through this using the Divine Treasures. The seven Divine Treasures were what my partner and I put in as the last achievements for gamers. They are the most powerful artifacts in the game. They could break the game to one side which is of course, not what we want since we prioritize balance. But my partner also believed that gamers needed something to pursue, something that they know will put them on top if they manage it. It is a drive my partner believed will make the game more compelling. But of course, for the sake of balance, we put many limitations to these divine treasures. One of which, was that no one player can monopolize these treasures. There are seven of them and one player can only utilize one treasure. Additionally, if the player possessing the treasure is killed, he will lose the treasure, even if said player equips Amulet of Rebirth. This treasure will then vanish and appears in a random SSS quest for other players to pursue."

"But Apollyon removed these limitations?" Jack asked.

"He did. Now the treasures won't vanish from a death protected by Amulet of Rebirth or the Immortal Soul, only a death that brings your level back to one will cause the treasure to leave your body. Not only that, he made it so that the seven can be merged. When they do, the power one will gain upon such a feat will be heaven-defying. It will be equal if not even more powerful than the Gods and Goddesses my partner and I had set up as the apex beings within the game."

"So, if I gained a second divine treasure, I can merge with it as well?"

"No. Even though Apollyon was doing tamperings. He wasn't able to do radical changes. My partner had implemented a sort of core system that locked or balance certain things up. I bet Apollyon took a lot of time to circumvent this core system when he was doing his tamperings. There is one divine treasure that he spent the most time to change which is also the one that allows him to merge the other six divine treasures. It is the Chalice of Space. This divine treasure of darkness element was originally meant to serve as the ultimate storage bag. It has the ability to store any goods inside, including trade goods that originally is unable to be stored inside a player's standard bag. Additionally, the volume inside this Chalice of Space equal the size of a small town."

"Sma—small town...?" Jack said. He was rather proud of his Large Bag which could fit a volume of one hundred cubic meters, but this Chalice of Space would dwarf his Large Bag significantly.

"After Apollyon's tampering, this Chalice of Space could now hold the other divine treasures within it. Making the bearer able to fuse the other divine treasures that would have otherwise been impossible. This was also why this particular divine treasure was his first target once he arrived in this world."

"So, the third divine treasure you said he has inside him, it's the Chalice of Space?"

"Yes. He already has three divine treasures inside him. Wind God Blessings, Earth God Blessings, and Chalice of Space. Without the Chalice of Space, other players like us will only be able to merge with one divine treasure."

"I have the Lightning God Blessing. Leavemealone has the fire one. So that leaves two more. Do you know where these remaining two are?"

Wilted shook her head. "The remaining two, Ice God Blessing and the Book of Creation, I don't know where they are, but so did Apollyon. Someone had gotten his hand on the Ice God Blessing, as you did, but my friends and I have gotten to the person before World Maker did. And... we find this person to have insufficient ability to protect the divine treasure."

"So you wasted the person?" Jack asked.

"Yes... You don't approve?" Wilted Tree asked back.

Chapter 546: The Truth About The World 3

"In the past, I wouldn't have. But now after learning the stake, I would have done it myself," Jack replied. "But why did these divine treasures so easily gain? That means all have been gotten so early in the game."

"That is also due to Master's tamperings. Originally only players with levels over 70 have the chance to get and fuse with these Divine Treasures, but Apollyon is not someone who has the patience to work his way up to that level before getting his desire of becoming a God. So he altered the divine treasures and weakened them to enable a low-level player to fuse with them and also make it so they appear in fixed quests of his choosings. The core system made it so that these divine treasures only appeared in SSS difficulty quests. He disguised an originally A or S rank quest into an SSS quest by adding an impossible boss to defeat, yet incorporated a mechanism that can weaken the boss, providing a chance for him to defeat the boss since he knows how to activate this mechanism."

Jack thought back to the purple lightning balls when he fought Eldingar.

"Then the Ice God Blessing has now returned to a proper SSS quest?" Jack asked.

"Yes, as I said, it is not easy for Apollyon to make changes. He practically has to fight the core system my partner developed every time he made any changes. He only had the time to plant these divine treasures each into a single fixed quest. If he loses them, he will have to wait until he was strong enough to search for them again."

"Why didn't he make it so he could go at them once the world turned?" Jack asked. "With all the plannings he has done, it seemed rather sloppy that a lot of these divine treasures ended up in the hands of random players, such as me for example."

"That because he didn't have the time to," Wilted replied. "He initially still has many other preparations to make. For example, making all twenty-four Second Soul Remnants to give him all the twenty-four elite classes. But creating each of these Second Soul Remnants took a lot of time due to the core system's restriction. The one-month cooldown for fusing with that item is also imposed by the system. Also, he couldn't place them all nearby where he will have easy access to, the core system made it so that he had to spread them out. He was doing a lot of circumventing to fight the core system."

"He didn't have enough time to arrange everything and minimize risks because he found out that I have been onto him. When I learned that he knew I was snooping around, I panicked. I took what information I have gathered and planned to go to a journalist friend of mine to release it to the public. Although it won't make the authority start investigating him, it will make a lot of people ask about his machine. His plan would be in jeopardy if the public somehow demand his machine to be studied. He didn't want to take the chance, so he operated his machine prematurely."

"That was on the day of the planned beta test," Jack asked.

Wilted nodded.

"That guy is nuts," Jack said. "Just getting all twenty-four elite classes is already enough to make him a God amongst players. He still wants the power of all the divine treasures?"

"In the time he had, he managed to produce eleven of those Second Soul Remnants," Wilted informed. "Five he had absorbed. Two were stolen by us recently. One by you at the start. The other three had the same fate as you where it had fallen to other players. However, to my knowledge, two of those players were unlucky enough to perish and their second class was gone, high possibility World Maker was behind it. The remaining one I have no idea where. Maybe this last one had perished as well."

"Apollyon's machine at that fort can't pull out the Second Soul Remnant as he did with divine treasures?"

"It cannot. Those Second Soul Remnants are completely alien entities. Once they are gone, they are gone for good. It has no place in the original programming."

"Hm... In that case, Apollyon will always be the player with the most classes, I won't get another one to catch up to him."

"That's true," Wilted nodded. She agreed that such a fact did not bode well for them. But when she looked at Jack's expression, she was surprised to find out the guy was grinning.

"What are you smiling about?" Wilted asked.

"Oh? I am? Guess I am just excited," Jack replied.

"Excited? About Apollyon having more classes than any of us?"

"It means a worthy challenge for us to surpass. Many others always thought that I can beat them because I have more classes than them. Well, that is not wrong, but now I can prove if the situation is reversed, I will still be able to come out on top."

"I can't see where your confidence comes from, considering he has kicked your ass twice," Wilted said skeptically.

"That's easy, because he has one major weakness."

"What's that?"

"The dude is not a gamer."

Wilted eyed him for a while, trying to make sure the guy was not joking. She then said curtly, "What the hell does that have to do with anything?"

"The guy takes too many shortcuts. He probably has studied all the information to get the best weapons, best armors, best skills, and such. Though those will be a huge problem, true gaming experts spend their time grinding, studying every equipment, exploring the unknown, experimenting with every skill, find out what is best for them personally and what is best for each situation. In short, he doesn't have the tenacity of a true gamer. In time, we will find a way to beat him."

Leavemealone didn't have any comment, but his expression said that he was completely lost on the logic that Jack had just said. The guy was spouting nonsense for all he knew.

Wilted, however, was having a melancholy expression. What Jack had just said reminded her of what her partner had said before. Both she and her partner were gamers first before they worked on creating the Second World for Trigitech. The game was the result of their love for gaming. She could see this Jack fellow shared the same passion as her partner.

"I'm just sad about one thing though," Jack continued.

"What?" Wilted asked.

"The natives that I have befriended all this time, so they are truly just NPCs?"

"They were at first, but this world has become as real as ours. Who is to say that they are not as real as us as well? For example, that Liguritutum prince, although we did write him to be someone ambitious. He was never coded to start a rebellion, and yet he did. He has become someone with desires and feelings as any of us players. Another example is that third prince of Themisphere you befriended. I heard you are helping him in claiming the throne, aren't you? He was never meant to fight against his two brothers, he was programmed to be a pacifist that stand by the side while his two brothers vie for the throne. But somehow, he has become determined enough to fight for his fate.

"However, those with fewer codes in them were probably still a bit unreal, for example, the low-level monsters and outlaws. They still act following the basic rules we instill in them. For example, the hideout's outlaws. The boss and its aides always stayed inside the hideout. Only if an enemy approach that they stepped outside. What do you figure they are doing inside there when no enemy approaches? Chatting with each other? Playing cards? Or just stand still like puppets waiting to be activated? No one knows. But I figure with how this world becomes reality, they will evolve as to how our previous world does. Probably in the future, those outlaws will act differently from what my partner and I have encoded them."

"That was... some food for thoughts, but not important. What about the deals with the Gods and Goddesses? Why did Apollyon want to mess with their programmings?"

"Because the Gods and Goddesses are what we have placed to ensure the system remained in balance and the rules we have set for players remain in place."

"I have met the God of Fear, he didn't exactly portray someone who gives a damn about rules."

"He is part of the bad Gods," wilted said.

"Why the hell do you need a bad God?" Jack asked.

"To spice things up. The original plan was, once the game was up and running, it will mostly be controlled by AI. Changes can happen to the environment. Even quests will be randomly generated by the core system depending on the situation. If nothing ever changes, it will be dull and players will become bored. The bad Gods were meant to create havoc. They are programmed to always think of a way to upset the balance, creating obstacles for players to overcome. But of course, too much havoc will instead make the games unplayable, so we also have good Gods to put them in check. There were six good Gods and Goddesses, and three bad Gods. The good Gods are doubled in number to make sure that they always come out on top."

"Let me guess, Apollyon wants to cull the number of the good Gods," Jack said.

"Yes. He had originally wanted to erase all the good Gods, leaving only the bad one," Wilted said. "The bad Gods are easier to manipulate since they have desires, as had been proven by how he exploited the God of Fear. I myself didn't know what he did to convince that God to assist him. The good Gods, on the other hand, will have to interfere if they find out that Apollyon can become more powerful than them and upset the balance of the world. In the short time I had, I have only managed to save the God of Hope and Goddess of Love, the other four were lost."

"Uh... I saved the Goddess of Serenity. This dude has saved the God of Pride," Jack said while pointing at Leavemealone.

"You did? How?" Wilted blurted in surprise.

Chapter 547: Time Pearl

Jack recounted what he had done during the Tutorial phase. Leavemealone did the same, what he did is roughly similar to Jack's.

"There are such events?" Wilted said, a crease on her forehead. "Weird, once Apollyon erased them, they should have disappeared for good. It doesn't make sense for him to place such a backdoor system for someone to save those God and Goddess."

"So, there is something that you don't know? Some game creator you are," Jack teased.

"This is no joking matter," Wilted Tree chided. "You said those incidents were where the two of you gained your growth weapons and high fairies?"

"Yes, I got Peniel from..." Jack was turning to Peniel, only then did he notice the two fairies had been unusually quiet. When he looked closely, the two fairies wore blank expressions.

"Hey... Are you okay?" Jack asked Peniel.

She seemed to be awakened from a trance. She was lost for a bit before she answered, "Yes... Why wouldn't I be?"

Jack then realized what was the matter. Imagine if you find out your world and life was make-believe and you were created for the sole purpose of entertainment. The three players looked at each other in understanding.

"Look..., as I said, this world has become as real as it can be, so you are as real as us," Wilted Tree tried to console.

"What? Do you think we believe all those rubbish? Of course, we are real! It's you, players, who are not real," Peniel said as she flew to the door.

"Hey, Peniel..." Jack called out.

"I SAID I AM OKAY...!" She yelled. "Now open the door...!!!"

Jack hurriedly did as she asked. She flew out once Jack opened the door.

"I... I will go make sure she is okay," Carnelia said as she flew out as well, but she didn't look okay herself.

"Aren't you going to say something to her?" Jack asked Leavemealone.

"What can I say?" He asked back.

Seeing there was nothing he could do, Jack closed the door and sat back down.

"You are not going after her?" Wilted asked.

"She won't get far. She is tied to me, if she gets too far she will just get teleported back to my side," Jack replied.

"You are truly insensitive," Wilted complained.

"Why only me? He is the same!" Jack said, pointing at Leavemealone.

Wilted could only shake her head.

"Anyway, those incidents you two experienced are strange. It doesn't sound like something Apollyon would have done. Can I take a look at your growth weapon?" Wilted asked.

Jack took out his Storm Breaker and handed it to her. The weapon was bound to him, she won't be able to steal it even if she wanted to. Of course, Jack didn't think she would do so anyway.

Wilted observed the black longsword. "This isn't an alien entity. It was clearly part of this world," she said and returned the sword.

"Can it be another colleague of yours who did this in secret?" Jack asked. "Maybe he or she found out about Apollyon's intention and did something to hinder him as well."

"I don't think so, but I don't dare to rule that out as well. I did manage to gather some allies, though they didn't know the full picture until the world was changed. Anotherday is one such ally, he was one of the top ranged players whom my partner and I used to play with. He had been our quality tester during our game development."

"Ah, I do think I have heard his alias before, so he is one of the famous experts. No wonder he is good."

"Apollyon also gathered many allies who did his bidding. Most were his past students who worshipped him like a cult. But some of them were also my colleagues in Trigitech who worked on the game. Apollyon had enticed them with positions under him, where they would rule all the others under his name. They were the ones that formed the bulk of World Maker."

"A bunch of sick people then," Jack commented.

"It is indeed so," Wilted agreed.

"Well, what can we do now?" Jack asked. "How about we go after the last divine treasure? The Book of Creation?"

"That was also lost, but not lost in the sense that it went to a random SSS quest. The news of what happened to this book was rather special. Before the book was able to be linked to a player, an NPC stole it."

"Stole it? I thought natives... or NPCs didn't have an interest in loots? Is that your programming as well?"

"Yes, if NPCs keep on fighting over loots with players, won't the game become a mess? Still, I doubt this condition will stay as it is. As I said, I suspect the NPCs will evolve and one day they might probably fight over loots with us. Life always finds a way as it has proven in our past world. Anyway, a divine treasure is part of this world, not loots. If you take it out from the special space that you got it from without fusing

with it first, NPCs who saw it would most likely try to steal it. After all, even the king of a country covets a divine treasure. The guy who successfully got the Book of Creation was stupid enough to do just that. The book was lost now, I doubt Apollyon himself knows the book's whereabouts."

"So, there is nothing we can do about the divine treasures. Master and the World Maker are also too strong for us to deal with at this time. What do you suggest we do?"

"Becomes stronger! Assemble more allies, whether players or NPCs. For player-wise, choose some trustable ones and let them know the stakes," Wilted said. "I heard you have a guild who placed top in Themisphere's guild ranking list, don't you?"

"I do," Jack answered.

"Make it grow as strong as you could. Player guilds will become important instruments during country wars. And because World Maker meddles with Liguritutum's politics, these country wars might happen sooner than expected. You have better prepared. If Apollyon managed to conquer all the countries, then our chance of beating him will be very slim. Try to train as many armies as you can."

"What's the point? The trained army can only be active inside a guild's territory. We can't even send them to attack other players' Guild Headquarters."

Wilted smiled upon hearing it. "Get your guild to level 3, then you can send your army to attack other Guild Headquarters, considering of course if the defending guild is also level 3 already."

"Oh? Is that so?"

"Yes. Below level 3, guild headquarters are still in development. The trained units are to let them cope with assault from other guilds' combined attack. But after level 3, you can build multiple defensive structures, which render players' combined assault meaningless. At that time, there is no menace anymore if you just have to fight against players, so we set it so after level 3, a guild can send their army to invade other guild headquarters. But only the trained force of one guild is allowed. Once one guild does so, other guilds will not be able to teleport their forces to the same guild headquarter."

"Oh? So the trained forces are teleported directly to enemy guild headquarters ' territory?"

"Yes, you still won't be able to bring your trained forces out to the wilderness outside your territory, so you can't abuse them for monster grinding. However, aside from guild wars, if a country the guilds reside in issued an emergency, you can summon your guild's trained forces into the battlefield as well. That's why I told you to build your guild's army, as strong as it can be."

Jack nodded. "I understand. I will try my best."

"In that case, here," Wilted said and threw her a round shining item. Jack caught the item and found it to be familiar. It was the object Wilted had taken from the device when they saved Syndrillis. He used Inspect on it.

Time Pearl (Legendary Artifact)

Allow manipulation of time around the user, slow or increase time flow by up to ten times. Activation: 100 mana cores / 30 minutes (not usable for combat).

Guild Use: Allow the construction of a Time Chamber.

"Legendary! Hey, the manipulated time is even better than when I'm inside the Valley of Tempus!" Jack exclaimed after seeing the description.

"Valley of Tempus?" Wilted asked.

"Yeah, underneath that valley is a place that had its time slowed by seven times. I spent eight weeks in there and only eight days had passed outside."

"There is such a place?"

"Lady, I thought you created this world? Are you conning me?"

"I do not know there is such a place under there. It must be one of those secretive spots my partner hid. He was like that sometimes. He created something in the games that only he knows and hid it so deep in the program that other programmers know nothing about it. He said that when us game-designers play it ourselves, we will still get that sense of discovery. One thing for sure, if that is truly one of his secret spots, then he had hidden something good inside. Something even Master doesn't know about."

"Really?" Jack thought back to the special class the old man in the cave had offered him. Now he had to make sure to go back there when he reached level 50.

"Anyway, I give you that Time Pearl so you can utilize its true purpose. Its ability to manipulate time is all good, but if you constructed the Time Chamber, all of your members can utilize it."

Jack thought about it.. He could already picture what to use with this Time Chamber.

Chapter 548: Real Names

"I want to ask another thing about this game you created," Jack said.

"What?" Wilted asked.

"Why the hell did you make it so we lose everything and go back to level 1 when we died in the wilderness? Traditional RPG always has us only losing some exp points or a maximum of one level. Why go such a roguelike version for this game? I doubt many people will play Second World if they risk losing all their progressions with just one death."

"We originally didn't intend for it. It was Apollyon's request. My partner and I fought hard against this. We don't understand then why this scientist wants to interfere with the game style. Now, I know. If everyone loses only a little exp, the threat he poses will be less. Even if he is God-like, he is just one person. Players can just run away from him. In the unfortunate time when they encountered him, all they will lose will just be one level, there is not much menace in that. He originally wanted even permanent death for the players, not just reverting to level 1 and losing all possessions. In the end, the owner made us compromise by creating two versions of the same game. The normal one and the hardcore with roguelike version. But even for the hardcore version, no permanent death."

"Let me guess. When he activated his machine, Apollyon used the hardcore version as the basis."

Wilted nodded.

"Well, I actually prefer it this way, adds more realism, considering this is now the real world. By the way, are we immortal here then? Will we ever die? I mean, the permanent death one, ceasing to exist that sort of things, not the go back to level one things."

"I think so, but we will not die from illness or accidents as in our past world. I think we will still die from old age."

"Old age? Then won't those that have gotten the Vampire and Elf races benefit a lot? Those races live for a really long time, right?"

"The native ones do, but I don't think players of vampire or elf races share the same trait. They are still basically human simply being rewritten into another race. They will still have the same lifetime as normal humans. I am an elf player, I feel myself still age normally."

Horatio said the same thing about vampire players.

"Anyway, if we are immune to illness, I guess those with a terminal illness would going to be very grateful to Apollyon when they found themselves in this world and fully healthy," Jack said.

"Not only those," Wilted said. "I've also met some players who used to be cripple, blind, deaf, or the sort in the previous world. Even ones who had those complications since birth. They were fully complete and healthy once the world changed."

"Hm... I bet they will not want to change this world back if somehow given the option. Hey, Wilted, when we beat Apollyon and if we somehow discover his machine and it can change the world back. Would you want to?"

Wilted paused upon the question. They looked at each other. Leavemealone looked away when Jack and Wilted turned to him.

"Why the hell are you looking away for? It's not like we are going to force you to answer," Jack said.

"We can ponder about that if we did manage to beat Apollyon," Wilted Tree said and stood up.

"We will!" Jack announced. "Right?" He asked Leavemealone, who again looked away.

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Wilted Tree took two things out and gave them to Jack. "I have no use for these. As I said, make your guild stronger, these should help."

Eagle Rider Hunter Insignia (Unique Insignia, for guild purpose only)

Allow the training of Eagle Rider Hunter

Ice Cannon Tank Blueprint (Unique blueprint, for guild purpose only)

Allow blacksmith workshop to construct Ice Cannon Tank

"Lady, I thought I have many unique items. Considering you threw two away without even batting an eye, I admit defeat," Jack uttered while admiring the two unique-grade items.

"I don't think you can use them now, though. That insignia can only be used once your guild reaches level 3. While for the Ice Cannon Tank, your blacksmith workshop will need to be level 4, and your blacksmith should be at least Basic Master."

"What about the Time Pearl?" Jack asked.

"The Time Chamber you can build immediately regardless of the guild level," Wilted answered. "I will leave now. You two better have a good talk with those high fairies. They are special even for their kind. I'm surprised to find all the knowledge implanted inside them, even I will not be able to secretly apply the modifications on them, not to say Apollyon. I can't picture anyone who has been able to do that. Well, there is one actually, but he was already dead before he can do anything."

Wilted's sad expression returned.

"Your partner?" Jack asked.

Wilted nodded. "He was the only one who had complete control of the core system. However, after his death, I see the irregularities in the system were still there. Apollyon should have found out about my partner's snooping while my partner was still studying the irregularities. If my partner had the time to implement these changes with your fairies and growth weapons, he could have a more easy time simply erasing all the irregularities caused by Apollyon."

Wilted stood up, "anyway, I can't stay any longer. I still have a lot to do. I will be going into a place where I can't come out or be contacted for some time, I'm not sure how long. The Liguritutum Realm will continue to be in much turmoil. My friends will try to halt World Maker's progress as best as they can, but I think it is only a matter of time before the country is theirs. You need to strengthen yourself and the forces in your country in the meantime, prepare them for the sure-to-come invasion."

Jack nodded.

Wilted activated a tool. A silvery portal appeared.

"Hey, what if we tell everyone this truth? I bet many will rally with us to fight against Apollyon," Jack asked before Wilted stepped into the portal.

"I advise you against it. How are you sure they will be noble enough to fight against him. For all we know, it will instead cause those weak-willed ones to look for Apollyon and offer him aids, requesting protection in exchange once he came into power. That is how his cult came to be. Only share this truth with the ones you can trust!"

"All right, I understand," Jack said. "By the way, my real name is Jack Fei. Now that you have shared with us the truth of this world. Let us share our real names."

Jack turned to Leavemealone, who again, looked away.

'Bloody hell, what's the deal with this guy? I intentionally asked for real names because I don't want to keep calling him by his ugly alias,' Jack said in his mind.

"Well, I suppose I can tell you mine," Wilted Tree said. "You can call me Mae, my name is Mae Ligna."

With that, she stepped into the portal and it vanished soon after.

"Hm, what an unusual name... But why does it sound so familiar...?" Jack mumbled.

Leavemealone took out something. It was a small gem-like stone. Upon seeing the stone, Jack remembered something. He took an exact same stone out.

Chris Memory Stone (Common item, cannot be discarded)

Please give this to Mae Ligna

"Mae Ligna! No wonder I find the name familiar!" Jack uttered. "Why do you have this stone as well?" Jack asked Leavemealone while at the same time sending a message to Wilted Tree. He received a notification reply that Wilted was unable to receive a message.

'Shit! She did mention that she would be going to a place where she can't be contacted.'

Seeing there was nothing he could do, Jack just sent a message telling her to meet once she had spare time. She didn't tell her about the stone nor that it was urgent, because how could he know if it was urgent? For all he knew, the stone was a simple prank from one of her colleagues, hidden inside loots. If she was busy with something important and she had to leave and come to him just to find out it was a prank, Jack would feel truly bad about it.

"How did you come by this stone?" Jack asked Leavemealone.

"It got it from a gold treasure chest," Leavemealone replied.

"Hey, me too!"

"You didn't send her a message to ask her to come back?"

"I did. She can't be contacted," Jack answered. "Did you not try contacting her as well?"

"I can't. She is not on my friend list."

Jack thought for a moment before asking, "how many players do you have on your friend list?"

Leavemealone didn't answer.

"Man... you truly should learn to socialize more. You must be that kind of martial artist who spent his time alone in the mountain or something to hone your skills. That ancient lone-warrior shit is all good and cool, but we are on the same ship now. You already see what that World Maker is capable of. Hell, you can't even beat that Wong guy. He has captured you all by himself, hasn't he?"

"I will be stronger the next time I meet him!" Leavemealone declared.

"Good determination! But what if he comes with his friends? You heard what that Master said, he still had another four enforcers who I surmise are not weaker than Wong. Hell, what if Master comes with him?"

"What if they come for you?" Leavemealone returned Jack's question.

"This time? I will run as fast as I can back to my Guild Headquarters. I have friends there I can depend on. If they dare come there, we will fight them on our turfs."

Leavemealone was silent.

"I bet you are not the type who runs away, eh?" Jack said. "Why don't you..."

"My name is Haon," Leavemealone said.

"Huh?"

"Haon Shaw, that's my real name!"

Jack received a friend request notification at the same time, from Leavemealone.

Chapter 549: Sieged On Two Fronts

Jack promptly accepted his friend request. He bet he was the only one inside Leavemealone's friend list.

Leavemealone stood up, "I will be leaving too."

"Want to come to my Guild Headquarters? It will be safe there. If those..."

"No," Leavemealone answered before Jack finished his question.

Jack decided to not push his luck. He originally wanted to invite this lone monk to join his guild, but it seemed like a tall order. Jack was happy to just get this monk into his friend list. 'One step at a time,' he said to himself.

The guy left soon, Jack decided to not wait for Peniel in the room. Peniel didn't show up on his radar, but after his mana sense improved, Jack could sense a tiny thread of energy that linked him with his familiar. So, he headed in that direction.

Jack came out to a porch overlooking the front street of the tavern. Peniel was sitting by the railing looking at the busy street below. Carnelia was nowhere to be seen, Haon must have gone far enough to force the fairy to teleport over.

Jack just stood beside the fairy as he joined her in watching the street. They stayed like that for a while until Peniel broke the silence, "Aren't you going to say something?"

"Uh, um... I'm not sure what to say... Cheer up...?"

"... You are hopeless," Peniel sighed. She then stood up on the railing. "I can't believe these were all made by someone."

"I think everything that exists was made by someone or something, even my previous world. At least that's what I believe. You simply find out about yours," Jack replied.

"But we are made for entertainment!" Peniel retorted.

"Yet, you become something more. I think sometimes inventions walk down a path never intended by their creators. Your world might have originally been meant for entertainment, but after fusing with the energy of our world. I said it has taken a life of its own. As Mae said before, she believes your world is evolving. It is no longer something that is just entertainment for us, players. Every native in this world, including you, has your own purposes and desires. I say that is as real as you can get."

Peniel glanced at Jack, the gloomy mood on her seemed to have diminished. She said, "Thanks. I feel a lot better now. By the way, who is Mae?"

"Oh, right. You were not there. Wilted Tree's real name is Mae Ligna."

"Mae Ligna? Isn't that..."

"Yes, it's the name described in this stone," Jack took out Chris Memory Stone. "Turns out Haon also had the same stone exactly like this."

"Haon?"

"Leavemealone's real name."

"Then why didn't you give Mae this stone? It said to give it to her, right?" Peniel asked.

"She has already left after saying her name. I didn't have the time to show her. She is currently at a place where I can't reach her. Not sure if this stone is important, probably just a prank from a bored programmer. I will show it to her the next time we met."

"So, what are you going to do now?"

"What are we going to do, you mean? We are together in this. That Apollyon threatened the balance of this world. If he became a God, he can do whatever he wishes. I doubt he will just leave us or the natives alone. He will most likely become a tyrant that demands us to follow his every whim. We cannot allow that to happen, for the natives or outworlders, we are in this struggle together. So, we are going to grow stronger. Strong enough to oppose him."

"Are you going to tell this truth to the others?"

"To the core members of the guild. Mae thinks that not everyone has the willpower to face this struggle. As for the natives, I will have to leave them in the dark."

"I guess that's for the best," Peniel said. "I don't expect they will take the news as well as I did."

"I'm proud of you," Jack said.

"Where did that come from?"

"I'm serious. You are strong. As you said, not everyone might be able to face this kind of truth like you."

Peniel flew to Jack's shoulder. "I still have to take care of you. You will be lost without me."

"That's true," Jack replied with a smile.

"So, where will we go from here?"

"First, we go back to Heavenly Citadel. The others need to know this truth and prepare. They will be dragged into this struggle sooner or later. Apollyon is aiming for world domination, after all. Then, we will continue our Faction chain quest. Themisphere needs to be strong. That means it needs to be under one leadership. The current fractured authority between the three princes will just weaken the country. It won't be able to survive an invasion when Apollyon strikes. We need to assist Prince Alonzo's ascent as soon as possible."

"Do you know how to start looking for Aubelard Maxius? Themisphere is too big to search aimlessly," Peniel asked.

"I've some ideas. We will talk about that later," Jack said.

The two used the Zone Portal and reappeared inside Heavenly Citadel's Teleportation chamber. Jack checked his friend list and saw that John was inside this headquarters while Jeanny was not. He went to the Guild Hall where John would most likely be. If he was not, then Jack would send him a message.

On the way, Jack saw some of the women he had saved in Tranviste, they were cleaning the hall. 'So, this was what Jeanny meant by having the women work here,' he thought.

The women saw him and immediately came to greet him. Jack was their savior, after all. Jack chatted with them for a bit. Turned out some of them had a talent for cooking, so Jeanny had assigned them to the Kitchen, another structure the guild had built. With constant ingredient supplies, they and the other player cooks in the kitchen continued to supply beneficial foods to the other members. One of the women even had a knack for blacksmithing and had taken an apprenticeship under Kirsi.

Jack was glad that they were happy here. He continued heading to the Guild Hall after saying goodbye to them. When he entered the hall, John was indeed there. The guy was still playing with the hologram platform as usual.

"Expert, fancy seeing you here. Are you lost or something? No one is attacking us at the moment," John greeted.

Jack ignored the sarcasm. "Where is Jeanny? I need to gather some of our most trusted members for a discussion," Jack said.

"We found another monster settlement. She was raiding it with most of our other core members. They had just started engaging the settlement before you enter. It should take them some hours to clear it. Just wait here if you want to meet them."

"Why aren't you with them?" Jack asked.

"The settlement is a small-sized filled with level 30 to 33 monsters, too easy. Though the loots might still be good, the exp isn't much, so I just let the side characters do the labor."

"Where is the place? Maybe I can speed things up if I go," Jack said. He was too used to the guy's cynicism to bother commenting.

"The fight might be over already by the time you arrive. But if you still want to try to go, here is the..."

John stopped in the middle of his sentence.

"What's wrong?"

John gave him the sign to wait. He seemed to be chatting using messages with someone.

After a while, he turned to Jack, "they had been ambushed."

"Ambushed? By who?" Jack asked.

"Crowd of Sins," John answered.

"The coalition? Are they going on an offensive on us again?"

"No. It is just that one guild, and I think it is a coincidence. Their scout must have found the monster settlement as well. We simply get there before them. But seeing the opportunity, they must have thought this is a golden opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. Our team is being besieged from two fronts, the settlement monsters and the Crowd of Sins. They were blocking the exit so we can't disengage from the settlement as well."

"Is my grandfather with them?"

"He is. Jeanny sent him to the rear to hold the line against the guild. Thank goodness that old man sees it as self-defense, so he complies."

"They should be fine then?"

"You are very confident with your gramps, eh? I need to point out that from the report, Crowd of Sins probably brought three hundred players. Our team who attacked the settlement was less than one hundred players. Your gramps might be strong but he was not a true gamer. Without properly utilizing game skills, smarter players could simply bombard him with spells. With enemy numbering three times and they still have to contend against the monsters, I don't see a good chance of victory on our side."

"Give me their coordinates," Jack said.

John did so. "I'm not sure if you can make it in time," he said.

Jack opened his map. He and Peniel looked at the coordinates John had given. The place was coincidentally not too far from a small town Jack had passed during his journey to the Sangrod Empire. This small town was one of those where only Themisphere faction members could access. Jack had already linked its Zone Portal with Heavenly Citadel.

"If you go from that town, with Pandora's speed, we should be able to arrive within one hour," Peniel said.

"Good. Tell them to hold out for at least one hour! I'm coming!" Jack said and immediately ran back to the teleportation chamber.

John added Jack to the group chat, before he typed, "Hold out, our hero is coming."

Chapter 550: Defensive Battle

Inside a large cave that housed numerous wooden structures, Jeanny was organizing his team members to resist a large number of trolls, carrying knives, clubs, and other melee weapons. The monster settlement they were raiding was a small-sized Troll Cave. Despite the trolls having lower levels than them, their numbers far exceed them.

Jeanny and most of the core members were at level 38 and 37. The regular members that followed them were level 35 and 36. She had asked Domon to take a portion of the team to block off the cave entrance

which was being assaulted by Crowd of Sins. But by separating the team, the pressure given by the trolls became heavier.

"Boss is coming?" The Man asked after reading the chat.

"Yes, we need to hold out until then!" Jeanny announced.

The others who were worried and depressed cheered after hearing it. Some of the regular members who had just joined recently were confused. Why was one person coming here made any difference?

Jeanny, who had become a dragoon, brandished her spear as three trolls came at her with their clubs. She first used Swing. The spear's long-range allowed her to hit the trolls long before they reached her. The trolls staggered from the hit.

She then readied her stance and executed a spear art that Domon had specifically taught her, Seven Spears Assaulting Heaven. This martial art consisted of seven moves using a spear. Each move was more complex than the previous one. At the moment, Jeanny had only learned until the fourth spear.

This art had a special trait in which when they were executed in tandem, the spear power from one move to the next would escalate. Domon explained that when one mastered this art and executed all seven spear moves one after another, the seventh spear was possible to punch through even a ten-inch thick solid steel.

Jeanny, of course, just treated it as an exaggeration. Still, with their enhanced strength in this game-world, this move might actually do that, even without needing to reach the seventh spear. However, in his learning this spear art, she did notice an apparent increase in the spear power when she executed the move one after another.

She stabbed out, performing the first stab on the rightmost troll. She combined it with his basic class skill, Penetrating Stab, scoring critical damage. She continued with the second spear, stabbing at the center troll. The third spear she stabbed the troll on the left.

She continued to move as she did the stabbings. Her footwork had also improved as she was also diligently practicing Eight Diagram Illusory Steps. Before she executed the fourth spear, she had moved from right to left and was now situated on the left side of the three trolls who were positioned in a straight line in front of her.

She stabbed out her fourth spear, combined with an advanced skill she had received after passing the elite class trial on the first try, Piercing Spear. It created spear energy that stabbed out in a straight line to a distance of ten meters. All three trolls were impaled by that energy. Both the damage amplification combined with the spear art caused high damage to the trolls. The three dropped dead and turned to dust at the same time.

"As expected of big sister! Your spear art is truly amazing!" Viral Cora cheered.

"Hey, keep playing!" Bowler shouted at her.

Viral Cora pouted before she continued playing the flute on her hands. She was now a bard. The song he played improved his teammate's movement and attacking speed.

"Watch out!" They heard Giant Steve call.

A troll larger than the average one barged out from the swarm. It was using a large cleaver on each hand. It was a level 35 special elite troll. This troll made a circular swing and knocked two players on its path back and headed straight to Viral Cora.

Giant Steve was running to Viral but he was still a couple of meters away from her when the troll swung its cleavers. Viral could have used Roll to move away but she stood her ground and continued playing her flute because she knew of Giant Steve's skill after becoming a Sentinel.

Giant Steve used Cover, his body which was close already, vanished and reappeared instantly in front of Viral Cora. He was holding a heavy-looking large tower shield. The troll's cleavers slashed onto the sturdy shield. No damage resulted.

Giant Steve used Shield Bash, a skill he had learned from a technique book. The troll was knocked back by the bash while suffering damage.

Jeanny suddenly appeared five meters high above the monster and stabbed down with the tip of her spear onto the troll's skull. It suffered critical damage. Jeanny's skill was Jump Attack, a move that teleported her high up in the air before striking down. The damage was increased based on how far a Dragoon fell while performing the skill.

When Jeanny landed, she activated another Dragoon's skill which she received after reaching level 35, Hundred Spears. The spear on her hand turned to a blur as multiple images of it stabbed onto the troll, delivering damage with each stab.

After the skill ended, Jeanny and Giant Steve took turns defending and attacking. Jeanny's long reach made it ideal for her to attack from Giant Steve's back. Supported by the other members, the special elite troll soon fell.

But another swarm of trolls came out to replace those that had fallen. Suddenly an explosion was heard above the swarm as a rain of arrows fell. It was Fierce Flame's level 35 Elite Marksman's skill, Shower of Arrows. All the trolls within a large area received damage.

"Steve, Share Damage!" Jeanny called.

The skill Jeanny mentioned was Sentinel's skill which was acquired after passing the trial on the first try. It targeted one teammate and formed a link. Half of the damage received by this teammate was dealt to the Sentinel instead, with each damage received by both the linked teammate and the Sentinel being reduced by 10%. The teammate had to be within thirty meters range, or else the skill would end.

With half of the damage shared, Jeanny could afford to be more reckless. She dove into the swarm and fought fiercely. She continuously employed Eight Diagram Illusory Steps to reduce the hit she received, lessening the pressure on Giant Steve who still had to protect the other teammates.

Despite their fierce effort, the situation didn't look too good for them. Their number was too few. The Crowd of Sins' assault had truly turned their plan upside-down. All they could do is fight defensively, they didn't dare proceed further as to not invoke the boss of the settlement from coming out. In their experience, the boss would only come out if they got too close to the settlement core or when all the minions had been wiped out.

Jeanny had sent Domon and Trinity Dawn to lead the group that faced the Crowd of Sins, but she still worry. She prayed that Jack arrived earlier.

At the cave entrance outside, Domon was standing at the cave entrance. Some bodies were lying down on the ground near his feet.

"Please do not try to force your way in, I prefer not to take your lives," Domon said to the crowd outside the cave entrance.

The players from Crowd of Sins had struck the Everlasting Heavenly Legends' team from the back. Everlasting Heavenly Legends players were having trouble due to this sudden ambush and suffered some casualties. As they were forced to retreat into the cave, Domon rushed out and beat the pushing force back.

Trinity Dawn aided Domon by casting Ice Field, an Elementalist's level 35 spell. It dealt ice damage to a large area while either freezing or slowing down the ones within. Trinity placed the spell at the mouth of the cave, thus reducing the number of players that swarm at Domon.

Domon's glaive with his Ki Weapon active, easily swatted the Crowd of Sins players back. When he executed his Death Carrying Cyclone art, several of the players dropped dead. Domon did not intentionally kill the players. He was planning to spare them actually, but he was not accustomed to the game system's damage calculations. His usual way of reserving strength to spare his opponent was not compatible.

Still, he did not dwell on it. If the players died, it was their fate then. They didn't truly die anyway, if the others still try to break in, they couldn't blame him.

After beating the first wave back, Domon just stood by the cave entrance and did not chase out. Those who watched the old man's figure would be reminded of the story about Zhang Fei on ChangBan bridge, just as Jack pointed out before.

"Who is that old man? How come the Everlasting Heavenly Legends has such an expert?" Lustful Elly who stood beside Prideful Josh asked.

"Don't know," Prideful Josh replied. Domon did not join the fight when the coalition attack Heavenly Citadel. He only came out after the coalition pulled back and was replaced by the undead horde. So none of the coalition members ever saw Domon in action, except for Red Death.

"Doesn't matter, he is just one person. He won't win against our number, we will continue to charge!" Prideful Josh announced.

'Wasn't Storm Wind also just one person, he still kicked our asses,' Lustful Elly thought sourly within.