

World 61

Chapter 61: Bronze Badge

"You could just touch them if you want to read their stats," he heard Peniel's voice. "Also, don't bother to look for uncommon or rare equipment. Normal shops usually just sold Common equipment."

'Oh, I guess that it's pointless for me to hang around then."

Jack was just about to exit the shop when he thought of something. He immediately turned around and approached the woman who was the shop owner.

"Do you sell magic equipment?" He asked her.

"Of course," the woman said with excitement.

"It's over here by this stand," she said as she led Jack to the other side of the shop. There were numerous robes, wands, staffs, and garments hung on the stand.

He asked the owner, "can you get me three of your cheapest magic staffs?"

The owner looked at him, "are you not going to look at their stats first, sire?"

"It's ok. Any stats is fine by me," Jack replied.

The owner was confused but still proceeded to follow the request. She went and picked up three magic staffs from the stand.

"What's in your mind?" Peniel asked.

'My magic weapon had been lacking,' Jack said. 'I think it's time to put that Transformation Box to test, shall we?'

"Oh... I see what you're getting at," Peniel said as she came to a realization.

The owner came back and placed the three staff on a small table nearby. Jack checked them, they were all level 5 common grade magic staff. Their total prices came to 5 silver and 40 copper, the magical equipment was slightly more expensive than their physical counterparts. The total cost was above Jack's budget. He was depressed.

"Do you buy items too?" He asked the owner.

The owner nodded, "yes, if you have unusable items and equipment, we can buy them off your hands."

Jack then took out some of the equipment that he thought would never use, which he had stocked in his storage bag. He placed Tunic cloth, Protective dress, Leather Vest, and Sandal on the table, then prayed that these were enough.

"How much would you pay for these?" He asked.

"I will take them off your hands for 1 silver and 52 copper," the owner said.

So low? Jack thought.

He gritted his teeth and decided to just sell all four equipment. After all, they didn't serve any use to him. Deducting the prices of the three magic staff, he just needed to pay 3 silver and 88 copper. After the transaction, he only had 1 silver and 1 copper coins in his bag. He felt much poorer suddenly. He stored the staff, said his thanks to the owner, and made his way out.

He didn't stop at any other shops anymore, afraid he couldn't resist the temptation to spend his remaining coins. He passed by a white building in the shape of a tower. He saw many people in white robes went in and out of the building.

'What's that place?' Jack asked Peniel in his mind.

"That is a library," Peniel answered. "In fact, that should be the first place you guys go to if you want to find out more information regarding this world. But you don't need it, because you have me!"

He heard a hint of pride in Peniel's words. He didn't deny it, as she really was a big help. Otherwise, he would be lost and didn't know what to do when he arrived in this new world. He then thought of Silverwing who was currently trying to collect information. He opened his Friends interface and sent a short message informing him about the Library and its position.

A moment later, he received a prompt reply, "Thanks, my friend! I will send people there right away."

He finally arrived in front of the Adventurers Association building after asking another two natives and were pointed the way. It was a large and luxurious building. The layout seemed to be oval-shaped judging from the curved walls, it was completely out of context if compared to the other medieval building styles in the vicinity. The walls were held by round pillars every eight meters. There were runes on the surface of the pillars, they flickered with light every now and then. Jack figured it should be some kind of magic enchantment that protected the place.

Jack went and entered the front entrance which should be free to enter judging from people coming in and out freely. When he was inside, he was greeted by a man in purple-colored formal attire.

"Greetings, sir. Are you an adventurer?" He asked.

Jack answered, "yes, I am."

"New adventurer should register first, please come with me." He led Jack towards a counter attended by a young girl.

Before leaving Jack at the counter, he said, "once you are done with your registration, you can go into the Bronze Hall to review available quests."

The girl handed him a dark red orb. "What's your name, sir?"

"Storm Wind," Jack answered.

"Please put your hand on this orb, sir," she said.

As Jack followed the instruction, the orb color blared to become more reddish. The girl at the counter scribbled something on his paper while mumbling, "age 23, Fighter class, level 13."

The orb light died down. She took it back and then placed another flat round object of bronze color on the counter table.

"This is your adventurer badge sir, please keep it with you at all times. You will need to show it when you apply for a quest and when you submitted the completion of your quest."

Jack nodded and took the badge. He observed it.

Bronze Adventurer Badge (special item)

Identification as a member of Adventurers Association

Adventurer points: 0

Available points: 0

He asked the way to the Bronze Hall from the girl. After getting the direction, he thanked her and then went as directed. He came onto a spacious hall which walls were lined with many counters. Each of the counters was manned by staff. Several people were there communicating with the staff. Some people were sitting leisurely at the benches lined up around the hall as they read the quests on three large noticeboards hung from the ceiling.

'Bronze hall and bronze badge, looking at the name, I figure there are ranks within adventurers?' Jack asked Peniel through his thought as he held the badge.

"Of course, there are ranks to almost everything," Peniel replied. "The Bronze rank was the lowest. You need to complete several Bronze rank quests and accumulate points in order to upgrade to the next rank."

'This the point I saw inside the badge here?'

"Yes, after you have completed the quests, you will be awarded rewards and points. The points will be recorded on your badge. You can also report quest completions for quests which you've received from out there, the ones not taken from this Association, but those reports will not net you any rewards, only points. And the point is also much lower compared to if you undertake the quests supplied from the Association."

'I see. Why are there two points categories in this badge? Do I get two different points?'

"No. They are the same. The difference is, the adventurer points recorded are the total points you have accumulated in your entire career, they will not reduce. While available points are the points you have that you can exchange for items in the Adventurers Association. At the start, those two amount points will be the same until you start exchanging points for items."

'I can exchange for items?'

"Yes, so go out there and accumulate as many points as you can. Some items and equipment can only be gotten here. The higher the rank you become, the better the prizes."

'How many ranks are there?'

"Four. First one is Bronze, which is where you are. The next is Silver, then Gold, and the highest grade is Diamond. Normally there were only a handful of Diamond adventurers in a country. They are those of the highest level with countless battle records."

'So many natives are also adventurers? Does that mean we will meet some out there in the field?'

"Certainly. But now since you outworlders are here, you folks will most likely take up the bulk of the adventurers."

That was weird, in past VR games. NPCs only stayed in safe zones and repeated programmed routines. He kept on forgetting this was a whole other world, not some games he could log in and out of.

'Outworlders... I still can't get used to that name.'

"Never mind that, hurry up and take a quest. You need to grab as many prizes as you can before the others realize the importance of this place."

'All right, but I need to at least inform Browler and Flame also about this place. So they can get ahead of others as well.'

"Man... You really are a goodie-do-gooders, you know that?" Peniel complained in exasperation.

Chapter 62: Taking A Quest

After sending the message to Bowler and Flame, he went forward to the rows of benches. Found a comfortable spot on one of the benches then sat down and looked at one of the large noticeboards hanging above. There were lots of quests.

Finding my lost cat: Mimi

Difficulty: E (recommended: Solo, level 1)

Rewards: 50 copper coins, 200 Experience points, 1 Adventurer Points

Escort a merchant to a meeting in the slum

Difficulty: D (recommended: Party of 3, level 10)

Rewards: 2 silver coins, 1000 Experience points, 8 Adventurer Points

Deliver a merchant package

Difficulty: E (recommended: Solo, level 5)

Rewards: 1 silver coins, 350 Experience points, 4 Adventurer Points

"Most of the Quests in Bronze Hall have difficulties of E and D," Peniel explained as Jack continued reading on the quests. "basically, they are quests meant for beginner adventurers who are still in Basic Class."

'All of the quests are located inside the city,' Jack noticed, then corrected, 'ah, no, found one that required you to go out from the city.'

Pick a blue magecrest flower for an apothecary at the foot of Siren Hill

Difficulty: D (recommended: Party of 4, level 12)

Rewards: 3 silver coins, 2000 Experience points, 14 Adventurer Points

"Most of the quests which required you to go out of the city are those that are more difficult," Peniel said. "That's why there were fewer. You can find more of those quests once you rank up to Silver."

'Hey, what is that quest?' Jack said as he pointed to one of the quests on the board.

Investigate the Cult of Phobos

Difficulty: ??? (recommended: ???)

Rewards: 1 silver coins, 500 Experience points, 3 Adventurer Points (subject to change)

"Yeah, sometimes this kind of quest will pop up. It is a quest where the Adventurers Association isn't sure of the difficulty. They placed it in this Hall because they think it is the most suitable difficulty, but it is not definite. Sometimes the person undertaking it might complete the quest as easy as that find the cat quest. Sometimes instead, it is way above their level. If it turns out to be so, and they still managed to complete it, the rewards will be increased. So, it's a gamble."

Jack continued reading through the quests. He then asked, 'How many points to get to Silver rank?'

"100 adventurer points!" Peniel replied.

'Wow, that means I have to do that find cat quest like one hundred times to rank up?'

"You are assuming there will be one hundred cat quests?"

'Sigh, never mind. Let's take that gambling quest,' Jack said.

"You sure? It might turn out to be a dangerous mission," Peniel warned.

'no pain, no gain,' he said as he rose up. He came up to one of the empty counters. A pretty lady was manning the counter.

"Good day to you, sir," she greeted in a polite manner.

"Good day to you, too. I would like to take a quest," Jack said to her.

"Can I see your Adventurer Badge, sir?"

Jack gave his badge to her. She received it and checked it. After confirming it was legit, she returned it.

"Which quest would you like to take, sir?"

"Investigate the Cult of Phobos," Jack answered.

"This is a mysterious quest, which meant that the difficulty has a possibility to be higher or lower than expected. Are you sure you want to take this quest, sir?"

"I am sure," Jack said firmly.

"All right, sir. Let me process your request." She took out a paper, wrote something on it, stamped it, then offer it to Jack. "Please put your badge here, sir."

Jack did as told. When the badge touched the part of the paper indicated by the girl. It trembled slightly and emitted a soft glow. A symbol was carved onto the paper where the badge touched. Jack heard a notification sound afterward.

"You have received a quest: Investigate the Cult of Phobos. You can review the quest under your Quests Window page."

'Quest Window Page?' Jack thought in his mind.

"It was among your status window pages, you should find out a new page now," Peniel explained.

Jack opened his status window and took a look. There was a new page after the Party page.

Investigate the Cult of Phobos

Difficulty: ??? (recommended: ???)

Rewards: 1 silver coins, 500 Experience points, 3 Adventurer Points (subject to change)

Go to the Residential district. Interview the baker Amy for more information about the Cult.

Time limit: 2 days

There was some additional information about the quest on his quest page. It gave him clue about how to proceed with the quest, and also added a time limit.

"That's all to it, sir. Good luck with your quest," the girl said as she took back her paper.

Jack thanked her and walked away.

'by the way, could I take on more quests?' Jack asked Peniel.

"For quests found outside, yes. But for Association's quests, you can only take one at a time. You will have to cancel your current quest in order to take another quest." she answered.

"Oh, too bad," he had the thought of hoarding the quests, but guessed the system didn't allow such shameless behavior.

Before he exited the building, he stopped at the young girl at the counter near the entrance, asking for direction to the baker called Amy. Luckily, it wasn't too far from the Adventurers Association, so he didn't waste too much time traveling. The baker's shop was in the same business district. It took Jack approximately forty minutes to find the Bakery, this included him losing the way and had to ask a native again for direction.

"You could just hail for a carriage to take you somewhere within the Business and Residential District, you know," Peniel told him.

'Is it free?' Jack asked.

"No, you will need to pay a cost. I have no idea for the exact cost, but should be ranging between ten to fifty copper depending on the length of travel."

'No, thanks,' Jack said after considering the number of coins he had left.

The shop this baker called Amy run was in a rather quiet street compared to the other streets he had passed through. It was situated at the edge of the Business district, so it didn't boast as many customers. Jack came up to the bakery which had an Open sign at the front of its door, and opened the door.

A doorbell rang out as sweet aroma of fresh-baked bread and cake assaulted his nostrils when he stepped inside the shop. Rows of delicious-looking bread decorated the stands on one side of the wall. While at the further side, was a glass counter with rows of cake inside. A chubby girl was behind the counter. When she saw a customer entered her shop, her countenance brightened up.

"Good afternoon, sir. Are you perhaps interested in our bread or our cake? They are all freshly baked and we used the best ingredient there is. You won't find a better taste outside after you have a taste of ours," she happily promoted.

Did she memorize those lines for all the customers that came in? Jack thought to himself.

"Actually, I'm here for the quest regarding the Cult of Phobos. Are you Amy?" Jack asked her.

"Oh," Jack could see a slight trace of surprise in her eyes, but it was soon replaced by her cheery nature.

"Yes, I am. Please follow me to the back room please," she said.

"You don't worry a customer will come in?" Jack asked.

"I will hear the doorbell if there is someone," Amy said as she ushered Jack to the door beside the glass counter.

Jack followed through the door and found it to be a small room with a dining table and a kitchen for her to make her bread and cake. Amy invited him to sit on one of the chairs of the dining table. Once they sat down, her expression turned serious.

Chapter 63: Clue About The Cult

"So, what can you tell me about the Cult of Phobos?" Jack asked.

"Are you from the Adventurers Association?" Amy replied with a question of her own.

"Yes," Jack answered.

"I didn't expect them to post a quest for this," Amy spoke to herself while fell in thought, she then realized she had mumbled and immediately said, "I'm sorry, I was getting ahead of myself. Let me tell you everything from the beginning."

"Originally, I went to the Adventurers Association in order to put up a request to look for my mother. She is the real owner of this bakery and is a skilled master bakery. My skill holds no candle compared to her. Anyway, she had been missing when she made a delivery to one of our customers in the slum. I went there looking for her and found out that she was last seen around an area in the slum which was a

private property of a group. After I went asking around, I was informed of this group that had just recently settled in, they referred to themselves as Cult of Phobos. I tried poking further, but I think they caught my scent."

"I felt that there had been people following me since when I went to the slum, and there had been two occasions where I had almost got into an accident. I have a feeling that those almost accidents weren't really accidents. I think they were a warning from the cult. I went to the guards, but they believe that my mother was just having a business trip as she often did. But she is not, she always told me if she does. But the guards just didn't take my words seriously. So I went to the Adventurers Association, hoping to put up a quest to look for my mom, but I don't have enough coins for their rate! I did tell them about the cult thought. I guess they are also interested in them if they had put on a quest themselves. I have a request, sir! Since you are going to investigate them, would you mind to also look for my mom? I don't have anything to repay you but an offer of our bread and cake, but she is really important to me. Will you help me?"

Jack heard a system notification after Amy's words.

"You are offered a quest: Finding Amy's mother. Do you accept the quest?"

The girl did say that there was not much reward in this, but how could he reject the plea of this sweet young girl? As what a fine gentleman would do, he accepted her request.

"Oh, thank you very much, mister... I haven't actually caught your name, I'm sorry," she apologized with a red face.

"Storm Wind," Jack said, then asked, "where was this place you said your mother was last seen?"

"I will show you, open your map please."

"My map?" Jack was confused.

"Your Map system window," Peniel interjected. "Natives can choose to interface with your Map system if they want to point you in a direction."

Jack then opened up her map as requested. He saw most of the areas around still filled with grey fog. Amy stood up and used her hand to shift the map. It moved following her hand's movement. She stopped after a while and pointed, "this is the area," she said. The place where she pointed suddenly had the grey fog cleared up and revealed the layout of several houses.

That was neat, Jack thought.

"Mr. Storm Wind, thank you very much, sir!" Amy then said in excitement. "I have been confused as to what to do, you have been a heaven-sent, sir. Please make yourself at home. Please try this bread, I made this on my own, not as good as my mom's though. I will be outside watching the store. If you need anything, just holler."

She then went out with a lively tiptoe. Jack watched her went out, she would hate to disappoint this cheerful girl, he committed to himself that he should try his best to find the girl's mother despite low reward potential. He opened up his Quests window and took a look at this new quest.

Finding Amy's mother

Difficulty: C

Rewards: 2 silver coins, 3400 Experience points, 30% discount at Amy's shop

Go to the area in the slum indicated by Amy to find clues about Amy's mother's whereabouts

Time limit: 2 days

It was the same time limit as the Cult quest, so he thought they really might be connected. Which should be good, he could kill two birds with one stone then. But why was the difficulty much higher?

'Peniel, what level usually required for difficulty C quest? It doesn't give a recommendation on how many people needed and what level.'

"Only Association's quests showed recommendation," Peniel answered and materialized in front of her. It was actually a long time since he saw her in person. She had been hiding in her own separate dimension all this time.

"You are not afraid she will come back and saw you?" Jack asked using his voice.

"I'm not that strange to the native people. We seldom appeared in front of them of course, but it's also not a big deal if we do... About your question of C difficulty. It usually required you to be advanced class level 15 to 20."

"Oh... that's bad then," Jack said.

"Yes, and if this link with that mystery quest you took from the Associations. It is safe to say that it is also a C difficulty quest in actual."

Jack pondered about this revelation.

"Maybe you should just cancel the quest with the association and take another quest in exchange," Peniel offered.

If it was just the association's quest, he would have done so. But after Amy's hopeful gaze as Jack promised her to look for her mom, there was no way Jack would take back his words.

"No, we will proceed with both these quests," Jack said with resolution.

"Are you sure? It might be more than you can handle," Peniel warned.

"I had better prepare then," he said and took out the Transformation Box. He placed it on the table and took out the three staff he had bought in the shop previously and the standard magic staff he had used since the beginning.

"So how do I use this thing?" He asked Peniel.

"Touch it, and activate it with your mind," Peniel answered.

Jack proceeded as instructed. The Box flared with dark grey light and its five sides opened up into one flat platform. A holographic image appeared above this platform. There was a box shape image and a text message, indicated him to put in the items to be transformed inside this box.

He then took one of the magic staff on the table and inserted it inside the box. Another three boxes appeared and the text changed to asking him to insert another three normal staff into each of the boxes. Jack put the remaining staff into the available boxes. The text then changed again asking him if he was sure to proceed with the transformation. Jack clicked accept.

The text disappeared and the four boxes rotated at a rapid speed before colliding with one another, resulting in a bright flash from the impact. When the flash receded, he saw a lone staff floating above the platform. A text saying that the transformation was successful was floating above the staff. He used his hand to grab the new staff. When he took it out of the box image, the platform rearranged itself back into Box shape. He looked at his new magic staff.

Repeater Staff, level 5/25 (uncommon magic weapon)

Magical damage: 24

Range: 10 meter

Attack speed: 1

Energy: 50

Energy automatically refills when out of combat

The staff ability was quite good, Jack thought. This way he didn't have to worry about running out of ammo in between fights. He then stored the Transformation Box and took out his Storm Breaker and the rare sword he had won from the bet with Grimclaw. He proceeded to feed the rare sword to Storm Breaker, then chose the ability that increased damage when attacked.

Storm Breaker, level 12 (rare one-handed sword, bound weapon)

Physical damage: 64

Attack speed 3

cannot be destroyed

bound to Storm Wind

Overlimit: Release the weapon's hidden power that adds an additional 150% damage as chaos damage, increases weapon range by 2 feet, and decreases target's defense by 65%. Duration 85 seconds.

Cooldown 8 hours

Dexterity +2

When user receives damage, next attack on the enemy dealing the damage will be increased to 150%

Jack was surprised. Not only the upgrade to Rare grade increased the weapon's damage and add additional ability. It also increased the power of the already powerful Overlimit skill.

Chapter 64: Finding The Cult

With these two upgrades, he had increased his fighting prowess, but he still did not feel it was enough. He then took out his Apprentice Hammer and Mobile Anvil. He used all of his available iron ores to upgrade his new magic staff all the way to level 12, making it the same level as his sword.

He was lucky that there was no fail upgrade on all attempts. Starting from level 8 upwards there was a probability of failure. When his staff was level 11 upgrade towards 12, the possibility to succeed was 80%. Maybe his luck stat did help him on all four attempts.

Repeater Staff, level 12/25 (uncommon magic weapon)

Magical damage: 38

Range: 10 meters

Attack speed: 1

Energy: 50

Energy automatically refills when out of combat

"Confident enough now?" Peniel asked him.

"It will have to do," Jack answered as he stored his Hammer and Anvil. "I don't have available resources to upgrade anymore. However..."

He took out his Cooking Stove. "Don't forget about the buff from meals. Every bit helps."

He made Chicken Soup which could increase his attribute points, but didn't immediately consume it. He stored it inside his storage bag. He looked at his restorative items, he still had some leftovers from the Tutorial world, they should be enough for now. If he still had any iron ore, he would have made a Whetstone as well.

"All right, let's head out," he said.

"It's getting dark soon," Peniel said. "Aren't you going to rest for the day and start tomorrow morning?"

"Why wait when you can get it done today?" Jack replied. "I ain't tired yet, and we are going to sneak into private property. Won't it better if we do it in the dark?"

"Why are you saying we?" Peniel said as she hid back to her separate dimension. "Good luck," she said.

"@#\$*"

Amy offered him a basket of bread when he walked out. Jack rejected it by saying, "give it to me when I brought your mom back." Her eyes teared up when she heard the confidence in his voice.

Jack followed the direction shown on his map to get to the place Amy had indicated. With a clear direction, he didn't waste time getting lost. Thought he still sometimes had to circle around building blocks as there was no straight way in the direction he was going. It took him almost two hours as the slum was in another part of the Capital, and he was not going to spend coins to hire a carriage in order to save time. The sky was already dark by the time he arrived.

The slum was significantly different from the Business and Residential districts. The streets were narrow, filthy, and unattended. Less activity was seen on the street. Some ruffians sat by the side of the street, eyeing anyone that came through, like an owl waiting for a rat to cross by. Jack's attire surely picked their attention.

However, it was not tempting enough for them to rob. If Jack wore merchant or noble clothes, then it would be a different story. Robbing an adventurer was like a gamble. You could just end up hitting a poor bastard, or sometimes you could even end up being the one that got robbed, so they left Jack alone. As he traveled, Jack was wondering how a sweet girl like Amy was safe traveling around such a place.

When Jack reached the place marked by Amy, there was nothing special. It was a street with slum houses alongside it. There were still a few people hanging around on the street despite it being evening. He looked for a person that looked most friendly and asked him about the Cult that had come to this part of town recently. He blanched and made some excuses then disappeared inside his house. The others who heard Jack's question turned their gaze to look elsewhere when Jack looked at them.

They are afraid of the Cult?

Jack was clueless now. He couldn't ask around, so where should he find out about where to find this Cult? As he stood there at a loss, his God-eye monocle made some noises. An object by the side of the street was highlighted in his view.

Jack approached it and found out that it was a loaf of bread that had already gone stale. Some small texts appeared beside the bread as the monocle analyzed it. It said it was connected to Amy's mother quest, and then traces of footprint were highlighted on the street. The monocle indicated the footprint as belonging to Amy's mother and it went along from where the bread was all the way to the end of the street, then disappeared at the turn.

"Damn! Your monocle is good stuff!" He heard Peniel's excited voice. "It can even do high-level tracking. This usually can only be done when Ranger got their advanced class and even then, they could only do low-level tracking at first. You are really cheating, man."

"Of course it is, that's why its name is God-Eye. With such a domineering name, you couldn't expect any less, could you?" Jack said with pride as he responded to Peniel's comment, but the fact was he was quite amazed by this monocle himself.

He followed the highlighted footprints along the street, until it came to a deserted warehouse surrounded by wooden fences. The front gate was barred with wooden blocks. There was a small door at one side of the fence, the footprints disappeared inside this door. There were several rough-looking guys hanging around the fence.

Weirdly, the radar indicated these guys with red dots, which indicated them as enemies. All the NPCs he had encountered thus far in the capital had been represented by white color dots, so this red color came as a surprise. However, these guys who were red dots didn't immediately attack him once he was in range like those wilderness monsters.

They however, all looked at him hostilely. He came nearer to check their reaction. One of the guys growled in menace. Another one spoke out, "What are you doing here? Don't you know this place is a restricted area?"

"Oh? I'm sorry, I don't see a sign," Jack replied innocently.

"You want a sign? How about I give you one?" The man brandished a hand axe.

"I don't want any trouble," Jack said as he lifted up both his hand.

"You don't? Then piss off!"

"All right, all right," Jack said as he backed off. When he turned the street out of their view, he made a round turn and came to the back of the warehouse. It was the same situation where some sentries were keeping watch. There was definitely something important in the warehouse to have people keeping watch. There was also a small back door on this back fence. He scanned the sentries. Each of them was level 8 Ruffian (Basic Human).

Level 8, not too strong, Jack thought. He was half expecting them to be level 50 like the guards, but that would be unreasonable. He would just give up on the quest if that was the case.

'Hey, Peniel,' he called out telepathically.

"What?" She answered.

'We were forbidden to fight in the city, right? But what about for natives that were marked as red dots? Red dots indicate enemies, right? Will we still get a penalty if we kill them?'

"If you are attacked first, or they are already registered as red by the system, then no, you will not get a penalty."

'Well, that's a relief,' Jack said. 'That will make things simpler.'

He took out the Chicken Soup he had prepared earlier and promptly consumed it. His stats increased due to the food effect. He pulled out his sword and magic staff. There was no need to conceal his dual-class to NPCs or monsters. He could unleash all his abilities. He sneaked until he could get closest to those sentries without being noticed.

"Let's test my new weapon now, shall we," he said as he aimed his staff and cast Energy Bolts.

Chapter 65: Infiltrating The Warehouse

Four energy balls rushed out from his staff and sped towards the three sentries keeping watch at the back fence of the warehouse. When the bolts hit them, they were still unaware. The ambush produced extra damage.

When they came to their sense, another Magic Bullet dashed along and hit the one further out. While the closest one saw a shadow suddenly appeared in front of him. The shadow made rapid multi slashes that took out his life which was already damaged from the ambush.

The second sentry who managed to pull out his weapon, found that the shadow that had felled his comrade, had come to his front, all the while shooting standard range attacks from the staffs on his left hand to the other comrade behind him.

He tried to cut the shadow with his hand axe, but the shadow brushed it aside with his sword. He then felt as if he was struck by an ox. His body bent as it flew backward and crushed the sturdy fence, its lifeless body bounced from the impact and landed on the ground.

The third sentry who had been continuously blasted by magic attacks, was too disoriented by the attacks that by the time he could get a better view on his assailant, two of his comrades had already fallen. He panicked and decided to turn tail and ran.

Jack couldn't let him notified the other grunts at the front of the warehouse. He used standard magic attacks and shot at the running guy's leg. Luckily his shot was accurate enough, it hit the guy's leg and made him tripped. As he fell to the ground, Jack caught up to him. He then thrust his sword on the guy's exposed neck. The blood spurted out from the neck as the guy lost his life from the thrust.

After all three of the sentries were dead, the fight ended and the three bodies conveniently turned into dust, erasing the gore away, leaving only a few coins on the ground. Jack picked up those coins. He then checked his radar, making sure the sentries at the front didn't make any move. They didn't, the ambush at the back had been completed in an instant, leaving the sentries no chance to warn the others. Those at the front were unaware of the disturbance at the back.

From his radar, he could check that there was a heavy concentration of dots at the center part of the warehouse. But the empty area between the warehouse and the fence was empty. They might be having a communion or meeting or whatever the hell a cult was doing at this moment.

This was good, the fewer people wandering around, the less chance he would be spotted. He went to the small door on the fence. If it was locked, he had no choice but to jump over. The fence was rather high, but he thought it should be doable with the degree of strength and dexterity this game body of him provided.

The door wasn't locked, so he would leave the testing of his fence jumping skill to another time. As his radar had indicated, the space inside the fence was devoid of sentry. He proceeded to sneak to the side of the warehouse building. Many windows lined up the side of the warehouse, some were slightly open. He came to one of them, then opened the window wider and sneaked inside after making sure no one was around. He could hear chanting and talking not far away. He slowly approached the source of the sound.

The interior of the warehouse had several side rooms formed by wooden partitions. When he came through the window, he came to one of this room. Outside the room was a hallway, there was a large opening at the opposite partition which opened up to the center of the warehouse, the voices came from there. He came to the opening silently while staying close to the partition, and peaked inside.

There were several people in black robes kneeling down on the floor facing an altar. On the altar was another black robe person wearing a deer skull hat, giving him an eerie vibe. Jack used his God-eye monocle to scan the guy.

Priest of Phobos (Elite Human), level 25

HP: 24,000

The heck! Level 25? Jack was flabbergasted. There was no way he could survive fighting that guy. But then again, the point of the quest was to investigate the cult, not eradicate it. Now that he had confirmed the people here were indeed part of the cult, he could proceed to find out more information. He also scanned the audience who were kneeling.

Acolyte of Phobos (Basic Human), level 12

HP 1600

The acolytes' levels were more reasonable, but there were too many of them. This was definitely not the quest where he simply barged in and killed everyone. Stealth was a more crucial factor here. As he continued observing the communion inside, he found that there was not much going really. They were just chanting with unintelligible language.

After a while, Jack decided that he couldn't get any more information just by watching them doing their ceremony. He backed away and decided to check the side room one by one, see if he could find any more clues about the cult and their purpose. After spending several minutes going from room to room, he came out empty-handed.

As he was at a loss of what to do, his God-eye monocle picked up on traces of footprint again. He approached it and found out that they were continuation of Amy's mother's footprints that he had followed on the street outside. The footprint took him through the hallway, to the other side of the warehouse. It went into an opening that had stairs that went down.

He followed the stairs down to a large basement. There were three doors on the wall facing the stairs. From his radar, he could see that two of the doors had one occupant each, however, they were represented by white dots, which indicated that they were neutral NPC. Also, the footprints went to the left door, which was one of the two doors that had a white dot.

He walked carefully towards the door, afraid that fast movement might trigger some traps or alarms. Once he arrived at the door, he put his hand on the door knob.

Shit, it's locked!

Maybe he could try breaking the door? The communion up there was separated by one floor. And they were chanting quite loud, so they shouldn't be able to hear noise from down here. Resolved to take the risk, he brandished his Storm Breaker, and sent Power Strike to the door. The strike crashed onto the door, but he was sent back due to recoil force. The door was completely fine.

"Dumbass, doors and chests in this world can't be broken by brute force you know," Peniel mocked him as she reappeared.

"So what do I do?" Jack asked.

Peniel flew around observing the door. "There is a keyhole. You don't happen to have lockpicks, do you?"

"No, I don't."

"We should make that a priority next when we get out of here. Well, if you can't lockpick, then your only option left is to find the key."

"Where?" He asked.

"How should I know? Don't just expect me to give all the answers. Try searching around the room!" She said as she flew looking around the room.

Jack also started walking and observing the basement. It was a simple rectangular room. The stone floor was half-covered by hay. Probably the room was used to store farm products or kept small animals in the past. There was a small desk accompanied by a lone chair at one corner of the room. Jack approached it.

The desk was empty, but at the wall by its side, there were several hangers that were normally used to hang keys or coats, but it was also empty. From the look of the setting of this room. This basement was probably where the cult held their captives, and this desk was where the warden was supposed to be while watching the captive cells. But where was the warden?

As the question surfaced in his mind, his monocle again lighted up. It showed some process in analyzing the hangers, some texts appeared saying 'key for cells', and then it highlighted another set of footprints going from the desk and back up the stairs.

Peniel whose soul was linked with his could see the footprints as well. She came to him and said, "I'm not going to comment anymore. Let's just go and follow the footprints, cheater."

Chapter 66: Cell Key Retrieval

Her tone put heavy emphasis on the last word in her sentence. Jack ignored her. He went back upstairs following the footprints. They should be the warden's tracks. If he found the warden, he should find the key.

He was just worried that the warden was among the Acolytes inside the communion. How would he get to him without alerting the other acolytes and that over-leveled priest then? He would worry about it later if that really was the case. For now, he just focused on following the footprints.

Luckily, his worry was not proven. From his radar, the direction the footprints took him was to a lone red dot not far from where the other group of red dots were having the communion. When he came near the place the footprints brought him to. It was to a door.

From the layout of the other rooms, this door opened to a small space inside. Jack's assumption was that it was a restroom. The warden must have taken a piss break during his watch.

As he was considering the possibility, he heard a click on the door. He quickly hid behind the restroom as Peniel vanished back into her hidden dimension. A person wearing a black robe came out of the room and walked away.

Jack inspected him and found out him to be another level 12 Acolyte. They were pretty closed to the main hall where the Priest and the rest of the Acolytes were having the communion, so if a fight broke here, it might alert them. Hence, Jack stayed in the shadow as he tailed the warden. He expected him to go back down to the basement.

Luckily, the warden didn't disappoint him. As the warden walked down the stairs, Jack took out his sword and magic staff. If he fought down there, the noise shouldn't reach the main hall group. Nevertheless, he needed to finish the fight fast to avoid complications.

Jack knew he couldn't walk as silently as the Ranger class, who could come behind another person's back undetected as Flame had demonstrated. That's why when he had decided to shorten the distance with the warden, he threw away all his stealth maneuver and ran down the stairs. The warden was caught off guard by the hasty footsteps coming from behind him. Jack jumped off the remaining steps as the warden turned around, he executed Power Strike as he came down upon the warden.

The warden was slammed down hard onto the stone floor as a damage of 142 appeared. He had not got the time to take out his weapon as Jack followed the ambush with several successive slashes. Damage numbers continued to appear above the warden's head. After some struggle, the warden managed to kick Jack and pushed him away. He scrambled to his feet and took out a mace.

Jack didn't give him a chance as he cast Mana Bullet, but the Warden was quite nimble. He evaded the Mana Bullet by side stepping. However, another five Magic Bolts came upon him. He could not evade this second magic attack, all five of the Magic Bolts stabbed onto him continuously, each dealing damage ranging from 48 to 53.

Jack came upon his side as he was still disoriented and sent several other rapid slashes. The warden's HP quickly fell to a critical level. He made a desperate swing in an attempt to free himself from the barrage of attack. Jack ducked as the mace went past his head. The warden took this opportunity to make a run for the stairs.

He must be thinking of warning his fellow acolytes. Jack couldn't let him do that, he used the same tactic as when he fought the sentries, he made a normal range shot using his magic staff directed to the warden's legs. It missed at first, but the advantage of normal attacks was there was no cooldown, so he could fire another attack once the first one was done.

The second attack fortunately hit the mark and the warden stumbled and rolled down the stairs. He shouted in a final attempt to draw the attention of the people above, Jack shut him down by sending another Power Strike which scored a critical as it came off cooldown.

The warden finally stopped moving, its body soon disintegrated, leaving behind a few coins and a key. Jack watched his radar as his body tensed up. He didn't know if the warden's last shout had reached those above. He exhaled a relief sigh after seeing those red dots remained in place. He then picked up the loots and identified the key as Cell Key.

With the key on hand, he went towards the left door. When he inserted the key into the key hole, there was an irrational fear that the key in his hand was still not the key that open this door. Fortunately, that was not the case, the lock in the door released with a click as the key turned. The door opened and revealed a dark room.

There was no illumination inside. As the door opened wider, the light outside exposed the interior of the room. There was a shadow sitting in the corner of that dark room. It was a woman, her eyes showed fear but yet there was also determination in them. The fear in her eyes turned to confusion as he looked at Jack who was not dressed up like those acolytes who had held her captive.

"Samantha?" Jack said to the woman. Amy had told him her mother's name before he left her shop.

The woman's eyes widened as she heard her name mentioned.

"Who are you?" She asked.

"I am Storm Wind, Amy sent me," Jack said.

Her eyes glistened as she heard her daughter's name. She rose up and went to him. "How is she? Is she all right?" She asked nervously.

"She is fine," Jack replied. "You are the one she is worried about. She suspected the Cult had something to do with your missing, thus she asked for help from the Adventurers Association. She was right about it apparently."

"That poor girl," Samantha cried. "They threatened to harm her if I try anything funny. I'm glad they didn't do anything to her."

"What's this about anyway? Why were you held captive by this cult?"

"I have no idea as well. I was delivering bread to one of my regular customers in the slum. Before I know, those cult people came and took me and my customer away."

"Your customer?" Jack thought of the other dot next door. "Is he being held here as well?"

"Yes, he is in the other room," Samantha answered.

"Let's free him too then," Jack said as he went to the other door. His other quest was investigating the cult, till now he still didn't know what they were doing here, so he needed to find out more.

He unlocked the door. When the key turned, he noticed the dot inside the room moved and approached the door. A silhouette was then formed in his monocle's view, showing the shape of a person behind the wall right next to the door.

Was he trying to ambush me? He thought.

He pushed the door open but didn't step through. The silhouette maintained its position beside the door opening.

"Why didn't you enter?" Samantha asked.

Hearing Samantha's voice, the silhouette moved. "Samantha?" An aged voice was heard as a bearded face peeked out from the door opening.

"Mister Gilbert! Are you all right?" Samantha responded when she saw the elderly face.

Gilbert glanced at Jack suspiciously.

"He's okay," Samantha said when she saw Gilbert staring at Jack. "His name is Storm Wind. My daughter sent for him. He is from the Adventurers Association."

"Really?" Gilbert said as he came out of the room, but he still maintained his distance from Jack. "May I see your Adventurer Badge then?"

Jack fished out his badge and showed it to the old man. Gilbert squinted his eyes as he scrutinized the badge. He then nodded, "it seemed real. Forgive me, the cult had been trying to trick me since they couldn't force me to give them what they want, so I thought you were their latest attempt to deceive me."

"What do they after?" Jack asked, if what the old man said was true, then he was the reason the cult had appeared in this place.

"I would rather not talk about it," Gilbert replied.

Jack frowned. What's the old man hiding? Was he still suspicious of me?

"Could we have this talk somewhere else? I couldn't stand being in this place longer," Samantha interfered.

"You're right, let's leave this place first," Jack concurred. He waved at them to follow him, but as he was about to step onto the stairs, he froze. The cluster of red dots that were gathering at the main hall before, had now dispersed and spread all over the warehouse, cutting their path of retreat.

Chapter 67: Container Of Souls

"What's wrong?" Samantha asked.

Jack didn't reply. He opened his map system. He had traveled through large parts of the warehouse, so the warehouse layout could be seen on his map. He then compared it to the red dot positions on his radar. Fortunately, none of the dots seemed to be heading for the basement.

However, they were spread out all over the warehouse that if he wanted to exit, he would most likely stumble upon one of them. Based on his memory, the exit was either from the front door, back door, or windows where he went in before. But those windows were only at the opposite sections of the warehouse. At the wall this side of the section where these stairs came up onto, there were no windows.

"Mister Storm Wind, what's wrong?" Samantha repeated her question.

"The cult people were having a communion before, but now they have gone back to their patrol," Jack told them the truth about the situation. "We need to sneak through them. It will not be easy. You two need to follow my every lead."

Samantha nodded her approval. Jack glanced at Gilbert who gave his silent nod.

"Ok, stay close to me, and don't make any noise!" Jack said as he climbed up the stairs. From the comparison between his map and radar, he had found out that after the communion dispersed, it was the main hall which was now empty of the cult's presence. The Main hall had an opening to both sections of the warehouse. He could use it to cross over to the rooms which had the open windows.

When he almost reached the top of the stairs, he gave a signal for the other two behind him to stop. They leaned on the wall of the staircase as they kept complete silence. He had seen in his radar two dots were coming near their position. He stayed in his place in patience as he waited for the two dots to pass

by. His heart leaped when the dots stopped near the opening to the stairs. He heard a voice from where he was hiding.

"Hey, want to go check on that old man?"

Another voice came after, "what for? Our shift will come next, let's go have some refreshment first."

"Okay," the first voice agreed, and then the sound of their footsteps getting farther as Jack exhaled a relief breath.

He waited until the red dots were a distance away, then checked to make sure no others were in their vicinity before he signaled for the two to continue. He brought them into the alleyway where the entrance to the main hall was. After making sure again the hall was empty, he led them inside.

The hall was a simple rectangular room with several benches facing towards a stage with an altar. It was the common setup for a religious space. The altar was rather wide, allowing three people to hide behind it. Hence, he took his entourage to hide there while he reobserved his radar to determine the correct timing to make the cross.

As he hid behind the altar, his God-eye monacle made a beep and highlighted something underneath the altar. The monacle marked it with a silver glow. He examined the place and found a small partition underneath the altar that could be opened. He removed the partition and it exposed a small compartment. Inside it was a pot-like object.

"That's...!" He could hear Peniel's surprised voice. "I must say, the Goddess Blessing didn't get wasted. Your luck stat had shown its effect."

'Is it something impressive?' Jack said as he took it out.

When Gilbert saw the object, his eyes went wide. He seemed to also know this object. Samantha however, only showed a confused expression.

"What's that?" She asked.

To find out, Jack used his God-eye monacle to inspect the pot.

Container of Souls (Unique Artifact)

Collect souls of slain people or monsters

Uses 1,000 souls to increase user's 1 basic skill level

Uses 10,000 souls to increase user's 1 advanced skill level

Uses 100,000 souls to increase user's 1 elite skill level

Needs to be linked with user before the container can start collecting souls.

Souls collected: 0

After reading the item's description, Jack had to agree with Peniel. This was damn good luck. He had gotten his hands on two Unique artifacts in just the span of a day, while everybody was still struggling to find rare items.

Though this item would not increase his strength immediately, it would provide tremendous help in the long run. He would not just rely on level up to increase the power of his skills. He just needed to collect these so-called souls.

'So, I will get souls from any monsters or NPC I kill now?' Jack asked Peniel in his mind.

"After you linked with it, then yes. I'm not sure, but I think other Outworlders you kill will also provide souls," Peniel answered. "But I suggest you don't proceed with the linking now, it will take some time. You are not in a situation that allows it at the moment."

Jack remembered when he made the link with Second Soul Remnant, that time it also took quite some time to complete the process. So he stored the Container in his storage bag for the moment. Gilbert seemed to want to say something when he saw the object disappeared into Jack's inventory. His face showed a complicated expression. He then said, "the Cult folks are gonna flip on their pants once they find out that thing is gone. Not that I sympathize with them though."

Jack shrugged. "They should have stored it more carefully then," he said.

After the boon, Jack returned his attention to his radar. When he saw the red dots' positioning, his heart sank. It seemed like he had used up his luck when he found that Container of Souls. The parts of the warehouse which had windows on its side, now had a large part of red dots gathering outside of it. If Jack and the others went out those windows, they would immediately be spotted. Their path of escape now only left the front or back door. Fortunately, with those red dots gathering outside, the remaining that roamed inside the warehouse were largely reduced.

After reviewing his radar, he chose the back door. There was only one red dot in the alleyway before the back door and then another one outside, after the back door but before the fence gate. He might not be able to kill those two red dots before they warned the others, but he could force his way if he only had to go through two hostiles, then escaped through the small door near the fence gate where he had entered from before.

With the plan in mind, Jack informed the other two. Gilbert seemed to wear an inquisitive look as to how Jack knew about the cults' positioning, but he didn't utter any word. Samantha meanwhile, was just glad they had a plan to escape. With everyone clear on the plan, Jack took them out of the main hall as they proceeded towards the warehouse's back door. They stopped right before the turn which will bring them to the back door. The sole red dot was still roaming around there.

Jack watched his radar and waited until the dot came near the turn they were at. The idea was to catch him off guard and leave him stunned before they ran through the back door, and then Jack would hold the other lone cultist outside long enough for Gilbert and Samantha to run for the small door beside the fence gate.

They could hear a humming as the lone cultist came near the turn. Jack gave the signal and he rushed out. The cultist who was humming in a leisurely walk, was shocked at being jumped. He was sent flying by Jack's Power Strike and crashed on the wall with a loud bang. The sound must have alerted the other cultist outside. No matter, Jack thought, as long as there were not too many enemies on guard outside, he could still manage the escape.

The cultist who had been sent crashing to the wall was still dazed on the floor as Jack and the others were making their way to the back door. He pushed the door hard, no longer bothered with stealth, and dashed out as the door open. He readied his sword to attack the lone cultist outside and keep him occupied until Gilbert and Samantha made their escape. But when he saw the enemy, his feet skidded to a stop.

The one who stood before him was the level 25 Priest of Phobos.

Chapter 68: Dominated In Close Combat

Samantha was confused as to why they stopped. Gilbert on the other hand was more aware of the situation, the priest in front of them was the leader of the group of cultists stationed in this place. He was the one who had been interrogating him all this time and thus Gilbert understood how precarious their current situation was.

"Who are you?" The Priest asked, and after seeing Gilbert and Samantha he chuckled. "Oh, you come to rescue them?"

Crap! Jack thought, out of all the cultists that were in this place, why did it have to be him? He was truly convinced now that his luck had run dry after obtaining the Container of Souls, but he was not one to just give up without trying anything.

"Continue with the plan! Run as fast as you can!" Jack said to Gilbert and Samantha as he lunged at the Priest and made a slash.

Since the start, the Priest didn't show any sign of alarm. Even as Jack came at him, his face maintained his calm. Before Jack's sword made contact with his body, his hand quivered and a long mace appeared. He swung the mace with a speed that was almost untraceable to human's eyes.

His mace made contact with Jack's sword. Jack felt like he was hit by a truck as the mace slapped his sword aside and the momentum pulled him several meters back. Gilbert and Samantha who were about to make their run froze when they saw it.

Jack kept his balance with difficulty to prevent himself from falling to the ground. His hand still trembled from the impact. He was flabbergasted, he thought that because the cultist name was Priest, he should be magic-based class. But clearly the guy was a physical class, his plan to harass the Priest in melee was useless now.

Some hasty footsteps were heard from all directions, soon numerous Acolytes appeared from inside the warehouse and its sides. They were just about to attack when the Priest stopped them.

He then looked at Gilbert and said, "our patience is running thin, Gilbert. Our God had sent instruction if you were still unwilling to hand out the item, we will execute you today."

Gilbert's expression was deviant as he said, "you are wasting your breath. I'll never cooperate with you, you fanatic scum!"

"Suit yourself," the Priest's tone turned steely. "I will start by killing this woman in front of you first!"

The Priest took a step forward as he lifted his long mace high. Samantha cowered from the sight, her legs were about to give in when a shadow came in front of him just as the mace swept down.

Jack was holding his staff with two hands as it received the Priest's blow with Magic Shield. His knees buckled from the force as he half knelt down on the ground. The damage from the mace completely exceeded the tolerance of which the shield could hold, a damage of 68 appeared above Jack's head.

Jack didn't stay passive though, as the momentum dissipated, his right hand let go of the staff and reequipped the Storm Breaker. He sent Power Strike to the Priest's open waist. The Priest was pushed back two steps as he suffered 98 damage. Jack was dismayed, the powerful strike which could score around 140 damage to the Acolyte was much less when applied on this Priest. With the Priest's 24,000 HP, this damage was just a scratch.

The Priest looked at the sword mark on his waist.

"Interesting," he grinned. "Let's change the first person to be killed then."

Unlike Bowler and Flame, Jack couldn't send his current two companions with a silent message, so he had no choice but to shout out his intention, "make for that small door! I will hold them!"

"Ridiculous," the Priest said when he heard Jack's words.

Jack lunged at the Priest, hoping that Gilbert and Samantha didn't waste these precious seconds by staying in their places. At the same time, he cast Energy Bolts to his side, the Bolts would automatically search for enemies in that direction, he hoped the spell was enough to hinder the Acolytes while he kept the Priest busy. In this way, Gilbert and Samantha should have enough windows to run to the exit door.

The Priest responded by lifting his mace high. Jack had known that he was no match for the Priest's strength and speed. He had been paying attention to the priest's shoulder, once it moved, he was ready to perform an evasive move.

The key was to quickly identify whether the Priest was making a horizontal or vertical swing. Jack's reaction was pretty fast as he side-stepped and narrowly evaded the Priest's vertical swing. The ground cracked as the mace slammed onto it. He was just about to counterattack when he saw the Priest's arm moved again. He canceled his attack and put his weapon by his side just before the mace slammed onto him.

He was sent flying to the fence with damage of 82. He had used defensive skills on both occasions, but the damages were still so high, he couldn't imagine how much the damage would be if he suffered a direct hit. His 590 HP would soon be depleted at this rate. Good thing was Gilbert and Samantha didn't freeze in place, the old man was pulling on the baker's hand as they rushed towards the small door on the fence.

Jack was just about to get back up to his feet when he felt pressure from above. He looked up and saw a ball of light came down like a meteor. It crashed right before the fence's door, creating a shockwave that pushed the two fleeing pair back several steps. The ground before the fence's door caved in due to the blast, the Priest's long mace was seen protruding at the center of the crater. It was deeply embedded in the ground.

"You think you can escape so easily?" The Priest laughed. The other Acolytes were advancing, but they were again stopped by the Priest. He was very confident that he alone was enough to keep these three mice from escaping.

Samantha was disoriented from the blast, Gilbert held onto her body to keep her from falling to the ground. Jack came up again, putting himself between the Priest and them. Gilbert was astonished by the action. The young adventurer in front of him was a stranger to them, yet he was willing to put his life on the line for both of them. If he was to focus on escaping and leaving them behind, he should still be able to make it out of here, but instead, he insisted on protecting them.

Little did they know that Jack was not that noble, he simply thought that even if he died in this clash, as long as the duo managed to escape, it was still worth it. He needed them both to complete his quests. Although there would still be a penalty for dying in the city, due to having Immortal Soul, he would only lose 50% of his experience instead of losing one whole level. This trade was worth it as long as he could complete his quests.

"He has lost his weapon. Go through the door! Don't worry about me," Jack said to the two.

"Heh," the Priest still wore his mocking grin.

Jack cast Mana Bullet at the Priest. Now that the Priest no longer held his mace, his menace should be much reduced. Or so Jack thought, before the Priest disappeared abruptly, the Mana Bullet only hit his afterimage. He suddenly appeared beside Jack.

Jack's reaction was fast enough that he made an instinctive slash towards the Priest who suddenly appeared, but his sword was stopped by the Priest's hand. Jack felt as if his sword had hit solid steel instead of an arm of a human.

The Priest sent a simple punch to Jack's guts. Jack lost his breath as his body bent forward. He then felt two rapid blows on his face. His mind was blank when his back hit the ground, but he immediately regained his focus and pushed himself up. His HP was only half now.

He was dumbfounded, though the damages had been reduced, the Priest movements were even faster after he let go of his mace. Furthermore, the way he used his unarmed strikes was like a professional boxer, he was completely dominating Jack in this close combat brawl.

Chapter 69: Life Burning Art

He glanced at the small door, hoping that Gilbert and Samantha had already used the time to exit out from this warehouse compound. To his dismay, they were still behind the mace. It vibrated with a transparent light that created a layer of force field that prevented the two from reaching the door.

'What kind of skill is that? Is the Priest a melee fighter or a magic-user?!' Jack screamed in frustration in his mind.

"He is a melee fighter, most likely something of a hybrid between an inquisitor and monk class," Peniel voice came to explain. "That force field thing is most likely the mace's weapon skill."

Jack wasn't really asking for an explanation, he was just expressing his frustration. He asked Peniel, 'do you have any idea for us to get out of this situation?'

"Nope," she answered flatly.

Jack was about to curse how useless she was in his mind, but managed to stop it before he formed the words. He just remembered that the Fairy heard everything he uttered in his mind.

Left with no choice, he decided to just fight with everything he had in order to buy time. He just hoped that the force field from the mace had a time limit. He aimed his staff and sent standard range attacks at the Priest. The priest dodged all of them with ease as he leisurely walked towards him.

Jack knew the Priest's speed was very fast, he only had one chance when his opponent still underestimated him. He focused all his attention on the Priest's movements as he continued to send range attacks towards him.

When his Mana Bullet came off cooldown, he cast it. The Bullet again passed the Priest's body as he vanished from his place again. This is it! Jack thought. He didn't know if the Priest would come to him from the left or right, but he was pretty certain the Priest wouldn't waste time to circle to his back. The Priest wouldn't consider it necessary against such an easy opponent. Hence Jack jumped back at once the moment he noticed the Priest's sudden disappearance.

As he jumped back, a shadow swiftly swept by from his left. The Priest's fist was swung at a low altitude, he was repeating his attacks from before. Jack didn't have time to scoff at his opponent's lack of creativity, he kicked the ground to launch himself back forward.

The Priest's expression showed surprise when he realized his prey had escaped his attack, but he wore back his mocking grin when he saw the prey coming back towards him. Like a moth to a lamp, he thought. He saw the prey swung his sword towards him. He could have easily evaded the attack, but he chose to lift his hand up.

He was going to slap the sword away before sending another series of punches at his prey. But before the sword connected with his hand, it broke apart. He was confused by this turn of events. Did the sword's durability run out? But if so, it should break when it hit his hand, not before. Then he felt a surge of power from the sword as it emitted golden light at its center. It was too late for him to dodge anymore. When the sword slammed onto his hand, he felt hot pain burned from his hand to his entire body.

Jack's Overlimit skill managed to break through the Priest's iron-like defense. It cut a gash on the Priest's arm as a line of blood spewed. Jack had combined the attack with his Power Strike skill. Though the slash only hit the arm, his opponent lost 196 damage.

The Priest was so shocked by the sudden increase of his opponent's power that he failed to dodge the second attack. The second attack was only a normal slash, but it still scored him 105 damage. Not planning to waste the opportunity, he followed with a third slash. But this time, the Priest had come back to his sense and no longer allowed Jack to attack him freely. Jack's third slash hit empty air as the Priest circled to his back.

Jack was aware his opponent was behind him but his speed was not fast enough to react, he was punched hard on his back. He stumbled forward and made a roundhouse slash, but it still hit nothing but air. The Priest fist then came and jabbed at his face. He swayed backward, trying hard to keep his balance as he executed Swing, hoping the large area skill with struck his opponent. But it still hit nothing.

Jack had cast Magic Shield but the Priest's punches came from unexpected angles. The Priest was starting to take him seriously after being injured twice. Jack's Overlimit skill was rendered useless if it could not make contact with his opponent.

Jack felt another hard punch on his chest as it sent him flying to where Gilbert and Samantha were. He fell to the ground, his HP was in a critical state now. He would not last another two punches. The force field was still there, they couldn't pass through.

He could see the mocking faces of the Acolytes watching from distance, and hear the relaxed footsteps from the Priest slowly approaching. He would lose his life and still failed to complete the mission, it was depressing.

Screw it! Jack cursed as he rose to his feet again. He was just going to lose 50% experience anyway, he would just try to deal as much damage as he could with the remaining health that he had. As he thought all hope was lost, he saw the Priest's eyes went wide and his expression turned grim.

Jack heard a screeching sound from his back, he turned and saw Gilbert enveloped in a blood-red aura, had his arm stretched out, and drilled through the force field of the mace. His hand was just an inch away from the mace's shaft.

"Are you insane?" The Priest yelled. "You know you don't have much life left, you will burn through it if you use that Life Burning Art again!"

"Better than let you slaughter us all here," Gilbert replied with a resolute face.

His hand grabbed onto the mace and the force field shattered. He pulled the mace out from the ground. The force tore the earth out and threw them all over the place. A large hole was left where the mace had been embedded before. Gilbert brandished the mace and rushed past Jack in a shape of a red glowing ball. The ball of energy slammed onto the Priest and exploded. The impact sent the Priest flying to the other side of the warehouse's outer yard.

Gilbert then swept his hand in a horizontal arc, it created a shockwave that pushed away all the Acolytes that were stunned by what they had just witnessed.

"Go!" Gilbert shouted to Jack and Samantha.

Jack didn't waste any time, he went to Samantha and carried her while he ran to the fence's small door. When he opened the door, he glanced to the side and saw Gilbert threw the mace towards the Priest who was just getting back up on his feet. The Priest tried to use both hands to catch his weapon, but instead, he was further pushed back by the force and slammed onto the faraway fence on the other side. Gilbert turned back and ran to them as Jack went out the door.

They came onto the street which Jack had come before. Jack was just about to run towards the direction of the Business district, but Gilbert called to him, "no, this way!"

Jack stopped and turned to where Gilbert was heading, the old man was still being enveloped by the same red aura. He looked completely different. Before, he was like an exhausted man who was having trouble with his age, now he seemed to be as fit as a tiger. As they ran away from the warehouse, he saw on his radar the red dots were coming after them. He glanced back and saw the Acolytes rushing out of the warehouse.

"This way!" Gilbert shouted.

Jack still carried Samantha so that they could run at full speed. He turned the corner where Gilbert had gone to. They made several weaves through the complex alleyways around the slum. Gilbert was very familiar with the layout of the slum, he kept on making turns to throw their pursuers off their scent.

There were even two occasions where they went through doors, passed through empty dwellings. Although the Cult had many members, they would have a hard time trying to find them. Throughout the run, Jack also ate the remaining Bread and Junk foods that he still kept from the Tutorial Period, to recover his critical health, just in case if those Cult members managed to find them during their escape.

Chapter 70: Fragment Of Map

Finally, when they reached a house with a simple brown door, Gilbert fished out a key and inserted it into the door's key hole. He opened it and ushered Jack and Samantha inside, before he went in and hurriedly closed the door and locked it again. Afterward, the red aura around him dissipated and he fell onto a nearby chair. He was panting heavily.

Jack put Samantha down on another chair, and took a seat next to Gilbert. The old man was having difficulty breathing. Jack sat there patiently waiting for him to gather his breath. Samantha went up and looked around the room. She found a glass and a bottle of water in a cupboard. He poured the water and brought it to Gilbert, who drank it slowly.

When he was calm enough, he started to spoke, "I don't have much time left..."

Jack frowned, during his travel around the business district, he had seen several healer shops. There was also a large hospital building. "If you are hurt, we could go to the business district to get you treated," he said.

Gilbert coughed a few times after another drink, he set the glass down. "No use, what ailed me was not something external. It was the result of having used a forbidden art too many times. I used to be one of the most devout members of the Cult. I don't mind throwing my life away for the benefit of the Cult. Hence, I have used the Life Burning Art several times during my service, it had eaten away at my life force each time I used it. Now I guessed it was finally time to pay the dues."

"Why did you leave the Cult?" Jack asked.

Gilbert was silent for a while, then he said, "let's just say I finally have my eyes open and see the Cult as what it is, a bunch of fanatics doing the bidding of a mad God."

Jack didn't enquire further. Instead, he asked, "is that why they come after you? To punish you for leaving the Cult?"

"If only it was that simple," Gilbert shook his head. "They were looking for something I have taken from them."

"What is it?" Jack asked.

Gilbert didn't answer. Instead, he looked at Samantha and said to her, "I'm sorry. I was the reason you were taken by them. They thought they could use you to pressurize me."

Samantha put her hand on his shoulder and gave him a consolation look, her gaze telling him that she didn't blame him. Gilbert then turned back to Jack.

"I admire your courage and determination, young man. If not for you, we wouldn't have made it out of there. I am very much in your debt. However, I still would like to ask you for a favor."

"A favor?"

Gilbert took a deep breath, and then he rose up with difficulty. He then walked slowly to a corner of the room. He removed one of the stones on the wall which revealed an empty space behind. He took something out and came back. He offered the thing to Jack. It looked like a piece of torn paper. Jack accepted it in confusion.

"I have been looking for someone that I can trust to pass this thing to," Gilbert said. "At first I considered Samantha, but if I give her, it will only bring her disaster. She doesn't have the strength to keep it."

Jack scanned the torn paper.

Fragment of Map (Special item)

One of three fragment pieces. Combine with the other two fragments to reveal the map.

"Fragment of Map? What is this map for?" Jack asked Gilbert.

"It's part of a map. We found it during an excavation on an ancient ruin. It was supposed to be very valuable as the Cult placed much importance on this Fragment. I went through much trouble to hide in this Capital, but they managed to find me still. I don't have much time left, they will continue to hunt for me. I will lead them away to another town. I hope you can keep it away from their reach."

Jack was conflicted. He wanted to return the fragment. It doesn't seem to give him any benefit. It would be a different issue if he had the other two fragments and had a complete map. Then it might point him to a treasure that he could use.

But for now, it would just bring him trouble. What if the Cult came to hunt him next? He was still a long way from being able to contend with them. The Priest alone was already enough to beat the shit out of him, and he thought that the Priest was not even among the upper echelon in the Cult.

Seeing Jack's hesitation, he said, "if you can find the other two fragments, it will point you to a treasure with unimaginable power. Trust me, this information is from a reliable source. The Cult wouldn't have wasted so much time hunting for it otherwise."

Jack gave him a wry smile, "that is considering if I can get my hands on the other fragments. They are most likely in the Cult's hand. How am I going to take it from them?"

"No, this is the only fragment they had," Gilbert replied. "They still have no clue of the whereabouts on the other fragments."

That still doesn't make it any easier for me to find, bro. Jack thought in his mind.

"Don't worry, they will not know that you are the one who has the fragment. Although my time is short, I still have at least a couple of months left yet. I will take them far away and leave several distracting clues for them. It will throw them off your scent. For all they know, you are just an adventurer that is involved due to a quest."

Samantha who was listening from the side told Jack, "please accept Mister Gilbert's request, Mister Storm Wind. It was a wish from a dying man. If you kept that thing, it will put his soul to rest when the time comes, knowing he had foiled the Cult's plan."

Jack glanced at Gilbert's hopeful gaze. Finally, he agreed. "Fine, I will keep it as long as I can."

Gilbert exhaled in relief. He said, "thank you. As a token of appreciation, and also to help you become stronger to oppose the Cult, I will give you these."

He took out two books and gave them to Jack.

"Technique books!" Peniel exclaimed from his side.

Jack received the books as he asked Peniel, 'what's a technique book?'

"Why don't you just check it yourself using that magnificent God-Eye of yours?" She replied.

'No need to be jealous,' Jack quipped back, and then did just that.

Technique Book: Sword of Light (Rare Consumable)

Grant the skill: Sword of light

Restriction: Warrior class

Technique Book: Life Burning Art (Super rare Consumable)

Grant the skill: Life Burning Art

Restriction: Any Advanced class

A book that gave you skill? These were good stuff. He thought he would only get a new skill from leveling up, so there were other ways to get skills.

'Warrior class?' He asked Peniel.

"It's one of the two advanced classes branched out from Fighter class," she answered.

Before he could ask anything further, Gilbert spoke, "I hope you can become stronger. The Cult's plan is to bring chaos onto this world. As an adventurer, sooner or later you will clash with them. I also hope that you can find the other two map fragments before they did. Unfortunately, I also had no clues of their whereabouts."

As he spoke, he took a backpack from another concealed compartment, and walked to the door.

"You should take the Northern part to go back to the Business District. That way had a guard office so the Cult people will not dare to attack there. Samantha will lead you through there. Once you reached Business District, it will be much safer as there are more regular guard patrols."

"Where will you be going?" Samantha asked with worry.

"Away from here," Gilbert replied. "The sooner I started, the further I can lead them away in my remaining time."

"Good luck," Jack said to him.

"You too," he replied, and then walked out the door.