

World 741

Chapter 741: Road Trip

The afternoon before the day he gathered with the others to depart for the pet's armor, Jack visited Thereath. He visited Amy's Bakery and met with Ellie to check on things as well as give the draconic meat to the cook. Ellie was visibly happy because she said she had been looking for this ingredient and Dylan could still not find any for her. Jack didn't stay long to find out what she needed the meat for, though.

Jack reaped a huge profit of 321 gold coins from the two establishments.

Previously when he became an Earl, his properties received an 8% discount on tax instead of the 5% he received when he was still a Baron. Additionally, another effect of becoming an Earl was an increase in the popularity of all the business properties he owned. This popularity increased the number of native customers to Ellie's restaurant and Amy's Bakery.

He donated 100 gold coins to the guild. He then used some of the coins to restock on potions and other necessities. He bought a few recording stones, he didn't have any plan for them but having a few ready would not hurt. He also bought a few Wind Jet, Walls of Vines, and Haste scrolls. He did not need offensive magic scrolls anymore. The current players had grown past these scrolls. He just bought some that might still help in unique situations.

He visited the mage academy to imprint his Magic Shield spell. He had finally found enough tower shields to fuse them into a super-rare grade after his time at Mount Draygetos. He imprinted this tower shield into his Magic Shield spell. Now, the magic shield he summoned would have a very large surface for more effective protection.

He also went to report his chain faction quest. He was worried at first that he would be thrown the continuation of the quest immediately but he figured that since he had talked to the prince directly about taking a break, it should be okay.

He received exp, coins, and most staggeringly, 20,000 merit points. He was now only lacking 19,030 merit points to become a Marque. As expected, he was not forced to continue his chain faction quest. The description in his quest was "Wait for the prince's summon or continue gathering support from different powers."

Jack used 2,500 merit points to again buy the training boost and building boost for the guild.

After finishing with his tasks around the capital, he spent a night at Amy's Bakery and had a long chat with the cheerful girl before returning to Heavenly Citadel to meet with the others the next morning.

*

The eight players teleported to Therimdell, the main city not far from the border of the Sangrod Empire. But they didn't head for the Sangrod Empire, they followed Fierce Flame and went in a different direction. All of them already had at least rare steeds, so their traveling speed was fast. But still, Pandora needed to slow down to match their speed. Jack ended up asking for the general direction and just went

around a half-day journey ahead of them to hunt nearby monsters, regrouping with them only after they approached.

When Jack was about to head off again, Grace held him and said, "Hold! You can't just regroup with us for a few seconds and head off again just like that. Do you consider as your team or not? If a member of a team is slow then you should follow the pace of that slow one. You can't just leave us behind like that! If you want to farm for exp, we do it together. If we encounter monsters, we take them out together. Even if the exp is split but we will also farm the exp faster."

"Uh, um...", Jack was lost for words. These words were something Grace had said to him in the past. He always liked to head off by himself. That's why he gave himself the alias of Lone Wind. It was because of these words of Grace that he started to farm and do quests together with her and Paytowin. However, these words were not wrong in the past, but with the current him, it was actually the same speed whether he farmed alone or with others. So, he was the one who lost if he followed this advice this time. Still, he complied. He stayed behind and had Pandora match the others' speed, which caused the Nightmare to regularly huff disdainfully.

Jet was cheery throughout the journey, and chatty as well, especially with Salty Trade and Wondrouslife. Jack gave him a side-eye. These girls could practically be his granddaughters, but the guy acted like a teenager. Weird Trap didn't want to lose to this energetic geezer, so he said something once in a while to draw attention, but it was pretty clear that his art of smooth-talking was not as advanced as the experienced old-timer.

Sturdy Serpent was mostly quiet, while Fierce Flame was ignoring everyone. The two were like composed adults leading a bunch of rambunctious kids on their first school trip.

"So, Master Jet, I heard you joined the world martial art championship in your younger days," Salty Trade asked.

"I did!" Jet replied genially.

"You must be a great martial artist then."

"Now, now, little lady. Don't hurt my feeling. I AM still a great martial artist now."

"So, did you ever win the championship?"

"I won the second place a few times."

"In other words, his answer is no," Weird Trap interjected.

"Well, have you ever been to a martial art championship?" Jet asked Weird Trap.

"I, uh, no..."

"Then being the second winner is still much better than being a nobody, don't you say?"

"Yeah, the second winner is also impressive," Wondrouslife exclaimed.

Jet beamed hearing that. "Now, you are truly an angel, miss! The man that catches your heart will truly be the luckiest man in the world."

"Aw... Mister Jet, you are embarrassing me."

"Don't be. Let me be the one being embarrassed. Being on the road trip with you pretty ladies truly makes my old bones feel lively again, so please forgive me if I talk my heart out."

"Hey, old man, can you tone it down a bit? I am having goosebumps hearing you," Jack said from the side.

"If you don't like to hear, you can move further away. Don't disturb me in dispensing wisdom to these fine ladies," Jet said.

Jack was just about to heed the words and moved away when Grace came up beside him, blocking his path.

"Going somewhere?" She asked.

"Ah... haha," Jack simply laughed. He was caught before his ploy was even carried out. Grace must have been keeping an eye on him.

"Tell me about your past," Grace asked. "What did you do before this? Before the world turned. Do you played lots of VR games before?"

He thought for a bit before answering, "Yeah. I played some VR games in the past."

"Really? Which games?"

Jack was still under the impression that Grace didn't know about his past, so he carefully tried to remember the older games where he had not met Grace and told her about those ones.

"Hm... You didn't play any newer games?"

"Um... I don't really remember that well," Jack shrugged anxiously. He hurriedly tried to change the topic, "What about you? I heard you are a very well-known idol in the real world."

"Oh? And where do you hear that from?"

"Um..., from one of your boybands," Jack lied. "So, it's true? How does it feel to have the life of a celebrity?"

"Very stressful," Grace answered. "You have to always consciously think of your every act, your every word. It was like living under a microscope. People scrutinize you for every single thing you do."

"I see... Well, if it was so uncomfortable, why didn't you just quit?"

"It's not... It's not that simple. Things are complicated..."

"Is it?"

"... I don't know. Perhaps I'm just afraid of change. I'm not sure what I can do if I quit. I'm also afraid of letting down the people who have supported me along the way, and I'm also afraid of letting down my fans... Or perhaps I'm still enjoying the spotlight even with all the inconveniences."

"Well, whatever it is, you have the second chance to figure out your life now, for good or bad."

"You are right. And I think my place is with you, people."

"Really? So you like the guild? Phew... And here I am worried if we are good enough for an idol like you," Jack made a show of wiping his brow.

Grace giggled. "What about your real life, what do you do?"

"My real life is boring. Not much to tell."

"With a world martial art champion of a grandfather? I don't see how that can be considered as boring."

"I haven't lived with my gramps for a large portion of my adult life. And don't you think a martial artist's life is exciting. It's just training every day and every day and every day. Doing the same kind of thing again and again. How can you call that exciting?"

"Isn't exp farming in games the same?" Grace asked.

"Well... When you say it like that... Hey! New monster!" Jack uttered and rushed off abruptly.

"Hey! Wait! Let's do it together!" Grace called and tried to chase after him.

Before she could catch him, she saw Jack jump down from his steed and run toward the monster. Grace was amazed that even his running speed didn't lose to her steed. Jack then gave the monster a few blindingly fast slashes. The monster disintegrated soon and he then jumped to Pandora and rode back.

"Yes?" Jack asked her.

"... Never mind," Grace answered.

Chapter 742: Request for Petâ€™s Armor

At night, everyone stayed inside Grace's tent. It was a super-rare grade large camping tent that could accommodate ten people. It's called Repellent Group Tent. It discharged an aura that repel any monster below special elite grade. When any stronger monster approached, it would send a warning to wake up its occupants.

Jack spent his time training mana manipulation again before he slept. He never slacked off from this routine. He cast Myriad Ensnaring Chains and used his Hundred Synchronous Thoughts talent to assert control on all fifteen chains individually.

The chains moved very slowly under his command. He was trying to get back the feeling of the time when he was on Broidrireg's back. At that time, his control over the chains to hold him on Broidrireg's back had been superb. However, it was all done on instinct. When he tried to do it consciously this time, it was like treading through muddy waters.

He sighed after the duration of Myriad Ensnaring Chains ended. He proceeded to cast other spells and tried to control them with mana manipulation.

Grace had been watching him. She asked, "Isn't using mana manipulation onto skills and spells much harder than a normal attack? Why not train from the basics first?"

"Sometimes you have to run before you can walk," Jack replied.

Peniel smacked his head upon his comment, she then flew to Grace and said, "He did that basic training in the morning, coupling it with his martial arts training. At night, he tried doing it with spells. He thought that by practicing both, he should be able to boost his understanding of the technique."

"Does it work?" Grace asked.

Peniel shrugged. Jack didn't answer.

After a while, Jack said, "There is no right or wrong way. We are all new to this world. In this sense, we are all experimenting here. We have to find our own way."

Grace thought about his words. She then closed her eyes. After her joining the Everlasting Heavenly Legends, Domon had taught her a basic method of training mana sense. She had been training diligently since then. She didn't want to get left behind by Jack too much. If she was too weak, following Jack would only make her a burden. Hence her determination in training.

*

After several days of travel, they arrived in an area that was not part of either Sangrod or Themisphere. It was a wooded region called the Dorwin region.

"If you go along this region, you will come up at the Aurebor Dynasty," Peniel informed.

"Really? Aurebor is that close from here?" Grace asked.

"Close? This Dorwin might be called a region, but its size is almost half of Themisphere or Aurebor's area," Peniel replied. "Be careful to not wander around too much. A no-man's-land region like this is home to extremely powerful monsters. Especially the deeper parts."

"Don't worry, our destination is just at this region's edge. There is no need to go into the deeper territory," Flame said. "The monsters around this place we are heading to are only around levels 30 and 35, so there is no need to worry."

Everyone followed Flame going into the woods. There was no road or pathway to mark the road, but Flame had put the mark on her map so she had no problem navigating. Flame could have just given them the coordinates but the person who they were looking for was slightly a recluse. It took Flame doing several quests for the person before she was willing to even talk to her. Flame figured it would be easier for the others if she brought them there and gave the introductions.

Even when the monsters were low-level, Jack still rushed off whenever he saw new monsters. Grace asked him why the passion about such a low-level monster and Jack explained to them about his monster books. Unfortunately, none of them were of the Warrior branch so they couldn't join the League of Champions to get the books.

He had currently filled out many pages already, but when he checked the blank pages, they still dominated the book by almost eighty percent. Jack knew then he had only met a small portion of the denizens of this world. Still, with his current filled books, he received small benefits of extra damage and defense against the book's monster type. While against monsters that were already registered inside the book, those benefits were doubled.

Flame then showed them similar books, but they were titled hunter's handbooks. These handbooks were similarly divided based on monster types. Flame got these handbooks from the Hunter's Lodge, the faction where Jack had his Beastmaster trial, of which Flame was a member. These handbooks similarly gave Flame some boosts when fighting against monsters already recorded in the handbooks. Apart from that, it also increased the chance of Flame getting the monster parts that she needed to submit to the Hunter's Lodge for the faction points.

Almost all of them were from the Archer class. Those who were not yet a member of the Hunter's Lodge made a mental note that they would apply there the first chance they returned to Thereath.

After a long walk through the woods, they finally arrived at what Flame said was their destination. A hut in the middle of the woods. There were wooden fences around the garden surrounding the house. They saw several small critters leisure around the garden, seemingly out of concern for anything.

"You all stay here, I will approach first," flame said.

She walked to the fence's small wooden gate before announcing, "Madam Guila, I have come again. I bring several friends with me. Are we allowed entry?"

Several seconds of silence passed before a woman's voice was heard from inside. "Only you enter, the others wait outside."

Flame glanced back at them to make sure they understood the request. She then opened the fence's gate, passed by the garden, and entered the hut alone. Jet was again chatting with the girls while waiting, with Weird Trap trying futilely to join in. Grace found somewhere to sit and then practiced mana sense. Sturdy Serpent waited silently. Jack swung his swords around practicing mana manipulation into his swings.

An hour passed. The others were starting to wonder if anything happened inside. Weird Trap asked if perhaps they should go in and see if everything was okay. Wondrouslife disagreed. She said since they had been asked to stay outside then they should just stay and wait.

Another hour passed. Weird Trap brought up his suggestion again. This time Wondrouslife didn't say anything. But before they decided anything, the door to the hut opened. They saw Flame on the door, gesturing for them to enter.

When they entered, they saw the hut was composed of a living quarter on one side with some sort of blacksmith workshop on the other side. There was no partition to separate the two sides. Also, Jack felt as if the room inside was bigger than when it was seen from the outside, but it was probably just his feeling.

A middle-aged elven woman was sitting on a chair by a table. A weird cat was lying beside her feet. Flame was sitting on another chair. There were only two chairs, so the rest stood before them as if employees facing their employers. Jack used Inspect, Guila was just a level 20 elite native.

"This is the lot who you want me to make armor for their pets?" The woman asked.

Flame nodded to her. To the others, she said, "She is Guila. She is the one I mentioned to you. She will be willing to craft armor for your pet as long as you all complete her quest and pay a certain amount of

fees. The quest will be to fetch the materials required for your pets' armor. Most of the material should be available in nearby areas."

"How much is the fee?" Salty Trade asked.

"Depends on your pet and the grade of armor you wanted to craft," Flame replied. "The quest for the materials also varied depending on the grade of armor requested. It will be more difficult if you ask for higher-grade armor. For my Windy, which is a special elite pet. I crafter rare-grade armor which cost 50 gold coins. If I go for the uncommon grade, it will only be 20 gold coins."

'Great,' Jack was glad within. He had no problem with coins. The monsters around here were also too weak for him, he would finish the fetching quest in a jiffy. He thought at first there would be some hurdles before he can get armor for Therras. Looks like this time it would be an easy one. He had no problem with an easy task. In fact, he thought it was about time he got easy once in a while.

"Show me your pets," Guila commanded.

Everyone except Grace summoned their pets. Salty Trade and Wondrouslife both had wolf-type pets, similar to Fierce Flame. Weird Trap had a weird creature that looked like a badger. Sturdy Serpent's pet was, unsurprisingly, a hound.

After seeing everyone's pets, Guila said, "Everyone is fine except those two." She was pointing to Jack and Jet.

"Huh? Why?" Jack asked.

"I can't craft armor for medium-sized pets," Guila answered.

'Shit,' Jack uttered within. Perhaps he had celebrated too early.

Chapter 743: Harmony Keepers

Guila proceeded to hand out all the required quests for those with small-sized pets. Jack and Jet could only watch from the side.

"Damn, kid. I have been swindled by you," Jet said. "I drag my old bones all the way here in the middle of nowhere and for what? No armor for my pet."

"Go die!" Jack shot back. "Don't act like you don't enjoy the trip. Teasing those girls all the time like a teenager going through puberty."

Flame came to them. "I'm sorry, I didn't know that she can't make armor for medium-sized pets," she said.

"It's not your fault," Jack said.

Jet also said, "That's right. There's nothing for you to worry about. I'm grateful already to be able to spend the time with all of you, gorgeous girls."

Jack made a show to kick at him. Jet jumped away from the attempted kick.

Peniel said, "If you are so eager to get the armor pet, you can still try the Hunter's Lodge. That faction should have the service for that. But for Beastmaster's medium-sized pet armor, you will need to be very high-rank and lots of that faction points."

"I'm in hunter's lodge, I don't see the option for that," Jet said.

"Neither do I," Flame added.

"That's because your ranks are not high enough," Peniel said.

Hearing them, Jack said, "Too much hassle, I don't have the time for it. I need freelancers like this place who can do it without consuming much time." He then turned to Flame. "By the way, your relationship with Guila is quite good. You mentioned before you did a lot of quests before you can use her service, right? Now, it only takes you two hours of talking and she is already taking crafting orders from four strangers."

"It's not exactly just based on our relationship," Flame said. "I've struck a bargain with her. She required a regular supply of ferret skins, as well as regular help in thinning out the pesky monsters around this area. I've taken the liberty to propose that our guild could help her regularly on these matters. In return, she would accept armor-making requests from our guild members. Of course, these guild members still needed to pay the fee and did the material-gathering quests."

"So, we have to arrange for members to come here regularly?" Jack asked.

"I will do that for free this time," Flame said. "The next time, she would put in the request to our guild. So, it will be a guild quest with discounted pay. However, we have to make sure to complete this quest. Rejecting it or waiting too long to complete it will result in her service no longer being available to us."

"I see. I will send a message to Jeanny so that she could organize," Jack said.

Flame nodded.

"So, are we heading back now?" Grace asked. "They would take some time to get their pet armors, right? Are we going to wait here until they are done?"

Instead of answering, Jack asked Flame, "Do you need help doing these tasks she asked of you?"

Flame shook her head. "No need. At my level, I can complete it easily by myself. There is no need to trouble everyone."

"In that case, we won't stay," Jack said. He saw Guila was done instructing the four. They had gone out of the hut to search for the materials. Jack walked to Guila then.

"Ma'am," Jack greeted with a slight bow. "I understand that you can't craft pet armor for medium-sized pets, but is there by any chance you know of anyone who can?"

People of the same profession normally knew one another. Jack was hoping this was true as well for the pet's armor craftsman.

Guila was laying her head on her palm which was resting on the table. She eyed Jack with a weird stare while the fingers of her other hand were tapping the table.

"Well, it's not that I don't know any," she answered after a while. "It's just that I don't think it will do you any good even if I tell you."

"Don't worry about us, ma'am. As long as there is such a person, all you need to do is just point us in the direction. We will take it from there."

Guila chuckled. "I certainly am not worried about you. All right, if you want to find someone who can craft armor for your medium-sized pet, I will tell you. You can head deeper into the woods of this region. Continue until you find a place called the Lost Forest."

"The Lost Forest?" Peniel uttered after hearing.

"You know of the place?" Jack asked.

"Oh. So, you already have a guide? Then this good fairy can lead you there then," Guila said.

"That's not the problem," Peniel said, she was visibly agitated. "What's the point of going to the Lost Forest? No one is living there. It's a forest that trapped everyone who goes in."

Guila laughed. "I see you are quite knowledgeable, little fairy. However, not knowledgeable enough. I know for a fact that people are living inside that forest. In fact, there is a whole village of people there. However, this village is closed and hidden from all others except those who live in the village."

Peniel frowned, "How do you know?"

"Because I am from that village," Guila answered. Jack caught a hint of sadness in Guila's eyes when she mentioned this.

"What?" Peniel said with surprise.

From the exchange, Jack understood that this Lost Forest was not someplace that one traveled safely. And since Peniel didn't know there was a village inside the forest, it meant the location and entrance of this village within the Lost Forest were well hidden.

"Since you came from this village, you should know a way to find and enter this village, shouldn't you?" Jack asked Guila.

Guila again eyed Jack with a weird stare. She then answered, "Unfortunately, no. And if you want to know the reason, it's because I've been cast out. If I enter the Lost Forest now, I will similarly be swallowed by the forest like any other who enters. I can't find nor able to tell you the way to enter the Village of Peace."

"The Village of Peace?!" Peniel uttered. This time she was even more agitated than before.

"Oh? So you know about this place as well, little fairy?" Guila asked.

"The Village of Peace is inside the Lost Forest?" Peniel asked.

"It is," Guila confirmed.

Seeing the two didn't elaborate any further, Jack decided to ask, "What is this Village of Peace? Is it an impressive place?"

"It is the place where Harmony Keepers dwell," Peniel answered.

"And I'm supposed to know what a Harmony Keepers is?" Jack asked, slightly exasperated.

"The Harmony Keepers is another divine faction," Peniel answered. "One that worships the Goddess of Serenity."

*

It was almost night when Jack and the others entered Guila's hut, so they decided to stay for the night inside Grace's Repellent Group Tent. She set it up next to Guila's hut. They only departed for the Lost Forest the morning after.

Now, it was only Jack, Jet, and Grace who were heading to the Lost Forest. They summoned their steeds again. Peniel knew the location, so they had no problem with the direction to take. The trees around them caused their steed to be unable to run at their top speed, but it was still faster than if they travel on foot.

Peniel was glum along the way. When Jack asked, she mentioned that what she was worried about was the Lost Forest. She warned them that the Lost Forest had a notorious reputation of making anyone who wandered inside to be lost. Jack told her not to worry, whatever causes this forest to earn that notoriety, they would deal with it.

"I wish I can be as blindly confident as you," Peniel mocked.

"Fake it till you believe it, sister, then you will be confident as well," Jack said.

"By the way, didn't you say that your sword and Peniel were bestowed by the Goddess of Serenity?" Grace asked.

"That is true," Jack confirmed.

"Then you should be allowed into the village, right? Considering that the village worships her and your good relationship with the Goddess, perhaps whatever prevents people from finding the village within the Lost Forest will allow you a passage."

"That is an example of good confidence. However, I'm afraid I'll disappoint. There is no such thing as the good relationship you mentioned. I met her twice. Talked to her for just a brief time on those two occasions. She comes and goes as she pleased. I don't exactly have a way to contact her. So, don't put your hopes up of relying on her to give us any aid."

Jack then turned to Peniel and asked, "You don't have a way to contact her as well, do you?"

Peniel shook her head.

"She is a Goddess, right? Perhaps you can talk to her by praying?" Grace suggested.

"Hm... Let's give it a try." Jack closed his eyes. After a while, he opened his eyes and said, "Nothing. I don't receive any signal."

Grace rubbed her temple, "I take it you are imagining a phone when you are praying."

Jack looked back. Jet was riding there at their back. "You are awfully quiet," Jack remarked. "I also noticed, you didn't tease her like you did the other two girls. What's wrong? She is even more beautiful than those two, right?"

Grace's cheek went red hearing that.

"I don't flirt with my buddy's girl," Jet replied.

"Buddy? Old dude, you are old enough to be my gramps!" Jack uttered.

"Oh? Does this mean that you admit that she is your girl?" Jet asked.

"What? How can you say that? We are just friends, right?" Jack said and turned to Grace, who was looking at him as well.

"Hah, you two! Keep on pretending like that. I know there is something between you. Now, cut the crap! You won't fool my experienced eyes!" Jet said and jumped towards them. Without any warning, he grabbed both Jack's and Grace's heads. He then shoved them toward one another.

The two were completely caught off guard. And since the two were facing each other, their faces touched when their heads were pulled by Jet. More correctly, their mouths touched. The two were wide eyes as they were force-kissing each other by Jet.

Chapter 744: Nearing the Lost Fores

Jet landed behind them and folded his hands with a proud expression. "Hm, aren't you two glad now that I help you express your honest feelings?"

His satisfied expression suddenly turned serious. He jumped away just as a sword and a mace came cleaving where he stood. The attack didn't stop, both Jack and Grace chased after him, sword and mace swinging.

"Hey! Hey! Have you two gone mad? Why are you attacking me?" Jet exclaimed while continuing to back away.

"Why? How about you just go and die!" Jack uttered and kept on slashing.

The three went on for a while. Jet continued to jump back and dodge. Although Jack and Grace were attacking seriously, they never used any skills. After a few minutes, they slowed down before stopping altogether.

"You two cool your shit already?" Jet uttered, which drew the ire of the two. The cat and mouse game resumed again for another few minutes.

After the three stopped, Jet didn't dare to say a word anymore. He just looked at the two while panting. It was not easy to dodge Jack's attack non-stop. Additionally, Grace had come numerous times at the worst timing. He was fully serious when he dodged the two's attacks.

Jack and Grace didn't say anything as well. They turned back and climbed onto their steeds. The three resumed their journey. The difference was that it was dead silent now.

Jet was itching to say something to break the ice, but he was afraid he would just blow another fuse. It was Peniel who finally said something after the long awkward silence. "I didn't disagree with what that pervert old man do, you know. You two are just asking for it," she said.

Jack rolled his eyes at her. He then glanced at Grace, the girl continued to be silent.

*

That night, Grace used her Repellent Group Tent again. The tent magically adjusted its size to not become bigger than the space around it. Because of that, it couldn't accommodate the usual ten people. At its current size, it could only allow four to sleep inside. She had searched for a large clearing within the woods but found none that was large enough for her tent's full size.

Even though it was enough for the three of them, Jet was barred from entering.

"So, where do I sleep?" Jet asked.

"In a gutter somewhere, for all I care," Grace replied crudely.

Jet walked away grumbling. "This is what you get for trying to do good," he grumbled and kicked a stone away. He then took out his own tent, a rare-grade tent. He whirled back and was about to shout, 'If you two just want me to stay out so you two can do something improper inside, all you need to do is just ask!' But he stopped himself once his mouth opened. He was certain that if he did, the two would come rushing out and it would then become a heavy exercise before bed. He was not looking forward to it. So, he just resumed his grumbling and went into his tent.

Inside the tent. The two were lying on the bed. Yet, their eyes were wide open. Peniel sighed. How long would this last? All the worry she had about the Lost Forest was somehow being offset by the worry of a long journey with this awkward silence. She decided to just recede into her hidden dimension and forget everything.

Jack and Grace continued to lay awake for quite some while. Jack took a glance at Grace to make sure that she was still awake. She was.

He thought for a bit before saying out loud, "I am Lone Wind."

"I know," Grace replied.

"Hm... I somehow suspect you do," Jack said.

"So, what now?" Grace asked.

"... I think we should take things easy," Jack said.

"Sure, good night," Grace said.

Jack looked at her. She was now lying sideways with her back to him.

Jack sighed. He was never good about this relationship thing. Mostly because he was not sure about his own feeling. He did care for Grace, but he was not sure if the care he had for her was simply the same as the care he had for his other friends.

After thinking a bit more, he decided to just let the matter proceed naturally. He closed his eyes and went to sleep.

*

The next morning, Grace greeted Jack cheerfully as any other morning. Jack did the same. They then talked as usual. Seeing as if things had gone back to normal, Jet came and joined the conversation, only to be chased away by the two.

'Damn it, they are still holding a grudge,' Jet thought dejectedly.

They continued their journey for several more days. Peniel took them through a route that had no monster too strong for them. So, they killed the monsters they met when passing through, for exp and also to alleviate boredom.

"Is it still far?" Jack asked.

"Should be around three more days with this speed," Peniel answered.

'With this speed,' Jack thought. If he went by himself with Pandora, he would have arrived earlier. But Grace was right, he was in a team now, he should adjust himself to accommodate the slowest member.

Two more days passed. They should arrive at the Lost Forest tomorrow if Peniel's estimation was correct. On that day, Jack caught something interesting on his radar. A white dot.

A native? So deep in the middle of the woods in this no-man's-land region? Very little chance that it was a native adventurer, they usually traveled in a group. This dot was alone.

"Something's the matter?" Grace asked after noticing Jack's expression.

"There is a native over there," Jack told her.

"A native? What is a native doing so far out here?" She asked.

After thinking for a while, Jack said, "Can it be one of the villagers from the Village of Peace?" Guila did mention only the ones from the village could travel through the Lost Forest safely, which meant there were times when the villagers came out. This lone white dot could be one such case.

"It might be so," Grace said.

"Then we should catch this person and force him or her to tell us the secret of entering the village," Jet said.

Jack and Grace gave him annoyed glances.

'Ugh, these two still harbor a grudge,' Jet thought.

Jack said, "If this person is from the village. We should approach and ask nicely. Perhaps we would even be invited into the village if we can show that we are a friendly group."

He came down from Pandora and unsummoned her. The Nightmare's aura might cause a stranger to feel uncomfortable.

"I will approach this native. It's probably better if I go meet this person by myself first. The sight of many people approaching might spook the person, otherwise."

Grace nodded. "Be careful," she said.

Jack then ran in direction of the dot shown on the radar. He slowed down after getting close. Any person would also be spooked if seeing a stranger running at full speed toward them. Jack decided to approach the native covertly. He wanted to take a look first. Fortunately, there were a lot of trees and bushes for covers.

He came behind a tree where he should be able to see the native. He peeked from behind the tree and frowned because no one was there. Was the person above? Jack looked up. Nothing above. There was also no tree for someone to climb up.

Below the ground? Jack wondered. But then he noticed tiny dust swirled on the ground. At the same time, the white dot on his radar was moving.

'Invisible?' Jack thought.

The white dot moved around a bit. Jack hid back in the tree. Without seeing the person, Jack was not sure if the person was looking in his direction or not. He used his radar to track the person's movement. When it was slightly close to where Jack was, Jack's mana sense felt some kind of energy radiating out. This energy passed him by. Once it does, the white dot suddenly bolted in the opposite direction.

"He knows I'm here!" Jack uttered. He immediately came out of hiding and chased after this invisible native.

"What was that strange energy that he used to find me?" Jack asked Peniel while running. "Do you sense it as well?"

"Yes," Peniel answered. "Most probably it is the Detect skill. It's a non-standard elite skill that can be learned by Ranger's branch. It will let the user know all the hidden objects, monsters, or persons within a twenty-meter radius. Max level can cover a fifty-meter radius."

"He is fast!" Jack said. He had been running at top speed. The distance between him and the native was decreasing at a very slow pace.

Jack activated Life Burning Art, increasing his attribute. He then used a Haste scroll. His increased speed managed to shorten the distance abruptly. But suddenly the white dot also picked up in speed.

"Don't think you can escape!" Jack uttered and used Shooting Dash. The distance was short enough to be covered by his three connecting dashes.

Jack didn't take out any weapon. He didn't want to antagonize this native. He just wanted to stop this person and asked about the entrance to the Village of Peace.

His third dashes allowed him to reach the invisible native. The native turned visible just before Jack caught on. Their bodies bumped into each other. Their collision caused the two to fall and roll on the ground.

When they rose, Jack had a clear look at the person and uttered, "Oswald?!"

Chapter 745: Rematch

The assassin was similarly surprised to see Jack at this place. After his failed assassination attempt at Daminos Square Garden atop Mount Audacias, he had been fleeing non-stop. His original plan was to assassinate the human team's healer and escape before anyone had the chance to identify him. He never thought that not only did he fail, but Jack who knew his identity was also there.

He knew he was doomed already then. He couldn't go back to the Assassin's Guild. The faction won't offend the Council of Virtus for him. His only option was to continue to flee and hide. He had practically three forces targeting him, Council of Virtus, Assassin's Guild, and Verremor. He had been continuously pushed until he ran out of hiding places and ended up in this wooded Dorwin region.

"So, this is where you have run to. Good! Let's settle the grudge between us!" Jack uttered. He cast Magic Weapon.

Oswald had no intention of entertaining Jack, he vanished.

"Vanish skill again? His invisibility just now is not due to that skill?" Jack asked.

"No, he might have used Hide. He lost his invisibility before you touch him," Peniel said.

Oswald's Vanish was already max-stars, his skill covered a large distance. Jack's mana sense didn't detect so far. His radar also couldn't pick up on someone who had turned invisible from Vanish skill. Fortunately, he now had a new skill that could counter this max-star Vanish. He activated Gold Dragon Sight.

All the movements around him appeared to slow down greatly. But this was not the ability Jack was after, it was the other effect. The Gold Dragon Sight gave him the ability to see invisible objects. Oswald now appeared in his vision. He was currently running away.

Jack used Charge in his direction, shortening their distance. He then cast Mana Beam. The thick energy beam shot at Oswald.

The assassin had been looking back periodically while running. He was greatly surprised when Jack used Charge in his direction. He told himself the guy just did a lucky guess, but when Jack shot his Mana Beam, he knew it was not a coincidence. The outworlder knew his position!

Oswald rolled to the side evading the beam. Yet, it grazed him, turning his invisibility off. Jack swung the beam to the side. Oswald, who was ready to jump away again, was puzzled. The direction Jack swung his beam was away from his position.

The beam hit a nearby tree, or at least what Oswald thought to be a tree. An enraged roar was heard. The tree moved. It turned out to be a Lumbering Ent, a level 50 special elite monster that populated this area. Both Jack and Oswald had fought this monster in these woods. This monster liked to pretend to be a tree and then struck unsuspecting prey that came near.

Jack hit the Lumbering Ent on purpose. He saw the red dot on his radar. Although Jack was the one who hit the Ent, Oswald was closer. Hence, the Ent was now targeting him. The ent lifted his arm, which

turned elongated when it swung that arm forward. The elongated arm came lashing like a whip. Oswald had no choice but to dodge away. This dodge halted his escape further and allowed Jack to close in.

Jack summoned his wolf pack when the ent was attacking Oswald. The ten fast wolves caught up to Oswald and were now surrounding him. The ent was also approaching.

"Don't think you can hold me!" Oswald shouted and jumped upward. His body exploded into countless shadows.

These shadows spread and struck everything around him. Both Jack's wolves and the Lumbering Ent were hit. This was the move Oswald had used in the past to decimate the Mouseants. It couldn't kill his wolves and the ent in one hit like the Mouseants, but the numerous slashes reduced their HP rapidly and also pushed them back. The shadows then flew some distance away before fusing back into Oswald.

Jack had been following the movement of the shadows. Once they turned back into Oswald, he used Combination Assault with Therras which he had just summoned. The two turned into a meteor and slammed into Oswald.

The assassin had exhausted most of his skills to escape previous attacks. He now had no choice but to block the assault directly. Despite blocking with his twin large daggers, he still suffered high damage and was flung from the impact.

Jack cast Magic Bind to catch Oswald where he fell, but the assassin was very nimble. His foot tapped the ground for only an instant, but it was enough to allow him to jump away before the magic ring formed to lock him.

Jack used Wind Slash with his right hand while casting another spell with his left. Three wind energies rushed out. Even with his speed, Oswald couldn't escape all of them. He ended up getting hit one out of the three. Jack completed his spell and ten thin beams shot out. It was his level 45 Archmage spell, Tracing Beams.

Oswald was already staggered by the Wind Slash. The Tracing Beams now came from every direction. It was even more difficult to avoid this attack. He ended up getting hit by multiple beams and kept on getting pushed back. While he was losing balance, the ground underneath him lighted up. Fifteen crimson chains came out.

The last time Jack tried to capture him with this spell, he had managed to escape. Now, however, he was not in a position where he could move freely. The chains bound his body and kept him in place.

Jack sent Sword of Light while Therras used Oppressive Wave. The two slashing energy hit Oswald and brought his HP down further.

Oswald yelled. The chains that were holding him became loose.

Jack was surprised at first, but then he realized Oswald was of the human race. Oswald should also have the human race's skill, Willpower. This skill gave Oswald enough window to escape Jack's crimson chains. Oswald's body turned into a shadow and dashed towards Jack. It was the Deadly Flash Strikes.

Jack countered the skill as he did against Disco Rain during the tournament. He used Blitz Slash. Two flashes of light and shadow crossed one another and resulted in numerous clashes in the air. When the confrontation ended, Oswald was down on the ground with zero HP.

"Eh? I thought this clash would just negate each other like the last time with Disco Rain? How come his one is so weak?" Jack uttered after seeing the assassin's still body.

The lumbering Ent was still around. Jack's wolves and Therras were engaging it. He didn't bother dealing with the monster himself. At this time, Jet arrived with his Crimson-manned Lion. They were now bullying the ent.

Grace came to Jack who was still standing over the dead assassin.

"I thought you are going to ask for a favor? Why do you kill him?" Grace asked.

"He is not a villager," Jack explained. "Do you remember the assassin that sneaked in and tried to kill our human team's healer? This is the man."

"Oh? Why is that assassin here?"

"Don't know. I planned to ask him myself, amongst other things. My intention is to capture him. How can I know he is so weak? Hm... To think he overpowered me so easily in the past. Now, I can kill him even when I don't mean to. I truly have come far."

"If you are done being self-satisfied, you still have to work out how we get into the Village of Peace," Grace said after seeing Jack's expression.

"We will think of a solution once we enter the Lost Forest," Jack replied.

"Mm... You know. He looks weird. What do you think he looks like?" Grace asked, indicating Oswald on the ground.

Jack shrugged. "Looks dead to me," he said.

"He looks more like a creature in hibernation," Grace said.

"Hibernation? All right, let's hit him and see if he wakes up," Jack said and slashed down.

He was just joking actually, but when his sword hit, the body turned into a puff of smoke. He then saw what was on the ground was a piece of wood.

"Substitution Escape!" Jack recognized this skill. It was used by Sinful Pleasure in the past.

Oswald was now standing in front of them, his HP was no longer zero, but it was in a critical state, though.

Jack was about to move, but Oswald held out his hand. "Hold!" He uttered.

"I heard you want to ask me things. How about this? I answered whatever questions you want and you let me go?"

"Don't think to be let off that easy. You attacked me in the past, remember?" Jack said.

"You are still fine now, aren't you?" Oswald said.

"Doesn't mean I'm not pissed off by your past attack."

"Holding a grudge is not a good thing. You should learn on forgiving. The attack is not personal. I'm simply carrying out a hit. If it's not me, some other assassin will take my place. It is the person who placed the hit that you should be pissed off with."

"Oh, make no mistake. He will get his beating sooner or later. About you... All right. Tell you what, you answer all my questions. If I'm satisfied, I'll think about letting you go."

Chapter 746: A Condition

"What do you want to ask?" Oswald asked.

The Lumbering Ent was defeated already. Jack's Therras and his few surviving wolves came and guarded Oswald's back, in case the assassin tried to flee again. Jet also did the same after receiving Jack's silent message.

Oswald looked around him. He failed to escape when Jack was alone. Now with so many surrounding him, the chance was even slimmer.

"First question, how are you still alive when your HP is already zero?" Jack asked.

Peniel spoke before Oswald answered, "You are using the Fake Death skill, right?"

"Yes," Oswald answered.

Peniel then explained to Jack, "Fake Death is a non-standard assassin elite skill that masks one's HP to appear at zero while it is not truly so."

"Hm, it's a good thing Grace suspected something was wrong. I would have been fooled otherwise. You should have told me there is such skill in existence."

"There are countless skills and spells in existence. Do you want me to spell every single one out to you?" Peniel retorted with an irritated expression.

Jack decided not to argue with his fairy companion in front of everyone. He asked Oswald his next question, "What are you doing here?"

"Hiding."

"From what?"

"From a disgruntled customer, a faction who feel slighted by my action, and a former employer who is offended by me taking an unsanctioned job."

"I take it this has something to do with that assassination attempt you pulled inside Daminos Square Garden?"

"You are correct."

"Well, then here comes the main question," Jack said. "I assume that you are hired to kill our team's healer. Who ordered the hit and why?"

Oswald was silent for a while, pondering. He then said, "You will let me go if I tell you?"

"I am for sure won't let you go if you don't," Jack answered without giving him a promise.

Oswald pondered again for a bit, this time while looking around at those who surrounded him. "Ah, hell," Oswald said, lifting his hands with a show of a defeated gesture. "The people who asked me for the hit are now hunting me, so I don't see any need to protect them. If you want to know, it was one of the Lord Chiefs of the Verremor nation, Abdu Raretooth. You should have seen him. He was there in the tournament as well. He was the one that masked me and slipped me into Daminos Square Garden amongst his entourages."

"One of the orc's rulers?" Jack mumbled. He did notice this one named Abdu Raretooth. This orc was always seen with Abasi Raretooth during the tournament. Jack had suspected this orc to be of a high station from the way Abasi deferred to him. Verremor was governed by the Council of Ten, comprised of the Lord Chiefs of the ten biggest tribes. This made Abdu one of the ten Verremor's rulers.

"Why do they want to target the human team's healer?" Jack asked.

"I'm not in the habit of asking my employer's motive," Oswald answered. "That is a recipe for not getting hired the next time, you know?"

"Did they ask you to hit the Vampire team as well?" Jack gave his next question.

"No, only the human team," Oswald answered.

Jack gave the matter some thought.

"Can I leave now?" Oswald asked, trying his luck.

"Tell me, why do you take the job?" Jack asked. "You said that job was unsanctioned, which cause you to get hunted by your own faction. Why takes such a risk. Are you so desperate for a job?"

Oswald chuckled. "I am never lacking for jobs, kid. Well..., the reason is that I owed this Abdu fellow in the past. He is cashing in this favor I owed him and I'm not one who ran from a debt. Plus, he offered me something irresistible. Can I go now?"

"And this Abdu is also hunting you now?" Jack asked, ignoring Oswald's question.

"Along with the Council of Virtus and the Assassin's Guild. One job and my life is reduced to a never-ending solitary. Sigh, maybe death is a mercy to me."

"Sure, I will do you that favor," Jack said.

"Hey, hey! I'm just saying it in the hope that you will let me go, considering that I already suffer due to living a fugitive life!" Oswald hurriedly said.

"Man, you shouldn't joke about that kind of thing. I almost went ahead and kill you," Jack said.

"Does this mean that you will let me go?" Oswald asked with a hopeful feeling.

"Of course not," Jack answered flatly.

"You are really mean, you know that?" Oswald said dejectedly.

"We can let you go, on one condition," Grace said.

"You will?" Oswald's face brightened again.

"We will?" Jack also asked, looking at her.

"As long as you agree to become my companion," Grace said.

"Why would you want a weak companion like him?" Jack said. "He is just an elite grade."

"Hey!" Oswald uttered hearing the insult.

"Elite? My inspect tells me he is Special Elite," Grace said.

"Oh?" Jack used his Inspect. When Oswald came targeting him at the Busculla Plateau, he was an elite grade.

*

Oswald (Special Elite Human, Assassin), level 51

HP: 189,000

*

"You increase your grade?" Jack uttered after reading the assassin's description. He also noticed the native had increased by a level.

"Remember when I said Abdu offered me something irresistible? It was a thing that upgraded my grade."

"Pill of Growth?" Peniel asked.

Oswald nodded.

"What's that?" Jack asked.

"It's a thing that is only useful for natives or pets. It can increase them by one grade," Peniel answered.

"Cool! We should search for that thing! I can increase Therras and Alucard's grades with that."

"Unfortunately, this pill's ability to increase a grade is only limited until Rare Elite. Once one reached that grade, the pill is useless. Both your pet and companion are already rare elites."

Jack slumped back after hearing that. Oswald turned to Therras, "that thing is a rare elite?" He asked. Therras replied by stomping its foot and huffed menacingly. Oswald backed off a step.

"Mine is also a rare elite," Jet said and pet his Crimson-mane Lion.

Hearing that, Oswald sighed and sat on the ground. He again gave a defeated gesture. "You outworlders are unbelievable. I bullied this kid around half a year ago, and here I am getting bullied instead. I give up. Do with me as you please."

Jack turned to Grace and sent her a silent message, 'You sure you want him as a companion?'

Grace sent a reply. 'I saw the way he fight against you on my way here. Although he was clearly at a disadvantage, he was cunning enough to think of a way out. I think he can be of a great asset if developed properly.'

'But he is hunted by many sides. Are you not afraid you get dragged into trouble as well for siding with him?'

'He can just stay here until he is strong enough. There are plenty of monsters here for him to level up. I will only call him at certain times when I need him.'

Jack nodded. He then said to Oswald, "What do you say? Are you willing to be this lady's companion? You will gain the ability to level up expressly like us, outworlders. You might become strong enough to not worry about those who pursue you anymore. It's not a bad deal for you, isn't it?"

"But I will be someone's lapdog. Ready anytime at her beck and call," Oswald said, and then added, "Even if I'm willing, I don't have a binding stone."

When Jack showed a puzzled expression, Peniel explained to him, "A binding stone is what a native uses to bind their pledge. This stone will then become a companion token."

"Don't worry about that, I have one," Grace said. She took out a tiny stone with the shape of a coin and threw it to Oswald who caught the stone. Oswald looked at it with a complicated expression.

"If you are not interested in being a lapdog, I can't always relieve you from your misery of living a fugitive life," Jack said.

"All right, all right! There is no need to push me like that. It's not like I get a choice, to begin with," Oswald grumbled.

Oswald unsheathed his dagger. Jack was alarmed for a moment, but then he saw Oswald cut his own hand and put the stone coin on his cut hand. He then uttered some unknown incantation. Runic symbols appeared around him. These runes then became smaller and swirled around the coin before submerging into them. The coin shone and changed shape. When the glow ended, what was now in Oswald's hand was a companion token.

Oswald flipped the companion token back to Grace, who also caught it deftly. The runic symbols appeared again when the token touched Grace's hand. She used her other hand to touch the center of the symbols' formation. The symbol appeared as if entering Grace's hand once she did.

"The contract is done, I'm your companion now," Oswald said and stood up.

Grace cast a healing spell on his new companion, bringing his critical HP up.

"You are free to do as you like, but I suggest you work hard to hunt monsters for leveling up. I will call you when needed," Grace said.

"Where are you all going?" Oswald asked.

"We are going to the Lost Forest," Grace answered.

"You people have a death wish or something?" Oswald asked. "In that case, I will tag along."

When Oswald saw their expressions, he said, "I just got the benefit of fast leveling. It will be a waste if I lost it so soon after. If you all are determined to enter that cursed forest, I might as well be there full time to help."

"You are just bored of being alone all this time, aren't you?" Jack asked.

"Well..., there is that as well," Oswald answered truthfully.

Chapter 747: Entering the Lost Fores

As they continued their journey, Grace noticed that Jack was silent most of the time. His expression showed that he was thinking.

"What's in your mind?" Jack thought.

"Something about what our captive had spoken," Jack said and pointed to Oswald.

"Hey! I come along of my own free will," Oswald protested.

"About the orc trying to win the tournament in a dirty way?" Grace asked.

"I think their target is not about winning, it's more about preventing the human team from winning," Jack replied. "It made no sense by itself but if I combined it with what Four Winds had told me about the orc nation's movement, it might mean something."

"And what does it mean?"

"I will need to go back to Thereath and meet Prince Alonzo after our business in the Lost Forest. It might be crucial information. Well..., I will just text Jeanny and ask him to pass this info along."

"It's that important?"

"I don't know. It's just a hunch. But better to let them know, just in case." Jack said and proceeded to type the message. Grace had no idea what he was writing in that message.

*

The next day, Peniel informed them they had arrived outside the Lost Forest. As a matter of fact, they did not need to be told. The scenery in front of them was very different from the woods they had passed through all these days.

The trees were larger, with denser foliages. No sunlight entered because of the thick foliage. The trees also grew close to one another, with many bushes around them. But the most different feel they got was the ominous aura emanated from these woods. It was not just because these woods appeared much darker. The hairs on their bodies were raising. Their instincts told them not to enter.

"Is it just me or do you all feel the cold as well?" Jet asked.

"It's not just you," Jack answered.

"Are we truly entering this place?" Grace asked.

Their steeds refused to enter that dark forest, except for Pandora. Still, the layout of the forest didn't allow easy maneuver, so Jack unsummoned the nightmare and went on foot with the others.

"Let's go," Jack said and took the first step in. "No sense coming all this way here just to abort because of a little spook."

"This is little?" Jet asked.

"I'm beginning to regret following you people here. This forest has a very bad reputation, you know?" Oswald said.

"So, do you want to stay out?" Grace asked.

"No, I am right behind you, lady boss!" Oswald said.

They followed Jack in.

*

Once they entered the forest, all three of the players received notification that they had received a quest, Escape the Lost Forest. They didn't have a good feeling about the quest's name.

"Do you know where to go?" Jack asked Peniel after walking for a few hours. Since sunlight didn't enter this forest, Jack used his illumination spell to help the others see their way.

"I didn't even know that the Village of Peace existed in this place, remember? So, how do I know where to go? I don't have any information about the internal layout of this forest."

"Well, we should just continue then. If the village is hidden inside here, it should be at the deepest part," Jack said. Then he asked another question, "What about the monsters here? Do you have any info about what monsters roam this forest?"

"No," Peniel answered.

"Then we don't know how strong they are?" Grace said. "Well, it's a good thing Jack has his radar then. We should just avoid them if we are not sure whether they are too dangerous."

"Actually..., that's the reason why I asked," Jack said while smiling wryly. "The moment we enter this forest, my radar becomes blank. I can't even track you people who are next to me."

Jack then turned to Oswald, "But it's a good thing we have Oswald here."

"Why is that?" Grace asked.

"Because he can sense if something comes by. A sense that covers a larger area than mana sense. That's how you sensed me approaching and you activated your invisibility, right? So you can use your Detect skill while unseen."

Oswald nodded. "It's a skill called Danger Sense. It's a passive ability. Unfortunately, this skill is useless at the moment."

"Why is that?" Jack asked.

"Because it has been blaring the moment we entered this forest. It hasn't stopped now," Oswald answered.

"..."

"Maybe we should turn back?" Jet proposed.

"Hey! We have passed here before," Grace suddenly said.

"How is it possible? We have been going straight," Jack said.

"I have seen that tree before...", Grace said while pointing to a tree.

"It's a tree, they all look similar," Jack said, dismissing Grace's claim.

"Are you saying there's something wrong with my eyes?" Grace asked with an irritated stare.

"Um, no, ma'am. I wouldn't dare," Jack hurriedly said.

"Kyaaa...!!" Grace suddenly screamed and ran behind Jack.

"What? What happened?" Jack said with confusion. He looked around trying to look for hostile monsters. His mana sense didn't detect anything close.

"Rats!!" Grace said and pointed down. Several rats were running around the ground. They soon disappeared behind into the darkness where Jack's illumination spell couldn't reach.

"They are gone already," Jack said.

"Really?" Grace peeked out.

"You fought horrible monsters but you still go kyaa when you see a rat?" Jet asked.

"What's wrong with feeling disgusted by rats?!" Grace said hotly.

"No, ma'am. Nothing wrong at all!" Jet said, copying Jack's tone.

"Let's continue," Jack urged them to proceed.

"You know, I agree with lady Grace. I also feel like we have passed this place before," Oswald said.

"Maybe we should really turn back?" Jet said again.

*

They walked for another few hours. After a while, Grace suddenly uttered, "See?! I told you we have passed through here!"

She pointed to a tree. There was a marking on the tree. Oswald was the one carving that marking using his dagger under Grace's request. Jack went over. He had seen Oswald carve the marking. He checked it. This was indeed the same marking Oswald had made.

"Man, do you have any sense of direction at all?" Jet said to Jack who had been the one leading them the whole time.

"Zip it, old man. You know as well as I that we have been traveling in a straight line," Jack retorted.

"I don't know. We moved to the side a few times to go around a tree or shrubs with sharp branches. Perhaps you have veered then."

Jack gave Jet an irritated look for his insistence.

"It's the forest. People that go in here will be lost without they even know it," Oswald said.

"Can you please not spook your elder?" Jet complained.

"Eek...!!" Grace again hid behind Jack. Rats were running around the place again.

Jet had been edgy enough that he jumped just now due to Grace's yell. "I swear, missy. If you aren't so cute..."

"Let's take this way," Jack said.

"Why that way? You see something unusual in that direction?" Grace asked.

"No. Since walking forward didn't work, I figure we should just try going in a different direction and see if that made any difference."

"..."

"I propose instead that we go back in the direction where we came from," Jet said.

*

They continued their walk. Everyone was silent, which added to the eerie atmosphere. Jack tried cracking some jokes to lighten the mood but ended up being given glares by everyone, so he shut his mouth as well. Suddenly, Jet jumped to the side.

"Did you guys see that?" He asked anxiously.

"What?" Jack asked, looking around.

"I saw some shadows moving," Jet said.

"Stop it, old man! You are spooking yourself," Jack reprimanded. "Didn't you use to spend plenty of alone time in the jungle when hunting?"

"This forest is more spooky than any jungle I know!" Jet uttered.

"Look!" Grace pointed to a tree. She continued asking Oswald to make markings for references. She was pointing to one of these same markings.

"Okay, let's take another direction now," Jack said.

"Jack boy, are you going to just randomly pick a different direction every time we found out that we go in a loop?" Jet said. "If we go your way, we don't even know the way back anymore."

"I doubt that we can even go back anymore," Oswald said.

"Dude! What did I say about spooking your elderly?" Jet complained.

"Okay, then. Let's do it your way. We try taking the way back," Jack said.

"Now, that's what I wanted to hear," Jet uttered. "This forest is so dark, we won't even know if it is night already. Let's just head out and think of another way."

"At least there is no monster here," Jack said. They had been walking for hours and didn't encounter any.

"Plenty of rats, though," Jet remarked. They saw another group of these rodents raced by. Grace again hid behind Jack.

*

As they traced their way back, Grace appeared agitated.

"What's wrong?" Jack asked.

"We have been walking back for a while... But I don't see the markings Oswald has placed along the way. Also, I don't think we have ever passed this place before, all the trees looked different."

Jack looked around. He honestly couldn't tell if the trees were different. They all looked the same to him.

"So, does that mean we have managed to come out of the loops that prevent us from proceeding forward?" Jack asked.

"Are you telling me that we can't go back?" Jet asked.

The two asked with different tones. Jack's one carried excitement while Jet's was laced with worry.

"Why are you so worried about getting back? We can just use our Town Return Scroll whenever we want to leave," Jack said to Jet.

"Oh, you are right!" Jet said. He immediately took the scroll out.

"Bloody hell, are you planning to leave right now?" Jack asked.

"Don't lump me in with you young people. My old heart can't take this anxiety," Jet replied.

"Hey, I can't leave like that. Are you people just going to leave me in this accursed place after dragging me here?" Oswald asked uneasily.

"What the..., " Jet uttered. His face appeared to be concentrating. He then said, "I can't use this scroll!"

"What?!" both Jack and Grace uttered. They tried theirs as well, but the scrolls didn't work.

"I think we should separate, cover more ground," Jack said.

"Dude! That is a terrible idea! Getting lost together is already bad. Getting lost alone is the worst!" Jet immediately objected.

"How about Oswald go? I can summon him back if he is lost," Grace offered his opinion.

"What?! Do I have to?" Oswald didn't seem so keen on the idea.

"Let's give it a try then," Jack said. "You go twenty meters away. Should be safe since we can still see you. Grace will then use the companion token. See if you can still be summoned here."

"That's right. Oswald, please go over there," Grace said and pointed.

Oswald let out a long sigh before walking towards where Grace indicated.

While they watched Oswald walking away, they heard rustling from above. Jack sensed something coming with speed from above, he hurriedly warned everyone with a yell while rolling away at the same time. A long branch came down and struck where he had stood.

Before he could make sense of what was happening, the vines on the ground suddenly came alive and coiled around his legs. Jack felt himself getting pulled away forcefully. He caught a glimpse of the others similarly getting assaulted by branches and vines and getting dragged away in different directions.

Chapter 748: Los

The vine dragged him very far away. It was too fast and the dragging repeatedly bumped him into the trees and shrubberies around, causing him the inability to do anything. Jack tried using Willpower, his human race's skill that needed only a thought to activate, but it seemed to have no effect on the vines holding his leg.

Jack was not sure how long or how far he was dragged, but his body was suddenly pulled high into the air. The vine grabbing his leg was dragging him up onto one of the branches of a very tall tree. No longer hindered by the bumpings, Jack did a hanging sit-up. His Storm Breaker appeared in a swift motion as he cut the vine holding his leg. The vine broke and Jack fell down. He managed to flip his body before hitting the ground and landing back on his feet.

Jack looked up, his magic staff was also out now, expecting more branches or vines to come attacking from above. Everything was still. He looked around. The forest was quiet again.

Peniel materialized out of thin air at the moment. She said, "I have flown after you once you are dragged away, but you are too far already to be followed."

"Did you phase back to me out of your free will or it was forcefully?" Jack asked.

"Forcefully," Peniel replied.

Jack became worried after hearing that. Even though Peniel couldn't leave his position too far, she could still travel a decent distance away. She had been able to stay with Jeanny and John when Jack hunted for monsters in Heavenly Citadel's vicinity. For her to be forcefully pulled back to his side meant the

distance between them was greater than that. Which didn't make sense, there was no way he got dragged that far.

But just thinking about it won't solve anything. After making sure nothing was attacking anymore, Jack ran back in the direction where he had been pulled from.

He ran for quite some time, trying to hear his friends, but all he heard was just eery silence.

"Do you recognize the place where I was dragged from?" Jack asked Peniel.

Peniel shook her head. She was as oblivious as Jack in recognizing these look-alike trees. Only Grace was able to do that.

"Grace...! Jet...! Heck, Oswald! Any freekin one...!" Jack shouted. He had also been trying to send messages, but the replies were notifications that he couldn't send any messages.

Jack left his Illumination spell on. He didn't need it because of his Dragon Eye passive ability, but the glowing orb might help attracted his friends' attention if they were nearby.

He went on for some time but still couldn't find anyone or hear anyone.

"Damn it... I'm lost," he uttered.

*

Jack continued wandering around aimlessly. The forest didn't attack anymore, it seemed the purpose of the attack just now was only to separate them. Still, Jack kept vigilance on all the branches and vines around him.

Jack continued to shout for his friends but got no response. He also paid attention to the trees, trying to see if there were any markings on them. This way he would know if he had returned to the path they had traveled before, but he found none.

"Huh?" Jack whirled around suddenly.

"What?" Peniel asked.

"I thought I saw a shadow there," Jack said.

'Bugger!' He thought within. He was now as spooked as Jet. Traveling alone inside here was indeed much more unsettling compared to when his friends were still nearby. If he was like this, he couldn't imagine how the others were doing. This forest was indeed as creepy as shit.

*

"Is it night already?" Jack asked. It was no different inside this forest since the sunlight couldn't enter.

"I will try flying up there to check," Peniel said.

Jack had the urge to use his Supreme Dragon form and flew away from this forest as well. Not long after, he saw Peniel fly back down.

"I can't pass through the foliage," Peniel informed with alarm. "It's as if something is preventing me."

Jack thought for a moment. "Similar to the Valley of Tempus?" Jack asked.

"I guess so," Peniel said. She similarly couldn't fly away from there as well when they were in the valley.

Jack was not worried about himself. If this place was like the Valley of Tempus, he could still escape by using Pandora. What he was worried about were Grace and Jet. They had no means to escape. Return scroll didn't work. Even if they died here, they most likely revived back inside here. So they couldn't escape by killing themselves while wearing the Amulet of Rebirth.

While he was worried, he heard Grace's voice, "Jack?"

Jack turned back and saw Grace was there. She was holding a torch. "Oh, thank goodness that I find you!" She uttered while running towards Jack. Before Jack could say anything, she stored her torch and hugged him. Jack was pleasantly surprised by her action.

"Um..., uh, you okay...?" He asked.

Grace was still hugging him. Only letting him go after a while. "I'm so glad that I find you. I am so scared!" She said. Her eyes were teary.

'Now, now, don't worry. I am here,' Jack said, trying to be a man.

Grace didn't let go of him. Although she had let go of her hug, she was still holding his arm, tightly pressed to her body. As if she was afraid to let go.

'Ah... Too bad she was wearing a stiff chest armor,' Jack lamented.

"Where are the others?" Jack asked her.

"I don't know. After you are dragged away. The vines also dragged me, Jet, and even Oswald in different directions. I have been wandering around non-stop since then. I'm so scared. There are shadows everywhere... and rats. I can't stand this. I want to go back!"

"Don't worry, we will find a way," Jack said, trying to console her. "Let's go, we have to find the others as well."

When Jack wanted to move, he felt Grace keep him from moving. She was still holding his arm. Jack turned to her, "What's wrong? Let's go."

"I don't think that's a good idea. We should stay here. What if the vines decide to come and drag us apart again?"

"Staying here won't solve anything. Jet might need our help. Let's go," Jack said and tried to move again, but Grace continued to hold him firmly.

That's weird, he never thought Grace had the strength to cause him to be unable to move like this. Jack turned to her again. This time, however, what he saw was not Grace's beautiful face. It was a face formed of wood branches and vines, with leaves for hairs. Jack was seriously startled by the sudden change. Even Peniel yelped as he saw Grace's transformation.

This wooden Grace spoke, her voice was hoarse. "Stay! Stay with me! Do not leave me alone!"

Jack looked down. What was Grace's body was now a tree trunk. His arm that was held by Grace was now encased inside this trunk. "Letâ??Let me go!" Jack shouted while using all his strength to pull his arm free, but the trunk was as if solid concrete.

"Stay with me forever! We will be together forever!" The wooden Grace continued to yell. Her voice became more terrifying with each utterance.

"Rarrgggh...!" Jack couldn't help the terror that gripped his heart. His Storm Breaker was out. With Flame Strike, he shattered the trunk that was imprisoning his arm.

His arm came free, but wooden Grace's arms came at him, now a pair of branches that shaped like claws. Jack used Whirlwind Slash, shattering them.

"You impersonator! How dare you scare the shit out of me?!" Jack executed Devouring Cross.

Instead of shattering into tiny wooden pieces like what his two prior attacks had done, wooden Grace instead shattered with a poof. She became black smoke which was then blown away, even when Jack felt no wind whatsoever there.

"Shit! What monster was that just now?" Jack asked Peniel.

"I don't know!" The fairy seemed as shocked as him. "I don't think that was a proper monster. It was more like an apparition conjured by this forest. We can't continue staying in this forest like this. The forest will just repeat its assault the longer we stay."

"Yeah, no shit," Jack uttered.

He looked around. After a while, he sat down cross-legged.

"What are you doing?" Peniel asked.

"We can't continue wandering around like before," Jack answered. "If searching physically doesn't bring results, I will try searching using a different method."

"You are doing that long-range reconnaissance thingy?" Peniel asked. "You do know that I can't protect you if you are attacked by those vines or if that apparition appeared again when you are out, right? I also can't contact you."

One weakness of Jack's corporeal form that they had tested, was that Jack was unaware of what happened to his body when he was out. That's why he preferred to not do it when he was in the open. Peniel could slap him, bite him, and he wouldn't feel a thing. If a monster came while his consciousness was away, it could whack him to death while he was completely oblivious of it.

Chapter 749: Found

"I don't see a choice. My radar is also out. I can't continue going blind like this," Jack replied. "You said it yourself, the longer we stay, the more dangerous it will become, right? That apparition has just attacked, I believe it won't attack again so soon... I hope. Also, you are not powerless. You can heal me. Keep my body alive till I'm back, eh, partner?"

Jack closed his eyes and focused his mana sense. Peniel opened her mouth to say something but decided against it. She also didn't have any better ideas, so she just let Jack try his method. Jack's consciousness slowly drifted out. First, he made one round in the vicinity, making sure there were no monsters or apparitions in hiding. Nothing. It was just the trees and those rats. This forest was filled with these damned rats.

After making sure no dangerous hostile in the immediate vicinity, he drifted further. As he went further, he sensed something strange.

"This..."

There was some sort of barrier. He traced alongside the edge and went in the direction he had been before. Beyond him was the path he had come from, but now he couldn't pass through. He didn't feel this kind of barrier when he passed by here before. He continued to trace along the barrier as well as fly up to check if he could go past the tree's foliage. He couldn't.

After making one big round, he was certain the barrier was encircling him. Not only that, he could sense different kinds of space beyond these barriers. Several different spaces, but they all contained similar things like the one on this side of the barrier, part of the forest.

Jack felt like he could understand the setup of this place better after this observation. But to make sure, his consciousness touched the wall barrier. The mana encapsulated this place felt special, he had a feeling that he could form a link with them. He let his consciousness resonate with the barrier's mana. He felt as if his thought had expanded. He could see them. There are a multitude of spaces within this place, all separated from each other as if different cells. That's why Peniel had been forcefully teleported to him when he was dragged by the vines, they were inside different cell spaces.

After further investigation, he surmised that to proceed, he needed to go from one cell to another. He noticed several node points that linked these cells. To pass through to the next cell, one needed to pass through these nodes. They were like invisible doorways. And unlike the cells, these nodes were static.

He now had a better understanding of this place's construct. He would never find a way to proceed or even go back if he just wandered aimlessly. He would remain in the same cell even if he walked for ten years. The sceneries were simply getting reshuffled as he walked along. Only by passing through these invisible nodes that one could move on.

They were simply not lucky enough that they didn't pass through any of these nodes. If they did, Jet or he would have been able to sense the unusual mana. The boundaries, on the other hand, moved as they moved, so they would always be at the center of the cell. That's why neither he nor Jet sensed these boundaries when they walked because the boundaries were always out of reach. Until now, when his consciousness was away from his body. The cell stayed as it kept his real body as the center point.

Through the sensing just now, he also felt the cells where his two comrades were. He mapped their locations in his mind. He should be able to reach them by passing through several nodes. He also memorized the positions of these nodes. He couldn't trust the scenery, it changed randomly. So, what he memorized were the direction and distance in accordance with his body's position.

After memorizing everything, he returned to his body.

"I know how to travel through this Lost Forest," Jack uttered once he opened his eyes.

"How?" Peniel asked puzzlingly.

"Follow me!" Jack said and led the way.

When he reached the location of the node, he noticed something else that he didn't pay attention to during his corporeal state. The rats. They were passing through the nodes.

'I see...' Jack thought in his mind. Corporeal state ability was not something Wilted knew about. Her partner might have incorporated mana sense and mana manipulation in the game with the help of a martial artist's input. But the corporeal state was something of a myth even for martial artists in the real world. His grandfather had told him this after Domon found out about his ability from Jet.

No way the game makers designed this Lost Forest with a riddle that only players with corporeal state ability could solve. They had provided a different clue, the rats. As long as one followed these rodents, one would find the nodes that brought them to the next cell.

Jack looked at the spot where the node was. If ones only relied on their eyes, ones would see nothing there. Even the rats that were the clues appeared to be simply passing through the spot. They were still visible after passing the node as if nothing had changed. But Jack felt unusual mana on that spot, which confirmed what he had sensed during his corporeal state.

When Jack was about to step through the invisible node, he felt like he was watched. He looked down and came eye to eye with one of the rats.

Huh?

The rats seemed to watch him with fascination, before turning its head away and creeping away.

Jack watched the rat scurry away. 'Was it just my imagination?' He thought.

He banished the thought. It's not important. It was also creepy, he preferred not to think about it. What's important now was to find his teammates before they accidentally went through a node. He would then have to search for them again if that happened, to find out which cell they had ended up in.

When Jack went through the node, he didn't see any difference. He was beside a large tree trunk when he walked past the node. After he passed through, the same tree trunk was still on his left. What he saw before and after were exactly the same. Those without mana sense would feel no different from taking a normal walk. But Jack's mana sense told him a different story. He could feel the mana after walking past the node was inherently different from before he passed the node. He was sure that he was in a different space now. He was in another cell that comprised the maze of this Lost Forest.

Without further ado, he immediately headed to the next node. One cell could have more than one node. Different nodes brought them to different cells, creating multiple possibilities of travel. He had mapped the ones targeting the cells containing his friends.

He arrived in the cell where he last saw Grace was in. She was holding a torch with Oswald walking beside her. They both looked anxious.

"Grace!" Jack called out.

Grace whirled back. But before Grace could respond, Oswald came before her. "Wait, ma'am! He could be a fake conjured by this forest to fool us. Let meâ???"

Oswald didn't finish his sentence because he was pushed aside by Grace who uttered, "Move aside! I can tell if he is fake or real!"

When Oswald pointed out the possibility that Jack was a fake, it also came to Jack's mind that these two could be fakes as well. But seeing Grace came running at him like this, he decided that even if she was a fake, maybe he should take advantage for a bit. He opened his arms, welcoming Grace's hug.

Grace stopped in front of him. "What are you doing?" Grace said when she saw Jack's weird posture.

"Um... Nothing," Jack said, feeling awkward.

Grace scrutinized Jack for a bit. She then said to Oswald. "He is real."

"You can tell by just a look?" Jack asked. "Which means that you have been assaulted with doppelgangers created by this forest?"

"Yes," Grace nodded. "I met a copy of you. I know it was a fake when it came near. I immediately summoned Oswald using his companion token. We took down the fake together."

No wonder Oswald was with him. When Jack did his reconnaissance, Grace was still alone then. It's a good thing to know that tools are still useable here. Meaning he could summon Arlcard here if needed.

"How can you tell that I am real or fake?" Jack asked.

"We can tell the fake if we look closely. They have some details missing," Grace answered.

"I think only you can use that method... Well, anyway, now that I have found you, we can go and find Jet."

"You know where he is?"

"Yes. If he still stays where I last saw him."

"You saw him? Why did you leave him again then?"

Jack didn't feel like wasting time explaining, so he just told them, "Follow me!"

Chapter 750: Real and Fake

Jack followed the directions he had memorized. Grace and Oswald followed him. When Grace kept on complaining about the rats, Jack informed Grace that the rats were the key, they needed to follow them. He then gave her a simple explanation about the nature of this forest, about how it was separated into different cells that trapped those who traveled inside. Only when one passed through a node that one could travel in between these cells.

When Jack brought her passing through her first node. She didn't feel anything. Her mana sense was still at its very beginning stage. She had to close her eyes and concentrate before she could feel an inkling that something was unusual there.

They went through three nodes before arriving at the cell where Jack last saw Jet. They started searching around. As long as Jet was still within this cell, they would stumble into him sooner or later.

After wandering for a while, they heard something. "Sounds like fighting," Grace said.

"Let's go take a look!" Jack said and took point.

They soon came upon the source of the sound. It was indeed the sound of two people fighting. Or more correctly, two identical dwarfs fighting. Two Jets were fighting against one another. The more fascinating thing was that they both used the same style. Both of them jumped around trying to hit each other with their katars.

"The heck...!" Jack uttered. He used Inspect on both of them. Both displayed the same information.

Hearing Jack's voice, the two Jets turned to them. "Jack boy!" both of them shouted at the same time.

"Hey, why are you copying me?!" The left-side Jet scolded.

"Damn copy! It should be me asking that question," the right-side Jet scolded.

"Calm down!" Jack said. "One of you is a fake, but do not worry. We have a secret weapon against such a trick. Grace, do your magic!"

When Grace didn't respond, Jack looked back, "Grace?"

"What? I can't tell if any of the two is fake," Grace answered.

"But didn't you say you can notice the difference?" Jack asked.

"I can if I know the person well. I haven't known him for long. How can you expect me to know all the details of his appearance?"

"Eh? But you know me around the same time as him. Maybe we are old friends in the past, but you only started seeing my real appearance at the tournament. That's around the same time you have seen him as well. So, why can you know my details but not him?"

Grace didn't answer, she instead lowered her head. When Jack was about to say something, Peniel smacked him on the head. "You insensitive brute. Stop speaking or I'm going to slap you for her!"

Jack was confused by Peniel's action, but he didn't ask Grace further. He didn't notice Grace's cheeks that had gone red. Oswald was sighing by the side and thinking, 'To think that I have been defeated by a clueless guy like him. Sigh... How low I have fallen...'

The left Jet was getting impatient. He said, "What are you doing, Jack boy? Hurry come here and defeat this doppelganger with me!"

"That should be my line, you fake cheat!" The right Jet uttered. "I will show you my Seven Injuries Fist! The real one will be the most proficient with this martial art!"

"Good idea! That will be how I unmask you," The left Jet didn't back down.

The two lunged at one another again. Jack didn't stop them. Letting them exhibit their signature martial moves should indeed be the most likely way to determine who was real and who was fake. But when

they clashed, the two used almost the same punching move. Each executed seven punches that bordered on reality and illusion, fast and slow. Both of them were also proficient enough to evade the fists. They ended up getting hit by two of the seven punches. Both their HPs went down.

"Shit... Even their martial arts are equal," Jack uttered dejectedly.

The two Jets seemed unhappy with the result just now. They couldn't believe that they were at a standstill even in martial arts execution. They were just about to go at one another again when Jack abruptly shouted, "Look! A naked woman!"

"Where?" The left Jet's head turned to where Jack was pointing with such speed that it defied logic. The right Jet's gaze lingered on Jack for a bit before turning.

"Got you!" Jack shouted and sent Wind Slash to the right Jet.

That Jet was startled by Jack's sudden assault, but he was still reflexive enough to jump away. One of the three wind energies still cut him, though.

"Oswald, attack!" Grace said while casting a spell. She had started casting once she saw Jack take action.

Oswald's body zipped forward and arrived before fake Jet in an instant. He then disappeared when Jet tried to punch him. He reappeared behind Jet and delivered a backstab, but this Jet was equally skillful as the real one. He turned back swiftly and slapped, foiling Oswald's backstab.

"Let's gang this son of a b*tch!" The real Jet was about to join the fight, but Jack held him back. "No! You stay back! We can't have you get mixed up with him again. It will be trouble if we have to again try finding out which one is the real one."

Grace's spell formation was completed and a lightning snake shot out. It was the Chain Lightning spell. Grace had used the Universal Technique Book to learn this offensive spell from the Elementalist class. She could now be said as an all-rounded character, with healing spells, offensive spells, and the capability to melee. But of course, being all-rounded also meant that she was just average in all. She didn't mind though, she preferred this way so she had more options for every situation.

The Chain Lightning was fast. It hit fake Jet who was busy dodging Oswald's attacks. Fake Jet got paralyzed from the spell. Jack threw a few more spells as well before joining Oswald ganging the doppelganger. Fake Jet soon turned with a poof into black smoke. This black smoke was similarly blown away despite there being no wind.

"Damn! That was spooky," Jet said. "Wait...! You three are real, aren't you?"

"If we are not, don't you suppose we would have ganged you instead?" Jack said.

"Heh, well then I am really glad to see you, people!" Jet jumped and hugged Jack. "You don't know how scared this old man is. Oh, I truly regret following you here, Jack boy. Of all the places you have to pick thisâpoof!"

Jet had let go of Jack and was heading to Grace while talking. He was in the middle of a jump to hug Grace but ended up getting a fist.

"Damn, girl! Can't this old man express his joy in reuniting with his teammates?" Jet complained.

"I can welcome your hug," Oswald said with open arms.

"Who wants to hug you? I've just known you for one day!" Jet retorted.

"All right, cut the crap!" Jack said. "I already know the way to get through this forest, but I have only looked for the path to get to you two. Now I'm going to map the path going forward. I need you guys to protect me while I'm checking them out. We don't know if the vines will attack and try to separate us again. Be vigilant!"

Jack summoned Therras and his ten wolves for extra security. He then sat cross-legged.

"How are you going to... Oh, I get it. You are doing your corporeal state," Jet came to an understanding. He then took his position beside Jack and stood guard. Grace and Oswald did the same, they didn't truly get it but Jack had given them a brief explanation about his corporeal state ability when they were on the way here looking for Jet.

Jack did as before. He went to the furthest part of the cell to touch the barrier's mana. On his way, he thought about the nature of a single cell. It always placed the people inside as its center, but what if these people separated? Who would the cell consider as the center? If the cell picked one of them as its center, then the others could move towards the barrier physically.

But then he remembered, the vines that separated them had only attacked when Oswald started moving away. Which meant this was a mechanism applied so that the people in the cell continued to stay at its center. If they didn't, they would be forcefully divided and placed in one cell each. This rule probably had exceptions only for those who had just passed through a node, like how he did when he was looking for Grace and Jet. But now that they were together again, they were most likely considered as one group again.

Jack looked back to where his body was. He was already too far away. He hoped his friends didn't try to move away from one another when he was out.