

World 751

Chapter 751: Bonus apter 751. Entering Village of Peace

Once arriving at the barrier, Jack did as before. He resonated his consciousness with the barrier's mana. He then felt his consciousness expand. He felt as if he was looking at multiple cells at the same time. They stacked on each other like a massive beehive.

There was no way he could remember everything with the wealth of information available here. He noticed that most of the nodes although winding through different cells, most of them ended up at the same place. He sensed the outline of a colony there. That must be the Village of Peace that was their destination. Seeing this setup, as long as one stumbled upon nodes continuously, one would most likely end up in this village.

However, he also saw that there were other destinations. More obscure. These destinations could only be reached by a certain combination of nodes, which meant it was less likely for one to get to these black zones if one just went through the nodes randomly by following the rats. Jack wondered what was there in that hidden destination. He couldn't sense anything from those places.

Jack decided to forget about those places. Although they tingled his adventurous sense, he also suspected those places were nothing safe. Maybe when he had gotten much stronger then he might try visiting those places.

Another thing he noticed, the nodes that he passed through before had now shifted positions. In other words, he couldn't map out the route he had taken before and gave it to his guild friends for a safe passage through this Lost Forest. He could inform them to follow the rats, but if they simply follow the critters, there was a chance that they would end up inside those black zones that Jack suspected to be unsafe.

He memorized the shortest path towards the destination with the colony outline. It's a good thing his intelligence stat was high, so he didn't find it hard to memorize the complex pathway.

He returned to his body. His teammates were fortunately not wandering around. They still stood guard beside him. Jack unsummoned his Terras and wolves. He then shared his theory about them having to stick together. Otherwise, the forest might try to separate them again.

Jack took them through many nodes. With how often they encountered the rats since those critters also went in the same direction, Grace had grown tired of feeling disgusted.

"The one who designed this forest is sure to have a rat fetish!" She complained.

"I will be sure to ask Wilted who that person is. We can go at him or her together," Jack said.

"Count me in!" Jet uttered. "Making such a creepy place that scares the shit out of an old man."

After a while, they arrived at where Jack memorized to be the last node. Beyond this node should be the Village of Peace. They stepped through the spot and found nothing change. Around them was still the same forest.

Jack stood there, puzzled. Grace, Jet, and Oswald were waiting for him to start moving again. They didn't know that they had passed the last node.

'Perhaps I remember wrong?' Jack thought.

"Something's the matter?" Jet asked.

"I thought that by now we have arrived at the Village of Peace," Jack replied.

"Did someone say Village of Peace?" A voice was heard.

The three players and one native looked around. It was not their voice. The voice sounded near but they saw no one else around them.

"Hey, you people! You are outworlders, right? I asked, do you want to go to the Village of Peace?" The voice was heard again.

This time they could pinpoint where the voice came from. They looked down. A white rat with a red suit was staring at them.

"Hello," the rat greeted, waving its forepaw.

Grace shrieked.

Jack reeled since Grace was closest to him. 'Ugh! Girl, I was shocked by the talking rat, but now I am more shocked by your scream.'

"What... What... What are you?!" Grace stepped backward while pointing at the rat.

"My name is Captain Whitebeard. Please to make your acquaintance, miss," the rat hopped over to Grace while offering its paw for a paw shake.

"Stay away!" Grace shouted while continuing to back away.

"Calm down, you are being rude to this little fellow," Jack said. He then squatted near the rat and asked, "Why are your name so like a pirate but you dress like a gentleman? And you don't even have a beard, you have whiskers."

"What kind of unimportant question is that?!" Jet chided and pushed Jack away. He then squatted in front of the rat replacing Jack. "Okay, Captain Squarebeard," he said.

"It's whitebeard," the rat corrected.

"Whatever. Listen, little rat. I'm sick of this creepy forest already. Do you know the way out of here?"

"I thought you want to go to the Village of Peace?"

"Anywhere as long as I'm not in this forest."

"Well, if you want to go to the Village of Peace, I can take you. I live there!" Whitebeard said.

'Live there?' Jack thought and turned to Peniel. 'Don't tell me this Village of Peace is a village populated by talking rats,' he asked Peniel silently.

'I don't know. I never see the village before,' Peniel answered.

But then Jack remembered Guila said that she came from the village, so there should be humans there. It would be weird if the divine faction, Harmony Keepers, consisted of members of only rats.

Captain Whitebeard was gesturing for Jack and the others to follow. Grace was reluctant but she had no choice but to follow the others. She was probably imagining a village filled with rats. Whitebeard talked a lot along the way. It mostly asked about the outside world, Jack entertained the rat with answers as best he could. Whitebeard told them that it used to sneak outside with a friend, but after an incident, it never did so anymore. It also said that it had known about their comings because of its scouts inside the forest. Jack was reminded again of the white rat that was staring at him when he passed through the node.

After walking a short distance, they saw the trees became sparser and they could see the sky again. It was already nighttime. They had spent the entire day lost within the Lost Forest. They then saw lights and buildings some distance ahead.

They came upon a wooden plank sign hung from the thick branch of a very large tree. Village of Peace was carved on the sign. An owl was perching on that branch, It was watching the newcomers. Jack was worried whether the owl would swoop down and snatch Captain Whitebeard for supper. The owl then spoke.

"Whitebeard, who are these strangers you brought here?"

"They are guests coming from the forest, and they are also outworlders. They said they want to visit the village," Whitebeard replied.

"Mm, they should see chief Meratis then," the owl said. "But she is already asleep. You lots are rather rude to come at this hour."

"Sir owl, it's not like that's our intention," Jack felt like crying. "We are lost in the forest. We only manage to arrive here with much difficulty."

"The name is Oldeye," the owl said. "Fine then, Whitebeard will take you to the guest house. You can stay there. Chief Meratis will meet you tomorrow."

"Follow me then," Whitebeard said.

Jack and the others followed. They were just glad that they didn't need to spend a night in the Lost Forest. They didn't think they could sleep at all if that was the case.

When they stepped past the wooden plank sign hanging above, they heard a notification that their quest, Escape the Lost Forest had been completed. They received exp points and gold as rewards. The notification said additional rewards would be given for arriving in the Village of Peace, but the rewards would be given by the Village's inhabitants. They were too mentally tired already for going through the Lost Forest, so they were not so excited about the possible rewards.

Another thing that Jack noticed after passing through the wooden plank, the mana density had greatly surged. It was similar to the condition at Daminos Square Garden. This place would be the best place to learn mana sense and mana manipulation.

They followed Captain Whitebeard to a small hut by the edge of the village. There was a river running nearby. Jack also caught a glimpse of a lake some distance away.

"Please stay in the hut. Chief Meratis hasn't cleared you as guests, so do not wander around. Otherwise, you might get into trouble," Whitebeard warned.

"Do we have to stay inside the hut? Or it's okay for us to stay outside here?" Jack asked.

"Outside here is ok, but do not go to other places. I would hate to lose new guests as soon as they arrive. We don't get many guests here, so I'm rather excited about your arrival. In fact, this is only the second time we met outworlders."

"Second? Another outworlder has arrived here before?"

"Yeah. She was here almost eight months ago."

"What?! That was just about one month after we came to this world," Jack uttered. "How can a young outworlder journey here? Wait... Did you say she? Is she by any chance named Wilted Tree?"

Captain Whitebeard appeared to be thinking. It then said, "I believe that's her name."

"Well, if it's her, I guess it is more believable. Do you know what she is doing here?"

"I don't. She mostly spoke with the chief. I tried talking with her, but her reaction to me was very much like that one," Whitebeard pointed to Grace.

"I guess we can conclude now that this Lost Forest idea was not hers," Jack said. "Okay, we will take our rest. Thank you for your hospitality."

"It's my pleasure," Whitebeard said. It then went to the side of the hut. Jack realized only now that there was a small hole there. Whitebeard sneaked inside.

"This is your home?" Jack asked.

Whitebeard's head stuck out of the hole. "Every house in this village is my home. I chose to stay in this one so you can just call me if you need anything."

Jack looked at the other houses. There was indeed a mouse-hole in each house.

"Um, thank you again for having us," Jack said.

"My pleasure. Good night!" Whitebeard disappeared into its hole again.

Chapter 752: Meeting the Village Chief

Grace, Jet, and Oswald went into the hut to rest. Jack didn't go to sleep immediately. Despite it being almost midnight, he still wanted to do his regular training before bed. It didn't sit right with him to skip a training session, not to mention the mana density here greatly improved his learning process. That's why he had asked Whitebeard if they were allowed outside the hut. He couldn't train inside without disturbing the others.

He cast his spells and trained his mana manipulation on the spells. He also cast spells to increase their proficiencies. Skills as well, especially the Spirit Weapon skill. Peniel mentioned that with each star, the spirit weapon would get more powerful.

Jack had used the skill every three hours when it was off cooldown. The spirit weapon complained every time there was no enemy, just like it did when it was first summoned, but Jack ignored it. He had tried communicating with it, but he learned that although this spirit weapon could talk, it only responded to simple commands. It was not an entity like Peniel who was capable of complex communication.

Once he trained for around one hour, Jack retired into the hut.

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"Rise and shine! Rise and shine!" Whitebeard's voice echoed throughout the hut accompanied by loud gong sounds. The talking rodent was carrying a miniature gong and was hitting it with passion. Everyone inside the hut was awake due to the noise.

"Dude! It is still dark outside!" Jack protested.

"Our custom here is to rise before the sun comes up, so we will be fully awake when it does. Come on! Give me that wake-up smile!"

"Damn, you are one energetic mouse," Jack said. He then rose with a grunt.

"Oh, you are real...," Grace said when she saw Whitebeard again. She probably slept with the hope that it was all just a dream.

"I will wait outside," Whitebeard said. "Don't make me wait long! I have talked with chief Meratis, she will be seeing you once you are ready."

"All right. Come on, everyone. Let's get ready," Jack said. He was wearing loose clothes when sleeping. With a flick of his mind, all his armors reequip instantly.

"Damn it! You outworlders are cheats," Oswald uttered. He was changing his clothes manually.

"Hey! Why do you just change your clothes here?" Grace protested. She immediately turned away.

"What? It's not like I can do it in an instant like you people," Oswald replied. He continued undressing without any shame.

"Let's wait for him outside," Jack said.

Grace was the first to rush out.

Jet came over to the naked native assassin and took a look. He then grinned. "Hehe, I win."

Oswald looked at Jet walking out the door with his smile. He asked Jack, "What the hell does he mean?"

"You don't wanna know," Jack replied.

After everyone was ready, Captain Whitebeard asked them to follow it. Now that the sun was about to come up, many of the villagers were out. Similar to the Daminos Square Garden, they saw seven main races in equal proportion here. In addition to that, there were also many animals. Not just common

animals, these animals mostly wore clothes like Whitebeard. Not only that, but they also saw these animals talking with one another.

"This is certainly... different," Jack said.

"Yeah, it's like we have entered a village full of animals from children's books," Jet remarked.

They walked slowly as they watched everything in fascination. Jack used his Inspect. All the ones he saw can be considered weak. Their level ranges from 10 to 20. They were mostly basic grades, with only a few elite grades. He had a problem accepting this place as the home to a divine faction equal to the Council of Virtus. Or perhaps this divine faction called Harmony Keepers lived in another part of the village?

"It's so peaceful here," Grace commented.

"Yeah. As I said, it looks like a place pull out from one of those tales in children's books," Jet said.

"It is ironic, don't you think?" Jack said. "A peaceful village in the middle of a forest of horror."

"Maybe that's why they have this peace? Protected by the forest, they are free from outsiders."

They were suddenly startled by a voice from above. "Whitebeard! These the guests you mentioned?" They looked up and saw a monkey in a shirt, dangling from the eave of the roof.

"Yes, Shortpaw," Whitebeard replied. Then to Jack and the others, it said, "This is Shortpaw, my pal."

"Sup, you all," The monkey extended its one hand for a handshake, with its other one still holding the eave.

"Sup," Jack said and shook the monkey's hand, feeling weird while doing it. The others followed his lead. Only Jet had a problem because the monkey dangling from the roof was too high for him. Shortpaw dropped down and shook his hand on the ground.

"Yo, what takes you so long!" They heard another voice. This time, it was a german shepherd in some sort of a uniform.

"Sorry, Sharpsnout. This is the first time our guests visit our village. I think it's a lot to take in for them," Whitebeard said to the dog.

'It certainly is!' Jack said in his mind.

"Hurry up, will you? Chief Meratis is already waiting," Sharpsnout said and dashed off.

"You heard him, let's pick up the pace, shall we?" Whitebeard said. "You can sightsee the village after meeting the chief. Well, considering if she lets you stay, of course."

"Why would she not let us stay?" Jet asked, but Whitebeard didn't answer.

They were heading towards the largest building in the village. It was visible from afar. It had a tall and sharp roof. Taller than all the other houses in this village. Jack guessed that should be the village hall. When they arrived, they saw Sharpsnout standing in pose outside this village hall.

Whitebeard half-covered his mouth and whispered, "Sharpsnout enjoys acting as a guard dog, just treat him like one."

"Greetings, loyal Sharpsnout. I come bringing guests from the outside world. They wish to meet our chief," Whitebeard said with a bow.

"You may all enter," Sharpsnout said, maintaining its pose. "But take care to show respect. Otherwise, you will have to answer to me."

The mutt was a level 18 basic animal. How would it make them answer? Jack wondered. But he still showed respect nonetheless. He gave the dog a slight bow following Whitebeard. The others did the same.

When they entered, a loud voice was heard, "Guests from the outside world have arrived!"

They saw the voice was coming from a rabbit in court attire beside a seemingly old woman. This woman must be the village chief, Meratis, that the animals had mentioned. Jack was expecting this woman to be one of the Harmony Keepers and possess a high level considering her high station in this village, but she was just a level 20 elite.

"That rabbit is Pete, the chief's herald," Whitebeard informed with a whisper.

A talking rabbit named Pete, how original, Jack thought.

Whitebeard came before the old woman and bowed, "Chief Meratis, I have brought the guests from the outside world."

"Guests of the outside world, approach!" Pete's loud voice was heard again.

Meratis who was beside the shouting rabbit cringed. The rabbit's voice was indeed a little too loud.

"Thank you, herald," Meratis said gently to the rabbit. "I wish to speak with these guests alone. Do you mind leaving us alone?"

"Of course, my chief," Pete said and hopped outside.

When Meratis saw Whitebeard still standing before her, she said to the mouse with a smile, "that includes you as well, my little captain."

"Oh, as you wish, my chief," It scurried towards the door. "Just call if you need anything."

Meratis chuckled. She then spoke to the guests, "Please sit."

There were four chairs already prepared for them, so Jack and the others sat on them.

"Three of you are outworlders," Meratis said.

"That will be us," Jack nodded and pointed to himself, Grace, and Jet.

"As you can see, we don't usually have outsiders," Meratis said. "The forest protects us from all outside threats and we also have no desire to involve ourselves with the outside world. I know it is not easy for you to pass through the forest and come here, I imagine you must have a purpose coming?"

"Yes, we would like to..."

Meratis lifted her hand to stop Jack's words. She said, "Before you tell me your desire. I must first see if you are qualified to remain in this village."

'What? Another trial? Isn't the forest trying enough already?' Jack lamented within.

"How do you determine if we are qualified?" Grace asked.

"I need to see if any of you carry wickedness within you," Meratis answered.

"Wickedness? What if we do carry it?" Jet asked.

"If you do, we will tear you apart and let you be the fertilizer to the forest outside. Or in your outworlders' case, send you back to your starting level."

Chapter 753: Request for Pet Armors

They were speechless hearing Meratis' words. Jack sent silent messages to Grace and Jet immediately, 'Wear your Amulet of Rebirth.'

'They are all weak. How are they going to tear us apart?' Jet replied.

'Don't underestimate them. I think they are hiding something. No way a divine faction is this weak.'

While messaging, Jack said to Meratis, "So, what do you need us to do to show you that we don't carry wickedness?"

"You don't need to do anything. Just sit tight," Meratis replied.

"Hm?" Jack was puzzled.

Meratis was quiet then. None of them were speaking. The atmosphere turned awkward. Grace and Jet had worn their Amulet of Rebirth. They could easily change their equipment with their minds, so their action was not conspicuous. Jack just felt bad for Oswald, perhaps this native shouldn't have followed them here.

After a long and weird moment of mutual staring, Meratis broke into a grin. "You all passed," She said.

"Huh?" Everyone was confused.

Meratis chuckled. "Those chairs you sat on can detect the darkness inside the person who sits on them. If your desires are too overwhelming that they turn you wicked, the chairs will react. Since it doesn't for so long, that means you are in control enough of those desires."

"Desires?"

"People who have strong wants aren't necessarily a good thing. These wants might propel them into improvements, but if you can't control these wants. They will instead become an obsession that pushes you to do whatever is necessary to achieve that obsession, including harming and sacrificing others. That is the root of wickedness."

"We don't have them?"

"I can sense strong desires from you all, especially you," Meratis pointed to Jack. "But you kept them under control. You exercise pressure strongly on yourself for those desires, but not at the expense of others."

'Uh... I hope you never hear the story about when I let my friends fight the Grim Sand Drake,' Jack thought within. But then again, he did it only because he knew they all wore Amulet of Rebirth. Otherwise, he would have retreated.

"What will this chair do if it detects the wickedness inside us?" Jet asked.

"Demon hands will appear from those chairs and rip you apart," Meratis answered.

"Um, can we stand now?" Jet asked, shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

Meratis chuckled. "Don't worry, if the chair hasn't acted by now, that means you have passed. The chair won't do anything anymore... probably."

Jet shifted again, eager to stand.

"Wait! Are you telling me this guy is not wicked?" Jack pointed to Oswald.

"Hey, man. What's your problem?" Oswald protested.

"He kills people for a living," Jack said.

"For a living. I've never done it out of my own desire," Oswald said.

"So, does that make it okay? What if someone pays me to kidnap and torture you? Am I not at fault?"

"There is no need to argue. These chairs don't decide if one is right or wrong. It simply searches within you if there is an imbalance between your desires and restrains," Meratis said. "Now, then. Tell me what you are here for."

"We heard that you have someone in this village who can craft pet armors for medium-sized pets," Jack said. "We would like to craft ones for our pets."

"Where do you hear this from?" Meratis asked.

"Guila," Jack answered.

Meratis seemed surprised to hear the name. A glint of sadness was seen in her eyes. "How is she doing?" Meratis asked.

"She is... lonely," Jack said, remembering the sadness in Guila's eyes when she mentioned this village. "Forgive my curiosity, but why was she exiled?"

Meratis was silent at first. After a few moments, she said, "Guila becomes too attached to a particular animal that is her friend. She also likes to wander outside with said animal. There is one time when they encountered a group of native adventurers. This group heard Guila's animal friend talking, so they attempted to capture it. Guila and her friend tried to flee, but her animal friend got wounded in the process. Guila lost herself and ended up killing the group."

"She is just defending herself and her friend, right? Why was she punished for that? I would have done the same. If this is considered wicked, then this chair should have torn me up already, isn't it?"

"It might not be considered wicked for you outsiders, but we who dwell in this village bear a higher creed. Unless this village is attacked, killing others even for self-defense is a violation. At best, she was only allowed to wound them or scare them away. She had killed because she lost herself in rage and desecrated the peace in her heart."

Jack decided to not judge their way. Every society had their custom. One thing confused him though. He remembered Guila was only a level 20 elite. Was this group of adventurers so weak that a level 20 Guila could slaughter them all? But he also remembered Peniel told him that natives usually only came out to the wilderness after passing level 30. Was this group a bunch of daredevil youngsters who decided to brave the wild when they were still under-leveled?

Meratis stood. "Come," she said and led the four outside. Jet was happy that he no longer have to sit on that trial chair.

Meratis led them to another part of the village. Whitebeard, Sharpsnout, and Pete walked beside them. Jack also caught the sight of Shortpaw following after them from the roof.

"It is tradition for those who have managed to pass through the Lost Forest for the first time to be bestowed a reward," Meratis spoke on the way. "The reward was the permission to stay inside this village for thirty days."

'Thirty days? I will be able to improve my mana manipulation greatly if I can stay that long,' Jack thought. He only stayed in Daminos Square Garden for six days and it already helped him a great deal with his improvement. But of course, a large portion of it was due to the ancient battleground. Still, he believed staying in this dense mana place for a month should bring similar improvement.

"Normally, our blacksmith will need you to fulfill some requirements before she crafts anything for an outsider," Meratis said. "But I can vouch for you so you don't need to go through troublesome requirement quest. You only need to pay the fee and get the materials for the pet armor. However, your stay will be reduced to ten days. Do you prefer this arrangement?"

"Will we be able to search for the materials within ten days?" Jack asked.

"Don't worry, the materials are inside this village. But whether you can get them or not, that's another question. If you can't get them in ten days, having thirty days won't make a difference."

Jack thought about the proposal. Here he thought he could have thirty days of mana training in this place.

"If we cross through the Lost Forest again to this village, how long are we allowed to stay?" Jack asked.

"We will ask you what business you need with us. If we deem it unimportant, we will politely escort you out," Meratis answered.

In other words, this would be the only chance we are allowed to stay for a long period. After giving the matter some thought, Jack said, "In that case, all right. We will take your offer. Please vouch for us."

Jack then turned to Jet, "Okay?"

"Okie Dokie," Jet said.

"Good," Meratis said. "We have arrived." They came to a large house in which half of its structure was an open workroom. The open workroom had only a roof and one back wall. A large furnace, large smelter, several anvils, and various blacksmith tools were inside that space. There were also some empty stalls. A dwarven woman was hammering an iron plate on the anvil. Jack inspected her and found out she was called Hedite, a level 20 elite.

"Hedite, I have customers for you," Meratis called out.

The dwarven woman named Hedite stopped her work. She looked over. "Outsiders...? Outworlders even. What do they want?"

"They want you to craft pet armor for them. I've agreed to them that you will do it. You will do it, won't you?"

Hedite grunted. "Show me your pets."

Jack summoned his Therras and Jet called out his Crimson-maned Lion.

Hedite whistled. "Not bad. And here I thought you are going to ask me to craft armor for some weak-ass pets. All right, since the chief had asked, I won't turn her down. The fee is one hundred gold coins for each pet. You will have to look for the materials I need."

"No problem," Jack said and took out a hundred gold coins from his bag. It's a good thing he had taken his share of the restaurant and bakery's profit before he journeyed here.

Hedite accepted Jack's coin.

"What about that other one?" Hedite asked, referring to Jet.

Jack turned and saw Jet who was showing an embarrassed smile. "Jack boy, you have some coins I can borrow?"

"You don't save enough coins?" Jack asked.

"I never thought it will be this expensive. It's almost the same price as a plot of land in the capital," Jet reasoned. "I only have forty gold coins here, if you can add the rest."

"Keep your coins. Here, one hundred gold coins for his pet as well," Jack said, giving the coins to Hedite.

"Thank you, Jack boy! I will pay you back!"

"Don't sweat it. You treat me a lot when I was little. It's my turn now."

Chapter 754: Materials for the Pet Armors

"All right. Leave your pets with me in the meantime," Hedite said. "I will need to take their measurements. Bring them to those stalls."

Jack and Jet gave instructions to their pets to enter the stalls. Once they did, rune diagrams activated within the stalls.

"That will hold them in place till I finish my work. You won't be able to summon them while they are here," Hedite informed. "Now, about the materials. You will need to find runic metals. These are specific metals needed to craft armor big enough for these pets."

"Where should we look for them?" Jack asked.

"They can only be found in specific places. Very limited specific places. But lucky for you, this village happened to be one of those limited specific places. You see that lake over there?"

Jack and Jet looked over to where Hedite was pointing. It was the lake that Jack had caught a glimpse of the night before. They happened to be much closer to it now. Jack could see that it was a very large lake with clear blue water. Several animals were grazing beside it and drinking the lake's water. Seeing the scenery, Jack couldn't deny this village was aptly named.

"Those runic metals you mentioned are inside the lake?" Jet asked.

"At the bottom of it," Hedite confirmed. "Now mind you. These runic metals are not your common materials. You need to mine it by yourself. When this runic metal is taken from its source, it will form a link with the one who mines it. With that link, the runic metals will maintain their power when it is crafted into that person's pet armor. This means you can't take a runic metal mined by another person. Such a metal will lose its power when used on another person's pet."

"Aw, heck. I was just about to ask you to go get the metals for me," Jet said to Jack. "I am not a good swimmer."

Jack rolled his eyes. He had already paid the coins, was this old dude expecting him to do all the work as well?

"Okay, so all we have to do is just head down the lake and mine these runic metals, right?" Jack asked. "How many do you need? Do we need any special tools for the mining process?"

"You only need to mine one runic metal," Hedite explained. "One person can only carry one. Mining another one will have you losing the link with the previous one, rendering the previous one useless. As for the tools, here. You need a special pickaxe to mine it."

Hedite gave them one green-colored pickaxe each. These pickaxes were larger than the normal ones.

"Will one be enough? Will it break upon failure during the mining process?" Jack asked.

"That pickaxe won't fail, but it does break after you completed the mining process. Take care not to stop halfway after you start using it though, or it will break as well."

"Well. It's an easy task then. We just dive into the lake. Look for the runic metal deposit. Use this no-fail pickaxe on it and come back. Sounds simple."

Hedite gave them a grin. She was seemingly amused by Jack's words. "Yes, it is that simple."

Jack felt like the dwarven blacksmith was mocking them. He then asked, "Are the runic metal deposits difficult to spot under the lake?"

"No, they are very eye-catching. They glowed a bright green," Hedite answered.

'Hm, then what's so difficult about getting this metal?' Jack thought. He felt like this woman was intentionally leaving some details out.

"Pay attention though, that there are different grades of runic metal. The higher the grade you can find, the better the armor that I craft," Hedite said.

"How do we determine which deposit had a better grade metal? Any visible difference between the low grade and the high grade?"

"The high-grade ones will have a brighter glow. Lower grades are dimmer."

'Still sounds simple,' Jack thought. "Any other things that we need to know before we dive into the lake?" He asked.

"Yeah, try to not die," Hedite replied.

'Damn, woman! If you know something, why don't you just tell us?' Jack complained in his mind.

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While Jack and Jet were talking with Hedite, Grace stayed outside with Oswald and Meratis.

"You are not here for a pet armor as well?" Meratis asked.

"I don't have one," Grace answered.

"Ah, I see. You are an Inquisitor. May I ask what is your purpose for coming here?"

"... I'm just accompanying them."

"Well, since you don't have any special request, you can stay your full thirty days here. Do you wish to spend your thirty days here?"

Jack had mentioned the high mana density in this village compared to the outside. Grace didn't feel any difference when she was at Daminos Square Garden. But now that she had started to dabble in mana sense, she could. There was a time chamber in Heavenly Citadel to increase her training time. But training for thirty days here would be much more effective compared to her using the time chamber daily for thirty days.

She pondered about the option. She was eager to get stronger, but this meant she couldn't accompany Jack since Jack would have to leave after ten days. After some thought, she said, "Yes. I will stay here for thirty days."

She wouldn't be able to level up for these thirty days since there was no monster to grind here, but she thought improving her mana sense ability, for now, was more important than leveling up. Additionally, her level of 49 was already ahead of the current average players' levels.

"I'm glad to hear that, miss. Don't worry, I will keep you company during your stay here," Grace heard a voice from her feet and saw Captain Whitebeard there. She almost uttered a yelp but stopped herself. She made an involuntary step away, though. Whitebeard seemed to not be aware or simply ignored Grace's repulsive reaction. It scurried closer again to Grace's feet. Grace tried her best not to think about the rat.

Jack and Jet came then.

"You are done with the arrangements?" Meratis asked.

"Yeah, we just need to get runic metals now, in that lake," Jack answered. "Is there anything dangerous down there?"

"Hedite didn't tell you?"

"No. She appears to enjoy letting us find out by ourselves," Jack said. "Are there monsters inside that lake?"

"No, no monsters."

"But there should be something, right? Are you going to tell us to find out by ourselves as well?"

Meratis chuckled. "Follow me."

The village chief led them towards the lake. They came by the lakeside. The nearby animals gave Meratis a short bow when she came by. Some even greeted her. Jack still felt weird seeing all these talking animals.

"What are we doing here?" Jack asked. They had been standing by the lakeside for a while. He was waiting for Meratis to start telling him about the danger under the lake, but she had been silent.

"Wait," Meratis said. "There! See that?"

They looked over to where Meratis was pointing at. They were confused at first about what she was indicating, but then they saw it. The water at the center of the lake was swirling. The swirling became greater that it turned into a whirlpool before transforming into a powerful maelstrom.

"At the center of this lake bed, there is a large sinkhole. Occasionally, powerful force burst out of this sinkhole, creating a strong vertical stream that creates that whirlpool. The force that creates that stream is unusual, if you are caught in that whirlpool, the energy will erode your life."

"Let me guess, that runic metals that we are supposed to get, they are inside this sinkhole," Jack said.

Meratis nodded.

"Great. I know that it's no way this is going to be easy," Jack said with a slightly mocking tone.

"Nothing ever is. Now that if you excuse me, I'll return to my duties. I pray for your success in getting the runic metals. You are also welcome to explore the village. Just don't create any disturbance, we don't take it lightly if you disturb the peace of our village. Also, don't wander out into the woods, you will enter the Lost Forest if you do. If that happens, you will have to find your way back here again. Please note, however, that the days you are permitted to stay here continues ticking even if you leave this village. So, I suggest you not leave the village."

Meratis then left with her entourage of animals, except for Captain Whitebeard, who stayed beside Grace and was still not getting tired of trying to converse with her. Grace was lamenting why this rat insisted to stay with her. She only gave the talking rat some simple responses, simply because she tried to not be rude by ignoring it.

"Okay, let's dive?" Jack asked Jet.

"I don't know, man. It's a while since I last swam," Jet said.

"Don't worry. We can breathe underwater in this world. So there is no need to worry about running out of air. You can practice swimming first if you want. Meratis said there is no monster in the lake, so you can take time re-acustoming yourself to swimming before we head for that sinkhole."

Chapter 755: Diving into the Abyss

"We can breathe underwater?" Jet asked.

"You have never tried going into the water all this time?" Jack asked back.

"Why the hell would I want to go into the water in an alien world when I don't know what is lurking under its surface?"

"Well, you will have to now if you want that pet armor for your sweet kitty."

"Are you looking down on my Crimson-manned Lion? You should know that it is the same grade as your pet. How about we decide whose pet is stronger by having them fight, eh?"

"What is the level of your Tame Pet and Master Tamer skills?" Jack asked.

"16 and 12," Jet answered.

"Hoho! Sure, let's have our pet fight. You do know that aside from the pet's inherent skill, a medium pet got another skill every ten levels of Tame Pet and Master Tamer, don't you? This means your lion should only have three skills at the moment. Not to mention, the highest the level of those two skills, the stronger the pet will be."

"What is the level of yours then?"

"Hahaha, max at 20. For both! Still want to fight?"

"Ugh, not talking to you anymore," Jet said.

Jet changed into common clothing before going into the water edge. Jack told him that he didn't need to. Jack had experienced swimming underwater with full armor. It didn't hinder his swimming at all. The armor's weight also didn't make him sink. Jack mentioned that this was probably a programmed mechanic so that they could fight monsters underwater.

Jet seemed to be having trouble understanding the concept. So, Jack brought him to a part of the lakeside that had a protruding ledge overlooking the lake water below. Jack asked him to change back into his usual armor, before kicking him off the ledge.

Jet was screaming profanities as he fell into the water below. Jack jumped into the water following him. Peniel retreated into her hidden dimension when Jack entered the water, she didn't want to get wet.

Under the water, Jack saw the old dwarf flailing his arms and legs in a panic.

Jack sent him a message since their voice was muffled underwater, 'What are you panicking for? It's not like you can drown.'

Jet stopped his frantic movement. "Hey, I really can breathe here," He tried saying, only to have water going into his mouth. He coughed a few times before sending Jack the message.

'You don't believe me when I tell you? Now, get accustomed to swimming. We will go to the center once you feel comfortable.'

Jack swam around while waiting. The lake had clear water. Many fishes and colorful corals decorated this underwater world of green-blue light. The morning sunlight that managed to pierce through the water gently shifted with the water movement. The sight here was nothing like the murky view inside the river when he escaped Death Associates' headquarters.

He wondered if Heavenly Citadel's lake was as beautiful as this lake? But some members had reported that there were monsters dwelling inside Heavenly Citadel's lakes. Some members had had the misfortunes of becoming their victims. So, not many dared to explore the lake.

As he marveled at the view below, a large shadow passed by. He was startled because he was too absorbed. Plus, he didn't sense any hostility. His weapons appeared in his hands ready for conflict, only to find out the shadow was a very large fish swimming lazily by. The size of this fish was as big as him, but the fish treated him as a fellow denizen of the water.

He stored his weapon. Meratis told them there was no monster under this lake. No sense for her to lie. This was a village of peace, so the lake should be peaceful as well. Additionally, his radar didn't show any red dot.

'Look at me fly, Jack boy!' Jack received Jet's message. He turned and look at the old dwarf. Jet was doing some whip kicks that propel his body before staying still and letting his body float forward.

'Ain't you enjoying it? You do know that we have a mission here, right? Are you good to go already? You can enjoy this diving all you like after we get those runic metals.'

'Sure, sure. Let's go. My problem with swimming or diving is always with breathing underwater. Now that it is taken out, I have no problem moving underwater.'

'All right, stay together. We should go that way,' Jack pointed.

The two swam in that direction. They were not sure how far this sinkhole was, so they continued forward while keeping close to the lake floor. Meratis said the sinkhole was very large, so it should be visible as long as they trace the lake floor.

Suddenly they saw a pillar of light shoot up in front of them. It suddenly appeared and churned the water around it. The agitated water then turned into a water tornado. The energy also radiated out, creating a powerful wave. It happened so abruptly that Jack and Jet didn't know how to react. The wave hit them and pushed them a distance away.

It was some time before they regained control. They looked at the pillar of vortex in the distance. The vortex lasted for a few minutes before it finally died down.

Jet sent a message. 'Are we seriously going over there? It already felt so powerful from so far away. What do you think will happen if we get caught up inside that?'

Jack replied, 'We have no choice. You want that pet armor, right? We should time the interval between when the vortex happens and see if it happens at a fixed time. If it is so, then we can time our approach and search the place within the interval time.'

Jack sank to the lake bed. He sat cross-legged there. One part of his mind was meditating and training mana manipulation, the mana density here didn't decrease underwater. Another part was counting. The other part was paying attention to where the water vortex had appeared, waiting for the next one to happen.

Jet felt it was a strange scene seeing someone meditating at the bottom of a lake. He would have taken a photo if there was a camera in this world. He spent his time swimming around. Enjoying his time under the water. This was an experience that was not available in the real world, diving without gear for an unlimited amount of time.

After waiting for some while, they saw the energy pillar again, followed by the water vortex. They could still feel the wave rolling onto them. But their current distance was where the wave had reached its weakest point, so the force was not enough to push them again.

'The interval is ten minutes, the vortex itself last two minutes,' Jack sent Jet a message.

'That is a short time. How long do you reckon for us to swim from here to where that vortex is?' Jet asked.

'Probably three to four minutes,' Jack estimated.

'That has cut down almost half the available time. Do you think we can search for these runic metals in the remaining time? Not to mention we have to leave before that vortex appears again.'

'We can only give it a try.'

'So, should we go? Give it a try?'

'No, let me check the timing another two more times. Make sure the interval is fixed.'

'All right,' Jet got back to his swimming. Jack returned to his meditation.

The vortex happened another two more times.

'So?' Jet asked.

'The timing is the same. There are no variations. It should be safe to assume the next one will be as well,' Jack replied.

'So?' Jet asked again.

'Let's go!' Jack uttered and kicked the lake floor, propelling himself forward. Jet swam after him.

'Pick up the pace. The faster we arrived there, the more time we have for searching,' Jack advised. He was doing the dolphin kick swimming, his two legs went up and down in a wave motion. Jet copied his style.

After swimming for some time, they finally saw what Meratis described as the sinkhole. It was a very large circular hole at the bottom of the lake. Like a giant cave but going vertically into the floor.

Jack had been keeping their time while they swam here. It was almost five minutes, longer than he had estimated.

'We don't have much time. Let's hurry. Hedite said the deposits give off a green glow, we should be able to easily spot them.' Jack sent a message.

They reached the edge of the hole. Without wasting any time, they swam into it. What they saw was total darkness. They couldn't see the end of this hole. It was like a doorway into the abyss.

'Jack boy... I don't see any green glow down there,' Jet said.

Jack had the Dragon Eye ability that allowed him to see better in the dark. He sent Jet a reply, '... Neither do I.'

'What should we do...?'

It took Jack a beat before he replied, 'We won't know if we don't try. Let's just head down!'

Jack dove into the abyss.

Jet took one glance at where they came from. He had the compulsion to just swim back. He then looked down at Jack who was getting farther. He scolded himself. If this youngster dared to go in, he should be ashamed to be scared.

He then dove down chasing after Jack.

Chapter 756: Fighting the Vortex

'How deep is this bloody hole? I still see no bloody green glow,' Jet complained. They had been swimming down for some time. They felt the strong pressure from underneath as they went down, which hindered their movements and slowed their swimming.

Jack cast his Illumination spell to help Jet see their surroundings. Jet's senses had improved after becoming a beastmaster, including his vision, but it was still nowhere as good as Jack's Dragon Eye.

'I think I see some glows. There seems to be some kind of black fog obscuring the water. They are still far down there, but we should make it,' Jack said.

They continued to dive down. A ring of light suddenly appeared on the tunnel wall at their elevation. Both Jack and Jet were startled by the appearance of this light. This ring of light soon died down. They looked around, expecting something to happen. But nothing did. Jack turned to Jet who shrugged. Jack then pointed down, indicating for them to resume swimming.

Not long after they resumed heading down, the vertical tunnel around them suddenly glowed. Jack saw innumerable rune diagrams along the tunnel. They were the ones producing the glow. They then felt extremely strong mana from under them.

'Shit, the energy that creates the vortex is coming!' Jet exclaimed.

'No way! It's only eight minutes,' Jack uttered, but he didn't dwell long on this unexpected situation. He looked around frantically. 'There!' He pointed.

Because of the glow, the wall of the tunnel became clearer. They saw some kind of an indentation on the wall nearby. They swam towards it. There was no time to think, they acted immediately on whatever option they found at this time.

They swam into the indentation and saw that there were several bar handles inside.

'Hold onto one of these!' Jack told Jet. The old dwarf didn't need prompting. He was already gripping the bar tightly.

The energy pillar that they saw before from the distance, appeared right outside where they were hiding. With how close they were, the light was blinding. It also felt blisteringly hot. Jack had a feeling if they were hit by this energy pillar, they would be instantly evaporated.

The energy dissipated and what came soon was as expected. The water started to swirl. So strong that it even sucked Jack and Jet who were hiding inside the wall.

'Hold tight!' Jack instructed. He slung one of his arms through the bar and used his other hand to grip his elbow, locking himself to the bar. Jet followed.

The sucking force became so strong that their legs were forcefully lifted. Their bodies were now hanging horizontally with their legs dangling outside the wall indentation.

Jack was in a better situation because of his high strength stat. Jet seemed to be truly struggling. His arm started to slip.

'Use your Beast Form and the Strength of the Wild!' Jack instructed.

Jet followed the advice. He activated the two skills. His attributes increased, allowing him to be able to resist the vortex's force and kept his grip on the bar handle.

After a long two minutes, the vortex receded. Jet was still agitated, so he was still gripping the bar tightly. Jack let go and peek out.

'I think it should be safe now. Let's continue,' Jack said.

'Are you sure?' Jet asked nervously.

'Hurry! We only have ten minutes before the next vortex... Or eight... I don't know! We have to move now!'

Jet understood that staying like this was not a solution, it was just that this handle gave him a safe feeling. He reluctantly let go and followed after Jack who had resumed diving.

The two subconsciously stayed next to the tunnel wall. The energy pillar just now was large but it didn't cover the entire space of the tunnel, so the area near the tunnel wall was not touched by the energy pillar.

As they continued to descend, Jet could also see the green glows now. 'I see it. It's not far anymore, we should be able to get it long before the next vortex.'

As soon as he sent the message, the rune diagram around the tunnel wall started shining again.

'What the f*ck! It is only one minute now! This is seriously cheating!' Jack complained.

'What should we do? Should we go back up there to that hole above?' Jet asked.

'We won't make it. Look, over there!' Jack pointed. There was another hole in the wall. However, this hole was directly opposite the wall where they were.

'Shit! Let's go. Stay near the wall!' Jack said and started swimming along the wall to get to that hole. They could have swum across to save time, but if they were caught in the middle when the energy pillar shot out, they were toast. So, they stayed close to the wall, but this increased the time they needed to get to that hole.

When they were halfway, the energy pillar emerged. It zoomed past right next to them. They felt its intensity greater this time.

'Go! Go! Go!' After the pillar weakened, Jack kicked at the wall and propel himself directly into the hole. They had to get there before the vortex formed. Jet followed his lead.

The water started to agitate around them. Jack was just about to reach inside the hole when he heard Jet's message, 'I can't make it!'

Jack looked back and saw the water start swirling. Jet in his form was struggling to resist the water, but it was soon apparent that he was losing. Not only that, small damage numbers started to appear above him. Apparently, being inside the vortex would cause damage.

'F*ck!' Jack was about to touch the bar handle inside the hole, but he flipped back and kicked the wall, shooting himself towards Jet.

He arrived and grabbed Jet. All his movement skills required foothold, which he had none at the moment. But he had a tool that gave him movement skills while in the air. He took out the Wind Jet scroll.

However, after he grabbed Jet, the vortex had already become stronger. They were swept away. When he activated the Wind Jet spell in the scroll, it propelled them towards the hole on the wall. Yet, the force of the vortex's pull counteracted the Wind Jet's power. The spell only pushed them half from the intended distance before it expired.

'Shit!' Jack cursed within. The vortex reached its full power and they were completely swept by its current. They were swirling inside the vortex, powerless as they were brought upward while their HPs kept on going down.

'We won't last two minutes like this!' Jet sent Jack a message.

Jack actually could survive, because his HP was way higher than normal, but he agreed that Jet won't.

In this predicament, he turned to Peniel, 'Peniel, is flying spell working underwater?'

'I can't tell, but I think it should,' Peniel replied.

Jack gave the matter a brief thought. He remembered his Float spell was working when he was resisting the pull from the sand whirlpool during the tournament. Water was less dense than sand, no sense that the same principle didn't work.

So he activated his Supreme Dragon Form. Two large wings sprouted from his back. Even after transforming, he still had problems controlling his movements, because he kept getting tossed within the vortex. So, he activated Gold Dragon Armor as well. Similar to the time when he resisted Broidrireg's sonic winds, this golden state allowed him to be more steady inside the vortex.

He flapped his dragon wings and willed himself in a direction. After an effort, he finally tore out of the vortex edge with Jet still in his clutch.

He continued distancing themselves from the ongoing vortex. He found out that the Vortex had carried them out of the sinkhole, they were back in the lake again. Jack stopped after a safe distance. Jet's HP was less than a quarter already when they escaped the vortex, it was slowly refilling now due to his beast form's body recovery.

The two looked silently at the vortex which was now slowly dissipating. The water was soon back to its calm state.

'Damn it! How are we going to get to that runic metal deposits like this?' Jet complained.

If Jack used brute force, he might be able to get to the first green glows they had seen, which should be the runic metal deposits. However, Jet won't make it. Additionally, Jack didn't think the mechanic in this lake was made to be solved using brute force. There should be a way to get down there for normal players.

'Let's observe further first,' Jack said. He sank to the lake floor and again meditated. Seeing that he had nothing to do, Jet went back to enjoying his leisurely swim.

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Jack continued to observe while training mana manipulation as well as training his skills and spells' proficiency. It had been hours since they escaped the vortex. Jet was already getting bored of swimming around. He thought about going back up to the surface but he felt like an a*shole if he left Jack here. After what Jack had done to save him not long ago, the least he could do was keep him company.

'That's strange,' Jack sent a message, 'I've been monitoring the interval. All these hours, their intervals are always ten minutes. Why did it change when we go down there?'

'It's probably because we go down there?' Jet offered his opinion. 'Remember the glowing ring when we are in the tunnel?'

Jack thought about it. That's right. The energy pillar appeared not long after that ring of light. Perhaps the interval was shortened after the tunnel detected intruders.

Chapter 757: Divine Visi

After some pondering, Jack said, 'I will go scout the tunnel out. You can go back to the surface if you want. I will call you when I'm ready to go again.'

'How are you going to scout it out?' Jet asked, before soon sending another follow-up. 'Oh, right. Your corporeal state.'

Jack nodded.

'Okay, call me when you need me, Jack boy,' Jet said and swam back to shore.

After Jet left, Jack decided to wait for the next energy pillar one more time, to make sure again that the interval truly was just ten minutes when no one entered the sinkhole. He practiced mana manipulation while using skills and spells to kill time. He received notification that his Mana Bullet had increased to 8 stars. He was rather surprised by the notification, he understood that the proficiencies needed for this spell were still quite a lot.

He decided to test it out. He opened his spell list, checked on a spell's required proficiency, and then cast that particular spell.

'Hey! The spell I cast just now is counted as being cast five times,' Jack said to Peniel.

Peniel also paid attention after Jack received the notification. 'I seemed that this village gives additional benefit other than the high mana density.'

'This is the real reward for getting past the Lost Forest,' Jack said. 'The reward of staying inside this village for thirty days won't be enticing except for martial artists who understand mana sense and mana manipulation. Hence, it will be weird if this reward is given to a player who cannot sense mana. There is no avenue to level up here, no one will want to stay for three days here, much less thirty days. But after seeing the acquired proficiency, that reward makes more sense. This place was much better than Commander Quintus' training ground.'

The energy pillar shot up in the distance, followed by the underwater twister.

'It is exactly ten minutes. No change,' Jack thought. 'All right, first thing first. We can get back to proficiency training later.'

He sent a message informing Grace and Jet of the benefit of practicing skills and spells here. After that, he closed his eyes and sent his consciousness out. This lake was safe. So, he didn't worry about the body he left behind. He floated forward towards where the sinkhole was.

After arriving, he descended into it. He was using his mana sense to see his surroundings during his corporeal state, not his eyes. So, his Dragon Eye ability wasn't in effect. He couldn't see far ahead. Yet, his sensory of the immediate surroundings were enhanced.

'This was where the ring of light appeared before,' Jack thought. There was a ring-shaped indentation, the surface in this indentation was smooth, so it was a deliberate creation. Jet was right, this must be the mark where this tunnel started considering someone as intruding.

He floated down and found the hole in the wall where he and Jet had hidden from the vortex.

He continued to descend and found the second hole which he almost reached before Jet was trapped by the vortex.

'The distance between this second hole and the first hole is almost the same distance between the first hole and the ring indentation,' Jack thought.

So, he went down further. He passed by what he sensed as energy deposits. Those must be the runic metal deposits that they had seen before they got sucked by the vortex. He only gave these deposits brief attention before continuing down.

After descending a certain distance, he found what he had expected, a third hole in the wall.

'I see... I think I understand the mechanic now,' Jack thought.

These holes were put here as a shelter from the water vortex. Once the vortex died down, one could proceed down and hid in the next hole before the vortex hit again. The positionings, however, required about one minute of swimming, which was the interval of when the vortex appeared after they crossed the ring up there. They would have to either swim truly fast or memorize the positionings of the holes beforehand so they knew where to head to without wasting any time.'

It's a good thing then that he could do this scouting. He memorized the positions of these shelter holes. He then went deeper. He felt energy deposits that were even denser than the ones up there before the third holes.

'As expected, the deeper one goes, the better the runic metal deposits are,' Jack thought. Hedite had informed them that the quality of the pet armor would depend on the quality of the runic metal they acquired. this meant the deeper they got the runic metal, the better their pet armor would be. So, Jack continued downward.

The setup was the same, every interval, there was a hole with the bar handles within. The deeper one went, the stronger the energy emitted by the runic metal deposits.

Jack reached the sixth hole and then he couldn't go any further. It's the limit of how far his corporeal state could leave his body.

'That's okay. With what I have seen, it should be safe to assume that this setup is the same down there,' Jack thought. Additionally, the mana he felt from the deposits before the sixth hole was already very dense. He assumed the runic metals contained inside should be at least the super rare grade already.

With this discovery, he returned to his body. While he almost arrived at his body, he was startled to find someone standing right next to him on the lake bed. Peniel who hated to be wet was out in the water beside this person.

He was dazed for a second before re-entering his body. He opened his eyes, turned to this person, and made a greeting gesture. The person smiled and waved her hand. The water around them parted. A bubble of air was created around them. The water hung at the edge of this bubble as if there was a glass wall there.

Now that he was back in his body, he observed his radar. The person beside him was not appearing on his radar, the same as Broidrireg. The last time when he met this person, he didn't pay attention to his

radar because everything was too hectic. With this discovery, he surmised that his radar couldn't detect eternal and divine beings.

Now that he could talk again, Jack greeted, "Goddess Serenity! It's a surprise to find you here."

"I should be the one to say that," the Goddess replied. "And please drop the Goddess part, Serenity alone will be fine. When I sensed the mark that I gave you is here in the village of my worshippers, I can't help but come to check."

The mark? Jack thought back to the creator mark that Broidrireg mentioned. Was it the mark that Goddess Serenity had given him?

"I come here to get a pet armor for my medium-size pet," Jack said.

"I know. Peniel had filled me in when you are... out. Was that what you do? It is very peculiar to me. Is that some kind of special ability of an outworlder?"

"Um, you can say that," Jack replied.

"Still, he is the only outworlder who can do that," Peniel informed.

"I think that chick from the Cipher Flight can as well," Jack said. "My gramps said she did what I did when he was watching the final team match."

"Well, you outworlders are indeed fascinating," Serenity remarked. "Now, how is your progress to get the runic metal? Does this special ability of yours give you a breakthrough?"

"I think it does. I think I know how to get them already," Jack said. "But of course, if Lady Serenity is willing to help get the runic metal and save me the trouble. I won't mind." Although Jack had dropped the Goddess part as requested, he didn't feel right to just address this divine being by her name alone.

Serenity chuckled at Jack's words, while Peniel rolled her eyes. "You should know us divine beings are prohibited from interfering with worldly matters. You will have to solve this predicament yourselves."

"Can't blame me for trying," Jack shrugged. "So, is there anything particular thing that you need from me or you just come to say hi? Not that there is anything wrong with you coming just to say hi. I'm glad about it. You should do it more often."

Peniel again rolled her eyes. This guy was getting a bit too comfortable with the Goddess.

"I do have a purpose for meeting you," Serenity said. "Remember the last time we met when I said that Hope's followers and mine will be paying more attention to Fear's cult and the outworlders who are associating with them? After getting the reports, I do think that they warrant a worry. They are especially active in Liguritutum. However, Hope and my other brother and sister still didn't think that we should interfere unless eternal or divine grade beings from Fear's cult were involved."

"You don't think that way?" Jack asked.

"Unfortunately, I'm the only one who thinks that way."

"It is ironic that a Goddess who embodies peace is the one who thinks to act first."

Serenity chuckled at the remark. "It is because I value peace that I can see that if we don't act now, this little war in Liguritutum will spread out to the entire realm."

"So, will you be sending your force to aid the Liguritutum's royal army?" Jack asked.

"I can't. My followers have a creed that makes them passive in terms of conflict. To give them a command to involve themselves in violent acts is to betray their trust. I can't bring myself to do that."

Jack understood the Goddess' words. He had learned of this village's principles after hearing how they dealt with Guila. "So, how do you propose to help with the situation?"

"Although I can't have my followers aid in manpower, I can have them provide support," Serenity said. "Do you have trustable outworlder contacts who are on the side of Liguritutum's rightful ruler?"

"I have," Jack nodded.

"Contact them, please. And give them this whistle. Ask them to come monthly to any entrance of the Lost Forest and blow this whistle. My followers will then come to them and give them a supply of five thousand bottles of Grace of Tranquility potion."

Chapter 758: Divine's Aid

"Grace of Tranquility Potion? Is it good?" Jack asked.

Peniel smacked Jack's head. "How can something that is offered by Goddess Serenity to be anything mediocre?" She scolded.

"Uh, I'm not doubting it. I'm just curious about the effect," Jack said.

"If you are curious. Here, Let me give you ten bottles," Serenity said. Ten bottles materialized and floated before Jack.

Jack wasn't going to reject gifts from the Goddess. He took the ten bottles and inspected them.

*

Grace of Tranquility Potion (super rare consumable)

Effect on NPCs: Fully heal HP & stamina/mana. Cure all afflictions. Increase attributes and defenses by 100%. Grant HP regeneration of 100 HP/second. Immune to all mental status effects. Last 12 hours.

Effect on players: Fully heal HP & stamina/mana. Cure all afflictions. Increase attributes and defenses by 50%. Grant HP regeneration of 50 HP/second. Immune to all mental status effects. Last: 20 minutes.

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"A super rare grade consumables!" Jack uttered. It had different effects between being used on natives and players. But rather than calling them different effects, it's more appropriate to say that this potion was much more effective if used on natives. The buffs on natives were double and it also lasted a whole lot longer than when used on players.

"Five thousand... If the Liguritutum's native top combatants use these potions, they might turn the tide," Jack said.

"I hope so. Since I can't interfere directly, this is the best I can do," Serenity said. "Even with this help, I'm pretty certain I will get criticized by Hope and the others."

"Well, like the advice from many classic cheesy romance movies from where I come from, you should follow your heart. Don't be too bothered about what others thought of you," Jack said.

"Did you just advise a Goddess?" Serenity gave Jack a raised eyebrow.

"Did I? I must not be thinking straight then," Jack laughed.

Peniel was speechless with the guy. He truly didn't put any hierarchy in his mind.

Serenity didn't mind Jack's attitude at all. She gave him a warm smile. Her hand waved and another thing appeared. It's a flute. "This is one other thing I want you to give to the outworlder who fights at the Liguritutum's side. Or if you are planning to do that yourself, you are welcome to keep it. I trust you the most anyway."

Jack felt flattered by the statement. He accepted the flute and inspected it.

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Pipe of Monster Control (Legendary Artifact)

Takes control of monsters of special elite grades and below within a five thousand meters radius.

Maximum of monsters that can be controlled: 1,000 (will choose the strongest monsters among the available ones)

Duration: 1 day

Cooldown: 5 days

Special Restriction: Can only be used as Goddess Serenity intended

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"Le-Legendary...!" Jack almost dropped the flute. One thousand special elite monsters. This would immediately add one battalion to Liguritutum's fighting force for one day. They don't even need to worry about this battalion not surviving, they could send these monsters as the tip of the spear.

"Please take note, though, I place a restriction on that artifact," Serenity reminded. "If it is used for any other purpose other than helping the Liguritutum during their struggle, the artifact won't work. I will not only be criticized if the other Gods and Goddesses find out I give such an item without this restriction."

"Thank you, Lady Serenity!" Jack uttered. "I represent the Liguritutum country and all the freedom-valuing outworlders to thank Your Grace for these aids."

Jack stored the legendary flute.

"Okay, that's all I want to convey. I will leave now. Stay out of danger," Serenity said.

"I'm afraid that will be difficult," Peniel said.

Jack only showed a grin for a response.

"Well, in that case, try your best to keep the peace in your heart," Serenity said.

"That I can do," Jack replied.

Serenity's figure slowly dissipated. When she vanished completely, the air bubble holding the water crumbled.

"What the—" Jack was taken aback as the lake water suddenly battered him and overran the place he was standing at. Peniel had instantly retreated into her hidden dimension before the water hit.

Being submerged underwater again, he couldn't utter any curse words. He thought about the matter that had just happened and then sent a message to Wilted Tree.

Wilted replied soon. "What is it? You know long-range communication is expensive, right? Unless you are near Liguritutum, please don't contact me if it is not important."

"So cold. I contact you because I have an important matter. Something that can aid your cause in keeping Master's force from beating Liguritutum's legal ruler."

"Are you talking about Council of Virtus' special squad? They have arrived more than a month already. Their aid allows us to hold the tide but it was only a stalemate at the moment. But at least they lift the pressure off Syndrillis. She is now back to healing herself. Once she gets back to full power, we should be able to gain the upper hand."

"You might not need to wait that long," Jack then narrated to Wilted what had transpired just now and the support that Goddess Serenity provided them.

"Goddess Serenity? You are in the Village of Peace? You successfully passed through the Lost Forest?" Wilted was lost for words. Any of the achievements would have made her speechless, much less all of them together.

"Considering you managed to get to this village just one month after the world changed, I can't see what I did as anything impressive. Why did you come here so early anyway? Is it to get the proficiency bonus?"

"So, you know about that as well? Yes, I am there for utilizing the thirty days of proficiency boost."

"But you should only have a few skills then. What's the point of maxing out the stars of those basic or standard skills?"

"What are you talking about? The ones I aim for are the auxiliary skills, specifically the Diplomacy skill. I need that skill to get through to the royal ruler of Liguritutum. That's how I involve myself in their politics and prevent Master from completely getting the upper hand in conquering this country."

'This place affected the proficiency for Auxiliary skills as well?' Jack thought in surprise. Just now, one of his auxiliary skills, Influence, had increased to Intermediate Expert when he was talking to Goddess Serenity. He credited the increase to he had somehow befriended a divine being. That might have been true, but now he knew this place's proficiency bonus also played a part.

"So, who are you going to send here? I will only be here for ten days," Jack said.

"So short? I thought you have only arrived there? Didn't they let you stay for thirty days? I will go there myself. I can't hand such important items to anyone else. I should be able to arrive in ten days. I will enter directly into the Village of Peace. They might not let me stay, but they should allow me enough time to just take those items from you."

"Okay. In the case that you take longer to arrive, I will give these items to another player named Grace. She is staying here for thirty days," Jack replied and looked into the Chris Memory Stone inside his bag. He could pass this item along when Wilted came. "Oh, by the way, how do you know how to travel into this Village of Peace with a hundred percent certainty?"

"By following the white rats of course. Didn't you use the same method?" Wilted asked.

'White rats?' He then remembered there were indeed different color rats when passing through the nodes. Those white rats must be what Captain Whitebeard referred to as its scouts.

Wilted sent another message, "All right. See you then. Oh, right. Since you are there, try diving into the lake. There should be two more treasure chests lying somewhere inside that lake. There were originally three, but I have taken one of them. I cannot bring too many lockpicks with me at the time."

Jack was astonished to hear the tips. Should he tell her that he was currently trading messages with her from under the lake? He looked around. Nothing that looked like a treasure chest was seen. But the lake was large, they were probably on the other sides. He thanked her for the info.

After ending his messages with Wilted, he sent a message to Jeanny, informing her about this village and the Lost Forest as well as the village's benefits and the certain way to enter. He told her to only informed trusted core members.

Next, he sent a message to Jet, telling him that he had found a way to descend. However, Jet sent a reply, "Jack boy, do you want us to go down there now? It's already night, man."

"It is?" Jack looked up. He was underwater and the lake bed here was pretty deep so not much sunlight reach there. Hence, he wasn't aware of the time. Now that he looked up, there was indeed no more light from above.

'I have spent so much time here?' He thought. He decided to just put the descent on hold to tomorrow. He would also look for the two treasure chests tomorrow. The lake was rather large, he would ask for Jet and Grace to help in locating those chests.

After coming out of the lake, most of the animals were gone already except for some nocturnal ones. Those animals just sent him a curious glance. Jack couldn't believe he spent the entire day under the lake. He headed back towards the hut where they were staying. Most of the village was quiet. The villagers here didn't seem to have much activity once the sun went down.

Arriving in the hut, Jack saw Grace and Jet were busy chatting with Captain Whitebeard. The rat's monkey friend, Shortpaw, was also there.

"I see you have cured your aversion to our little furry friend," Jack said to Grace.

"He is not bad once you get to know him," Grace said.

"Also, it seems that this place not only boosts the proficiencies of combat skills but also auxiliary skills," Jet added. "Both our diplomacy skill has upgraded after talking with the villagers here today."

Chapter 759: Two Treasure Chests

Jack confirmed to the two that it was indeed true, that they should not waste their time in this village. To hammer in his point, he also joined in the conversation with the two animals while unleashing his combat skills and spells one after another.

Grace and Jet were impressed by Jack's ability to carry out a decent conversation while doing other things. They were similarly impressed with his expansive arrays of skills and spells.

Captain Whitebeard and Shortpaw were more than happy to entertain their talks.

Jack informed Grace and Jet about the treasure chests in the lake. The two agreed to help him search the lake tomorrow. Jack told Jet that they would first look for the chests in the morning before attempting the descent into the sinkhole for the runic metals. Jack laid out everything he had found during his corporeal state scouting and his plan on how they should descend.

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The next morning, the three entered the lake. Meratis and Oswald simply observed them from the lakeside. The natives here were either oblivious of the treasure chests' existence or simply paid them no heed.

The lake was rather big. Jack and the others agreed beforehand to divide the lake into three sections, not including the central part where the vortex regularly sent out strong waves. Each of them separated and headed to these three sections to look around.

It was Grace who spotted the first chest. She sent a message informing the others of the coordinates. Jack and Jet came soon after.

"Gold treasure chest!" Both Jack and Jet were amazed after seeing the color of the treasure chest.

Jack told the two about his luck stat and runestone of luck. If he was the one opening the chest, the probability of getting good items was much higher. But he asked them if they wanted to improve their lockpicking grade then this was also the best chance to do it. Both their lockpicking grades are rather low so it was unlikely that they could open the chest.

Yet, Peniel informed them although it was unlikely, it was not impossible. In the case that this fluke accident happened and they opened the chest, then it was not reversible. So, they decided to just let Jack work on the chest.

They didn't try to move the chest out of the lake. By now, they had encountered several treasure chests in the wilderness. Sometimes, a treasure chest would even spawn randomly on the field. Though these treasure chests were mostly bronze grade, the same fact about them was that they were immovable.

As usual, Jack used his Enduring Lockpick first. After that, he used the normal lockpicks, which he had stocked a great number of. While Jack worked on the chest, Grace and Jet went and looked for the second chest. After finding it and marking its location, they came back to Jack who was still working on

the first chest. They then spent their time swimming and practicing their available skills while waiting for Jack.

Jack spent almost three hours working on the chest before it finally opened, all the time using his Runestone of Probability to increase the success chance. He also activated his Runestone of Luck when he heard the successful click. Blinding light spread underwater, blanketing everything around them. Jack thought the visual effect was even more exaggerated underwater. While for Grace and Jet, this was the first time they saw a gold treasure chest being opened, so they were notably dazzled.

Since the chest was opened underwater, its content floated out of the chest. There were a lot of goods. Jack took all the mana cores. They had agreed that the mana cores from these chests would all be donated to the guild. While for coins, Jack gave them all to Grace and Jet to be divided in two. He had no shortage of coins.

Aside from the coins and cores, there were seven armors; three uncommons, two rares, and two super rares. One super rare weapon, a mace. This mace was unanimously given to Grace. Six materials and ingredients, two of which were unique grades. These were also agreed to be donated to the guild. Two gemstones; one rare amber and one super-rare amethyst. Jack asked for the amethyst and he let Grace and Jet roll for the amber, he had no runestone of the earth element. The two didn't object to letting Jack take the super rare amethyst.

The last item was a crystal. After inspecting the crystal, they found it to be a unique-grade summoning crystal that could summon a level 70 Mythical-grade Water Serpent. However, this crystal was usable only during a guild conflict. So, they did not need to discuss who got this crystal, it was donated to the guild.

"No one would dare to mess with our guild if they know we have this thing," Jack commented in his party chat.

As for the equipment, they were divided based on their types. Grace took the heavy armors, Jack the medium armors, while Jet the light armors, followed after their classes. The cloth armor they rolled to decide.

Finished with the loots, they had over to the second chest. It was also a gold treasure chest. These chests should be some kind of secret reward for those who came to this village first. Wilted was first. Unfortunately, she only had enough lockpicks for one chest at the time, so these two others became their boons instead.

They left Jack to work on the lockpicking again. This time it took a shorter time, around two hours. Thanks to this village's boost, after the successful lockpicking, Jack's two auxiliary skills had upgraded. Both his Lockpicking skill and Runecraft skill were now Intermediate Expert.

After the dramatic light show, there were similarly many items floating out of this second treasure chest.

The coins and mana cores followed the previous treatment. Eight armors this time, no weapon. The highest grade was super rare. They dealt with this equipment following previous arrangements as well. Materials and ingredients went directly to the guild. There were three gemstones; one rare sapphire, one super rare emerald, and one unique diamond.

The diamond was the most valuable since it could be used with any element. Jack asked to roll, but Grace and Jet agreed that Jack should have it. In their opinion, Jack was the one who knew about the chest and also the ability to open it. If Jack wanted, he could have monopolized everything without letting the two of them know. They were already happy to get some spoils from these treasure chests. Hearing them say it that way, Jack wasn't courteous anymore. He took the unique diamond and let them roll for the other two.

Two other items from this treasure chest were the most special. Their values were not less than the unique-grade summoning crystal from the first chest. One of these two was a runestone, it was called Runestone of Detection. Its beginning grade was a rare grade. Peniel informed them that after fusing with this runestone, one could summon it to detect things within a radius of one hundred meters.

Jack asked Peniel what kind of things. She said living things like monsters, natives, or outworlders, and also valuable items, including the invisible ones. Jack said then it was almost similar to his Godeye's radar. Except his radar didn't detect items unless those items were nearby and within his field of view.

Grace remarked that if they had this runestone before, it would be much easier to find these two treasure chests.

After giving the matter some thought, Jack offered the runestone to Grace. Grace felt hesitant to receive it at first. Jack explained that this runestone was less useful for him. He already had a monocle with a similar function, while Jet's mana sense was already advanced. So, Grace was the one who needed this detection ability more. Jet supported the decision.

After seeing that the two didn't mind, Grace accepted the offer.

The last item from the second treasure chest was a unique-grade seed. This was even a higher grade seed compared to the super rare Vampiric Seed Jack had gotten from Aubelard. His eyes were visibly glinting seeing the seed.

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Organic Seed (Unique consumable)

Evolve a skill

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Grace and Jet noticed Jack's glint. They looked at each other and silently agreed. The two then extended their hands and pushed the seed to Jack.

Jack turned to the two with a surprised look. The two nodded at him. Since it was so, he accepted their generosity. He took the seed.

'What can this seed do?' Jack asked Peniel.

'Well, the most likely answer I can think of is that it turns your skill alive.'

'Alive?'

'This is one of the seeds that have the most uncertain effects. You will have to use it to find out.'

'Hm... What if I use it on a skill that is already alive? Like for example, my tame pet skill?'

'You can't,' Peniel said.

'Why?' Jack asked.

'You can't use a seed to evolve a skill that is linked to another thing. For Examples, Tame Pet, Master Tamer, Spirit Weapon, and Magic Weapon. Those skills already change based on what you linked them with. Like Therras for your Tame Pet and Storm Breaker for your Spirit Weapon. A seed won't affect that kind of skills.'

'I see.'

'So, what are you going to use that seed on?' Peniel asked.

'Let's put it on hold first. It's time to get those runic metals,' Jack said and stored the Organic Seed.

Chapter 760: Descending the Tunnel

Same as yesterday, they waited for the next energy pillar to appear. After the vortex following it died down, they swam towards the sinkhole.

Grace followed the two until the edge of the sinkhole. Jack warned her not to follow them in or else she would get caught up in the vortex. She promised that she would leave once they went down. Jack and Jet descended the sinkhole. Grace looked down from the edge as the two went deeper into the dark abyss. Jack cast Illumination again to light up the surroundings. Grace saw the two go in deeper and deeper as the light from Jack's illumination spell was slowly swallowed by the darkness below. Her eyes stayed there for a while longer before she turned back and swam away.

Jack and Jet proceeded to descend. When they reached the ring indentation, Jack gave Jet a sign. This was where the interval of the energy pillar would shorten. They would have only one minute once they passed this line.

Jack had given him one bottle of Grace of Tranquility Potion. Jack asked him to drink it now. When the vortex hit yesterday, Jack had no trouble holding on to the bar handle while Jet almost lost his grip. This potion should increase his overall attributes and help him hold on without the need to use his beast form.

Jet drank the potion. He felt stronger at once. He gave an okay sign to Jack. The two then descended at high speed. Every second mattered now.

Jack already knew where to head so they arrived at the hole in the wall before the energy pillar emerged. The two of them secured their grips on the bar handles and waited. The energy pillar came. The vortex followed soon. The two felt themselves getting pulled by the strong sucking force of the vortex.

Jack paid attention to Jet. He seemed struggling but he managed to hold on. The potion helped.

After the vortex dissipated, the two proceeded down. Jack took the lead, he had memorized the next hole's position. After hiding from the second vortex, they continued down again. After the second hole,

they passed a few spots that were exuding a dim green glow. These were the deposits that they had seen the first time they descended this tunnel. They were now in reach but Jack and Jet ignored them. These should contain the lowest grade of runic metals. Their target was the better grades down below.

'Do you feel the water getting harder to swim through? Or it's just my feeling?' Jet sent Jack a message.

'Should be just your feeling,' Jack replied.

They reached the third hole. The energy pillar shot out as they were securing their grips. They were again getting pulled by the vortex.

While Jack was resisting the pull, he received an urgent message from Jet. 'Jack boy, help me!'

Jack turned and saw the elder dwarf almost losing his grip. Jack hurriedly released one hand and grab Jet's body. Steadying and keeping him from getting sucked by the vortex.

'What's wrong? The potion should last twenty minutes,' Jack asked.

'The buff is still on. The problem is the vortex, it is stronger than up there!' Jet informed.

'It is?' Jack couldn't tell. Probably because the vortex was not strong enough to cause him discomfort. But he believed Jet wasn't joking. This meant that the vortex was getting stronger as they descended.

Should have expected this, Jack thought. If not, then anyone who had known this tunnel setup would be able to get the highest grade of runic metals down there as easily as the lowest grade up here. This meant that with Jet's attributes, he would soon reach his limit.

'In the next hole, use your form,' Jack advised.

'Okay,' Jet replied.

'What is your Beast Form level?' Jack asked again.

'Fifteen,' Jet answered.

'Do you have five free skill points available?'

Jet nodded. 'I have some stocked for use on level 50 skill.'

'Use five to max your beast form skill. You will need all ten minutes of its duration.'

Jet followed the instruction. He leveled up the skill while waiting for the vortex to end.

They descended again once the vortex stopped. As they swam downward, Jack again received Jet's urgent message, 'It's not just my feeling. It is truly getting more difficult to swim.'

Jack turned back and saw Jet was a few meters behind. Truthfully, he also felt his body getting heavier than usual. He couldn't move as easily as before. It was like the water under here was becoming more solid.

Jack stopped advancing and waited for Jet. When he was in range, Jack held him and they swam together. He slowed down but Jet became faster. This time, the energy pillar came shooting up before

they grabbed the bar handles. They frantically swam and grabbed the handles just as the vortex was forming. Jet turned into a and held tightly.

This time, Jack also felt some difficulty holding on. He activated Life Burning Art.

They descended again. The runic metal deposits were giving a stronger glow here. They passed by them without stopping. Jet was in his form while Jack had his Life Burning Art on. These buffs allowed them to swim through the heavier water and arrived at the fifth hole just before the next vortex came.

Jack thought about the next descent while waiting for the vortex to end. Most likely they won't be able to reach the next hole with their current conditions. Jack made a decision. Once the vortex ended, he used his Supreme Dragon transformation.

Before Jet could ask anything, Jack grabbed his arm and dragged him out of the hole. With Jack's dragon form's flying ability even underwater, he shot down. The water indeed proved harder to pass through as they went deeper. Jack could feel the resistance as he pierced through the water.

He arrived at the sixth hole with some decent seconds to spare. The two grabbed the bar handles and waited for the vortex. This sixth hole was the last one he had scouted for the position. He didn't know in which direction the seventh hole down there was located. But with the speed of his dragon form's flight, he should still have time to look around before the vortex hit.

His dragon form lasted ten minutes. He spent three minutes on each descent. One minute to reach the next hold and two minutes to wait out the vortex. This meant he could do this two more times, totaling nine minutes. The remaining one minute would be used to take the runic metal and escape.

This planning put his target for the runic metal deposits under the eighth hole. He delivered this plan to Jet. Jet said he would follow whatever Jack decided. He was just a passenger at this point.

Jack rushed out with Jet in tow once the vortex ended. He flew down as fast as he could. The pressure resisting his descent had increased but his dragon form could still manage. Going down another time was still a feasible feat. As he reached the distance where the next hole should be and searched for it, something caught his attention. The abyss below was suddenly cleared. There was light from below there. Soft light in the shape of a white round disc with a black dot in the middle.

Though it was peculiar to see a light source suddenly appear down there, Jack was just about to dismiss it because he found the seventh hole he was looking for. When his eyes were about to turn away from the light disc below, the disc blinked. Jack froze for a second.

Jack didn't move, but he had willed himself over to the hole. He was currently drifting slowly towards the hole. The black dot at the center of the round white disc was following his movement.

And then, the round white disc disappeared. The abyss below returned.

While Jack was still trying to make sense of what he had seen, another light emerged from down there. A bright strong light this time. It was the energy pillar. The force from the pillar knocked him out of his trance. Luckily, they were already right beside the hole. They hurriedly leaned in and grabbed the bar handles.

'Did you see that?' Jack asked.

'Can we leave now?' Jet replied, his face was pale. Jack took it as he had also seen that thing, a giant freeking eye.

Jack looked at his radar. Nothing. The only dot was just the green one indicating Jet next to him.

'It is probably a being similar to Broidrireg or Goddess Serenity,' Peniel conjectured. Both of them also didn't show up on Jack's radar.

'With an eye that big, I will be surprised if it is anything lower than an eternal grade,' Jack said. 'What is a thing like that doing down there anyway?'

'Aside from being backed by a God or Goddess. There is one other thing that makes a divine faction unlikely to be attacked by others. It's that they had an eternal-grade guardian watching over their territory.'