

World 81

Chapter 81: Deciding About Loots Distribution

The Man looked at John. "What's he talking about?" He asked.

John replied calmly, "I was just about to tell you guys. We are going to take on a level 20 Boss."

"You f**king kidding me? That's an 8 levels difference from us! Well, 9 levels if you considered the majority. You are asking us to go against that kind of monster? You made us waste our time coming all the way out here?!"

The Man pulled out his large mace in anger.

"Calm down, calm down," John said as he took several steps back and hid behind Jack. "With our numbers, it is not impossible to take down the Boss as long as we coordinate properly. I thought you Men of Solidarity are known to be fearless?"

"Fearless is different from suicidal, you maniac!" He took some steps forward, completely ignoring Jack as he swung the mace in his hand at John.

Jack took out his sword and blocked the mace mid-blow.

"Calm down," he said.

The Man was surprised, his mace couldn't move an inch further, it was as if he had bumped into a wall of steel. His strength stat was the highest out of the rest of his team. He had fully allocated all his free attribute points to his strength. Yet, this person in front blocked his blow without moving even a little from the impact. And he seemed to be at ease doing it.

"Who are you?" The Man asked.

"You can call me Storm Wind," Jack replied.

Seeing that The Man's rage was somewhat diminished, John came out of hiding and persuaded, "as you can see, Mr. Storm Wind here is another capable adventurer, just like you. With the two of you working together, even a level 20 Boss is as good as dead."

"Stop with your bullshit!" The Man hissed at John.

"Fine, fine," John didn't intend to poke on the big guy's temper.

The Man put his mace down, then said to Jack, "what level are you?"

"Fourteen," Jack answered.

He could see The Man's eye twitched when he heard Jack's words, his gang members behind also started to murmur.

"High level doesn't guarantee success. Furthermore, the boss is still six levels higher than you," The Man said.

"That's true," Jack said, "but as this guy said, it is not impossible if we work together."

"Are you confident we can do this?"

"Not really, but I think we should try."

The Man seemed to ponder for a bit. He looked back at his gang members, and then returned his glance to Jack. He then uttered, "Men of Solidarity have never been afraid of a difficult challenge! And we also respect people with real strength. You seemed to be an okay fellow. If you dare to try challenging this boss, then we will not wuss out also. But we still need to get back at the distribution of the loots! We are not going to go back empty-handed with such high risk!"

"What do you propose then?" Jack asked.

"If I may," John interjected.

The Man glared at him.

"Friend, don't shoot me down before I speak, ok? I really have something good to say." John said with exasperation.

"Fine, talk!" The Man uttered.

John smiled and then said, "I at first was going to let you folks find out for yourselves, but since you are so hung up about the loots, I guess I would let you all know then. In the room where I saw the Boss, I had caught a glimpse of something that looks like a treasure chest. I'm pretty sure if you folks had played VR RPG games before, you would know what a treasure chest means. So here is my proposal, there are three groups here. I am after the quest completion. You two are after loots, so how about you simply divide to one side take whatever the Boss drops, the other takes whatever is in the treasure chest. Is that game enough for you folks?"

"Treasure chest?" The Man seemed to consider the proposal.

After some consideration, he then said to Jack, "then we will take the treasure chest. What say you?"

Jack didn't answer carelessly, he asked Peniel instead, 'which is more profitable? The boss drops or the treasure chest?'

"Depends on what grade for both," Peniel answered. "Ask the scheming guy what color is the treasure chest."

Jack turned to John, "Do you happen to see the color of the chest?"

"My attention was mostly occupied by the Boss, so I don't really pay attention," John said. "And it was also quite dark inside the cave, so forgive me if I couldn't determine the color of the chest."

After hearing, Peniel said, "Listening to him, I would say it was most probably the lowest grade bronze chest."

'Why do you say so?' Jack asked.

"Because if it was the other grade, Silver, Gold, or the highest grade, Diamond. Even with a glimpse, you can easily tell the color in a dark cave, as they would appear bright."

'I see... Why is the grade color the same as the grade used by Adventurers Association?'

"It's the other way around actually. The Associations copied the grade found in Treasure Chest. Anyway, if it was just a Bronze Chest, then take the Boss drops. Even if it was just an Elite Boss, the loot quality should be slightly higher, but the quantity will be less compared to treasure chest loots."

'Just? Aren't we hoping that it was an Elite? If it was a Special Elite, we will be in trouble, right?'

"If it was a Special Elite, just ask everybody to pack and go home." Peniel agreed.

Jack nodded, "okay, we take the boss' drops."

The Man offered his hand for a shake. Jack gave his, which The Man shook vigorously.

"Now that the negotiation was done, shall we get the show on the road?" John asked them with a smile.

"Show the way," The Man said.

"All right, but before that..." John made a few gestures. Not long after, both Jack's and The Man's group all received Party Invite notification.

"If we are to cooperate together, it will be better if we are all in the same Party," John said.

"With you as the leader?" The Man scoffed.

"Just imagined me as a puppet leader," John said. "The boss is after all for my quest, so if I'm not the leader of the Party that killed it, I'm afraid the system won't acknowledge my quest as complete? Then all of this would have been a real waste."

'Is that true?' Jack asked Peniel.

"Nah, he just made that up. He would clear the quest as long as he is in the party that kills the monsters in the cave. Even if there is another team joined in killing the monsters, his quest will still be considered as completed."

"Fine! But my people only take orders from me." The Man accepted the Party invite.

Jack also accepted the invite.

John then led them to the cave. They climbed up a significant distance to the higher part of the hill. The grassy field with flower patches gave way to rocky terrain, then was replaced again by small woods filled with pine trees. In these woods, they were attacked by a pack of Silver Wolves. Men of Solidarity walked on the front, while Jack's group walk at the back.

When the wolves attacked, John expertly retreated to the back side, conveniently letting Men of Solidarity handle the wolves. They didn't seem to mind thought, they looked like a bunch of battle crazed lunatics who relished in combat. They yelled and laughed as they made short work on the wolves. Jack and the others didn't even need to take out their weapons.

After killing all the wolves, The Man glanced back at Jack and said, "impressed?"

Jack replied by simply giving him a thumbs up.

Chapter 82: Strategy Meeting

After passing through the woods, they came to a steep cliff that had a large hole at its bottom. That was the cave John was taking them into. Before they entered, John stopped and said to them, "the last time I came, this place was crawling with Goblins. We wipe most of them out. I'm not sure if they respawned, but even if they did, you guys should have no problem dealing with the creatures. The Boss is at the end of the cave which opens up to a large cave hall. This cave hall is not entirely empty, it has many stalactites and stalagmites around the cave. I suggest we used these stalactites and stalagmites to organize our assault against the boss."

"What organize, we just gang-bang the Boss to a pulp!" The Man said aggressively.

"Did you forget the part about the Boss being level 20?" John asked.

The Man's face was frozen in his expression. It looked like he really had forgotten it.

John took out his weapon which was a wand and used it to draw some sketches on the soft dirt on the ground. He drew a large circle and within it, several large dots.

"This is the cave which the Boss is," he referred to the circle. "This is the stalagmites," his wand pointed to several of the large dots. "We will be coming from here," he pointed to one side of the circle.

"You remembered all that from your last encounter?" Bowler asked. "I thought you were running for your life after seeing the boss?"

"I only need one glance," John said.

When Bowler gave him a cynical look, he added, "I got a photographic memory."

"Photographic my ass! You said you don't remember the color of the treasure chest."

"I said I didn't see the color clearly. I didn't say I didn't remember. The chest was dark in my memory," John explained.

"Can we get on with this please?" The Man expressed his impatience.

John pointed to his drawings again, and said, "In our party, we have three range players and tons of melee. So for all the melee, we will break them into four teams."

"Why four?" Bowler asked.

"Can you let me finish first, please? The sun would have set already if you keep interrupting me," John uttered in irritation.

The Man concurred with John as he gave Bowler a death stare.

Bowler shut himself down with a grumble after getting reprimanded with words and glare.

After seeing Bowler behaving himself, John got back to the drawings at his feet. "The three Magicians in our team will place themselves here, here, and here," he said as he pointed at three of the large dots.

"Now for the four melee teams, you should spread out to each corner of the caves," John pointed to show the positions in his drawings. "The idea here is consecutive combat by taking turns in engaging the Boss for each team. While one team fights, the other recuperate while the other two on stand by to take over. The range team will continue to bombard the Boss with range attacks while melee teams keep the Boss occupied. In this way, we will grind the Boss' HP until it runs out. I suppose every one of you has prepared recuperative potions, haven't you?"

"What if the Boss attacks the Magician from range?" One of The Man's subordinates asked, which immediately received The Man's glare. The subordinate shrank to the back of the team.

"It won't, the Boss is a melee type." John still answered nevertheless.

He then continued, "now that I have explained our general tactic, please understand that things might go wrong inside. In fact, expect things to go wrong. That's why I need you to memorize some things."

"There are still more?" The Man asked with restlessness.

"To beat an opponent much stronger than us, we need to coordinate well. We can't just charge in like normal. Bear with me please," John said.

The Man sighed and waved for John to continue.

"Now, this is the thing I need you to memorize," John wrote alphabets on each of the dots. "I need you to remember the alphabet on each of these stalagmites. They will be your point of reference inside. If you have difficulty remembering, then just take note that the first alphabet is closest to the entrance, while the later ones are further from the entrance."

"If needed, I will send messages in Party chat and telling you to go to which Alphabet. Please pay attention and moved once I gave the instructions. Now for the four melee teams, please divide yourselves. Since there are fourteen of you, two teams will have four members, while the other two have three members. I suggest Storm Wind and The Man be among the ones with three members team."

Flame and Trap were originally standing close to Jack, so they chose to form a team with him. The eleven members from Men of Solidarity formed another three teams.

Looking at the composition, John said, "the two rangers should be separated. One of you can perhaps swap with the other team?"

Hearing that, The Man uttered, "I'll follow your strategy, but Men of Solidarity fight with their own. We don't need Ranger nor Magician in our team!"

John stared at The Man as if asking him, are you for real? But then just shrugged and said, "suit yourselves."

He then looked at Jack and said, "I'm going to call you team 1," then he looked at The Man, "you are team 2."

As he was turning his head to the other team, The Man uttered, "I want team 1!"

John stared at him with irritation, then exclaimed, "fine! You are team 1. Storm Wind, yours is team 2."

Jack shrugged. John then continued to assign numbers on the remaining two teams.

"Are we done here?" The Man didn't bother to hide his impatience.

"Have you memorized the alphabet positions on the stalagmites?" John asked back.

"Yeah, yeah. A, B, C, near the entrance, others further into the cave," The Man replied.

John shook his head. "Fine! Let's go!" He said with annoyance.

"Wait!" Jack said, he then took out the food he had prepared and distributed them. For Men with Solidarity, he gave five to The Man. "Sorry, I didn't have enough ingredients," he said.

They looked at the food and read the description and its effect.

"Good stuff," John complimented.

After they consumed the food, the group then entered the cave. It was dark all over. John took out a torch and light it.

"Where do you get that?" Bowler asked.

"I bought it in a shop," John answered. "You should pay more attention to wares in the shop. Many tools that can assist in adventuring are available other than weapons and armors."

Tip and Trap also took out a torch each. They must have prepared them before they left town for their quest.

"You going to fight while holding the torch?" The Man asked.

"My weapon is a one-handed weapon," John replied. "Don't worry, the cave hall where the Boss is located is quite bright. So you can fight even without a torch."

They proceeded further into the cave. It was awfully quiet inside the cave. Probably the Goblins that John mentioned really didn't respawn. The cave was quite deep. They walked for a while. Several times they met forks on their way, but John chose which path to go without hesitation. It seemed like he really remembered the way without fail.

After walking for almost half an hour, they heard many footsteps approaching. The footsteps sound was small, they were made by light persons like children.

"Goblins!" John informed. "So not all were eradicated. Get ready, they like to utilize the dark. Tip, Trap, spread out! Provide lightings to all sides!"

Jack didn't need the light, he could see the red dot positions in his radar. The Goblins were coming from all sides, they tried to find the group's blind side in the dark.

"They are here!" Jack said as he executed Swing. His one move hit two of the approaching Goblins. Flame followed up by dashing to them and delivered several fast stabs. The others also started to clash with the Goblins. The Men of Solidarity didn't disappoint, they were ferocious and seemed to revel in the fighting. Some of them received damages but they didn't fall back. It didn't take long before all the Goblins were routed.

After the fight finished, Jack checked his Container of Souls. He had received another dose of souls again. Even though all the monsters he had met until now gave only 1 soul, from yesterday night until now, he had collected 38 souls. The soul count in his Container had now reached 48. It was still far though till the needed 1000 souls before he could use them to upgrade his basic class skills.

Chapter 83: Horned Ogre

"The cave hall is just ahead," John told them. "Get ready. Those that have lost health in the fight just now, use your restorative items first."

"We are all fighters," The Man said. "We have Natural Body Recovery, a little rest and we are good to go."

Luckily none of the Rangers and Magicians were hurt, so they could save their recovery potions. After Men of Solidarity filled up their HP by resting, they proceeded into the cave hall.

Just as John described, the cave hall was decorated with stalagmites while the ceilings filled with stalactites. The hall was not dark as the other parts of the cave as its walls and stalactites emitted their own light. The light was probably from bioluminescent fungus and glowworms similar to that which could be found in the real world.

John and his other two comrades doused their torch and stored it. "Get into positions," he said to the rest.

The hall was quiet, there was no sign of activity or any monster inside. Could the boss not in the cave anymore? Everybody had this thought, except for Jack, who had seen a lone dark red dot at the other end of the hall. Despite the thoughts, the Magicians still proceeded to the aforementioned positions, and the melee teams broke up to four teams and spread out.

They moved out silently and carefully. Even though the cave hall appeared to be empty, they still did not let their guards down. Jack was a bit surprised by Men of Solidarity's vigilant advance, he thought this rowdy bunch would just charge through the hall. It seemed that this group was rather dependable as well when the needs arose.

As they got nearer to the far end of the cave hall, they heard a sound. It sounded like... snoring? Jack approached the sound and peek out from a stalagmite. There was a large humanoid beast, lying down by its side on the cave floor. The beast had dark grey skin and Jack measured it to be around five meters tall if standing up. There was a white cone-shaped horn at its forehead, and two large tusks were seen coming out from its mouth. The sound was indeed a snore from this beast, it was sleeping while holding onto a huge stone club as if it was a bolster.

Jack inspected it using his God-Eye monocle.

Horned Ogre (Elite boss, Humanoid)

Level: 20

HP: 16,000

It was an Elite, Jack exhaled a relieved sigh. He typed in the Party chat, "found the boss, it's sleeping."

He soon received a reply message from John, "sleeping? That's great, so the first strike will be on us. Storm Wind, you have the highest level, so team 2 will initiate the first strike. Lured it to position J, which will be our kill zone where us three Magicians can all attack from our positions. Team 1, 3, and 4 prepare to take over once team 2 is in a pinch."

Not long after, another message from John arrived, "all of you do know where position J is, right?"

Jack made a silent chuckle and replied, "yeah, I know. Don't worry, leader."

But then another message arrived, "uh, where exactly is that?" It was a message from The Man.

"The center of the cave hall!!!" John replied in chat. Jack could imagine him fuming.

"Going to engage in ten!" Jack said to the chat as he headed towards the sleeping Ogre.

He gave a signal for Flame and Trap so that they attacked together in the ambush to score as high damage as possible in their first strike. They were only five meters away from the Boss. He had a nagging worry that the system would alert the Boss once they came into its vicinity, so he was ready to jump back the instant it moved. But after they arrived in front of it, the Ogre was still soundly asleep.

With a relieved, he signaled Flame and Trap to aim for its head, to try to get critical damage while they had the chance.

Jack had been counting since he informed the group in the chat, his finger count was now down to two. His two companions took their position. When his last finger came down, the three of them made a simultaneous attack. The Ogre's head was big enough so they didn't have to cramp together when making the attack.

Jack used his Power Strike. Flame and Trap both performed Swift Strike. Three numbers floated out of the Boss' head at almost the same time.

Critical! 194!

Critical! 73!

32!

Trap made a mistake due to nervousness hence he missed hitting on the vital part. He was shocked thought to see one of the damages almost reached 200 damage. He looked at Jack in disbelief.

Jack at the time had already shouted to them, "Get back!"

The Ogre's eyes opened at the same time. Finding three tiny trespassers disturbing his sleep, it was furious!

It slammed his hand to the ground, creating a small earthquake while pushing himself up. It opens its mouth wide and roared towards the three trespassers who were now scampering away. Jack and his two partners stopped on their track and covered their ears, the roar was so loud that it felt like it was going to burst their eardrums.

They then heard a notification, "you have been afflicted with Disoriented condition."

"What the...!" Jack immediately checked the condition.

Disoriented (Negative Status Effect)

Reduce 50% to movement speed, and attacks have a 30% chance to miss.

Duration: 10 seconds

Crap! No wonder they were getting slower. The Ogre walked towards them. Its movement was slow but its steps were wide. In just a few steps he would have reached them.

"Go first!" Jack told Flame and Trap. Their movement speeds were greatly reduced thus they won't be able to outrun the Ogre. Jack stayed his ground to give the other two time to escape.

"But..." Trap was reluctant as he felt like he was abandoning his comrade.

Flame, on the other hand, was more accustomed to Jack. She was confident if there was anyone that could survive going toe to toe with the Boss, it was Jack. They should get away first in order to not get in his way. He yelled to Trap, "come!"

Seeing Flame's decisiveness and Jack's unflinching pose, the hesitant Trap finally left.

The Ogre had arrived in front of Jack, it lifted its huge stone club high and swung down. Jack received the blow with a Parry using his sword. The force of the blow was so high that Jack's knee was bent and he half-knelt on the ground. He lost 62 damage from it.

Shit! The damage was not too far from the Priest of Phobos who was five levels higher. It was a good thing the Boss' speed was much slower compared to the Priest. If not, there was no chance they would be able to contend with this monster.

It lifted its club and about to strike again, eager to turn this annoying trespasser into mincemeat.

Jack who had experienced the power of the Ogre's blow, did not wish to just receive another blow passively. He side-stepped to the side as the blow coming down. Because his movement was hindered by the Disoriented status, he almost didn't manage to dodge, luckily his Dexterity was also far higher than normal players.

The club landed on the ground and created a crack on the cave floor. Jack used the window where the Ogre paused after its attack to land a hit. But just before his hit struck, it suddenly swerved. His attack ended up just grazing the Ogre's skin. It caused a low 21 damages.

There were still around 3 seconds before the Disoriented status expired. Jack decided to contend with the Ogre in melee until it expired. Once his status was back to normal, he would immediately run to position J.

The Ogre had lifted his club again, ready to strike. At this moment, a loud yelling was heard from the back. The Man appeared with his entourage. He sent Power Strike to the monster's leg. It took out 46 points from the Boss' HP. The other two Men of Solidarity who were just about to attack, stopped short when the Boss made a large swing. They managed to avoid the swing as they were not yet in melee range. The Man, however, didn't have the time to jump back. He blocked with Parry and received 78 damage and got blown away.

As the Ogre turned to deal with The Man, Jack immediately sent several swift normal slashes. It infuriated the Ogre as it turned back again and whacked at Jack.

The Disoriented status had run out, so Jack's movement speed had gone back to normal. He immediately moved away, letting the Ogre's club hitting the ground again.

"Go!" Jack told The Man's team, who did not hesitate to run away from the Boss.

Chapter 84: Taking Turns To Attack

The Ogre was more enraged by Jack, so it ignored the others and chased after Jack. He led the Boss towards where John and the others were waiting.

"I'm coming!" He said in team chat.

"Took you some time," John commented in the chat.

"Screw you! you try holding the Boss yourself," Jack retorted.

"Okay, we can see the Boss already. All Magicians, attack!" John commanded in chat.

As soon as he finished the command, multiple balls of energy were flying in from three directions. All three Magicians had simultaneously used Energy Bolts as starting spells. There was a total of thirteen of the Bolts, they all found their way to the Ogre and bombarded it continuously. Each bolt dealt an average of 30 damages.

Despite suffering damages, the Ogre boss just barreled through the rain of bolts as if it was nothing. He kept on chasing Jack.

"Team 3, moved in to engage the boss! Team 4 stand by. Team 1 and Team 2 recuperate your health!" John gave out instructions as he continued to cast spells and shot standard attacks.

The four Fighters from team 3 charged in as they shouted in loud noise. Jack could still continue to fight but he followed the strategy so as not to disrupt the rhythm. He disengaged and went towards where Flame and Trap was hiding. The Ogre wanted to continue chasing him but the four fighters surrounded him and started to hack on it.

Enraged, it made a wide swing. Two of the fighters were knocked flying, each suffering over 100 damages. The third one managed to evade by ducking. The fourth Fighter who found himself facing the Boss' back immediately used the opportunity and executed Power Strike on it.

But he was soon become the Ogre's target and got knocked flying too. The last Fighter who still within the boss melee's range make a quick slash on its legs and then intended to jump back before the club came back at him. To his surprise, the Ogre used his other hand that was closer to him, it grabbed his waist and threw him away like a piece of rock. The Fighter slammed to one of the stalagmites and he almost broke it. He suffered 93 damage.

"F**k! So Fast? Team 4, engage!!!" John shouted.

The Ogre was walking towards the Fighter he had just threw away to finish him off, but another wave of four fighters appeared. These annoying flies were so detestable, they kept coming one after another, the Boss thought with irritation.

Team 4 Fighters fared as well as team 3. One hit from the Ogre had roughly taken out one-third of their health. They could at most take two hits before they needed to run away.

"Team 1, are you ready to engage again?" John asked.

"Damn it! I'm still in healing!" The Man answered.

"Bloody hell! Use your restorative potions! We don't have time to wait for your Natural Recovery crap!!" John yelled.

"Team 2 will engage!" Jack said as he saw all team 4 Fighters were already running for their lives.

He charged towards the Boss as Flame and Trap following by his sides. "You two flank it! I will get his attention." Jack told them.

When the Ogre saw them coming, it immediately remembered. These three were the ones who woke him up. He made a loud cry. The three almost had a heart attack, they thought they were gonna be afflicted by Disorient again. But fortunately, there was no such notification, it was just a normal roar. However, the massive club starting to glow with yellow light.

Seeing that, Jack immediately had a bad feeling. He promptly halted their advance and shouted, "fall back! Fall back!"

The club came down and slammed onto the floor. The yellow light spread out and the ground that was covered by the light cracked and then multiple sharp rocks came crashing out. Jack and the others were lucky to have stopped their charge. If not, they would have been impaled by those rocks. The rocks then disintegrated and fell back to the ground.

"Holy shit! It can cast skill too!" Bowler uttered.

"It is a Boss, after all, it will be weird if it doesn't have a trump card. But that skill should have a long cooldown, hurry up and attack while it can't cast the skill anymore," John said while continuing to throw range attacks.

"Hell! Easy for you to say! You are just standing there shooting from a distance!" Trap complained.

"Friend, if you want to complain, then complain about you choosing a melee class," John countered.

While they were bantering, Jack and Flame had rushed back to the Boss who had just performed the special skill. They realized that it was pausing, as if taking a rest after making the large attack. They immediately used this chance and sent as many attacks as possible.

Trap who realized it immediately came to join as well. But when he arrived, the Boss had come out from its trance state and immediately swing its club. He was so shocked that he immediately performed roll. Despite the roll, he was still got knocked flying by the swing. Luckily he was using the skill: Roll, hence his defense was doubled, but he still lost almost half his HP.

Jack and Flame continued to send slashes and stabs in the meantime. The Boss frenziedly sent swing after swing towards them, but they utilized their speed to evade the attack. And they positioned themselves opposite each other. When Jack dodged, Flame attacked. When the Ogre turned and swung at Flame, Jack took the chance to attack.

"Those two were good!" John commented.

"Damn right they are!" Bowler exclaimed with pride.

"What the hell are you so proud of? You are not even half as good as they are," John said.

"F**k you!" Bowler gave him the middle finger while casting Mana Bullet at the Ogre.

"I am ready!" they suddenly heard The Man declared.

"F**k me! Took your damn sweet time. Just stand by! Charge in if team 2 had problem holding," John said.

Jack and Flame were still harassing the Boss with the same method. When the other saw the two going at it, it almost seemed like if they could continue this pattern, they would be able to slowly grind the Boss to death in this way. But as this thought surfaced in their mind, the Ogre's eyes suddenly glowed yellow.

Crap! It was going for another skill again, Jack thought. He was just about to warn Flame to pull back, but the Boss suddenly stomped his feet on the ground. A gust of wind knocked them up into the air, making them completely defenseless. It then made a 360-degree swing with his massive club. Knocking Jack and Flame who were at the back and in front of him consecutively. Jack lost 138 health while Flame lost 161 health, they weren't even able to execute their defensive move.

Flame fell a distance away, she was left with less than a third of her HP. The Ogre as if knowing which one was close to death, went towards Flame. Another hit and she would lose her life.

"Cover her! Cover her!" Bowler shouted in panic.

Jack was still getting to his feet. He would not be able to get to her in time. When he was disheartened for being helpless, he heard a shout. "No worries! The Man is here!"

The Man leaped from a high ground nearby, heavily brought his large two-handed broadsword cleaving at the Ogre's shoulder. It left a large gash on the Ogre's shoulder as it screamed in rage. It shifted its attention to The Man who had just cost him pain, and swung at him madly.

Flame used the chance to escape from the vicinity. Jack could still fight but he moved away and regrouped with Flame and Trap. They took out their restorative foods and started munching on them.

For a man his size, The Man's movement was pretty fluid, as he expertly dodged the Ogre's attack. However, his speed was not as fast as Jack's or Flame's, hence on the Ogre's fourth swing, he couldn't dodge and instead have to block with Parry. He was forced back several steps as he lost HP. His other two friends arrived and started making the attack, taking the pressure off him.

The teams continued to grind the Boss by taking turns, while the three Magicians continued to cast their spells and sent range attacks non-stop. They also activated their fourth skill: Heightened State, which

increased their mana regeneration and reduced their skills' cooldown. When their mana was too low, they took out energy potions to replenish their mana.

Chapter 85: Running Out Of Potions

The group continued to burn through their restorative foods and potions, except Jack, whose HP was two to three times from theirs. But he still ate his two bread during the interval.

"I only have two more basic healing potions and one bread!" one of the Fighters said with worry.

"Me too..." Another said.

"We have taken out half of the Boss' HP," John encouraged them. "Slow down the pace. Try to avoid damage as much as possible. Your job now is to hold the Boss' attention for as long as possible. The longer you can hold it, the more the other team could disengage from combat and recuperate with the Natural Body Recovery, so saving potion usage. Thank goodness most of you are Fighters! Leave the damage to us Magicians, we will be the ones that eat away the Boss' HP."

"My staff's energy is running low!" Bowler remarked.

"Motherf**ker! Why you didn't replenish it to full first before coming here?!" John was speechless.

"Well, if you remembered. It was not originally our intention to fight against a Boss way higher level than us now, was it?" Bowler retorted.

"Still, you are heading out from safe zone, man! Don't you know the importance of preparedness?"

While they were arguing, the Boss' club started to glow yellow again.

"Watch out!" Jack warned team 4 who was in the middle of battling with the Boss. But it was still too late, they were too close. The Ogre slammed its empowered club into the ground and another round of earth spike lunged out again around the Boss. Three of the Fighters in team 4 were impaled by it, causing around 200 damages. The last Fighter was spared because he was struck previously and fell out of the ground spikes zone.

The Spikes disintegrated but the three Fighters were paralyzed on the spot.

"Get away!" The Man screamed to his men.

"They can't!" Jack realized after watching the men being motionless. He immediately dashed towards the Ogre even as John called out, "team 2, support!"

However, he was still too late. In the time he was running to the Boss, the Ogre made another swing, hitting two of the Fighters simultaneously, scoring its first two kills at the same time.

"Damn it!" The Man cursed when he saw his men lost their lives.

When the Ogre was about to make his third kill. Jack crashed onto it with a Power Strike. Staggering it and made it miss. He then made several stabs to its legs as he circled around the Ogre. It caused the monster to stumble. The Fighter from team 4 who was paralyzed had recovered at this time and

immediately retreated. Flame and Trip came at this moment and supported Jack in dealing with the Boss.

Since team 4 was down to two people, they were ineffective anymore. John allocated them each to team 1 and 3 who were composed also of members from Men of Solidarity, as they seemed like the type that despised cooperating with other classes.

"I will hold it as long as possible, use this time to recover without potions!" Jack told the others.

"Your bravery is commendable," John gave him a thumbs up.

Jack told Flame and Trap to use hit and run tactic. As they were rangers, they didn't have Natural Body Recovery skill, once they used up their recovery items, they would not be able to recover. Jack told them to only attack when they were sure it was safe, and retreated to a safe distance once they had made their attack. If the Boss used another one of his skills, Jack could still afford to tank the damage, but Flame and Trap would most likely be closed to critical if not dying outright.

Flame added in Throw Weapon skill when she retreated to a safe distance. Seeing that, Trap followed her move, he completely forgot that he had that skill as well.

Jack continued to weave in between the Boss' attacks. He was completely focused. He spent more of his attention in dodging the Ogre's assault and only made a counterattack when he was sure it was safe. Hence the fight dragged on. The Boss' HP decreased slower, but Jack managed to buy the other Fighters enough time to recuperate without potions.

Seeing Jack's effort, one of the Men of Solidarity uttered, "Damn! I lost almost half my life when I got clubbed by that beast. He had been taking blows from it several times but his health is still more than half. Who the heck is this guy?"

The Man nodded, he must admit that Jack was a different league compared to them. Could a difference of two levels made that much distinction? It didn't make sense!

The Boss eyes started to glow. "Get back!" Jack immediately shouted to the others.

Fortunately, Flame and Trap were already at a sufficient distance, so they made it out of the area of influence when a gust of wind similar as previous pushed Jack upwards. Jack who was airborne, was more prepared this time as he held his sword in front of his body when the club came swinging. It registered as Parry as Jack was sent flying by the blow.

"Our turn!" The Man exclaimed as he let his men forward to intercept the Ogre who was about to head towards Jack.

The battle was proceeding slowly. When the Ogre used its skill while being engaged with Men of Solidarity, they lost people. Only when it was Jack that the team could survive the skill's onslaught. In the ensuing battle, Men of Solidarity had lost another two members. The Man's face was dark seeing his members dropping like flies.

"I've counted the skills' cooldown time," John told the teams. "The ground spike thing had a three minutes cooldown, while the air blow thing got a four minutes cooldown. I will give a sign when the cooldown time is about to expire, you guys better pay attention!"

Jack was impressed, that Magician could still make the calculation this fast in the heat of a battle. In fact, he was also trying to count the cooldown time, but John beat him to it. But then again, the guy was just standing there sending range attacks, so it made sense that he got an easier time to analyze things.

With John's timely warning, they managed to reduce the risk and prevent further casualties. The battle proceeded at a slower pace. They also found out that when the Ogre performed a skill, if it didn't hit anyone, the Boss would go into a state of short stupor, allowing them to attack without worry. However, if the skill hit, the Boss would forgo the pause and follow up with normal attacks which would most likely finish the wounded player.

John also started to give detailed commands to the teams. At first, he used the aforementioned alphabet positioning system. Jack's team had no problem following the command, but Men of Solidarity ended up with more confusion than not. In the end, John was forced to use a more simple command, "team 1 go right, team 3 go left," as such.

"I'm running out of mana potions," Bowler advised.

"I'm down to my last..." Pointy Tip added.

Their firepower would reduce even more if they needed to rely on their natural mana regeneration. "A little bit more, it had less than 20% HP left. Hang in there, everyone!" John tried to encourage.

At this moment, the Boss released a thunderous roar. Team 3 who were in the middle of fighting the Ogre were stunned by it.

"Shit! I got this thing called Disoriented," Uttered one of them.

"Me too!" Said another.

"That status effect reduces their movement speed. They will have trouble escaping," Jack said as he prepared to re-engage the Boss.

At that moment, the Ogre followed up its roar with a frenzied stomping on the ground. Each stomp caused a small earthquake that prevented the Fighters from moving, and also prevented Jack from approaching. Stalactites on the cave's ceiling started falling on team 3 members who were stunned. Each stalactite caused around 50 damage.

The earthquakes caused the Fighters to keep on losing their footings, while they were also afflicted by Disoriented conditions. They became sitting ducks while stalactites continued to fall on their heads. Before long, their health had reached critical states.

As the earthquake finished, all four of team 3 fighters were in life-threatening condition.

"Move out!" Jack and The Man yelled at the same time as they dashed to the Boss at the same time. Three of team 3 Fighters managed to move away. One of them, however, was not so lucky as he was targeted by the Ogre and got stomped to death.

Chapter 86: Slaying The Ogre

Jack and The Man arrived at the same time and started to send attacks aggressively. Their respective teams were still on their way. The Ogre whacked at The Man who managed to dodge aside, but its free hand then grabbed onto his legs. It pulled him up and then slammed him down hard. The slam caused him damage and stunned him as it forced out the air in his lungs. The Man was yet to recover fully from the previous engagement, so his health had fallen to a third. The Ogre lifted its club high to deliver a lethal blow to the dazed The Man.

Jack came to the rescue by parrying the lethal blow, he fell to his knees from the force. The Ogre then grabbed his body with his free hand and threw him upwards. As Jack was defenseless in the air, It struck him using its club like a baseball player scoring a homerun. Jack was sent flying far away passing John and Bowler.

The Man's teammates arrived at the time and pulled The Man out of his dangerous situation. Flame and Trap also arrived and started to harass the Boss while the Fighters were engaging it.

"Arggh..! Damn it all to hell! Everyone attacks at your will!" John yelled as he saw the situation was getting out of hand.

He took out his last energy potion and drank it. It was also the time when his Heightened State skill went off cooldown, he immediately activated it again and cast Energy Bolts followed with normal range attacks. His wand's energy was also getting low. Bowler and Tip had long depleted their weapon's energy, they were just relying on their natural mana recovery and cast spells whenever they got enough mana. Hence their DPS were greatly reduced.

As he cast Mana Bullet, he saw five Energy Bolts rushing from behind, followed by Mana Bullet which slammed into the Ogre. He assumed that they were cast by Bowler, but then he remembered that both Bowler's and Tip's Energy Bolts only fired four bolts. And the damages were impressive, much higher than the damage usually caused by them. Hell, the damage was even higher than him.

He turned to look, there were no Magicians here apart from the three of them. At this time, Jack jumped past him, sword in hand ready to engage the Boss again. John glanced around again, was there another Magician player hiding in the dark? Trying to take advantage of their battle? He walked back a little bit and looked around, there was no one. The cave hall was not a place where people could hide around completely. Although there were stalagmites, the stalagmites here were not large enough to completely concealed a person.

"Hey! Where the hell are you going? Sight-seeing!?" Bowler screamed at him.

He then remembered his Heightened state was still in effect. Not to let it go to waste, he threw the idea of the mysterious Magician out of his mind and went back to throwing offensive spells at the Ogre.

When Jack clashed back with the Ogre, The Man who was nearby said to him, "thanks for the help!"

"Thank me when we defeat this son of a bitch," Jack replied.

"Agreed!" The Man replied with vigor, despite having only half his HP left.

When Magician used the Heightened State skill, there was no glaring visual effect. The only visual cue of a Magician activating this skill was the air around them appeared to be distorted by heat, but the effect was very small. Only when one stood near said Magician would they noticed such distortion. Thus, no

one noticed such distortion around Jack, while the Fighters who were fighting nearby him couldn't spare him the attention.

When Jack was knocked flying far away, he had taken a basic healing potion and medicine to recover his health. He had also taken the opportunity when he was behind everyone's line of sight to throw a couple of Magician's spells and activated Heightened State. One thing that he had learned from experimenting with this skill was that it did not only affect his Magician's skills cooldown and MP recovery, but also his Fighter's skills cooldown and Stamina recovery. With the skill in effect, he could dish out more Power Strike and Swing than the other Fighters, hence scoring more DPS on the Boss.

Now that everyone was crawling around the Boss, he could spare more time delivering damages then kept on trying to dodge. The Ogre's HP was dropping at a faster rate. They, however, also suffer casualties more easily. Tip was killed in the process as with another one from Men of Solidarity. The gang only had five members left in the group, they had lost more than half of their numbers.

Despite the casualties, they managed to bring down the Boss to a critical state. It let out a furious roar. However, it didn't affect them with Disorient status this time. But John felt like its roaring animation was similar to its previous one, hence he immediately told the others to retreat, "Get back! It was going to make the stalactites fall again!"

The Ogre didn't let them down, it really started to stomp and cause earthquakes. Fortunately, they weren't afflicted by Disoriented and were warned by John early, so they managed to get out of the earthquake range before the stalactites hit the ground, except for one Fighter who was hit by one as he jumped out of range. His health was already low, but he still survived that one hit. When they looked back, they realized that Jack didn't join them. Instead of running away, he dashed further in.

"What the hell are you doing?" The Man shouted at him.

Without replying, Jack arrived at where the Ogre was as stalactites started falling around him. He had noticed from the previous time the Ogre activated this skill, that the stalactite only fell around it, but never hit the place where the Ogre stood, so the safest place was actually the center of the skill.

As the Ogre continued with its stomping animation and summoned more stalactites down. Jack slashes at it frenziedly. Using all his skills whenever it came off cooldown. As he was still in the Heightened State condition, he executed Power Strikes after every two normal attacks. His stamina was dropping fast despite the increased recovery rate.

The others could only watch in awe as Jack continued to take away the Boss' HP.

When the skill ended, the Ogre looked at Jack angrily. It couldn't believe that its ultimate skill had failed to kill anyone this time. Instead, the most annoying fly had slashed at it like nobody's business. Not only was his HP hurt, but his pride had also suffered humiliation.

It used its free hand trying to grab Jack, but this time Jack had anticipated it. He deftly moved aside. Using the Ogre's low position when trying to grab him, he stepped onto its thigh and jumped upwards as he climbed the Ogre's body.

The others' jaws were smacked close to the ground when they saw his stunt.

Jack climbed onto the Ogre's back and grabbed its hair as a handhold. He then stabbed at the back of the Boss' neck, causing critical damage. The Ogre turned around with hands flailing around trying to reach Jack but its bulky hand prevented him to reach its own back.

Jack continued to stab his sword onto its head, causing continuous damages. In desperation, it ran backward and smashed onto one of the stalagmites hard. The stalagmite broke to pieces as Jack HP fell, but he didn't let go. He sent a Power Strike again to the back of the Ogre's head.

It caused critical damage as the Ogre roared out loud. As the roar ended, its limbs became limp. It fell to its knees, before it fell forward with its face flat on the ground. Jack was thrown forward in the fall. He dropped to the ground in a roll, and quickly got up as his adrenaline was still pumping, he expected the Ogre to rise again, but it didn't.

Chapter 87: You Will Be The Boss!

Jack let out a relieved sigh after seeing the Ogre remained still on the ground. He finally could allow his tense nerves to loosen after a long fight.

They soon heard a notification voice, "Congratulations on defeating the Horned Ogre. Receiving 3420 experience points."

The experience granted boosted everyone's experience points. Two out of the remaining five Men of Solidarity leveled up. Bowler had also leveled up to level 12. Jack himself was just a tiny bit away from level 15. He could soon become an advanced class! He felt excitement within his heart.

"Yeah! I am level 12 now!" Bowler proclaimed in joy.

Jack saw something floated out from the Ogre's body, it looked like a semi-transparent blue flame. It floated towards Jack then disappeared inside him. Jack was confused, but then he thought of something. He checked the Container of Souls in his bag, it now had 98 souls. A single Boss monster had granted him a 50 soul points boost. He was thrilled by the gain.

As he was contemplating on the souls he gained, a strong hand clapped on his shoulder, startling him. He turned and saw The Man grinning at him.

"My man, I never saw anyone fight as crazy as you. You inspired us!" He said.

Jack was about to give him a humble reply, but he had spoken first, "come, join us! You are just the right material for the Men of Solidarity!"

Jack was dumbfounded by the offer, before he could say anything, The Man interrupted again, "I will let you be the boss! Our gang only recognized the strong. You are stronger than me, so naturally, you will be the boss!"

"I'm sorry, I'm not interested," Jack finally blurted out quickly before he was interrupted again. But it turned out The Man had left and gone towards where the Ogre fell, it had disintegrated and left several things behind instead. Jack was not sure if The Man had heard his words.

"Come, boss! See what loots you have gotten from this kill," The Man said. He definitely hadn't heard Jack's reply, or chose to ignore it.

Jack approached the loots on the ground, there were three items and several coins. The items were a book, a helmet, and a staff. Jack inspected them with his God-eye monocle.

Steel Helmet, level 10/20 (uncommon medium armor)

Physical Defense: 14

Magical Defense: 10

Durability: 40

Endurance +1

Burning staff, level 10/20 (uncommon magic weapon)

Magical damage: 34

Range: 10 meters

Attack speed: 1

Energy: 60

Add 10% fire damage to Magic attacks

Skill Book (rare consumables)

Grant 1 skill point

2 uncommon and 1 rare! The Boss didn't disappoint. But how should they distribute it? There were three people in his team, Bowler and Fierce Flame, so logically they should get one item each. Flame and Bowler had arrived as well and made the inspection.

"You choose first," they both said to Jack. They both agreed that by contribution, Jack should take priority.

After considering for a moment, Jack decided to take the helmet. Flame and Bowler were surprised, they thought Jack would take the rare item. But in Jack's consideration, it was better for him to complete his armor set, he was just missing a headpiece. Furthermore, he could upgrade his skills later with the Container of Souls. As for the staff, thought he could use it for his Transformation Box, he didn't want to show the others that he wanted a magic staff. They might get suspicious.

Fierce Flame then chose next, as she took more risk when fighting the Ogre compared to Bowler. She obviously had no use for the magic staff, so he picked the skill book. Bowler took the staff, he was the last to choose but he felt that he was the one that got the most valuable loot, as it was suitable to his class. he immediately replaced his equipped weapon with this new one.

They then distributed the coins. There were 4 silvers and 69 coppers. Flame and Bowler gave the large portions to Jack, only taking 1 silver coin each, and handed the rest to him. Jack wanted to divide equally but they just left him after they took the 1 silver coin. Jack had no choice but to accept.

"Good haul, boss?" The Man asked Jack.

"I'm not your boss..." Jack replied.

"Sure thing, boss. Now let us go look for this treasure chest. Where is it?" The Man turned to John.

John pointed to the opposite end from where they entered. He said, "I saw it near the cave wall over there."

The Man nodded then signal for his gang members to follow him. Jack and the others also accompanied him.

Jack said to The Man, "I'm sorry for the men you lost."

Contrary to expectation, The Man laughed heartily, "Hahaha, no worries! It was not like they really died. They just returned to level 1. They would get back to their levels in no time, a real man won't be fussy about things like this! When we meet back with them, you will see, they will be proud instead to have had the chance to fight such a tough boss! Actually, I'll bet they will be damn surprised that we have managed to beat that monster! Haha!"

The Man was surely easy-going despite his rough exterior. Jack had a better impression of him.

When they came near the end of the cave hall, they saw a dark treasure chest near the wall. It was the place where the Ogre had been sleeping. Jack and the others didn't notice it because the Ogre had been sleeping with his back leaning on it, thus covering it from view.

"Treasure chest!" The Men of Solidarity shouted in excitement. They ran towards the chest in high spirit.

"Look at them. A bunch of grown men acting like children. They had really made me lose face," The Man said in disdain.

"Boss! The chest is locked!" One of them said.

"What?!" The Man yelled, then ran towards them in panic.

"Look at him, getting panic over a trivial matter," John said in disdain.

"Why, you know already the chest was locked?" Jack asked.

"Yes," he answered. "I've read something about treasure chests when I visit the library, all of them are locked."

'Is that real, Peniel?' Jack asked the unseen Fairy.

"Yes, what the guy said is correct," Peniel answered. "That's why I asked you to stock up on some lockpicks."

'So I can use a lockpick to open it?'

"You can try, but it was not guaranteed to open. However, this Bronze chest poses the lowest difficulty. So even with your lowest lockpick rank, you should still have a sufficient chance to pick it successfully, unless your luck is truly rotten."

Jack then asked John, "you know how to open it?"

John answered, "I do."

"How?"

"The book in the library said we can use some special treasure chest keys. If we don't have, then we can try our luck with lockpicks."

"You have such keys?"

"No."

"You have lockpicks?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you go to help them open then?"

John looked at Jack with an innocent face. "Why? It's not like I will get the item in the chest," he said.

Jack was speechless with the guy. He ignored him and went towards the Men of Solidarity who were still hunkering around the chest trying to figure things out.

"You really are a despicable fellow, you know that?" Bowler said to John.

"I know," John shrugged. "Can't help it."

When he arrived, he asked The Man, "do you or your men have any lockpick?"

"Lockpick? No, we don't," he answered.

"Okay, move aside. Let me have a try," Jack said as he fished out a lockpick from his bag.

"You will help us open it?" The Man asked with a surprised expression.

"I can't guarantee it will open, but I can try," Jack said.

The Man showed a grateful face. "You are the best, boss!" He said.

"I am not your boss!" Jack said helplessly.

He took a look at the treasure chest. It was quite large. Its height reached his thigh, its depth was almost an arm's length, while its length was longer than that. Its color was dark bronze, with surfaces that had some carvings of mystical runes on them. He squatted down and looked at the keyhole. There was a handle above the hole. He tried to use the handle to push the lid up. Yep, it's locked, he said to himself in his mind.

'How do I use this lockpick?' Jack asked Peniel.

"You use each hand to hold that two steel pins. Then inserted into the keyhole, then try rotating them inside. The pins will automatically look for the correct spot, but it was not always accurate. You have to feel its vibration. When you felt it gets stronger and heard a click, that's when you twist the pins."

'Sound rather complicated,' Jack said as he followed the instruction and put the pins inside.

He did feel the pins moved by themselves after being inserted. He then concentrated to feel its vibration. When he heard the faint click, he twisted the pins.

Chapter 88: Lockpicking The Treasure Chest

He heard a crack sound. He pulled the pins out and saw that they had broken. He failed.

He heard a notification voice, "Lockpick fails, receive 20 proficiency points."

'I still got points for failing?' Jack asked in his mind.

"Of course, if not, it will take you ages to reach the next grade," Peniel answered.

Jack took a look at his Lockpick skill inside his status window. It was written 20/1000 proficiency to reach the intermediate Apprentice grade. So if he used up all twenty of the lockpicks in his possession, even failing, he would be almost halfway there already.

'you are right, I should have bought more lockpicks,' Jack admitted. 'I could just fast-track by inserting the lockpick and let it fail in quick succession to increase my grade. As long as I have enough coins, my skill will increase in no time!'

"You are one simple-minded buffoon," Peniel scoffed. "You think the world will let you cheat like that? If you do it like that, you might not even get any proficiency point at all. The reason you got 20 points was because you have done it perfectly just now."

'Wait, perfectly? Then why did it still fail?' Jack asked in bewilderment.

"Because that's just how it works. Your lockpick skill grade is too low, even if you do everything right, you still have a high chance of failing. But you still have to try your best every time, because that's how you get your maximum proficiency points to increase your skill grade and thus increase the chance of successful lockpicking. And the reverse is true also, even if your lockpicking skill is at maximum already, if you do the lockpicking wrong, you will still fail. Thus, it is not just about increasing your skill grade, you have to also get used to using it and refine your technique until you truly become a master locksmith"

'that was such a hassle,' Jack complained.

Peniel scolded him when she heard his complaint, but Jack wasn't paying attention as one of the Men of Solidarity asked him, "you only have that one piece, mate?"

"Call him Boss, you nitwit!" The Man smacked the guy on the head.

"I thought you are the Boss?" The guy asked The Man with wronged expression.

"I am the boss, he is the big boss," The Man said.

"I am not either of your boss!" Jack said in exasperation as he took out another lockpick.

He went through the same motion as before, done everything correctly, heard a click, and his lockpicks failed with a snap. He received another 20 proficiency points. He then went for a third one.

As he continued to fish out lockpicks and repeated the sequences, everyone started to gather around him and looked at him working. His concentration got lax on his sixth tries, so he was a little late when he twisted the lockpicks after the click sound, he only received 16 proficiency points. The next one, he got tense due to the failure, and twisted the lockpicks too early, he only got 12 proficiency points.

He paused for a while and took a deep breath, loosen himself up, and then went to work on the lock of the treasure chest again.

"Are you hoarding lockpicks? How many do you actually have?" John asked.

"Please don't disturb me, I'm concentrating," Jack replied.

"Let me have a try next," John said.

"I thought you are not interested because you will get nothing?"

"Well, looking at you having such fun. I am tempted for the experience."

When his current try still failed, Jack then moved aside and let John have a go.

John took out his lockpicks and inserted them as he saw Jack did. Jack wasn't a petty person, so he explained the method as Peniel had explained to him. John did everything perfectly but also failed, he heard the notification sound.

"Oh, I still got proficiency after failing?" He asked.

"Yeah, in this way, you didn't waste lockpicks for nothing...," Jack then proceeded to give the same explanation as what Peniel had explained to him.

John looked at Jack intently, "how do you know so much about this?"

Jack was astounded for a bit, he then quickly said, "uh, I read it somewhere in the library."

John looked at him in suspicion, "you have gone to the library before?"

"Of course," Jack answered.

"Then you should have met the Keeper of the Books. What's her name?"

The Man interjected at this point, "what is this! Interrogation? Go away! Don't bother our boss working." He shooed John away, which was powerless against the Fighter's strength.

For once, Jack was glad that The Man treated him as his boss. He then ignored John and gone back to work on the treasure chest's locks.

Not long after, he was down to three lockpicks left. He had no confidence that he would be able to open the lock.

"I'm sorry, these are my last three lockpicks," he said to The Man.

"It's okay, boss. We know you have done your best," The Man said sincerely.

"Can't we pick up the box and take it away first?" Bowler asked.

"Cannot, we tried already," one of The Man's subordinates replied.

"You, give him the lockpicks you have," The Man said to John.

John smiled, "I will sell him to you guys, 30 copper for one lockpick."

"Screw you, man. That is three times the market price!" Jack uttered.

"You are such a bully," Bowler added.

"That's called business," John shrugged.

Jack continued to try picking the locks. Due to being anxious as he was about to run out of lockpicks, he again performed badly twice and got low proficiency points. In his last attempt, forcing himself into full concentration, he managed to perform perfectly. However, the result still failed. The treasure chest remained lock.

Men of Solidarity had their shoulders slumped with disappointment. Yet they bore no resentment against Jack as they knew that he had been serious in helping them.

"How many lockpicks do you have?" Jack asked John.

John answered, "I still have six in my bag."

"Give them all to me."

"One silver and fifty copper coins, please."

"You fiend!" Bowler cursed.

"Friend, no need to be so hostile. We are just making a transaction," John said. "During such emergency time, I could even increase the price by five or even ten times. Giving you three times market price had already been considering you as friends."

"Don't bullshit too much, give them to me," Jack said as he took out his coins.

But The Man held his hand, "boss, how could we let you pay for it when it is our responsibility. Here, take our coins!"

"It's okay. I got proficiency points anyway, and I got enough coins to spare," Jack said.

"No, we will pay for it!" The Man was resolute.

Jack didn't argue anymore. John received the coins with a smile and then handed six pairs of lockpicks to Jack.

"Nice doing business with you," John said to The Man, who replied by spitting at his feet.

Jack went back to working on the lock.

He performed imperfectly two out of four attempts, with failed results on all four. He was now left with two lockpicks. If these two were gone, then there was nothing more they could do. They had to return to the city and bought more lockpicks then returned and pray that the treasure chest would still here and untouched.

He focused his attention on the lockpicking, couldn't afford to waste the remaining two chances. When he heard the click, he twisted the lockpicks gently. He felt something falling into place and didn't feel the lightness that was usually there when the lockpicks snapped.

Could it be? He thought.

Then he heard a sound of notifications, "congratulations! You are successful in your lockpicking, receiving 50 proficiency points."

Chapter 89: Take One For Tribute

The lockpicks dissolved in his hand.

So I still lose a lockpick even if I succeeded? Jack thought in his mind.

The treasure chest then emitted some mechanical sound, not long after, the lid clacked and opened ajar.

Men of Solidarity who saw it soon jumped in excitement and yelled, "it's open! It's open!"

Jack stepped back to let them open the lid. It was after all their share.

The Man stepped forward and put both hands through the gap which was created when the lid was unlatched. He then heaved the lid hard and made it swung open wildly. The lid rotated one hundred eighty degrees on its hinges and stopped with a bang. Blinding golden light poured out from inside the treasure chest, causing the visions of those who were looking at it to blur.

After the light dissipated, they could at last, see the content of the treasure chest. There were seven items inside and a pile of coins.

"We have struck it rich!" One of Men of Solidarity yelled. Just from the pile of coins, it had at least ten silver coins.

"Damn, so treasure chest content is so generous, I shouldn't have forfeit on it from the start," John commented from the side.

"Piss off," The Man said to him rudely.

He then Inspected the items inside the treasure chest. Out of the seven, four were uncommon equipment, one was uncommon blacksmith material, the other two were common equipment.

He stored all the coins and the uncommon material and the two common equipment. "we will decide how to distribute it when we meet up with the others," he said to his men.

He then turned to Jack and said, "boss, please pick one of this uncommon equipment."

Jack shook his head, "I'll tell you again, I'm not your boss. And we had already agreed on the loot distributions, the things inside that treasure chest are yours."

The Man laughed, "everyone here knew that if not for you, we would have been wiped out by that Horned Ogre. And you had already spent all of your lockpicks for us. We haven't even compensated you yet for that. Please, make a pick."

"We defeat the Ogre together, and I used the lockpicks to increase my proficiency. There is no need to give me any compensation."

"Please don't argue anymore. A strong man such as you have to be more straightforward. Stop wasting time and just pick one," The Man was adamant.

Jack was helpless by his attitude, he shook his head and then took a peek at the equipment. There were chest armor, a belt, shoes, and an armguard. Out of those four, his armguard was the most lacking, still at level 1. He inspected this uncommon armguard.

Steel Vambrace, level 10/20 (uncommon medium armor)

Physical Defense: 16

Magical Defense: 12

Durability: 40

Strength +2

"I'll take this one then," Jack said.

"Great!" The Man exclaimed, "Now that boss had accepted our tribute, our relationship can be considered sealed."

"Wait, what tribute?" Jack turned to him.

The Man either pretended not to hear, or honestly didn't hear Jack's words. He stored the remaining uncommon equipment. He then sent Jack a friend request and said, "don't worry, boss. We won't disturb your matters. You go do whatever you want. But if you need help, just give me a holler, we will come running."

"Can you please stop calling me boss?" Jack uttered, but he still accepted the friend request. From what he had seen, The Man was an honest and upright person, he was just a bit rough on the edges.

"If I need help, can I give a holler as well?" John asked.

"Piss off!" The Man repeated his previous words to him.

"Now that our business here is done, let us return to the capital," Jack offered.

"Before that...," Bowler said, then extend his hand towards John with his palm facing upward.

John seemed to understand the gesture as he took out something from his bag, and placed it onto Bowler's hand. It was a small blue flower. Bowler stored it in his storage bag. Now they only need to go back to the capital and handed the flower to complete their quest.

"Shall we leave now?" John asked.

Everyone agreed since they had no better things to do anymore around the area. Since they decided to go back together to the capital, they stayed using their current Party system.

The sun was still high up in the sky when they emerged from the cave. When they entered the cave, there were seventeen of them, now there were only ten. Men of Solidarity lost six of their men, John's group lost Weird Trap, only Jack's group was still intact with three people.

Their group of ten walked down the hill with ease. After fighting the level 20 Elite Boss, the creeps that they met along the way felt like child's play. Men of Solidarity especially walked at the front with a swagger, as if they were the kings of the hill.

"Hey, I received messages from the ones who died," The Man told the others. "They will be waiting for us in the city."

"Why only sent now? Didn't they resurrect sometime ago?"

"No," The Man told him, "they said they were in this strange place called Limbo for half an hour before they were sent back to the capital."

"Half an hour? So there was a waiting period before reviving?" Jack murmured.

They continued to chat as they proceeded on their way back. Bowler as usual was especially talkative. He got along well with all in the Party except for John. He intentionally avoided the fellow. In fact, almost everybody avoided John, only Pointy Tip stayed close to him, while Jack and Flame were indifferent. John, however, was oblivious of their treatment.

When they were about an hour more of walking distance from the capital, Jack noticed several blue dots on his radar. They were coming up to a small upslope, and those blue dots were behind that upslope. He didn't give them any thought at first, but as they continued forward, he felt strange. The blue dots were separated some distances away from each other, and they were not moving. They just stayed there in fixed locations away from each other. After some thought, he couldn't help but felt uneasy.

"Halt!" He said to the others.

The others looked around, thought that there were some monsters coming at them, there was nothing. They looked at him weirdly. "What's wrong?" Bowler asked.

Jack was hesitant for a bit, before saying, "I'm not really sure, but I think there might be an ambush not far ahead."

"Monsters?" Bowler asked again.

Jack shook his head. "Players," he said.

"And you know this how?" John asked.

"If Storm said there are people in front, then there are people in front," Bowler defended Jack.

"Oh, I didn't say I don't believe him. I'm just curious as to how he knows," John said. "I noticed that you had also detected me and my teammates' presences when we first met. Do you have a tool that can detect people's positions?"

Jack didn't give him an answer.

"Well, at least can you tell us the position of this supposed ambush?" John asked.

"They were scattered around," Jack answered. After looking around, he then copied John's method. He picked up a small branch lying on the ground and found a patch of soft soil. He then made some drawings on the soil. He used circles to symbolize them, and crosses to represent the players in front.

"This is where we are," he pointed to a collective circle at one side. "And these are where those players are," he pointed to the scattered crosses around the soil.

"They just stay there unmoving?" John asked.

"Yes," Jack answered.

"So you really do have a tool that allows detection of others!" John exclaimed.

Jack was peeved. "Do you have a suggestion regarding this situation or not?" Jack asked him sternly.

"Sure," John replied. "From the look of it, there really is an ambush in front. But I am wondering if they are just bandits targeting people that ventured out of the capital, or one of you got an enemy among the players?"

The Man gave the question a thought, "I did offend some people here and there, but I'm not sure people will waste time to organize this kind of ambush for me."

"They are probably after me and my friends," Jack said.

Chapter 90: Ambushing The Ambushers

"So you really have enemies already this early? You've been busy, eh? We've just arrived in this world five days ago," John commented.

"We made enemies with them during our tutorial period in Bay city," Jack said.

"Bay city? Don't you mean Windmill city?" The Man said.

"Hm? What do you mean? You didn't come to this world from Bay city?" Jack asked.

The Man shook his head.

"I was from Star city," John said. "It appears that not all players that were transported here came from the same city. But we can talk about this later, let's resolve our current issue first. Who are these enemies of yours?"

"One is Weary Wolf gang, but it shouldn't be them. They should still be in detention by the guards," Jack answered. "So the ones in front should be Death Associates people."

"Death Associates?" The Man blurted out. "Isn't that one of the famous guilds with many experts?"

"You made an enemy with Death Associates?" John asked with a frown.

John nodded. "If you guys don't want to get dragged in the confrontation, I will understand."

The Man laughed, "hahaha! Only a real man dares to go against stronger opponents. I know our boss is not simple. What Death Associates, we are not afraid of them! Count us in!"

John looked at him with disdain, "there is bliss for being simple-minded people."

"Are you looking for a fight?!" The Man hissed at him, "if you are afraid, then get the hell out of here!"

"Your daddy here is never afraid of anyone," John replied.

"Can we stop fighting before the actual fighting starts?" Jack told them. "So who will join? And who will leave? I don't mind either way, we will still be friends. I don't like involving you guys in my fight anyway."

"Heh, don't say that. The enemy of our boss is our enemy too. Right, guys?" He looked at his teammates.

"Of course!" His men shouted without hesitation.

Jack was surprised, he knew The Man was the type that value relationship, but he didn't expect all his men to also have the same resolution. There was probably a reason why they called themselves Men of Solidarity.

Jack turned to John and Pointy Tip, "you are in?"

"Heh, I don't like to get into unnecessary trouble. But it's not like I get any better thing to do. Messing with Death Associates seemed like fun. What about you?" He said to Tip.

Pointy Tip looked at him with a helpless expression, "only you can say it's fun to mess with a big guild with a straight face... I would rather not get involved, but I also don't think it's safe for me to go back to the city by myself, so I would just tag along."

"That's ok, you can just stay at the back," Jack said. "It is still not certain that they are Death Associates people and are targeting us anyway. If it is and a fight breaks out, you can retreat and stay out of the conflict."

"Grow a pair, will you?" John said to Tip, "with so many people in action and you being insignificant, I doubt the enemies will even remember you after the fight is over. So there is no need for you to be afraid of that large guild's retaliation."

"When you say it like that, I do feel safer and feel bad about myself at the same time..."

Jack ignored them and looked at the others, "so you all ready?"

Men of Solidarities, Bowler, and Flame nodded. John on the other hand looked at him with consternation, he said, "don't tell me you are going to just waltz in like that?"

"Why? Do you have a plan?" Jack asked.

"Of course I have a plan! You already know their position. It will be a waste not to take advantage of that. We hit them first while they are not yet aware."

"I don't think that is good? What if our assumption is wrong and they are not Death Associates and they are not even targeting us?"

"It is always better to make a wrong kill rather than get killed ourselves," John said.

"What kind of depraved saying is that?" Bowler protested.

"Yeah, it's not good to act so imperiously, it will just make us look like a bunch of bullying bandits," The Man agreed.

"You talked as if you have never bullied anyone," John said to The Man with disdain.

"Only if the person deserved it," The Man retorted.

"What plan do you propose exactly?" Jack asked John.

John looked at the upslope in front, he then squatted down at the place where Jack made his drawing. He took out his wand to make some additional markings. He said, "Looking at the landscape and their positions, they won't be able to see us until we come up that upslope, which is strange actually. If I was the one that planned the ambush, I will at least post one person before the upslope to notify the others of our arrival."

"Maybe they are afraid we will notice them if they do it that way?" Bowler mentioned.

"Maybe, or the planner is simply dumber than me. Anyway, from the positions they are at, I will say they are hiding around the rocks and trees at the sides of the main road to the capital." John drew further markings to indicate the rocks and trees.

"You still remember the positions of rocks and trees beside the main road?" Bowler asked.

"I walked past this road when I was headed to Siren Hill. Why? Are you using a different road?"

"No, but I don't remember every tree and rock along the way."

"Well, of course. How can you compare my brilliant brain with that junk you have inside your head?"

Bowler was about to cast Mana Bullet on the guy before Jack stopped him.

"I told you I got photographic memory already, right?" John said, then he drew a few more additional markings. "Back to the plan. Now we can separate into two teams and circle around to both their flanks, then we can then take them by surprise. There were fifteen of them if Jack's detecting tool is accurate. If we follow this plan, we can ambush them first and take out ten of them in our first strike, cutting their numbers by more than half. The rest of the fight will then be us outnumbering them. Should be piece of cake by then."

Jack thought for a bit, then he said, "all right, we will do that, except for me. I will stay and walk on the main road."

"Why?" Bowler asked.

"To make sure that they really have ill intention against us. If they don't, then we can just walk past, no need for conflicts. If they really plan to ambush, then their intention will be onto me on the road. That will give you all easier time to strike them from the back."

"You are a bit too cautious, why worry about killing one or two innocents," John said. "But that distraction part works also, let's do it as you say then."

"Ok, you guys go to the positions indicated by John," Jack said. "Wait for my signals in Party chat. Once I give it, you all make the ambush at the same time. No need to worry about those that come towards me. I will hold out until you all finished your opponents."

No one doubted Jack's ability to hold out, so everyone nodded and parted away to go to their positions.

"Let me know when you all had arrived at positions," Jack said in chat. "Proceed slowly to avoid alerting those people in front. I will start walking towards them after you all had reached your places."

Jack waited as he observed his radar. The nine green dots that were by his sides a moment ago separated to five to the right, which were the remaining members of Men of Solidarity, and four to the left, which comprised of Flame, Bowler, John, and Tip. They slowly made their way forward, they then separated again with each green dot approaching the scattered blue dots closest to the outer perimeter.

Jack figured they should have arrived in their positions before long, so he started to walk slowly along the main road to the capital.

"I'm in place."

"I'm ready."

"Good to go here."

Not long after, messages upon messages arrived as his allies reached the positions marked by John. And as Jack continued to monitor his radar, the blue dots didn't make any movement. The unknown players hiding in the front seemed none the wiser that someone else had stalked them.

"Waiting for your cue," John was the last to send a message as he arrived at his position.