

World 941

Chapter 941: A Draconian Intruder

So, Jack repeated the boring routines every day. Mason asked for two full rehearsals daily, which lasted from late morning until almost the entire afternoon. He gave reviews on each rehearsal to let everyone know what they were lacking. Sometimes he stopped a rehearsal mid-way because of a glaring mistake and asked everyone to redo the rehearsal. The one that made such a mistake would receive glares from everyone. On two occasions, Jack was the subject of those glares.

Jack spent his free time doing training caves inside the guild as well as doing runs on the Ancient Battleground legacy dungeon and Ice Throne legacy dungeon. The remaining time he spent inside the Time Chamber perfecting his sword art and training mana manipulation.

There was no possibility for him to join John nor Leavemealone's adventures, but he was still slightly hoping he could join the battle between the Wicked Witches and World Ruler. If the battle started at night, he might still be able to join once he completed the rehearsals on that day.

He kept in contact with Jeanny to keep tabs on the situation. Unfortunately, the spies in Death Associates informed them of that guild's big movement in the morning one day before the coronation. Mason had stressed to Jack that the last day of rehearsals was the most important. Emris, Meryl, and the others would arrive at noon that day, so they should be able to join the second rehearsal. Mason warned Jack to not miss the rehearsal that day and to not be late.

Jack was so dejected that he would be spending another day in boredom and missing out on the excitement of joining the battle in Wicked Witches' headquarters. Little would he expect that boredom was the last thing he would be worrying about on that day.

After arriving in Verremor Nation, Abasi didn't follow the main army back to the capital. He brought his force back to his tribe. The raretooth tribe was one of the main tribes and thus controlled one of the main cities in that country.

The city his tribe was based in was named Mjibu Maba. This city was also one of the cities the players who were given the orc race were teleported to after they completed their tutorial period.

Mjibu Maba was one of the cities that was closest to the nation's border with the Fulgur region. Hence, it didn't take long for Abasi to arrive in his home city while the main army continued on their way back to the capital of Verremor, Magna Masat.

Abasi had in fact been ordered to return to the capital as well to submit a report to the grand chief about the invasion, but he was not in the mood to follow that order. He returned to Mjiku Maba and intended to carry out the burial ceremony for his father before dealing with other matters. He hadn't even gone to the Church of Creation to request treatment for his missing arm.

Upon arriving, he ordered everyone to prepare the ceremony while he waited in the grand hall with Abdu's body.

A servant came in and informed him that he had a guest. Abasi told the servant to chase that guest away. He was not in the mood for dispensing hospitality.

"It's... It's chief Woga Braidedbeard, young master," The servant informed, but he quickly corrected his words, "I mean, chief!"

With Abdu gone, Abasi was now the head of the tribe.

Abasi grunted with displeasure, but he said, "Let him in."

The servant left before coming back not long after with another orc. Woga was an elderly orc, yet his body was still fit and vibrant. The servant left after showing the way. The old orc knelt beside Abasi and uttered a prayer to pay respect to Abdu's still body in front of them.

After he was done, he said to Abasi, "I'm sorry for your loss."

Abasi simply grunted for a response.

"You should have gone to the capital first as ordered," Woga said. "But then again, even if you did, it won't change what will be happening."

"What do you mean?" Abasi asked.

"You should have expected a repercussion after this failed invasion. I believe your father march into Themisphere with the full awareness that the invasion was a gamble. A gamble on whether the Raretooth tribe could rise to the top of the ten tribes, and gave him the qualification to be the next grand chief of this nation. Or, to fail and fall."

When Abasi didn't give any response, Woga continued, "I am among those who had shown support for Abdu's proposal for an invasion. Now that it failed, all the other tribes who had voiced their support are now looking for a scapegoat to avoid getting ousted themselves."

"Ousted?" Abasi asked.

"The council is now discussing the matter. But honestly, I think it's a done deal. The Raretooth tribe will soon be declared as no longer one of the Council of Ten."

Abasi scowled. "So, you are saying that the tribes that supported us before are now agreeing to this decision of expelling us from the council to save themselves? Is that including you?"

"I'm here to tell you in person because I still have respect for you, your late father, and your tribe. But you should know that I have to put the interest of my tribe before everything else. My feeling and desire are unimportant. I'm sure if your father is still alive, he will understand."

"But he is not...!" Abasi bellowed and slammed his one remaining fist onto the floor. "He died for this nation and what does he get in return? Being blamed for its failure? To have its tribe thrown out to be fed to the wolves? He considered you as a brother who will be there for him no matter what!"

Woga sighed. "Such is the game of power. You win and you get everything. You lose and you lose everything. You can blame the politics, you can blame me, you can blame everyone, but it won't change the way the game is played. If you need my help, I will do everything I can for you, young chief. But there is nothing I can do to sway the decision of the council."

Woga uttered another prayer and paid his respect to Abdu one more time before he stood up.
"Goodbye, young chief, and good luck."

Woga walked out as Abasi stayed kneeling in silence. His fist clenched tightly and his body was shaking as he tried to keep the rage within him bottled.

"Hehe... That was a miserable scene to watch," A voice was heard.

Abasi spun around, the giant axe slung behind his back was in his grip in a heartbeat. He faced the direction the voice came from, wondering at the same time how an intruder entered this place without being detected. From the direction he was facing, a draconian in a battle monk garb emerged from the shadow.

"You!" Abasi exclaimed, recognizing the intruder. "You are the outworlder who coaxed my father into proposing the invasion!" He had seen this draconian with his father before, but he wasn't involved directly in their conversation. He just knew a little detail and that this draconian's name was Long.

"Heh, don't say it as if you and your father are victims. Both you and your father have wanted to attack the human country for a long time already. I simply provided the information that allow your father to convince the council to finally agree to the invasion."

"Hmph? Information?! Just like the information when you asked us to be ready in front of Themisphylae fort? That a disruption will occur in that fort that will give us a chance to break in?"

"Well, I do admit we ourselves are greatly disappointed by that. It seems that our agents inside that fort are more incompetent than we hope."

"Don't try to make excuses! If my father hadn't trusted you, we wouldn't have lost so miserably. My father wouldn't have died!"

"Young Lord Chief, I know you are still in grief. But the failure of your invasion has nothing to do with me. Don't blame me for your own incompetence."

"What did you say?!" Abasi couldn't accept this stranger making fun of him. His giant axe went ablaze with flame as he lunged forward.

Long didn't appear surprised by Abasi's sudden aggression. He just stood there with a smile as Abasi's flaming axe came swinging. Long's skin turned golden. His feet shifted when Abasi's axe arrived. The axe missed him by a hairbreadth.

The flame accompanying Abasi's axe still burn Long and caused damage, but the damage was very little. It had been soaked by Long's protective skill, Golden Body, which was an evolved version of Battle Monk's skill, Steel Body. This evolved version granted the skill extra defenses as well as elemental resistances.

Abasi was surprised that his attack missed, but he didn't stop. His axe was brought back again with incredible speed. Yet, this following slash also missed. Abasi's one arm continued slashing, but each slash only managed to hit the air.

Frustrated, Abasi used a skill. Numerous flaming axes followed his latest swing, advancing on the draconian from multiple angles, cutting his escape paths.

Long's body suddenly swayed at high speed. He appeared as if split into several images. Abasi's multiple flaming axes cut through these swaying images, but no damage number appeared, indicating none of the axes hit the target.

In his consternation, Abasi's movement paused. Long, on the other hand, never stopped moving. Long's hand moved forward. An image of an oriental dragon suddenly appeared and followed the hand's movement. A dragon's roar was even heard as the dragon's image snaked around Abasi's axe and struck Abasi's chest. At the same time the dragon hit Abasi, Abasi saw Long's palm on his chest.

PANG!

A very loud sound was heard. Abasi was thrown back from the force. His feet skidded on the floor a decent distance before stopping. He also received large damage from that hit.

Abasi looked at Long in a different light. He no longer underestimated this draconian outworlder.

Chapter 942: Something Shocking

"Is that a skill?" Abasi asked.

"No. It's what we outworlders called martial art," Long replied.

Two orc guards barged into the hall. The sound of fighting had attracted their attention. "Chief! Is there a problem?" They then realized an unknown draconian was there.

"Leave! We will talk later about the matter of how you let someone pass through unknowingly," Abasi uttered.

The two bowed anxiously before retreating.

"What do you want coming here? My father is no more. Whatever deals you have with him had died with him," Abasi said.

Seeing the orc warlord had calmed down, Long said, "I'm here to make a new deal with you. I believe you have heard from your father about the organization I represent. We are based in Liguritutum but we will be making our move to the rest of the world before long. We are inviting you to join us."

"Hmph! My place is here," Abasi said.

"In a place that no longer values you and your tribe," Long said, causing Abasi to scowl again.

"You have heard what the other chief said just now. The council will soon expel your tribe. You will just be one of the many tribes in this nation without any political power. If you are willing to accept the demotion and are satisfied with letting your tribe do others' bidding from now on. Then so be it, let us part ways. But let me tell you this, if you let that happen, you will lose any opportunity of taking revenge."

Abasi turned to Long and said mockingly, "If I join you, I can?"

"Yes," Long answered, not offended by the mocking tone. "If you don't believe that we have the power to take on the world, there is nothing I can say to convince you of that. But know that after that failed invasion, Verremor would no longer take another action against Themisphere. Which meant you will no

longer have a chance to go after the ones responsible for your failure and your father's death. Your father died at the hand of an outworlder woman named Jeanny. She is in the same guild as Storm Wind, your nemesis. Their guild is an enemy of mine. So, you see, the best chance for you to get to them is with us, because we are also targeting them."

Abasi was silent. He seemed to be seriously contemplating the offer. Long could see that, so he added an incentive. "Take this as a gift," he said and threw a small bottle at Abasi.

Abasi caught the bottle.

"That's a reconstruct potion," Long said. "It will grow your missing arm. There is no certainty that the Church of Creation will agree to heal you. With that potion, you no longer need to worry about persuading them to heal you."

Abasi didn't respond. He just looked at the bottle with a contemplative expression.

"There is no need to give me an answer immediately. Just leave me a message at the usual place your father did if you are interested to join," Long said. "And don't worry about that reconstruct potion. As I said, it is a gift. There is no need for you to feel indebted for that potion. If you want to join us, that's great. If you don't, that's fine as well. Just know that by not joining, you have thrown away the chance of joining the winning team. The future ruler of this world."

Abasi wanted to scoff at Long's remark, but the draconian's confidence made him unable to.

"I will take my leave then," Long said.

"Hold!" Abasi called. "I have two conditions if I am to join."

"State your conditions," Long said.

"I want to be there when your guild makes a move on Storm Wind and Jeanny's guild," Abasi uttered.

"Naturally," Long replied. "What's your second condition?"

"I want to be your companion."

Long raised his brows. He didn't expect this. But after a brief thought, he could understand Abasi's request. Abasi had seen how crazy the outworlder's growth speed was. The first time Abasi encountered Jack, Jack was nothing. Abasi could kill the outworlder as easily as flicking his finger. But now, Jack could fight at almost an even ground with him already. The next time they met, maybe Abasi would turn out to be the one powerless against Jack. Hence, he needed to level the playing ground. He needed to be able to increase his power as fast as the outworlders did.

Long in front of him was the perfect candidate. Although Abasi hadn't fought seriously, this outworlder before him could force him back with one hit as well as sneak in undetected through a guarded complex. This showed that Long was not a simple outworlder.

"Hahaha, I accept," Long said.

"All right. I will prepare my companion token. Stay here first for a while." Abasi called one of his servants to prepare the material for the token. Long took a seat inside the hall in the meantime.

"Hm?" Long frowned in his seat.

"What is it?" Abasi had sat in a chair opposite Long while waiting for his servant.

"Something shocking had just happened in Themisphere," Long answered.

"Something shocking? Is it your guild's doing?"

"No, this is something unexpected. This will cause waves in the Themisphere country. Your nation should receive the news soon. This also concerns that nemesis of yours."

Arriving at the palace, Jack went to report his presence to Mason as usual. The royal advisor informed him that Emris, Duke Alfredo, and the others should be arriving soon. Mason didn't want to delay the rehearsal for them, but they might be able to join the rehearsal mid-way. Jack proceeded toward Prince Alonzo's chamber as usual.

Arriving there, the two guards opened the door for him. Jack then waited in the foyer as he had done many times throughout this week. He stood in attention while waiting.

During the first few days of rehearsals, Peniel had teased him about his seriousness. She said in any other situation, he would have sat leisurely on the couch that was available in that foyer while waiting.

Jack told her that while he was frivolous in general, that didn't mean that he was not able to be formal when needed.

"Hm... today the prince was taking especially long to prepare," Jack commented.

"Yeah, it has been almost an hour already," Peniel agreed.

"Maybe he was nervous since tomorrow will be the real thing, so he wants to make sure that everything is perfect," Jack said. Mason did tell him that he might wait for one hour for the prince. But in all the rehearsals before this, the prince never took longer than half an hour. He looked at his radar. The lone white dot in the prince's bed chamber was still there, but it had been static for a while.

Jack continued to wait. Another ten minutes passed.

Jack finally couldn't keep standing still anymore. He went to the door of the bed chamber and knocked.

"Your Majesty, do you need any help?" He called.

The sound of something falling and crashing was heard from inside. The sound gave Jack a jump, but he was even more surprised when the lone white dot inside the prince's bed chamber suddenly vanished.

"What...?"

Then he noticed a white dot appeared some distance away. This white dot then moved further away from his position.

"Huh...?"

Did the prince use a teleportation spell? But why? He had a bad feeling after seeing the weird movement on his radar. His radar told him that the room next door was already empty, but he uttered, "Your Majesty, I'm coming in."

Jack then opened the door and was shocked to see prince Alonzo on the floor. He was frozen for a second by the scene.

"Prince Alonzo...!!" He shouted as he snapped out of his shock. He hurriedly ran to the prince who was laying on the floor. He used his Inspect on the way, only to prove what he feared was real. His Inspect confirmed that the one on the floor was indeed Prince Alonzo and his HP was zero.

He knelt to look at the prince's body. There was no sign of struggle, just a single sword stab wound to the heart. The room was the same. Aside from a table lamp that was on the ground, all the other things in the room appeared intact.

While he was still trying to make sense of what had just transpired, he heard the sound of the door opening followed by hasty footsteps. He turned back and saw the two guards who guarded the door come in, behind them was royal advisor Mason.

"Your... Your Majesty...!!!" The guards shouted once they saw the body on the floor.

"You...!!" The two guards immediately brandished their weapons at Jack.

Jack was taken aback by the two's reaction. "Hey! Wait a minute! The prince is already dead when I enter this room!"

"Liar! We talked to the prince a few moments before you came. He is still fine then. No one came into this room except for you! If you are not the perpetrator, who is?!"

"What...? We will deal with that later. The palace should have someone with the resurrection spell, right? Hurry and call one!!"

Hearing Jack's words, Mason immediately commanded one of the guards to go and call the palace's main healer.

"Royal Advisor, I...," Mason lifted a hand to stop Jack from talking.

"I'm sorry, mister Storm Wind. I like you, but currently, you are the main suspect. I can't let my personal feeling cloud my judgment. Unless prince Alonzo can be resurrected and we hear his explanation, please stand to the side and refrained from making any movement."

Jack thought about making an argument, but he decided he should just comply. He went to one side and waited. Not long after, the guard returned with an old man in a white robe. Following behind them was Emris. This lord marshal was the first to arrive in the capital among the natives who went to the war.

Emris frowned heavily after seeing Alonzo's body. He glanced at Jack before returning his attention to the palace's main healer who was now casting a spell.

The spell was completed. A saintly light appeared out of nowhere from the ceiling right above Alonzo's body. This holy light bathed Alonzo's body. A hymn could be lightly heard.

The light didn't last long. It died down soon. The soft hymn was also gone. Alonzo stayed still.

The healer turned to Mason and said, "I'm sorry, My Lord. The prince had died for more than one hour. The resurrection spell cannot work on him anymore."

Chapter 943: Detained

"Impossible!" Jack uttered. He remembered the white dot that had teleported away. The murderer should have just fled after he or she successfully carried out the assassination. That was not an hour ago.

"You are still trying to deny? You murderer! I will kill you right here for your treachery!" One of the guards exclaimed. He was about to lunge forward with his weapon drawn but royal advisor Mason stopped him.

"Halt!"

The guards turned to Mason and said, "My Lord, you can't be thinking of letting him go, can you?"

Mason stared at Jack for a while before saying, "No. Take him into custody. We will decide his fate later."

When he saw Mason is still reasonable enough, Jack immediately said, "My Lord, before I found the prince here, there was someone else in this room. He or she used a teleportation spell to go in that direction. We need to lock down this castle and search for that person.

Mason frowned. "Why do you say that?" He asked.

"That's absurd," Emris uttered.

The two guards snickered and said, "If you want to make an excuse, why don't you use one that is more believable?"

Seeing that none of them was taking him seriously, he decided to take matters into his own hands. His magic staff appeared in his hand. "I'm sorry. I will chase the prince's killer on my own and prove my innocence!"

At the same time, he said to Peniel, "Peniel, invulnerability!"

A spell formation started forming above his staff. He also used Dragon Eye to increase his casting speed. He asked for invulnerability because Emris was there. The lord marshal might be able to do something to disrupt his casting even with his Dragon Eye's express casting. The invulnerability was to prevent anything Emris do from affecting him.

In his slow-motion perspective, he saw Emris and the two guards become tense and were about to attack when he started casting the Teleportation spell. But strangely, all of them stopped mid-way and just stood back and smirked.

Jack didn't let their strange behavior affect him. He completed his spell, his body vanished with a flash of light. But when he was expecting to find himself in another room, he found that he was still inside the same room with the prince's body. He noticed a rune diagram flaring on the wall.

"All the walls in this castle are defended by a rune diagram that prevented instant teleportation," Emris explained. "Unless you are one of the direct descendants of the royal family, you won't be able to teleport anywhere."

"What...?" Jack was still in bewilderment when he sensed Emris casting a spell.

Jack tried to jump away but Emris' lightning lasso came so fast. He used Flash Step, but the lightning lasso was as if alive. It changed direction and accurately hit the position Jack moved to. Emris could also sense mana and knew of the direction Jack was moving toward.

The lightning lasso locked Jack's body. Jack had a very high resistance against lightning so it was not life-threatening, but it paralyzed him for the first few seconds.

A runic rope came then and wrapped around his body when he could not move. He was now totally incapacitated. He tried using his race skill, Willpower, but he couldn't. The runic rope nullified his ability to use skills and also prevented access to his inventory. He also couldn't send messages to his friends.

"Take him to the dungeon," Mason said. Then to Emris, he said, "Can I trouble you to watch him until he is inside the prison cell?"

"No problem," Emris replied.

One of the guards came and shoved Jack toward the exit, while the others took the lead and held the runic rope. They brought him down toward the basement. On the way, Jack thought about assaulting them using unarmed martial arts. But after careful consideration, he decided against it. The two guards were level 75 special elites. As the prince's guards, their equipment was also a better grade compared to common soldiers. But most of all, it was Emris' existence that snuff out his hope of escaping.

The dungeon under the palace was cleaner than Jack expected. It also had enough lighting that it didn't appear as gloomy as any typical dungeon. He saw many cells, but all of them were empty. He figured this place was rarely used. The cells were probably meant to punish the palace's occupants, which was inappropriate to show to the public.

The guards brought Jack to one of the cells and threw him inside. The runic rope came off after Jack was inside the cell. The cell's door was then locked.

Jack tried sending a message to let his friends know about his situation, but he received a notification that his message was blocked. He then noticed the walls around him were etched with rune diagrams.

"These diagrams prevent you from using any skills, accessing your inventory, and messaging others," Peniel informed.

Jack sighed. He had expected as much. But getting the confirmation still caused him to become depressed.

"I hope you rot inside here," the guards said through the bars.

In a tavern inside Thepuergua, the only city in Themisphere to border the sea, several days before Jack discovered Prince Alonzo's body inside his bed-chamber, two players were chatting on a table while drinking ale. One of them was fat, the other skinny.

"You ever heard about this client of ours?" The fat one asked.

The skinny one shrugged. "Just that he is one of the big shots from the number one guild in this kingdom."

"A big shot who is not punctual," the fat one said. "It had been almost half an hour since our agreed time."

"Well, it's not like we got better things to do. Hey, while we wait, how about I tell you a tale? Have you ever heard about the lost maiden quest from the adventurer associations?"

"The quest about the lost ship?" The fat player asked. "That is a dead-end quest. No one has ever found that ship."

"I know for a fact that Will and his team had encountered that ship."

"Will Corner? That wannabe pirate? Are you sure?"

"Yeah. Will frequently recruit players to form a team for that quest. I was among the player on that team when he found the ship. I joined his team regularly. I expected it to be just another run to roam around the archipelagos outside the gulf. The runs were usually profitable as the monsters around there gave good exp points and treasure chests frequently popped up on the small islands there. So, even though we never completed the quest, I still happily tag along. The fee for the ship's rent was paid by Will, after all."

"This time it's different?"

"It was. It happened during a full moon night. The sea was blanketed by fog. Out of nowhere, this large galleon appeared. From the distance aboard Will's ship, we could already notice something was wrong with the ship. The sails on the ship's three masts were all torn. The ship's hull itself was not in a good condition. Many holes were seen in its wooden hull, one would wonder how this ship had not yet sunk. Seeing that suspicious ship, Will immediately steered his ship to approach it."

"It's the Lost Maiden?"

"The letters of the ship's name were hardly eligible but the ones that were still intact did suggest the Lost Maiden as the ship's name. Plus, there is a statue of a half-naked girl as the ship's figurehead. Will believed we had finally found our prize. So, everyone boarded that ship without hesitation."

"So, you lot completed the quest?"

"Not quite. The quest required us to bring back the captain's diary from deep inside that ship. As we were searching the ship, things started to get spooky."

"Spooky? How so?"

"Like we heard voices from inside the ship. We heard running steps from cabins which we found later to be unoccupied. We saw shadows around the corners, following us as we headed deeper into the ship."

"Are you shitting me, bro?"

"I shit you not, brother. Many of us had our hair stood on ends. We expressed our desire to leave, but Will pressed us to proceed. That lunatic was probably the only one who wasn't bothered by the creepiness. As we headed deeper, things started to turn sinister. Things fell from the ceiling or the walls. Those that were hit received damage. Two players fell through weakened floorboards. They disappeared

underneath. We can't see what happened down there because it's dark. We heard their screams for a while before they stopped abruptly."

"They came back to life later, right? What did they say about the experience?"

"They didn't understand what had happened because it's all dark down there. They just felt like they were getting clawed and chopped non-stop. Before they could get their torches out, they had lost all their HPs."

"So, you lot continued further into the ship...?" A voice asked. The fat and skinny players turned to the one who asked. Someone had sat at their table without them noticing. The two were too absorbed in the tale that they didn't realize someone else joining them.

"Who the hell are you?" the fat player asked.

"I am Saint John," the newcomer answered. "I'm the one who wants to hire you, people."

Chapter 944: A Ghost Tale

"You are Saint John? From the Everlasting Heavenly Legends?" The skinny player asked.

"You can use your Inspect to check my identity, friend," John replied. Which the two did. They were mighty impressed to find out John was level 58. Most everyone was still at level 55.

After confirming John's identity, the skinny player said, "I am Billy Pants, he is Rough Criminal."

"I know. I used my Inspect, unlike you," John said mockingly. "Now, let's dispense with these useless formalities. Continue your tale."

"Don't you want to tell us where you need us to guide you?" Billy asked.

"Later. Your tale has piqued my curiosity. Continue, or I'm finding others for the job," John said.

Billy didn't know whether he should feel offended or glad that someone was interested in hearing his tale to this extent. He decided to continue then.

"Well, after all that happened, we were adamant about leaving. Will still insisted to continue, but we would have none of it. We agreed to leave. Will could continue on his own if he wanted. Seeing that the others started leaving, he had no choice but to turn back as well. He followed us but he continued to curse and grumble that he would find someone else with some balls the next time he ventured into the sea. He even threatened to not let us board his ship to return. We said to him to try it if he could. We couldn't kill him and took over his ship because it was rented to him so only he could control the ship, but he needed to physically throw us off the ship if he wanted to drive us out. With all of us and only one of him, he won't be able to. But anyway, we soon found out that it didn't matter whether we could board his ship or not."

"Oh? Why is that?" John asked, leaning closer.

"At that time, an eerie voice was heard from our back, asking us why do we turn back. Why didn't we go deeper into the ship? We looked back and found that the corridor behind us had turned pitch black.

There was still some moonlight coming in from the window when we walked through that corridor before, but now, it's like something was blocking the light. Then we heard rapid footsteps approaching, faster and louder from inside that darkness."

"Shit, man! I'm sure you are shitting me now!" Rough Criminal uttered.

"I still shit you not! I tell you, man. We were spooked as hell. We started running as fast as we could. Even Will who was so eager to continue exploring the ship was running faster than us. He was a Bard who spent lots of his free attribute points on dexterity. He is also higher level than us at level 56, so he eventually ran past us. One of us who was the slowest since he had the Sentinel class, got left behind. I looked back and saw him overtaken by the darkness. I still remembered his scream from inside that darkness."

"He also couldn't tell what got him inside that darkness?" John asked.

"No, he couldn't. He said the same thing as the others who fell through the floorboards," Billy replied.

"So, since you are telling the story merrily, I assume you got out of there safely?" Rough Criminal asked.

"No, bro. Can't you see my level is 54 now? I died as well. I lost another Amulet of Rebirth. Damn! I already lost five amulets of rebirth. This one here cost 32 gold coins! I won't be able to afford the next one if I die again."

"I pity your predicament, friend, but I'm not interested in the sad part of your story. Please continue the interesting part of your story," John said.

Billy was again in a conflict about how he should feel.

"Yeah, tell me how you die. I'm also eager to know," Rough Criminal said.

Billy sighed. He continued, "After running as fast as we could, we finally came out of the ship's deck. However, instead of feeling relieved, we found that we were not alone. Along the deck, there were ghosts of sailors, blocking our way to Will's ship."

"Ghosts?"

"Yeah, it's like those spooky colorless hologram images you saw in old movies about ghosts. We were at first panicked about what we should do. The ghosts were all around us and coming at us, we have nowhere to run. No way we were going back into the inside of the ship. It was Will who first drew a sword and hit a ghost that was approaching. When we saw a damage number come up from the ghost Will hit, we remembered then that we are in a game world. Everyone took out their weapons and fought the ghosts. The ghosts were tough, but not at the levels that we couldn't handle. With our cooperation, we managed to kill those that approached. However, as we fought, we realized that their number didn't decrease. New ghosts just popped up to replace the one being killed. We knew we couldn't continue like this. We then fought our way toward Will's ship, inching there little by little."

"Then you were killed by the ghosts?" Rough Criminal asked.

"No, I ain't killed by the ghosts!" Billy answered.

"Then how did you die?" Rough Criminal asked again.

"If you keep on interrupting, then you won't find out, will you?" Billy replied with annoyance.

Rough Criminal took the hint and shut himself up.

"Now, where was I? Oh yes, we were fighting our way toward Will's ship. When we reached the side where we docked the ship, we found out that it was half sinking already. Many ghosts were on Will's ship, hacking at it. Even if we jumped over and chased those ghosts away, the ship was already too damaged to be used. That was when we became truly panicked."

"So, that's when you died," Rough Criminal said.

Billy gave him an irritated stare. Rough Criminal put both his hands on his mouth, indicating that he won't speak anymore.

"Though we were panicking, we still fought the ghosts off the best we could. But we truly see no way out, the ghost waves were unending. During our struggle, Will proposed a crazy solution. Jump to the water and swim, he said. We all turned to him as if he was a lunatic. Well, now that I think about it, he was certainly a lunatic. But since none of us had any better idea at the time, we followed the crazy man. All of us jumped into the water."

Rough Criminal almost opened his mouth and spoke but he stopped himself when he saw Billy was staring at him.

"Luckily, there is a map system in this world, so we knew in which direction we had to swim to reach the nearest shore."

"Can't you just use your Town Return Scroll once you put enough distance between you and that ghost ship?" It was John who interrupted this time.

"He must be one of those players who have not swum in the ocean before," Billy said to Rough Criminal with a laugh.

"Haha. Yeah, dude, you are such a land dweller," Rough Criminal mocked John.

"I can easily find others to be my guides, you know?" John threatened.

"Ahem," Billy cleared his throat. "Well, the reason we can't use Town Return Scroll is that it is unlikely for a player who fell from a ship to be out of combat. Many aquatic monsters swam around the ocean. Even though most near the sea surface are low levels, their existence nearby still causes the players to be in a state of combat. Unless one was aboard a ship, it is unlikely that the Town Return Scroll can be used. That's why one must get a ship before venturing into the sea, one can't be in constant combat."

"Hm... Interesting fact," John muttered. "So, these low-level monsters just kept on attacking you as you swam?"

"Yeah. That's how I died. Although most of these aquatic monsters were low-level, sometimes some decent ones could appear. I was killed when I was attacked by a level 50 Red Shark while being harassed by other low-level monsters."

"This will be a problem... I need to get to the bottom of the gulf. Does this mean that I will be constantly attacked by monsters?" John asked.

"What? Why do you want to go down there? Is that why you hired us?" Rough Criminal asked.

"If you are looking for treasures, forget about the gulf. Players in this town had scoured the place. Well, except for the more dangerous areas with high-level monsters and the Merfolk's territory," Billy added.

"Anyway, answering your question. The bottom of the sea is not that heavily packed with monsters. It is only on the surface that had such thick monster density."

"Then why didn't you just dive into the ocean to escape from the non-stop combat?"

"Because although the deep has fewer monsters, it is guaranteed that the ones you encounter are much higher level than the ones near the surface. If I didn't have the bad luck of getting attacked by the red shark, I had a better survival chance by swimming on the surface."

"I see... Since you said the bottom of the gulf had been scoured by players, you should know which area had the higher-level monsters, am I right?"

"That's right. If you need guides through the bottom of the gulf, you have come to the right ones," Billy said proudly.

"Great, all right. Let's go then," John said.

"Wait, wait. You don't expect us to guide you from the port all the way through the gulf by walking at the bottom of the ocean, right? It is a long way to go. The longer we spent swimming under there, the more likely we might stumble into a high-level monster that roams outside its usual place."

"Of course not, we are going to rent a ship. I will be needing your info as the locals for that. Take me to a place where I can rent a ship!"

Chapter 945: The Crazy Sailor

When Billy Pants and Rough Criminal came out of the tavern, they were surprised to find a large group of players waiting outside. All of those players were members of the Everlasting Heavenly Legends. John had picked a hundred players for this hunt for their second guild guardian.

Although he didn't join when Jack and Jeanny went hunting for the first guardian, he had read the report and understood what he should do. He originally wanted to bring more members than during the hunt for their first guild guardian, at around three hundred players. But since the issue of defending Wicked Witches' headquarters appeared, he had to let go of a lot of combatants.

The ones he brought here were the ones who were the best swimmers. These players had practiced a lot in fighting aquatic monsters under the lake next to their headquarters.

"These are the two clowns who will guide us?" Jet, who was among the group, asked.

"It is not nice to say that to people we have just met," Bowler, who was also there, said to Jet.

"Why? Are they going to be angry? With so many of us here?"

"Well then, when you say it like that, I guess it's okay to be a bit overbearing."

The two grinned yet showed menacing expressions to Billy and Rough Criminal.

"Stop it, you two! We are not bullies who intimidate others with our numbers!" John scolded. He then turned to Billy and Rough Criminal. "Now that you see we are not people you can afford to offend. I believe we can discuss a discount?"

Billy and Rough Criminal were fighting the urge to spit at John. They forced themselves to smile. "Well... I guess since this is our first time working, we can give a ten percent discount..."

"Thirty percent? You are very generous, my friend. Here is the down payment! You will get the rest when we are done. Do well, and I might throw in a bonus as well," John uttered.

Billy looked at the six gold coins in his hands. The deal was twenty gold coins. With the one-sided forced discount, it was reduced to fourteen gold coins. The previous agreement was half for the deposit and half after the job was done, but now these six gold coins were not even the full half. He looked at Rough Criminal next to him, who just shrugged. He turned to the front again and saw the stare of one hundred players. Except for John who was smiling, none of those other players were displaying friendly expressions.

He gulped. "Fo... Follow me to the port, please."

"Uh... My share," Rough Criminal's hand went to the coins in Billy's hand. Billy retracted his hand and said, "Yours is later when we got the rest of the payment!"

The group walked down the street following their two guides. The place was bustling with natives and was rather messy. After players could traverse the wilderness, many had also come here as it was the only city with a port inside the Themisphere Kingdom. Many guilds had sent their members here to check out the place, including Everlasting Heavenly Legends. That's how John contacted Billy for an offer of a job.

As they walked, John said to Weird Trap who was walking beside him, "As we have talked before, go and meet with the members we have stationed in this town. Together with them, learn more about the shipbuilding native experts and sailors in this city. Recruit them if possible."

"All right," Trap said and separated from the group.

After their guild leveled up to level 4 and because they had a lake within their territory, there was an option to build a port and a ship-building factory. These two structures were currently being constructed. John believed these structures were needed for them to build their naval power. Thus, the order for Trap was to find and recruit native ship-builder experts. Just like Kirsi, the blacksmith who now worked in their guild, it was possible to hire other native experts. They had also hired a few natives who specialized in alchemy and scroll-making.

John had also started searching for players who were actual sailors and shipbuilders in the real life through Florence, who ran the Missing Outworlders Coordination Center. The shipbuilders were to work and learn from the natives in the ship-building factory and the sailors were for operating the ships later.

After a decent walk, they arrived at the port. They could see the sea. This was not the first time these players saw a sea, but it was the first time for them to see one in this game world. They couldn't help but stop for a bit to take in the view.

Many ships were lining the port. Some were big, many were small. A majority were fishing boats.

"Uh... Exactly what kind of ship are you looking for? Are all of you going on the ship?" Billy asked.

"Of course! What a stupid question. I wouldn't have brought them here if I don't intend to take them with me, would I?" John answered.

Billy took a deep breath to cool himself before saying, "In that case, you will need a carrack. Or do you prefer to rent two to three caravels? A caravel would have better mobility."

"Which will be cheaper?" John asked back.

"Um... Renting a small carrack should be cheaper compared to renting three standard caravels or two large caravels," Billy answered. "A large caravel will cost you 30 gold coins each for one week of usage. A standard one is around 20 to 25 gold coins. You can get a small carrack that can hold a hundred people with 50 gold coins."

"Carrack it is then. We don't need speed. We just need the ship to take us to our destination," John replied.

Billy nodded. He planned to bring them to a place where he was familiar with the native owners. Because they were a large group, it took them quite some time as they had to weave through the messy mass in the port.

On the way, they heard a commotion. They saw everyone crowding at the edge of the port and looking at the sea. Curious, they also went over and tried to see what had caused the commotion.

Out in the distance, they saw something on the sea. It was drawing near. Not long after, they could identify the thing. It was a person swimming. The person was occasionally fighting with the sea monsters as he continued swimming to the port.

"Hey, Pants. When exactly do you die in that tale you told in the tavern?" John asked.

"Call me Billy, please," Billy said with annoyance. "It's two days ago. I only managed to swim for half a day. I was the last of the two who were still swimming. The last one remaining when I died was Will."

"I will be damned, so this guy had been swimming for two days non-stop?"

"Huh?" Billy looked at the person swimming in the distance. His expression turned into astonishment.

"Holy shit! Is that Will? That motherf*cker is still alive and swimming?"

"For one who used a class that only excels in a team, it was impressive that he alone managed to stay alive," John commented.

They noticed that Will's swimming became more rapid after getting close to the port. Billy explained to everyone, "The aquatic monsters are not that crowded after coming to a certain distance to the port."

When Will climbed onto one of the piers around the port, everyone who was watching started applauding. John, Billy, and Rough Criminals applauded louder since they knew the extent of the struggle Will had gone through compared to these other people.

Will himself dropped flat on the pier's floor once he was safe. He was completely exhausted.

Billy ran to the man. "You crazy son of a b*tch! You do know there are closer shores than swimming all the way to this port, don't you?"

"Billy, matey...!" Will called with a laugh. "Well, I wasn't exactly thinking straight at the time. Now, if you can excuse me. I need to take a little nap."

Will then went into slumber without delay. He even produced very loud snores.

"Very interesting fellow," John remarked. "Hey, Pants."

"It's Billy."

"Yeah, sure. Tell me, Pants. Is this Will Corner a good sailor?"

"If you don't mind a sailor with a few screws loose in his head. Yeah, he is pretty good."

"What are you thinking?" Bowler asked.

"We are looking for sailors, aren't we?" John asked. "This here is one. Plus, he is a good swimmer and a good fighter. Not to mention, incredible determination to survive that journey back."

"He also got a few screws loose in the head, remember?"

"We can deal with that. Change of plan! We will rent the ship tomorrow. Here, you and Jet go shop for a few things on this list," John said and handed him a paper and some coins. He then pointed to a member who was a Berserker. "You, pick this guy up. We are going to give him a comfy bed to sleep on. Everyone else, you can just do what you want until tomorrow morning. We will gather here and depart tomorrow. Pants and Criminal, you two come with me to the Seasick Inn, I am going to rent a room there. I need you to describe to me in detail the undersea landscape of this gulf."

After giving his instructions, John left with Billy Pants, Rough Criminal, and the berserker who carried Will Corner on his shoulder.

Chapter 946: Settling a Debt

Inside one of the rooms in Seasick Inn, John, Billy, and Rough Criminal were sitting around a table while Will slept on a bed nearby. Billy and Rough Criminal had been describing the general layout of the gulf and its undersea landscape. They even made a hand-drawn map on a large piece of paper and put markings as they explained.

After Billy was done explaining, John pointed to a point on the map. "This is the coordinates I want to get to," he said.

"What? The Demon Tooth Rock? Why do you want to go there?" Billy asked, seemingly agitated after reading the coordinates.

"Why? Is there a problem?" John asked.

"You bet there is," Rough Criminal said. "That place is a forbidden zone. No one goes there."

"Oh? Is there a strong monster there?" John asked. But considering that was where their target was, it was a rhetorical question. He simply wanted to gauge how strong the dragon turtle at that place was. He had gotten the general information from Peniel about the monster, but every monster had slight differences.

"Not really sure, the reason it is a forbidden zone is not that the place is populated by strong monsters," Billy answered.

"Then why can't one go there?"

"Because the Demon Tooth Rock is surrounded by constant whirlpools. One wrong step and your ship will get sucked into the whirlpool, then boom! Your ship is no more," Rough Criminal answered.

"So what? It's not like we can drown in this world," John said.

"Some players thought that and tried to swim through from the surface. But once they got near the whirlpools, they got sucked in. The waves caused by those whirlpools were too strong. And when they were inside the whirlpool, they continuously lost their HP, unable to swim out. They finally died and respawned."

"You also can't go in from underneath," Billy added. "If you look at this map I've drawn, you have to go through the merfolk's territory to reach that part. These merfolks are fine with a few ships passing above their waters as long as you don't cause a disturbance like having a sea battle or something like that. But if you go under the water, they'll consider it as trespassing."

John massaged his chin and pondered. "What about if we circle from the land that formed this gulf and entered from the back?"

"Those land are steep mountainous regions. I don't think it is traversable. At least not by normal people," Billy said. "You can try it if you want, but we won't follow as your guides if you do. We are not interested in doing a fool's errand. Bringing a hundred people, I can't see how you can navigate the terrain. Without flying, I don't see any other way of going to that place."

"I know someone who has sailed through those whirlpool-filled waters," a voice was heard behind them. They turned and saw Will standing there, looking at the map.

"You have rested?" Billy asked. It's just a few hours since they came into this room.

"I never need much sleep anyway," Will said and just took a sit next to them. He didn't look like someone who is deprived of sleep. On the contrary, he looked very energetic. He picked up the map to have a look.

"Friend, you are saying that you know someone who has navigated that part of the waters before?" John asked.

Will placed the map back and looked at John. "Who are you?" He asked.

"He is Saint John. He is the one who brought you here and gave you a nice sleep on a comfy bed," Rough Criminal answered.

"Oh! In that case, thank you, my mate!" Will said with a bright smile and offered his hand for a handshake. John gave his hand. Will grabbed it with both hands and shook it vigorously. "It's not every day we meet kind-hearted strangers in this town, not with all these atrocious and charlatan individuals filling the port."

Will was pointing at Billy and Rough Criminals as he spoke, which drew glares from both that said, 'What the hell do you mean by that?!'

"So, mister Corner...", John said.

"Just Will is fine," Will interjected.

"Of course, mister Corner. You said you know someone who can sail through this whirlpool-invested waters?"

"Okay then. Well, mister Saint. I didn't see it with my own eyes, but a friend of mine told me that he had. Whether he lied to attract attention or bragged about a real accomplishment, I can't say for sure."

"Do you mind telling us who this person is?"

"I most certainly don't mind, but I can't go near him. I can point his direction to you, though."

"Is he a native or a player?"

"A native."

"I see. A different question. Mister Corner, do you consider yourself a good sailor and adventurer?"

"Mister Saint, I can almost absolutely certain that I am."

"Perfect! I would like to invite you to join our operation. We are hunting something in those coordinates I mentioned. Are you interested?"

"Hunting something?" It was Billy who asked. John hadn't described to them the full extent of the job.

"Yeah, the offspring of a very dangerous monster. Very high level and probably a mythical grade," John answered, which caused Billy and Rough Criminal's eyes to bulge.

"Don't be so anxious. It's not like I ask you to fight that monster. You are simply guides."

"Well, we have shown you the place to go and what you need to know. The terrain under those coordinates is also alien to us, so we don't see how we are still needed. I guess this is how far we can help. We wish you good luck with your endeavor."

"Sure," John said. "Then I don't need to give you the remaining half of the payment. The deal is for you to follow us until our operation is completed."

"Ugh...", Billy grunted and looked at Rough Criminal who shrugged and gave a signal that he would follow Billy's decision. Billy was weighing if eight gold coins were worth the dangerous journey.

"So, what say you?" John asked Will.

"A mission with the risk of almost certain death to traverse impossible terrain into the territory of an extremely dangerous beast? Absolutely!" Will exclaimed. "However, I do have one tiny bit of a problem."

"What sort of a problem?" John asked.

"Well, you see. The reason I can't go near this person that claimed to have navigated into the whirlpool area is that I owe the same guy a ship."

Billy turned to him with an inquisitive gaze.

"Yes, that ship that had sunk when we were on that haunted ship," Will said to Billy, understanding his query. "So, if you somehow manage to hire him to sail your ship into that water. I can't join. He will skin me alive if he sees me."

"Hm... How much do you owe him? What is the price of that ship?"

"Well, it was just a small sailboat that could fit ten sailors, so it's the cheapest one. But even the cheapest ship is still expensive."

"How much?"

"I'll say... around 100 to 150 gold coins, I think?"

"Tell you what. I will settle this debt for you. In exchange, you join our operation and join my guild, what do you say?"

150 gold coins were not a problem for John. The rewards he had received from the invasion war were again higher than even Jack. He also retrieved a portion of the profit from the training center under the Valley of Tempus, which was substantial. He had prepared a large number of coins before coming to this city. The report he had received from the players he sent here did mention that dealing with ship businesses in this city was very expensive.

"Guild...? Uh... I don't really like to be tied down by any organization, you see. I just want to travel the sea."

"If you join my guild. That will be your job, traveling the sea. We will provide you with a ship and if needed, battle-capable crews. In return, you share with us all the information about your travels and we get a 10% profit from everything you acquired on the sea. Profits consist of coins, mana cores, ingredients, and materials. You can keep all the equipment and the other items. Of course, if we have a sea battle, we hope you can join. Not mandatory, but it will be appreciated. What say you?"

"Mmm...", Will appeared to be contemplating.

"Um... Why did he get a payment of hundreds of coins and an offer for a ship while we only get a bloody less than twenty coins?" Billy asked.

"Can you swim for two and a half days straight while battling the aquatic monsters in the sea?" John asked back.

Billy shut his mouth then.

After a minute of pondering, Will finally said, "Mister Saint, how about this? You pay my debt. I join your operation. We see how it goes. If I don't like the people I work with, then I won't join your guild. I will pay off the debt that you've paid for me, but give me time to pay it in installments."

"Sure, but I will require 100% interest if we go with the installment payments," John replied.

"Damn, Mister Saint! Are you truly a saint or is it just the name?"

"It's just the name."

"Ah... That explains a lot. Okay, it's a deal then."

Billy just looked between the two. He couldn't tell who was the one with the benefits here. He sent a message to Rough Criminal, 'I think I will just join. This job seems too dangerous for a meager 14 gold coins, but these people are the number one guild in this country. If we impress them enough, we can probably join as well. They can offer Will a ship without batting an eye. Maybe we can get one too if we prove worthy enough.'

'Okay, bro. I will follow your lead,' Rough Criminal replied.

Chapter 947: To Reclaim a Ship

The next day, Will took John and the others to find this person whom he claimed to have traveled through the whirlpool-invested water. As they walked, they moved further and further to a different part of the port. The part where it looked deserted and fewer people were seen. The buildings and ships around the part were more rundown and broken.

"Dude... Are you bringing us to the right place?" Bowler asked.

"No worries, mate. I never lost my way when it comes to direction. By the way, what's your name, mate?" Will answered and asked.

"Can't you use your Inspect? My name is Star Bowler," Bowler answered.

"I prefer direct communication. It feels more personal. It's great to make your acquaintance, Mister Star," Will said.

"Just call me Bowler. Everyone did."

Will nodded and turned to Jet.

"Jet Hung," Jet said before Will asked.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Mister Hung," Will said.

"Likewise, young weird dude," Jet replied.

They passed by several rough-looking native sailors who eyed them with unfriendly stares.

"Are we truly in the right place? I mean, in the right district, even?" Bowler asked again, anxious.

"Well, we did hear rumors about this place to be where many players got mugged by the natives," Billy said.

"Seriously, man?" Bowler said, even more anxious now.

"You people worry too much, haha... Now... I remember there should be a shack here...," Will said.

"Seriously, man?!" Bowler uttered, louder this time.

"Ah, it's over there!" Will pointed at a distance shack that bordered directly to the sea. Beside it was an anchored boat that looked like it could fall apart at any time. "See? I told you I was never wrong when it comes to direction."

"Really? You seemed pretty lost just now!" Bowler uttered, but Will had already walked away merrily toward the shack.

"You seriously recruiting this guy?" Jet asked John.

"Hm... He hasn't accepted yet. So, let's consider it a probationary period. We can always tell him that we change our mind later," John replied.

They followed after Will to the shack. When they were near, they saw someone on the derelict boat next to the shack. The person seemed to be fixing the boat. Above the mast with a torn sail, a colorful parrot perched there. Its feathers had the color red, yellow, and blue. Will came to the boat instead of the shack after seeing the person on the boat.

"Ahoy! Joe, my matey! How are you doing?" Will called the person. He then said to the others, "This here is Joe Parrot."

The others had already used their Inspect. Joe was a level 55 rare elite. They were rather astonished to find such a high-grade native in a run-down part of the port.

"Will is here! Will is here!" The colorful parrot uttered from up top, before flying down and perching on Joe's shoulder.

"That is one smart scarlet macaw," John remarked of the parrot.

Joe stopped what he was doing. He turned to Will and gave him a stern expression, which stopped Will on his track.

"Don't you matey me," Joe said. "I heard about you returning to the port, by swimming. I do remember you used my ship when you sailed out. The fact that you came back swimming did make me wonder. Hey, what happened to the ship I loaned the guy? Now, I am honestly quite surprised to find you appear before me. I thought you are going to hide somewhere. But since you don't, care to explain to me where is my ship?"

"Ahaha. How can you think that I'm going to hide from you? I'm a responsible man, matey. That being said, I need to inform you that your ship had sunk," Will said.

The two then just stared at each other for a long time. Bowler and Jet turned to each other before looking back. They wondered if they should say something or just continue watching what was going to happen between the two.

It was the parrot who broke the silence, "bad Will! bad Will!"

"You..."

"Before you say anything, know that I can pay for the ship!" Will hurriedly said before Joe could say anything.

"You can?" Joe asked.

"Of course! When have I ever lied to you?"

"Plenty of times, but I still believe you! Since you can pay for it, that means we are matey again, haha! Come here!" Joe jumped down from the boat and came to Will merrily. The two hugged and laughed together.

"No wonder they are friends. They both share the same level of weirdness," Jet commented.

"Now, where are the coins for my ship?" Joe asked after he released their hug. To which Will replied, "I don't have them." Which caused Joe's smile to freeze.

"But, my mate here has them and he will help me pay for the ship! Just tell him how much the ship costs." Will came to John and clapped his shoulder.

John simply nodded with a smile and said to Joe, "How much does this fine gentleman owe you, Mister Parrot?"

"Uh... Are you talking to me, or her?" Joe asked while pointing at the parrot perching on his shoulder. "You should address her as Miss Parrot if so."

"I'm Miss Parrot! I'm Miss Parrot!" The parrot echoed.

Jet looked at John with a look that asked, 'Are you sure we should be working with these crackpots?'

John continued to force a smile on his face. "Mister Joe, How much is Mister Corner's debt?" Jack clasped Will's shoulder to make sure Joe understood the person he was referring to.

"Oh, yes. The boat he owes me. Mmm... three hundred gold coins," Joe replied.

John's smile froze upon hearing it. The others had stronger reactions.

"Three hundred? Are you trying to rob us?!" Bowler exclaimed.

"How about you find someone else to scam, you punk!" Jet added.

"Mister John, don't need to listen to him. Let's just leave them and let them settle their debt issue themselves," Billy said.

"Three hundred is almost the price of a caravel, you know!" Rough Criminal uttered.

John looked at Will with a questioning stare. Will laughed awkwardly. He then turned to Joe and said, "Come on, mate. Don't joke like that. The sailboat I borrowed from you can't be that expensive. You are making me look bad, mate."

"Well, I am in need of coins, you see. Without that sailboat that I lent you and this junk here also nowhere near fixing, I can't sail the sea. You know how I get if I don't sail the sea."

"I am here exactly for that!" Will said. "These fine gentlemen are here to hire you to sail the sea. You see? It's a win, win solution. They rent a ship for you to sail the sea, and you help them go where they need to go."

"Oh? Where do they need to go?" Joe asked.

"The Demon Tooth Rock," Will answered.

"Demon Tooth Rock? Do they have a death wish? It is impossible to sail into there with a ship."

"What? You said you have sailed there before, didn't you? Are you lying to me, mate?"

"I did sail there. But not with a ship. I sailed there with my soulmate, the Grey Jewel."

"Who's that?" Bowler asked.

"Uh... Grey Jewel is his ship," Will answered.

"..."

"I think we should really turn back, man," Jet said to John.

"Grey Jewel is NOT a ship. She is the queen of the sea!" Joe exclaimed.

"Queen of the sea! Queen of the sea!" The parrot repeated.

"I concur with Jet's suggestion," Bowler said.

"And where is this Grey Jewel of yours?" John asked Joe. "You said before that you can't sail the sea. Something happened to her?"

"Oh, right. Now that he pointed it out. I don't see her as well. Where is she?" Will asked.

"Um... She had been impounded," Joe replied.

"Impounded?!" Will uttered.

Joe nodded. "I happened to gamble with some folks and I don't have the coins to pay... So, they seize my soulmate. Hey, speaking of which. If you want to go to that Demon Tooth Rock, you will need my Grey Jewel. Only she has the ability to sail through those whirlpools. Help me reclaim it back and I will take you to that rock, or anywhere else on the sea, capisce?"

"Well, I figure you will need to pay off this gambling debt to get your ship back. How much is that debt?" John asked.

"Um... three hundred gold coins," Joe answered.

"Motherf*cker! John, let's go look for another sailor and ship. I'm sure we can find one that can take us to the Demon Tooth Rock," Bowler said. He then turned to Billy and asked, "Right, Billy?"

"Uh... I mentioned yesterday that the Demon Tooth Rock is an impossible place to sail into. So, I don't think we will find any other sailor who is willing or crazy enough to take us there."

"Are you confident that you can take us to the rock if we get your Grey Jewel back?" John asked.

"One hundred percent!" Joe exclaimed.

'Ugh, so that's what it feels like,' John said in his mind. He had done the same thing many times already he could recognize it when someone was boasting confidence. Still, this man was currently their best option to reach the place. Only very few of them had the Soar spell at the moment, while he wanted to bring all one hundred of his members to the place. They needed the ship.

"All right, let's go get your ship!" John uttered.

Chapter 948: Setting Sail

Following Joe Parrot, they arrived at a harbor where a lot of ships were anchored. They went to the office where the harbormaster was stationed. Two soldiers guarded the door.

John had left behind a majority of their members on standby near the port. It was not convenient to move around in a large group. But their current seven-men group was still considered large by the guards. They were barred from entry and were asked the purpose of their visit. After informing the guards of their purpose, they were informed only two persons were allowed to enter. So, John entered with Joe Parrot. The others waited outside.

Inside the office, they saw a man behind a desk. Another soldier was standing behind in a ready pose. It was easy to assume the sitting man was the harbormaster.

"What can I help you with, gentle...," The harbormaster was writing something when John and Joe entered. He spoke while looking up, and stopped himself after noticing Joe. "Joe, it's you again! How many times do I tell you that I can't give you back your ship no matter how many times you beg?"

"This time it's different, Mister Percy," Joe replied. "As you see, I brought someone with coins."

"Coins?" Percy said skeptically as he looked at John.

John nodded. "Yes. My kind harbormaster. I understand this man owes a debt of three hundred gold coins. I'm willing to settle it for him so you can release his ship back to him."

"Really? You are an outworlder, aren't you? Do you truly have that many coins?" Percy asked.

John didn't reply. He simply took out the coins in his inventory and laid them on Percy's desk. Percy's brows went up in a surprised expression.

"Splendid! So, now I can have my jewel back, can't I?" Joe asked expectantly.

"Well. I must say I do not expect this," Percy said. "If it was yesterday, then everything will be peachy. Unfortunately, the ship is already scheduled as one of the items to be auctioned today. It is a hassle to

go through the process of canceling it. I'm afraid I cannot accept these coins, but maybe you can use them to buy back the ship in the auction."

"What? How dare you auction my jewel!" Joe uttered in agitation.

John gestured for Joe to calm down. He then said to Percy, "You said that you don't want to go through the hassle of canceling it. This means that you can. Perhaps we can come to an agreement?"

"Hehe. If you are willing to pay double the amount of his debt. Maybe I can consider it."

"How about you do it as a favor to me?" John said.

"Hahaha!" Percy laughed. "Why should I bother with a favor from an outworld...",

The harbormaster stopped midsentence. The reason was that John had just equipped a title. The title was Themisphere Chief Strategist. He got this title when he was appointed one when the Verremor invasion happened. He was not a member of the Themisphere kingdom faction like Jack and Jeanny, but this title gave him the recognition that equaled a Duke or a Lord Commander of this country. Every Themisphere native would give him the same amount of respect as when they met ones with those ranks.

Aside from having the effect of making the natives respect the title-bearer, this title also gave all the natives who carried out John's strategy a 20% increase in damage, damage reduction, healing received, and overall speed. However, this title only affected Themisphere natives. It didn't work on other forces.

"Sir—sir chief strategist...!" Percy said and stood up. The soldier behind him was similarly anxious about finding out a big shot of the kingdom was in this room.

"I'm... I'm sorry! I didn't realize that it is you," Percy said. He had heard about the chief strategist who had managed to repel the recent orc invasion with his strategy. Every citizen of this kingdom owed their freedom to this chief strategist. He had heard the rumor that the chief strategist was an outworlder. He simply dismissed it as a bad rumor. Now only did he realize that it was the truth.

"At ease, gentlemen," John said. "So, can you give me a face and remove the Grey Jewel from the auction list? That will be greatly appreciated."

"Certainly, Sir. I will deal with it immediately once I process this debt settlement..."

Percy was just about to grab the coins on his desk when John beat him to it. John dexterously split the coins into half. Percy was slightly taken aback by his action. "Uh... Sir chief?" He asked.

"Can you consider doing me a favor and giving us a discount?" John said. "I believe you can negotiate with whoever owns this fine gentleman's debt to give leniency on the debt, maybe cutting the debt to half for example."

"I..."

"I know I'm asking a lot. Here, I will add fifty more gold coins, making it two hundred gold coins. I'm sure this will help you better in negotiating. Now, if you don't mind. Can you please sign the release paper for this fine gentleman's ship?"

"This..."

"Mister Percy, please understand that I'm on a secret mission given directly by Prince Alonzo, your future king by the end of this week. So, you will understand my hurry. And I need this fine gentleman's ship for that secret mission. I believe you don't want to be the one explaining to the prince about the failure of this mission, do you? Because if I don't get that ship leaving this harbor within the hour, this extremely urgent top-secret mission will definitely fail. Do you want to be the one responsible for it?"

"No... No! I wouldn't want that. I will process the release immediately."

"Good man. We will be waiting by the ship. Please don't make us wait too long."

"I won't, I won't."

John turned and walked toward the door then, followed by Joe who was grinning widely. The parrot on his shoulder flapped its wing excitedly while uttering, "Good man! Good man!"

When they were outside, Joe asked, "Is it true that this mission you are undertaking comes from the prince?"

John turned to him and lied, "Of course!"

"Cool!" Joe uttered.

"What is cool?" Will came and asked. Joe told him. He and the parrot on Joe's shoulder soon parroted 'cool' as well.

"Now, let us prepare and make sure we don't f*ck up this royal mission, shall we?" John said. "Which one is your ship?"

"Come!" Joe said and took the lead again.

They came to a very large ship. Its hull appeared to be multi-decked with many gunports. It had three tall masts. The fore and main masts used square-rigged sails, while the rear mast used lateen-rigged sail. The ship had an overall grey color. A seashell figurehead decorated the front of the ship.

"A galleon?" John said after seeing the ship. "Your ship is a galleon?"

"Yeah, did I not tell you that?" Joe said.

"Are you sure you can maneuver such a large ship around the whirlpools-filled water? Won't it be better to use a smaller ship?" John asked.

"That's where you are wrong, mate. If the ship is too small, it will be too light. It will be easier to be affected by the waves. If I entered the vicinity of the whirlpool with a light ship, it will be easily sucked in by the force. No, we need speed, but we also need weight to resist the pull. My Grey Jewel has the balance of both weight and speed required for the task. That's why we need it."

"If you say so," John said, and then added a warning, "Just remember that you will face the wrath of a prince, and future king, if you fail."

"Don't worry. Have confidence in Joe!" Joe exclaimed.

"Have confidence! Have confidence!" The Parrot supported the sentiment.

Not long after, Percy came. He gave a paper for Joe to sign and then gave instructions to his people to release the chains locking the ship to the pier.

"Everything is done, sir chief strategist. I wish you success on your mission," Percy said.

"Very well, good harbormaster. I will put in good words about you to the prince, or the king maybe by the time I return," John said.

He then sent messages for everyone to gather. Everyone was just hanging out nearby, so it didn't take long for them to arrive. Everyone was rather amazed after seeing the ship. This large ship could easily take in more than twice their number, perhaps even five hundred could fit inside if they didn't mind being a little cramped.

John was already aboard when they gathered. He called everyone to board the ship. Once everyone did. He gave the signal to Joe. Joe was already at the helm. He seemed eager to set sail as well. He shouted instructions to the only crews who knew about sailing, Will, Billy, and Rough Criminal.

John gave him several players to command while the others watched. This was a good chance to let them learn about how to control and sail a ship in this world.

The ship was indeed fast despite its size. Before long, the port city of Thepuergua was already very far away.

Chapter 949: Braving the Whirlpools

The Grey Jewel sailed at a fast speed. Joe was indeed not kidding about his ship being speedy.

Despite its large frame, the strong waves of the sea still caused the ship to rock. Some players who were not used to sea travel were sitting on the floor of the deck with pale faces. They were getting seasick.

"What a bunch of landlubbers," Joe laughed.

"Can't blame them. There are not many places in this country where we can experience sea travel," John said.

Bowler, who had gone down below deck to explore the inside of the ship, came out and said to Joe, "Why are there no cannon at all?"

After seeing the numerous gunports at the sides of the ship's hull, he imagined many large cannons were fixed behind those gunports. He was disappointed to find that it was not so after going down exploring.

"Um, I lost those cannons from gambling long ago," Joe replied.

"You really need to work on that gambling issue of yours then, dude," Jet said. "If you keep on losing in gambling, might as well quit it altogether."

"Don't say it like that. I do win from time to time," Joe said.

"Really? What did you win?" Jet asked.

"Dolly here," Joe pointed at the parrot on his shoulder.

"Me Dolly! Me Dolly!" The parrot echoed.

"A parrot against a ship and its cannons. I don't know, dude. I still think it's better that you quit gambling," Jet said.

They continued to travel for a few hours until Will, who was on the crow's nest atop the main mast, yelled to them that they were getting close to their destination.

"All hands on deck! It's going to get rough!" Joe called.

"All hands on deck? Do we need to help? John asked.

"No, just grab something to keep yourself steady. Or better yet, lay down on the floor. Leave everything to me," Joe uttered.

Not long after, everyone on the ship could see the turbulent water in the distance. Many whirlpools were seen ahead. It was a long strip packed with whirlpools, separating the sea into two halves. Each whirlpool was separated from the other whirlpools only by a narrow part of water, but even these parts had extremely rocky waves as they were the meeting points of the force from multiple whirlpools.

"Are you really sure you can steer this ship through that mess?" Bowler asked worriedly.

"Definitely!" Joe replied. Dolly echoed his response. "It's a good thing that the weather is clear, it's the same as the last time when I braved through those whirlpools," he added.

"Uh... I saw some black clouds over there," Bowler pointed at the distance beyond the whirlpools.

"Nah, that's nothing. Don't worry about it," Joe assured him.

"Joe, I see a halo around the sun. Perhaps we should wait until later before going in," Billy said.

"You people worry too much. Just sit tight and leave everything to me," Joe responded.

Everyone looked at each other and shrugged. They couldn't be sure if this native was just being cocky or was truly confident. Will, who knew Joe the best, was still up there in the crow's nest. They decided to just hold onto something and trust Joe. Since they had asked him to take them to the destination, they supposed they should trust him.

The turbulence water was getting near. They could see the nearest whirlpool clearly now. Joe was still steering their ship at top speed, and they were heading straight into one of the whirlpools!

"Hey, man! Are you sure you don't want to turn?" Bowler called anxiously.

Joe just laughed at his words. He didn't change direction.

"Dude! This is no time for a joke! We will go straight into that whirlpool!" Bowler shouted.

Joe continued to laugh.

"Man, you're crazy! AAHHH...!!!" Bowler screamed as he saw that they were about to dive bow-first into the whirlpool. In fact, not only him. Everyone else on the ship was screaming. Only Joe was laughing.

"Hahaha! Grab tight, you landlubbers...!!" Joe exclaimed and spun the steering wheel at high speed. The ship turned sharply, aided by the centripetal force of the whirlpool. The ship's speed increased in speed due to the same force.

Grey Jewel trekked along the edge of the whirlpool with incredible speed. It soon came into the part where it was sandwiched by another whirlpool. Joe worked his steering wheel to make use of the force from this other whirlpool to balance his ship so it didn't get sucked into either of the whirlpools.

Using the same trick, he continued to propel his ship in curving zig-zag treks between the whirlpools, utilizing the whirlpools' force while keeping enough relative velocity for the ship to avoid going into any of those whirlpools.

"Crazy piece of work! Only a lunatic can think of navigating this whirlpools-filled water in such a way!" Bowler yelled.

Joe just laughed harder at the comment.

"Haha, don't worry. As long as there is no storm. This is a walk in the park!" Joe uttered.

Then they heard the sound of thunder. Black clouds were above them. The winds also picked up in speed.

"Oh, didn't see those before," Joe said, looking up.

"Didn't I already point out those clouds to you before?!!" Bowler screamed. He felt the urge to stand up and kick that native on the ship's helm. But he was grabbing the railing so tight. He was afraid he would get thrown out of the ship if he let go.

"Do not worry! It's just a little wind. You and you! Go undo all the sails and put on the storm sail!" Joe ordered Billy and Rough Criminal.

The two were grumbling. They had given the warning, but this cocky native just won't listen.

The ship rocked heavily through the path between the whirlpools, but Billy and Rough Criminal had been on ships many times before, so they had no problem keeping their balance. They were also sailors in real life so it took them no time to carry out Joe's instructions.

With the sails undid. They slowed down a bit. They relied on the momentum and the whirlpools' force to keep going.

"How long will this take?" Jet asked. He felt like they had been going in circles for a while.

"We need to go through a predetermined path. Otherwise, I can't get the right balance to keep this ship out of the whirlpools. That means going in and out a few times. Sometimes even passing through the paths we have passed before. We can't go in a straight line!" Joe explained.

The wind was getting stronger. The rain started falling.

"Hey, can you still control the ship?" Bowler asked.

"Sure, no problem. There is absolutely nothing to worry about!" Joe exclaimed.

"No worry! No worry!" Dolly shouted. The parrot was miraculously unaffected by the wind. It continued to cling to Joe's shoulder.

Even though Joe said what he said, his facial expression and the way his arms were shaking trying to hold the steer from turning wildly didn't exactly inspire confidence.

"Everyone, wear your Amulet of Rebirth!" John issued the order. It's time to face the possibility of failure.

A bolt of lightning struck next to them followed by very loud thunder, the ship rocked heavily. Every player aboard the ship thought, 'This is it. We are going to crash.'

They were all lamenting the thought of losing an Amulet of Rebirth. Some of them had died throughout the course of the two wars, a few times. So, the cost of the amulet was getting increasingly more out of their reach.

They continued to wait and pray. Waiting for the crash that they thought was an inevitability, while simultaneously praying for a miracle that this crazy sailor sailing the ship could somehow navigate through this impossible water and unfriendly weather.

They just sat or lay on the deck floor while holding tightly onto something, all the while the ship continued to rock heavily. Water splashed into the ship. Every time it happened. They thought the ship had sunk already. The rain was getting heavier, and so was the wind. Lightning struck more frequently. The thunder seemed non-stop by now.

They didn't know how long all this lasted. But all of a sudden, the rocking stopped abruptly. The rain and wind also started to die down. They remained still though. They somehow couldn't believe everything was over. They looked at each other with questioning glances.

One of them finally drew enough courage to stand back up and look.

"We... We've passed the whirlpool zone...," that player said. The others started to stand and look back at the turbulent water behind them. They were now back on calm sea again.

"Hahaha, did you ever doubt my words?" Joe exclaimed. Yet, those who stood nearby the helm could see his pale face doing a stiff laugh. His body was also trembling.

"Please tell me we don't have to go through that again on the way back," Jet said to John.

"Don't worry, we will just use the Town Return Scroll. Let this crazy maniac go back through this water by himself," John replied.

"Demon Tooth Rock ahead!" They heard Will's voice from above.

They wondered how that guy managed to stay up there throughout all that.

Chapter 950: Diving in

The Demon Tooth Rock was a large rock jutting out of the sea and had a pointy tip facing the sky. It indeed resembled a lone tooth in this vast sea.

Joe anchored his ship nearby the protruding rock. "Now, that I have brought you here. What are you going to do here?" He asked.

"We are going to dive down there, but we will still be using this ship as a place to rest. Please keep this ship here until we are done," John replied.

"Aye, aye, boss," Joe said. Dolly echoed his words. He then went and laid down leisurely on the deck, enjoying sunbath and the sea wind.

"Life Runner, Hideout, come here!" John called. "You two know what to do. Go in and scout the place."

Life Runner was the first orc player Jack encountered, while Hideout was a dwarf player from Jet's gang. They both had one thing in common. Both of them had the Hide skill, which allowed them to move around with invisibility. John had tested their Hide skills in the guild's lake. This skill had no problem working underwater. Though a skillful observer would see the water behave strangely in the place where they were passing through.

John had briefed the two on their way here. He had specifically brought them along because of this Hide skill they possessed.

Life Runner leaned on the ship's railing and looked at the water below.

"I don't know, man... Scouting the land is one thing, but going into unknown water... That's a different beast altogether," Life Runner said. Hideout who was beside him agreed with the sentiment.

"Jack told me that you are the first player to cross between countries all by yourself," John said. "That took an incredible amount of guts. You are one who is not afraid to journey into uncharted territories. Down there, my friend, is the next uncharted territory. Let your adventurous spirit guide you. I believe you will do just fine. The guild is counting on the two of you. You two are the only ones who can do this scouting operation."

Life Runner looked at John. He admitted he enjoyed this guild he was in and he had also received decent benefits as a member. He was even given a core member status and enjoyed privileges similar to the other big shots of the guild. But he knew he was not a competent fighter, nor was he someone who brought benefits to the guild in other ways. Maybe at first when he was acting as a liaison to the orc players in Verremor. But now, with more orc players joining, he was basically unneeded anymore. So, hearing John's belief in him made him feel somewhat valued.

"All right, I'll do it," Life Runner said.

Hideout also agreed. If Life Runner wasn't afraid. He also won't chicken out.

"Good," John said and gave each of them a bottle of potion. "Drink these. These are Underwater Vision Potions. They allow you to see clearly under the deep water even at the bottom where light can't reach."

Those potions were one of the things John instructed Bowler to shop the day before. Before departing, he had asked Peniel about all the common tools that were beneficial for an underwater adventurer. These common tools were usually purchasable at shops in coastal cities.

Life Runner and Hideout accepted and drank the potions.

"The effect lasts for one day," John informed. "I don't believe you want to spend more than one day under there. But no rush, take your time and prioritize safety. You can continue your scouting again tomorrow if needed. We have plenty of those potions to spare."

The two nodded. Life Runner then stood on the ship's railing and got ready to jump into the water. "Back away a bit, please. My Hide skill required space."

Everyone complied. Hideout also took a sufficient distance before climbing over the railing.

The two turned invisible. Afterward, the ones aboard the ship heard two splashes from the water where the two were facing before they turned invisible.

After the two were gone, John announced, "Okay, while we wait for their return, everyone is free to do as they wish. But I suggest you do something productive, like practicing your martial arts or training your game skills. But make sure not to hit the ship if you are training your game skills. You can also go into the water to grind the aquatic monsters for exp points. But take care not to wander too far or go too deep. Stay near the ship!"

Everyone then went and did their things. When some of the players practiced their martial arts, Will, Joe, Billy, and Rough Criminals watched in fascination.

"You people know kung-fu?" Will asked.

"Yes. If you join our guild, you have the opportunity to learn as well. We have several very competent martial art trainers. Our chief trainer is even one of the legends with ten years of undefeated championship titles under his belt. This merry fellow here is also one of our trainers," John answered while clapping Jet's shoulder.

"Really? He didn't look like much," Will said.

"How about I give you a demonstration by sparring with you, punk?" Jet challenged.

"Haha, just joking, old mate. No offense intended," Will laughed.

Billy and Rough Criminal came close to John and said, "Boss, do you see any chance of us getting accepted into your guild?"

John smiled amusingly at them. He did need some sailors to recruit. After seeing the two help Joe controlled this ship during the trip, he did think of recruiting them. But since the two were interested in joining, he decided to play a little hard-to-get to increase the guild's standing in their eyes.

"Sure. If you show that we can depend on you during this operation, I don't mind accepting the two of you as members," John replied.

"You won't be disappointed, boss!" The two uttered excitedly.

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Under the water, Life Runner and Hideout continued diving into the deep. With the effect of the Underwater Vision Potion, they had no trouble seeing nearby aquatic monsters. They also possessed

basic mana sense from Domon and Jet's training. With that awareness, they kept themselves a sufficient distance from those monsters so their Hide skill didn't get deactivated.

The Demon Tooth Rock that was seen on the surface was just the tip of an underwater mountain. It took them quite some time to reach this mountain's base. This gulf was apparently a pretty deep sea.

After arriving at the bottom, the two split. During John's briefing, the two were given different tasks. Life Runner was to search around the Demon Tooth Rock because this place was supposed to be where the Dragon Turtle resided. While Hideout was to swim away from this location in direction of where Merfolk's territory was located. Both of them were to map the area in detail before the others on top came down.

After Hideout left, Life Runner took out and equipped something that John had secretly given him. It was the God-eye monocle. Life Runner was among the core members whom Jack and the others trusted, so John didn't worry about lending the monocle to him.

Once he equipped it, he could see the radar indicating hostiles around him. John had informed him that if the Dragon Turtle was nearby, he should be able to see it as a large dark red dot on the radar. There were only regular red dots on his radar at the moment.

But he could be certain that their target was inside this underwater mountain. This mountain was where the coordinates given by the fortune teller were located, after all. The mountain's circumference was very wide, so it was not strange if the monocle hadn't detected the Dragon Turtle yet. It just meant that their target was deep inside the mountain. Life Runner swam around the mountain. There should be a cave somewhere as the entry point to the inside of the mountain.

Though Life Runner was a good swimmer, he still couldn't move as fast underwater as he was on land. He also had to take care to not let any monster come near him. So, it took him some time to search around. After a couple of hours, he finally found a cave, but he thought it to be too small. He still entered it, though.

He felt lucky he got the God-eye monocle. His radar told him that there was no monster in the direction he was heading, meaning the cave was clear. He wouldn't dare go into such a cave otherwise. Monsters could jump on him in such a narrow tunnel.

After exploring for a bit, he was met with a dead end. This cave did not bring him to the Dragon Turtle's lair.

He went out and continued to swim around the mountain. He found a few more caves. Some he entered, some he didn't. The ones he didn't were because his radar told him that there were hostiles inside. Most of the aquatic monsters he saw down here were around level 45 to 50 elite grades and a few special elites. Not something that he couldn't handle as long as he didn't get swarmed. But he still took caution. Billy had mentioned the chance of powerful monsters residing in the deep, he preferred to not bump into one.

After a long time searching, he finally found one cave that seemed prospective. The reason was that this cave had an opening of around one hundred meters in diameter.