

World 991

Chapter 991: The Ice Titan's Core

With the remaining two ice bugs still harassing her, Red Death saw the ice titan's hand coming at her. The ice titan was planning to slap her to death!

Rayne, who was on the ground, tried his best to attract the titan's attention by attacking its legs. But his attacks were completely ineffective. The titan didn't feel a thing.

Just as the titan's hand was about to arrive, Red Death pulled out the dagger that was securing her onto the titan's body and jumped away.

The titan's hand arrived and squashed the two ice bugs that were still there. The two received huge damage and were killed immediately with one slap.

Red Death, who was in the air, used her grappling hook again. She shot at in an angle that allowed her to swing away before the titan's hand came again at her. She also got to a higher elevation thanks to the hook. She landed on the titan's back, where the six ice bugs had sprouted before.

The titan tried to reach for her, but since she was directly at her back, its hands couldn't get to her. In its frustration, it shook its body violently. It even started to jump around in an attempt to throw Red Death off. Her jumping caused the ground below to shake and caused huge ice dust all around its feet. Rayne didn't dare to approach for fear of the titan accidentally stomping on him.

Red Death used her two daggers to cling on madly. She didn't dare make any attempt to climb higher. It was very easy for her to get thrown off in this situation. Her grappling hook was also still on cooldown.

As the titan continued to jump erratically, the ground started to crack. A few more jumps and the ground collapsed. The titan dropped into a large hole in the ground. His leg was submerged until the knee.

Because of the drop, the titan wasn't able to jump or make any large movements. Red Death wasn't going to let go of this opportunity. Her grappling hook was also off cooldown at the time, she immediately fired it again and gave her a boost in climbing.

She landed near the back of the titan's neck. She could sense that her target was close already.

The reason she had decided to climb the titan was not that she thought hitting its head would let her score higher damage. She wasn't even thinking about defeating this titan. It was a seemingly impossible task. He estimated this titan could very well be an eternal-grade creature. Luckily, though, this titan only seemed to be capable of simple melee assaults. Hence, it was unable to get to her when she was already at its back.

The reason she had climbed the titan was that she was still following the cold mana she followed since entering this icy world. The cold mana had brought her to this titan. She thought at first the titan was guarding the mana source. But when she was behind the titan, she sensed the source had moved to her front, which meant the titan was the source.

She then sensed that the cold mana was denser at the upper elevation. Hence, she knew that whatever the source was, it was on the titan's upper body.

When she landed near the neck, she could sense it more clearly. Whatever the source was, it was embedded inside the back of the titan's neck. She used her daggers to climb up and get nearer. From the titan's seemingly transparent ice skin, she saw a round object buried a few inches under the titan's skin.

'That is the source!' She exclaimed in his mind. This was her target.

As she was ready to use her dagger to dig into the titan's skin, she noticed the ice layers on her two sides atop the titan's shoulders budged. Those layers then grew legs and started crawling to her. They were ice bugs twice the size of the ones from before.

Her prize was so close already, she couldn't afford to hold back anymore.

She used the State of Madness from the set armors. The ability increased her damage power. At the same time, she felt this unreasonable rage building inside her, trying to burst out.

As Wrath had pointed out, she always had this rage within her. The rage of her father leaving her and her mother. The rage of having to move away from her hometown due to her parents' split, and into a foreign place she was not familiar with. The rage of having no friends in that new place. The rage of the accident which took her mother's life. The rage of having no choice but to do petty thefts and join the gangsters to survive. And after becoming Wong's disciple, the rage about having the male disciples underestimating her simply because she was a girl. There was also the matter of her vow to beat a boy whom she trained in martial arts with during childhood, a vow that she still couldn't accomplish until now. They all fueled her rage.

She had long since learned to deal with this rage. She kept a lid on them when they were unneeded. Then opened the lid a little bit when it was time to fight, letting them out as needed to fuel her power.

She thought she had complete control. But at this moment when she used the State of Madness, all this rage that she had kept inside had somehow become mad. They were fighting to get out. She felt that she would explode if she kept on trying to hold them in.

With a thundering shout, she let all these frustrations out. Red-like energy burst out of her body. Her two eyes turned completely red. The energy created an explosion that blasted the two ice bugs away. One of them failed to cling to the titan's body and fell. The other stabbed its legs and stopped itself before falling.

The rage made her feel as if she was losing herself, but she didn't let it be so. She had learned to cope with this rage a long time ago. She focused her mind and used Demon's Bite, the special ability from her set weapons.

She stabbed the two daggers into the spot where the round object could be seen. A shadow of a demon's head appeared following her stabs. The demon's head bit down on the spot where her daggers struck.

All this time when she stabbed her dagger, it simply penetrated the skin. But this time, the daggers dug deep into the ice skin and cracked it. The shadow of the demon's head then seeped into the crack before exploding from within, shattering the ice.

The ice titan roared. This time, it felt the attack. A damage number of around 10,000 appeared above the head. Rayne, who was watching from below was extremely shocked by the number. Even for him who was level 72, all his attacks only caused 1 point of damage.

Even though the damage number was impressive, the HP bar above the ice titan didn't seem to reduce at all. The 10,000 damage didn't even seem to be 1% of the titan's HP.

But Red Death's intention wasn't to kill the ice titan. She was aiming to get to the round object inside the titan. There was now a large hole where Red Death had struck, but it was still not deep enough to reach the object. There was still a thin layer of ice. Red Death frantically stabbed, chipping off a small chunk with each stab. Her State of Madness was still active, so her stab was more powerful than normal.

The ice titan felt it. It couldn't just let this person on its back do as she wished. It tried lifting its leg, but the hole in the ground restricted its movement. In its fury, it forcefully tore the ground apart. Rayne stumbled back due to the resulting earthquake.

The shaking also caused Red Death to almost fall. She quickly stabbed one of her daggers to keep her footing. The one ice bug that didn't fall had rushed over and started biting her. She ignored it. She was fully focused on breaking the last layer protecting the round object. The bite had instead made her angrier and increased her damage.

This ice bug was larger than the one from before and hence stronger. Each bite caused large damage. Even with the set armor's high defense, Red Death's HP was still falling at a fast rate.

But she didn't stop. She instead let it continue to bite because she was targeting the State of Madness' ability that will be triggered when she received a fatal hit.

When it happened, her HP lingered at 1. Before the ice bug could bite again, she made a final stab. The State of Madness' effect was gone but her next attack was increased by five-fold. She also used Assassin's level 50 skill, Assassinate Soul.

At its first level, this skill dealt 300% soul damage and ignored 50% defense. If the target's HP was below 50%, it dealt an additional 100% soul damage. It also had a 5% chance of an instant kill.

Red Death had upgraded this level to the max, which increased the inflicted damage to 900%. Added with the five times multiplication, the resulting damage was massive.

But the most useful feature against this ice titan was the skill's ability to bypass 50% defense. The ice titan's defense was astronomical. The Demon's Bite had managed to create a large hole in its skin aside from its high damage was also because the attack completely ignored all defense.

Even though Assassinate Soul only ignored half the defense, the high damage made up for it. The layer that protected the round object cracked open. She stored her weapons and immediately grab the object and jumped away just as the ice bug was about to bite her again.

She only had 1 HP. She couldn't afford to get hit anymore. She let herself fall. She planned to use her grappling hook on the titan's body to stop her fall after putting enough distance from the ice bug. But as she fell, she saw cracks appear all over the titan's body.

The titan then shattered to pieces.

The titan apparently couldn't exist without the round object Red Death had taken.

Red Death looked in dismay. With the ice titan gone, she had lost any place to use her grappling hook on. Her body continued to fall. If she hit the ground with her current HP, she would die.

Chapter 992: Ice God Sphere

Red Death could do nothing as her body continued to plummet. She tried to reposition her body in the air so that at least she could land on her feet. But her starting position was bad, she was unable to alter her body position too much.

She looked back and saw the ground fast approaching.

She gritted her teeth. She hated such a helpless feeling. She didn't want to give up. She paid attention to the ground. It had been more than one hour since she started climbing the ice titan. Her Vanish skill had gone off cooldown. She would use it just before she hit the ground. She supposed the teleport feature might save her from the impact.

But before she carried out her plan, a shadow swooped by. Red Death felt his body getting pulled to the side. Before she knew it, she was on the ground. Rayne had jumped and caught her just before she smashed into the ground.

"Are you okay?" He asked.

Red Death just nodded. Rayne let go of her. She wobbled a little. The speedy fall unbalanced her. She looked around. The ice bugs were nowhere to be seen. They had also vanished with the ice titan.

"So, mission accomplished?" Rayne asked.

"Not yet," Red Death said. "I can still sense this thing influencing this place. Until we get rid of this, I don't think the quest is considered completed."

"What is that thing anyway? Shouldn't we just bring it out to Goddess Wrath? She should be able to deal with it, shouldn't she?"

Red Death didn't deny that that was one way to solve the problem. Wrath said that she couldn't enter because this thing prevented it. But if Red Death took this thing to her, she should be able to sever this thing's influence on this place. However, Red Death was also curious about the thing.

"Wait, I will try to inspect it first," she said. When she used the skill, a loading bar appeared.

"This will take quite some time," she informed Rayne. She put the round object on the ground and sat cross-legged beside it.

Rayne didn't argue her decision. He stood by her side and observed the surrounding. See if there were any other menaces.

After half an hour, the loading bar was finally filled. The information about the round object was revealed and her eyes went wide.

It was the Ice God Sphere. She knew about this item because Jack had told her about it. It was the only remaining divine treasure whose location was still unknown. Jack said that someone had found this divine treasure via a quest that Master tweaked, but that person died a wilderness death. This caused this Ice God Sphere to get transferred to a random SSS quest somewhere in this world.

Whether it was fate or luck, she had stumbled upon this divine treasure. She wasn't going to let this opportunity go.

"Watch over me!" She said to Rayne.

"What? Why? Have you found out what that thing is?" Rayne asked.

"Just watched the surroundings. I won't be able to move for quite some time. I will need your protection if any monsters show up."

Rayne was already used to Red Death ignoring his question ever since she came to Rhemos' side, but it didn't mean he was not annoyed by it. He was tempted to use his own Inspect on the round object, but since it took a long time for the Inspect to work, he decided against it. He needed to be ready in case a monster approached.

Jack had also told Red Death about what happened when someone established a link with a divine treasure. She took out her recovery potions and put them next to her for easy access. It's a good thing that Wrath's set armors provided passive HP recovery, that should help. Her level was also much higher than Jack's when he linked with the Lightning God Sphere, so her HP pool was more than Jack's at that time.

After finishing her preparation, she drank a potion and waited until her HP bar fully recovered. Then, she interfaced with the Ice God Sphere. She proceeded with the option to soul-link with it.

After some time, the temperature around her dropped another notch. Ice flakes started to materialize. Before long, the air around her started to swirl. A sharp ice blade was formed from the cold air. It then slashed her arm, causing damage.

"Red...!" Rayne called worriedly. He was about to come to her aid but Red Death stopped him.

"It's okay! Just don't let anything come near. You don't need to worry about whatever happens in my vicinity."

Rayne was not truly convinced, but he didn't approach her. He stood away and continued to observe.

More ice blades were formed, and they continued to cut Red Death's body. As time passed, she started drinking healing potions and regeneration potions because her HP recovery was unable to keep up with the damage anymore.

Layers of frost started covering parts of her body, but they were unable to fully cover her. She thought maybe it was because of the Madness Raiment's immunity to freeze. The gears' high resistance to the ice element also helped to mitigate the ice blades' damage. Wrath not only gave her equipment that helped her complete this quest but also aided her in conquering this divine treasure.

After a long torment, the icy wind raging around Red Death died down. The Ice God Sphere broke apart. It then turned into many tiny icicles and stabbed into Red Death's body.

Red Death was panting after all was over.

"Are you all right?" Rayne asked. "What was that all about?"

Red Death gave Rayne an explanation. He was extremely surprised to find out that the round ball just now was a divine treasure. Although Red Death trusted Rayne, she still thought it was prudent to not inform her companion until she fused with the divine treasure.

Rayne showed a surprised expression, but he didn't seem offended by Red Death's act.

Red Death was opening her status window to check the information about the fused treasure.

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Ice God Blessing, Level 1/3

Ice resistance +50 (passive skill)

Every attack +10% ice damage and 1% chance to cause Freeze for 2 seconds (passive skill)

Ice God Barrage (Active skill)

Shoot 20 balls of ice that explode dealing 300% ice damage each in a 5-meter diameter area, 30% chance of causing Freeze for 5 seconds, 80% chance of causing Slow for 30 seconds.

Range: 20 meters

Cooldown: 5 hours

Upgrade to the next level requires: 1 Divine Gem, 10 Magic Crystal, exp: 0/3,000,000

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'No wonder Jack's skill is so powerful,' Red Death thought. She looked at the experience required to level up the blessing. She knew that the next exp points she received would all be consumed by this blessing. But for her current level, three million exp points was no problem.

Their surrounding suddenly transformed before their eyes. The snow on the ground melted. The ice on the frozen tree cracked before shattering, revealing the tree within. The tree then burst into flame. The melted snow gathered and turned into lava rivers. Multiple geysers were sighted along the land. Even the previously blue sky turned red.

While they were marveling at the transformation, a voice was heard from the sky, "I'm impressed, mortals. The two of you have succeeded. You've returned my chamber to me."

Wrath materialized from the thin air above them.

'Chamber? This looks more like another world,' Red Death thought within.

"Only a world is worthy to be a Goddess' chamber, isn't it?" Wrath chuckled. When she saw Red Death's surprised expression, she explained, "In my chamber, no mortal's thoughts can be shielded. Hm...?"

Wrath floated down to where Red Death was. "You have something inside you... This... It's the Ice God Blessing... I see. So, the thing that had invaded my chamber was a divine treasure. No wonder it resisted my power."

Wrath then gave Red Death a sharp glance, "You are pretty brazen to just fuse with it without my permission."

"You said to get rid of it. I get rid of it," Red Death answered.

Rayne was anxious hearing the exchange. He was worried that Wrath would feel offended.

Instead, the Goddess laughed. "Hahaha. Outworlder, I like you. I will free your aunt as we agreed, but you will be my follower."

"Follower?" Red Death asked.

"From now on. You will do my bidding. You will carry my will and be my representative in the outside world."

"I..."

"This is not a discussion. If you refuse, your aunt will be freed as promised, but you will take her place instead."

"... All right," Red Death said. She didn't seem to have any choice.

"Good!" Wrath uttered.

Red Death heard a system notification that her quest had been completed. The received exp points immediately filled up the exp needed by the Ice God Blessing. Additionally, she received notification that she had received a special class.

The special class was called Mad Slayer, a first-class special class.

Chapter 993: The Day of the Execution

Since yesterday's announcement where outworlders were banned from Themisphere's cities, the population inside the capital had been on edge. After this one year, the natives had gotten used to the existence of the outworlders. Many of their economies and livelihoods also revolved around these outworlders. Many had even become good friends with them. So, when these outworlders were ushered out, the capital suddenly felt much emptier.

Many of the outworlders were similarly confused. Everything had been so sudden. They didn't understand why this had happened. All they had been told was that an outworlder named Storm Wind had committed the grave sin of murdering the heir to the throne.

But that was the act of one person. Why were they also punished? Not to mention, wasn't that Storm Wind supposed to be the country's hero? One of the generals who pushed back against the orc invasion and also a good friend of the prince? Why was he accused of the prince's death?

Not much was explained to them. They had just been told to pack up yesterday and then escorted out of the capital. It was no problem for the adventurers, but a large portion of them were just common folks who had no interest in braving the wilderness. They had made their livings within the capital all this time, so their level was still very low. Most of them were below level 10.

They had been making camps next to the capital. They didn't dare to venture too far for fear of meeting high-level monsters. A group of high-level independent players had volunteered to guard these camps, protecting them from monsters that wandered close.

They knew this was not a solution. They couldn't continue to camp outside like this. The kingdom had promised to give them a decision in a few more days. But many received rumors that there was a high chance that they would get chased out of this country entirely.

The atmosphere around the camps was mostly in bad mood due to these rumors. Some of them had even started to curse Storm Wind for being the person who had caused all these misfortunes.

The news was that this Storm Wind was to be executed at noon today. Those angry with this situation hoped they could witness the execution as well.

While they were waiting for noon, they saw an army of high-level players appear in front of the capital, facing the entrance gate. Horns were sounded from the city wall. The gate opened and a company of kingdom soldiers marched out. They came to meet this outworlder force.

The common players who saw the incident were very curious. They approached but didn't dare to come too close. They watched the scene from afar.

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Two persons came out of this large group of high-level players. These two were John and Jeanny. They approached the kingdom's company who watched them warily. Many of the current players were now slightly above the average soldier's level, after all.

The captain of the company walked out and addressed them, "What is the purpose of this congregation?!"

John and Jeanny stopped a distance away.

"We demand the release of Storm Wind! Or we will raze this capital...!!!" John shouted at the top of his lungs.

Not only the soldiers who were taken aback by this declaration, even the players watching from a distance away hear John's words. They were all wondering who these lunatics were. Challenging the natives like this?

"Can you please tone it down a bit?" Jeanny chided.

"What? He asked us to make a spectacle. This is us making a spectacle," John returned.

"But we need to draw their attention for some time. If they lose their patience and decide to just attack us instead of talk, then we are the ones in trouble."

The two spoke by whispering so the soldiers weren't aware of their conversation, but the way the two talked looked very much like two people bickering. The soldiers were confused. These outworlders suddenly showed up and antagonized them and then quarrel among themselves. They were not sure if they should take the declaration just now seriously.

Finally, out of the two, the woman spoke, "My good captain. Can you please send words to those inside the palace? We are from the Everlasting Heavenly Legends and its allies. We are the groups representing the outworlders in this country. We wish to speak with the person in charge."

The captain snorted. "What right do you outsiders have to dare ask for that? You should be glad that we tolerated you for this long. Leave now! Or don't blame us for being rude."

"Try it," John said. "You might be intimidating in the past, but take a look at the situation now. All of you are around level 45 and 50. You have the highest level at 55 and a special elite. Most of us are above your level already. Do you think you can stop us?"

The captain was speechless. It felt like not long ago when these outworlders were weaklings. How did they improve so fast?

"We are not the only soldiers in the capital. There are many more powerful ones inside," The captain said, refusing to be cowed.

"Yes, that's why we request you to call them out," Jeanny said. "You can see our large group here, but you can check that we also have allies at the eastern and western gates."

"In other words, you are surrounded," John said.

The captain sneered at John's words. Surrounded by outworlders? Like that was something to be worried about.

John continued, "We know that after the invasion war, most of the kingdom soldiers had gone to the border outposts. To replenish the soldiers who originally came from there but had died during the war. Those borders need soldiers more urgently. Hence, the number of soldiers guarding the cities decreased instead, including this capital."

"Don't forget that we can also summon our guild armies if a confrontation broke out," Jeanny added. "So, our numbers can easily double."

If a battle broke out with a large number of natives, it would be considered war. The world system would then allow the guilds to summon their guild armies.

The captain became wary after hearing the two's words, but he kept a solemn face. "Don't forget that we have two mythical-grade lord marshalls still inside this capital."

"Please invite them to come out. We very much like to talk to them," Jeanny said with a smile.

The captain hesitated a bit before calling his deputy to deliver the message to the palace. After his deputy left, he stood there with the rest of his company. They just stared at John and Jeanny in silence.

John and Jeanny walked back to the army of players they came with. At the front of that army were mostly the core members of Everlasting Heavenly Legends. Domon and Leavemealone were also there. They used their guild return scroll yesterday after learning about the situation.

Aside from their guild members, there were also leaders or representatives from the other guilds.

"Thank you again for have come," Jeanny said to these representatives. Among them were Silverwing, Prideful Josh, Jennifer, David, Kill Order, and Regim.

"I'm here with my closest followers representing myself, not my guild," Silverwing said. "Unfortunately, my father opposed this act of going against the kingdom. So, we won't be able to assist you with our guild army if a battle truly occurred."

"Your presence here is already appreciated," Jeanny said.

"But you said a battle won't happen, right? That we are just putting a display?" Prideful Josh said to John.

"I said that if everything goes as planned, then there will be no battle," John replied. "But you know how things go with plans, don't you?"

"Do you forget already about the last battle in the invasion war? You still trust his words?" Kill Order said to Josh.

"Then why are you here?" Josh asked Kill Order.

"Well, my sources said that our time here in this country is numbered. Might as well go out with a bang," Kill Order answered.

"To be honest, I'm kinda surprised the two of you answered our call," John said of Prideful Josh and Kill Order. "I'm not surprised that the others didn't come, but the one that I'm disappointed with is that fatty. F*ck that Fat Gregory! He is so complying during the wars. Now, when the situation is truly dire, he bails out!"

John and Jeanny had sent a call of aid to all the guilds in their new coalition. Many didn't come. As for Dogs of War and Jackal Crews, they came because Jeanny paid them for the services. But the agreement was only for them to show up. If they were hired to go on a direct conflict with the natives, even they won't dare to accept the mission.

"We can't blame him, John," Jeanny said of Fat Gregory. "This is our mess. It is already great that some come to our aid."

"That's right. This is your mess. I hope you truly have a way out," Prideful Josh said. "It will be truly frustrating if all of us have to suffer just because of what Storm Wind did. So, can you tell us your plan now?"

"I don't have one," John replied.

"What? Are you tricking us again by not telling us your plan like in the invasion war?"

"No. I seriously have no plan here. We are here because of Storm Wind's request."

"What?" Almost all the other guild representatives uttered with surprised expressions. "What is his plan?"

"Beats me," John replied. "All he asked us to do is try to draw as many forces as possible out of the palace."

"Are you seriously doing this without knowing his full plan?" Kill Order asked.

"If I am to be honest. No, I don't like this any more than you do," John said. "But although that guy is reckless and sometimes appeared clumsy, he also gets the job done. Well, most of the time..."

"Don't worry," Jeanny said. "I believe in him. He will solve this mess."

Chapter 994: Preparing the Execution

"Those pests...!!!"

Claudius slammed his fist on the table. He was inside the war room with Royal advisor Mason, Princess Sindral, Duke Alfredo, Duchess Isabelle, lord commander Armstrong, the two lord marshals, Emris and Meryl, and several other officials.

They had convened for an emergency meeting due to the sudden provocation by the outworlders outside the capital.

"We should have eradicated all of them when we have the chance!" Claudius exclaimed. "Therribus was right! Sooner or later, the outworlders will rebel, just like they do now!"

"They aren't rebelling. They just want to talk," Duchess Isabelle said.

"Bringing an army to our doorstep? Is that what you called a talk?" Claudius returned. "Give me the command of the army. I will go out and give them a talk!"

"Whatever it is. It will not be good for both sides if a battle occurred," Duke Alfredo said.

"What is there to fear? They are outworlders. We can easily crush them!"

"In the past! Now, most of them are slightly above our average soldiers already."

"We have many officers who are still higher level than them."

"Yes. But at the moment, in this capital, they outnumber us," Alfredo said. "We have lost plenty of troops during the orc invasion. Many of the troops originally garrisoned in the cities are now transferred to the border stations, including the troops in this city. The troops we have available here didn't reach 20,000 soldiers. The outworlders outside our three city gates number more than that."

"Don't forget that if a battle happens, they can also summon their guild soldiers," Armstrong reminded. "I've seen their numbers. Each of the guilds with headquarters can summon roughly 15,000 soldiers. Their numbers have surely reduced after the war, but if they all summon their soldiers, it will still be significant."

"They won't win with numbers. We have more higher-level officers. Don't forget also that our two lord marshalls are here," Claudius said. "What can they do against mythical-grade combatants?"

"Although their levels were lower, the Everlasting Heavenly Legends also have Mythical-grade combatants. Their guild hero and guild guardian," Duke Alfredo said.

"We have three of them!" Claudius said, looking at Duchess Isabelle.

"They also have three. One of their members has a mythical-grade companion. A champion from the destroyed Council of Virtus. He is not someone to be underestimated despite his lower level."

"It is as you said! All of their mythical combatants are lower level than ours, they won't win!" Claudius exclaimed.

"They won't. But with their numbers, they will still be able to cause damage to our capital. If we battle them out in the open, we won't be able to stop their number from breaching into the capital."

"So what? We just cower inside the capital like we are afraid of them? I can't accept that!"

"We won't. We will make a show of force," Duke Alfredo said. "We will head out there and give them what they want. A talk. But we will do so with a full showcase of our battle power, which means all the available high-level combatants. We will remind them that trying to go against us by force will not end well for them."

"Okay," Claudius said. "But what if the talk goes south? I mean, what are we even want to talk to them about? They want that Storm Wind boy, don't they? Don't tell me you are going to negotiate with them about releasing that murderer. The court has already decided on his death sentence. We will lose face if we are not going through with it!"

"We will of course respect the court's verdict," Alfredo said. "The point of us going out to intimidate and talk with them is just to buy time. They want to prevent us from executing the boy. We simply delay them by talking while we carry out the execution early. They shouldn't expect this as noon is still three hours away. Once the boy is back to level 1 and loses everything. We just show him to them. The outworlders value strength. If they saw him as a powerless person, they will have no more reason to fight us."

"I'm surprised," Emris said. "I thought you are the one who objects to his execution the most."

"Do not insult me, lord marshal," Alfredo said. "Although I still don't believe that he is the one who murdered Prince Alonzo, I still belong to this kingdom. I won't tolerate the outworlders' rebelling act. They have themselves to blame for pushing us into hastening Storm Wind's execution."

"Please accept my apology then, my duke," Emris said with a slight bow.

Mason took a deep breath before asking everyone, "Does anyone have any other proposal? If not, I'm keen to agree with the duke. All of you will head out to meet those outworlders. Princess Sindral and I will stay behind with a few soldiers to carry out the execution."

When no one say anything, Mason told them to dismiss and start organizing the soldiers inside the capital to head out.

When all of them left, Duke Alfredo stayed behind.

"Is there anything else?" Mason asked the duke.

"Royal advisor, I'm sorry. I know that the verdict has been given. But can you please give the boy another chance?" Duke Alfredo said.

Mason knew the boy the duke referred to was Jack. He said, "Duke Alfredo, I know your friendship with that boy is deep. To be honest, I myself am as surprised as you. But we cannot ignore the evidence. Everything points to him as the murderer."

"I understand. But can you at least listen to him one last time before his execution? We have never listened to his side of the story. Just you and Princess Sindral. That's all I asked. I will head out and fight those outworlders if I have to, but I hope you give him at least this one chance. Even if it is just to honor his accomplishments from the invasion war."

Mason breathed a long sigh and said, "Fine. I will give him a chance to talk before his execution."

"Then we have to do the execution indoors," Princess Sindral said. "His words will be for us to judge. We can't let the others hear what he said. Just in case he spouts something that might cause doubts to the kingdom."

"I don't think that will happen, but as long as you two are willing to talk to him. I'm happy about it," Duke Alfredo said. "I will have my people arrange the execution device inside a closed room in this palace right now. I will also arrange for people to carry Storm Wind to that room bound with runic rope. He won't be able to do anything."

Mason nodded. "We will trouble you then," he said.

Duke Alfredo excused himself and left the room to make the arrangement.

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The room that was prepared as the execution room was a large circular hall at the upper part of the palace. It had a door to a balcony outside. Mason and Princess Sindral came to this room after Duke Alfredo's people informed them that the execution device had been set there.

The execution device was a large crystal that was attached to the ceiling. It had rune diagrams all over its surface. It emitted a field that caused anyone who died within its vicinity to die a wilderness death despite they were in a city. It also caused players who died inside its field of effect to come back to life here instead of at the usual rebirth point.

Upon activation, the crystal would shoot a continuous beam of energy onto the user's target, delivering magical damage. The target was usually bound so it was just a matter of time until the crystal depleted the target's HP.

The soldiers who set up the device informed Mason that the device had been set to follow the royal advisor's command.

Mason and Sindral were now on the balcony looking outside while they waited for Jack to be delivered to them. They watched the kingdom troops gathered at the palace's courtyard below before marching out to meet the outworlders outside the city gate.

"Do you think the outworlders will truly go against us for Storm Wind?" Princess Sindral asked.

Mason sighed. "I guess it is difficult for two different living beings to live together, just as the seven main races in this world live apart from each other. Probably these outworlders will just move to another land and create an eighth main country."

"That might probably be the best," Sindral said.

They heard the door open then. They turned back and saw Jack walk into the hall. He was bound by a runic rope and was flanked by two soldiers.

Mason and Sindral went back into the hall and closed the door to the balcony. The two soldiers that brought Jack excused themselves and shut the door when they exited. In the hall were now only Jack, royal advisor Mason, and Princess Sindral.

"I hear you want to talk," Mason said to Jack. "In honor of your past accomplishments, I will give you one last chance to speak before we carry out your execution."

Jack replied with a smile, which confused the two. "How about I tell you the real culprit behind Prince Alonzo's assassination?"

Chapter 995: Confronting the Culprit

"Everyone agrees that you are the culprit. Are you saying that you are innocent?" Princess Sindral asked. She was wearing her usual mask.

Jack continued to smile. "There are only the three of us here. I know that I won't be able to avoid my fate. At least I want to get this off my chest before you carry out my execution. I hope you don't mind humoring me in my last moment before you take away everything I have."

"I'm afraid I can't overturn the verdict, but we'll hear you speak, Mister Storm Wind," Mason said.

"Thank you, royal advisor," Jack responded.

"Now, I have been doing a lot of thinking in that jail, and all that idle time gave me all sorts of imagination. One such imagination just sorts of stuck in my mind. So, allow me to tell you a tale."

"A tale?" Sindral asked.

"Indulge me, will you, Your Highness? It's my last moment, after all," Jack said.

Mason didn't say anything but he gestured for Jack to continue.

"This is a tale about the children of a royal family. A royal family of a kingdom that lives with patriarchal values. The king of the kingdom has four children, three sons and one daughter. Everyone understands that one of the sons will be the one who will inherit the throne one day. However, unknown to everyone, the most ambitious among the king's children is the daughter, instead. So ambitious that she is willing to live her entire life in a mask that shrouds everyone from her true intention. So ambitious that she is willing to plot the death of her three brothers. All that so that she can defy the patriarchal rule of the kingdom. Since there is no other heir left, there is no choice but to appoint her as the next in line for the throne of the kingdom."

"That is one entertaining imagination," Mason said. "But please don't insult my intelligence. You are clearly referring to Princess Sindral here. I will not stand by while you sully the future queen of this kingdom. It is indeed a wise choice that we hear your words in this secluded hall. Otherwise, it will be a problem if this nasty lie is spread outside the palace wall."

"Oh, but I know that you will be hearing me inside a secluded room," Jack said. "In her effort to pry information from me last night, the princess had instead unmasked herself before me. I'm sure she will not let me speak freely in front of a crowd."

Mason glanced at Sindral, before saying, "If that's all you want to say, then..."

"My tale is not finished yet, royal advisor," Jack cut Mason's words. "There is still more. You see. Despite her ambition and her status as a princess, she is still powerless in this patriarchal kingdom. There is so much she couldn't do without exposing herself. No. Although she had ambition, she needs a helper. Someone who is the other culprit. Who planned and was involved in all the ploys to get rid of her three brothers."

Mason's eyes narrowed to slits.

"That other culprit is none other than you, royal advisor," Jack said.

There was silence in the room before Mason burst into a laugh. "As I said, it is truly an entertaining imagination, Mister Storm Wind."

Jack laughed as well. "Well, then, since it is so entertaining, you don't mind me continuing, right?"

Although he was laughing, Mason's eyes were in contemplation. He said after a few seconds of pause.

"All right. It's your last words, after all. Might as well let you say them."

"Thank you," Jack said cheerfully. "As I said, you have been planning this for a long time. Including Prince Alonzo's second attempted assassination after he returned from the expedition with Duke Alfredo. It is neither Therribus nor Rhemos' doing. It is yours!"

Mason just chuckled at the accusation.

"Remember when I said it is weird that the ploy was so well prepared that it allowed the assassin to flee and the evidence erased, yet the assassination itself failed?" Jack continued. "The reason was the assassination was meant to fail. Its intention was not to take the prince's life. At least not yet at that time. It was also not to sow hatred against outworlders. Though, I suppose you didn't mind that

accidental effect. That assassination was to harden Prince Alonzo's resolve to fight for the throne. To make him stand up and fight his brothers. Because what you wanted was for the three princes to fight fiercely for the throne. Fighting until only one was left, destabilizing the kingdom in the process. When only one was left, you took care of that surviving one. At that point, the people will be so wary of the kingdom's situation that they will welcome even an unorthodox ruler. A queen, for example, which breaks away from this kingdom's tradition."

Sindral didn't say anything. She just wore a thin smile on her face while glancing at Mason.

"Honestly, during the civil war, I felt kind of weird about why we had to go full confrontation with Therribus," Jack continued. "I mean, if our objective was Alonzo's safety, Alonzo could just run around the country. This country is big. Alonzo won't be able to hide but it was also not easy for Therribus to catch up to him. In the meantime, the reinforcement army we formed could go and harass Therribus' army, giving Alonzo a better chance of escaping. I didn't think about it too much at the time. But after this incident, it kind of makes sense now. You are the one who proposed Alonzo take shelter in Fort Garadhor."

Jack couldn't point his finger at Mason, so he was doing it using an intense stare.

"After Rhemos was taken out, only two princes were left. That was your golden opportunity. You wanted the two to fight it out at Fort Garadhor. Although on the outside you seem to support Prince Alonzo, I bet you never thought that he could win. On the contrary, you were hoping that it was Prince Therribus who won the civil war. Because Therribus would have no hesitation in executing Alonzo once he won. Alonzo was different. Unfortunately, even though it was Alonzo who won, as fate would have it, Therribus still died even when Alonzo had tried to spare his life."

Mason shook his head as if he had heard the most absurd thing.

"Another reason that you preferred for Therribus to become the victor was so it would be easier to place blame when you assassinated him," Jack continued. "If Therribus won, every outworlder in this country would know that their freedom was on borrowed time. If he was assassinated, no one would think twice about suspecting that the perpetrator was an outworlder.

"However, the impossible happened. Prince Alonzo won. This caused you to have trouble trying to think of a plan. Because your original plan to blame it on the outworlder was now not so feasible anymore. Alonzo was a friend to the outworlders. People wouldn't just take your word for it. No, you needed a plan before carrying out the assassination. I heard the coronation was delayed after the civil war. I bet it was you who suggested the prince delay it. Then, when you finally think of a good scapegoat to blame for the assassination, you are unable to carry it out because the scapegoat was nowhere to be found."

Jack thought of the time when he was trapped inside Greed's sanctum.

"Then, the orcs invaded. So, the coronation was delayed even more. When the invasion war ended, you immediately called the most accomplished outworlders to the palace, to reward them. But in reality, you wanted to put pressure on one of these outworlders, who was also your intended scapegoat, so that he didn't go off again before the coronation. You also demand that he attend the rehearsal, daily, without fail. All that was to ensure that I would be there to take the fall when Alonzo was murdered.

"You have me fetch the prince, day by day, waiting in front of his bed-chamber. All to ensure I am the only person in the room when the prince was murdered. But there was another person that was possible to be inside the room as well. A person who was able to bypass the rune diagrams that prevented people from using teleportation. The one remaining royal family member, Princess Sindral!"

"Hahaha," Sindral laughed. "You are truly delusional. Even though I am a noble and heir, I am but a level 1 commoner. Can't you use your Inspect?"

"There are many instances where a disguise can fool the Inspect skill," Jack returned. "After you killed Alonzo, you waited inside the room until you heard me calling. Then you broke a vase to lure me into the room before you teleported away. All the while, Mason waited nearby so he could bring the guards when I am still shocked after discovering the prince's body."

"That is all very fascinating theory, Mister Storm Wind. But please let me assure you, I never meant you any harm," Mason said.

"You know, I probably wouldn't have suspected you if you haven't blurted when you caught me in the prince's chamber," Jack said.

"Blurted?" Mason was confused.

"The day we found Prince Alonzo's body, I mentioned someone using the teleporting skill to escape the room. Everyone else had given me a dismissing remark because they knew it was an impossibility, except for you. You instead asked me why I said what I said. You didn't know I have a tool that can detect the positions of nearby people. You were surprised that I know someone had teleported from the room. Otherwise, you would have dismissed my claim just as Emris and the guards."

Mason shook his head with a smile. "I simply trusted you, Mister Storm Wind," he said. "I don't suppose you have proof, do you? Otherwise, this is all just a conjecture."

"Why do we bother about this?" Sindral hissed. "Just execute him already!"

"Heh! Where is that gentle mask of yours?" Jack said to Sindral. Then he turned to Mason and said, "I don't have proof. Commander Quintus had gone to investigate further to help me find proof. He must have found one, but he was instead assassinated by one of you."

"Since there is no proof, then I can't take your words seriously," Mason said.

"Do you think this is one of those detective movies? Where I need proof to punish the wicked?" Jack asked.

Both Mason and Sindral were confused. 'What the heck is a detective movie?' They thought.

"All I need to do is just prove that Princess Sindral is not a level 1 commoner!" Jack exclaimed. As he did, the rope that bound him slipped to the ground. Both Mason and Sindral were extremely surprised by this turn of events.

"For Alonzo and Quintus, take this slash! Reveal yourself!" Jack shouted as Storm Breaker appeared in his hand. It slashed forward and produced a crescent light.

The Sword of Light traveled at a very fast speed at Sindral. Mason wanted to do something but crimson chains burst underneath him, locking his movements.

The crescent light hit Sindral, who wore a terrified face. Damage number appeared and she slumped to the floor. Her HP was zero.

'What...?' Jack was startled by the scene.

"What have you done...!" Mason shouted.

Another voice was heard. "No... Storm... What have you done..." Duke Alfredo appeared from the shadow in the corner. The crimson chains that bound Mason were his spell.

Jack was speechless. He was confident that he was right. 'No!' He thought suddenly. Princess Sindral was not the only remaining one. One more person inside this palace was considered part of the royal family!

Chapter 996: A Different Kind of Invasion

Early morning before John and Jeanny led their members towards the capital, Duke Alfredo had come to visit Jack again. He was again using a disguise so no one was aware he had been visiting Jack. He told Jack then that he would go with Jack's plan.

Jack gave him his Cloak of Shadow, which gave the duke the ability to hide in the shadow as long as he remained still.

Although the rune diagrams in the jail cell prevented Jack to access his inventory, the Cloak of Shadow was on his body. So, he had no problem removing it manually and lent it to the duke.

After the duke synchronized his plan by proposing all combat-capable personnel head out to face the outworlders and persuading Mason and Sindral to have a private moment with Jack, he had gone to the room where the execution device was prepared. He then hid in the corner and let himself meld into the shadow and waited.

The soldier that had gone to pick Jack up from the cell was his trusted underling. The soldier was instructed to tie Jack but in a way that Jack could easily unbind himself.

Duchess Isabelle was also aware of her husband's plan. Alfredo confided with her the night after he visited Jack. It was due to her supporting this plan that Alfredo decided to go with it.

Duchess Isabelle had followed the others out to meet the outworlders. When anyone asked the duchess where the duke was. Why didn't he go with them to face the outworlders outside? She simply answered that he would be joining soon, that he had something else to take care of first.

Now, inside this execution hall, seeing Princess Sindral's lifeless body, Duke Alfredo couldn't help but think that he had taken the wrong decision. He was now an accomplice to the person who had eradicated the last of the Themisphere's royal line!

His mind was blank at the time. He couldn't fight this regret that was eating inside him.

Mason, who was bound by the duke's Myriad Ensnaring Chains, used the human race's skill, Willpower to break the chains' hold. The chains came back soon but he managed to cast a movement spell that brought him away from the chains' area.

Mason was a level 50 rare elite. He knew that he was not Jack's opponent. But he had the execution tool in his command.

"Fire!" He exclaimed while asserting his mind to the crystal above. Yet, it remained dormant.

He realized then, that the control of the crystal was never set to him. The soldiers who had set up the device were Duke Alfredo's people.

"Traitor...!!" He cursed at the duke who was still dazed in the corner.

"Guards!!" Mason called while running to the exit, but no one responded. Duke Alfredo had arranged so no soldiers were in the vicinity of this hall.

"Hold!" Jack was about to cast a spell to prevent Mason from fleeing, but the door to the hall suddenly opened. A large blade pierced Mason who was running towards the door.

Mason looked at the person who had ambushed him. His eyes were wide with surprise. "But... But... Your Majesty... I have done everything you instructed... Wh—Why...?"

A large armored man with a pale face came into the room. His steps were heavy and strong. His armor was dark gold in color. There was a dark golden crown on his head. There were many runic symbols surrounding his body.

"That's a rune technique!" Peniel uttered.

The runes slammed into Mason, who was still pierced by the armored man's sword. White flame erupted from Mason's body and burned everything in the vicinity. Mason screamed from the burning. His HP dropped rapidly. It was not long before his HP was zeroed and his body turned into a char.

"King... King Themos...?!" Duke Alfredo uttered.

"So... It truly is you...," Jack said. "King Themos, you are the one behind all this...!!"

"Hehe... Haha... Hahahaha...!" Themos laughed loudly.

"But... Isn't your condition...," The duke's words trailed off.

"My condition... Yes... It's amazing what one might do for his mortality," Themos said.

"What do you mean, Your Majesty?" Alfredo asked.

"Use your Inspect, duke," Jack told him.

Alfredo did so.

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Themos (Mythical Vampire, Fledgling, King), level 78

HP: 1,860,000

*

"Vam—Vampire...?" Alfredo Stammered.

Themos grinned, revealing his two sharp vampire fangs.

"He is the true culprit behind all this mess, duke," Jack said.

"But... but... your sons..." Duke turned to Sindral's body and added, "... your daughter."

Themos looked at Sindral's body. "Good. You save me time from doing it myself," he said. He then looked down at the charred corpse under his feet. "Don't forget my loyal aide here."

Themos' foot mercilessly stomped on the charred head, breaking it completely. "They are just the remnants of my old self. They meant nothing to me now. Hahaha!"

Both Jack and Alfredo were speechless at Themos' ruthlessness. Jack didn't know the king. This was the first time he laid eyes on the monarch. But the duke was different, Jack could see the shock on his face.

"You... You are not the king!" Alfredo uttered.

"If you are referring to that weak useless human you called the king, then yes, I am no longer that Themos. I have now been reborn, by my master! Hahaha!"

"Master? Care to tell us your master's name?" Jack asked.

"You are not worthy of his name," Themos returned.

"Then do you mind explaining what all this is about?"

Themos watched the two with his grin. He then said, "I suppose I can tell you a bit. Consider it my last confession. You will take them to your grave anyway. As this country knew, my body had been deteriorating for some time. About one year ago, I got a visit from an exalted being."

'One year ago, about the time when outworlders started appearing,' Jack thought. In this case, he could rule out World Maker in this scheme. Despite their knowledge, they were still powerless at that time. This meant what conspired here was caused by a native force.

"By exalted, I guess you mean your current master, right?" Jack asked.

Themos just sneered for a reply. "He offered me a choice for an immortal life free of illness."

"I'm pretty sure he demanded payment, didn't he?"

"Of course, there is no free lunch in this world. What he asked in return is something unimaginable to me at that time. He gave me time to think about it. I considered just rejecting him and being done with my life. But I guess my old self is not only weak but also a coward. In the end, I succumb to the fear of dying and agreed to his terms."

"... What terms are they?" Alfredo asked.

"Wiping out all my descendants," Themos answered.

Alfredo gasped. He couldn't believe his ears. "And... and you agree to it...?"

"Of course, I was told to do it inconspicuously. The people will revolt if I simply publicly executed all my descendants. Hence, all this scheming. I have heard what you said to Mason from outside. Most of what you said is correct. Except it was not Sindral who drove a blade into Alonzo and Quintus. It was me. Haha!"

"So, these two who helped you with your scheming. You have always planned to kill them?" Jack asked.

"Of course, they knew too much. Furthermore, Sindral was included in the descendants I need to get rid of. As you said, the country is in so much turmoil that they will most likely accept any leader who can bring stability back. Even one who is a vampire. I will appear to the public as that leader, exposing my vampire race as a blessing from heaven."

"Don't you get it? You have sold your country to a foreign force!" Jack uttered. "You might continue to rule this kingdom but at other's bidding! I bet that master of yours is a noble from the Sangrod Empire, isn't he? He had you wipe out all your descendants just to make sure that his rule through you is unchallenged. This is no more than a different kind of invasion!"

Themos' grin didn't diminish. "So what? All that's important is that I live. This country is mine. What's wrong with selling it in exchange for my life? This country should be happy that they can serve their king in this way. Since my turning, my life has been my master's. This country and all his subjects will now be his as well. Hahaha...!"

"You...!!" Duke Alfredo was lost for words. The shock on his face now turned to anger. Anger at a betrayal by the one he had pledged his loyalty to.

"I must admit, you are more than what I expect," Themos said of Jack. "When Mason told me a report regarding you, I was the one who asked him to recruit you into our kingdom faction. By accepting you into our faction, I can better observe the outworlders so I can judge how wary I should be toward them."

"I guess you have now decided that outworlders are too dangerous?" Jack asked.

"Hehe, the old me that is still human did follow the Gods' instruction by accepting your lot among us. But now, after watching your progress, I change my mind. My master agrees with me as well."

"He agrees with you, or your mind is simply influenced by his?" Jack asked.

"Hehe," Themos simply chuckled at the question.

"The news leak about Jack murdering Prince Alonzo, was that also Mason's doing?" Alfredo asked.

"It is, following my instruction. I want to push the court to a swift ending," Themos answered. "It is boring getting cooped up all the time in my chamber, you know. Only having Mason and Sindral to talk to. Now, this wait is over. I will reveal myself to the public and be this country's savior, eradicating the outworlders who are the menace to this country!"

"No. Everyone will know that you've betrayed your own kingdom!" Jack said. He then turned to Alfredo, "Duke, you are still recording, right?"

"I am," the duke answered.

"Recording?" Themos asked bewilderedly.

Instead of answering, duke Alfredo shouted, "I will punish you for our kingdom!" He activated the execution device above. It shot a thick yellow beam at Themos.

Chapter 997: Territory Advantage

Themos lifted his free hand just as the yellow beam arrived. A rectangular translucent bronze wall appeared before the king. The yellow beam smashed into the wall but it was unable to penetrate.

"Don't forget. This is still my palace!" Themos said. He then pointed at the crystal above and uttered, "deactivate!"

The runic symbols that were flaring on the ceiling around the execution crystal grew dim before disappearing altogether. The crystal lost its power and the assaulting beam stopped.

"Hah! Just accept your fate!" Themos exclaimed and swung his large sword. Raging winds filled with white flame swept across the hall.

Jack cast Barrier and Magic Shield, but he was still swept by the wind. He was thrown to the ceiling before slamming back to the floor. Duke Alfredo was in a better situation. He cast Magic Wall, but it broke after being assaulted by the flaming wind a few times. He staggered backward while protecting himself with his magic shield.

"Haha, you two are not bad. To tell you the truth, my original power isn't this strong," Themos laughed. "The duke should know. I was originally a rare elite. It was due to my vampiric rebirth that my power increased by one grade. My master said that it was because of my royal bloodline. Hahaha! I never had the chance to go all out ever since turning. I will use you two to test my power!"

Many runic symbols appeared and revolved around Themos.

"It's a rune technique again! Don't let him finish it!" Peniel exclaimed.

"Another one? Didn't he just use it when he killed Mason?!" Jack uttered.

"Then he probably has two rune techniques!" Peniel replied.

"Damnit!" Jack used Wind Slash and fired Mana Beam, while Duke Alfredo cast a spell that conjured several magical hammers.

However, all those attacks were stopped by the translucent bronze wall that was still in front of Themos. The wall was called Bulwark of Royalty. It had a very high defense and also had its own HP. If its HP was not depleted, it could last for as long as three minutes.

Themos was grinning behind the translucent wall. His expression was clearly mocking the two's efforts.

"Don't underestimate us, you filicides freak!" Jack exclaimed and used his companion token.

Jack summoned Arlcard, Therras, Ice Demon Fiend, his spirit weapon, and his ten wolves.

"No summons!" Themos exclaimed. The rune diagrams around the hall flared. Therras, Ice Demon Fiend, the spirit weapon, and the ten wolves vanished. Only Arlcard remained.

"What?" Jack was startled when most of his summons were forcefully disbanded.

"It's the palace!" Peniel informed. "It has many defensive mechanisms that benefit the owner, in this case, the king. Arlcard was not unsummoned because he is a native of this world."

"What's this?" Arlcard asked. He was level 65 now. "A vampire?" He said when he noticed the opponent. He frowned deeply when he also noticed the opponent was a mythical grade with a level much higher than theirs.

"Drink this," Jack said and handed him the Ancient Blood Awakening Potion from his inventory. It was not the time to hold back.

Arlcard recognized the bottle. It was similar to the bottle he had drunk which gave him the power to beat Aubelard in the past. Jack had taken this potion as one of the rewards from Horatio Maxius when he gave the vampire prince the Book of the Damned.

Arlcard took the bottle without hesitation.

Themos saw Arlcard take the bottle. He also knew the potion. His eyes shone with golden light.

Jack recognized the move. He had seen Mihos use it before. It was Petrifying Gaze. Jack immediately put himself before Arlcard just as the eye skill was unleashed. Jack felt himself become stiff. A layer of stone appeared and covered his body.

A soft light fell on him. The stiffness and the layer of stone disappeared. Peniel used her Fast Heal to cancel the petrify status as well as heal the HP Jack lost from the earlier flaming winds.

With his petrifying gaze failing to fall on Arlcard, Themis could only watch since his rune technique didn't allow him to move away from his position.

Arlcard felt the similar heat that ravaged his body the first time he drank the potion. But this time, he was ready for it.

Jack cast Body Double. He then charged ahead with two copies. He left one copy behind.

The Bulwark of Royalty was rather durable, it had suffered many punishments but its HP was still around twenty percent. Jack could see more and more runic symbols formed by Themis behind that bronze wall.

"Be careful!" Peniel warned. "Rune technique had the potential to inflict one-hit kill even on a native. It was one of the abilities that delivered the highest damage."

Jack was aware of that. The full HP Mason had been killed with only one stab. This other rune technique the king was preparing should not be any less powerful.

Jack used Dragon Eye once he arrived in front of Themis. He also executed the third phase of his Formless Flowing Sword Style's burst attack. His ninety-six slashes battered the bronze wall with combo damages.

However, his eyes never left Themis' sword. From the number of runic symbols, he predicted that Themis almost completed his rune technique when he charged. Now, as he was before the bronze wall,

he saw the runic symbols all enter the sword, signifying that the preparation phase was already completed.

"You think you can fool me by using clones?" Themos laughed. "Ever since I became a mythical grade, I have been able to sense mana. I know exactly which one is your real body!"

As Themos finished speaking, the bronze wall in front of him vanished, even when there was still a sliver of HP left. He no longer needed the protective wall once his rune technique was completed. His sword thrust forward at Jack's real body with a speed almost imperceptible to human eyes.

Luckily, Jack's eyes were at the moment equal to a dragon's eyes instead of a human's ones. Hence, he could catch the movement before the blade pierced his body. He immediately changed places with the copy he left behind near Arlcard.

Although he never saw Themos' second rune technique, he believed it was a melee single-target attack. The reason why he thought so was due to Alonzo's death condition. Alonzo died in a room where everything was still intact. Nothing was disturbed except for the broken vase used to lure him into the room.

From the lack of signs of struggle, Jack surmised Alonzo died without fighting back. Even though Alonzo was not high level or high grade, his HP was still large enough. To kill him in such a short time, a rune technique was most likely used. And since Alonzo's wound was only a single stab and his surrounding was undisturbed, the attack was not an AOE attack.

Peniel had informed Jack that rune techniques were extremely rare. No matter how powerful Themos was, Jack didn't believe Themos had three rune techniques. Hence, the one that Themos was using now had to be the one used to kill Alonzo. That's why Jack put himself forward as bait, to make Themos waste his move.

The blade that thrust Jack's copy emitted a purple energy that pierced forward. Jack could sense the mana in that attack. He would absolutely die if that attack hit him, even if he activated all his defensive abilities other than Peniel's invulnerability.

Themos was baffled when he sensed that Jack was still fine. The three Jacks in front of him were now just copies.

"Hah! Not bad, outworlder," Themos chuckled.

'He is not taking this seriously,' Jack thought worriedly.

"Raarrggh...!!"

Jack sensed an energy spike behind him. He turned back and saw Arlcard whose long hair was blown up by a torrent of energy. The energy dissipated and Arlcard was calm again. Arlcard gazed forward with pitch-black eyes. Jack felt a coldness from those eyes as if he was staring into a bottomless abyss.

Jack used his Inspect and found that Arlcard was a level 75 Mythical vampire now.

Arlcard suddenly vanished.

While Jack was still wondering what had happened, he heard sounds of impact from behind. He turned back and saw that Thempos was swinging his sword, striking a black shadow that continuously zoomed around him at extremely high speed.

Jack knew that the black shadow was Arlcard. He couldn't see his companion's movements at all. However, Thempos seemed to still be able to clash with the super-fast Arlcard just fine. The two of them were both mythical grades, but Thempos was still three levels higher.

Jack didn't stay idle, he cast Time Domain. A sphere radiated out, covering the entire hall. With this Time Domain, Arlcard's speed increased while Thempos' was slowed.

With the handicap, Thempos was unable to block Arlcard's lightning-fast assaults. He now received damage every time Arlcard zoomed past him. The inflicted damage was high and it was never-ending. However, Thempos was oddly laughing.

"Hahaha! Do you worse!" Thempos laughed. At the same time, rune diagrams in the walls and ceilings nearby him flared to life. A thread of energy flowed into him and his HP healed rapidly.

"Oh no!" Peniel uttered. "It's the palace's defensive mechanism again. It was tied to the king's life force. We won't be able to defeat him as long as we are inside this palace!"

"Hahaha! This is my territory. Forget about defeating me!!" Thempos continued to laugh.

Chapter 998: The Country's Guardian

"Damn it!" Jack cursed. "Is there no other way? No way he is willing to follow us out!"

Duke Alfredo came to Jack's side. He was firing standard ranged attacks from his magic gloves to help Arlcard. "How about we told him about the recording stone?" He whispered to Jack. "Maybe he will chase after us out of this castle."

When Duke Alfredo visited Jack in his cell early this morning. He had let Jack out of the cell for a while so Jack could access his inventory. Jack took the recording stone out of his inventory and gave it to the duke.

Duke Alfredo had started recording using the stone ever since Jack entered this hall and talked with Mason and Sindral. He had continued recording even after Sindral's death and when Thempos revealed himself and admitted his deeds. This would be the proof that Jack was innocent.

"Good thinking!" Jack praised. "Give me the stone."

Duke Alfredo handed the stone to him.

Jack then showed the stone and then yelled, "Thempos! See this recording stone? This contains everything you have said since you entered this hall."

"What?!" Thempos' brows furrowed. This was the first time he didn't display a mocking expression.

Jack stored the stone in his inventory. It was the safest inside there. Thempos would have to kill him if he wanted to get rid of the evidence.

"Come and catch us!" Jack said and transformed into his dragon form. Although this place was extremely high from the ground, he would have no problem flying away with the form. The duke also has a flying spell.

"No one leaves...!" Themosh shouted.

As he did, the door to the balcony closed by itself just as Jack and Alfredo were about to rush out. The rune diagrams on the walls flared. An energy barrier encapsulated the entire hall. The barrier prevented anyone from escaping.

"Bloody hell...! How many defensive mechanisms are there?!" Jack complained.

"This is the palace of a main country. Of course, it will have many defenses!" Peniel shot back.

"I've been bored for quite some time. You people will entertain me!" Themosh exclaimed as he swung his large sword in a circular motion.

The swing conjured another flaming wind, but this one formed turbulence around the king. Arlcard's movement was fast, but the flaming wind hit everything in Themosh's vicinity. Arlcard was struck by the violent wind, receiving both fire and wind damage. He was forcefully flung to the side. He hit the wall hard, but since the wall was protected by the barrier, it wasn't damaged.

Arlcard wasn't discouraged. Under the effect of the Ancient Blood Awakening Potion, he was as if on steroids. He felt this power welling inside him, demanding to be let out. Even when he was the one suffering damage, he felt like he was winning.

Arlcard dashed forward again, casting a spell and thrusting his sword at the same time.

"Peniel, any way to disable Themosh's healing ability?" Jack asked.

"You can try using Dispel on the rune diagrams on the wall, but I doubt it will succeed," Peniel answered.

"You will most likely need Greater Dispel."

Jack tried it anyway. As expected, the spell failed to affect the rune diagrams.

"Do you have Greater Dispel, duke?" Jack asked Alfredo, to which the duke shook his head.

"Damn it! Does this mean we won't be able to defeat Themosh?" Jack said dejectedly.

"Unless you can kill him with one hit, or send attacks that deal damage to him at a faster rate than the diagrams are healing him. Otherwise, he will be undefeated," Peniel said. "Or you can continue hitting the barrier and damaging him until the diagrams run out of energy. Its power came from the power crystal at the heart of this palace, but I suspect the palace's power crystal had enough energy to continuously sustain the activations of these diagrams for days, or even months."

"Kill with one hit...?" Jack muttered.

"You thought of something?" Peniel asked when he sensed a hopeful feeling rise in Jack's heart.

"Duke! I will need an opening to land a clean hit on the king," Jack said to Duke Alfredo.

"What's your plan?" Alfredo asked.

"Try to constrain him! I will take my chance when I see it!" Jack said. His copies were still around, he sent them to approach Themos. He also cast Myriad Venomous Vipers.

Fifteen Large green snakes burst out from the floor under Themos. But before they could entangle Themos' body, the king used Whirlwind Slash. All fifteen snakes were sliced apart and they vanished.

"Crap!" Jack cursed. The difference in power was too great that Themos' brute force easily canceled his spell.

Only Arlcard had the power to go toe to toe with the king. The two heatedly exchanged moves. While Arlcard fought like a crazed maniac on drugs, Themos fought while laughing. Arlcard won more blows despite being lower level due to Jack's Time Domain, but those blows were as if nothing since Themos' lost HP was rapidly healed again.

But due to this, Themos also fought without care of receiving damage. Jack thought he could make use of this. He only had one chance, though. He had to make sure that his attack landed successfully.

Jack's three copies danced around Themos. The king ignored those copies. His mana sense would let him know if Jack changed places to one that was near him.

Duke Alfredo started casting a spell. The spell formation was very large. A mega spell!

Alfredo planned to use his Prism Prison, the mega spell he had used on the Grim Sand Drake in the past. Although Themos could still move inside the prison, his movement would at least be limited.

Themos noticed the mega spell casting. Even though he didn't think the mega spell could endanger him, it was still wiser to not let any mega spell or rune technique be used on him. He slashed vertically. A large crescent black light shot out. The crescent energy left a trail of dark flame as it cut through the air.

Duke Alfredo had no choice but to cancel his casting and erected a magic shield for defense. The magic shield was shattered and he was slammed into the wall behind him.

"Hah! Let me make sure that recording stone is gone!" Themos uttered as his body shot forward, barging through Arlcard's slashes.

His movement was so abrupt and also very fast. Even when he was still being slowed by Jack's Time Domain, he appeared before Jack in an instant. Jack was sure that Themos' movement just now was using a skill.

Thanks to the Time Domain, Jack managed to see Themos slashing motion. It was still so fast that he was unable to dodge, but he could exchange place with one of his copies, escaping Themos' slash. After this, he could switch places three more times.

"Don't you run away from me!!" Arlcard yelled while casting his spell, Dark Lord's Sword.

A gigantic black sword materialized in the air and pierced Themos' body. The speed the dark sword was formed was very fast due to the time domain, hence Themos wasn't able to dodge it. Yet, Themos simply smiled even when he lost more than 300,000 damage from that single stab. The rune diagrams flared and healed him again.

"Hahaha! Do your worst!" Themos laughed.

Arlcard was not fazed, he rushed forward, throwing a few shadow bat darts while his swords slashed and created a net of criss-crossing black lights. The two mythical creatures soon traded blows again.

'I can't get near them,' Jack thought frustratingly. He could forcefully try to approach by using Peniel's invulnerability, but if he failed to land a hit, then it's all over.

As he was still lamenting about what to do. He heard a loud thump from above.

He looked up as another thump was heard, and then another. The ceiling cracked. Jack was stunned. The barrier that Themus had summoned was integrated into the ceiling, walls, and floor of this hall. To be able to crack the ceiling meant the one doing it had enough power to affect the barrier.

Another louder thump and the ceiling collapsed. The barrier now had a large hole on top.

From that hole, Jack saw a gargantuan creature. A dragon that was similar in size to Syndrillis!

It had yellow scales and its gigantic head was staring down through the hole. Its mouth opened, and a deep and powerful voice was heard, "Themus! I sensed that you are attacked!"

"It's this country's guardian!" Peniel exclaimed. "He comes either when the sovereign of this country summons him, or when he sensed that the sovereign is in danger."

Jack used his Inspect on this giant dragon.

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Tiemezzys (Eternal Dragon, Draconic), level 90

HP: 5,000,000

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With the ceiling and the barrier having a hole, in theory, Jack should be able to escape from that hole. However, He didn't dare to make any move with the gargantuan dragon standing on top of that hole.

"Haha, Tiemezzys. You have come needlessly. I'm just having fun," Themus laughed. "On second thought. Please kill that outworlder there. He has something that can trouble me."

Jack saw the yellow dragon's eyes turn to him.

"Shit!" Jack exclaimed.

Chapter 999: One Hit Kill

"Outworlder with a supreme dragon form...," Tiemezzys remarked when he saw Jack's form. "Surprising. You must have impressed Broidireg enough for him to grant you that form. Unfortunately, that won't save you!"

The dragon's eyes shone a bright yellow. Jack, who was staring at the dragon, found himself unable to move, unable to think. It was as if his mind had frozen.

At this moment, Tiemezzys' jaws opened and a stream of thick yellow fume burst forth.

"Storrrmmm...!!" Duke Alfredo called out. There was no time for him to cast any spell to help Jack. Jack just watched the incoming yellow breath with a dazed expression.

Luckily for Jack, whatever had caused him to blank out didn't affect Peniel. Peniel used Invulnerability just before the fume hit.

Peniel's invulnerability made Jack immune to everything. Whatever was holding Jack catatonic stopped affecting him after Peniel used the skill.

Jack was still confused when his mind cleared. The yellow breath engulfed him but he was still invulnerable. Peniel's invulnerability lasted 5 seconds, 2 seconds more than its base duration due to Jack's Call Familiar spell at its 4-stars grade.

The yellow breath continued to wash over him. Jack hurriedly switched places with one of his copies before the invulnerability ended.

"What the heck was that?!" Jack asked after he was safely away.

"It's the Divine Stone Gaze," Peniel informed. "Similar to Petrify Gaze. But instead of petrifying your body, it petrifies your mind instead."

The yellow breath from the dragon still battered the hall's floor. The barrier on the floor shook heavily as it resisted the powerful fume. Rune diagrams all over the hall shone brightly as they tried to maintain the barrier.

"Tiemezzys! Stop damaging this hall! I need to keep them inside here!" Themosh shouted.

Tiemezzys stopped his breath attack then. "You asked a lot of demands, mortal," the dragon complained.

"Haha. I am no longer a mortal," Themosh said.

Tiemezzys looked at the king. He had also sensed the change in Themosh, but it was not his concern. His pledge was to this king. What Themosh did, whether it was right or wrong, was not for him to judge.

"You simply turned into a vampire, still a mortal in my book," Tiemezzys said.

Tiemezzys' eyes turned to where Jack was. It was difficult getting to the outworlder if he was not allowed to use his ranged abilities for fear of destroying the hall. He had originally planned to rip the entire roof off, but now he had to find another way.

"Hmph," Tiemezzys harrumphed while shaking his neck. Several of his scales fell off through the hole in the ceiling.

Jack looked at these fallen scales. These yellow scales suddenly moved. They transformed into humanoid beings resembling the draconian race, but without faces. They looked like yellow living statues. Each was holding a long spear. There were six of these creatures.

Jack used Inspect. The six were Earth Dragon's Servants. They were level 80 special elites.

The six rushed at Jack.

"Drat! As if the current situation is not difficult enough," Jack cursed. He activated Gold Scale Armor and Strength of the Wild before clashing with the six. They were only special elites but their levels were very high. Luckily, Jack's Time Domain was still in effect, so he could still contend with these six.

Duke Alfredo cast a spell, conjuring numerous magical spears that assaulted the six, assisting Jack. Arlcard was still on the other side fighting Themis. Tiemezzys just stayed above the hole keeping guard in case anyone wanted to run out from there.

Jack knew he didn't have much time. The effect from the Ancient Blood Awakening Potion wasn't endless. His time domain was also about to run out of duration. He looked at Themis who was still dealing with Arlcard without any worry. Jack knew he had to take the risk!

Jack had been sending Arlcard a few mental messages for some time. He wanted to coordinate with the vampire to create an opening, but Arlcard didn't respond.

Arlcard's mind had been in a frenzy due to the potion, but it cleared little by little as time passed. He could see now that they were in trouble if this situation persisted. Another mental call from Jack arrived and he responded, just as Jack had decided to just go ahead even if Arlcard still didn't respond this time.

Arlcard hastily retreated when he caught Jack's mental messages. Arlcard used his shadow clone as he retreated. The dark clone took over and fight Themis just as twenty balls of lightning came at them.

At the same time, Jack rushed forward while activating Lightning God Suit. He also cast Accelerate as Time Domain ended at that time.

The lightning god barrage detonated where Themis and Arlcard's shadow clone were fighting. Because Jack was rushing forward, Jack was also in the detonation area. But his lightning god suit made him immune to all lightning damage, so he was fine.

Jack didn't expect the lightning god barrage to kill Themis. Although his divine skill caused a large amount of damage. It was far from enough to kill a level 80 mythical being in one hit. The rune diagrams around the hall quickly replenished Themis' lost HP.

Jack was hoping for the divine skill's paralyzing effect. Each lightning ball had a 30% chance to paralyze the target for 10 seconds. Unless his luck was very bad, at least a few of the twenty lightning balls should trigger the Paralyze effect. Considering his high-luck stat, he believed this should be nothing to worry about.

He had even timed his lightning balls to hit at a one-second interval. Even if Themis had a skill that cleansed status effect, he would get afflicted again when the next balls hit. Thus, Jack was sure that Themis won't be able to escape the paralyzation effect.

Even if somehow Themis did, Jack had Arlcard provide backup. Arlcard used Shadow Lock.

Jack couldn't see anything inside the lightning explosion. He approached Themis using his mana sense, while Arlcard target his shadow lock based on his shadow clone who was still clinging to Themis. Jack could sense from Themis' mana that he had indeed been paralyzed. His mana was in frozen status.

Jack took out a small knife from his storage bag. Themos came into view when he was near. The electrical dust from the explosion was also starting to subside. As he was about to drive the knife into Themos, Jack caught Themos' eyes turning red.

"Shit!" Jack exclaimed. Although Themos was unable to move due to the Paralyze effect, he could still use a skill that needed no movement. Jack was hit by Vampire's race skill, Mesmerize.

"I've been a vampire for more than nine months, outworlder," Themos said with a grin. Now both of them were paralyzed. But Themos' grin froze when he saw the knife in Jack's hand. The knife had a dark blade and its hilt was adorned with many gems.

"Vampire-slaying knife...!" Themos exclaimed in horror. Now he understood why Jack tried to approach him.

Themos' Paralyze effect ended. But before he could move, a swarm of bats flew all over him. Before he knew it, the bats turned into Arlcard who grabbed him from behind. Arlcard sunk his vampire teeth into Themos' neck, sucking his blood.

A vampire's bite had a kind of pacifying effect. Arlcard's hands also grabbed both of Themos' arms, locking him. Jack, upon coming out of his paralyzation, immediately resumed thrusting the vampire-slaying knife.

However, before the blade penetrated Themos' skin, an energy force exploded from the king. It didn't manage to throw Arlcard away, but Themos managed to free one of his arms. He was unaffected by the pacification from Arlcard's bite.

Themos' freed hand came up and grabbed Jack's wrist. The knife stopped just a few inches from Themos' torso.

"Raargghh...!" Jack tried to push forward with all his strength. He activated all the attributes-enhancing skills he had, but the knife refused to push forward.

Tiemezzys, who also identified the vampire-slaying knife, knew Themos' predicament. He no longer cared about preserving the hall. He smashed and broke more parts of the roof. His claw came directly at Jack, aiming to stomp him flat.

But before his claw can hit Jack, a soft green wall appeared between him and Jack. The yellow dragon was unable to pierce through this seemingly fragile wall.

"Lady Serenity, what is the meaning of this...!" Tiemezzys roared.

Goddess Serenity materialized beside Jack. Her appearance brought soothing tranquility to everyone there. She said to the dragon, "I've promised no eternal grade beings may harm this outworlder until he is strong enough. I sense an eternal-rank attack on him. So it is you, Tiemezzys. Why is such a reputable being such as you attacking someone much weaker than you?"

Everyone was startled by the Goddess' appearance. So were Jack and Themos, but Jack recovered first. Themos was still gripping Jack's hand which hold the vampire-slaying knife. Jack released his hold. The knife fell and Jack caught it using his other hand.

Without pause, he drove the knife into Themos who was still in consternation.

"NO...!!" Tiemezzys, who saw the act, shouted. He couldn't prevent it since the Goddess' green wall was still in the way.

"ARGGHHH...!" Themos screamed in agony once the blade sunk in. The vampire-slaying knife could kill any vampire below archaic rank. Since Themos was only a fledgling, he was unable to resist the knife's property.

His HP went down at a rapid rate. The rune diagrams on the wall tried their best to heal Themos' HP, but they were unable to keep up.

In a short time, Themos' HP hit zero. He lost all strength and slumped down. His eyes were still opened wide, staring at the outworlder who had brought about his demise.

Chapter 1000: Doomed Country

Outside Thereath, the two large forces faced one another. Most of the players were nervous. Now that the native army showed up before them, the sensation was completely different from when they were simply massing out here without any adversary.

Despite many of the players have reached a level that allowed them to confront native's average troops, the thought of going against the natives was still unsettling. They had been spending the majority of this year thinking that natives were beings whom they shouldn't offend. Many of the higher-ups of the native force also had levels much higher than theirs.

Of course, they had fought against natives during the wars. But a majority did it with another native force at their side. Now, they were pure player force facing the natives. The thought that they had done a mistake continued to hammer their minds. This was especially true for those from guilds other than Everlasting Heavenly Legends. The player whom they came here for was not their member. Why should they bear the natives' ire as well?

These members kept on glancing at their leaders, waiting for their commands to retreat. But their leaders just stood there, so they had no choice but to stay as well.

Unbeknownst to them, those leaders also had the same turmoil. The leaders were only better at masking their feeling. They looked at the backs of John and Jeanny who stood some distance away, conversing with the leaders from the native force. Those two had promised that this was just a show of force. There won't be a battle. They hoped those two didn't lie to them.

"As I said, all we wanted is just a fair trial," Jeanny said. Emris, Claudius, and Duchess Isabelle were opposite her. She and John had been negotiating for some time with these three since the native force came out to meet them.

"And as I said. He was already given a trial. The trial had reached a verdict," Emris said.

"But is it fair? He is one of us. We should be present in his trial," John said.

"Where we came from, a fair trial is one where the accused is given the chance to defend his case," Jeanny said. "He should be allowed a representative that helps him through the trial and we should be given time to examine the evidence. He should be considered innocent until proven guilty."

"If you are so keen on your fair trial, how about you just go back where you came from?" Claudius uttered. "No one forced you to stay here! It is just one trouble after another ever since you, outworlders, showed up."

"Unfortunately, we don't have a choice in that," Jeanny explained. "We can't go back even if we want to."

"Well then, go somewhere else! Just out of our country. You are no longer welcome here!" Claudius didn't relent.

Duchess Isabelle gave Claudius a gesture to calm down. "Let us all cool ourselves. None of us want a conflict to happen here. It will just hurt our two forces. Lord Marshall, in light of their contributions during the war. We should try to find a common ground between us."

Emris gave a contemplative expression. "Duchess, I don't see how we can..."

His words stopped when he heard a rumble from behind. Everyone looked back in the direction of the capital. On top of the palace in the distance, they saw a huge yellow dragon perched on one of the palace's roofs. The dragon was banging on the roof and causing loud thumps.

"What the..." Claudius was speechless at the sight.

"That's... That is Tiemezzys! Our country's guardian!" Emris recognized the yellow dragon. "What is he doing attacking the palace?"

Duchess Isabelle also knew of the guardian. But since she knew her husband's plan, she was more apprehensive. Her face was pale when she realized the place where the dragon was attacking. It was where her husband had arranged for Jack to meet Mason and Sindral. 'What exactly is happening inside that hall? What could have triggered the country's guardian to come?' She thought worriedly.

"Our country guardian? The one that dwells on top of Mount Thenias behind our capital?" Claudius asked. He never laid eyes on the guardian, but he had heard tales of it.

"I need to go check. Stay here and guard our city's entrance!" Emris gave the order to Claudius.

Before he took to the sky, he said to Jeanny and John. "This has better not be your doing, or you won't find anything to negotiate about anymore!"

"I will come as well!" Duchess Isabelle said and took to the sky following Emris.

John and Jeanny looked over at the dragon in the distance. 'The hell is Jack doing?' Both of them thought.

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"No... NOOO...!!!" Tiemezzys bellowed when he saw Themos' slumped body. The rune diagrams on the wall stopped sending healing light after Themos' HP dropped to zero. Many loots fell near Themos' body. Jack had used his Runestone of Luck when he drove the knife into Themos's belly.

"You, murderer...!!!" Tiemezzys opened his jaws and unleashed his divine earth breath. He couldn't care less about leaving the hall intact anymore.

The thick yellow fume blasted the area where Jack and the others were at. However, no matter how hard Tiemezzys spewed his breath, it couldn't go past the soft green wall erected by Serenity.

"Stop, Tiemezzys. Calm yourself," Serenity said soothingly. Her voice penetrated the dragon's mind and made him slightly drowsy.

His breath stopped. He was reeling back and shook his head heavily. "Get out of my head, serenity!" He hollered. "Why do you defend this outworlder so? He just killed a sovereign of a country!"

"He is... my ward," Serenity said with a pause. She then turned to Jack. Her gaze went to Themos' body who was on the ground before looking back at Jack.

"Revive Themos! I know you can do it!" Tiemezzys demanded.

Instead of following Serenity's demand, Serenity asked Jack instead. "Care to tell me what is going on here?"

"I think it's better if we show you," Jack said. He took out the recording stone the duke gave him earlier. He activated it and a 3D image appeared. It was the image of Jack with Mason and Sindral.

All of them watched the projected scene silently. The scene continued until Themos came in and arrogantly admitted his scheme. It stopped when the battle started.

"So what?! It is as he said. This country is his. He is free to use it as he wishes!" Tiemezzys insisted. "Now, revive him!"

"Watch your tone, dragon!" Serenity said back. Her voice was still soft but it was no longer soothing. Instead, it caused the heart of everyone to tremble.

"I understand your anger but the Themos here is no longer the Themos you knew from the past. He had been corrupted by the vampire's blood that turned him. His mind was no longer his own. You should see that as well after knowing what he did. He exterminated his entire offspring for his vampire master. Which parent would do such a thing? He is clearly not sane anymore. Reviving him will only bring calamity to this country."

Tiemezzys bared his teeth. He growled menacingly, but Serenity stood her ground. She didn't show any sign of yielding to the dragon's demand.

The dragon's anger was plain for everyone to see. It was apparent that his relationship with Themos wasn't shallow. But Tiemezzys knew he won't be able to defy the Goddess. He stomped his feet in resentment and harrumphed, "Hmph! With the sovereign dead and no available heir, this country is doomed. I have had enough of this! To hell with all of you!"

Tiemezzys glanced at Jack before flapping his wings and lifting off. His speed was incredible. In just a short time, the great dragon was a speck in the distance. The dragon didn't return to its lair on Mount Thenias.

Duke Alfredo slumped to his knees. His expression was dispirited. "The dragon is right. We have no king. No heirs. No guardian... this country is doomed. People will revolt, nobles will fight among each other to vie for power... Perhaps... Perhaps we should revive Themos... Even if he is a corrupt king, at least this country will still be united..."

"Please tell me you are not seriously considering that...", Jack said. "No good will come of a country ruled by a king who murdered his own children. This country will find a way to survive. We will make sure of it."

Alfredo didn't say anything in return, he continued to kneel dispiritedly on the ground. Jack left him be. He didn't think anything he said would cheer the duke up. Jack's eyes turned instead to Arlcard who had retreated to a corner. But instead of seeing his vampire companion, he instead saw a strange bag of soft tissue, like a cocoon.

"What is that...?" Jack asked. "Where is Arlcard?"

"He is metamorphosing!" Peniel exclaimed. "He must have triggered the state due to drinking Themos' blood."

"Does this mean he will get stronger?"

"A vampire who undergoes this state is sure to increase his grade by one after finishing the process."

"Wow!" Jack remarked. He was excited by the prospect of having a mythical-grade companion. Now, he didn't lose to Paytowin.

"This is a very rare incident," Peniel said. "It might be his bloodline is unique, or Themos' blood is unique, or a side effect from the Ancient Blood Awakening Potion, or a combination of all three. Anyway, we must make sure that he is not disturbed."

Jack was no longer paying attention. A voice notification had just sounded inside his head.

"Congratulations on solving Alonzo's murder. Receive rewards of 2,000,000 exp, 100 gold coins, and 50,000 merit points. Congratulations on completing the chain kingdom faction quest, Throne of Themisphere. Receive rewards of 6,000,000 exp, 200 gold coins, 1,000 mana cores, 100,000 merit points, and the chance to become the King of Themisphere."

Jack was dazed after hearing the notification. "King... King of Themisphere...?"