

World 151

Chapter 151: Interviewing The Occupants 1

"Thank you," Jack replied. "Now, do you remember what time you arrived at this mansion two days ago?"

The Marquess seemed to be thinking for a moment, then answered, "around ten in the morning."

"Can you describe what you did starting from when you entered the mansion until when you were aware of the theft?"

"Well... When I arrived, the butler received me at the main entrance. He then took me to the guest room where I waited while he went and informed the duke. One of the maids brought me a wine to drink. I have been sitting in the guest room waiting until I heard the commotion. The butler came back and informed me that there had been an incident and asked me to remain seated for the moment. I waited there for quite a while before the guards showed up. Curious and tired of waiting, I followed the captain to meet the duke, that's when I heard about the theft."

"What time did the guards show up?"

"Almost noon, I think."

"The maid that brought you your wine, was it the old maid?"

"No, that's the head maid. She rarely did anything here, she just gave instructions to the two other younger maids. It was one of the young maids, I don't remember her name."

It should be the maid other than Joselyn then, Jack thought. Since Joselyn was detained by the duke at the time.

"Thank you for your time," Jack said. "I will come to find you again if I have any more questions."

"What? You are still planning for a next time? Are you kidding? Go find others if you want to ask questions, don't come to bother me!"

Jack's eyes twitched. Calm down, calm down, he told himself.

The next one that came in was the butler Winston. The guy sat down calmly opposite Jack. His calm demeanor displayed his high refinement training as deserved of someone his station, but Jack could not help but think that he saw an allusion of disdain in the butler's eyes.

"Can you describe to me the series of events in the morning two days ago leading to when you found out about the theft?" Jack began his interview.

"Certainly. I've started the day as usual. I oversaw all the chores of the maids, gardener, and cook to make sure that everything was fine. And everything was just the usual morning, with the exception of a visit from Lord Marquess Fernando."

"At what time was that? Do you remember?" Jack interrupted.

"I certainly do. It was at 9:48 AM when I heard the door knock. I answered the door and brought him to the guest hall. I instructed one of the maids to serve him with wine before I headed up to inform His Grace Duke Alfredo about the Marquess' visit. Afterward, I went back down to check on the Marquess briefly before I went to do my other chores. But I could soon see the barrier formation activated, hence I went to find the duke immediately and I was informed about the terrible theft. The Duke told me to inform the rest of the occupants to calm them down, and told me that the guards would come soon to handle the matter. I went and did as was told. The guards showed up around 11:45 AM. I then brought them to see the duke."

Jack scribed down important points as fast as possible, he was not a fast writer so this was not easy for him, but it would not look professional if he asked the guy to repeat his statement, would he? It's a good thing his intelligence stat had granted him a better memory compared to his real-life self, it allowed him to not miss any points that needed to be noted down.

"Did you go outside of the mansion at any time during the event you described before? Particularly to the area under the tower by the mansion's front façade?"

The butler looked at Jack with astonishment, "why? What was under the tower?"

"Just answer the question, please."

"No, I stayed indoors the entire morning."

"Any other unusual thing you are aware of?" Jack asked again.

The butler lifted one of his eyebrows. "Define unusual," he said.

"Like probably, if you see a stranger around the mansion or something you don't see on any other days in this estate."

"If I saw those, I would have said it already, wouldn't I?"

Jack looked at the butler awkwardly, "all right, okay, thank you for your time."

A rather large man was next. His clothing consisted of a simple long shirt and long pants, with thick boots under his legs, and a pair of rubber gloves was hanging on his belt. Some dirt was spotted on his clothes. It was easy to surmise him as the sole gardener of the mansion. He also wore a straw hat which he took off when he sat down on the chair opposite Jack.

"Good day to you, sir. I am Matias," he greeted in a timid manner which was contrary to his body size.

"Good day to you as well," Jack replied.

"Am I in trouble, sir?" Matias asked. Jack realized now that his expression seemed to contain a bit of anxiety.

"Oh, no, no. No trouble, I'm just going to ask you a few questions. There's nothing to worry about," Jack tried to put the big guy at ease.

Matias nodded, but his expression did not ease up.

"I assume you are the gardener for this estate?" Jack started with his questions.

"That's right. I mostly tidied the main garden in front of the mansion. But on occasions, I tend to the other outdoor parts of the estate as well. I am also the resident carpenter, so I can fix up any wood furniture that got broken."

"Where are you in the morning two days ago?"

"Two days ago..." He looked up as if trying to remember, before he snapped back after recalling. "Ah, I remember! I was trimming the overgrown shrubberies by the side of the lake."

"Do you see the barrier formation coming up around the estate?"

"Huh? What's a barrier formation?"

"Um... The colorful light that appeared by the side of the estate."

"Oh, that. It's beautiful, it is."

"Yes, it is. When did you realize it? Were you still trimming the shrubberies by the lakeside?"

"Uh... not sure. I guess I still was..."

Jack was speechless for a while. Were his statements even reliable?

"Did you remember when the castle guards came in?"

"Oh, them! Yes, I saw them coming in drove before I had my lunch break. After my lunch, I saw them again walking all over the estate. I was wondering what they were doing, but I was too scared to ask."

"When you saw them come in, before you have your lunch, were you still trimming the shrubberies?"

"Yes, I was."

"Okay, all right. Now, a few more questions, Mathias, bear with me. Did you work on or go anywhere near the bushes under the tower at the left side from the front of the mansion?"

"Do you mean the tower where Duke's workroom was at?"

"Yes, yes, that's the one!"

He looked up to try to recall something again, then said, "do you still mean two days ago? Then no."

"What about yesterday and today?"

"Uh, also no."

Then why did you ask if I meant two days ago? Jack had the urge to shout out, but instead, he took a deep breath. He then asked, "did you see anyone go near that shrub?"

"Uh, I think not."

"Did you see anything unusual during these two days?"

"How do you mean unusual?"

"Never mind, thank you for your time."

Then came the old woman in the maid dress. She still put on that irritated look. She was obviously not in the spirit of cooperation. She sat down and crossed her arms in front of her.

Before Jack could say anything, she spoke out first, "I'm not sure what you are trying to do, but you are wasting all our time here. We have many chores still to do, and now that Joselyn was unavailable, I cannot appoint Luciana to do it all. I assure you that the duke will not be happy if our tasks are unattended to. Now I would like you to just call off these meaningless meetings, and let the guards do the job. They are more than capable to handle such matter compared to a nameless charlatan like you."

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Jack let her finished her rants first, and then continue to keep his silence some more.

"What? Nothing to say for yourself?" She said with a smug expression, thinking that Jack had been intimidated by her scolding.

Jack then gave her a sharp look and said, "well, miss..."

"Jimena, I'm the head maid of this mansion," the old maid said with some pride.

"Miss Jimena, what I can assure you about your master, the duke's unhappiness, is if he fails to recover the thing that he is looking for. I've been tasked to help him in finding it, and what do you think he will respond if I told him I fail to find it because some of his servants are not willing to cooperate? How about we call him now and ask if he would like to have you working on your chores or helping me look for the stolen item. should we call him?"

The old maid shifted uncomfortably. It was apparent that she was not so confident anymore.

"There is no need to disturb His Grace, he is busy as it is," she said, her eyes were not looking at Jack.

"Well, then this means you will answer my questions willingly?"

"Fine, ask as you will," the old maid answered with an annoyed face.

"Where were you in the morning at 10 AM two days ago?"

"Working," she answered. "This mansion is huge, do you think it was easy keeping it clean while still attending to the duke and duchess' needs? There is hardly any time for me to take a break, I spent every day fully at work!"

"Mam, I'm just asking for your whereabouts in the morning two days ago. Is it necessary to tell me your life story...?"

"I'm with the duchess! I'm preparing her medicine, and tend to her needs, and made sure her room was clean. She had a weak body that requires regular medication and a clean environment. When Luciana gave me the morning report, Joselyn was absent. So I went to search for her. That's when I found her to be in detention in the duke's workroom. They were having a meeting with the castle guards that had just arrived. That was when I found out about the theft."

"You didn't see the barrier formation being erected?"

"Do you mean that colorful light that prevents people from going in and out? No, I was busy inside the mansion, how would I be aware of it?"

Jack was silent in his thought for a while.

"Are you done? I still have many chores to tend to," the head maid spoke impatiently when Jack stopped asking her questions.

"One last thing, did you go out at any time after finding out about the theft? Particularly to the tower under the duke's workroom."

"Did you have a problem with your ears? I have said already I am a very busy lady. I have almost not enough time to deal with the tasks inside the mansion, why do I still have the time to go out?"

"Thank you for your time, please take care when you go out," Jack said with a forced smile.

Next came a plump guy. When he sat on the chair, it creaked. Jack was worried for a second that it would break. The plump guy seemed to be cautious of it too, as his expression appeared to be awaiting that fateful moment. After a few seconds passed without the worry came to pass, he finally relaxed and looked at Jack with a genuine smile.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Tomas, the chef," he said cheerily.

"Nice to meet you too. Mr. Tomas, I'm sure you have been told before. I will be giving you some questions, I hope you will answer them truthfully," Jack said.

"Of course, of course. I would be happy too," he replied enthusiastically.

Jack nodded. "So, can you tell me where you are in the morning two days ago?"

"In the kitchen, preparing breakfast."

"After that?"

"Preparing lunch."

"..."

"Any other things you did? Did you go out of the kitchen for anything?"

"No."

"Did you meet anyone during that time?"

"The maid Joselyn, came to take the breakfast and later, wine for the duke. The maid Luciana came bringing me groceries and again later to take the wine for Marquess Fernando whom I heard had come to visit."

"So, you didn't see anything unusual?"

"No."

"When did you find out about the theft that happened?"

"There was a theft?"

"..."

"Okay, next!"

The Maid Luciana was next. When she sat on the chair, something did not feel right. She fidgeted the chair a bit and felt that its legs were shaky. She pushed the chair away and took another one to replace it. She sat back down after, made another fidgeting. After satisfied nothing was wrong, she turned her attention to Jack with a sweet smile.

Jack smiled back, not willing to waste more time, he immediately began, "Miss Luciana, I..."

"Please call me sister, everyone here calls me that way. I'm still very young after all, and I prefer that way."

"O... kay, Sister Luciana. I will be giving you some questions, and I hope you will answer them honestly."

"Shoot away," she said.

"O... kay. Can you describe what you did in the morning two days ago?"

"Two days ago? Let's see, hm, I did my chores as usual. I cleaned the guest hall, dining hall. I received grocery deliveries from the shop and brought them to the kitchen. Then I report to head maid Jimena, before I was summoned by butler Winston to serve Marquess Fernando who had come to visit. I gave him a cup of wine, then I go back to do some more cleaning on the other halls."

"When do you find out about the theft?"

"After the guards showed up, I realized there was a ruckus, but I don't know what it was. Later when I met head maid Jimena again, I asked her about it, she then told me about the theft."

"Do you see anything unusual? Any stranger or something out of place?"

"No... but... hm, I'm not sure if it is important, but it was unusual."

"Oh? Tell me," Jack's interest was piqued.

"I don't think it's anything significant. It's just that when I said I met the head maid, she was at the west wing of the mansion."

"What's so unusual about she being there?"

"It's not exactly about she being there. It's more like the way she behaved. She looked to be sneaking, or maybe it's my imagination. Do you know I have a wild imagination? Do you know once I thought I saw a unicorn in the woods in this estate? I mean, can you believe that?"

"I find that hard to believe. Can we go back to the sneaking head maid?"

"Oh, right. Forgive me, sometimes I get distracted. I was often time scolded by the head maid and butler Winston because of it. I mean, can you blame me? It's just that my mind likes to run by itself, I think it's because of my youthful energy."

"Yes, yes. About the sneaking head maid. Do you see what she was up to?"

"Oh no, she realized I was there, so she called me and told me that she was getting some medicines for the duchess from the medicine room, which was, by itself unusual. Because usually, she asked either me or Joselyn to get this medicine."

"So she was trying to explain herself when you caught her sneaking?"

"I don't know, or maybe she really was just getting medicine from the medicine room. Speaking of catching people sneaking, I also caught the butler sneaking some food a few days ago when..."

"Okay, thank you for your time. We will talk again when I think of some other questions."

Chapter 153: Interviewing The Occupants 3

After Luciana exited, Duchess Isabelle walked in. Even after seeing her for the second time, Jack was still stunned by her beauty. He was mute for a while even after the duchess sat down and waited for him to begin asking her question. She smiled and made a small cough to wake Jack up from his daze.

"Ah, forgive me. That's very improper of me. Your Grace must have gotten used to men turning their heads on you."

The duchess giggled softly, "I would think that you outworlders have a fair share of beauties, I do not think that I will be special if compared to your kind."

"Oh, on the contrary, we find it hard to discover among our kind someone as elegant and as fair as you in both manners and look. You can easily topple our top beauty."

The duchess let out a straightforward laugh now, "I do not know you outworlders are such teasers. Don't let my husband hear you, he is a jealous sort."

Hearing that, the memory of a level 65 Rare Elite came back to Jack. He immediately threw his fascination on the duchess' beauty out of his mind.

"Let us begin then, shall we?" He said in a serious tone. "Where were you in the morning two days ago?"

"On my bed, in my bedroom," the duchess answered.

"The whole morning?"

"The whole day."

"I'm sorry to pry, the head maid informed me of your weak body. Was it because of this condition that you have stayed in bed for the whole day?"

"No need to feel sorry. It is not really a secret, everyone in this mansion knows about my condition. I have good days and bad days, badly most of the time, unfortunately. During these bad days, I stayed mostly in bed and have medications regularly."

"Then I guess today is one of your good days?"

"It is. Lucky for you, ain't it? Not so for me, as I have been planning to go for a walk in the garden on this rare occasion."

"Ah, I'm sorry. I won't take much of your time," Jack said with an apologetic expression.

The duchess giggled, "I'm just messing with you. A walk in the garden is something I can do some other time. Having a conversation with an outworlder though, is not something so common. So, I'm actually looking forward to this talk."

"Oh... Then... I'll try to make this talk... longer?"

"As long as it does not cause my husband to become suspicious, hm?" The duchess narrowed her eyes teasingly.

"I think we better keep this conversation formal," Jack went back to a serious tone. "Did you see anyone during the morning two days ago?"

"My husband, as he left to his workroom in the morning. Then head-maid Jimena came in to clean my room and accompany me and took care of my medication. The maid Luciana came for a bit as well to talk with Jimena. Apart from that, not many things happened. My days during bad days were pretty much boring."

"When did you find out about the theft?"

"When Jimena came back again in the afternoon with my lunch. She told me about the coming of the castle guards and the theft."

"You didn't see the barrier formation around the estate?"

"No, I was in my bedroom all the time, remember?"

"Don't your bedroom have windows? I thought the main bedroom for Duke and Duchess should have large windows showing the best view of the estate, shouldn't it?"

"We have windows, but that barrier formation is not exactly clear to see through a window, right?"

"Is it?" Jack didn't notice this, he had only seen the barrier when he was outdoor.

"Yeah, try seeing it. It was not obvious, unless you open up the windows and peer outside, it will not be obvious in a glance. And that's what I do after I heard about the theft from Jimena, I asked her to help me to a window and had it opened so I can see the dancing light in the sky. It was not every day you get to see such a view."

Jack was deep in thought as he pondered something.

"Is there anything else you want to ask?" The duchess asked.

"I think that's it for now, I will look for you again if I think of some other things to ask."

"Then how about I give the questions now? Tell me about you outworlders, where you came from, and how did you get into this world?"

Getting invited to a conversation by beauty was every man's dream, but as Jack was about to gladly converse with the duchess, the memory of the level 65 Rare Elite came back again. He courteously said, "maybe another time. I need to finish these interviews as soon as possible while the clues and memories are still fresh. The longer we delay, the harder it is to get back the duke's stolen item."

Duchess Isabelle smiled, she did not seem to be bothered by Jack's rejection. "All right, we can find some other time to talk when you are free. You will have to excuse me then."

"A moment, one more question," Jack said as he thought of something. "Do you know what kind of painting that was stolen?"

"It was a painting?" The duchess gave him a frown. "I can't recall a painting that warranted this much attention. But then again, I don't exactly know what my husband keeps in his workroom, I never venture there."

"I see. Okay then. Thank you for your time. Do you need my help going out?" Jack offered.

"It is fine. I can walk on my own in my good days," the duchess replied.

Jack kept the last interview for the main suspect. Maid Joselyn came into the study room accompanied by a guard, who then left after making sure that there was no other exit in the room. Joselyn sat on the chair quietly, Jack could see a trace of nervousness in her eyes. Was it because she was worried about being framed as the thief or because she really was the thief?

"Maid Joselyn, I'm going to..." As Jack was about to begin asking his questions, the maid cut him off, "I'm not going to say anything."

Jack frowned. "That is unwise, maid Joselyn. If you are not telling your story, people will consider you to be the thief. You don't want that, do you?"

The maid kept his mouth mum. She was not even looking at Jack, her eyes were on the exit door.

"If you can explain what had happened in the morning two days ago, perhaps I can help you to prove your innocence," Jack tried to persuade.

Still no response.

"This is not the way to do it, maid Joselyn. It would be in your best interest to talk to me. Perhaps you were just in the wrong place and the wrong time when the painting was stolen. I'm sure there is an explanation. If you will just tell me, I can help you to work it out."

No change of expression in the maid's face.

Damn! this woman is adamant, Jack cursed in his mind. Since he could not persuade her to talk by trying to place her as an innocent party, he decided to change tactics with a conversation that placed her as the culprit.

"You threw the painting out through the small opening below the window, right?"

While Jack was saying, he paid good attention to the maid's expression. His Dragon's Eye skill granted him incredible perception on details, he could detect minute changes on a person's face if he put his focus into it. He could see the maid's eyebrows made a small twitch after he asked the question.

"It must be a shame that the Duke decided to go back to his room. He ended up finding about the theft too soon. You have no chance to go and retrieve the painting you have thrown out of the window."

She was still not giving any response, but Jack could see the restlessness in her eyes.

"But fortunately, you have made a backup plan. You didn't need to go and take the painting which you have thrown out of the window by yourself."

The maid's eyebrows started to make a small frown.

"Admit it, you have an aide who collaborated with you. He or she was the one that picked up the painting that you have thrown out of the window."

She finally turned to look at Jack, she uttered with a trembling voice, "You... know nothing!"

She then leaned back on her chair, folded her arm, and kept quiet with a troubled face.

Jack frowned. Her reaction was a bit different from the raging retort he was expecting. Why did she sound more like a helpless victim?

Chapter 154: Clueless

"So, what did you learn?" Peniel asked after the maid Joselyn was escorted out of the study room.

"Well, I learned that even NPCs can have various kinds of rich personalities," Jack answered absently.

"What's an NPC?" Peniel was bewildered.

"Never mind," Jack said, he was looking at the notes he had written down, trying to make sense out of all the talks just now.

He heard the door was opened. Who was it? Had he not interviewed everyone already? He turned and saw Duke Alfredo walking in with Captain Salem.

"Did you learn anything useful?" The duke asked.

"I'm still trying to piece all the information together. I might need to do some more roaming around the mansion and probably outside the estate. That should not be a problem, right?"

"As mentioned before, as long as you don't force open any locked door, you are welcomed to explore."

"The maid Joselyn, who is it that she is most friendly with?"

The duke gave some thought to the question, after a while he said, "most of the occupants here mostly mind their own selves. I guess Joselyn is most friendly with the other maid, Luciana. I saw her also spent some time chatting with the cook Tomas when she was free. But then again, Tomas is friendly to everyone, so I don't think there is anything special about that."

"Did she exhibit any strange behavior prior to the day of the theft?"

"I'm not sure, I don't really pay attention to her. You might need to ask about it from the head maid or Luciana, they were the ones most often to be in contact with her."

"I'll do that then while I explore this place further. I suppose they are not assembling out there anymore?"

"No, I've dismissed them once their interviews were done," Captain Salem replied.

"That's okay. I will talk to them when I see them."

Jack went out afterward. He started to walk around the mansion first. It was separated into three sections of West wing, North wing, and East wing, with the courtyard where Jack first met the duke as the center point between the three wings. It was so huge that Jack still managed to get lost after walking around for some time. He made some sketches on his paper in order to understand the basic layout of the mansion.

When he walked through the West wing, he saw a door marked as a medicine room. This must be the place where Luciana said he had seen head maid Jimena when she was sneaking. He tried the door of the medicine room, it was locked. He continued walking and realized that this place was actually close to the place where the footstep tracks from the bushes had disappeared. Was there any connection?

He went back to where the tracks were, and retraced the steps. While he was doing that, he saw the windows of the hallway. He peeked through the window and realized it was indeed difficult to see the barrier formation. Somehow the colorful light was not seen through the window glass. He had to move his face closer to the glass and focused his vision to see a slight disturbance in the sky outside. When he opened the window, the full display of the barrier formation was clearly visible.

He went outside through the side door with the tracks, and walked back to the bushes under the tower. Couldn't find anything more, he started to walk around the outdoor field. He went into the small woods, walked around the edges of the artificial lake, and traveled to the edge of the estate to see the barrier formation up close. The time kept on passing by that the sun started to set in the West already.

"So, did you find anything?" Peniel asked.

"I'm f**king clueless, is what it is," he cursed. "Damn it! There is no monster here. Am I just to waste my time searching for clues for this quest? And if I can't solve it after three days, won't that mean I've totally wasted these three days? Other outworlders might have increased one or two levels within this time frame."

"Complaining isn't gonna help," Peniel said. "If you are not confident, just request to drop this quest, then pick up another one."

"There won't be any penalty?" Jack asked.

"Penalty for failing or canceling quests will only start after you reach the gold hall of the Adventurers Association. For this one quest here, there will not be a penalty," Peniel answered. "However, the duke might be disappointed with you if you drop the quest midway."

"Would that be bad?"

"Dude, he is a duke. You are practically living in the kingdom where he holds some political power. Unless you planning to move to another country, I think it will be a bad idea to cross the duke. On the other hand, if you managed to impress him, you might get an unforeseen advantage."

Jack thought about Peniel's words. "But that is on the condition that I succeed with this quest, right?"

"Even if not, it is still better if he sees you put your heart into it, rather than outright dropping the quest."

"Argh! How come this quest is so complicated!"

"You are the one that decided to take on a mystery quest again."

Jack took a deep breath, then he said, "never mind about levels then, let's just focus on solving this case first. Let's go back, it's getting dark soon. We will continue again tomorrow."

While he walked back, he took out his staff and started to draw a mana rune using his mind.

"What are you doing?" Peniel asked.

"Practicing," he answered as he completed the rune and the Barrier spell was cast on him.

The estate was so large that it took him more than five minutes to get back to the mansion, hence the cooldown of his Barrier spell was off before he arrived in the mansion. He re-cast the spell again, he tried to draw the rune faster this time, but it dissipated mid-way.

"Oh, it can fail?" Jack asked.

"Of course, you need to keep concentrating. If your mind wandered off or you draw the lines wrongly, then the spell will fail," Peniel explained.

"So I can just attack mages in the middle of their casting in order to stop them from casting spells."

"That is true, but some skillful mage can train their minds with stable concentration which can resist their spells from failing even if they were disrupted. If you want to become a powerful mage, you will need to train your mind for that as well."

"Ah, being a mage is so troublesome. Luckily my main class is a physical one."

"Don't hold your breath yet. Many physical classes regretted their choice after experiencing the powerful spells of Elite magic users. You will not find your results disappointing if you diligently practice your mage skills."

"All right then, I will just take your words for it," Jack formed the rune for the Barrier spell again. Good thing was that failing the spell didn't consider it as being cast, so there was no cooldown, he could immediately start casting again.

He arrived in the mansion and was invited to a dinner with the Duke and Duchess. The good thing about this quest even if he failed, was that he had experienced a dinner amongst royalties. Something that he had not and would not have experienced in the real life. The food was extravagant and the wine was exquisite. The courses kept coming, he started to had a feeling he was at a feast instead. He was already full even while there was still plenty of food on the table.

He bid the two royals good night after the dinner. He was led by Butler Winston to his guest bedroom to retire for the night. In his bedroom, he took out the remaining technique book he had in his inventory. Since he had become a Mage, he could learn this skill already. Without further ado, he proceeded with it.

Body Double (Active skill)

Create a copy of self, cannot attack, cannot be attacked.

Can switch place with original body, copy will be destroyed once switching is activated.

Duration: 5 minutes

Cooldown: 1 hour

Mana: 50.

It was a skill that created a doppelganger? But could not attack? So it was a skill just for distracting foes? Jack was wondering what's so useful about this skill that Peniel had strongly recommended him to learn it.

He then continued to practice forming the Barrier spell rune while re-examining the notes he had jotted down.

"You can cast the spell while thinking about the clues?" Peniel asked when she saw him.

"Yes. I have always been good at multi-tasking," Jack said. "That's one of the reasons I'm so good at solving puzzles. I can analyze things from different angles at the same time."

"That was impressive," Peniel commented. "That will be a good asset when you get more powerful spells with complicated runes."

Chapter 155: The Case Escalates

Jack stopped reading his notes after hearing her, "oh? Why is that?"

"I told you before that higher class' spells had more than one rune, right? There are some magic users who had trained their minds so well that they could form multiple runes at the same time. This means they will be able to cast their spells faster compare to magic users who form each rune one at a time. If you can process multiple thoughts at the same time, you should be able to do this multi-runes forming at the same time as well."

"That would indeed be great. Now I can't wait to quickly get those high-level spells," Jack said enthusiastically.

"First you will need to brush up on forming one rune first. Look at how slow you are, it will be useless even if you can form multiple runes at the same time with such slow speed," Peniel immediately doused his spirit.

Jack spent the rest of the night practicing his Barrier spell while thinking about the quest's clues and chatting with Peniel. The night passed soon and another day began.

The next morning, he was woken up by the butler who came and served him breakfast. He slept rather late last night as he kept on practicing and thinking about the quest. He had made no breakthrough in the quest, but he had quite a significant improvement in the speed by which he drew the rune. He now only needed three seconds to complete the Barrier rune, half the time from when he first cast the spell. However, Peniel said three seconds was still too slow. He didn't disagree with her, three seconds would be more than enough time for a melee class to cross the distance and disrupt his casting.

He resumed his casting training while he ate his breakfast. After finishing it, he took the empty tray down. He wanted to find Luciana or head maid Jimena today to ask them about Joselyn, as he didn't meet them again when he was strolling around the mansion yesterday.

He did not find anyone after he came down to the main hall. It was indeed difficult to find someone within this oversized mansion. Since he did not know where to go to find them, He checked on his radar, he would approach the nearest white dot and asked him or her about Luciana and Jimena's work schedule and about where he could find them. He regretted that he didn't ask about it when Winston brought him breakfast.

He was looking at his radar when he felt like he heard something.

"Do you hear that?" Jack asked Peniel.

"Hear what?" Peniel replied.

"I thought I heard a scream."

"Should be your imagination."

"Probably, but since I have no direction to go, might as well check it out," Jack said and headed to the direction he thought he had heard the scream from. When he checked his radar again, he noticed that the scream direction was also where some white dots had gathered, one of the white dots parted away and went in his direction, he decided to approach that moving white dot.

He tried his best to navigate through the maze of this mansion in the direction of that white dot. It brought him to a small staircase that led upstairs. There were just too many damn staircases in this mansion, Jack didn't know which one brought him to where.

He soon heard hurried footsteps coming from above the staircase. Not long after, the plump body of the cook, Tomas, rushed down. He almost fell on the last few steps, but luckily his hands managed to grab the railing and prevent his heavy body from crashing onto the floor. Jack noticed his face was pale, the jolly expression that the cook always wore was nowhere to be seen.

"Did something happen?" Jack asked.

The cook looked at Jack, as if unsure who was in front of him. Finally, he uttered, "Jo... Joselyn..."

"What's wrong with her?"

Tomas couldn't seem to continue his words, he resolved to only point up to the stairs. He then ran away in the direction of his kitchen. Jack looked at him in bewilderment. Since there was little chance to get information from him, Jack then decided to go up the stairs and found out what had spooked the cook so.

When he arrived upstairs, he heard someone was crying in the adjacent room. He went there and saw Luciana was the one crying. Not far from there, he saw a crowd of people. Most of the occupants of the mansion were there. They were standing in front of a door looking inside.

Jack approached them and asked, "what happened?"

But when he looked inside the room, he could see what's wrong without the others telling him. Inside the room, Captain Salem was half-kneeling while checking on a woman lying on the floor. The woman was Joselyn, his eyes were wide open but there was no life in it. The maid who was the main suspect of his quest was lying dead on the floor.

"Wha... What happened?" He asked again, this time he was directing the question to the duke who was standing closest by the door.

"I don't know, she was found already dead when Winston came to bring her meal. I only came soon after hearing the incident," the duke answered.

Jack turned to the butler, "so you are the first one to have found her?"

"I did," Winston answered.

Jack then went into the room, when he passed through the door, he saw on his left another body. It was the guard who was watching over Joselyn. Apparently, he had died as well, in a sitting position on the floor with his back leaning to the wall.

Shit, it was a murder scene. He thought at first the maid did suicide, but after seeing the guard's body, that was no longer possible. This theft mystery quest had further escalated to a murder mystery quest, exactly like those detective novels that he used to read.

'Wait, when NPC died, they didn't disappear like the monsters?' Jack asked Peniel in his mind.

"NPC again? Can you please explain what it means?" Peniel asked back.

'Oh, sorry. I mean the natives. The original people of this world who is not an outworlder.'

"NPC... So that's what you called us? Never mind. Yes, unlike monsters, us natives do not disappear when died. We usually got buried, or cremated, or disintegrated using magic, depending on each tribe's belief."

So the NPCs were similar to real people in his real life, Jack thought.

Captain Salem stood up when Jack approached, he said, "I asked the others to wait outside, so you can see this place as it was first discovered."

Jack nodded, the captain had a forensic sense to preserve the crime scene, which was a good move. But then he thought of something, "You are waiting for me? What if I don't show up until noon?"

"I've asked the other maid and the cook to go look for you," the captain replied.

Jack was speechless, those two people he asked to look for him, one was crying in the adjacent room, another was scared shitless. If he did not stumble onto the cook prior, wouldn't they had been waiting in vain?

"There didn't seem to be any struggle inside this room," Jack said after seeing that the things in the room were still all neatly in their places.

"Yes, they were killed in one and two strikes," the captain informed.

One and two strikes? Jack looked at the body of the guard. He wondered if he could still scan the NPC level after he died.

Castle Guard (Basic Human / Deceased), level 50

HP: 0/42,000

Jack's eyes twitched after reading the description. Crap! He said in his mind.

"What's wrong," Peniel's voice asked in his mind.

'Apparently, this quest is really way out of my league,' he replied.

"How so?"

'I'm tasked to find a thief which is now also a murderer, who can kill a level 50 guard in just two strikes. What do you think the chance of a level 16 adventurer like me have if he decided to attack me?'

Chapter 156: The Wooden Display Stands

"That is indeed troubling."

"So, do you want to just forfeit the quest? Considering the high risk," Peniel asked when Jack was silent for a while.

Jack pondered on the question for a bit, and said, 'no, let's continue.' He still had the Immortal Soul inherent skill, even if he was killed, he would only lose half the experience to the next level. He sighed, not only did he not get any experience during the progress of this quest, but there was a potential in him losing experience as well. He would really consider twice the next time he was thinking about tackling a mysterious quest.

He knelt beside Joselyn's body. There didn't seem to be any traceable wound, but his eyes soon picked up a small burned hole at the underneath of her jaw.

"So you notice?" Captain Salem said from beside him, "it was likely from a lightning type of skill or spell, judging from the burnt mark. It was a high penetration and high-speed attack, she was killed instantly after her brain was punctured."

Jack touched the top of her skull and moved her hair aside, there was a hole at the top of the skull. The attack went in from under and came out on top. Jack looked above, he found a small burnt hole on the ceiling. He then turned to the dead guard. In his case, there were two burnt holes. One on his chest, the attack completely punched through his chest armor and damaged his heart. The other one was on his forehead. It took two attacks to kill the guard, but still, from the absence of mess, those two attacks went pretty quick.

"What do you think?" Captain Salem asked.

Jack shook his head. "I still need to check this room further," he said.

"All right, I will leave you to it," captain Salem said. He then went out and asked the others to disperse. The duke asked the captain to stay with Jack considering the murderer had managed to kill a castle guard easily. The captain acknowledged, he stood outside the room waiting for Jack.

"You found out about something, right?" He asked.

"Have the others left?" Jack asked back.

"Yes," the captain answered.

"I think she recognized the attacker," Jack answered.

"How so?"

Jack stood under the burnt hole on the ceiling. "She must have stood here when she was killed. The attack went from under and hit the ceiling after passing through her. In order to attack from that angle, the attacker must be standing extremely close to her. That's mean it is someone she knew. Judging from the guard staying still at the corner, the attacker was someone that had been frequently in converse with her. If not, the guard would not have allowed the attacker to get close to her. The attacker must have killed her first in a surprise attack, then turned to the guard and killed him before he could react."

"You mean the killer is one of the occupants of this mansion?" Captain Salem asked.

"There is a high probability it is," Jack answered.

"Impossible! All of them are commoners, none of them are capable of this. Or are you insinuating it's the Duke himself that have done this? It is even more impossible. I know the Duke personally. He is not someone that will do this kind of murder."

That was true, Jack had scanned all the occupants when he interviewed them the day before. They were indeed all level 1. For the Duke himself, he did not know the man that well, but he doubted he would do such blatant murders.

"I'm not sure," Jack said. "I'm still looking for more clues. I might still be missing something, but I think the murderer and the thief were the same person."

"I thought Joselyn was the thief?"

Jack shook his head, "she was working with someone. Maybe that someone had decided to shut her up."

"She has a partner? Who?!"

"That's what we are trying to find out."

Captain Salem watched Jack with a solemn gaze as he took a piece of cloth to cover Joselyn's corpse, then he laid the guard's corpse down carefully and started to check on it. The captain said, "at first I was skeptical about your kind, the Gods had left behind prophecies about your kind, about your limitless potential. But the ones I have seen are all weak yet greedy and rude adventurers, I doubted how strong

any of you can get. And even if you become strong, how useful you are to us, perhaps you might instead become our disaster. However, seeing you now, I can see now what the Gods meant."

"Don't get your hopes up yet," Jack chuckled. "Not all of us are the same. Some are indeed greedy and also selfish. They will have no problem sacrificing others for their own gain. You should still be careful when you are dealing with our kind."

"But you are not like that, no?"

"I try not to."

Jack finished checking the guard's corpse, he could find no further clue. He used another piece of white cloth to cover the corpse as well. He then stood up and looked around the room. At first glance, the room appeared to be tidy without disturbance, but he saw one of the drawers of a cabinet nearby was ajar with some clothes sticking out. He went and opened the drawer. It was disheveled inside, it looked nothing like a girl's drawer. He opened the other drawers, it was also messy. Somebody had been ruffling the inside, probably in search of something?

He turned to the captain, "tell me again how the corpses were found?"

"The Butler found them, the Marquess passed by not long after. The Marquess then stood guard here while Winston went around calling everybody."

Jack proceeded to look at the other part of the rooms, especially the cupboards and cabinets. Only the one that he had first checked had been ruffled, the other was still tidy. When he reached the last cupboard and opened its doors, he was surprised to find it was devoid of clothing as was typical of a woman's cupboard. Inside were some wooden display stands that were similar to the one at the Duke's workroom.

The assailant had only searched through one cabinet, why? Because he was interrupted and did not have the time to search the others? Or he had found what he was looking for? And why were there display stands inside the maid's cupboard?

He took the display stands out. Some had its top parts broken apart, no, it was disassembled. Jack looked at the one in pieces, and then looked at the one that was still in one piece. He touched the panel that sat on the top of the display stand. It shifted. He applied some pressure and tried moving it in a direction. After some tried, it detached. Jack looked at the panel and turned it around. It was just a thin wood panel, nothing special, and nothing was hidden behind the removable panel.

After pondering for a bit, he put all the pieces back into the cupboard. He continued to search the room a bit more but found no other unusual thing. He came out and said to the captain, "I want to ask the duke something, do you know where he is at the moment?"

"He should be in his chamber checking on the duchess. Come, I'll take you there."

Jack followed the captain. He was grateful for it, if he went by himself just based on an indicated direction, he would quickly lose his way. They arrived in a large bedroom that was beautifully decorated. Several antique pieces of furniture decorated the spacious room. At one side of the wall was a wide and luxurious bed, the duchess was lying on the bed while the duke accompanied beside her. The head maid Jimena was also there, tending to the duchess.

"Is something the matter?" The duke asked when he saw the two.

"Yes," Jack answered. "Is there somewhere we can talk in private?"

"Here will be fine," the duke answered, then he turned to Jimena and said, "can you excuse us?"

"Yes, Your Grace," the head maid responded and headed to the door.

"Before that, I would like to ask some questions first, head maid Jimena," Jack said.

The head maid glared at him as if wanted to say, ain't we done this already yesterday? But considering the duke was there, she replied obediently, "what do you need to know, sir?"

"Joselyn, was she meeting anyone often this lately?"

Chapter 157: Cloak Of Shadow Concealment

"Joselyn?" The head maid's gaze seemed to tremble for a bit. She might be conjuring the ghastly image of Joselyn lying lifeless on the floor of her room. She tried collecting herself before uttering, "S-she meet often with people she used to hang out with the other maid, Luciana, and the cook, Tomas. Now that I think about it, she did indeed acting rather unusual lately. She had been slacking off, some of her chores had been neglected. I had caught her wandering outside the mansion, chatting with the gardener, Matias. She had no business roaming outside the mansion. I had warned her about her slacking, she had promised to pay more attention to her duties."

Jack thought about the head maid's words for a bit before saying, "thank you, mam. That will be all for now."

The head maid recovered her demeanor and gave Jack a peeved glance. She then headed out. After she closed the door, Jack returned his attention to the Duke.

The duke said, "whatever you need to say, you can say it. I keep no secret from my wife."

Jack nodded, he then explained about what he had found from the crime scene at Jimena's murder, and also about his hypothesis regarding the culprit being one of the occupants of this mansion. The duke expressed similar disagreement due to the rest of the occupants being a commoner, impossible for them to take out a castle guard instantly. Nevertheless, the duke did not dismiss Jack's conjecture outright, he agreed with his discretion to keep this information contained.

"I believe you are not here just to report about your findings? Something else you need?" The duke asked.

"Yes, I want to ask Your Grace about the display stands in your workroom, one of which used to house the missing painting. Where did you get them from? Did you buy them or had them made?"

"I had them made, by the gardener, Matias. He was also a carpenter. Is something the matter? Does it have to do about finding similar stands in Joselyn's quarter?"

"I'm still trying to find out. I guess I would need to talk to Matias next. Do you know where I can find him at this time?"

"At this time, he should be tending to the flower field at the back of this house," duchess Isabelle took the chance to answer the question. "It was my personal garden which I visit when I'm in my good days, which as you see, is not at the moment."

Now that she mentioned it, Jack did see a trace of paleness on her fair face. She also seemed weak compared to her yesterday's appearance.

The Duchess continued, "I've asked him to tend to my flower field daily, and it was usually at this time. So you should be able to find him if you go there now."

"Thank you, Your Grace. I will do that then." Jack then turned to Duke Alfredo and gave a slight bow, "if you will excuse me, Your Grace."

The duke nodded. "Captain Salem will accompany you," he commanded.

Jack didn't refuse the offer. Now that he knew the culprit in this quest might be an over-leveled NPC, he would feel better with an over-leveled guardian by his side."

He vaguely remembered seeing that flower field the duchess had mentioned, during his last afternoon roaming around the estate. So he made his way in that direction. The flower field was not hard to find, as it took up a rather large portion of the land and was not obstructed by any structure around it.

When he arrived near the place, he could see the shape of a person among the flowers. The large frame of the gardener was hard to miss. Matias also noticed them coming, he waved to them as a greeting, to which captain Salem replied by making a hand gesture asking him to come to them. Matias put down his tools and made his way to them as they kept on walking forwards. They met around the edges of the flower field.

"Good day to you, sir," Matias gave his oral greetings, "coming to enjoy the outdoor, sir?"

"No, Matias, we come looking for you," captain Salem replied. "Mister Storm Wind here had some more questions to ask of you."

Jack followed up by immediately asking him a question, "did you meet Joselyn often lately?"

"Joselyn...," the gardener's face turned sad by the mention of her name. "I heard about what happened to her. Such a terrible thing, I can't believe something like that will happen here."

The gardener was lost in thought, Jack snapped him back by repeating his question, "Matias, did you often meet with her? Before the theft incident two days ago?"

"Yes, yes, I did meet with her a few times," Matias finally collected himself.

"What did you two talk about?"

"Many things. I don't remember all the conversations, I don't have much good memory in me head," he said while putting a hand on his head with a silly smile.

"Did she ask you to make her something from wood?" Jack asked again.

"Ah, that I remember! Yes, she said she was fascinated with the wooden display stands in the duke's workroom. She knew I was the one that made them, so she asked if I could make a few pieces that were exactly like them."

"Did you make it for her?"

"Yes, I made two pieces for her. Was it wrong to do that?" Matias asked with a worried expression.

"No, it's ok. You are not in trouble, I'm just trying to understand things," Jack said to ease the guy.

"Thank you for your time. I'll let you return to your task at hand."

"So, did you learn anything new?" Captain Salem asked when they were on their way back to the mansion.

"Yes. I have some suspicion. But the next part I might need to do it alone," Jack answered.

"The duke was worried about your safety."

"I know, but it's necessary in order to solve this case. Don't worry, I will take utmost caution."

"All right," the captain said after some hesitation. He then handed Jack a small piece of jade with a rectangular shape.

"What's this?" Jack took the jade.

"It was a Beacon Stone," the captain replied. "if you are in danger, you crashed that stone. Me or my men in the vicinity will immediately come to your aid."

"That is cool!" Jack exclaimed as he looked at the jade. "Thank you, captain."

The captain nodded. "Just make sure to be mindful of your safety at all times," he said.

"I will," Jack replied as he stored the Beacon Stone into his inventory.

After they arrived at the mansion, Jack parted way with the captain as intended. He then made his way back to Joselyn's chamber. He made sure there was no one around on his radar before entering the room. The two corpses had been taken away by the castle guards, Jack and the captain had finished examining their bodies, hence there was no need for the bodies to be left behind in the room.

The room was not so bright. The only source of light was from a lamp hanging from the ceiling, it was powered by some magical source. Jack cast a Mana Bullet and destroyed the lamp. The room became slightly dark now without the illumination, there were many shadowy corners. He went into one such corner and stayed still. After a while, His Cloak of Shadow's ability took effect, his body blended into the shadow and disappeared.

Chapter 158: It's Her?

Jack stayed still, as the invisibility will only take effect if he did not move. But he was bored to hell, hours had passed without anything happening. Could his suspicion be wrong? Peniel had been bothering her several times asking what he was doing. She was also bored, and Jack forbid her from coming out from her hidden dimension.

Jack had explained to her that he suspected that the culprit had tried to search Joselyn's room after murdering her. Probably looking for the so-called painting that was stolen, most possibly hidden by Joselyn. But his or her search attempt had been cut short when the murder was found out, the culprit was forced to abandon the search. He highly suspected that the culprit would come back to this room to continue the search. Hence he was waiting in the dark to find out.

Peniel had also pointed out that if that was the case, wouldn't the first one to find the bodies be the prime suspect? He could have been searching the room when Marquess Fernando passed by, then acted as if he had also just found out about the grisly murders.

Jack countered by saying different probabilities could also occur. It was possible that the culprit was not those two people who stumbled onto the crime scene, that the culprit could have heard or sensed their coming, considering his ability to kill a castle guard in such a short time. Thus had made his or her escape before the butler arrived at the crime scene.

Jack also added it could be the Marquess as well. Saying that probably after Winston went off to call the others, the Marquess went inside and searched through Joselyn's possessions while the others had not yet arrived. If so, then it would be much more complicated, because then it would mean that the murderer and the person searching through the room were two different cases. He hoped this was not the case. Anyway, he needed to make sure. That's why he was waiting in the dark inside this silent room.

It was probably almost nighttime outside, he had lost track of how long he had been waiting. Did he need to wait until midnight? Or until tomorrow morning? Tomorrow was already the last day permitted to complete this quest, he would fail if he could not solve this case by tomorrow night. Should he be wasting time like this doing nothing? But he also had no other clue to follow up on at the moment. He was having a dilemma as he continued to wait.

His body was already stiff due to standing still for such a long time. If it was in the real world, he would not have been able to keep such a still position for such a long time. Good thing his body here had high endurance stat, but still, the boredom was eating at him mentally.

While he continued to try to console himself about the patience of waiting, he finally noticed a white dot in the vicinity. There had often been white dots in his radar since his radar covered quite a wide area, but this one dot was moving in his direction. Seeing it, the boredom in his heart vanished. It was replaced by expectation, and tension. Considering if it was the murderer, he must make sure he was not found. Otherwise, there would be a second murder case appearing in this mansion.

Jack focused his attention on the approaching white dot. Not long now, he said in his mind. It stopped. From its position, Jack surmised it was just outside the room, near the entrance. He was sure now that this white dot was not simply a passerby. He soon saw a head poking out into the room.

It's her?

The said person went in after checking that the room was empty. She went to the middle of the room and looked around. She seemed to be cautious about something. Could she sense his presence here? Jack tensed up with the thought. To his relief, the person stopped looking around. She shifted her attention to one of the cupboards, and went there and opened it up. After ruffling through the contents,

she closed it up and went to a cabinet next to it. She opened the drawers and continued to search for something.

Is she the murderer? Jack could not help but think about it. He decided to take the risk to use his God-eye monocle to inspect the person.

Jimena (Basic Human), level 1

HP: 150

The head maid was still at the same level as he last inspected her during the interviews. He could take her out easily. But if she was the murderer, perhaps then she had some kind of tool that could kill the castle guard instantly, which would also be able to do the same to him. Thus, he stayed hidden. Or could she be an underling? There was another powerful person behind the scene. This was getting more confusing, Jack was irritated by this quest.

The head maid spent quite some time searching for something, but she didn't seem to find what she was looking for. Her expression was ugly with frustration. She seemed to be trying hard to keep her calm so there was no noise. Eventually, she calmed down. She put everything back to its place but didn't bother to tidy up the insides. She then went out of the room.

Jack waited for her to be at a safe distance first before he came out of the shadow and followed her. If she had a powerful superior, she should be on her way to make a report now. He had to follow her if he was to find out. He focused on her white dot, as there was no name marker on the white dots on his radar, he might lose her to the other white dots if he lost track of it.

He maintained his distance so Jimena would not get suspicious. While he continued following, something caught his attention while he was passing the hallway with the balcony overlooking the inner courtyard. He glanced over and saw head maid Jimena was crossing over the courtyard below while bringing a basket of fruits.

What the...? Jack was stunned for a moment as he was looking at the Jimena below. He focused his sight, he did not see wrong, that was indeed the head maid. But wasn't the white dot he was following went in the other direction? Wait! Where was that white dot?

He returned his attention to his radar, he had lost track of the moving white dot. The direction that it was moving before only had several stationary white dots now. He ran in that direction, he saw the butler Winston was talking with the Marquess, he went further to the other white dot, the position indicated the kitchen below. He went there and saw there was only the cook, Tomas, inside.

He had lost the one he was supposed to be following. But why did he see Jimena when he was already following one that was in a different direction? And where did that other Jimena go? Why were there two of them? Or could it be that she had used a teleporting device that sent her to the floor below? But she did not notice the white dot made an instantaneous shifting when he saw the head maid below.

"I don't understand, this is getting very confusing," Jack uttered.

"What's so confusing? One of the head maids must have been someone in disguise," Peniel said in his mind.

"In disguise?" Jack asked.

"Yes. Some magic tools can do that."

That's right, this is a game world based on magic. He was too caught up with the mystery case that he treated it as the same as those detective stories he had read, which used logic and science. This place used magic so some tricks could be explained with magic.

With that thought, he started to ponder on what he had learned since he came into the mansion. At this time, the butler approached and said to him, "dinner in half an hour. The Duke would like to invite you to join them again."

"All right, I will be there," Jack said.

Chapter 159: Laying Out The Trap

During the dinner, Captain Salem, Marquess Fernando, and Duchess Isabelle had also joined, the same as the night before. The dinner was being served by head maid Jimena and maid Luciana, while butler Winston brought out the wine.

"I am well enough to join the dinner again this evening," explained the Duchess with a smile.

"Always happy with you around, Your Grace," Marquess Fernando said charmingly.

Captain Salem turned to Jack, he was curious about what Jack had found out after they parted. "How is the progress of your investigation?" He asked.

"Aren't the two of you together?" the Duke inquired with a frown.

"Forgive us for going against your instruction, Your Grace. I have asked Captain Salem to give me some time alone as an important part of my investigation," Jack explained. "But due to that, I have made an important discovery."

"Did you find out about the murderer?" Captain Salem asked.

"No, but I think I have found out where the missing painting is at," Jack answered.

"You have?" The Duke's eyes glittered when he heard it.

"I have my theory, but if my guess is not wrong, it should still be inside your workroom," Jack said loudly.

"In my workroom? How can that be? Where is it? We should go get it at once!"

"Don't worry. It's not going anywhere. I still have a couple of things to think through. I will go get it first thing tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning...?" The Duke was unwilling to wait.

"Don't worry, your Grace, I guarantee I would return the painting to you tomorrow morning," Jack said with confidence.

Hearing Jack's assurance, the Duke no longer pushed further. He said, "all right then, I hope I can take your word for it. The thing is very important to me."

"I will not disappoint you, Your Grace," Jack said with a slight bow.

After the dinner, everyone went back to their chambers. Everything was silent in the mansion as the darkness of the night enveloped the estate. All the occupants dwelling in the mansion took their rest after a full day of tiring activities.

However, one shadow was moving along the mansion's hallway. It moved swiftly from one cover to another, while making sure that no one was around in the surrounding rooms. It continued to move, getting closer to one of the mansion's towers where the duke's workroom was located.

When it reached the entrance to the workroom, it took out a key and used it to unlock the door. Inside, it looked around the room, then it started to make a search, starting from the duke's work desk. It did not have the key to its drawers, so he tried to use brute force to open it, but without result.

It continued to search around the room, but suddenly it tensed up and looked in the direction of the exit. It was about to move when a figure emerged from the shadow of one of the room's corners.

"So you really can sense incoming people. Don't bother to run, they would have blocked the base of the stairs at this moment. Even if not, only two paths were leading out from the stairs. Both paths had guards on it already," Jack said after coming out from the shadow. He turned on the magic lamp on the duke's work desk, its light illuminated the room and revealed Head maid Jimena who stood not far.

"You! How do I not sense you in the room?" She asked with consternation.

"And how do you disguise yourself to be a level 1 head maid Jimena?" Jack asked back.

"How do you know?" the head maid's expression was ugly.

She then abruptly turned back to the room's entrance, and saw Duke Alfredo was already standing there. Some rapid footsteps were heard before Captain Salem appeared not long after. There was still some distant sound of footsteps, but it would still take them some time to arrive.

"You... you all... set this up?!" Jimena exclaimed after realizing the situation.

"It is really as you said..." Captain Salem uttered after seeing Jimena in the room. "Can you explain this, Mister Storm Wind? Was she the one behind the murders and theft that had happened recently?"

At this time, Jimena suddenly changed her expression to a confused one. She uttered, "wait! What is the meaning of all this? What is this talk about murder and theft? I was just coming in here to clean the room"

"At this hour? Come on, I've been in this room from the start, I can see you are searching for something," Jack countered.

"I..." Jimena was still trying to explain but the Duke cut him off, "Jimena, silence! I would like to hear Mister Storm Wind's explanation."

At this time, the footsteps that were still coming a moment ago had arrived. The castle guards stood behind the duke and their captain, while another old woman in maid dress came out from behind them.

"H-how can this be?!" She exclaimed as she stared at the woman who looked exactly like her in the middle of the room.

"See? There is no use for you to disguise yourself as the head maid anymore. You yourself had provided the proof," Jack said to the fake Jimena.

"I don't get it, if she is not Jimena, then who is she?" Captain Salem said. "Is she also the one that killed Joselyn and my guard? And steal the painting?"

"For the theft, no, it was indeed Joselyn's doing. But she was ordered by the one who ended up murdering her, and that person was, yes, the one that stood before us here, who was also the other person apart from the duke that possessed the key to this room. It's the butler who did it!" Jack said as he pointed to the disguised head maid. Damn! He never expected he could copy this famous phrase from a detective story he used to read.

"Winston? Is it really you? The Duke seemed to be unwilling to believe the culprit was his trusted butler. "How can it be? After all these years..."

"I doubt he is your real butler," Jack added. "He probably had taken care of your butler, then stole his identity to infiltrate your mansion."

The duke looked at the fake Jimena with a sharp gaze. If what Jack said is true, then the person in front of him was truly unforgivable.

Jack continued, "I guess he took on the identity of the butler and head maid as they are the only one to have the master key of this mansion, thus the key to this room as well. But he did not dare to steal the painting directly as he knew about the enchantment on the painting that will automatically activate the barrier formation once it leaves this mansion. He will need a scapegoat as a distraction while he is looking for a way to escape. He just never thought that the duke would find out about the theft early and activated the barrier formation before the painting left the mansion. And also never thought that Joselyn would defy his instruction by hiding the stolen painting."

"So it was indeed Joselyn who steal the painting?" Captain Salem said.

Jack nodded, he said, "the theft was indeed done by Joselyn, but technically, it wasn't a theft."

"What do you mean?" Captain Salem was confused by Jack's words.

"Because the supposed painting was not taken by her. She simply hid it somewhere in this room."

Chapter 160: Cardinal Of Phobos

"Why would she do that?"

"I assume because she did not want to blindly follow this fake Jimena or fake Winston's wish. She must have been coerced by him to steal it, probably using a threat or something. However, she had no

intention to just follow the instruction through. She probably didn't believe the culprit would let her go once she gave the painting away, thus she hid it and tried to use it to negotiate with the culprit."

"But I suppose the negotiation failed," the captain commented.

"Yes, and probably in a fit of rage, she was killed, along with the guard that was supposedly in charge of her."

"If it was the Jimena or Winston that came to talk with her, it made sense that the guard I appointed to watch over Joselyn did not react until the culprit has made his or her move."

"Yes, but unfortunately for the culprit, and fortunately for us. Joselyn did not tell him where he had hidden the stolen painting. I bet he was using his Winston persona during the deed. After committing the murders, he searched Joselyn's room to try to find it, but his endeavor was cut short when he sensed someone passing by, which happened to be the Marquess. He pretended as if he had only just found the bodies as well, and told the Marquess that they needed to inform the others. He was probably hoping for the Marquess to be the one that would go to inform the others while he stayed at the crime scene, so he could continue with his search. Unfortunately, the Marquess must be feeling inappropriate for a ranked noble like him to go around calling for people, that's why the butler ended up the one that was sent to inform the others while the Marquess stayed behind."

The fake Jimena's eyes twitched when she heard Jack's mocking tone during his last sentence.

"But it would make no difference anyway," Jack continued. "As the stolen painting was never really in her room. Nevertheless, the culprit didn't know about that. So I believe he would be coming back to Joselyn's room to look for it. Hence I decided to hide inside the room waiting for the culprit to show up."

"That's why you asked us to part ways yesterday," captain Salem said.

"Yes. And the culprit did indeed appear, in the form of head maid Jimena. I was slightly perturbed when I saw her, because even at that time, my first suspect was actually already the butler. So I decided to follow her, but on my way, I accidentally saw another Jimena. That's when I realized the culprit was using some kind of disguise magic to change his or her appearance."

"I see, that's why you lay your trap during the dinner time, when both Jimena and Winston was present, in order to bait the culprit to come here by saying the stolen painting was still in this room."

"Yes, that would be the case," Jack admitted. He then looked at the fake Jimena, "what do you have to say for yourself?"

"So where is that supposed painting now?" Fake Jimena said with a surprisingly calm tone.

Jack frowned at her reaction. "At a safe place," he answered while putting his guard up.

"Take it out," she said.

"So you admit to all this?" The duke came forward.

Captain Salem put his body to block the duke. "Careful," he said. Despite the duke being a higher level and higher trait, he was still a magical class, not suitable for melee. If their opponent made a sudden move, the duke would be unable to cast a single spell before the opponent strikes."

Fake Jimena laughed before suddenly her countenance shifted, and she transformed into another person, the butler Winston! He said to Jack, "you said you were already suspicious of me already from the start, care to explain why?"

"Nothing much, just some words you have said during the interviews," Jack replied.

"Oh? What about it?"

"You said you saw the barrier formation appearing, but you deny that you have gone outside of the mansion."

"And why is that suspicious?"

"It will be difficult to notice the barrier formation from inside the mansion. The light show of the barrier formation is not seen through the window glass."

"Only because of that?"

"It was a start," Jack said, and continued, "You must have seen the barrier formation when you went outside. You tried to cover about going outside because your original plan was to have Joselyn throw the stolen painting out of the window. You used the coincidence of the Marquess' visit to check on the duke and make sure the painting was on the stand. Then after you came out of the workroom, you told Joselyn to proceed with the plan. When she went into the duke's workroom, you went outside and waited underneath the tower. Once the painting left the window, the barrier formation would be up, and Joselyn would be inside to take the fall while you would use the chance to escape from the formation. You must have been getting restless down there when it took so long for the item to fall from the window, as Joselyn had diverted from your original plan at this time. When the barrier formation was finally up and nothing came down from the window, you knew then something had gone wrong. You wanted to confront Joselyn but she was kept in custody by the duke. And when the castle guards appeared, she was constantly being watched. It was not until yesterday morning that you finally couldn't wait anymore and decided to confront her despite the castle guard was by her side."

Winston laughed, "I must admit it, Duke Alfredo. The adventurer you had hired was indeed impressive."

"Who are you? You are certainly not Winston!" The Duke demanded.

"The adventurer and you were half correct, this body is Winston's. However, I am not."

"Arcane Possession?" The Duke was startled. "Who are you really?"

"Anyone who defies the God of Fear will be punished!" A dark silhouette suddenly appeared above Winston without warning, the aura in the room abruptly dropped several degrees. The silhouette turned to Jack and looked at him with an eery gaze. Jack could not help but tremble from that cold piercing gaze.

Jack used his God-eye monocle to gauge the apparition.

Cardinal of Phobos (Rare Elite Human, Apparition), level: 60

HP: 310,000

Crap! Level 60? Jack started to panic. "Run!" He heard Penniel's scream in his mind.

The phantom apparition exclaimed with a screeching voice, "the punishment for your meddling is this! I'll pry that item from your meddlesome corpse!"

Winston lunged at him together with the phantom silhouette. His movement was too fast! Jack had no chance to dodge. His hand pierced through Jack's body with raw strength alone.

"No!" Captain Salem yelled. He wanted to take action but Winston's attack had simply been too fast and too sudden.

"Huh?" Winston expressed a baffled expression. Jack's body disintegrated in front of him, but he felt something was off. He sensed something and turned to the other side of the wall. Jack emerged from the shadow.