

## World 261

### Chapter 261: Paths Of The Elite 2

Jack reviewed the options for the elite class. From the Warrior side, Mage Knight was a no-no. Berserker was also out, as it specialized in axe weapons. He could not change the type of his Storm Breaker anymore, he was stuck with a longsword. Not to mention also that he was no good at fighting using axe.

So that left only Blade Dancer and Weapon Master. Weapon Master put emphasis on the multiple weapons that could be used, so his Storm Breaker would be undermined. Blade Dancer seemed the best choice but it was a dual-wielding class. He was no stranger to dual-wielding in past games, but if he dual wield swords, he could no longer utilize his Mage class which required him to hold a magic staff.

The magic-user path had even more choices. Although the Elementalist was very tempting, the other paths were also viable. All of them should be able to provide great support for his melee class.

He didn't spend too much time contemplating the choices. It was still some time before he had to make the choice, he would gain more experiences and see more of this world first before deciding.

Jack had been tuning out the auction for a while. Several items had come and gone, but his ears caught attention again when he heard the auctioneer mentioning another technique book. He immediately activated the gadget beside him to check the book's statistics.

It was a technique book for advanced skill exclusive for Warrior class. His interest grew further as he read its description. It was called Shredding Fang. It was a range AOE offensive skill, it hit targets in a fan shape area. Sort of like a combination between Swing and Sword of Light. The bid was similar to Flash Step which started from 3 gold coins with an increment of 1 gold coin. At that moment, the bid had increased to 8 gold coins.

Jack waited a bit longer for the bid to start slowing down. When the auctioneer started counting with his hammer at 13 gold coins, Jack threw out a bid of 16 gold coins. The auctioneer started counting again, when he almost reached three, another NPC made a counter bid of 17 gold coins. Jack sent another bid at 20 gold coins without waiting for the auctioneer to count. He finally won the technique book.

"I thought for a moment there that your auctioning special combo method didn't work," he said to Dylan.

"Don't just go and give a weird name to people's method," Dylan complained. "And they are not exact science. In the end, as you said, it still comes down to who has the bigger stash of coins. If the other side is willing to spend, no method will be useful. But that counterbid you made shortly after you were countered, that was good. That gave the other side the impression that you still have the coins and not afraid to bid higher."

"Is it so? I simply was just very eager to get that book," Jack replied.

The next bid was a super rare grade flower vase. It allowed alchemists to boost the growth of any medicinal plant if using the vase. Jack soon lost interest again, his mind went back to converse with Peniel.

'Tell me about the elite paths of the other classes.'

"Why? It's not like you can choose from them," Peniel said.

'I still would like to know. I won't be in a fluster if I have to fight against one of them in the future,' Jack replied.

"All right. I will just start from the melee then. The Knight class will branch out to Sentinel, Paladin, Avenger, and Dragoon. All of them can wear heavy armor and utilize a shield, but the focus on shield is more heavily on Sentinel and Paladin classes, which possessed skills that can be used in conjunction with their shield. While Avenger and Dragoon can choose to use a shield as well, but they will be more effective if using two-handed weapons. In short, Sentinel and Paladin are heavy melee classes focusing on pure defense, while Avenger and Dragoon are heavy melee classes that are more inclined to offense."

'What's the specialty between each class?' Jack probed further.

"Between Sentinel and Paladin, Sentinel is the better tank as it can use tower shield, the largest shield type there is. While Paladin is supported by the availability of holy magic and healing spells. Avenger is a fighter that will get stronger the more hits they received. Dragoon is mobile heavy melee whose skills favor spear weapon."

'Ah, that Dragoon is the class that you asked me to suggest to Jeanny!' Jack said as he remembered his past conversation with the Wicked Witches' girl.

"Yes," Peniel replied. "For the Rogue class, it will branches out to Assassin and Battle Monk, which I mentioned before, and the other two more are Bard and Technocraft."

'Those bunches sound colorful,' Jack commented.

Peniel didn't respond to his comment, she continued with her explanation, "answering your earlier question about the elite class from rogue that still uses dagger, that will be the Assassin. They can dish out very high damage with their sudden attack and is proficient in poison. Their survivability is a question though, they mainly relied on their speed to survive due to their low HP pool. Battle Monk is also a speed-based melee fighter like assassin, but they can survive better with their defensive skills. They fought using an unarmed style. Bard is mainly a support class. They can play musical instruments that provides buffs for themselves and their teammates. They are not completely useless in melee though, as they can also learn some fencing skills. Technocraft is a speed-based class that is not particularly good in melee nor range. Their primary advantage comes from their knowledge on using traps and their ability to build a techno golem."

'A what golem?'

"A techno golem," Peniel repeated.

'What is that?'

"An automaton that can be commanded to fight the enemy in place of Technocraft. A technocraft can simply stay behind and lay his traps while his golem does the battle."

'That's... interesting,' Jack commented.

"Well, you can't be it. You are not a Rogue."

'I just said it's interesting, doesn't mean I want to be one. How about the elite classes of Archer? I assume they will be all physical range classes then?'

"Most. Archer class will eventually transform into Elite Marksman, Gunner, Hidde..."

'Gunner? There are guns here? I can use guns?' Jack almost blurted out again as he interrupted Peniel.

"You cannot use guns. Only a Gunner can, and you cannot become a Gunner because you are not an Archer," Peniel said slowly, as if talking to a child.

'Forgive me, please continue.'

He could hear Peniel sighing, before she resumed her explanation, "Apart from Elite Marksman and Gunner, Archer can also become Hidden Weapon Specialist and Beastmaster."

Jack had the urge to ask questions again, but he restrained himself and let Peniel went on with her explanation.

"Elite Marksman is ranged melee class that specialized in using bows or crossbows. Gunner is the same type except for their weapon of choice is as their name implies, guns. Hidden Weapon Specialist is a range class who is an expert at using multiple types of small throwing weapons. Beastmaster has no boost in their range capability apart from what they had received from their basic and advanced class. Their strength will be on their pets, and their ability to change into beast form. Once they transformed, they can basically be considered as a melee class instead."

'The Beastmaster class can have pets? Maybe I should have chosen to be a Ranger instead of a Magician,' Jack mused.

"All of them can have pets," Peniel said after hearing his thought. "the ability to have a pet comes from Archer class. The difference is, only Beastmaster can have medium-sized pets, the others are limited to small-sized pets. Furthermore, Beastmaster also has access to skills that can further strengthen their pets."

'Archer can have a pet?' Jack asked.

"Yes, Archer gained the skill Tame Pet once they reached level 20," Peniel answered.

Jack thought of Fierce Flame who was an Archer. Had she reached level 20 as well? Perhaps the next time they met, she would have had a pet already.

'You mentioned it can change into beast form? What kind of beast?'

"Depends on your affinity and your fortune, the most basic ones are cat, wolf, lizard, and bear."

'Wolf? Are you saying a Beastmaster class can transform into a werewolf?!'

"I wouldn't call it werewolves. Werewolves are monsters... But then again, they do look like one if they choose the wolf form."

'Cool,' Jack uttered

"Why are you getting all excited about that kind of rabid dog class? You Outworlders sure are weird."

'The last class, Healer,' Jack asked, ignoring her ridicule.

"Aye, the Healer class can become Priest, Druid, Reaver, and Inquisitor. Priest is the enhanced version of Healer. They can heal allies better and are further equipped with light magic that is especially destructive to undead and evil creatures. Druid is also good at healing allies with a focus on nature magic. Reavers can heal themselves or allies by absorbing the life forces from enemies. Inquisitor is a magic-user class who transitioned into a melee class instead. They gain the ability to wear medium armor and use mace weapons, but they are still provided with healing spells and holy magic in their arsenal."

## **Chapter 262: Quest Target**

Jack contemplated as he tried to absorb Peniel's information. Each class was specific and had its own strengths. It was a good thing that he had the fairy which allowed him to have some considerations before changing class.

'I pity the other outworlders, the elite classes are so diverse. If they make the wrong choice and end up with a class unsuitable to them, that will be really frustrating.'

"Actually, they can simply find out the information about elite classes from the library. It's not like it's a secret. However, they probably will have to join the library's faction and attained higher ranks before they have access to that level of information."

'The library is also a faction?' Jack asked.

"Yep, most of the largest library in a city is run by a specific faction. It is another one of the neutral factions. This faction is called Custodian of Knowledge."

He felt very lucky again to have Peniel. Otherwise, he would have needed to waste much time in the library doing their quests before he could gain the information he was looking for. He supposed guilds would have at least one or two of their members focusing in the library to gain rank and attain access to information.

He didn't think too much about it, his attention was again on the auction as he heard the auctioneer mentioning another technique book. It was a technique book containing an elite skill this time, the restriction was limited to elite classes which branched out of Warrior class. He felt the technique books appearing in this auction heavily favoring Warrior class.

The skill inside the technique book was called Wind Slash. It produced an energy sword of wind element that could strike at enemies at a distance, similar to Sword of Light. But from its description, the damage output should be higher and the attack didn't travel in a linear motion. It went in a curve like a slash, which should make the attack trajectory less predictable. Another point to note was the number of slashes will increase as the skill level was increased.

Jack was very interested in this skill. He looked inside his inventory and saw that his private stash of coins was at 32 gold coins. Although he could not use the skill now, he would be in the future. He listened intently to the bidding as they started. The book was auctioned with an opening bid of 8 gold

coins, with bid increment of 1 gold coin. The bid went on for a while until it reached 18 gold coins before the auctioneer started counting with his hammer.

Jack threw his bid at the time at 22 gold coins. The auctioneer did his count again. Another NPC bid 23 gold coins. Jack immediately counterbid with 26 gold coins. This time the auctioneer almost hit the hammer the third time, giving Jack a hopeful thought, when a different NPC call out 27. Jack paused for a moment before gritting his teeth.

Ah screw it! He thought and yelled, "32 gold coins!" He decided to go all out.

The auctioneer went, "going once... going twice... going th—"

"35 gold coins," a sound was heard from an NPC in one of the VIP rooms several platforms away.

Damn! Jack cursed out in his mind. He still lost the bid in the end. That last NPC who bid finally got the technique book.

"Hey, your auctioning special combo method didn't work," he complained to Dylan.

"Go to hell," Dylan simply replied. He was feeling rather complicated though. He had always thought Jack to be those typical gamers who just knew how to fight and level up. He thought that in terms of possession of gold coins, he who had focused on trading would be far superior to Jack. However, when he calculated the number of coins that Jack had spent in his previous two bids, combined with the amount he offered when the last failed bid. The guy had almost double the coins he possessed.

Dylan was utterly at a loss on how the brute had managed to amass such wealth. From their chats when they came to the auction, it was clear that he was an independent player. Unless he was an executive of a guild who had the guild's members collect coins and took a portion of their earnings for himself, then there was no reason that he could have more coins.

As Dylan continued to ponder about this enigma. Jack was already back to his relaxed self. He didn't mind the loss too much, he was only teasing his younger friend with his complaint. He looked at the VIP platform that held the two players. He noticed the two had not made any bid at all since the auction started. Did they not have enough coins?

The auctioneer proceeded with the next item. Different than his previous act, he interestingly gave an introduction first before revealing the item's image, "this next item is a bit special. Why did I say special? Because even our appraisers are not sure of its worth. Now mind you, even though its valuation was unknown, it could still be something worth a fortune. Why did I say that? Because this particular item was something that was excavated from the ruin of an ancient palace, and it was stored inside that palace's king's most innermost chamber, and amongst its other most valuable objects. However, this item was a set, and the one we offer here was only a part of the set."

The auctioneer made a wave at his female assistant after finishing his last sentence, who activated the monolith. The device again formed an image of an item. When Jack saw the image of the item floating above the monolith, he immediately sat upright and activated the red gem beside him.

He had actually forgotten the purpose of his coming to this auction until he saw the image. He now remembered that he was here on a quest. A task from Duke Alfredo to bid for an item in this auction. He was not sure at first what the duke wanted him to bid, but now that confusion had been dispelled. The

image floating above the red gem beside him was something he recognized. In fact, he had two pieces of the same type of item inside his bag. That item was the last piece of Fragment of Map.

He had gotten the first piece from Gilbert, a defector from the Cult of Phobos. The second piece was from Duke Alfredo himself for safekeeping. It was Duke Alfredo as well who had asked him to attend this auction. It appeared that the duke had known that this item would appear in this auction, and thus tasked him to attend.

Considering the matter now, marquess Fernando's request for them to wear this concealment coat made much more sense now. The duke didn't want others to know which outworlder that had gotten this piece that was auctioned. After all, the Cult of Phobos might still have some spies within the noble district.

The Fragment of Map was auctioned with the starting price of a pitiful 2 gold coins. No one found it strange since the purpose of it was unknown. There was some hesitation in the air before one of the NPC bid for 3 gold coins. Someone placed another bit after a long pause. The auctioneer was not in a hurry to start his count, since the bid had just started.

The bid for this Fragment of Map was totally unlike the previous bids. It had been going very slow since the start. Probably everyone was having doubts as to who would want to buy something that cannot be used? The item was also just looked like a piece of torn paper that had no aesthetic worth.

Seeing that no one else was bidding when the bid was at 6 gold coins, the auctioneer sighed. He then started counting dispiritedly.

"Going once... Going twice..."

Great, I will be able to buy it at such a low price! Jack was rejoicing in his heart. He glanced at the bag of coins given by duke Alfredo. Apparently, the duke had overestimated the situation. 100 gold coins were way much more than necessary. He wondered if the duke would mind if after he bought this fragment of map, he used the remaining coins to bid for his personal things?

Okay, time to place a bid, Jack thought as the auctioneer's count almost finished at three.

"20 gold coins!"

Jack's hand froze in the air as with his open mouth. The voice that was just about to come out from it was choked to a gasp instead. He turned to the source of the bid. It was from one of the two remote players on the other VIP platforms.

They were interested in it? Jack was startled. His surprise almost made him forget to counterbid as the auctioneer made his count again.

### **Chapter 263: Mysterious Players**

"25 gold coins!" Jack immediately shouted.

The two remote players turned to him under their hooded coats. Jack's gaze stayed on them as well. Both parties staring at each other in silence as the auctioneer made another count.

"30 gold coins," the other player, whose voice was male, announced.

"35," Jack countered.

"50 gold coins!" The remote player made a huge jump in the bid.

The NPCs were awed. They never expected these two groups of outworlders would be making such a high bid competing for a seemingly useless piece of paper. They started to reexamine the data of the item on their red gem consoles.

"60!" Jack was not dismayed.

"75!" The other player seemed firm in getting this item.

Jack pondered for a bit before going all the way, "100 gold coins!"

The NPCs around made a gasp. This was the highest bid amount since the start of the auction.

Jack and the other player stared at each other again after that last bid.

Please don't bid anymore, Jack prayed in his mind. Still, despite how sincere he was in his praying, he couldn't prevent the other guy's hand from lifting up.

"120 gold coins," that player uttered.

Damn it! Jack cursed in his mind. The announcer started counting, he was not as slow as before anymore. After all, the bid had reached an amount that far surpassed his expectation.

After giving a thought on the matter, he decided to go all out. "132 gold coins!" He shouted. He had even put his own private coins into the stash. After all, this item was not only crucial for his faction quest, it was also the target of the chain quest he got from the duke. On the other hand, he had always been curious about this Fragment of Map ever since he first got them from Gilbert.

That's all the coins he had. That should be enough, right? If those players still—

"150 gold coins!" Before Jack's thought was even finished, his hope had been squashed already as the other player upped his bid.

Motherf\*\*ker! Jack cursed in his mind. He turned to Dylan. "How many gold coins do you have?" He asked without ceremony.

Without waiting for Dylan's answer, he also asked marquess Fernando, "what about you? How many gold coins you bring?"

The marquess looked at him with a sheepish smile. "I don't bring any gold coin," he said.

"Are you f\*\*king kidding me? You come to an auction with an empty pocket?"

"I simply enjoy watching. I never buy things in an auction anyway," he answered.

Jack didn't even pay attention to the marquess' explanation, he had already turned his attention back to Dylan. "I will pay you back," he said with a serious tone.

Dylan's impression of Jack had increased ever since he found out about the number of gold coins he possessed. He was not impressed by those players who had high levels or being a member of a large

guild. To him, the most important thing, whether in real life or this game world, was still wealth. Everything else was secondary. Hence, he couldn't help but respect Jack.

After thinking further, he thought that he should have realized from the first time they met. He knew it was not easy to gain access to noble quarter, and even harder to befriend a noble, but Jack had done both. Furthermore, he had even joined this country's kingdom faction. He had information from his Trade Association contact that one required an invitation to join. And at this stage, the rumor was the kingdom was still observing the outworlders before making any attempt in recruiting them. He had even hoped that he would get the chance at being invited by befriendng a noble when he received the quest to attend this auction. But Jack was already ahead of him, every fact pointed out that this player that he had just met was not simple.

"Hey! Answer me, will you? Jack was panicking as he saw Dylan being unresponsive and the auctioneer was already starting his count.

"I want 10% interest," Dylan uttered.

"Deal! Give all your gold coins to me," Jack said without hesitating.

Bloody heck, maybe I should have asked for more, Dylan thought. He took out the gold coins in his possession and gave them all to Jack.

Jack dumped all the coins into his bag. His inventory system automatically calculated the gold coins that were entered. When he saw the total number, he went and yelled, "169 gold coins!!"

He heard a bang from his side. He turned and saw the player who was competing with him had smacked the table by his side.

Yes! Jack uttered in his mind. The gesture the other player showed highly likely meant that the amount he bid was already over their limit. That would be best, if this current amount was still not enough, he would not know where to get more coins.

The auctioneer started his counts, "going once... going twice... going thrice... sold!"

Jack was staring at the other players and praying all the time the auctioneer was counting. This time fortunately his prayer didn't disappoint. He could finally relax as he slumped back into his seat.

The two players that failed to win the bid stood up. They both stared at Jack under their hoods. Jack couldn't see their expressions due to their hoods but he could imagine that they might be pretty pissed. The two then turned around abruptly and disappeared.

They left? Jack was bewildered. Come to think of it, they never made any bid apart from this Fragment of Map, and they did not hesitate to throw such a large sum. Wait, did that mean they knew this item's worth. From the look of it, they had attended this auction specifically to get this Fragment of Map. To know about this item's value and to know that it will appear in this auction, those players' intelligence network was implausible. How did they know? Even he who had a fairy guide was not privy to such information. Additionally, the duo had managed to collect 150 gold coins. Were they from a large guild?

Jack didn't think too much about it. Both he and the other players were wearing concealment coats. None of them knew each other. Besides, those players were in another city. Even if they came and look



for him, they would need some time to traverse the wilderness. And he was never afraid of people coming to trouble him. He would just smack them back to where they came from.

The auction continued. There were still some things that caught Jack's attention, but there was nothing he could do anymore since his pocket was completely empty already. He even owed Dylan some coins, with interest. He had never felt poorer. Still, he did not regret it. That Fragment of Map pieces could finally be completed.

The auction closed with the bid on the main exhibit, which was a piece of unique grade equipment, a light armor shoulder piece. Still, the coins bid for this main exhibit paled in comparison to the bid for Fragment of Map. The unique equipment sold for 126 gold coins, which made the NPCs wondered, exactly which one was the main exhibit?

In a city far away from Capital Thereath, two players were seen coming out of a building. They were wearing black concealment coats. At this time, the two of them took off their hoods. Both of them were males. Their features revealed that one of them was a young man, while the other was more mature. On the right eye of the older male was a strange rectangular-shaped monocle. If Jack saw the device, he would recognize it as the God-eye monocle which he was also wearing.

"Who the heck was that player? Are you sure they are players?" The younger man spoke.

"The God-eye indicated so," the older man replied.

"What should we do now? We were told that the most an NPC would bid for an item below Unique grade was 100 gold coins. That's why we have prepared fifty percent more just in case. Who would have expected that a player was also targeting that thing? And how did they amass so many coins? Are they from one of the top guilds?"

The older man did not answer. He was deep in thought.

"Could it be that girl?" The young man uttered as he came to a thought.

"No, couldn't be her, didn't you hear the sound of the one who bid was a man?" The old man refuted. He didn't need to ask to know who the girl his younger colleague was referring to.

"She could be the other player that sat beside the one who bid. You said there were two players shown in your God-eye, weren't there?"

"It still couldn't be her. The last intel said that she was in the Dorwin region a few days ago. It was impossible for her to be in capital Thereath in such a short time, not at this stage of the game."

"So what should we do now?" The young man asked again.

The older male was quiet for a while, before saying, "we can only request the Cult of Phobos to gather intelligence again."

The young male's face was full of worry when he said, "the Master won't be happy..."

## **Chapter 264: Are You Making Me A Bait?**

After the auction was finished, the beautiful female attendant took them to a counter to receive the items that Jack had won in the auction. Jack and Dylan continued to wear the concealment coats with their hoods up. Jack put the three items he had won into his storage bag. After finished with the procedure, the three exited the venue. Marquess Fernando's carriage was already waiting for them in front, ready to take them back to the marquess' home.

Once inside the carriage, Jack took out both the technique books he had won from the auction. He proceeded to learn them with excitement.

Dylan gave him a contemptuous sneer, "you boy and your toy."

"Boy? Dude, you are younger than me," Jack countered.

"Age is but a number. I am clearly much more mature in style compared to you."

Jack didn't bother arguing with him. He opened up his skill window to check on his new skills.

Flash Step, level: 1/20 (Active skill, movement)

Instantly moves in a direction to a maximum distance of 2 meters. Create an afterimage in the original position.

Cooldown: 10 seconds

Stamina consumed: 10

Shredding Fang, level: 1/20 (Active skill, range, required melee weapon)

Creates three giant energy fangs that traveled in three directions in a fan shape. Each fang deals 180% physical damage, 25% chance to cause Bleed.

Range: 6 meters

Cooldown: 2 minutes

Stamina consumed: 50

"Not bad, not bad," Jack commented. With the Flash Step combined with his speed, he should be able to move in a more unpredictable way than before. The Shredding Fang skill was almost as powerful as Sword of Light, but its area effect made it a better skill when in a group fight.

Dylan made a scoffing sound when he heard Jack commenting in delight.

"You said you are mature, but why act like a jealous child?" Jack said to him.

"Who is jealous? I just find it childish seeing you so happy for getting new game skills."

"Dude, if you have not yet been aware of the state of the world now, you better open your eyes and take a look. You are not living in the normal world anymore. In this world, this so-called game skill you called, is a real thing that allows you to perform superhuman tricks. Do you think that precious business skill of yours will be any good if I can blast you to death with a spell of lightning?"

"Hmph, what do you know. I can always hire a bodyguard with my wealth," Dylan retorted.

'He can?' Jack asked Peniel in his mind.

"He can. Member of Trade Association can spend their points to hire a skilled bodyguard."

'Not just during caravan travel? He can hire a bodyguard that follows him as he walks around?'

"Yes, there is a time limit though. He will have to spend more points if he wants to continue hiring the guard."

"I still think personal power is the way. Having a bodyguard even if powerful won't guarantee your safety. You can't be protected from every angle."

"Then I will just hire more then," Dylan was not backing off.

"You said you are mature, but you squabble like a kid," Jack ridiculed him.

As they continued bickering, they suddenly realized the carriage had stopped and marquess Fernando opened the carriage door.

Jack was puzzled. "We arrive? So fast? Why does it feel like we have just traveled for less than ten minutes?"

"Where do you think I am taking you to?" The marquess said before he climbed down the carriage.

Jack followed down and found that they were in front of a luxurious building with scenic surroundings. The marquess was already taking the lead walking to the entrance of the building. Jack and Dylan looked at each other before following the marquess.

They entered the building and were greeted by a lovely stewardess. Marquess Fernando whispered something to the stewardess who then nodded with understanding and asked them to follow her. They passed through a large hall with palatial décor. One of the walls opened up to an open courtyard with a swimming pool. A few people could be seen sitting leisurely on the loungers beside the swimming pool. Some stewardesses were serving them drinks.

"It's a clubhouse," Jack heard Dylan said.

"What are we doing in a clubhouse?" Jack asked, which Dylan replied with a shrug. "Beats me," he said.

They just resigned to follow the marquess and the stewardess as they were led to a large corridor. The stewardess guided them to one of the doors along the corridor. She opened the door and ushered them to go in.

When they went in, they saw a decently large leisure room with many gorgeous furnishings. The attendant closed the door after the three of them entered, allowing them privacy.

They heard a clinking sound from the side. They turned and saw another hooded figure in a black coat behind a bar counter was pouring ice into several glasses. Marquess Fernando walked towards the hooded figure and sat at one of the bar chairs opposite from the hooded bartender.

Jack and Dylan looked at each other again before shrugging and took the seats beside the marquess. The mysterious bartender gave each of them a glass filled with cold beverages. The bartender then unhooded himself.

"Duke Alfredo?" Jack called when he recognized the person in front. "What's with all the theatrics?"

"It's a precaution," the duke explained. "I mentioned before that I am going to investigate about the Cult of Phobos after their attack on my home, didn't I? Turns out their infiltration might be deeper than I have imagined. It will take a longer time to flush out all their spies, I can't be sure if any of them is watching our movement at the moment. Hence the need for these concealment coats."

"I see, so you don't want them to know who had gotten the Fragment of Map from the auction," Jack commented as he digested the duke's words.

"Yes, they will know that an outworlder had gotten the item, but they will not know who."

"But wait, the cult knows that I have helped foiled their plan when they tried to take the piece in your house. They will certainly know about my relationship with you."

"Are we having a relationship?" The duke chuckled. "Don't flatter yourself, all they know is that you are doing a quest posted by me. And since that time, I have made several other requests albeit pointless ones, just to make contact with several other adventurers in order to throw your scent away from them."

"Oh, that's smart."

Marquess Fernando chimed in at the time, "also, if there was a spy watching, what they see was that the outworlders who got the piece came with me. And if they checked further, they will just find out that the outworlder associated to me at this time are ones coming from the Trade Association."

"Hold on a second!" Dylan suddenly interrupted. "What kind of dangerous affair are you guys involving me here with?"

Jack turned to him and gave him a pitiful look, "well, it's just some issue with a bunch of murderous fanatics who serve a mad God."

The marquess peeked out from behind Jack and said to him, "sorry."

"Why, you..." Dylan didn't know whether to get angry or to cry. He was just trying to get enough points for another caravan trip. His focus was on trading and gaining more wealth. He had no intention of getting involved with whatever conflicts of these world's storyline that the game-makers had cooked up.

"I am sorry," the duke also apologized. "We needed another outworlder as a distraction, but don't you worry. I have my top people watching you from the shadow. If any of the cult people trying to come at you, they will be taken care of."

"Yeah, that way, we might even catch them and find out about the remaining spies," marquess Fernando added.

"Wait a minute, are you now also making me a bait?" Dylan protested.

"Don't worry, I believe my people are more than capable to preserve your safety," duke Alfredo said. "And you won't be without compensation. Here, take these gold coins as the current compensation. If there is any attack attempted on you, I will give you more and reimburse any loss incurred upon you."

Dylan checked the pouch that the duke had given to him. There were 20 gold coins inside. It was almost half from his initial stash. His bad mood was instantly alleviated. This reward was more than the profit he could make with one caravan trip. However, his business sense told him to capitalize on the current opportunity.

"I also want to be accepted into this country's Kingdom Faction!" He demanded.

## **Chapter 265: Fusing The Fragments**

"This..." The duke was surprised by the young man's request.

"Wow, you really know how to ask for something, eh?" Jack commented.

"I can't make this decision, but I can give my recommendation," the duke explained. "Your achievement in the Trade Association is pretty competent, so I think you will have a high chance of being invited into our kingdom faction with my recommendation."

"I will expect no less," Dylan said as he folded his arms and leaned back onto his seat.

Jack must admit this younger man did know how to display a stylish demeanor.

"Now, do you mind...?" The duke asked Jack.

Jack was puzzled at first by what the duke meant, but realization soon hit. "Oh right," he said as he took out the three pieces of Fragment of Map.

During their time in the carriage, Jack had actually tried to fuse the three pieces together. Normally in past games, when a set of items that can be combined into one piece were brought together. They would automatically fuse, or at least they would send out an indication of how to fuse them. However, in the case of this Fragment of Map, there was no reaction whatsoever even when he touched the three pieces to each other.

He even wondered at the time if these three pieces were indeed the correct matching piece, or there were other versions of Fragment of Map. Peniel came and informed him that nothing happened because he didn't possess the required skill to perform the fusion. She however did not know the specific skills required for it.

Jack gave the three pieces of the Fragment of Map to duke Alfredo. He soon heard voice notification.

"Congratulations! You have completed the first part of the chain quest: Duchess' Cure, Fragment of Map pieces, receive rewards of 2 gold coins, and 30,000 Experience points."

Somehow he was not so thrilled hearing the rewards. He looked at Dylan. The boy did nothing but be a distraction and a bait, and he received an upfront payment of 20 gold coins. While he had trudged through a long quest, and he only got a frigging 2 gold coins? Wasn't this a bit unfair?!

"What?" Dylan asked when he noticed Jack's stare.

"Nothing," Jack said to him.

Peniel who sensed his feeling, said, "I told you already that the individual quest of a chain quest is not much. The real reward is at the end of the chain quest. Now quit your moping already."

Jack turned his attention back to the duke who was holding the three pieces of Fragment of Map. "You have a way to restore them to their complete state?" Jack asked.

"Yes. I've studied my one piece previously when it was still in my possession. It required a master Scroll-maker who also possessed master runecraft skill, or two masters of each craft working together, in order to restore these fragments."

"I see, and I suppose you know such masters?"

"We have many in our kingdom," the duke replied as he stored the fragments. "I will take them to the one I trust."

Jack nodded. "So what do you need me to do in the meantime?"

"Nothing, I will inform you once the process is done, and share with you the information from the complete piece."

Jack heard a voice notification at the same time, "automatically receive chain quest: The Duchess' Cure, part 2, wait for duke Alfredo's news."

That was unusually easy, Jack thought, he only needed to wait. Well, he would never complain if things went easy. There would be plenty of time that things went difficult.

"Before I forget, here," duke Alfredo gave him a coin pouch as well.

Jack accepted it with puzzlement and inspected it. The inside was 32 gold coins. "This..."

"I knew you had used your private coins to get the fragment in the auction. This is to reimburse you. I should have given you more, I just never thought there will be another party that is willing to fork out such a huge amount for this fragment as well."

"Do you have an idea who that other party was?" Jack asked.

Duke Alfredo shook his head. "No, I only know that they were outworlders, and they accessed the auction from a facility in Thenident. It was another city of our country, far away from here."

"Um... about the coins used to obtain the fragment, I..." Before Dylan could finish his sentence, the duke gave him another coin pouch. There were 37 gold coins inside.

"Uh, what about my 10% interest?"

"Bro, didn't you just receive a 20 gold coins profit? Isn't that already more than your paltry 10%?" Jack said with exasperation.

"That was compensation for using me against my will," Dylan grumbled, but he didn't pursue the issue further.

"We should separate from here," the duke said. "It will be better if we go out of this place individually. This place was mine, so I am sure of its security, but we don't know if anyone is watching outside of this

place. I will leave first. You three take turns to leave at different times. The two of you keep the concealment coat, only take it off once you have reached a place where you are sure is safe."

After giving his instruction, the duke left the room.

He heard Dylan whistled. "This place is his? Not bad... Can I come here another time?" He asked marquess Fernando.

"You are not even able to enter this noble district freely," the marquess reminded him, which caused his face to turn gloomy.

The marquess chuckled, "don't worry. The duke is always good at his words. Once you are invited into our kingdom faction, you should be able to enter this district freely. You still have to pay if you want to come here though. But come look for me if you want to visit, I got a free pass here, so I will be able to bring you along... If my mood is good."

"Ahaha, if you need anything from another city, just tell me. I will get it for you," Dylan uttered cheerily.

So this was what a businessman was like? Jack thought. Good thing for him this game world put more emphasis on fighting skills, rather than trading skills.

They loitered around for a bit, with Dylan and the marquess enjoying the various beverages at the bar counter. Seeing that they enjoyed their time so much, he guessed he would need to be the second one to leave.

"Okay, I will take my leave first," Jack told marquess Fernando.

The marquess replied half-drunkenly, "see you-hic, take care..."

Then to his new young friend, Jack said, "catch you later, just Dylan."

The young man responded by giving him the middle finger without looking over.

Jack left the building and went towards the office tower where commander Quintus was at. He still needed to report on the completion of his faction quest. The last time he went there was by carriage, so he didn't memorize the way. Good thing there was a map system in this world. The layout of the district was visible in his map interface once he had walked through the area once. Furthermore, there were markings on the map to show important places, so he had no problem finding his bearings.

He first found a place desolate of people. After making sure from his radar that there was no one nearby, he took off the concealment coat. Before he took off the coat, he had activated the Orb of Disguise. So when the coat was off, it was Unrivalled Arcaner who was seen. The radar showed no people, but he still preferred to take precautions. In this case, if there was still someone spying on him, it will be his disguise mage that was seen.

When he thought about it more, he actually hoped that the Cult of Phobos did have someone seeing him right now. Maybe they would end up going to Death Associates causing troubles when they couldn't find him. After all, his Unrivalled Arcaner persona was still registered as that guild's member.

After walking for some distance, he looked for another deserted alleyway and turned back to Storm Wind after making sure that no one was around.

He finally arrived at the guard tower, but there was a different officer behind the desk. He guessed probably commander Quintus was not always there to take care of faction members. He submitted his quest completion and got 20 silver coins, 10,000 Experience points, and 50 Merit Points. He received an additional bonus of 150 merit points for successfully getting the item that the duke was interested in.

He was now halfway from becoming a Baron. He also noticed that the real value of these faction quests was on their hidden goals. The merit points received from fulfilling the quest requirements were trivial. The bulk of merit points gained was if they managed to perform well.

He asked the officer for another faction quest but he was told at the moment there was none available. So it was as commander Quintus had informed him, nobility faction quests were limited. Jack asked the officer how he could find out if there was a faction quest available. The officer simply told him to come every day to check.

## **Chapter 266: Runecrafting**

With nothing better to do, Jack returned to the business district. He didn't feel like spending the hard-earned merit points to rent commander Quintus' training ground.

He went to Ellie's restaurant to check on them. Also, the day before was the day when he could pull out the weekly profit of the restaurant. The place was still bustling like the last time he visited, if not more. Jack went inside the kitchen and was greeted by a very busy scene. Ellie and Bill were fully focused on their cookings.

Jack stood at the side didn't want to break their concentration. After a while, Ellie finally saw him. She asked an NPC cook to take over before she went to him.

"Hiya, boss!" She called out with ardor.

Jack nodded as he was still admiring the NPCs which were still busying about.

"It's a kitchen, man. There's nothing much to see," Ellie remarked.

Jack chuckled. "I can see business is doing good," he said.

"Very good, very good. Words of mouth travel fast. Not to mention we are the first outworlders to own a business place, many of our kin came here to support us. We might need to expand soon. Otherwise, this place won't hold with its current popularity."

Jack made a cringe face and said, "I'm not sure if I can gather 150 gold coins that fast." That was the amount needed for the second upgrade of a shop.

Ellie agreed, "that's true. That was indeed a lot of coins, but the profit last week should help. Have you taken them?"

Jack shook his head.

"You can use the interface at the cashier to cash them out. It was quite an amount, even after the expenditures and the 20% tax," Ellie informed him.



"All right, I will do that," Jack said. "Before that, I want to inform you about a friend of mine."

"What friend?"

Jack then told him about Dylan Fairdeal, about how he had made a request for him to search for the Rosemary ingredients. And that if he found any, he would bring it to the restaurant for her.

Ellie nodded, "okay, I will keep an eye out for him."

She returned to the stove where she was cooking before, there were still many orders to be prepared. Jack left them to their work and went to the cashier. There was a lady NPC staff manning the device. She recognized Jack as her employer and was about to move aside to give him access to the device, but Jack waved for her to stay.

Jack stood beside the device facing her, he could still activate it from the side. If the restaurant customers look in his direction, all they saw was another customer making payment or having a chat with the beautiful NPC. They could not see the holographic interface that floated above the cashier.

Wow, Jack made a comment in his mind as he saw the number indicated under the tab of the owner share. It said there that the profit of last week which he could withdraw was 26 gold coins.

This was after deducting expenditures and tax? It almost doubled from what he got from Amy's Bakery. But then again, he was only an investor in Amy's Bakery while here, he was the owner. So it made sense that he received more. Also, the scale of customers here was also bigger.

He clicked on the withdraw button and took all last week's profit into his storage bag. His stash of gold coins almost went back to the amount before he attended the auction.

Now that his matter here was done, he exited the place. He looked at the time, it was not much longer before it went dark. If he went out to farm for experience, he would have to spend the night in the wilderness.

After thinking for a while, he asked Peniel, 'Peniel, how is runecrafting work?' He had seen the category under the support jobs in the auxiliary skills section. He didn't pay it much attention before, but he was reminded again when duke Alfredo mentioned that the fragment pieces needed Scroll-making and Runecrafting jobs in order to be able to make them complete again.

He had heard the explanation of Scroll-making from Peniel, he had no intention of trying that job out, as he already did blacksmithing and cooking. Trying too many things would just convolute his focus. While runecraft was under the support jobs together with lockpicking, detect and disarm traps, and inspect. He had done lockpicking and inspect, these two support skills had been helpful on his journey.

The detect and disarm traps he had no doubt was essential as well. He had not met any trap but he was pretty sure his God-eye monocle could help in the detecting department, the disarming though, was another story. So if looking at the other three skills under the support section, the fourth one, runecrafting, should serve a helpful purpose as well. Hence, his interest.

"Oh, you are finally interested in it? All right, I will enlighten you," Peniel said in his mind. "In the meantime, ask one of the natives for the direction to a runecraft shop."

Jack proceeded to ask, and then walked in the direction told by the native.

"Runecraft is a support skill that can be used as support for many activities depending on the runestone you possessed. The one you can get from the shop is the most basic ones. In fact, there are only three basic runestones available, and all of them were mainly as support for the other auxiliary jobs."

'What kind of support?'

"The three basic ones that you can buy from the shop are the Runestone of Probability, the Runestone of Enhancement, and the Runestone of Duration."

'What did they do?'

"Runestone of Probability increased the success rate when you do blacksmithing, alchemist, scroll-making, lockpicking, and disarm traps. Runestone of Enhancement has the chance to increase the quality of items produced by artisan jobs. Runestone of Duration affects the products made by alchemists, cooking, and scroll-making, but only on products that give effect with duration. It will increase the length of the duration of these products."

'So it really is only for support? Not really very useful to me then, as I have no intention to focus on the artisan jobs. Except for that Runestone of Probability, it can help when I do lockpicking of a treasure chest, and also so that I don't waste too many materials when I upgrade my equipment.'

"You underestimate runecraft too much," Peniel said. "There are also runestones that can support your battle prowess, but they are very rare to be found. You can only depend on luck if you are to get them."

'Oh, I have a high luck stat if you haven't noticed,' Jack said.

Peniel pretended to not hear him, she continued, "there are also runestones for multiple occasions. What you can do now was practicing using those three basic runestones. So when you get the other rare runestones that are suitable for your use, your runecraft skill will not be too low."

The shop that was informed by the NPC Jack had asked, was not too far from Ellie's Restaurant, so he had arrived before long. The shop was rather small. If the entire shop only sold three types of runestones, he could imagine that it didn't need a big shop for that.

He entered the shop and saw a clerk behind a counter. There was also another glass display on the side that displayed gemstones.

'Oh, I remember. You said that gemstones can also be used for runecrafting. I have some in my bag, so can I use them with the runestones then?' He asked Peniel.

"We will talk about the gemstones later, just ignore them for now," Peniel replied.

He did not think too much of it since Peniel said so, he went to the clerk. The counter in front of the clerk had a glass display. Inside was multiple oval-shaped stones. There were a lot of stones, but they were divided into three sections, and the stones in each section were identical. He presumed those were the three types of runestones that Peniel had informed him on their way here.

"How much for these runestones?" Jack asked.

"Each one costs 1 gold coin," the clerk answered flatly. There was no smile or any emotion. Jack figured the fellow didn't get many customers here. Probably when many players learned about runecrafting then this shop would be busier.

1 gold coin was quite expensive for average players, but not for Jack. He took out 3 gold coins and gave them to the clerk.

"I want each one of them," Jack said.

The clerk received his coins and took one stone from each section. A total of three stones were placed in front of Jack. They looked ordinary. Jack took them and inspected one of them.

Runestone of Enhancement (uncommon runestone)

Empty. Required will to activate.

"Huh? Will?" Jack blurted after seeing the description.

## **Chapter 267: Willpower**

'What was this will all about?' Jack asked Peniel in his mind.

"You can consider it as the fuel for the runestones. Now let's go back to your room first. You will need a quiet place to concentrate."

Jack thanked the clerk, who did not give any reply nor expression.

Probably the programming of this particular NPC was broken, Jack thought as he left the shop. He didn't go anywhere more but went straight to Amy's Bakery. Amy greeted him when she saw him entered and asked him where he had been for the last two days. Jack told her they could speak later. She looked a bit busy with customers anyway.

He went to his room and once he was alone, he took out the three runestones he just bought. Peniel came out of her hidden dimension and flew above the runestones. "Take one of them," she said.

Jack picked one up. "And?" He asked.

"Insert your will into it," she asked.

"What the heck, do you think this is one of those manga stories where willpower is something that can be controlled? How do I even insert my will into this piece of stone?" Jack complained.

"What's a manga story?" Peniel asked in puzzlement.

"Never mind. How exactly do I do what you asked me to do?"

"You put your mind into it. Concentrate your thought into the stone and imagine as if you are sinking into it."

"Mm..." Jack mumbled as he held the small stone right in front of his face and concentrated on it. He felt the plain stone trembling a bit, or was it his imagination? He continued to concentrate on it. Something seemed to change with the stone, some red dots appeared to form on the surface of the small stone.

The dots connected and formed into a line, which then turned into a strange shape of a rune. That rune flared with red light as Jack's vision suddenly experienced a sense of vertigo. He felt as if he got pulled into the stone.

"What the...," He was shocked as he found himself floating in a seemingly infinite empty space.

"Peniel...!" He yelled as he could not make sense of what just happened. He looked around trying to find a way out, or something that he could use as a reference point. But all around him was just nothingness.

"Don't worry, it is a normal thing to happen when you activate this runestone." He finally heard Peniel's voice. He never thought that her voice was so sweet until this moment. However, what she said next caused him to feel that her voice had changed back to the annoying version, "you will soon experience pain, a lot. Try to endure it with your willpower. You will conquer the runestone once the process is done. Oh, one more thing, do not press the exit button."

"The heck are you sayi...," Jack didn't have the chance to complete his sentence when a crack of lightning whipped at his body. He could feel his body spasming due to the shock.

"Motherf...!!" Another of his sentence was cut short by a second lightning.

The torture continued. The lightning seemed unending. The only thing he found comfort in was, no matter how much the lightning burned or scorched his body, it appeared to be undamaged. There was no burn mark or anything on his body. The pain was real though. He could not even make a coherent thought with all the convulsions. All he could do was endure the torture as Peniel had told him.

He didn't know how long he had endured the torture, it felt endless. All of a sudden, a holographic image appeared in front of him. The hologram only showed one simple image. A rectangular button with one large word written on it, EXIT.

His arm instinctively went to it, but he stopped himself before it touched. Despite his chaotic thought due to the pain, he still remembered Peniel's words. Do not press the exit button.

"Grgghh...," he gritted his teeth as another whip of lightning torched his body. The hologram image of the exit button floated in front of him, tempting him to simply press it and get this over with.

"Annoying piece of crap! You want willpower, I will give you willpower! Come and get me! Come and... urrggghhh... F\*\*king hell! That bloody hurts...!!"

He started to shout and yell incomprehensible curse words, just to distract himself from the pain. The lightning continued to shoot at him one after another. The hologram button maintained its tantalizing position. More than a couple of times Jack almost went and touched it, but he forced himself back every time. In the end, he just resolved to close his eyes so he didn't need to see that aggravating Exit word in front of him.

Everything suddenly turned tranquil. It was so abrupt that Jack had difficulty believing it. His eyes were still closed, expecting the next lightning to strike. But it never came. He opened one of his eyes to peek, and he saw Peniel's face so closed to him.

He gave a loud yelp as he threw himself back. He realized he was back in his room, he was covered by cold sweat.

"That is so rude! How can you get startled by my beautiful face?" Peniel said to him with a pout.

"Lady, I had just experienced the worse torment in my life. Please give me some slack."

He then realized his hand that was holding the piece of runestone, was empty now. "Huh? Where did the runestone go?" He asked with a worried tone.

"Don't panic, it had merged with you after you passed its tribulation. Try to summon it with your mind," Peniel informed him.

Jack tried to think about the runestone, and called for it mentally. It materialized abruptly beside him. It looked different now. The size and shape were still the same, but the rune word that he saw previously had manifested on its surface and seemed to be permanent. There was a thin layer of blue aura around it. He did another Inspect on the floating runestone.

Runestone of Probability (uncommon runestone)

Increase approx. 10% success chance to auxiliary jobs.

Elemental energy required for upgrade: 0/100

The description had changed, Jack thought as he observed the illusory floating runestone beside him.

"It can be upgraded?" Jack asked.

"Yes. Any runestone you get will always be at their lowest grade," Peniel said. "You will need to upgrade them manually in order for them to increase in effectiveness."

"What do I use to upgrade them? Where can I get elemental energy?" Jack asked.

"The gemstone," Peniel answered.

"gemstone? Why does gemstone contain elemental energy?"

"gemstones were created out of the excess elemental energies in nature, which then condensed within the earth into gemstones. Everyone knows that."

"What nonsense is that? That's not what my teacher taught me at school."

"Which school did you go to?"

"The school I went to in my real world."

"Was it that imaginary real world you kept on mentioning during the tutorial period?" Peniel said with a mocking tone.

"I'm not arguing with you," Jack said. "Why does the description say approximately? Does the success rate change in every usage?"

"It does. The success rate will change depending on the strength of your willpower."

"What? We are still not done with that willpower business?"

"The whole runecraft process revolved around the strength of will. The more you will it during the application, the better the result is."

Discussing won't get him anywhere, let's give it a demonstration, Jack thought as he unsummoned the floating runestone and took out his apprentice hammer and apprentice mobile anvil. He then put his level 26 Red Dawn staff onto the mobile anvil. He used the upgrade feature to increase the staff's level. A probability of 30% was seen on the interface.

So low, Jack thought, but the apprentice mobile anvil had a decrease success rate of 10%. Also, the previous few times he had been upgrading his equipment using the blacksmith workshop feature which increased his success rate, so he never actually experienced how low his blacksmith grade was. But couldn't help it, he could not just throw away his focus on leveling for the sake of upgrading his auxiliary jobs like what Ellie and Dylan did. His focus had and always would be his battle prowess.

"Now, let's give this runecraft a test run," He said and resummoned the runestone of probability. It floated again beside him with that eerie blue light. He looked back at the blacksmith interface and found the probability had increased to 36%. It had increased by 6%, but it was still far from the 10% increased success rate indicated in the runestone's description.

"Try to will it to increase," Peniel advised.

Jack concentrated his thought on it. He imagined the success chance displayed on the blacksmith interface to increase. There was no response at first, but then he realized the floating runestone beside him flared with a stronger blue light. Then the number indicating the success chance displayed on the blacksmithing interface started to increase.

## **Chapter 268: Elemental Compatibility**

37%... 38%... 39%... 40%

"Wow, it really does increase!" Jack uttered with amazement. His concentration slipped and the number started to go down again.

40%... 39%... 38%

"Crap!" He quickly put his concentration back into the runestone and willed the number to go up again.

"This is so burdensome!" Jack complained as he put all his mind into willing the increase.

Peniel lifted her two hands up and gave a shrugging expression. "You need to put in work for it. No free lunch," she said.

Jack finally managed to get the number to 44%. It kept on alternating between 43% and 44%. He guessed that's the best his willpower could manage to push.

"Now I feel like one of those characters from manga stories who use their willpower to fight," Jack commented.

"Again with the manga stories? What exactly are they?" Peniel asked.

"Never mind, it's just some sort of storytelling from the real world."

"Again with the real world? This is really getting old."

Jack didn't bother arguing with her. He had done that with her pretty often during the tutorial period. He canceled the upgrade process and store both the apprentice hammer and apprentice mobile anvil. He was not going to waste the upgrading materials with a measly 44% success rate, not when he could boost the success rate by spending a few coins to use the blacksmith workshop equipped with rare tools.

He took out all the gemstones he had gotten in the past. There were two rubies, one amethyst, and one emerald. All of them were common grades.

"So I can use these to upgrade the runestone?" He asked Peniel.

"Yes, but before you feed any of the gemstones to the runestone, I need you to tell me what element you encountered during the tribulation of that runestone."

Jack glanced at the floating runestone and cringed, he would prefer not to be reminded again of that tormenting moment. "I thought you know every basic knowledge? How come you don't know what element this runestone has?" He asked back.

"Because every runestone is different. Even the ones with the same type. You can only know about their element once you undergo their tribulation," Peniel replied.

"It's lightning," Jack answered.

"In that case, you should use the amethyst to upgrade that runestone."

"Why is that?"

"Because amethyst contains the elemental energy of lightning. By using the same element as the runestone, the elemental energy absorbed by the runestone will be more. Thus, reducing the number of gemstones you need to complete the upgrade."

"I see... What about these rubies and emerald?"

"The ruby contains fire element. Emerald is wind. There are three more types of gemstones. Sapphire for water, Amber for earth, and Diamond which contained no element."

"Oh? Then Diamond is the most useless then? Since it has no element, it doesn't provide any boost when upgrading runestone."

"On the contrary, Diamond is the best. It has no element because it is compatible to all. So any type of runestone will get the maximum benefit when you used diamond gemstone."

"Oh? Then I assume this diamond will be the rarest type of gemstone then. How lucky of me to get it."

"Yeah, how lucky of you," Peniel responded with a smirk.

"Okay, let's give it a try," Jack said as he picked up the amethyst and neared it to the floating runestone. The runestone blue light flared brighter and he heard a notification voice asking if he confirmed to feed

the amethyst to the runestone. Jack confirmed it and a blue light shot out from the runestone and snatched the amethyst in his hand. The gemstone soon disappeared into the runestone. Another notification voice informed him that the gemstone was of a compatible element so the number of elemental energies being absorbed was doubled.

Jack made another scan on the runestone using Inspect.

Runestone of Probability (uncommon runestone)

Increase approx. 10% success chance to auxiliary jobs.

Elemental energy required for upgrade: 10/100

Seeing the number, if he was to use other common gemstones, the energy would only be 5 points.

Jack remembered something and said to Peniel, "hey, that shop we went to before. They sell gemstones, right? If I go and buy those gemstones, I will be able to upgrade this runestone in no time."

"You can go try if you want," Peniel said.

"Why do you sound like I will not be buying them even if I go...?"

"Heh, each of the common gemstones costs 1 gold coin. Are you still going to buy them?" She asked.

"Ugh, why are they so expensive? It costs the same price as the runestone itself," Jack complained. "I will need 10 gold coins to upgrade this runestone even if I use matching element."

He might be loaded with coins now, but he would still not simply spend them just like that. Not for the sake of auxiliary jobs.

"Yes, it's better if you just get them from monster loots, or mining," Peniel said. "Unless of course, if you have too much coin in your hand."

"No, thank you, I think I will just keep my coins," Jack said. He stored the remaining gemstones and unsummoned the runestone. "I'm beat, I guessed I will turn to bed early," he said.

"Are you forgetting something?" Peniel asked.

"Hm?" Jack had no idea what she meant.

Peniel pointed in a direction. Jack followed her pointing and saw two runestones on the floor ahead.

He was silent for a few moments before asking Peniel, "tell me, if I merge with another runestone, will I have to go through tribulation again?"

"You do," Peniel answered.

Jack stared at her in silence for a long while, before finally uttering, "oh, what the hell."

He ended up spending the night going through two more tribulations to merge with those two runestones. One of them was of the fire element. He had to go through the sensation of being burnt alive. The other was of water, where he got drowned again and again.



Despite the intense suffering he had to go through, it was really not too difficult. After all, he did not actually have to do anything. He only needed to endure through the pain. He felt it was not difficult because of the fact that the torture did not bring him any actual harm, and the knowledge that it would be over soon. When a person knew for sure that his or her sufferings did not give any permanent risk and knew for sure that those sufferings were going to end at one point in time, it made the experience much easier to overcome. Except of course for spoiled brats who could not endure even a little bit of pain.

He observed the two new floating runestones in front of him.

Runestone of Enhancement (uncommon runestone)

Approx. 10% chance of increasing the effectiveness of products made from artisan jobs.

Elemental energy required for upgrade: 20/100

Runestone of Duration (uncommon runestone)

Increases the duration of products created from artisan jobs which have duration, by approx. 10% more.

Elemental energy required for upgrade: 0/100

He had also used his two rubies to upgrade the Runestone of Enhancement which had the element of fire. For the Runestone of Duration which had the element of water, he did not have any sapphire so he just left it for now. Using the last gemstone, emerald which had the element of wind felt like a waste.

He was still pretty exhausted mentally after the ordeals. He went to bed immediately afterward. Another fact that he found was that each merging with the runestone gave him proficiencies in his runecraft skill. He had not actually applied any runecrafting in his activity but his proficiency was already around 30% from intermediate apprentice grade after merging with three runestones. Too bad the next runestone could only be gotten by luck, he could only increase his proficiency by applying the runecrafting the next time when he used his auxiliary skills.

The next day he immediately put the runecrafting to test. In the morning he started by cooking a couple of Egg Fried Rice and used the Runestone of Duration to boost its duration. He almost never consumed the food he cooked anymore since he could stock up on Ellie's cooking. The duration of the food increased from three hours to around three hours thirty minutes and three hours forty minutes.

Jack then went to the blacksmith workshop and rent a room that had rare tools. He again put his Red Dawn staff onto the blacksmith forge. With the boost from the rare tools, his success rate was 60%. He then summoned the Runestone of Probability and injected his will into it. The success rate increased to around 74%, which was a much better success chance compared to last night's one. He proceeded to spend 2 iron ores and 1 steel ore to go with the forging. And the result was... failed.

Couldn't help it, he thought. 74% was still not 100%, so there was still a chance of failing. It's a good thing he had a large stock of iron ores and steel ores from the previous robbery incident. He could afford numerous failures, so he decided to continue on it.

## **Chapter 269: Forging With Runecraft**

He continued to upgrade his magic staff until it was level 30. He didn't proceed further as he would not be able to use it if it reached level 31. He failed another two times during the process, ended up spending 14 iron ores and 7 steel ores.

He didn't proceed to upgrade but he still opened up the blacksmith interface to look at the statistic if he wanted to upgrade it to level 31. The success rate was 50% without him activating the runestone of probability. That was already including the 30% boost from the workshop's rare tool. He was apprehensive about the prospect of future upgrades. The success rate was getting lower and lower. He would have more failures than successes if he did not improve his blacksmith job level. However, he did not want to spend too much time on this auxiliary job. Well, he would worry about it when it happened. For now, the failure rate was still bearable.

After level 30, the material required to upgrade had increased another notch again. It would consume 4 iron ores and 1 steel ore for each attempt in upgrading.

He took off his magic staff from the forge and observed it.

Red Dawn Staff, level: 30/40 (rare magic weapon)

Magical damage: 108

Range: 10 meters

Attack speed 1

Energy: 80

Intelligence +6

All spells range +3 meters

The increase in the damage at later levels was larger compared to lower levels. Especially when he upgraded it to level 30, the increase was a solid 10 points on the damage. He also noticed that the skill bonus on the weapon had been raised as well. Previously it only added 3 points to intelligence stats, now it was doubled, while the added range to all spells increased from +2 meters to +3 meters.

"In case you are wondering, do know that level 30 is a threshold for equipment as well," Peniel explained to him when she saw his confusion. "Just as how level 30 is when you become an elite class, most of the weapons found at this level and above are vastly superior to the lower-level ones. So the sudden spike when you upgraded your equipment to level 30 is to compensate for that."

"I see...," Jack felt good that he had come to upgrade his equipment then. He was not sure if he was the first person to reach level 20, but if yes, his level 30 weapon would outclass the other player's weapons even if they had the same rare grade.

He took out the rare longsword which he had been saving all this time. He would upgrade it to level 30 before feeding it to his Storm Breaker, thus bringing his Storm Breaker directly to level 30. He put the longsword onto the anvil and started the upgrading process with the help of runecraft. The longsword was a level 15 rare weapon, it took him twenty-two attempts before it was successfully brought up to level 30. Including the failed attempts, he spent 39 iron ores and 10 steel ores.

Without further ado, once the level up was done, he immediately fed the weapon to his Storm Breaker. His black longsword hummed with excitement when it fed on the weapon. A thin fog of black light was exhumed from the sword's body, exposing more of the golden lines along its dark blade.

This was new, Jack thought. Was this also due to that level 30 threshold Peniel was talking about?

Storm Breaker, level 30 (rare one-handed sword, bound weapon)

Physical damage 140

Attack speed 3

Cannot be destroyed

Bound to Storm Wind

Dexterity +6

Parry skill +3

Overlimit: Release the weapon's hidden power that adds an additional 200% damage as chaos damage, increase weapon range by 2 feet, and decrease the target's defense by 70%. Duration 120 seconds.

Cooldown 8 hours

The damage improvement on his special longsword was even greater. The skill bonus of the weapon had also increased. Out of curiosity, he also checked on the other skills inside his Storm Breaker which could be exchanged. Each of them had also been increased proportionately.

What delighted him further was to see the Overlimit skill of his Storm Breaker had also undergone an improvement. Its additional chaos damage, decrease target's defense, and duration had all been increased compared to before. Most distinct was its duration, it had received a spike to 120 seconds. Now he could maintain the Overlimit form of this sword for a full two minutes!

After experiencing the wonder of level 30 equipment, he proceeded to work on all his current equipment. The one-hour time was not enough for him to do that, so he paid another 50 silver coins for an extra hour. He also realized that despite his deep stock of iron ore, he still did not have enough iron ores for all the upgrades. So when he went out to pay for the extra hour, he also went to buy another 60 iron ores.

Although the runecrafting skill only improved his success rate by around 14%, it still helped in reducing the number of wasted materials needed during the upgrade. After finishing with all the equipment he currently wore, with numerous failed attempts, the total materials he had used were 154 iron ores and 50 steel ores. The stock left inside his bag after the labor was a pitiful 13 iron ores and 31 steel ores. Good thing iron ores were easily acquired, so it was not a problem.

He then proceeded to test the Runestone of Enhancement by making whetstone. He used all the remaining 13 iron ores to produce the whetstones, all the while activating the Runestone of Enhancement. Out of the 13 whetstones produced, 4 were the enhanced version. The enhanced whetstone gave a 20% boost to weapon damage instead of the usual 10%, ultimately doubling the effectiveness of the whetstone.

He was satisfied with the work. He checked on his proficiency in his auxiliary skill page. The runecraft skill was not even 50% yet. The application just now had only increased the proficiencies by a bit. He would need to apply it more or find another runestone if he wanted to boost its growth. The blacksmith skill was also still some distance away from the advanced apprentice.

He stored all the whetstones and reequipped his equipment. He took a look at his equipment stats.

Head = Silver Guard Helmet, level 30/40 (rare medium armor), Physical defense: 68, Magical defense: 52, Durability: 40, Endurance +6, +40% resistance on dizzy and disoriented

Chest = Blood Guard Scale Armor, level 30/35 (rare medium armor), Physical Defense: 75, Magical Defense: 62, Durability: 50, Dexterity +6, Reduce all range damage received by 35%

Shoulder = Blue Wing Spaulders, level 30/40 (rare medium armor), Physical Defense: 62, Magical Defense: 50, Durability: 40, Dexterity +6, Reflex +6

Arms = Silver Beast Vambrace, level 30/40 (rare medium armor), Physical Defense: 63, Magical Defense: 51, Durability: 40, Strength +6, increase strength by 20% when HP is below 50%

Belt = Coin Snatch Fauld, level: 30/40 (rare medium armor), Physical defense: 54, Magical defense: 48, Durability 30, Reflex +4, 15% chance to increase coin drop from monster kill

Pants = Shadow Bear Tasset, level 30/35 (rare medium armor), Physical Defense: 68, Magical Defense: 60, Durability: 40, Endurance +6, When HP is below 50%, defense is increased by 100%

Boots = Silver Wing Leggings, level: 30/40 (rare medium armor), Physical defense: 62, Magical defense: 48, Durability: 40, Reflex +4, movement speed +20%

Physical Defense = 452

Magical Defense = 371

He was pretty satisfied with the increase. After all the hard work, he could say that at this moment, his equipment set was at his strongest, unless of course if he got a super rare grade armor. He had upgraded all his equipment to the highest point of which he was still allowed to equip them.

## **Chapter 270: Implementation Of Resource Management Plan**

At that time, they heard a loud knock on the door. It soon opened. The workshop owner appeared behind the door.

"Hey, time's up. I have been knocking for a while already now," he said with an annoyed tone.

"Ah, forgive me! My work is done, thank you for renting me the place," Jack quickly packed up and went out.

In the next four days, He spent it by doing some short adventurer quests and hunting quests. He did the hunting quests again on the second day with Flame, Bowler, and The Man. One of The Man's subordinates had succeeded in his Warrior class, so he was also invited to the hunting quests. Fierce

Flame and The Man were already level 19, Flame especially was closed to level 20. While Bowler was still at level 18.

Jack thought that if he had not encountered that level 28 special elite Ice Troll Sentinel and kill-stole it, he probably would be lower than Flame in terms of level. After all, it took him twice as much exp to level up compared to the others.

After they completed their hunting quest trip, they celebrated by spending time together at the tavern. In the tavern, Jack told Flame about the Tame Pet skill since she was close to level 20. He told her that she would need to purchase some baits, cages, and pet foods from the hunter shops. The process of taming a pet was arduous and required preparation. She could choose any monster from the wilderness as long as it was considered small-sized monster. The Silver Wolves and Grey Sabrecats that were commonly found in the vicinity of the capital were one such example of small-sized monsters. The skill would not work on anything larger like Swamp Croc or Horned Rhino.

An Archer could only have one pet. If they decided to choose another pet, they would have to release their current pet, so it was important to choose carefully. The monster would be lured using the bait before being trapped using a cage. Taming would be done after the monster was in captivity. The cage could also break during the taming process, thus the need to prepare more than one cage. Several attempts might be needed before a pet was successfully tamed. Once the monster was tamed, the skill would change its name to Summon Pet. The pet could then be called for assist during battle.

Jack also told her that it would be better if she chose to capture the offspring of her chosen monster. It would be more difficult for her to find as it would require her to track the monster to its lair. Another drawback was that even if she had successfully captured an offspring, it could not be immediately summoned for battle. After all, an offspring had no battle capacity. She would need to nurture it and raise it to adulthood before it could be summoned for battle, which would take time. But if she managed to do so, the raised monster would have a better bond with her and able to coordinate better with her in a fight.

Another advantage was that the raised monster would have better attributes compared to its standard counterpart. The better the pet food used to raise the monster, the stronger its growth would be. There was even a chance that the raised monster would increase in its grade and possess special skills that would not be available from the other monsters tamed in a normal way.

All this was of course informed by Peniel to Jack, before he relayed the information to Flame. The others were impressed by how knowledgeable he was. As usual, he used the excuse that he had read the information from the library.

"You really like to read, eh?" The Man commented. "I would never be able to sit still and spend more than five minutes with a book filled with words."

"I can imagine," Jack replied without trying to be polite.

Jack also informed them all about the Amulet of Rebirth, which could be purchased from the Church of Creation.

"Do you mean this amulet?" Bowler showed him the amulet he was wearing.

Jack inspected it and saw that it was really the amulet he was mentioning about. He only heard the name from Peniel, he didn't truly know what it looked like. When Earmouth wore the amulet, he never really paid attention to it.

Bowler also informed them that he had actually become a member of the Church of Creation. There were many technique books of spells for Healer available there, but he would need a lot of contribution points before he could get any of them.

Since the topic touched upon the league factions, Jack proceeded to explain to them about the multiple factions available in this world. That they should find a suitable faction to develop. He told them that he had joined the Kingdom faction but he was not sure how he could help them to join, since it required an invitation for it. They, however, were not too bothered by it. They didn't seem too interested to join actually.

They also talked about the development after that meeting organized by the three big guilds. John had managed to scare off a part of the ones who attended the meeting, but some remained. Jack didn't know what the secret content in the third part of the meeting, but the resource management plan, as Manager Steelhand called it, had started to be implemented.

After that meeting, there were eight guilds, big and medium, who were willing to join the three big guilds. Forming a coalition of eleven guilds. They were a force to be reckoned with.

John and White Scarf had spread the bad rumors about Corporate United's involvement in the robbing incident, and also the dictatorial plan in the meeting of controlling certain leveling up areas. These rumors had caused many independent players and small guilds to denounce the coalition. However, their resistances were disjointed and could not form a cohesive front. In the end, the coalition still managed to take control of several leveling-up areas.

The other large guilds, like White Scarfs and Saint Edge, had no choice but to also carve out a portion of area for their own. The wilderness surrounding the capital ended up becoming a collection of turfs between the guilds. The ones that suffered the most were the independent players and small guilds. They were forced to go level up at areas with higher difficulty which provided higher risk, or areas with lower difficulty which gave less exp, or pay tribute to the coalitions in order to be allowed a limited time to grind for monsters within their turfs.

In the end, it still came back to who had the most men, Jack thought with a sigh. Gangs, mafias, corporations, governments, the pattern of the real world was starting to be applied in this world as well. The minority would always have to follow the rules decided by those with more numbers.

And the sad thing was, even with the exposure of the bad deeds by the member of the coalition. Many players still lined up to join the guilds within the coalition. Such was human nature, always prefer to join the seemingly winning team, even if said team had a moral problem. As long as they could get a benefit, everything else was secondary.

Flame was not too bothered by those guilds' actions, since she usually enjoyed grinding at a higher difficulty area. Bowler, on the other hand, was cursing his heart out when the topic on those guilds came into talks.