

Chapter 341: Life And Death Struggle Between Two Titans

As Jack slew the first out of the four spiderlings that came at him, he looked at the web cocoon. It was not moving. The Grandmother spider was crawling slowly to the cocoon.

Maybe it's time to make his escape, Jack thought. He was about to disengage from the remaining three spiderlings when the Grandmother spider stabbed one of its forelegs into the cocoon.

Instead of stabbing on a trapped drake, the cocoon deflated, as if it was empty inside. The Grandmother spider was in bafflement as it sent another few stabs into the cocoon.

The ground underneath it suddenly burst apart as the Grim Sand Drake came out right underneath it and bit on one of its hind limbs. The bite was so powerful that it tore away another of its legs. It was now limping with only six legs left.

"Shit! I forgot about its burrowing ability, so that skill was still available to it?" Jack exclaimed after watching the scene.

"That burrowing is not a skill, it was the drake's other form of travel. Just like how flying is not a skill for winged monsters," Peniel explained.

Well, either way, the fight between the titans was still ongoing, so he guessed he would stay for a little while longer. He executed more vigorous attacks on the spiderlings and killed the second one.

At the side of the giant monsters' fight, the Grandmother spider scurried away from the drake, afraid to lose another of its legs. The Grim Sand Drake did not give chase, it shook its head as if it was having a headache. Jack wondered what it was, but then realized it must be the hallucination effect of the spider's venom taking effect.

The drake's resistance was high so it was not affected during the spider's first bite, but the second one enhanced the effect and it finally took effect. Still, the drake's fortitude allowed it to soon shake the hallucination off. It roared madly at the Grandmother spider, who had taken the chance to spew another torrent of webs.

The Grim Sand Drake disappeared into the ground again before the webs hit. The Grandmother spider whirled around in its place. Looking around with apprehension to predict the drake's position.

The Grandmother spider felt the ground below it trembled and immediately jumped away, just as the Grim Sand Drake stormed out from the ground at the spot where the Grandmother spider was on a moment ago. The entire scene reminded Jack of a documentary show he watched in the past about a great white shark breaching out of the water as it caught its prey.

There were still some small spiderlings around, but their numbers had decreased significantly. They tried their best to hinder the drake's movement by sacrificing themselves. Meanwhile, the Grandmother spider did its squatting move again.

Don't tell me it was going to breed out more spiderlings again, Jack said in his mind. Only one spiderling left that he had to fight. If the Grandmother spider bred more spiderlings, he would need to run even further away. He did not want any stray spiderlings to come his way again.

The Grandmother spider performed a different move next. It arched its body upward into a standing position, with its remaining three hind legs supporting. It then spewed out an unbelievable amount of web fluid. The fluid spread out in all directions and covered a large area of ground.

The area of coverage was so large that it also hit the ground where Jack was at. Jack made a rapid backstep and activated Flash Step. He barely escaped as the web fluid came down and splashed at the ground in front of him. The last spiderling that he was fighting was hit by the fluid and was glued to the ground.

Jack did not proceed forward to finish the incapacitated spiderling. The web on the ground still looked wet, he did not want to have his feet glued to the ground due to hastiness. He looked at the drake who was covered by the web.

The webs that covered the drake's body, although sticky, were less thick than when it was wrapped in the cocoon. It easily tore through the bindings and rushed at the Grandmother spider. The Grandmother spider jumped around as it evaded the drake's approach.

Annoyed by its opponent's unwillingness to face it in direct combat, the Grim Sand Drake stuck its head into the ground, trying to burrow again. However, this time it failed to go into the ground, as the sticky web held the ground together and resisted its attempt.

As the drake wanted to use more force to tear the webs apart, it felt the Grandmother spider jumped onto its side. It felt another bite. It snapped furiously to its side in response and managed to catch the spider just before it jumped away.

After catching the spider, the drake slammed the spider hard on the ground, and used its forelegs to claw at the spider and causing it damage. When the spider managed to reposition back and was about to jump away. The drake spun its body and had its tail bashed at the spider mid-jump. It was sent crashing back to the ground.

The drake swayed for a moment but endured the hallucination effect, it continued to put pressure on the Grandmother spider. The spider saw that the drake was intent on keeping it close, it also forewent all caution and furiously jumped towards the drake.

The Grandmother spider body pounded at the drake's large body like a giant bullet. The drake was pushed back but it forced itself to lunge forward again. The Grandmother spider was also no longer retreating, it came forward with its limbs stabbed at the drake.

The two titans fought even more violently as their HP continued to decrease.

"Maybe it's time for you to leave," Peniel suggested. "It is unlikely they would fall at the same time. Even if the surviving one only had a sliver of life left, it could still kill you easily."

Jack pondered for a bit before replying, "maybe you are right, I guess I will just have to forfeit whatever items the losing monster dropped. Okay, time to..."

He stopped as movements on his radar caught his attention. He gave the matter some contemplation before saying, "maybe there is still a chance to gain the jackpot."

"You do know there will be casualties, right?" Peniel asked as she understood Jack's intention.

"Look at them, they were both at their last legs. It would be a pity to leave. With luck, the drake will kill the spider, then the drake will die from the poison. I might not even need to do anything. With my luck stat, that should be what happens, shouldn't it?"

"That's your wishful thinking! The luck stat mainly affects the quality and quantity of items dropped. You are nuts if you want to rely on it to survive!"

At this time, the two titans were both at their critical. The Grandmother spider had managed to score another bite at the drake, causing the poison in its body to worsen. It was now losing more than a hundred HP each second. The Grandmother spider was in a worse condition, It had lost another limb. It was now crawling with only five legs, reducing its mobility greatly.

Jack was reluctant to leave. He received a party message, "holy shit! It is that Grim Sand Drake. Boss, you are fighting against it?"

He looked at his radar again. Lots of green dots were approaching, but they stopped after the drake came in view. He turned to the direction where the green dots were. He could see his friends already. He said in the party chat, "can't you see it is fighting against another monster?"

"Why are you still there then? It is time to run!"

Jack heard a thump and a roar. He turned back and saw the Grandmother spider fell. The Grim Sand Drake was giving its victory roar.

"It's too late! We won't outrun it. Prepare to fight!"

"How the hell are we going to fight that?" He heard Bowler screamed. He was not too far that his scream was still audible.

"Everyone has the Amulet of Rebirth, right?" Jack asked in party chat. "Wear them now!"

All of the ones in the expedition had the amulet, Jack had stressed on it. Even though not all of them wore it, but now everyone took out the amulet and equipped it.

"Friends, when I give the cue, close your eyes. Then run as fast as possible." He saw John's message.

Jack, all the while, had instead observed the drake as he took out a magic scroll. The drake only had a sliver of life left.

The Grim Sand Drake's HP continued to fall as the venom was still in effect. It shook its head as its body swayed. Now that the battle was over, its relaxed state caused the hallucination effect to become stronger. It never considered the few ants nearby to be of any threat. It could swat them to death even with its current condition.

Chapter 342: Risking All The Way

The Grim Sand Drake tried to calm itself as its exceptional draconic blood tried to purify the poison. The poison damage that ate away at its life by more than a hundred HP per second started to reduce to below a hundred.

It could cure itself?! Jack realized in consternation. Shit! So it was as Peniel said. His luck did not give him a free meal on two giant monsters' drops.

"I strongly suggest that you run," Peniel advised as she sensed that Jack was intending to attack.

Even so, the Grim Sand Drake's HP was very low already. It was just a bit over 6000 HP. Jack was waiting for its HP to go down until it was close to 1000 HP before taking action in order to be sure. But he would take the risk now, if the drake managed to cure the poison effect entirely, he would have no more chance. He activated the Fireball scroll in his hand, the only one he had in his bag which he bought before he left for the expedition.

The last time he used this spell, it had caused 1200 damage to the target, which was also a special elite. Though the target this time was much higher in level, he thought it should still score at least 1000 damage. Hence, why he had been waiting for the drake's HP to be further reduced by the poison. At the moment, the drake was still treating them as nobody. Once he made an attack, the drake would also go on the offensive.

The magic scroll disintegrated as a large Fireball sped towards the Grim Sand Drake. The drake was still concentrating to reduce the effect of the poison. Thus, it was not aware of the incoming spell. It would never expect the tiny ants to dare to provoke it.

The fireball slammed into the drake's body. The hit awoke the drake from its trance. It had managed to bring down the effect of the poison to just around 20 HP per second. But now that its concentration was broken, the poison effect stayed at that rate.

It glared at the ant that had dared to disturb it. Its eyes were filled with malice as it huffed and took one step forward.

Jack gulped, partly due to the intimidation showcased by the drake, another part was because of the damage caused by his Fireball spell. It was only a friggin 300 damage points!

The difference was too vast. Was it because the drake's defense was too high? He could only rely on the poison effect now. In other words, he needed to keep the drake busy so as to not allow it to cure the effect of the poison.

Jack made a fast count. The drake still had around 5800 HP. With the rate the poison was eating at its life, it would take around five minutes for it to reduce to zero. The prospect of surviving for five minutes against this monster was not encouraging.

"Anyone has another high offense magic scroll?" Jack called out in team chat.

"Only you have the coins to waste on those scrolls," Bowler commented.

"I have one," Trinity Dawn said.

"Save it! We are not fighting. Bowler, now!" John exclaimed.

"All right, everyone, close your eyes!" Bowler said and cast Brilliant Radiance.

The spell created an intense light. The Grim Sand Drake was caught unaware and its eyes were blinded. It roared furiously as it wrecked its surroundings aimlessly.

"Good job! Now, everyone attack!" Jack shouted as he rushed forward. The web that filled the ground had hardened already, he could run on it freely. But the hardened web still held the ground together, so the drake would not be able to use its burrowing ability to escape. This was the best chance to kill it. It was time to risk it all!

"Oh, for the love of... You are supposed to run!!" John yelled in exasperation.

"We won't outrun it! It was on its last leg and it can't use any skill. We can do this!" Jack countered.

"I have the Group Haste scroll, ah! Forget it. Damn you all! Attack! Attack!"

All the ranged players started throwing their attacks. When the attacks hit, however, they felt dread over their hearts. The damages were all below five points.

"F*ck it! You have doomed us all!" John complained.

"Less cursing, more fighting! Melee class, stay back!" Although Jack asked them to fight, he was still sensible enough to not sacrifice them blindly. The objective was to survive until the poison devoured the remaining HP of the drake. There was no need to go all offensive.

Jeanny had also noticed the poison that continued to ebb at the drake's HP. He told the others, "Prioritize safety. The drake is in poison effect. We just need to survive until its HP ran out from the poison."

Jeanny also started issuing commands to the others and let them organize more coordinated attacks.

Jack cast Barrier and activated Life Burning Art as he ran forward, then drank a basic healing potion to recover the partially consumed HP. He then shot all his offensive spells at the drake. His spells only fare a little bit better than the others, with each damage below twenty points.

The Grim Sand Drake had recovered from its blind condition. It saw Jack as the nearest ant that had attacked it. It stomped down with rage.

Jack jumped aside and managed to evade it, but he was startled. The speed of the drake's attack was even faster than he expected. He had dodged the stomp just barely. It was totally different between when he was only watching the drake's fight to when he was the one being attacked.

When Jack thought he was safe, he felt a rush of wind from the side.

"Look out!" He heard someone shouted. His mind was not in the mood to identify whose voice the warning was from, because a whole chunk of a tail was occupying all his mind's attention at the moment. When the drake failed to stomp the ant, it had followed up with a tail swipe.

Jack's body instinctively jumped back and then executed Flash Step when the tail was about to hit. He used all the 4.5 meters distance limit. As he reappeared, the tip of the tail still grazed over his body. He was thrown away and slammed to the ground, bouncing several times from the impact.

He rose up quickly and was extremely glad to find that he was still alive. He was still shocked though to find that he only had a little bit over 200 HP left. Even with his immense 1,210 HP, combined with level 7 Barrier at 1 star and Life Burning Art, he still lost so much life just from a little graze. He would have perished if it was a direct hit.

He quickly took out a Healing Potion that recovered 500HP instantly to recover his HP. He then used a Regeneration scroll to recover his HP slowly, at the same time countered the HP consumption effect from Life Burning Art. A healing light also fell on his body as Bowler cast his Heal spell.

"Allow me!" Trinity Dawn used the magic scroll that she previously had taken out.

Specks of blue light swirled near the Grim Sand Drake before they transformed into innumerable particles of ice that rained on the drake. The drake received only a little bit over 100 damage from the spell, but a layer of ice coated its body. This spell would have frozen normal monsters, but it could only slow down the drake's movements.

"Good spell!" Jack exclaimed, he was casting a spell. He formed three runes at the same time. The three-runes spell formation that usually took him more than three seconds to cast was completed in a little bit less than two seconds. Two copies of himself appeared.

"All mages, Arcane Turbulence!" John instructed. "Set your placements following my direction with the drake as the center! Storm 1 o'clock, Trinity 3 o'clock, Tip 5, Bitter 7, Swell 9!" He forwent the o'clock after saying it twice as it was a mouthful and took too long to say. Anyone with a decent brain would understand what he was trying to say.

There were six mages in the team including Jack. Everyone started to cast the spell. Jack cast the spell as he rushed forward with his doppelgangers. Everyone could not help but admire his bravery, the dude just got smacked away a moment ago, now he was rushing back into the face of danger again.

They never considered that Jack was doing that because he wanted to keep the drake's attention on himself. If the drake rushed over to their formation, they would be decimated.

Amongst the mages, Trinity Dawn completed her three runes first, in two seconds. Unlike Jack, she formed the rune one by one, but she still managed to complete it almost the same as Jack's multi-rune forming. Jack still used his multi-rune method, but because he was casting it while running, it took him two and a half seconds to complete. John achieved the same time as Jack, while the others were all over three and four seconds.

Chapter 343: Life And Death Struggle With The Drake

Luckily everyone understood John's instruction. The spells of Arcane Turbulence were placed around the drake, with the center part had multiple layers of the spell on top of each other, creating a massive amount of energy torrents. Still, the damage inflicted from each energy torrent was only 1 or 2 damages.

The drake tried to leave the area of the spell, but because the spells were laid a bit away from it and around it, it covered a very large area. The spell also caused the Disorientation effect. Although the

effect was reduced due to the drake's resistance, combined with the slow effect from Trinity's ice spell, it took an effort to move under the turbulence.

Jack also sent one of his copies to distract the drake. It slammed onto the copy and puzzled to find out his feet just passed through the human. But it was not dumb as well, it soon knew that the one in front of him was only an illusion. It ignored him and looked for the real one.

It saw two of them just outside the area of the spells. It tried to rush over. One of the copies headed towards the drake into the spell area while the last one ran in a circle outside of the spell area. It smashed at the one rushing at it, only to find out that it was another illusion. It turned to the one that was running outside.

It made a forceful lunge in an attempt to break out of the spell area.

"Magic Bind!" John shouted, "target its limbs!"

Every mage in the party was already level 25, except Bitter Rain and Jack. Four of them cast the Magic Bind spell which they acquired once they reached level 25. Although Jack had not yet learned the spell, he possessed magic scrolls of that spell. He took out one of them and activated it.

Five Magic Binds landed on the drake, four on each of its limbs while one on its neck. It bound its movement for a second, then one of the magic binds started breaking. The drake roared with annoyance and the remaining binds broke rapidly. If the spells were all cast on the main body, all five would have been shattered at the same time. The spell just bought them a bit of time, but every second was precious now as they waited for the poison to devour the drake's remaining life.

The magic bind managed to hinder the drake till the full ten-second duration of Arcane Turbulence expired. Once the torrents of energy disappeared, Jack activated his Storm Breaker's Overlimit and rushed in to meet the drake. The drake welcomed him as his open jaws lunged at him.

The drake's jaw snapped shut as it bit at Jack, the others were horrified as they did not see Jack evade.

The drake itself did not feel any satisfaction. In fact, it did not feel like it had bit anything at all. It lifted its head in confusion as it saw Jack was just fine. All three were illusions? The monster thought with puzzlement. Then it felt a cold feeling at its feet, followed by a stinging prick.

Jack had switched bodies with one of his two doppelgangers. Since his Body Double skill already had 1 star, it could be switched without deactivating the spell. He could do another switch one more time. He had cast Ice Ring immediately after switching, then sent a slash at the drake's feet. The Ice Ring unfortunately did not produce much slowing effect on the large drake.

Once the drake felt the attack, it swiped using the leg that was attacked. Luckily Jack did not take too much risk as he had already run away after that one stab.

The drake tried to turn around, but a large ice spike suddenly fell down from the sky, nailing one of the drake's feet to the ground. Seeing the opportunity, Jack returned and sent a rapid three-slash combo. Each of the slashes devoured around 30 HP. Although the damage was still low, it was much higher than the others. The Chaos damage from the Overlimit skill proved efficient enough to add the rate by which the drake's life was reduced.

Jack chose to stay close to the drake's immobile rear foot that was nailed by the ice spike, the drake had difficulty attacking him either with its tail or its front leg.

The spell that immobilized the drake's one foot had been cast by Trinity Dawn. Jack assumed it must be a special skill she had learned from a technique book. There was also a possibility that she had upgraded said skill using an ice seed. Peniel had previously explained to Jack that skill with an elemental property was very rare below Elite grade. Most advanced spells with elemental property were gained by evolving them using a seed, just like his Ice Ring spell.

The drake roared with rage and pull his rear leg with force. Jack saw the ice spike cracking. He immediately fled the space, not daring to stay longer. His decision had been right, as the spike shattered soon and the drake's foot stomped down repeatedly at where he was a moment ago.

His two copies danced around the drake, creating distractions. The drake swung its tail in a large area but it only passed by the two copies. it looked at the third one that was supposed to be the real one, but it remembered the last time it thought the third one was real, it turned out as an illusion as well.

Frustrated, it chose to ran forward to the other players, instead of chasing after Jack's real body.

"Oh, shit!" Jack exclaimed as he watched the drake rushed over to where his friends were.

"Disperse! Disperse!" John called out while he had been the first one to run.

Everyone ran around chaotically. The drake was confused to pick a target. If it could use its yellow dust attack, it could have blasted them all with just one breath. It randomly chose one that was the closest, who were Jeanny and Giant Steve. The drake was too fast and its steps too wide, it made a large jump. Its strong forelegs stomped down to flatten the two.

The two were not amateurs, they saw as it was impossible to outrun the drake, so they waited for it to make its move. The instant the drake initiated its attack. The two jumped and rolled away from their initial position. The drake's feet stomped heavily on the ground and created a small earthquake.

Despite they escaped the stomping, they knew that this trick only worked one time. It only bought them a sliver amount of time. The drake's follow-up attack would still end them. As they felt despondent, they heard a yell, "no worry! The Man is here!"

The Man did indeed appeared, jumping from a nearby high ground, and used his rare-grade axe with Power Strike skill to cleave at the head of the drake which was coming forward to bite at Jeanny. The attack did almost no damage, but the knockback effect from both the skill and the weapon's ability caused the drake to stop its biting motion.

Everyone that saw the scene could not deny the guy's embodiment of his name. Everyone would admit that at this moment, no one would dare to say the guy was not manly. Even the drake paused its assault and stared at The Man who landed next to Jeanny and Giant Steve.

As if the display of manliness was not enough, another figure jumped out from the same high ground, screaming all the way, and hit the drake at the same spot by the side of its head, then landed next to The Man. It was one of The Man's underling. The same character inspired the same action.

The drake could not believe it, two ants dared to show such disrespect! Its head dived down with lightning speed and chomped at the last person who had hit its head. The guy's HP instantly plummeted to zero.

It then lifted one of its forelegs and swiped sideways at the other three ants. Knowing that they could not evade the attack, Giant Steve went in front of Jeanny and The Man, then put his large shield to the front. His large shield shone with prismatic color.

Before the drake's claw hit the shield, Jeanny thrust her spear forward from behind Giant Steve. Her penetrating stab skill struck the drake's wrist just as the claw crashed into Giant Steve's shield. Although the stab was minuscule, she hoped it could reduce the pressure on Steve's shield even by a little. The impact threw the three of them flying away.

They crashed far away. Miraculously, all of them survived despite being in critical health. Giant Steve's defensive skill had soaked up much of the damage.

While the drake was dealing with them, Jack had arrived and jumped to the drake's back. He slashed at it a few times while it was still unaware. Then he stabbed his sword onto the drake's back. The Overlimit skill of the sword allowed it to penetrate deep into the drake's flesh.

Chapter 344: Massive Increase Of Levels

The drake shook itself viciously to throw Jack off its back, but Jack's deeply stabbed sword provided sturdy handheld.

Jack did not stay idle as he used his left hand's magic staff and continued to fire spells and standard attacks at the drake's back. The drake started jumping around to try to force Jack to dislodge.

The others who witnessed were captivated by the sight. It was like looking at an unusual rodeo, where instead of a horse or bull, it was a giant lizard, and the rider was so tiny it was as if seeing a mouse trying to ride a horse.

"Ranged class, continue your attack!" Jeanny reminded everyone. The mages and archers snapped from their dazes and immediately sent their attacks, while Bowler came over to Jeanny's side and cast Heal on them.

The drake in its frustration, flipped to its back, tried to crush Jack with its weight.

"I know you are going to use this trick again!" Jack exclaimed. Just before he was crushed by the drake's body, he activated the last switch of his Body Double skill. He switched place and his two copies disappeared as the spell ended.

Jack had expected the drake's move since he had seen it did it to the Grandmother Spider. He had placed one of his copies not far from the drake. So once he switched place, the drake's exposed underbelly was nearby. His Overlimit only lasted two minutes, and it was about to expire. He made fast slashes while the drake was still defenseless.

The Grim Sand Drake did not stay still. It swiftly spun its body back to the upright position. Jack had hurriedly run away once he saw the drake's move. The drake looked at the ant that was trying to run away and gave chase in its rage.

The haste effect from the scroll was still in effect, but Jack could still not outrun the drake. It reached his place in a short time. Jack had no more doppelganger that he could switch places with. He watched in horror as the drake open its gargantuan mouth and attempted to devour him in one bite.

Jack took out a Magic Wall scroll and activated it. The drake's mouth crashed onto the energy wall and it shattered. It stopped the drake's attack though, but the impact created a shockwave that caused Jack to fall down on his butt. He was completely defenseless at this time, but as the drake's movement stopped, an arrow flew in and struck the drake's left eye. Fierce Flame had taken the chance when the drake's movement paused to make her aim.

The drake roared from the pain, but it soon snapped out of it and lunged out in anger at Jack who was in front of it. Due to the lapse, Jack had the time to drink a Reset potion, resetting all cooldown. He then took out another Magic Wall scroll and activated it again. The second wall also stopped the attack and shattered.

Jack had run out of Magic Wall scroll. But he had prepared, he quickly took out a Wind Jet scroll then activated his Dragon's Eye. He was about to use it when he noticed the drake's movement had stopped.

Jack's heart was still pounding so fast. He was having trouble determining whether the drake's movement really had stopped or it was because his Dragon's Eye made it appeared not moving. He calmed himself and looked again at the drake.

He could see the unwillingness in the drake's gaze. Its HP bar at the moment was already completely depleted. It was not even four minutes yet. Their harassment on the drake, even though minuscule, still managed to hasten the drake's demise by over a minute.

The drake slowly disintegrated into dust particles. Jack was still standing there, the Wind Jet scroll in his hand. He only snapped out of his daze when he received the notification from the system. His experience bar shot up considerably. Both his Warrior and Mage classes were now at level 25, with his Warrior close to level 26.

The others in the party also increased in levels. All of them increased by three levels, bringing most of them to level 27 and the rest to level 26. Jack was now the lowest level amongst them.

Jack had experienced a similar massive increase the last time when he kill-steal the Ice Troll Sentinel. But at that time, the entire experience points generated were all received by himself. This time even after being divided by the whole twenty-five people in the party, everyone still leveled up three times on average. But considering the vanquished monster was a level 45 special elite, it made sense. If it died as a non-weakened condition of level 55 Rare Elite, Jack figured the experience gained would be even more insane. But if it was not in a weakened condition, Jack would have run away already once the drake clashed with the Grandmother spider.

Wait, no, the experience was shared between twenty-four people. One of The Man's underlings had died. Wait again, it was twenty-three! Jack counted the green dots on his radar. There were only twenty-three. After looking around, he realized the newest member, Sunset Walking was not there. Although

the guy was still registered as a member of their party, he was not near enough to receive the exp for killing the drake.

The others also found the death of the Grim Sand Drake unbelievable. They were still rooted at their places, dazed. Only after they received system notifications and found their levels increased, they broke into a cheer.

"Holy shit! We really did it! I can't believe it!"

"I thought I was a goner already this time for sure."

"I think I peed my pants. Oh, wait! Right, there is no need to pee in this world."

When the Grim Sand Drake disappeared, it had dropped several loots. Jack went over and took a look. There were a total of nine items, a heap of coins and mana cores. The others also came over.

The Man was amongst the first that arrived, his HP had gone back to safe level thanks to drinking potion and Bowler's healing. Jack said to him, "I'm sorry about your man who died."

The Man was grinning when he answered, "no worry, boss. He wore the rebirth amulet. He only lose one level. Even so, I think he is still the highest leveled player in the capital at the moment. He will be crazy when I send him the message that we had actually killed the drake. He will brag about it to the other members in the capital."

"Considering the kind of monster we have just fought, it has been an absolute miracle that we only have one casualty," John said as he came over as well. "Traveling with you truly gives one a heart attack. I will think twice the next time you invite me again."

"Are you saying that you are not happy that you are level 27 now?"

"I certainly am, but I am even happier that I know you are the second lowest-level player amongst us now," John said with a smirk.

"Second? That's right, Sunset Walking. Where is he? He didn't come with you guys? And how come all of you are coming over anyway?"

"What do you mean how?" Jeanny asked. "We are still in the same party. When you get into a combat situation, all of us were notified. That's why we all rushed over. Regarding Sunset Walking, he was with us as well, but he seemed to have run away once he saw the drake."

"Yeah, he is a coward!" Bowler cursed, he was opening his map. "He is at the entrance gate now, running to safety by himself."

"Don't blame him, he is not that close with us yet. His action is understandable," Jack said. "You people that did not run away even after seeing the drake, I truly thank you all for your steadfast support. Having you all as friends were truly a blessing to me."

"Don't count your chickens yet. If I had known you intent on fighting the drake, I would have left you the first chance I got, you lunatic!" John cursed.

"Yeah! I am only here to protect Sister Jeanny. I don't give a shit if you die!" Swellgoing added.

Damn these two, can't they just play along instead of bringing down the mood? And where the hell was that Swellgoing when Jeanny was almost killed just now?

Ignoring those two, Jack turned to Giant Steve. "What's that skill you used? It was amazing that it managed to allow you to survive the drake's direct hit."

Jack had been very impressed when he saw them surviving after receiving the drake's slap. Even for him who possessed tons of HP with an active Barrier protecting him, he almost died from just a graze.

"It was a special defensive skill I got through luck," Giant Steve replied. "It is called Final Shield. It consumed all my stamina to boost my defense and reduce the damage I received. The more stamina I have left before using the skill, the better."

"Oh, so that's why it was named Final. Once you used it, you can't use any other skill as you will have zero stamina at the time."

"Yes, it was a last resort move. In fact, this is the first time I have used it in a real fight. To be honest, I myself was not sure of the outcome. It's a good thing we end up surviving. Oh, and I think the fact that my equipped shield was a Rare grade might also contribute."

"Are you going to leave those?" John indicated on the loots that were still on the ground. "I will love to go pick them up, but I think everyone will lynch me afterward."

Chapter 345: Runestone Of Luck

"Of course it should be brother Storm Wind that has the right!" Bowler said. "He is the main reason the drake has died."

"Yes, yes, that's why I said I didn't just go ahead and pick it all up. Please just can that fanboy attitude already."

Jack observed the loots again, then asked, "so, how should we divide these loots?"

The others looked at Jack with weird faces.

"What's wrong?" Jack asked after seeing their expressions.

"Bro, you want to divide these loots with us?" Bowler asked.

"Of course he wants to divide them with us! How retarded are you to ask that question? All right, I say old rule. We roll a dice and see who came up the highest and that person will get the priority to choose!" John declared in a hurry.

Now the others were looking at John with disdain.

"You truly know no shame," Jeanny reprimanded.

"Sigh, you people are too straight. Someone offers you a gift and you people turn it down," John lamented.

"Boss, ignore him. Just take all the loots. We already received a lot of benefits from the levels," The Man said.

Jack looked around. He shook his head. He was blessed to have gotten such honest friends. There is no restriction to the loots on the ground, anyone could come and snatch them. Even for John, even if the guy was running his mouth, his restraint from picking up the loots already showed that he knew what was appropriate and what was not. Since they showed him such courtesy, he should return them in kind.

He declared, "We defeated the drake with our teamwork. So it is only fair if the loots are divided. Let's do it this way. Since you all admit that I contributed the most, I will make the first pick. For the others, we will determine based on class. The item will go to the one that suited one's class most. If it is not clear, then we do as John said, we use a dice roll to determine who gets to choose first. There are only nine items, while there are twenty-three of us. Fourteen will not get the item, so those four will get the coins and mana cores divided equally. What do you say?"

"Good friend! I must say, you truly are a fair person," John exclaimed as he put his hand around Jack's shoulder as if they were the best friends in the world. The others threw him another disdainful look.

Jack observed the loots again. Amongst the nine items, four were rare equipment, one super rare magic staff, two rare materials, one rare runestone, and one rare gemstone. Jack was astonished, none of the loots were below rare grade, and there were even so many. He didn't get this many even when he opened a treasure chest. That drake was truly a special existence.

He was about to pick up the super-rare magic staff when Peniel stopped him.

"What are you doing?" She asked.

'Picking up the best loot of course,' Jack answered as if it was obvious. There was only one super-rare grade item amongst the loots.

"Then you are targeting the wrong item," Peniel said. "Go for that Runestone."

"Runestone?" Jack used Inspect on both items to compare.

Illusory Staff, level: 25/55 (super rare magic weapon)

Magical damage: 125

Range: 15 meters

Attack speed 1

Energy: 120

Intelligence +10

Dexterity +6

Mirror Image: Create 4 identical images that will move and act randomly in close proximity around caster, image can't attack and can't be attacked. (If caster already possess the spell, mirror image level +5 instead)

Runestone of Luck (rare runestone)

Empty. Required will to activate.

'I was afraid at first that the equipment drop will be at level 45 like the drake. If it is so, no one will be able to use this equipment. Guess that was not the case,' Jack commented in his mind.

"The level of the items dropped will be in the level range of the party who killed it," Peniel explained.

'The drake was killed by the Grandmother spider's poison,' Jack reminded.

"But that spider is dead already, so you folks are the next best thing."

Jack didn't want to discuss further about the system rule, he instead commented about the magic staff's ability, 'hey, this staff gives spell that is better than my Body Double. It can create four images! My body double only creates two images, that is even after I level it to level 10.'

"It is only better in terms of numbers of images. Your Body Double spell is more tactically versatile. This spell is only good for distraction. It doesn't allow you to switch positions with the images, so if your opponent has keen eyes, they can discern your real self easily. And you can't control your copies, they will always move around close to you."

Jack still felt it was a pity. Even though this staff's level was lower than his rare staff, but its damage was higher. If he increased its level with blacksmithing, its damage would increase further.

'Hm... But I still think this super rare staff is better.'

"Just pick the goddamned rune already!"

'Geez, okay, okay. So bossy," Jack said as he picked up the Runestone of Luck. The others looked at Jack picking up the runestone with bewilderment. They thought for sure he will take the super-rare staff. They had been wondering why he just stared on the loots for some while.

"You sure you do not pick wrong?" Jeanny asked.

"Hey, hey, he already made his pick. Why are you people trying to rattle him?" John complained. Another round of disdainful glares was thrown his way.

'See? Everyone thought that staff is a better pick. What am I doing with this runestone anyway? I assume it will boost my luck once I insert my will into it. But my luck is already so high, are you telling me my superpower luck is not enough?'

"If you activate that runestone every time you are about to kill a boss or open a treasure chest, combined with your already high luck stat, getting more than one super rare equipment is not a dream. You might even get a unique grade one."

'If you say it like that, it does sound better.'

While Jack was discussing with Peniel, John was addressing the others, "all right, following what my best friend Storm had said, we will determine the loots based on class. This super rare staff is for a mage, there are five mages here—"

"Hey! A healer can also use that magic staff!" Bowler exclaimed in protest.

"Ceh, fine! So six of us will roll a dice for this staff."

"Do we even have a dice?" Viral Cora asked, which was promptly answered by John taking out a dice from his inventory.

"Why the hell do you have one?" The Man asked.

"I always carry one," John simply replied. "I will go first."

He threw the dice to the ground. It rolled on the ground and stopped with number six facing up.

"You are cheating!" Bowler promptly called out.

"Friend, a baseless accusation is a sin. You can check the dice if you want. You will also throw using the same dice since I believe it's the only one we have here. If it is rigged, you will also get a six."

Bowler grabbed the dice and inspect it. The dice was registered as junk item. It was most likely something that John had brought over from the real world.

"There must be a trick to it!" Bowler was still not accepting the result, to which John just shrugged.

Bowler threw the dice.

One.

"Ahahaha!" John was laughing loudly without reserve.

Bowler's face was red with anger.

"Stop it! You two are like children!" Jeanny picked up the dice. She checked on it for a while before saying, "it looks all right. Here." She gave it to Trinity Dawn.

Trinity rolled a four. Next came Bitter Rain who also rolled six. Tip rolled a two, and Swellgoing who went last also get a one.

"Since you two get the highest number. You two should roll again," Jeanny told John and Bitter Rain.

Bitter Rain rolled three. When John threw his dice, Bowler was watching him intently. He was going to call him a fraud if the guy rolled six again. Unfortunately for him, John got a four.

"It seemed that fate favors me," John said as he picked up the Illusory Staff and admired it. "For the rest of this expedition, everyone can address me as the strongest mage in the party."

"Strongest my ass," Bowler grumbled.

"Okay, let's continue," Jeanny said to the others, ignoring the two.

Out of the four remaining rare equipment, one was a robe for magic-user. So it automatically went to Bitter Rain who had also rolled a six previously. The other three were a heavy armor chest piece, light armor boots, and a spear.

Everyone had no objection to Jeanny taking the spear, since she was the only one using such a weapon. She happily replaced his uncommon grade spear with this new rare grade one. The heavy armor chest piece was directly given to Giant Steve, since only he and Jeanny were Knight class who could utilize the heavy armor, and Jeanny had already taken the spear.

The last light armor boots were rolled by Fierce Flame, Viral Cora, Weird Trap, Salty Trade, and Wondrouslife. Viral Cora won the dice rolling and accepted the prize.

The remaining two materials and one gemstone were general-use items, so everyone who left rolled the dice for them. Flame and one of The Man's underlings got the materials, while Bowler acquired the gemstone. The remaining people got coins and mana cores divided equally.

Chapter 346: Coincidental Gain

After finished with the distribution of the loots, Jack said to them, "well, I did say we split the drops here because all of us contributed. I am going to go there now and pick up loots from the giant spider monster who fought with the drake. Now that one is entirely my work, so I will get them all. No one has any objection, right?"

"Sure, sure."

"No objection."

Everyone was happy already that Jack divided the drake's loots with them. Swellgoing was about to protest but Jeanny shut him down.

Although they agreed for the spider's loots to be Jack's alone, they still followed after him out of curiosity. It was another titanic monster capable of going toe-to-toe with the drake. Its drops shouldn't be lower in quality.

On their way to the place where the Grandmother spider had died, John didn't stop twirling his new staff around. Bowler grew more irksome the more he saw it.

"Can you please stop that?!" He shouted.

"I'm sorry, are you jealous of my super rare staff?" John asked with a derisive tone. "I must say, I can't stop admiring it. I am probably the first player to have gotten a super rare staff. No, I am the only player to have a super rare staff at this stage! Hahaha. None of you can compare with me!"

Even Jeanny started to feel irritated with him, she said to him, "do you want me to remove you from the party again?"

"Sister Jeanny, you are too serious," John said teasingly.

Jack had been ignoring them. He had arrived at the place where the Grandmother spider had died. He looked at the drops, raised his eyebrows, then picked one of them up. "What a surprising coincidence," he said as he projected the item's description to the others.

Rapid Dazing Staff, level: 25/55 (super rare magic weapon)

Magical damage: 122

Range: 15 meters

Attack speed 1

Energy: 128

Intelligence +8

Standard attack has a 5% chance to cause Confused status effect for 10 seconds (effect does not stack)

Rapid Attack: Each standard attack shot out three projectiles (this ability can be turned on or off)

Another Super Rare magic staff? The others were dumbfounded. As Jack had said, what a surprising coincidence.

"Wahahaha!" Bowler suddenly laughed hysterically. "Who just now said he is the only player to have a super rare staff? What are you going to say now?"

"I will say, that fate has granted the two best players in this world with two first super-rare staffs," John replied nonchalantly.

"You know you won't hurt him with words, don't you? So why do you even bother?" The Man said to Bowler.

After reviewing this staff's description, Jack actually preferred this staff compared to the one John had gotten. Although the damage was lower and the attribute increased was less. Its abilities were better. The Rapid Attack ability was like having the burst mode of a gun. Combined this burst mode with the chance of each attack to cause a Confused effect, enemies would be in trouble even against just his standard ranged attack.

He had learned the effect of status effects from Peniel, this Confused effect caused the afflicted's spells or skills to have a chance to fail.

The downside of using burst mode was that his staff's energy would deplete faster. But he had ample stock of magic stone, so this would not be a problem.

Jack changed his currently equipped Red Dawn staff with this Rapid Dazing staff. He then picked up the other loots. They were fewer and lower quality compared to the drops from the drake, but the drake was originally much stronger, so he thought that it made sense.

The other loots were rare medium armor pants, but it was still not better than his Shadow Bear Tasset, so he just chucked it into his inventory, then an alchemy recipe and one gross ingredient, a large poison gland. The remaining were two gemstones, one rare amber and one uncommon diamond. He put them all into his inventory, he would review them later. For the coins and mana cores, he got 3 gold and 74 silver coins, and 12 mana cores.

After seeing Jack finished picking up the loots, Jeanny could not contain her curiosity any longer. She asked Jack, "how come those two monsters fought each other anyway? No way you just stumbled onto them when they duke it out, did you?"

Answering her question, Jack told her about the continuation of his quest after they helped him out last night. He didn't feel the need to keep the quest a secret.

"Damn! You are one nutty fellow to think of bringing those two monsters into conflict," Giant Steve commented.

"Kill with a borrowed knife, I like it. But still, you are crazy!" John said.

"As expected from my boss!" The Man exclaimed.

"Only a lunatic like you can think of something so risky like that," Swellgoing cursed.

"You really bring risk-taking to a whole new level," Jeanny added.

"There were many factors that had made me try that. If there was another option, I wouldn't have taken the risk. Please don't praise me for it," Jack told them.

"We are not praising you!!" All except The Man's group yelled.

"As I said, we should truly think twice the next time he invited us," John said.

They then walked back towards the capital. Chatting merrily as they were all glad to have survived such a dangerous battle. Jack checked on his Container of Soul as they chatted, he almost fell to the ground when he saw the number of souls inside. He might have gained amazing experience points and equipment from the two titanic monsters, but now he found out his greatest reap was the soul points. The container now had 221,298 soul points!

'So much!' He exclaimed in his mind. It was enough for him to upgrade an elite skill two times. Sadly he possessed no elite skill yet at the moment.

"The experience and the equipment dropped had been the standard of the drake in its weaker condition, but its soul was still a rare elite level 55 with a draconic lineage, it was not really that strange to get that many souls," he heard Peniel's explanation.

He could not decide which skill to level up with this many souls. He would decide it later in the inn.

As they were walking, they realized the direction they were heading to was not the town gate. They turned to Jack who was in the lead.

"Where are you taking us?" Giant Steve asked.

"I still have another unfinished business," Jack informed them.

They looked at each other apprehensively. John was the first to said, "okay, I wish you good luck," he then strolled away towards the town gate.

"Um, I also realize I have some other matters to attend to," Weird Trap said.

"Sis Jeanny, let's go first before we get dragged again into another perilous situation," Swellgoing said.

Jack shook his head. "I'm not going to do another dangerous thing again. There is just one last thing I need to do for my quest. You all can go back to the town first if you want. It's fine."

"Sis Jeanny, since he said it is not dangerous. Let him do it by himself. We should go first," Swellgoing said.

This guy was asking for another beating, Jack thought as he glared at him.

"Are you truly fine?" Jeanny asked.

"Yeah, no worry. This last thing is a piece of cake. I'm fine all by myself," Jack assured her.

"If you say so, all right. We will leave first," she said.

While the others were ready to depart, a large group of people was coming over. Jack had noticed them on his radar but he was not too concerned as they were all green dots. They saw the incoming group and saw it to be Captain Salem and Sunset Walking on the lead.

"You all are fine?" Sunset Walking asked with surprise when he saw them. "Did you guys manage to escape as well? I thought you were all caught by the drake already since I saw no one was around when I looked back. I immediately looked for the army to come help."

"See? He did not abandon us," Jack said to Bowler.

"Is everything all right?" Captain Salem asked.

"Yeah, everything is fine," Jack answered.

"What about the drake?" Sunset Walking asked.

"It died," Jack answered.

Sunset gave an expression that showed his disbelief. He then scanned everyone. His disbelief expression changed to astonishment when he saw their levels. He had no problem seeing their levels since they were in the same party.

"It really has died?" He asked. It was the only explanation to explain their sudden spike in levels.

The others just grinned at him.

Bowler said to him, "you shouldn't have been so eager to run every time you find yourself in a dangerous situation. You should stick with us more if you want to get more benefits."

Since they were not in danger anymore, Captain Salem took his army back to their camps. Most of the players also went back to the town, leaving only Jack and a few others who walked towards the cave where the Grandmother spider had come out from.

Jack looked back at the ones following him. They were The Man, Bowler, and surprisingly Viral Cora.

"You can go back first if you want. I'm really fine by myself," he said to them.

"I am with you all the way, bro," Bowler declared. Jack wanted to slap him, wasn't he so eager to leave him before when they found the stream?

"I am curious about your quest," Viral Cora replied.

"I'm just bored," The Man admitted.

Chapter 347: Three Alchemy Recipes

The three of them followed Jack as he delved into the depth of the earth to where the Grandmother spider used to have its lair. The eggs were still there.

Jack climbed down to the large hall with the eggs. He saw no red dots on his radar but he didn't let go of his guard. There had been instances when monsters could fool his God-eye monocle.

After making sure everything was fine. He brandished his sword and struck at one of the eggs. As expected, a damage number appeared, indicating the eggs were something that was meant to be destroyed. Jack gave it another two slashes and it popped into disgusting green goo.

"eww," Viral Cora said with revulsion.

The Man lifted up his axe and said, "I'll help."

"Wait!" Jack stopped him. He looked at Jack puzzlingly.

"I need to do this part by myself," Jack told him. "A requirement from the quest."

Jack was not sure actually. Guss could have just referred to the outside influence as the NPC's army, but he did not want to take the chance. Even though he had already used the drake which could also be considered as an outside influence. However, if he did not use the drake, there was no way he would have been able to take down the Grandmother spider.

Stick to the rule when he could afford it, bent it when he could not. That was another of his principle. Since at this moment, the task was easy enough for him to do by himself, no sense to risk it by letting others help. So he hacked away at the eggs and destroyed them one by one as the others stood aside and watched him work.

After he cracked three eggs, he realized the stupidity of his action. Moved back, and cast Arcane Turbulence using his new super rare staff. The spell engulfed a whole batch of the eggs and destroyed them with DPS as he attacked the other eggs.

Soon the task was completed. He saw the goo now had mixed with the water on the floor. He probably still had to tell Guss to not let anyone take water from that new stream. He told the three that he was done and they all went back to the town together.

Viral Cora didn't stop chatting with him about his quest among other stuff. The girl was highly chatty and cheerful. Jack found chatting with her to be rather enjoyable.

They entered the town before long and Jack excused himself to go to the town hall. They want to follow but the guards on the town hall did not permit players other than Jack to enter.

"You need to ask the duke to recommend us for joining the kingdom faction too!" Viral Cora said to him as he entered the town hall.

"I'll try," Jack replied with a chuckle.

Guss was on his desk scribbling on some documents when Jack entered. He stopped his work once he saw Jack.

"Chief Healer Albert had come to see me. He said a soldier on duty at mess hall D had come clean about using a new stream for one of the barrels for drinking water. He said you were the one that had found out about it. An action had been taken to close that stream so others won't have access to it anymore. The chief healer talked rather highly of you."

"He did?" Jack was surprised for hearing it. That grumpy NPC who kept on looking down on him for not being a healer?

"He did. Now, have you found out why that stream was tainted? Have you dealt with it?"

Jack then told him about what he found, about the spider lair, and about how the stream was tainted by the spider's eggs. He paused for a bit before deciding to be honest, he told Guss about how he lured the Grandmother spider to where the Grim Sand Drake was hiding, and had the two colossi fought one another. After the spider was killed, he went back to the lair to clean out the eggs.

Guss was silent as Jack made his report. He was still silent after Jack was done. Jack started to feel worried about the silence. The base commander stood up and clapped Jack's shoulder. "Good job," he said, giving Jack a huge relief.

He then heard a system notification informing him that he had completed the quest of disease investigation quest. He received 10 gold coins, 75,000 Experience points, and a rare grade medium armor chest piece. His Warrior's experience bar was very close to level 26 now. As for the rare armor, he just stored it as his Blood Guard Scale armor was better.

"I will let that lazy brother of mine know about your success. I will make sure he compensates you fairly."

"Yeah, you do that," Jack said.

"Albert also has a reward for you," Guss said as he brought out a piece of paper.

Jack was astounded. Did that grumpy healer truly regard him so highly? He received the paper and found it to be an alchemy recipe for Basic Regeneration Potion. Jack asked Peniel about the effect of this potion, Peniel told him that it granted the same effect as a level 1 Regeneration spell which he had cast before using a magic scroll.

Guss said, "when Albert asked me to give this recipe to you, he said, I quote, give that adventurer this recipe. Since he was a fool who did not pick a healer class, then he will need this potion to survive."

That's him all right, Jack thought. He stored the recipe and looked inside his bag. He now had three alchemy recipes which he did not know what to do about. The other two were from the Grandmother spider's drop and the Outlaw's drop.

Guss dismissed him, before reminding him that the expedition would be departing again tomorrow. The resupply had been going well as planned. Before leaving, Jack said, "That soldier who used the contaminated spring. If possible, cut him some slack. He had been cooperative in helping me solve the case."

Jack went back to the inn since he had no other thing to do. He would resume his spell formation training. He saw from his radar that most of his friends were at the inn. They all turned to him once he entered.

"Are you done with your quest?" Jeanny asked.

Jack nodded. He then said in a loud voice, "who among you that focus on your alchemy job?"

"You know I do," Bowler said.

"What's your alchemy level?" Jack asked.

"Advanced Apprentice."

"Anyone here who had the same or higher level of Alchemy?"

"What's this about?" John asked.

"If you can't do alchemy, then this has got nothing to do with you," Jack replied crudely.

"Ouch," John feigned getting hurt.

"I'm a basic expert at alchemy," Pointy Tip said.

"No one else?" Jack asked again.

Since no one said anything more, he said to Bowler and Tip, "you two, follow me."

Jack took them two to his room. John and Viral Cora had been following as well out of curiosity, but Jack closed the door on them.

After being in the room with the two, Jack took out his three alchemy recipes. Two of them, basic rejuvenation potion and basic regeneration potion, can be produced by an intermediate apprentice alchemist. While the third, which he had gotten from the Grandmother spider's loots, was a recipe for a basic expert alchemist.

This basic expert recipe was to produce Poison Salve. Peniel had informed him it is a consumable which could be applied to a melee weapon or physical ranged weapon, like the Whetstone. It added poison effect to the weapon for a limited time. The effect could be stacked with Whetstone.

Jack explained the effects of the three recipes to Bowler and Tip, afterward he said, "I can give the two of you these recipes, but I need you to promise me that you will produce these items for me in your spare time. You can buy the ingredients, I will compensate the coins when you give me the items."

"No problem," Bowler said.

"Well, I am game as well," Pointy Tip said. He knew he did not excel in combat, but his alchemy skill was pretty good. Having the chance to learn a new recipe and practice would increase the level of his alchemy job further.

Jack gave basic regeneration potion recipe to Bowler, and the other two he gave to Pointy Tip.

Pointy Tip reviewed the recipe before saying, "I have no problem with this basic rejuvenation potion, but this poison salve uses one ingredient that I never see in the market. I will not be able to make it if I don't have the ingredient."

"What ingredient?" Jack asked.

"Small poison gland."

Jack looked into his bag and took out the Large Poison Gland from the Grandmother spider's drops. "Can this do?" He asked.

"A large one?" Tip was surprised. "Yes, I can. This is the better grade of the poison gland. I have read in an alchemy book that if we use the better grade version for a recipe that required a lower grade, we can use it multiple times. With this one large poison gland, I should be able to use it around twenty times to make the poison salve."

"Awesome!" Jack said as he gave him the large poison gland.

"But the book also mentioned that it is a waste to use a better grade ingredient when you can use a lower one. Usually, this better grade can be used for a better recipe."

"Well, we don't know when we will get that better recipe, if ever. Better to use it rather than let it sit in my bag. Don't worry about it, just use it. If I find anymore poison gland, I will give it to you."

"Much obliged!" Tip said cheerfully as he stored the ingredient and recipes.

Chapter 348: Declaration

The next morning, everyone gathered outside the town gate. Guss was outside as well sending the Duke and the others off. Jack and the others were in position already at the head of the army formation as vanguard troops. The rest of the army was also in formation, ready to depart.

Before long, Commander Quintus gave the order for the army to move. The vanguard troops broke into three and moved out in advance. Everyone got back to their previous routine where the vanguard troops cleared out the monsters to provide a smooth way for the main troop. Jack's Warrior class reached level 26 shortly.

After one day of travel, they reached the border of Themisphere kingdom and entered the Fulgur region. The fertile land filled with grasses and trees soon gave way to a vast and arid desert filled with sand.

No wonder the army needed to resupply at Theseval. It would be difficult to get any water or food in this desert.

The monsters that populated this desert were Wind Elemental and Giant Scorpion. They had fought the Giant Scorpion before, so they were familiar with their attack patterns. The difference was the Giant Scorpion here had higher levels, around level 35 to level 40, with many elite grades.

The Wind Elemental was more troublesome to deal with. They had natural resistance against physical attack, although not as absurd as their cousin, the small rock golem which Jack fought long ago. Even

damage of magical attack was hampered by a portion. But such all-rounded damage resistance was offset by their low HP, so they were still manageable.

The thing to watch out for was that they could release air energy as sharp as a steel blade that whirled all around them. Anyone who came into melee range with this creature would have to suffer getting cut by the air blades. Hence only soldiers geared with full heavy armor were sent to face these monsters supported by range attacks.

Apart from the monsters, the elements were also against the army. The heat and low humidity were constantly causing discomfort to the soldiers and players alike. The wind was also always blowing as they carried the sand and hurt the eyes.

Another day passed as they delved deeper into the desert. They met another new monster, Flame Tiger. Unlike other monsters which were usually met in a pack. This Flame Tiger led a solitary life, so when they encountered this monster, it was always only one.

Despite had to deal with only one Flame Tiger at a time, the vanguard troops instead had a more difficult time. There were even some instances where some of the soldiers almost lost their lives. If the healers were a bit slow, or their comrades did not provide assistance fast enough, they would have been a goner.

Each of the Flame Tiger's attacks dealt massive damage, so the soldiers could only withstand a few hits before they were in critical health. The tiger also could unleash a fiery breath that hit a lot of opponents at once. The players made sure to move further back after seeing one of these breath attacks.

Its back was also constantly being coated by a layer of fiery energy, making it look as if it had a long fire mane on its back. This fire energy gave off an aura that dealt continuous small damage to anybody that came too close to the Flame Tiger.

None of the Flame Tigers they met was of basic monster. They were at least Elite grade. There was even one instance when they met a special elite Flame Tiger. At that time, the three vanguard troops came to encircle the single monster as they slowly wore it down to death.

All the players could see the difficulty of the monsters in this desert was higher. The vanguard troops' advance was getting slower that the main troop almost caught up to them a few times. Seeing this, Commander Quintus was tempted to just disband the vanguard troops and went back to having a large troop formation to scare away the monsters.

After half a day had passed, Jack noticed a large sand storm in the distance. Jack observed it as the sand storm appeared to be getting closer. It would be a problem if they were caught in the sandstorm. But upon closer inspection, it was not a sandstorm, it was a cloud of dust similar to the one he had seen before. Such cloud was not formed by natural wind but was caused by many feet traversing through the sandy terrain beneath it.

As if to prove his point, he started to see a large number of white dots appearing at the edge of his radar in the direction of that dustcloud.

White? Neutral NPCs? Not monsters?

Still, Jack did not dare to be careless. He commanded the other two vanguard troops to combine as they formed a defensive formation facing the incoming dust cloud. The dust cloud was very easy for everyone to see, so they did not find the command to be strange. However, in everyone's mind other than Jack, the incoming dust cloud was caused by a monster swarm. Everyone braced for the unavoidable conflict.

To everyone's consternation, when the dust cloud approached, large numbers of figures could be seen as they moved rapidly in front of the dust cloud. As they were getting closer, everyone could then see that these figures were riding mounts. Their mounts looked like large jackals the size of a horse, the jackal's skin was of dark brown color and was heavily covered by sharp hairs.

However, the riders were not any less striking than the monstrous jackals. Each of the riders sported a large and muscled physique with dark green skin. Their heads were large and ugly with two tusks jutting out from their mouth.

Every veteran RPG gamer would recognize such creatures anywhere.

"Orcs! Prepare for battle! Let's vanquish these monsters!" The Man screamed when he saw the incoming riders. The other players ready themselves in agreement.

Although Captain Salem was also ready himself for a clash, he looked at The Man with a weird face. "Monsters?" He asked.

Oh, right. I haven't told them, Jack thought in his mind.

"They are not monsters," Jack told the excited players.

"They aren't?"

As if to prove Jack's statement, the horde of orcs slowed their advance and stopped a few distances away from the human troop. They looked at each other with wariness. One rider came out from among the orcs' troops.

This orc had a larger stature compared to his compatriots. He had long hair that was tied into two ponytails that came down both his shoulders. He wore loose armor that displayed his muscular physique. A large hammer was slung on his back. His action indicated that he was a leader of this troop.

Jack used his God-eye monocle to inspect this orc leader.

Hubesi Loudroar (Elite Orc, Chieftain), level 50

HP: 115,000

Captain Salem took the initiative to come out and greet the orc representative, "greeting, honored chieftain. To what purpose do you bring your troops so close to ours?"

The orc chieftain huffed, when he did, a visible cloud of smoke was seen coming out of his nostrils, despite the hot air. "You still dare to ask, human?!" Hubesi roared. "Your army has trespassed into the territory of our mighty Verremor. We demand the price of blood for this transgression!"

Captain Salem frowned upon hearing it, he said, "what do you mean by this? Fulgur region is no man's land. Neither of our countries holds the right to it."

"Hmph, who said that? We of the Verremor always considered the Fulgur region as part of our territory. We don't place a station here doesn't mean that we do not consider it ours."

"Don't be ridiculous. If you can lay claim to the right of this territory, then we of the Themisphere can do so as well! Do not think that we are pushovers!"

"Har har, then a fight it shall be! I represent our Warlord, Abasi Raretooth, to announce a declaration of war against the Themisphere troops that had trespassed into this region. We will begin our battle the next time the sun rises. May it be a glorious battle!"

He then went back to his horde and led them away.

Huh? What's this? Jack was at a loss. He thought they were about to have a battle right then and there. Why the hell those orcs came all the way here just to make a declaration to fight the next day?

"What's that all about?" Jeanny asked. The players had gathered together when the three units of vanguard troops combined.

Answering her question, Jack explained to everyone about the seven largest countries in this world and the different races ruling them. He pointed out that not all the countries had a harmonious relationship with each other. One such country that had an enmity with theirs was the orc's nation of Veremmor, whose troops they had just encountered.

While Jack was explaining to the others. Captain Salem called for one of his aides and instructed him to carry an urgent message regarding the orcs to the commander and the duke in the main army.

Captain Salem then came to Jack and said, "we need to regroup with the main army."

"Are we going to war?" Jack asked.

"We are," he answered with a solemn expression.

Chapter 349: War Meeting

While they had their steeds galloping back towards the main army, Jeanny asked Captain Salem, "Why didn't they just attack us while we were still unaware? They would have had an easy win if they ambushed us. Coming all the way just to declare their intention seemed pointless."

"That is their way," Captain Salem replied. "For any orc to go into a conflict, they need to declare it to their opponents before they go into open combat."

"So they never ambush their opponents or use tricks in a fight?" Jack asked.

"Ambushes and tricks are justified after their enemies are made aware of their hostility. Attacking when the other party is unaware is a cowardly and dishonorable act to them. Especially in war, the other party will be allowed one natural night to prepare."

"That is the dumbest thing I ever heard," John commented. "How the heck did such a nation survive with such stupid rule?"

"Please refrain from insulting other's culture. Our world also has many cultures that possess rules that sometimes make no sense," Jeanny said.

"The fact that you asked him to not insult something means you don't know him well enough," Jack said to her.

"That's right. If something made no sense, it deserved to be insulted," John said.

Jack looked at him helplessly, why did he say it as if it was something to be proud of?

"Do not underestimate the orcs," Captain Salem said to them. "What they lack in intrigue and scheming, they make it up with their savagery and battle lust. To them, dying on the battlefield is an honor. You will find no race that was more eager to be in a battle than the orcs."

They united with the main army soon. Commander Quintus had stopped the army's advance after receiving the message sent by Captain Salem. He promptly dispatched several scouts to their surroundings to gather intel on the orc troops' movement.

Since the desert was mostly flat without any special terrain, they built their camp where they had stopped and deployed defensive measures around the camp's perimeter. After several hours, some of the scouts returned just before the sun was about to set. Commander Quintus summoned all the higher-ups to gather at the main tent to discuss their war preparation. To the envy of the others, Jack was again invited.

"Go, go! Leave us, lowlives, here," Bowler said.

"Mmm, then I will leave you, lowlives, for a while," Jack replied.

"Crap, you have given him a bad influence," Bowler said as he turned to look for John, only to find that he was not around. "Hey, where is that annoying guy?" He asked.

The Man shrugged, "don't know, he asked for two soldier escorts from the captain, then strode off to who knows where."

Jack left them and walked to the main tent. The army's camp was rather large, considering the size of the army, but the main tent's size was easy to spot from far away. When he entered, he saw at the center of the tent were Duke Alfredo, Commander Quintus, Captain Salem, Prince Alonzo, High Priest Laurent, Lieutenant Bailey, and the three NPCs who had fought with the commander against the Grim Sand Drake. There were also several other soldiers, but they stood at the side, they seemed to be the aides of the ones discussing at the center.

"What is he doing here?" One of the three NPCs who fought with the drake asked when he saw Jack entered. It was the one that used twin tomahawk axe as weapons, the one that almost got wasted by the drake before Laurent saved his life. Jack inspected him and found his name to be Samuel.

Jack also scanned the other two NPCs who had fought with the drake. The woman with the large bow was called Lucia, while the man who used the large shield was named Nicholas. All three of them had the same level, grade, and rank, which were level 55, special elite, knight captain.

"I invited him," Commander Quintus answered his question. "Everyone, this is Storm Wind. He will be joining us for the meeting."

"But he is just a civilian!"

"Careful, he is a part of our kingdom faction and he is a baron already."

Samuel glanced at Jack with a hint of surprise. "But he is an outworlder," he said.

"What's wrong with an outworlder?"

"They are weak! Look at him, he is only at level 26."

"Nevertheless, he is a part of us," Duke Alfredo spoke up. "I trust him. He is also Prince Alonzo's friend. You should do well to show him some respect."

Samuel seemed to be taken aback by the duke's words. He still denied Jack an acknowledgment, but he stopped complaining about Jack's presence.

Jack just came over casually as if nothing had happened. "So, what's the situation? Did the scouts find out about the orc's army?" He asked.

Samuel frowned at him. Letting this outworlder joined was one thing, but why did he act as if he was in charge?

Commander Quintus simply chuckled. There was a table at the center of the tent, they were all standing around the table. The commander pressed a button by the side of the table and a holographic image appeared. Jack recognized it as the 3D representation of the landscape. There were several markers on this 3D map.

"These green markers represent our troops. These red ones are the orcs'," Commander Quintus explained.

Jack reviewed the map. The green markers were represented in a triangle shape. He counted the one in green, there were thirty of them. Since their army consisted of three thousand soldiers, he deduced that each of that one triangle represented a group of one hundred soldiers.

He looked at the red markers and was discouraged to find them to be more than sixty. That meant the enemy's numbers were twice theirs.

He turned to the duke, "any chance for Your Grace to just fly over them and use your spells to decimate them?"

"See? It's a waste of time for him to be here," Samuel exclaimed.

The duke waved for Samuel to be quiet. He then said to Jack, "while it's true that it will be easy for me to obliterate the enemy's low-level common soldiers, they also have their own high-level leaders. Especially if this orc army was led by Warlord Abasi Raretooth as was declared by the orc chieftain, we cannot afford to be negligent."

"Is that orc a famous figure?" Jack asked.

Commander Quintus answered him, "his deed was known from the reports on Verremor kingdom collected by our spies. He was the youngest to have ever achieved the title of Warlord. He had made

many campaigns, whether against invaders or to cull the conflict of the tribes within their nation. He had many loyal and capable officers under him."

"And more importantly, from the report, he was not weaker than me in terms of level," the duke added.

Jack mulled about it. "That means when the leaders fight, us low-level ones will become cannon-fodder then?" he said in apprehension.

"That's why there is a common custom in warfare for us, leaders, to not interfere at the first stage of the battle," commander Quintus said. "It will be the battle between the lowest rank first. The stronger ones will interfere only after the lower-rank troops suffered heavy casualties. Of course, when that happened, the enemy's stronger force will also join in."

"There is such a custom?" Jack must admit that he found such tradition strange.

"It is just what we usually do in a large-scale war," the commander said. "It is not exactly a written rule. Of course, we can ignore it and have all our high-level leaders join in from the start, but things will get too chaotic. As you said, the low-level ones will just become cannon-fodders during such a fight, it will just increase casualties unnecessarily."

Samuel added, "I bet from where you came from, you outworlders just charge at each other without any rules, did you not?"

"Are you sure you are not one of the first prince's people?" Jack retorted.

"Are you calling me a traitor!?" Samuel yelled as he slammed the table. The 3D map projection shivered a bit due to it.

"No? Because your dislike against outworlders is similar."

"Stop this! I will have you two removed from this meeting if this continues," the duke warned. "Samuel, if it is not related to the enemy at hand, please keep your opinion to yourself."

Samuel gave an apologetic nod to the duke, but he still cast Jack an agitated glare. Jack ignored him and gave his attention back to the map projection. The red markers were spread out in a wider formation at one side.

"They are positioned behind us?" Jack asked.

Commander Quintus nodded, "yes, we found it strange at first. Considering their nation is at the other end. But then we thought this conflict might have been planned. They waited until we are deep enough before they put themselves behind us to not allow us an escape route."

Chapter 350: Calling In The Advisor

"They have been expecting us!" Captain Salem exclaimed. "They said it was because we trespassed. It was just an excuse to attack us."

"It is most likely so. Most probably someone from our nations had given them the tip on our movements."

Prince Alonzo smiled wryly, "I can give you two possible suspects for such action."

"We will deal with such treachery later," the duke said. "The problem at hand is how to deal with this orc army. Our army quality should be roughly the same as the opponent, but as you can see, they numbered us twice. It will be difficult to come out on top in this situation."

"And we also cannot retreat, since they cut our rear path," the NPC with the large shield, Nicholas, said.

"Even if we can, we won't," the duke said with a determined voice. "We are not to be deterred from our objective by a bunch of savage orcs!"

Everyone can feel his determination. They were reminded again of the purpose of this expedition. They must reach the Temple of Divine Squall to find the cure for the duchess. This was not just for the duke's private desire. It was also for the good of the country, as those that were within this tent here knew about the personalities of the first and second princes. If either of them took the throne, the nation would undergo a radical change, and not for the better. If they managed to cure the duchess, with her power, she should provide a solid backer to the third prince, allowing him to contend against his two older brothers for the throne.

Jack was not so interested in this game of throne. But after the provocations by the first and the second princes, he did realize that his fate in this world, or at least within the kingdom of Themisphere, was closely related to who ascended the throne. So whether he liked it or not, for his own sake, he would need this expedition to be a success as well.

The others discussed the options for engaging the orc army, but none really stand out. Most just expressed the resolution to give it their all and hope to win. Although they were all portrayed as the leaders of an army, the creator of this game world didn't give them a tactician mind.

Jack himself was not much of a planner. It was still ok for him to make preparation for his personal battle, but to organize such a large group of people, he had no experience. That had also been the reason why he had brought along his friends to share the commanding burden. Thinking about his friends, he was reminded.

He turned to the duke, interrupting their discussion, "Your Grace, can I invite one of my friends here?"

"Another outworlder? You must be joking, right?" Samuel spat out. "What difference will one more outworlder do with this situation?"

Jack did not respond to Samuel's remark, he continued to look at the duke with an assured gaze.

Seeing the hardihood in Jack's eyes, the duke nodded, "all right." Then to one of the aides standing by the side, he said, "Let the guards outside know that an outworlder will come, they are to let the person in."

Jack immediately sent a private message as the aide went out, "Where are you?"

He received a reply promptly after, "around, why?"

"Come to the main tent. It's the biggest one in the middle of the camp. Hard to miss. Tell the guards the duke sent for you."

"Why?"

"Just get your ass over here, now!"

Jack didn't receive any reply anymore. He opened his map, and looked at the dot that represents his friends. One of them was moving in his direction.

Not long after, John came into the tent. He walked in as casually as Jack, with an even more nonchalant attitude than Jack.

Samuel who saw that could not help but comment, "another one boorish outworlder."

John turned to him. "And you are...?" He asked.

"Hmph! I am—"

"Not interested!" John interrupted him mid-sentence.

"You!" Samuel's face was getting red as he tried to contain his anger.

'Maybe it was a bad idea to call him here,' Jack was starting to have regret. He sent the guy a silent message, "can you please behave yourself? That is a level 55 Special Elite, do you want to die in a ditch somewhere?"

"Did he not insult you as well?" Jack received John's reply message.

"He did."

"Did you not retort?"

"I... did," Jack replied, but quickly sent another follow-up message, "but not as rude as you. Just behave yourself when you are here!"

While they were having silent messages, Jack introduced John to the others. John nodded politely to each of them, except for Samuel.

Jack then explained to him the 3D projection on the table and about their situation. "Do you have any good idea?" he asked after finishing his explanation.

"I do," he answered swiftly.

Samuel harrumphed, "hmph! What bold words. Even us seniors here did not dare to say that we have a good idea for this situation, how pretentious of you to say you have one?"

"You can't think of a plan doesn't mean that others can't too. We are each been given a different level of intellect," John said.

"Are you saying I'm dumb!?" Samuel uttered in anger.

Jack gave John a stare as if saying, "behave yourself!" Did the guy not worry that the others might get offended by his words as well? Since the others also have not been able to think of a good plan. Jack could see the duke's forehead started to frown already.

"I didn't say that, you said it yourself," John feigned innocence.

"All right, you two, play nice!" Jack interrupted as he was worried that John might get kicked out immediately if he did not interfere. "I apologize for his words, but I do believe that everyone should listen to his idea first. Okay, John, please let us know your thought."

Better sped things up before this guy made another crude remark, Jack thought.

"All right, fine. First thing first, I know about the orc's weird custom to not attack until tomorrow morning. What about us? Are we bound by such custom as well? What if we make a surprise night attack?"

"We are not bound by such custom, but they will have expected and prepared for that. Very few have ever succeeded in a night ambush against an orc camp," Commander Quintus informed.

"Okay, then I need to confirm a few things. We know their numbers are twice from us. What about their strength? And did they have one with our duke-level power by their side?"

Commander Quintus explained as he had mentioned to Jack that even though they didn't have the exact detail, the majority of the orc base army should be at the same level as theirs. While their warlord should be able to rival the duke. There should also be a few high-level officers that were on par with the commanders and captains inside this room.

"The battles of these high-level individuals will complicate matters," John commented.

Before the commander gave a response, Jack informed John about the warfare custom here, where the high-level individuals would stay back until absolutely necessary.

"There is such weird custom? Why this world keeps on having these non-sensical rules? The orcs with the no-ambush before the opponent is aware crap, and now this boss stays behind until the underlings are almost wiped out."

Samuel was visibly upset by John's insensitive remark. John just pretended to not see it or simply not give a shit about it.

Jack quickly said, "It's just a guideline! It's not something that is fixed. It is to prevent unnecessary casualties." While in secret, Jack sent him a message, "keep your rude opinions to yourself!! If you have a plan, just spill it out already!"

"Another thing, I have noticed since we entered this desert that the wind tends to blow in the same direction in the same spot. Can anyone confirm this? Will tomorrow it blow differently?"

The others looked at each other. It seemed that none had knowledge regarding this, until a woman's voice was heard, "it is as you said." It was Lucia, the knight captain with the large bow. "I had often come to this desert during my adventuring days in the past. If it was the same place, the wind did always blew in the same direction throughout the year. There were some months though where the wind stopped blowing or blow harder, but it is not at this month."

"Good. Now, what about supplies? Do the orcs have the need for supply such as us? Do they carry their foods and water in supply wagons as well?"

"What kind of stupid question is that? Of course, they do," Samuel responded.

John nodded, unaffected by the rude answer. "Okay, let's get down to business," he said. He then pointed to an area on the 3D map that was close by. "Tomorrow morning, arrange the army here. And make sure to have all the soldiers arranged so they are facing the West."