

Titan King 161

Chapter 161 Time will tell

It had to be said—Lilith was a clever and strategic succubus.

With Delilah already holding the critical position of Stewardship Elder within the succubus clan(tribe), any attempt by Lilith to vie for power would undoubtedly invite gossip and dissent. Just because there wasn't any now didn't mean there wouldn't be in the future.

By positioning herself correctly from the start, Lilith demonstrated her intelligence and foresight.

Her choice to stand behind Orion, rather than taking a seat among the senior elders, earned her the favor and respect of the four senior elders. Aside from Delilah, the other elders nodded slightly in acknowledgment of Lilith's gesture.

Lilith returned their nods with a polite smile, and the meeting resumed.

"This time, our elders Desdemona and Vespera didn't participate in the Myriad Races Invasion. While they're clever, their experience is far too shallow," Delilah began, her tone calm but firm.

"They've been able to handle things smoothly under our watchful eyes, but that's only because we've been there to clean up their messes. We must be clear—they're not ready for major responsibilities yet. They still need more training and observation."

This was Delilah in her element—high-ranking, far-sighted, and adept at navigating the delicate balance of power.

Lilith's ascension to Alpha-level had already elevated the succubus clan's status to rival that of the giants. Yet, as Lilith soared to new heights, Delilah's words subtly suppressed the rising influence of the other succubus elders who had performed well recently.

Delilah understood that the horde needed balance as much as it needed growth. Her actions weren't just for herself—they were to reduce potential trouble for Orion and the other three senior elders.

Prophet Onyx, Rendall, and Thundar all nodded in agreement, their smiles signaling their approval of Delilah's perspective.

And Delilah wasn't wrong.

"The Giant Tribe elders—Slate, Samson, and Ursa—aren't stupid, but they're not exactly brilliant either," Rendall said bluntly. "Their current positions are the result of accumulated battle merits and their previous status."

"Still, I agree with the Stewardship Elder. We should give them opportunities to prove themselves and see if they can transform into true pillars of the horde."

Rendall's straightforwardness was a hallmark of his character. His life and loyalty were wholly intertwined with the tribe, and he never hesitated to speak plainly about the strengths and weaknesses of its members.

Orion nodded, signaling his agreement with Rendall's assessment.

"In that case, I'll take all eight council elders with me on the next southern campaign during the Myriad Races Invasion," Orion declared.

"We'll see then—are they dragons, or are they rats? Time will tell."

With this statement, Orion not only gave the eight council elders a chance to prove themselves but also determined their fates.

As for Rockwell and Dirtclaw, there was no need for further discussion. Both had survived the last Myriad Races Invasion, clawing their way back from the brink of death. Their combat prowess was solid, and their unique statuses made them valuable assets.

The four senior elders had no objections to these two. As long as they continued to grow, they were destined to become pillars of the Stoneheart Horde.

Meanwhile, deep in the dense woods of Thunderwood Forest to the south, a man was running for his life.

Lorne, the young chieftain of the Skytalon Tribe, and his father, Elan, had both bonded with flying beasts. Though their beasts were only hero-level, this was still a rare feat in Thunderwood Forest—harpies excluded, of course.

Thanks to Lord Ariel's guidance, the harpy clan had undergone a remarkable transformation. Every harpy could now soar freely through the skies.

During the last Myriad Races Invasion, Lorne had followed his father Elan's orders and delivered Reynard's sister, Rowena of the Skybond Clan, to the Fireraven Tribe.

But after hearing that Thunderhawk City had fallen, Lorne had been consumed by torment.

On one side was his beloved Rowena; on the other, his revered father, Elan.

Caught in this impossible dilemma, Lorne had nearly lost his mind.

In the end, he made his choice.

A father is irreplaceable. A lover, once lost, can always be replaced.

That was Lorne's decision.

Rowena, the proud yet pitiable woman of the Skybond Clan, was knocked unconscious by Lorne and handed over to Seth, the young chieftain of the Fireraven Tribe.

In exchange, Lorne was released from his semi-imprisoned state and granted freedom to move within Fireraven territory.

But this choice set off a chain of events that forced Lorne to flee northward for his life.

After Lord Ariel's forces occupied various regions of Thunderwood Forest, they discovered the Skytalon Tribe's betrayal. A kill order was issued against the tribe, and Lorne became one of the targets.

If not for a warning from a sympathetic clansman, Lorne would already be dead—or worse, enslaved. Either way, his fate would have been grim.

Compared to Lorne's desperate escape, Rowena's situation was far worse.

In a small wooden cabin, a man from the Fireraven Tribe emerged, whistling as he left. He was the twenty-first man to violate Rowena.

Rowena had been reduced to nothing more than a tool for pleasure, her life now a living hell.

"Brother... where are you?"

"Lorne... where are you?"

Her voice cracked with despair, her words laced with venom.

"I hate you... I hate you all..."

If Orion had been there, he would have realized that Rowena had gone mad.

She lay limp on the ground, her body trembling as she let out a hoarse, broken laugh. Another man from the Fireraven Tribe took her, his actions as brutal as the others before him.

What happens to a woman when she loses all dignity and becomes a plaything for others' cruelty?

Orion didn't know. Lorne didn't know.

At that moment, Lorne wasn't much better off than Rowena. Two hero-level harpies were hot on his trail.

Using his wits, Lorne sent his bonded Wind Eagle flying in the opposite direction to draw the pursuers away. Meanwhile, he slipped into the dense forest, heading north and following the secret markers left by his father, Elan.

As he moved, Lorne caught glimpses of an Alpha-level harpy driving a beast tide. He recognized her—Aella, a member of Lord Ariel's clan. He had once seen her from afar in Thunderhawk City.

Lorne was lucky.

The harpies chasing him lost sight of him near the Wind Eagle and realized they'd been tricked. Instead of killing the Wind Eagle, they let it go and followed it northward, hoping it would lead them back to Lorne.

But Lorne was also unlucky.

The two harpies weren't fools. The freed Wind Eagle became their bait, and they followed it closely, waiting for Lorne to summon it again and fall into their trap.

And so, the pieces fell into place: Lorne, the Wind Eagle, the two harpies, the beast tide, and Aella—all moving northward, as if drawn together by fate.

Chapter 162 Where flowers bloom, bloodshed and slaughter are sure to diminish

Moonshadow Valley, west of the ridge.

The northern and southern sides of the ridge had been carefully planned by Orion, designating them as special zones for the horde. The summit of the ridge became the territory of Elan, where the Skytalon Tribe raised their flying beasts. It was also one of the roosting grounds for the Thunderhawk Rayden.

When the Skytalon Tribe followed Orion to the Black Forest, they brought along two hero-level flying beasts. Naturally, raising flying beasts required cultivating magical plants that served as their primary food source. The areas on both sides of the ridge, adjacent to the Skytalon Tribe's territory, were allocated to the Garland Tribe for growing these magical plants.

Orion believed that the collaboration between the Skytalon Tribe and the Garland Tribe would eventually allow Blackstone City to establish its own magical plant plantations.

However, the Garland Tribe was small, with only three members.

Aside from Violet, the Saintess of the Garland Tribe, there was the mature yet graceful Lady Jasmine, who served as Violet's guardian elder. The third member was Ivy, Violet's maid, who was loyal and adorably naive.

Although Lady Jasmine and Ivy had been enslaved by Delilah, they were ultimately sent to assist Violet in cultivating magical plants and completing enchantment tasks.

Speaking of enchantments, a few days ago, Orion had assigned Violet a massive project: leading Lady Jasmine and Ivy to enchant the walls of Blackstone City. This was no small task, as the city walls were not only tall and long but also constantly under expansion.

"Saintess, is the giant chieftain treating you well?"

At one corner of the city wall, Lady Jasmine, having just completed an enchantment on a section of the wall, approached Violet with concern.

Violet, her face veiled, looked up at the Blackstone City walls, which had been raised another 20 feet. She couldn't help but sigh in awe.

"Elder, this will be our home from now on."

For some reason, as she said this, Violet thought of Orion's fierce passion during their lovemaking. She found herself growing increasingly dependent on him, looking forward to their nights together. Yet, when she thought about Orion's inevitable confrontation with a powerful being like Lord Ariel, a trace of worry crept into her heart.

"Saintess, have you fallen in love with that giant?"

Lady Jasmine's question caught the attention of Ivy, who turned her gaze toward Violet.

Violet stared at the scorched, blood-stained walls, and didn't immediately respond.

After a long silence, during which she successfully inscribed runes onto the wall, Violet finally sighed and spoke in a calm tone.

"I'm no longer a virgin. I've already become his woman. My pussy has been molded to fit his cock."

"What's the difference between hating him and loving him?"

"If loving him makes life a little better, a little freer, and a little happier, then why not love him?"

Lady Jasmine and Ivy stared at Violet in disbelief. If they hadn't heard it with their own ears, they would never have believed such words could come from the once-pure and holy Violet.

"Saintess, are we really just going to..."

The word "submit" never left Lady Jasmine's lips. She couldn't bring herself to associate such a term with the Saintess.

"Elder, we of the Garland Tribe are a peaceful race. Our existence holds great value for every faction."

"Where flowers bloom, bloodshed and slaughter are sure to diminish."

As Violet spoke these words, her expression was one of devout sincerity. This was the faith of the Garland Tribe. Lady Jasmine and Ivy lowered their heads and bowed to Violet, their gestures equally reverent.

Every move made by the three members of the Garland Tribe was observed from afar by Lilith, who stood atop the city walls.

Lilith believed her husband, Orion, was a wise giant. Every woman Orion brought into his tent had something special about her.

Take Lysinthia, for example. Not only did she possess a guardian beast and mastery of petrification magic, but she was also skilled in close combat. Ever since Lysinthia transformed into a Gorgon, even Lilith felt she could no longer fully understand her.

As for the Garland Tribe's Saintess, Violet, beyond her stunning beauty, she possessed the rare ability to perform enchantments. Most importantly, Violet was tasked with cultivating the Blood Mushroom.

Lilith didn't need Orion to remind her of the Blood Mushroom's immense importance to the Stoneheart Horde. This was why Lilith personally left her tent to secretly protect Violet.

Of course, while it was officially for protection, it was also a form of surveillance. After all, Violet hadn't willingly slept with Orion—she had been taken by force.

As for Orion, he was currently busy with other matters.

The tunnel connecting Moonshadow Valley to the Underground Fissure had finally been completed after significant effort from the horde. Orion took the opportunity to transport some of the beast carcasses stored in Moonshadow Valley to the Underground Fissure, providing Lorelia with a large supply of meat.

Accompanied by Lorelia, Orion conducted a thorough inspection of the Bottomless Abyss but found nothing unusual. Afterward, he traveled through the secret passage to the construction site outside the Underground Fissure.

"Chieftain, the progress on the city walls is faster than we anticipated!"

The cannon fodder troops, consisting of large numbers of gnolls and geckos, had been conscripted as laborers, significantly shortening the construction timeline. This delighted Prophet Onyx, who was overseeing the project.

"Prophet, I can't shake the feeling that something's off this year."

Standing on a newly completed section of the wall, Orion gazed into the distant horizon, his expression heavy with thought.

A few days ago, gnoll scouts had reported signs of a beast tide. At the time, Orion hadn't paid much attention, but now, upon reflection, he sensed something unusual.

"Chieftain, isn't a beast tide almost an annual occurrence? What's so strange about it?"

"On the surface, it seems normal, but it doesn't hold up under scrutiny. Besides, this year's beast tide has come earlier than usual."

Orion's gaze grew distant as he began piecing things together.

"Back then, Slagor received intelligence from Arden that Lord Gareth and Lord Ariel had clashed in battle, with Gareth retreating in defeat."

"Slagor speculated that Lord Gareth might have been injured."

"If that's true, then Lord Ariel must have been wounded as well."

Orion shared the details of his conversation with Slagor, causing Prophet Onyx to fall into deep thought.

But Orion wasn't finished. What he said next completely upended Prophet Onyx's understanding of the situation.

"Moreover, during our recent southern invasion, Lord Ariel suffered significant losses, with her territory greatly diminished."

"Logically, she should be focusing on recovery. So why would she provoke a beast tide and risk antagonizing Lord Gareth?"

"Or perhaps it's not provocation but an attempt to further weaken Lord Gareth's forces?"

"What could be Lord Ariel's motive for doing this?"

Sometimes, the weight of leadership forces one to think deeply about every situation.

Sitting in the position of chieftain, Orion couldn't help but analyze and speculate on every piece of information that came his way.

As his thoughts expanded, Orion began to see the bigger picture.

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Black Forest, the southernmost part.

Lorne rode atop the Wind Eagle, flying northward at full speed. The Wind Eagle had already left Thunderwood Forest and entered the Black Forest, but Lorne's heart was still pounding with fear. Two harpies were relentlessly pursuing him from behind.

"Circe, we've already left Thunderwood Forest. Should we keep chasing him?"

One of the harpies hesitated, unsure about continuing the pursuit now that they were outside their territory.

"The chieftain's orders were to hunt down the Skytalon Tribe traitor. He's right in front of us—why wouldn't we chase him?"

"But..."

"No buts. In Lord Gareth's faction, there's only one Alpha-level Storm Vulture. As long as we don't go too far north, we'll be fine."

"Alright."

The two harpies reached an agreement and decided to continue their pursuit of Lorne.

However, two hours later, a piercing eagle cry suddenly echoed from the skies above.

"That's a thunderhawk's call! Why is there an Alpha-level thunderhawk here?"

"Could it be Reynard? But isn't he already dead?"

"Run! The thunderhawk is coming for us!"

"Ahhh—!"

The two hero-level harpies tried to flee, but in the next moment, they were overwhelmed by the crushing pressure of an Alpha-level aura. Losing their balance, they began plummeting toward the ground.

Whoosh!

A dark shadow descended from the sky, tearing the two harpies to shreds.

Thunderhawk Rayden let out another triumphant cry, its voice ringing high and clear. It was exhilarated after killing the intruders who had dared to trespass into its territory.

Orion had once told Rayden that the skies above the Black Forest were its domain, and it was not to allow its authority to be challenged. Of course, the trembling, unsteady Wind Eagle in midair was an exception.

Thunderhawk Rayden recognized the Wind Eagle and its rider, Lorne. It remembered that Lorne was Elan's son, who had once tried to form a contract with it. However, Rayden had dismissed him as unworthy.

With a sharp cry, Thunderhawk Rayden ignored the Wind Eagle and Lorne, ascended higher into the sky, and disappeared into the clouds.

Lorne was overjoyed. The appearance of the thunderhawk meant that his father must be nearby. He hadn't expected that, in the end, it would be the thunderhawk that saved him from the harpies' pursuit.

"Dad, where are you? I've returned!"

In Blackstone City, inside the chieftain's tent, Orion sat at the head of the table, flanked by the four senior elders. The gathering was significant because Lorne, the young chieftain of the Skytalon Tribe, had managed to escape from the Fireraven Tribe.

While this wasn't a major event in itself, what made it important was Elan's claim that his son Lorne had critical intelligence to share.

Moments later, Elan and Lorne were escorted into the tent by the guard, Dace.

"Honorable chieftain, may the glory of the horde always be with you. This is Lorne."

Orion didn't respond immediately. Instead, he scrutinized Lorne.

"Elan, is this the son you've been so eager to reunite with?"

"Yes, chieftain!"

For Elan, Lorne's escape from Thunderwood Forest was nothing short of a miracle.

"So, what is this intelligence you've brought?"

Seeing that Orion was getting straight to the point, Elan quickly signaled to Lorne with his eyes, urging him to speak.

From the moment he entered the tent and saw Orion and the four senior elders, Lorne hadn't dared to lift his head. The overwhelming presence of four Alpha-level powerhouses made it difficult for him to even open his mouth.

"Relax. Since your father has chosen to serve the Stoneheart Horde, that makes us allies."

"And since you've come here to find your father, I assume you've made your choice as well."

"Lorne, we welcome you to the horde."

Orion's voice was calm and steady, carrying a warmth that was disarming. It lacked the sharpness he displayed in battle, making him seem approachable.

Lorne cautiously raised his head, stealing a glance at Orion. Forcing himself to speak, his voice trembled as he began.

"Honorable chieftain, I... I only managed to escape after offering Reynard's sister, Rowena, to Seth of the Fireraven Tribe."

"Rowena is now Seth's woman. She's nothing more than a sex slave, used by anyone who pleases. She'll never gain her freedom, nor will she ever escape."

Before entering the tent, Elan had specifically instructed Lorne to be honest about Rowena. Trembling, Lorne recounted how he had knocked Rowena unconscious and personally handed her over to Seth.

The tent fell silent. Everyone listened intently.

Perhaps because he had been speaking for a while, Lorne's voice gradually steadied.

"Honorable Orion, I can guarantee that by the time we launch our next invasion, Rowena will still be trapped in the Fireraven Tribe. Her life will be one of endless suffering—worse than death."

"When the time comes, I'm willing to personally kill Rowena."

Orion remained silent, his gaze fixed on the downcast Lorne. He found the man to be ruthless. Not only had Lorne handed Rowena over himself, but now he was volunteering to kill her later.

Reynard had killed Orion's sister, and the ultimate act of revenge would be to kill both him and his sister.

As for Lorne, he struck Orion as someone with a treacherous nature.

Still, Orion was curious to see if such a man could be controlled.

"Very well, Lorne. I'll leave the task of killing Rowena to you."

"Now, aside from Rowena, do you have any other intelligence to share?"

Realizing that Orion wasn't dwelling on the matter of Rowena, Lorne breathed a quiet sigh of relief. He quickly continued.

"Honorable chieftain, Lord Ariel of Thunderwood Forest has sent her people to consolidate the territories you invaded."

"A harpy named Aella is driving beasts through Thunderwood Forest. She's Alpha-level."

"Honorable chieftain, the beast tide from Thunderwood Forest will reach the Black Forest in less than seven days."

"Please prepare accordingly!"

This news caused Orion and the four senior elders to exchange glances, their eyes lighting up. It confirmed the suspicions of the gnoll scouts and the succubus intelligence agents.

"Do you have any specific information about the Alpha-level harpy, Aella?"

Lorne shook his head, indicating he didn't know, which left Orion slightly disappointed.

Orion then asked Lorne for details about his escape northward. Lorne answered clearly and methodically, without hesitation.

Chapter 163 You've angered me once again

As Lorne and his father Elan exited the chieftain's tent, Orion's gaze sharpened slightly, like the piercing eyes of an eagle.

Back in Stormrage City, Orion and his forces had encountered an Alpha-level harpy named Thunderwing—a flying powerhouse who had proven to be a formidable opponent. And now, another Alpha-level harpy, Aella, had emerged.

It was undeniable that Lord Ariel's resources and foundation far surpassed those of Lord Gareth.

"The appearance of Aella suggests there are things happening between Lord Gareth and Lord Ariel that we're unaware of."

"With the beast tide approaching, this means..."

Orion paused, thinking for a moment before issuing his orders.

"Starting tomorrow, I'll patrol the southern Black Forest with Rayden."

"Delilah and Lilith will oversee the horde, keeping watch over Blackstone City and the Underground Fissure."

"The cannon fodder troops working on the city walls will temporarily withdraw. Rendall and Onyx will lead them to hunt the beast tide."

"Onyx, Rendall, your role is to maintain order. The actual handling of the beast tide will be delegated to the eight council elders."

Delilah, Prophet Onyx, and Rendall all nodded, accepting their assignments.

"Thundar, keep a detailed record of the council elders' performance during this beast tide. Anyone who performs poorly will be stripped of their position."

Orion was determined to use this beast tide as an opportunity to identify and cultivate true talent for the horde. Only through rigorous selection could the best rise to the top.

Meanwhile, in the northern Abyssal Chasm.

The Abyssal Chasm was Lord Gareth's stronghold. Deep within its depths lay a sealed tributary leading to the deepest abyss.

In the darkness, Lord Gareth opened her eyes, her body radiating Abyssal energy that lingered and refused to dissipate.

"Ridj, summon Arden for me."

"At once, my lord!"

Ridi left the Abyssal Chasm and returned shortly with Arden in tow.

"My lord, you summoned me?"

Lord Gareth glanced at Arden and got straight to the point.

"Lord Ariel has sent her people to drive the beast tide again."

"Arden, take the Storm Vulture and redirect the beast tide back."

"Ensure that the Black Forest, Desert Oasis, and Poison Dragon Swamp suffer minimal losses during this beast tide."

After issuing her orders, Lord Gareth fell silent for a moment before speaking again, her voice slow and deliberate.

"Reynard of Thunderhawk City is dead, but the Skytalon Tribe that served him should still have an Alpha-level thunderhawk."

"The Skytalon Tribe has now submitted to the giants. When you go to the Black Forest, keep an eye out to see if that thunderhawk has bonded with Orion."

This revelation shocked both Ridi and Arden.

Arden, in particular, was stunned. When he had delivered the retreat orders in Thunderwood Forest, he hadn't seen the thunderhawk.

If the thunderhawk had fled at the time, there was nothing more to say. But if it hadn't fled and he hadn't noticed it, there was only one possibility: the thunderhawk had contract with Orion and was being hidden, ready to strike at his enemies when least expected.

The thought sent cold sweat dripping down Arden's back.

"Understood, my lord!"

Arden accepted the task. Just as he was about to leave the Abyssal Chasm, Lord Gareth's voice rang out again.

"Inform Soraya, Orion, and Slagor that once the dark beast tides of winter end, we will face an invasion from the northern lords. Tell them to prepare in advance."

The Abyssal Chasm fell into an eerie silence. After a long pause, the sound of Ridi and Arden swallowing nervously broke the stillness.

"My lord, are you certain the northern monsters will invade us next year?"

It was Ridi who spoke, his expression grim. As one of Lord Gareth's most trusted aides, he wanted to confirm the severity of the situation. It was clear that an invasion from the north would not be easy to repel.

"This time, Ariel and I fought fiercely, and we both sustained injuries. She will undoubtedly spread the news."

"The northern enemies will seize this opportunity to raid us."

"Prepare yourselves. It's best not to leave the Abyssal Chasm."

"When the time comes, I can at most hold off the Icebound Lord Jorik. As for his icefield monsters, they will be free to rampage through our territory."

Hearing this, Arden froze in place, stunned by the gravity of the situation.

"Go now. Redirect the beast tide as quickly as possible to minimize our losses. Perhaps next year will be a little easier."

At the southern border of the Black Forest.

Orion, riding atop Thunderhawk Rayden, had arrived two days ahead of schedule. The border region was still calm, with no signs of the beast tide yet.

Orion's purpose here wasn't to redirect the beast tide. For the Stoneheart Horde, the beast tide was a vital source of food. Orion would never cut off his own supply chain.

Instead, his goal was to intercept and kill the Alpha-level harpy, Aella.

A flying Alpha-level opponent would be the perfect test of Orion's coordination with Thunderhawk Rayden.

However, it seemed that Orion's plan might not come to fruition. After some thought, he directed Thunderhawk Rayden to fly westward.

The western region was the desert, Soraya's territory. Orion was curious to see what kind of beasts could invade such a harsh and unique environment.

Two days later, at the border between the desert and the forest, Orion spotted a group of massive sand serpents fleeing toward the desert. Both above and below ground, the serpents moved in droves.

Sensing Thunderhawk Rayden's presence, the sand serpents grew even more agitated, quickening their pace as they fled into the desert.

"Something's not right. These sand serpents are fleeing northward, which means they were being driven before this."

Orion quickly realized what was happening.

"Rayden, gain altitude. We're heading back toward the Black Forest!"

The lack of beast tide activity in the Black Forest earlier, combined with the movement of the sand serpents, revealed something crucial: Aella was driving the beast tide from west to east.

This meant that Orion could wait for Aella to arrive within his territory.

Based on the current situation, he estimated that he would encounter Aella within the next two days.

"No, I can't intercept Aella in the Black Forest. I need to hunt her in the Poison Dragon Swamp!"

The Stoneheart Horde needed the beast tide to secure food supplies. Orion couldn't disrupt Aella's efforts; he needed her to successfully drive the beast tide into the Black Forest.

Only after the beast tide reached its destination would it be the perfect time to strike.

"Rayden, head east. Our target is the Poison Dragon Swamp!"

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Three days later, in the area where the Poison Dragon Swamp bordered Thunderwood Forest, Orion stood atop Thunderhawk Rayden, hidden within the clouds, drifting silently with the wind.

Below, near the ground, the target Orion had been waiting for—harpy Aella—was already locked in battle with the approaching Arden.

Arden's expression was grim, his mood sour. The opponent before him was someone he knew all too well.

Lord Gareth and Lord Ariel had been at odds for years, and Arden and Aella had crossed paths and clashed numerous times. In all their previous encounters, neither had managed to gain the upper hand.

This time was no different. Arden had the assistance of his Storm Vulture, which kept him from falling behind. However, Aella's speed and agility gave her a significant advantage.

"Hahaha... Arden, you useless fool! After all these years, you've made no progress at all!"

"If I were Lord Gareth, I'd pluck every feather off that pathetic Storm Vulture of yours and roast it for dinner!"

Harpy Aella laughed wildly, her words sharp and cutting, each one aimed to mock and provoke Arden.

"Damn harpy! I'll tear that filthy mouth of yours apart!"

Arden raised his staff, chanting an incantation. A cloud of black mist poured from his mouth, transforming into a bat-like abyssal creature that flew straight toward Aella.

"A mere hero-level abyssal bat? You think that'll scare me? Die!"

Aella spread her wings, unleashing a razor-sharp wind blade that sliced the abyssal bat cleanly in two.

"Arden, you're such a disappointment!"

Aella's taunts didn't anger Arden. They had fought too many times for him to be provoked so easily. Instead, he continued chanting, pointing his staff at Aella.

"Abyssal Chains, rise!"

Clang... clang...

The sound of chains clashing echoed through the air. The abyssal bat, which had just been cut apart, dissolved into two masses of Abyssal energy. These quickly reformed into a chain that shot toward Aella, coiling around her.

The chain was covered in glowing runes, radiating energy that made Aella frown.

This Abyssal magic was something Arden had never used before. Clearly, it was a trump card he had kept hidden.

"Aella, today I'll make sure you die here in the Poison Dragon Swamp!"

The chain twisted and coiled like a massive serpent, spinning rapidly. In no time, Aella was surrounded by the shadowy chains, forming a cage around her. She was now like a bird trapped in a cage.

"Thunderstorm Cyclone!"

Zzzzz... zzzzz...

Aella stopped underestimating her opponent. She channeled the full power of the lightning and wind elements within her body. In the blink of an eye, a storm crackling with lightning formed around her, expanding outward in an attempt to shred the Abyssal chains.

The clash of crackling lightning and grinding chains created a deafening cacophony.

In midair, the Abyssal chains tightened, while the thunderstorm cyclone expanded outward. The collision of these two forces caused the surrounding weather to shift dramatically.

Even Orion, hidden high above in the clouds, felt the effects of the battle. Thunderhawk Rayden ascended to its maximum altitude to avoid the turbulence.

Orion looked down at the battle between Arden and Aella, captivated by the spectacle. He had never witnessed a fight like this before.

It was clear that both Arden and Aella were Alpha-level mages. Arden was an Abyssal summoner, which Orion already knew. Aella, on the other hand, appeared to be a dual-element mage specializing in wind and lightning.

"I wonder what a battle between Legendary-level beings would look like," Orion muttered to himself as he continued to observe.

Arden stared intently at the clashing chains and storm, his eyes fixed on Aella within the cyclone. He believed this was his chance—a rare opportunity to kill Aella.

Determined, Arden made his next move.

He raised his staff and plunged it into the body of his Storm Vulture.

In an instant, Arden's magic flowed through the staff and into the Storm Vulture. The creature let out a piercing screech, its feathers bristling as a ring of black plumes sprouted around its neck.

The black feathers detached, transforming into countless blades that shot toward Aella's thunderstorm cyclone.

Thud, thud, thud!

Inside the storm, Aella had no room to maneuver. The black blades struck her directly, embedding themselves in her body before exploding.

Despite the devastating attack, Aella didn't fall. Instead, a bolt of lightning erupted from her forehead, shattering the black blades and breaking free from the cage of chains and storm.

Without saying a word, Aella turned and fled at full speed.

Arden, standing atop his Storm Vulture, didn't give chase. He had recognized the aura of that lightning—it was a projection of Lord Ariel's will.

Simply put, Arden lacked the courage to confront Lord Ariel's will projection.

Watching Aella's retreating figure, Arden sighed heavily. With a dark expression, he guided his exhausted Storm Vulture back toward the Black Forest.

High above, Orion, perched on Rayden, was unfazed.

Orion had no qualms about angering Lord Ariel once again.

Without hesitation, he directed Thunderhawk Rayden to pursue Aella.

Cry!

As they neared the Thunderwood Forest, a piercing eagle cry echoed through the skies. Thunderhawk Rayden folded its wings and dove like a meteor.

"That's... a thunderhawk?"

"Reynard?"

"No, the aura is unfamiliar. Who is it?"

Boom!

Thunderhawk Rayden unleashed a bolt of lightning that struck Aella mid-flight. Already gravely injured, Aella was hit hard and plummeted toward the ground.

Even so, Orion hurled a trident after her, ensuring she wouldn't escape.

Crash!

The impact created a massive crater in the ground. Orion leapt from Thunderhawk Rayden's back, cautiously approaching the site where Aella had fallen.

"Giant, you've angered me once again!"

Sure enough, the unmistakable voice of Lord Ariel echoed from the crater, filled with fury.

At the same time, Aella's body slowly rose to its feet.

Chapter 164 Divine curse

"Go to hell!"

Orion's purpose in pursuing Aella was clear: to kill both her and the will projection of Lord Ariel. He had no interest in wasting words.

Gripping his trident tightly, Orion activated Titan's Rage and Swift Charge, launching himself forward like a thunderbolt.

Boom!

Aella, her expression cold and emotionless, slowly reached behind her back and tore off her tattered wings. Holding them like weapons, she swung one of the wings, deflecting Orion's trident.

"Damn giant! You've cost me two of my kin!"

Orion stared at Aella's battered body, scorched and broken by the earlier lightning strike. Or rather, he stared at what was left of her. It was clear that Aella had already died during the thunderhawk's attack. What now controlled her body was Lord Ariel's will projection.

A bloodthirsty glint appeared in Orion's eyes. He was determined to destroy Lord Ariel's will projection. The last time he had defeated one, it had dropped an Alpha-level weapon.

What would it drop this time? Orion couldn't help but feel a surge of anticipation.

"WAAAGH!"

Orion charged again, exhilarated by the challenge of fighting a Legendary-level will projection. The thrill of potentially defeating an opponent far above his level filled him with a savage joy.

But just as he was about to strike, Orion froze mid-charge, his momentum abruptly halted.

Crackle! Crackle!

Aella's body disintegrated into a burst of lightning, dissolving into nothingness. The crackling electricity coalesced into a shimmering, ethereal figure—a projection of Lord Ariel's will.

"Though Aella's body didn't contain enough lightning energy, it will suffice!"

"Die, you ignorant and insignificant giant!"

The projection flickered and dispersed, transforming into six spheres of lightning that shot toward Orion from different directions.

In that moment of life and death, Orion had no room to retreat.

His Ghostbone Armor and Ice Armor materialized instantly, encasing him in layers of protection. Raising his trident, he swung it at the incoming lightning spheres.

But the next moment left Orion stunned, his face etched with disbelief.

The trident passed through the lightning spheres without resistance. There was no explosion, no sound—nothing.

Even as the spheres made contact with his body, Orion felt no pain.

But then, before his eyes, his Ice Armor shattered instantly.

Next, his*Ghostbone Armor** began to decay, crumbling away at a visible rate.

And then it was his own body. The six lightning spheres merged into him, tearing his flesh apart. His skin and muscles peeled away, as if dissolving into the air like fragile bubbles.

The Titan's Heart within Orion's chest began to beat furiously, attempting to counteract the damage. But before it could take effect, the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms etched on Orion's body activated. The curse's intricate floral patterns spread rapidly across his skin, pulling his disintegrating flesh back together and anchoring it in place.

"What... what kind of power is this?"

"Damn it, this is a divine curse!"

"You lunatic! What filthy thing did you do to provoke a deity and get cursed by one?"

Lord Ariel's voice was shrill and hysterical. The curse's power was so overwhelming that it began to pull her will projection into Orion's body. The six lightning spheres, along with her projection, were absorbed into Orion's flesh.

In an instant, Lord Ariel's will projection was obliterated.

The process was swift and bizarre, leaving no trace of her presence.

No one could say how much time had passed before the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms finally calmed. The floral patterns receded, shrinking back to their original form near Orion's heart.

Orion regained control of his body, his movements no longer restricted. Looking down at the curse's markings, he noticed that four more flowers had bloomed within the pattern.

"What... just happened?"

Orion had witnessed the curse's power firsthand, watching as it pulled in and destroyed Lord Ariel's will projection. The strange and terrifying nature of the curse left him shaken, a cold chill running through his entire body.

"Those lightning spheres... was that the attack of a Legendary-level being?"

"And the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms... it actually protected me from that?"

"But... does this mean I'm now even closer to death?"

Orion tightened his grip on his trident, feeling its familiar weight and power. Yet, in the face of such an incomprehensible attack, that power felt insignificant—like dust in the wind.

Scanning the ground, Orion saw no sign of a survivor's chest or any loot from Lord Ariel's will projection. Nothing had been left behind.

This pursuit had been a loss. Not only had Orion gained nothing, but he had also come dangerously close to death.

Summoning Thunderhawk Rayden, Orion climbed onto its back and circled the area one last time. Finding nothing, he finally gave the order.

"Rayden, let's head back."

Thunderhawk Rayden let out a low cry and turned toward Moonshadow Valley.

As they flew, Orion couldn't stop examining his body. He scrutinized every inch of his skin, searching for any abnormalities.

But there was nothing. No visible changes, no lingering effects.

In the end, Orion's attention returned to the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms on his chest.

"A curse from a deity... why does it have the power to pull in and destroy a will projection?"

"And from Lord Ariel's reaction, she seemed to fear this curse..."

Orion stared at the floral pattern near his heart, his unease growing.

Anyone with a ticking time bomb inside their body would feel uneasy, and Orion was no exception.

Previously, when the curse had bloomed a single flower, Orion hadn't paid it much mind. He believed that within a century, he would ascend to become a Titan God, rendering the curse irrelevant.

But this time, the curse had bloomed four flowers at once, reducing his lifespan by four years.

This meant the curse's hundred-year limit wasn't fixed. It could accelerate under certain uncontrollable circumstances.

Although the curse had indirectly saved Orion's life this time, it left him deeply worried.

The fear of not being in full control of his own body was indescribable, leaving Orion restless and uneasy.

In Thunderwood Forest, atop Thunderpeak Mountain.

A streak of lightning flashed across Lord Ariel's forehead, leaving a blood-red wound.

"What is this?"

Lord Ariel's expression was one of confusion, but realization quickly dawned.

"Aella is dead?"

"And the will projection I left in her body... it's gone too?"

Lord Ariel stood, her face filled with disbelief.

"Strange. Why didn't my will projection send back any information?"

"Could it be that Lord Gareth personally killed her?"

"Gareth isn't injured? That's impossible!"

"But..."

Lord Ariel couldn't make sense of it. Even if Lord Gareth had personally killed Aella, she was confident her will projection would have transmitted some information back to her.

But this time, there was nothing. It was as if her will projection had vanished into thin air.

This was something Lord Ariel had never experienced before, and it left her with a faint sense of unease.

Chapter 165 I want you to fuck me hard

Moonshadow Valley, Blackstone City.

Arden circled above Blackstone City on his Storm Vulture, his gaze fixed on Delilah, who stood atop the city walls. His expression was uncertain.

"Where is your chieftain, Orion?"

"I have a message from Lord Gareth that requires his immediate attention."

To be honest, the growing strength of the Black Forest left Arden deeply unsettled. Although only one Alpha-level powerhouse was visible, Arden could clearly sense another unfamiliar Alpha-level aura emanating from one of the tents within Blackstone City.

What made it even more shocking was that the Alpha-level succubus standing before him, Delilah, had not been at this level during the southern Myriad Races Invasion.

"Two new Alpha-level powerhouses in the Black Forest?"

"This is unbelievable!"

"How are they achieving this?"

Orion's absence made Arden hesitant to descend. He was well aware that his only advantage here was the Storm Vulture beneath him.

"Messenger, the beast tide in the south has shown unusual activity. Chieftain Orion has gone to patrol the territory and investigate the situation," Delilah replied calmly.

Arden believed her. He studied Delilah for a moment, debating whether to leave. If he flew south to redirect the beast tide into the Black Forest, there was a high chance he would encounter Orion along the way.

Cry!

Suddenly, a sharp eagle cry pierced the air from the distance, shrill and commanding.

The Storm Vulture beneath Arden let out a low, uneasy whimper, clearly nervous. In the skies, a thunderhawk's strength surpassed that of a Storm Vulture by a significant margin.

Arden reached out to calm his mount. The thunderhawk's appearance didn't surprise him—Lord Gareth had warned him about it beforehand. Though startled, Arden managed to maintain his composure.

Moments later, Thunderhawk Rayden approached Blackstone City, letting out another piercing cry, a clear warning to the Storm Vulture that this was its territory.

"Messenger, you've come a long way. Why not join me in Blackstone City for a drink?"

Orion's voice rang out, hearty and confident, betraying none of the unease he felt inside.

Arden's pupils dilated slightly as he stared at Orion atop the thunderhawk.

"Lord Gareth was right. The thunderhawk has indeed contracted with this giant!"

Arden marveled silently before shaking his head and responding in a polite tone.

"Chieftain Orion, you're too kind. Lord Gareth has tasked me with redirecting the beast tide, and I must act quickly."

Orion laughed heartily, his voice brimming with confidence.

"Messenger, rest assured. The Black Forest has its own way of dealing with the beast tide. There's no need for redirection."

Arden nodded, already suspecting Orion's intentions. The Stoneheart Horde, now strong and well-fed, likely saw the beast tide as a source of food rather than a threat.

"Chieftain Orion, after the winter dark beast tides, the northern lords will invade this region. Lord Gareth asked me to warn you to prepare in advance."

Arden's tone was grave and serious, leaving no room for doubt.

This time, it was Orion's turn to be shocked. His expression darkened, and he fell silent.

"Is this true?"

After a long pause, Orion's voice was low and hoarse as he sought confirmation. His sharp gaze locked onto Arden, carrying an unspoken threat of violence if the information proved false.

"This is a direct message from Lord Gareth herself," Arden replied firmly.

Orion fell silent once more.

After a moment, he bowed slightly toward Arden.

"Thank you for the warning, Messenger. Please convey to Lord Gareth that the Stoneheart Horde will be prepared."

Arden nodded, studying Orion for a moment before guiding his Storm Vulture to turn eastward toward the desert.

It wasn't until the Storm Vulture had become a black speck on the horizon that Orion directed Thunderhawk Rayden to descend into Blackstone City.

"Welcome back, my dear chieftain!"

Delilah approached immediately, her voice warm and affectionate. Orion nodded and led her directly to the chieftain's tent.

As soon as they entered, Orion pulled the curtain down behind them. Before Delilah could react, he turned and pulled her into his arms, tearing her clothes apart with a single motion.

Delilah froze for a moment, her eyes wide with surprise. In her memory, this was the first time Orion had been so aggressive with her.

She didn't know what had come over him, but the next moment, she willingly knelt and began to kiss Orion's cock, surrendering herself completely to him.

After their passionate lovemaking, Orion held Delilah tightly in his arms, their bodies pressed together. Only now did Orion's mind finally begin to calm.

The fear brought on by the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms seemed to fade into the background, and the looming threat of the northern invasion felt momentarily distant.

"Orion, should I summon Rendall and Onyx back?"

Delilah quickly noticed that something was troubling Orion. However, instead of pressing him for details, she offered to call back the two Alpha-level powerhouses to provide him with a sense of security.

Orion shook his head without speaking. He continued to hold Delilah tightly, savoring this brief moment of peace.

After a long while, Orion finally released her and gestured for Delilah to dress him.

"Has anything happened in the horde while I was away?"

Orion asked as Delilah helped him dress.

"Everything is fine within the horde. The southern hunting parties have already begun transporting beast carcasses back to the city."

Orion nodded. Once he was fully dressed, he pulled Delilah into his arms and kissed her forehead deeply.

"Keep today's events a secret."

"Also, send a message to Rendall and Onyx. Inform them about the northern icefield monsters' invasion next year. Have them return immediately after finishing their hunts to attend a council meeting."

Delilah's voice was soft and reassuring.

"I understand, my dear Orion."

Orion nodded and left the chieftain's tent with steady steps.

At the southern gate of Blackstone City, Orion found Violet working on enchanting the city walls. She was accompanied by Lady Jasmine and Ivy of the Garland Tribe.

Ignoring Lady Jasmine and Ivy entirely, Orion walked straight to Violet and scooped her up into his arms.

Violet's face turned bright red as she avoided the gazes of the giant guards, her guardian elder, and her maid.

"Let's go back to the tent. I want to make love to you right now."

"Okay..."

Violet nodded softly, burying her face in Orion's chest.

And so, Orion carried Violet boldly and confidently back to the northern section of Blackstone City, heading straight for the chieftain's tent.

Violet's heart began to pound wildly, the indescribable ecstasy she felt when making love to Orion resurfacing. It was as if a volcano inside her had suddenly erupted, and her desires burned uncontrollably within her.

Orion never imagined that the former saintess had such a lascivious side. Even before Orion had removed his clothes, her vagina tightened, and a gush of arousal welled up, clearly wetting her panties.

Orion looked at her as if he knew exactly what she was thinking, suddenly reaching out to tear off her panties.

Violet's body trembled violently. She felt both anticipation and shame, her legs entwining around Orion's waist while her feet continuously moved around his testicles. "Darling, why are you so forward today..."

Orion didn't respond. He lowered his head and kissed Violet's mouth fervently, one hand stroking her two breasts back and forth.

Meanwhile, his other hand reached between her thighs, sliding and caressing her labia and the folds of her sex. Violet's arousal surged even higher, moaning in her mouth, her hips instinctively thrusting, and arousal flowed uncontrollably from her vagina. She began to crave Orion's large cock penetrating her.

"Ah~~ ah~~ oh my..."

Violet couldn't help but let out loud, sweet moans.

Hearing Violet's moans, Orion grabbed her hands, guiding her to lie face down on him.

Violet complied eagerly, her hands immediately clutching Orion's strong back tightly, as if fearing he might run away. Her legs were already raised high, her buttocks thrusting upward in anticipation of Orion's large cock.

She continuously kissed Orion's mouth, losing all semblance of the saintess image. She murmured and moaned, "Oh... dear Orion... fuck me... oh... I love you... I want you to fuck me hard... oh... quickly... quickly... oh..."

Responding to Violet's pleas, Orion thrust his large cock into her vagina and began to move powerfully.

With each thrust from Orion, her sweet moans grew louder, and the pleasure intensified.

Even though he had just made love to Delilah, Orion remained vigorous, quickly bringing Violet to climax.

Violet's body twisted and contorted, her moans growing louder, but Orion showed no signs of stopping...

It wasn't until Violet reached her twentieth climax that Orion ejaculated inside her.

Violet tightly held onto Orion's body, her legs wrapped around his hips, allowing Orion's large cock to remain inside her vagina.

Orion gazed at Violet's exquisite beauty and then asked in a low voice, "Did you see it?"

Violet didn't respond. While making love to Orion earlier, she had noticed a change in the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms on Orion's chest.

"Master, what did you do to deepen the curse?"

Violet had recovered from the pleasure of climax and was now filled with worry for Orion. Her voice trembled, and she felt a bit frightened inside.

Orion thought for a moment before truthfully telling Violet about his battle with Lord Ariel's will projection.

After hearing this, Violet was stunned and confused.

In the end, Orion didn't get the answers he wanted from Violet.

"Master, I'm sorry. It's all my fault!"

Violet was very concerned about Orion. The deepening of the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms meant that Orion couldn't truly live a hundred years.

"It's alright, it's just a minor change. This won't be difficult for me!"

Orion spoke in a deep, confident tone. He couldn't let his woman see his inner fear and terror.

Instead, Orion wanted his woman to feel that he was their greatest support.

"Dear Orion, there's a rumor throughout the horde that you favor Violet. Is this true?"

Lilith opened the tent flap and walked in with Lysinthia, a faint smile on her face.

The naked Violet heard the sound and swiftly hid inside the animal skin, not daring to look up at Lilith.

"My Lilith, you're back!"

"Is everything normal with the underground fissure?"

"Now, take off your clothes."

Orion stood up again, his cock erect once more, becoming big and hard.

Chapter 166 Smart move

After exhausting the three women to the point of deep sleep, Orion finally stopped, his mind turning toward the Survivor's Platform in search of answers. However, as he habitually checked his status panel, his eyes widened in shock.

- Strength: 4510/5000 (+9220)

- Agility: 4256/5000 (+236)

- Intelligence: 4501/5000 (+200)

- Constitution: 4225/5000 (+200)

- Resistance: 25% (against all negative effects)

- Bloodline Purity: 70% (Titan)

Orion noticed that all his attributes had increased. Strength, Agility, Intelligence, and Constitution had each risen by 500 points, all surpassing the 4000 threshold. Even his resistance had improved, climbing from 20% to 25%.

But what truly shocked him was the drop in his Bloodline Purity, which had decreased from 72% to 70%. This was a change Orion found hard to believe.

To confirm, he rubbed his eyes.

It wasn't an illusion.

Staring at his status panel, Orion couldn't help but think of the will projection that had been forcibly fused into his flesh.

"Could this increase in stats be related to the fusion of the will projection?"

"Does absorbing a will projection enhance my overall abilities?"

"Then why did my bloodline purity decrease?"

A flood of questions filled Orion's mind, leaving him momentarily dazed and unsure of what to do.

However, the significant boost to his stats brought him a sense of calm. Taking a deep breath, Orion focused his mind and entered the Survivor's Platform, initiating a trade with his old acquaintance, Arthas.

From his collection, Orion retrieved a Darkflame Stone the size of an egg and sent it over as a trade offering.

"Hulk, my friend, you don't give gifts without a reason. What do you need from me this time?"

Arthas didn't hesitate to accept the trade. To him, the Darkflame Stone was essentially free loot.

Seeing Arthas accept the offering, Orion skipped any pretense and got straight to the point.

"What do you know about divine curses?"

After sending the message, Orion felt a twinge of anxiety. Among his network of contacts, Arthas was the only major figure he could think of. If anyone could help him understand and possibly remove the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms, it would be Arthas.

"Divine curse? Are we talking about a demigod-level curse or a full god-level curse?"

Arthas's reply came quickly, but his question left Orion momentarily stunned.

"I'm not sure," Orion admitted honestly. He truly didn't know whether the Flower Goddess who cursed him was a demigod or a god.

After sending his response, Orion waited in silence. Arthas didn't reply immediately, leaving Orion to sit in uneasy anticipation.

Necro Realm, Bone Throne.

Arthas sat on his throne, momentarily stunned. The mention of a divine curse stirred ripples in his otherwise calm mind.

"This guy... he's even bolder than I thought!"

"Still at Alpha-level, and he's already provoking god-level entities?"

"Impressive courage!"

"But how should I handle this divine curse issue...? I'll need to think carefully..."

Blackstone City, Chieftain's Tent.

Just as Orion was about to drift off to sleep, Arthas's reply finally arrived.

"We'll discuss the divine curse later. First, let's talk about the Lord's Stone."

"Hulk, my old friend, what can you offer in exchange for the Lord's Stone?"

Orion's eyes narrowed as he read the message.

Truthfully, Orion had two goals in reaching out to Arthas. The first was to find a way to deal with the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms. The second was to obtain the Lord's Stone, a key item for advancing to Legendary level. With all his attributes now exceeding 4000, it was time to prepare for his breakthrough.

What Orion hadn't expected was for Arthas to immediately guess his second objective.

"It seems the divine curse tipped him off to my urgency to reach Legendary level," Orion thought. "I just hope his conditions aren't too outrageous."

In earlier conversations, Arthas had hinted that trading for the Lord's Stone would come with conditions. This was why Orion hadn't sought it out sooner—he feared being taken advantage of. After all, his relationship with Arthas wasn't built on complete trust.

Orion stared at Arthas's message, then gathered all the C- to A-grade crystal cores in his possession and sent them over. He also included most of his Darkflame Stones, keeping only the largest one for himself.

"Other than my personal belongings, this is everything I have!"

Orion couldn't help but feel like he was taking a huge gamble, trusting Arthas with his entire fortune.

"If this isn't enough, name your terms!"

Necro Realm, Bone Throne.

Arthas stared at the massive haul of crystal cores and Darkflame Stones Orion had sent over. Even as a seasoned Legendary-level powerhouse, he couldn't help but gasp.

"How many factions has this guy plundered? How many beasts has he killed?"

What surprised Arthas even more was that Orion had sent these items without any safeguards. If Arthas wanted, he could simply take everything without fulfilling his end of the deal.

Looking at the contract scroll in his left hand, Arthas suddenly felt a pang of guilt.

Hahaha...

Arthas burst into laughter, his voice echoing through the Bone Throne. It was a genuine, hearty laugh.

"How long has it been... since I've experienced this kind of trust?"

"Does this guy really believe in my integrity?"

"Or is Hulk just a pure fool, or maybe a bit naive?"

Whatever the case, Arthas felt compelled to reciprocate. Something about this exchange had stirred a long-dormant part of him.

With a wave of his hand, Arthas initiated a trade, sending a radiant, star-like stone to Orion.

Continue your journey on empire

Blackstone City, Chieftain's Tent.

Orion accepted the trade, his eyes lighting up as he gazed at the glowing Lord's Stone in his hands.

- [Lord's Stone]

- Type: Transcendent Item

- Use: Territory construction, rank advancement.

This was it—the key to advancing to Legendary level. Orion had finally obtained it.

"Hulk, your actions just now surprised me!"

"The Lord's Stone is yours, but I have one condition."

"When you feel ready, let me know. I'll teach you the sacrificial ritual to open a portal to your continent for me."

Reading Arthas's message, Orion's heartbeat quickened.

A sacrificial ritual. Another continent. A portal.

The implications were clear. Arthas intended to bring his undead forces to Orion's world.

"That's insane!"

Orion could feel the weight of Arthas's ambition and dominance—a force that sought to conquer and rule.

The condition left Orion conflicted. If the undead truly descended upon his world, it would undoubtedly lead to chaos and bloodshed. And if their interests clashed, how would their so-called friendship hold up?

"No wonder he said to wait until I'm ready. He's leaving the decision in my hands."

"Smart move, Arthas. Very smart."

After a long period of contemplation, Orion finally agreed to Arthas's condition.

The key was that the decision of when and where to open the portal remained with Orion, giving him room to maneuver.

"I accept your condition, but the timing will be up to me."

Necro Realm, Bone Throne.

Arthas nodded in satisfaction as he read Orion's reply.

"Interesting."

Whether Orion's agreement was genuine or not didn't matter much to Arthas. The Lord's Stone had already been traded, and he no longer held any leverage.

The condition was more of a test—a test of their budding friendship.

For someone like Arthas, who had lived for countless years, concepts like friendship and trust were rare luxuries. He didn't mind using this opportunity to see if such a bond could exist.

If Orion proved trustworthy, they could both gain a valuable ally. If not, the loss would be Orion's, as he would forfeit access to Arthas's power and connections.

Satisfied, Arthas shifted the conversation back to the divine curse.

"Hulk, divine curses aren't as terrifying as you think, but they're not as simple either."

"The most direct way to break a divine curse is to kill the god who cast it."

"Other methods include suppression, expulsion, absorption, fusion, or purification. Each approach requires a different strategy."

"Remember, divine curses are powered by divine energy, which comes from faith energy."

"You're on the right track. To deal with the curse effectively, you should first advance to Legendary level and gain control over faith energy."

"Once you've reached that point, the choice of how to handle the curse will be yours."

Orion read Arthas's message over and over, committing every word to memory.

What had once seemed like an uncontrollable force now appeared manageable. Even if he couldn't remove the curse entirely, suppression was within reach.

With this newfound understanding, Orion's confidence returned. His path forward was clear.

"Thank you!"

After sending his reply, Orion exited the Survivor's Platform. His eyes shone brightly, filled with determination and a renewed hunger for power.

Unable to sleep, Orion turned to Lilith, gently shaking her awake. She opened her rose-red eyes, looking at him with curiosity.

"I can't sleep. I'm going for a walk."

Lilith nodded, rising to help Orion dress. Without a word, she donned her cloak and followed him out of the tent.

Walking beside him, she silently took his arm, her intentions clear.

Orion didn't explain, leading her toward the distant city walls.

Inside the chieftain's tent, Lysinthia and Violet both opened their eyes. Neither woman moved.

Lysinthia, having been with Orion for so long, could sense his unease. She didn't know the cause, but she could tell something was wrong.

Saintess Violet, on the other hand, was fully aware of the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms and its recent changes. Her concern for Orion ran deep.

Chapter 167 Youngling Rolan

The next morning, Orion appeared at the other side of Blackstone City in the chieftain's tent, looking refreshed and brimming with energy. Any lingering worries about himself had completely vanished.

"How are Rendall and Onyx doing?"

Delilah stared at Orion for a long moment, unable to pinpoint what had changed about him. Yet, she couldn't shake the feeling that her man had transformed—his presence was sharper, his confidence and charisma radiating from within.

"Why are you staring at me? Is there something wrong with me?"

Delilah's eyes glimmered with a hint of seduction, her voice soft and alluring.

"I think you've become even more attractive," she said, her gaze flickering with desire before she quickly suppressed it.

"Rendall and Onyx's hunting activities are progressing smoothly," she continued. "There have been a few injuries, but they were caused by recklessness. The cannon fodder troops are steadily bringing back a constant supply of prey every day."

Orion nodded, his gaze drifting toward the city walls outside the tent. A wave of emotion washed over him.

In the past, Moonshadow Valley had to rely on its bloodline warriors to hold the stone walls against beast tides, barely surviving each wave. But now, with the construction of fortified walls, the horde had a solid defense and the confidence to face both beast tides and large-scale assaults.

This year was even more remarkable. Tens of thousands of cannon fodder troops and bloodline warriors had taken the initiative to strike out, preventing the beast tide from even approaching the dense forests near Blackstone City.

The difference between now and the past was stark.

Blackstone City itself was thriving—peaceful, prosperous, and full of life.

Orion felt a deep sense of pride. This was his creation, his legacy.

"How's the task I assigned you coming along?"

Delilah smiled, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear with a graceful motion, her demeanor exuding charm.

"Don't worry, my dear chieftain. I've already sent elite teams to accompany the hunting squads. They'll ensure we collect plenty of beast blood."

Orion nodded. The beast blood served multiple purposes. First, it was essential for Violet's cultivation of the Blood Mushroom. Second, it would save Aerin the trouble of procuring beast blood herself, reducing overall resource consumption.

The truth was, Orion's stockpile of crystal cores had been completely depleted, and he needed to cut costs wherever possible.

Lastly, the beast blood would serve as an excellent lure for the dark creatures during the upcoming dark beast tides.

"What about the walls at the underground fissure? How's the progress there?"

Delilah shot Orion a playful glare. She had been informed by her subordinates that Orion and Lilith had spent the entire night making love on the city walls, only stopping at dawn.

Surely, he had seen the progress for himself.

Still, Delilah dutifully reported the current situation.

"With the cannon fodder troops reassigned, progress has slowed. The only ones still working are Prophet Onyx's Obsidian Golem clan."

Orion pondered for a moment before speaking.

"Go find Lorelia. Tell her to get her little spiders out to help. She can't just laze around in the underground fissure all day."

Delilah nodded but hesitated slightly. In the entire Stoneheart Horde, only Orion and Lilith could command Lorelia effectively.

"Have Lilith handle it. She can monitor the construction site while she's at it," Orion added, noticing Delilah's reluctance.

"And take some time to speak with Violet. Ask her when the enchantments on the completed walls will be finished and urge her to speed up the process."

"As for the magical plant fields on the western ridge..."

Orion was in high spirits this morning, personally overseeing every aspect of the horde's operations, big and small, and making numerous decisions.

Just as he was about to continue, Dace entered the tent, bowing respectfully before delivering his report.

"Chieftain, the youngling Rolan is outside, shouting to see you!"

Rolan?

Orion paused for a moment before his eyes lit up with recognition.

"Did that youngling pull out my trident?"

"Yes, chieftain!"

Dace nodded, his expression tinged with envy. That trident had been Orion's personal weapon, a rare and precious item.

"Haha, looks like I'll be taking on a disciple!"

Orion stood up and strode out of the tent, eager to meet the young Rolan.

Outside the chieftain's tent, Rolan was dragging the Bloodthirsty Trident by its tail end, using all his strength to inch it forward step by step.

The youngling shouted loudly, demanding to see Orion, while a crowd of younglings from various clans(tribe) gathered around, cheering him on.

Thud!

The moment Rolan saw Orion step out of the tent, he dropped the trident and ran toward him with all his might.

"Chieftain... Honorable Chieftain... Rolan did it! Rolan pulled out your trident!"

Orion smiled warmly, nodding as he walked over to the Bloodthirsty Trident. With a simple flick of his foot, the trident flew into his hand.

"Starting tomorrow, come to my tent every morning to practice with the trident. If you skip even one session, don't bother coming to see me again!"

"As for this Bloodthirsty Trident, I'll return it to you once you've fully mastered its use."

Orion secured the trident and began walking back to the tent. As he passed Rolan, he playfully tugged on the youngling's braid and gave him a few words of advice.

Rolan touched his braid and broke into a wide grin.

As Orion disappeared into the tent, the surrounding younglings looked at Rolan with envy. They had all tried to pull out the Bloodthirsty Trident before but had failed. None of them possessed Rolan's natural strength.

"Youngling, go tell your mother that she can collect 100 pounds of beast meat from the warehouse every day," Dace said, patting Rolan on the shoulder.

"You're too scrawny. You need to bulk up!"

"Make sure your mother mentions my name, Dace, when she goes to collect it."

Dace had earned numerous battle honors during the Myriad Races Invasion and received daily rations as a reward. He didn't mind helping Rolan, who was about to become Orion's disciple. After all, the youngling would likely interact with the guards frequently in the future.

In truth, every member of the Stoneheart Horde was provided with enough food to sustain them until adulthood. However, consuming high-level beast meat was essential for building strength and vitality.

Rolan's biological father had died in battle years ago, and his current father was only a stepfather. This meant his mother didn't have access to extra food rations for him.

"Honorable guard, are you serious?" Read exclusive adventures at empire

"Do you really mean 100 pounds of beast meat every day?"

Dace chuckled but didn't say much. He patted Rolan's shoulder again before turning back toward the chieftain's tent to resume his rotation.

"Why don't you have your mother try collecting it and see for yourself?"

Chapter 168 They're wise, but their perspective is limited

Black Forest, Southern Dense Woods.

"Elder, the traps are set. Should we start driving the beast tide?"

The speaker was a Geckos leader from the cannon fodder troops, assigned to Rockwell for this beast tide operation.

Rockwell, now noticeably taller and more imposing than before, leaned against a massive tree, his gaze fixed on the southern forest.

"A gnoll scout just reported that the hexapods are veering off course, away from the traps we've set."

"We can't let them escape!"

Rockwell's eyes narrowed with determination. He was filled with ambition for this beast tide.

He was on the verge of reaching the peak of hero-level, soon to enter the ranks eligible for Alpha-level resources.

Rockwell understood that to secure Alpha-level resources, strength alone wasn't enough—he needed to amass significant battle achievements.

Currently, he had two competitors: Earthshaker and Desdemona.

Most believed Earthshaker to be Rockwell's greatest rival, and Rockwell had thought the same at first.

But after consulting Prophet Onyx, Rockwell learned that Desdemona, the succubus elder, was even stronger than him.

This realization put immense pressure on Rockwell.

The beast tide was his chance to accumulate achievements and surpass both Earthshaker and Desdemona.

"Prepare yourselves. We'll circle around and drive the hexapods back into the traps!"

"Whether we feast on meat or gnaw on bark in the coming days depends on this hunt!"

The Geckos leader, hearing this, grew visibly excited.

According to the Stoneheart Horde's rules, participants in large-scale hunts were entitled to a share of the prey after the horde took its portion.

While the cannon fodder troops received a smaller share, the sheer volume of the beast tide meant they could still secure a substantial amount of food.

"Elder, we'll follow your lead! Anyone who disobeys, I'll personally whip them into shape!"

Rockwell nodded slightly, his attitude toward the Geckos leader neither warm nor cold.

Elsewhere in the forest, the succubus elders Desdemona and Vespera had gathered.

They were among the key planners of this hunting operation.

This hunt wasn't just a test for the eight council elders—it was also a competition among them.

"Elder Desdemona, has our queen given any instructions?"

Desdemona shook her head. Her once-perfect figure had begun to show signs of age, losing the allure of her youth.

But her wisdom had only grown with time.

"Vespera, this time, we're on our own."

"With so many gnolls and geckos assisting us, you should have more confidence!"

Vespera was still young. Though she had been chosen as one of the eight council elders, her mindset remained rooted in the succubus clan's traditional ways.

In other words, Vespera was still somewhat fearful and anxious about facing the beast tide.

"This time, our goal is to work together to hunt as many beasts as possible and stockpile food for the horde's winter reserves."

"Don't think about anything else!"

"With our queen and her sister here, the succubus clan will not decline within the Stoneheart Horde. On the contrary, we will only grow stronger."

"As for us, we need to keep a low profile and focus on honing our skills."

"Work hard with me, Vespera!"

Vespera nodded. She trusted Desdemona's words. Read new adventures at empire

After all, Desdemona had been an elder of the succubus clan since Vespera was a child.

On a forested hill, Prophet Onyx and Rendall sat across from each other, their gazes fixed on the plains and woods in the distance.

"The chieftain has summoned another council meeting. Do you think something major has happened?"

Rendall's tone carried a hint of worry. He always felt uneasy without knowing the specifics.

"Relax. With the chieftain in Blackstone City, nothing will go wrong."

"Besides, the chieftain's orders were for us to return after the hunt, which means it's not urgent."

Prophet Onyx's calm words eased Rendall's concerns somewhat.

Shifting the topic, Rendall brought up the current hunt.

"I've noticed that the two succubus elders, while putting in effort, aren't giving it their all."

Rendall wasn't particularly clever, but his experience allowed him to pick up on certain things.

"They're wise, but their perspective is limited."

"No matter how strong the succubus clan becomes, Chieftain Orion will always have room for them."

"They underestimate the chieftain's vision and ambition. They haven't yet adapted to the horde's pace of development."

"I suspect Delilah hasn't guided them because she wants them to figure it out on their own."

"After all, they're both intelligent and far more cunning than most."

As Prophet Onyx spoke, his gaze shifted to Rockwell, who was driving the beast tide below. A satisfied smile appeared on his face.

Understanding Orion's ambitions, Prophet Onyx had given Rockwell some guidance, instilling in him a sense of purpose and drive.

This drive was a vital energy, a spirit that could influence both temperament and cultivation.

If Rockwell maintained this energy, it would make his eventual advancement to Alpha-level much smoother.

This was an advantage the two succubus elders lacked.

"Succubi always overthink things."

Rendall agreed with Prophet Onyx, feeling that Desdemona and Vespera were too cautious and indirect in their actions.

Meanwhile, as the cannon fodder troops actively hunted the beast tide, Orion was awakened by the playful laughter of children outside his tent.

"Whose brats are making such a racket outside my tent so early in the morning?"

Orion grumbled, still nestled under the animal skins, holding a naked Lilith in his arms. He kissed her nipple lightly.

"My dear Orion, have you forgotten?"

"The ones practicing combat techniques outside are your new disciple and a group of younglings!"

Orion, who had been about to close his eyes and laze in bed a little longer, suddenly opened them wide in realization.

"Rolan?"

"Exactly!" Lilith giggled.

Orion gave Lilith's firm buttocks a light slap, signaling her to get up and help him dress.

Nearby, Lysinthia and Violet also opened their eyes.

To Orion's surprise, it was Violet who got up first to assist Lilith in dressing him.

"Master!"

Orion responded with a soft hum and kissed Violet lightly.

"Master!"

Lysinthia leaned in as well, and Orion kissed her too.

"Well, since you're all awake, why don't you prepare something delicious? Rolan is still growing, and as his elders, you shouldn't hold back on your cooking skills."

Chapter 169 We must rely on ourselves

Black Forest, Southern Dense Woods.

When Orion stepped out of his tent, Rolan was already drenched in sweat from his morning training.

"Honorable chieftain!"

The youngling immediately noticed Orion and greeted him in his youthful, enthusiastic voice.

"Come here," Orion called, motioning for Rolan to approach. The boy had been running and jumping around near the guards, Dace and Otho.

"From now on, when you come to train outside my tent, address me as 'mentor,' not 'chieftain.'"

"Yes, chieftain!" Rolan replied, his tone mimicking the formal speech he had clearly picked up from the guards.

"Hmm?"

Orion's low grunt carried a hint of displeasure.

"Yes, mentor!"

Rolan quickly corrected himself, his sharp reaction dispelling Orion's irritation.

"Rolan, let me emphasize this again. During training, I am your mentor, and you are my disciple. Understood?"

"I understand!"

Orion nodded, his gaze sweeping over Rolan, who was wearing a simple leather vest.

"Now, Rolan, tell me—what do you want to learn?"

"Mentor, I want to learn how to use the trident! I want to become the strongest bloodline warrior in our horde!"

Orion chuckled and lightly tapped Rolan on the forehead.

"To become the strongest in the horde, you've got a long way to go!"

"Start by becoming the strongest among the younglings first."

Here, "younglings" didn't just refer to giant children but included all the juvenile members of the horde—succubi, obsidian golems, and others.

As he spoke, Orion pulled out a standard level trident and handed it to Rolan.

"Watch closely and mimic my stance."

Orion stepped to the left, assuming a wide, bow-like stance with his legs firmly planted.

Rolan imitated him, copying the posture as best as he could.

"Keep your head up, chest out, and hold the trident firmly in front of you with both hands!"

Orion continued to guide Rolan, adjusting his posture.

"Good. Hold this position for an hour. After that, switch to the other side."

Rolan looked confused. In his mind, training with a mentor should involve learning how to wield the trident in combat, not standing in strange poses.

Orion's gaze sharpened, and his tone turned serious.

"Rolan, remember this: if you want to master weapon techniques, you must first strengthen your entire body."

"What I just taught you is called the Wide Bow Stance."

"Every day, before practicing with the trident, you must alternate between your left and right legs, holding this stance for two hours."

To be honest, Orion was taking Rolan's training very seriously.

Unlike Orion, who had the advantage of a Survivor's Platform and a system to guide him, Rolan had no such tools. Everything had to be built from the ground up.

The Wide Bow Stance, when practiced consistently, would not only stretch and strengthen Rolan's muscles and tendons but also make his body sturdier than the average giant.

Additionally, it would improve Rolan's balance and stability—essential foundations for mastering weapons and combat techniques.

Training had to be done step by step.

For today, Orion only taught Rolan the Wide Bow Stance.

Two hours later, when Orion finally gave the command to stop, Rolan's legs were trembling so much that he had to lean on the trident to stay upright.

"That's enough for today!"

"Rolan, come with me into the tent. Today, we'll have a feast to celebrate your apprenticeship!"

Rolan didn't fully understand what a "feast" for an apprenticeship meant. All he knew was that the table was piled high with meats he had never tasted before.

And there was more than enough—so much that he couldn't finish it all.

After eating a modest portion of beast meat, Orion left the tent early to inspect the southern city walls.

His patrol eventually brought him to the eastern underground fissure, where the construction of the walls was still underway.

At the base of the walls, a large number of obsidian golems and cave spiders were hard at work, significantly speeding up the construction process.

Just as Orion was about to enter the underground fissure through a hidden passage, a succubus approached him with unexpected news.

Chieftain's Tent, Blackstone City.

Orion sat at the head of the table, with Delilah seated beside him.

Before them stood a lizardman messenger.

"Honorable Orion, this is a sealed message from my chieftain. He instructed me to deliver it to you personally."

Guard Dace stepped forward, taking the rolled beast hide from the lizardman. After carefully inspecting it for any signs of tampering, he handed it to Orion.

Orion unrolled the beast hide and scanned its contents, his eyes narrowing slightly as his brow furrowed.

After a moment, he wordlessly passed the message to Delilah.

Delilah read it carefully, her expression turning contemplative.

After a long silence, Orion addressed the lizardman.

"I've received the message. Stay in Blackstone City for a few days. I'll have a reply for you to take back."

With that, Orion gestured for Dace to escort the lizardman out and keep an eye on him.

Once the lizardman had left the tent, Orion turned to Delilah.

"What do you think of Slagor's proposal?"

Delilah shook her head, remaining silent.

Orion understood that Delilah wasn't without opinions—she was simply uncertain about her thoughts or felt they weren't fully formed.

The message from Slagor, the lizardman chieftain, proposed an alliance with Orion.

After the dark beast tides, Slagor wanted to migrate his people into the Black Forest and merge his forces with Orion's to jointly resist the icefield monsters from the far north.

"Slagor is a clever lizardman. He wouldn't propose an alliance with us without a reason."

"He wants to move into the Black Forest and merge our forces, but that's not his true goal."

"Slagor's real objective is likely to seek our protection."

Delilah didn't respond, so Orion continued, voicing his thoughts to spark discussion.

"In other words, Slagor lacks the confidence and strength to fend off the icefield monsters on his own."

"Those monsters from the far north must be incredibly powerful—or terrifying."

Orion's fingers traced the rim of his goblet as his gaze grew distant.

"What I can't figure out is why Slagor isn't seeking Gareth's protection. Why choose the Black Forest instead?"

This question puzzled both Orion and Delilah.

The root of their confusion lay in their lack of knowledge about the icefield monsters.

If anyone in the Stoneheart Horde knew about these creatures, it would be Prophet Onyx.

"When will Onyx and Rendall return?"

"In the next couple of days. The beast tide is already receding, and the hunting activities will soon conclude," Delilah replied, her voice soft and alluring.

Despite her tone, Orion wasn't in the mood for intimacy.

"Then we'll wait. Once Onyx and Rendall are back, we'll convene a council meeting and make a decision."

"As you wish, my dear chieftain," Delilah said with a gentle smile.

Three days later, the lizardman from Poison Dragon Swamp departed Blackstone City, carrying Orion's sealed reply.

"Chieftain, why did you insist on rejecting Slagor's proposal?"

Prophet Onyx, who had returned to Blackstone City the previous night with his people, had shared everything he knew about the icefield monsters during the council meeting.

He had also offered his perspective: Slagor likely possessed more intelligence about the icefield monsters than they did. Accepting Slagor's proposal to merge forces wasn't necessarily a bad idea.

Yet, Orion had decisively rejected the offer.

"Prophet, whether Slagor joins us in the Black Forest or not, we'll still have to face the icefield monsters, won't we?"

Standing atop the southern city wall, Orion gazed at the darkening horizon, his expression contemplative.

Prophet Onyx nodded. It was an inevitable reality.

Just as the Black Forest could invade Thunderwood Forest, the Icefield Monsters could invade Black Forest.

"Slagor offers us nothing in return, yet he wants to migrate into our territory. Why should I save him?"

Orion's blunt words left Prophet Onyx momentarily speechless.

"Besides, I'm increasingly convinced that Slagor is trying to shift the danger onto us—using us as a shield."

"Rejecting him is the logical choice."

"For the Black Forest to survive in this region, we must rely on ourselves."

"Lord Gareth is unreliable. To her, we're nothing more than pawns for her southern invasions—cannon fodder, even."

"If the Stoneheart Horde is to rise, we must be self-reliant."

For reasons he couldn't quite articulate, Prophet Onyx felt that their chieftain's demeanor and approach had grown sharper, more resolute.

It was a fearless determination—a boldness that radiated from within.

"Chieftain, regarding the large-scale hunt, the eight council elders performed with varying results. The data has been compiled. Should we remove those who underperformed?"

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Orion hesitated.

His gaze returned to the dark horizon, and after a moment of silence, he sighed.

"Not this time. Keep the data on record. With the dark beast tides approaching, it's not the right time to stir up internal conflict within the horde."

"Understood."

Orion turned to see Delilah ascending the wall, walking toward him.

"Have the resources from the hunt been tallied?"

"They have," Delilah replied with a soft smile, handing a piece of beast hide to Orion.

Orion glanced at the hide briefly before handing it back.

"Set aside 30% of the beast meat for the horde's daily consumption. Send the rest to the underground fissure."

"Tell Lorelia to ensure her spiders reach a population of 30K before the dark beast tides arrive."

Delilah froze, staring at Orion in disbelief. She thought she must have misheard him.

After a moment, she softly reminded him, her tone gentle but cautious.

"Chieftain, after the dark beast tides, it's highly likely we'll face an immediate invasion from the icefield monsters."

"If that happens, we won't be able to hunt outside. Shouldn't we keep more reserves?"

Delilah, as the one managing the horde's resources, was acutely aware of their current stockpile.

The horde's food supply was stored in the caves of Moonshadow Valley, primarily consisting of preserved beast meat.

If the spoils from this hunt were sent to the underground fissure, the remaining reserves might not last through the icefield monsters' invasion.

After all, no one knew how long the invasion would last.

Orion gently lifted Delilah's chin, his gesture playful yet restrained. He didn't follow through with anything more, instead turning his gaze toward Moonshadow Valley.

"There's a cave deep in Moonshadow Valley. You should go take a look. I've stored some food there."

Deep within Moonshadow Valley, several areas and caves had been designated as restricted zones by Orion.

No one but him was allowed entry, as the areas were guarded around the clock.

"Remember, only you can go."

Orion withdrew his hand and laughed heartily, his voice carefree and bold, carrying a hint of roguish charm.

"Prophet, let's head to the underground fissure together!"

"As you command, chieftain!"

Delilah watched as Orion strode away, her heart pounding in her chest.

At that moment, she found Orion more captivating than ever.

An hour later, deep within Moonshadow Valley.

When Delilah entered the cave Orion had mentioned, she was utterly stunned.

Inside, countless sacks of grain, sealed in some kind of magical straw bags, were stacked as far as the eye could see.

Delilah stood frozen, her mouth slightly agape, unable to process what she was seeing.

"This... this is food?"

"Grain from the southern regions?"

"When... when did Orion acquire this?"

"This much grain... it's enough to sustain the Stoneheart Horde for at least five years of stable growth."

"Am I... am I hallucinating?"

Her whispered words echoed softly in the cave, unheard by anyone else.

The grain stored here was the 100,000 tons Orion had purchased from Scarecrow.

That evening, Delilah summoned Orion under the pretense of having something important to report.

When Orion arrived, he found Delilah dressed in an incredibly revealing short skirt—and no panties. The skirt was so short that her bare vulva was visible.

Here, Delilah was bold and seductive, taking the initiative.

Her admiration for Orion had grown into something deeper, and now, all she wanted was to please him with her body. Of course, she thoroughly enjoyed it herself.

After all, Orion's cock was massive, and the pleasure he brought her during sex was beyond imagination.

After their passionate lovemaking, Delilah lay nestled in Orion's arms, silent and content.

Delilah was a clever succubus. She knew there were some things she shouldn't ask about or bring up.

"Are you surprised?"

Delilah looked up, her enchanting eyes meeting Orion's as he broke the silence.

Before she could respond, Orion continued.

"I'll handle the food supply from now on. But that doesn't mean we can slack off on our reserves. Do you understand?"

Delilah nodded, resting her head against Orion's chest and planting a soft kiss on his nipple.

"The food problem that's been holding back the Stoneheart Horde's growth is solved. Now, we need to focus on resources."

"Our bloodline warriors need better equipment. We need sharper weapons. We need more minerals."

"After the icefield monsters retreat next year, start preparing for an expedition to explore the Black Forest and the Barren Mountains for mineral deposits."

"I've heard from Dirtclaw that there are a few gnolls among the cannon fodder troops who are skilled at locating minerals. Identify them and give them special treatment."

"And about reviving my sister and finding my parents..."

Orion trailed off, lifting Delilah from his chest.

Despite her tall, 6.6-foot frame, Orion held her as effortlessly as if she were a doll.

"Stay by my side, and I'll show you mountains and seas."

"Remember, there are birds in the sky, clouds in the wind, mist on the mountains... and I want you to always be with me."

Delilah was utterly captivated, Orion's words plunging her into the depths of love from which there was no escape.

Of course, Orion meant every word.

At this point, Delilah had proven to be his most reliable ally, the one who had supported him the most.

She was, in every sense, the perfect partner—though she lacked the official title of wife.

Chapter 170 Thundar's pressure

Time always seems to accelerate during peaceful days.

One morning, as Orion crawled out of his warm bedding and stepped outside his tent, he was greeted by the sight of snowflakes drifting down from the sky. Winter had arrived.

"Chieftain! You're awake?"

Orion responded with a soft hum to the guard who greeted him.

Two Frost Wolves, now noticeably larger than before, approached Orion, lowering their heads for him to pet and rub.

"They're almost fully grown, aren't they?"

Orion pulled out two Pet Pills and fed them to the Frost Wolves, casually asking the question.

"Not yet, chieftain. Prophet Onyx said they'll need another two years to fully mature."

"Their bloodline is stronger than their parents', so they'll likely grow even larger."

Hearing this, Orion's eyes lit up slightly, and he offered a few words of advice to the guards, Beyn and Torba.

"Don't neglect your own training. When the dark beast tides arrive, make sure you contribute to the horde by slaying as many enemies as possible."

"Don't let Rolan surpass you!"

Beyn and Torba quickly straightened up and replied in unison, "Understood!"

Orion didn't linger with his guards. Instead, he walked over to Rolan, who was standing still in the snow, his shoulders already covered in a thick layer of it.

"Rolan, how much longer until your stance training is finished?"

"Reporting to mentor, just one more quarter of an hour!"

Orion nodded, saying nothing more. He stood beside Rolan in the falling snow, waiting for the youngling to complete his training.

A short while later, Rolan's small body shifted, shaking off the snow that had accumulated on him.

"Watch closely. Today, I'll teach you a move: Dragon Strike!"

The Dragon Strike was, in essence, a basic thrusting technique suitable for tridents and spears.

Of course, as a chieftain and mentor, Orion couldn't teach his disciple a technique without giving it a grandiose name. Thus, the exaggeratedly named Dragon Strike was born.

"Rolan, remember, this move requires you to focus on the power of your waist..."

"After your stance training, practice this move 1000 times daily. No shortcuts!"

After finishing Rolan's lesson, Orion returned to the chieftain's tent, where the council elders had already gathered for the meeting.

As he took his seat at the head of the table, Orion gestured for Beyn to pull back the tent's flap.

Orion remained silent, allowing the cold air from outside to fill the tent.

"It's snowing outside, and the cold wind has blown in. Elders, winter has arrived once again."

"The arrival of winter means that perhaps tomorrow, or the day after, we may no longer see the sunrise."

"The polar night is approaching, and with it, the dark beast tides will stir once more. We must remain vigilant!"

This was Orion's annual pre-council speech, a tradition meant to remind the elders of the impending arrival of the mysterious dark creatures.

As Orion finished speaking, the council members began murmuring among themselves.

Orion didn't interrupt, letting them exchange ideas and discuss freely.

"Finally, the dark beast tides are here. This year, I'm determined to level up!"

"Ha! You've been saying that for years. When was the last time you actually leveled up?"

"Exactly, Elder Volthun. You didn't level up last year, and I doubt you'll manage it this year either. Heh heh heh..."

"I think Elder Earthshaker has the drive to level up easily this year!"

"And Elder Rockwell too!"

"Elder Dirtclaw, how did your gnoll clan survive the dark beast tides in Thunderwood Forest?"

"..."

The council meeting grew increasingly lively as the elders' discussions became more animated.

This was exactly what Orion wanted to see—council members engaging in open dialogue to better understand each other's perspectives and brainstorm ideas.

Of course, such discussions needed to be kept in check. When the time came, Orion would step in to restore order.

Catching Orion's glance, Rendall stroked his beard and let out a booming shout, silencing the room.

"All right, discussion time is over!"

"You've all had your say. The chieftain has something to address!"

Orion smiled as he scanned the room, his gaze commanding silence.

As the tent grew quiet, the sound of breathing became audible.

"I'm curious as well—how do the southern tribes defend against the dark beast tides?"

"Dirtclaw, share your experience with everyone."

The gnoll elder, Dirtclaw, stepped forward, licking Orion's boot before turning to address the other elders.

"Honorable Master, I've never experienced the dark beast tides of the Black Forest, so I dare not speak on them."

"But in Thunderwood Forest, our gnoll clan survived by seeking refuge in Thunderhawk City every year."

Dirtclaw explained that the gnolls avoided the dark creatures by taking shelter under the protection of Thunderhawk City.

However, this protection came at a steep price. Each year, the gnolls had to offer countless magical plants and other resources as tribute.

"In Thunderwood Forest, no tribe dares face the dark creatures without the protection of an Alpha-level powerhouse."

"Even so, under Reynard's protection, our gnoll clan still lost half of our bloodline warriors every year."

As he spoke, Dirtclaw's expression darkened, clearly recalling painful memories.

"The satyrs had it even worse. They were like Reynard's livestock."

"Whenever Thunderhawk City was besieged by multiple Alpha-level dark creatures, Reynard would offer up the satyrs as sacrifices, letting the dark creatures feast on them to ease the siege."

Dirtclaw's tone was tinged with sorrow as he recounted these events.

For tribes like his, survival during the dark beast tides was nearly impossible without protection.

As a result, they had no choice but to comply with whatever demands the Alpha-level powerhouses made.

"Honorable Master, I once heard Reynard describe the dark beast tides of Thunderwood Forest."

"The strength of the dark beast tides increases with the number of living beings in an area."

"The more concentrated the life force and blood aura, the more dark creatures it attracts."

"And it's more likely to draw Alpha-level dark creatures as well!"

Dirtclaw's words caused an immediate uproar among the council members.

However, to Orion and the four senior elders, this revelation was unsurprising.

Orion and Prophet Onyx had discussed this possibility in depth and had reached similar conclusions.

But Dirtclaw's next statement left even Orion unsettled.

"Honorable Chieftain, I also heard that Thunderpeak Mountain in Thunderwood Forest once attracted a Legendary-level dark creature during the dark beast tides."

"This is just a rumor, though. I don't know if it's true."

The tent fell into a heavy silence.

The mention of a Legendary-level dark creature appearing in Thunderwood Forest was nothing short of astonishing.

Orion couldn't help but wonder how Lord Ariel had managed to deal with such a terrifying entity. His curiosity burned, but he kept his composure.

Exchanging glances with the four senior elders, Orion saw the same shock reflected in their eyes.

"Ahem!"

Orion cleared his throat, drawing the attention of the council members and signaling for Dirtclaw to return to his seat.

He couldn't allow fear to spread among the council, so he quickly addressed the room.

"Legendary-level dark creatures are nothing more than rumors. The Black Forest hasn't seen one in nearly a thousand years!"

Orion's words snapped the council members out of their growing panic. Hope began to return to their eyes.

"However," Orion continued, "our Black Forest horde has grown by tens of thousands of members this year."

"If my predictions are correct, this dark beast tide will undoubtedly bring Alpha-level dark creatures to our doorstep."

As the council members relaxed, Orion immediately pushed them back into focus.

"Therefore, elders, from this moment on, we must remain on high alert!"

"I hereby declare that from today onward, the Stoneheart Horde's bonfires will never go out, and the watchposts will never be unmanned."

"Every member of the horde, except for the younglings, will be mobilized. They will help stoke the fires, cook meat, and clear snow."

"And, of course, every clan member will receive their fair share of winter provisions. No one will be left out!"

Orion's gaze swept across the room, his expression stern and his eyes cold.

"Elders, let me make this clear: if anyone falters during this critical time, I will personally deal with them!"

The council members rose to their feet, shouting in unison:

"For the Stoneheart Horde, we will fight to the death without hesitation!"

"For the Stoneheart Horde, we will fight to the death without hesitation!"

"..."

The council meeting lasted a long time. Most of the discussions were led by Thundar, the Elder of Combat, and Delilah, the Stewardship Elder.

They covered everything from night watch rotations and combat squads to wall defense assignments and logistical support. Only after these matters were thoroughly discussed did the meeting conclude in a heavy but determined atmosphere.

When only Orion and the four senior elders—Onyx, Rendall, Delilah, and Thundar—remained in the tent, Orion's expression turned serious.

"The walls around the underground fissure are now complete. During the dark beast tides, we must station an Alpha-level powerhouse there at all times."

"We need to defend not only against the dark creatures outside the walls but also against any monsters that might emerge from the bottomless abyss."

The elders nodded in agreement, fully supporting Orion's decision.

"Additionally, the southern gate of Blackstone City must also have an Alpha-level powerhouse stationed at all times."

"In other words, we need to ensure that both the underground fissure and the southern gate are always guarded by Alpha-level warriors."

"Onyx, Rendall, Delilah, Lilith, and I will need to establish a rotation schedule starting today."

Orion's tone was heavy. He was grateful that the recent Myriad Races Invasion had allowed both Delilah and Lilith to ascend to Alpha-level. Without them, the horde would have been severely understaffed.

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"Chieftain, I have a suggestion," Prophet Onyx said, his voice calm but firm. "I don't think you should be part of the rotation."

"With your strength and the mobility provided by Thunderhawk Rayden, I believe you should remain stationed in Moonshadow Valley, ready to provide rapid support wherever it's needed."

Orion narrowed his eyes slightly, considering Onyx's suggestion. It made sense.

"Chieftain, I agree with Prophet Onyx," Delilah added.

"Under normal circumstances, the rotation schedule will allow us to handle a single Alpha-level dark creature at any given location."

"But what if multiple Alpha-level dark creatures appear simultaneously?"

"In that case, we'll need you to provide immediate support."

Delilah's reasoning was sound, and Orion nodded in agreement.

"Very well. I'll remain in Moonshadow Valley, ready to respond to any emergencies."

Orion wasn't a dictator. When a suggestion made sense, he was more than willing to listen.

"However, this means we'll need to adjust the rotation schedule."

"Onyx and Rendall, you two will alternate shifts at the underground fissure. I'll instruct the Spider Queen to assist you."

Orion looked at Prophet Onyx and Rendall, waiting for their nods of agreement before turning to Delilah.

"Delilah and Lilith, you two will alternate shifts at the southern gate."

"I'll also release the abyssal dragon to make its home outside the southern gate. With its presence, Delilah can also oversee the horde's logistical operations."

Delilah thought for a moment and, finding no flaws in the plan, nodded her agreement.

Orion's assignments were carefully considered. Onyx and Rendall were both tanky Alpha-level warriors, capable of engaging dark creatures head-on.

Delilah and Lilith, on the other hand, were more fragile and leaned toward support roles. Pairing them with the abyssal dragon would allow them to maximize their abilities.

Finally, Orion turned to Thundar, who had remained silent throughout the discussion.

"Thundar, as I've said before, I'll decide between you and Lorelia based on the situation."

"For the sake of the horde, you need to be prepared."

Thundar stood and looked deeply at Orion and the other senior elders.

"Chieftain, I am neither stubborn nor foolish. I will accept any arrangement you make and will do my utmost to protect the Stoneheart Horde."

"As for Alpha-level resources, I understand that the Spider Queen's advancement is more critical than my own."

Thundar's voice was steady and resolute, his words clearly the result of careful thought.

"I propose that the horde's dark source crystals be prioritized for the Spider Queen."

"Chieftain, this is my heartfelt suggestion."

Under the watchful eyes of Orion, Onyx, Rendall, and Delilah, Thundar continued.

"When I heard that you were considering joining the rotation schedule, I felt deeply ashamed."

"I've failed to ease the burden on you and the other elders. I am unworthy of my position as Elder of Combat."

At this point, Thundar lowered his head.

To be honest, sitting alongside Orion, Onyx, Rendall, and Delilah as the only non-Alpha-level elder, Thundar felt immense pressure.

This pressure didn't just come from within—it also came from the whispers of the horde's members.

Since Lilith's recent ascension to Alpha-level, the murmurs had grown louder. Many questioned whether Thundar still deserved his position as Elder of Combat.

Orion understood the weight Thundar carried.

The fact that Thundar could voice such thoughts today showed that he had a clear and honest heart.

But Orion also knew the power of rumors. Words could kill as surely as blades.