

Titan King 241

Chapter 241 Legendary-level

Lilith and Lysinthia were very proactive. Lilith kissed Orion's face and lips, while Lysinthia preferred to kiss Orion's penis.

Slowly, all three of them took off their clothes. Under Lysinthia's continuous licking with her tongue, Orion's penis quickly became big and hard, completely filling Lysinthia's mouth.

Meanwhile, Orion grabbed both Lysinthia's and Lilith's breasts with his hands, kneading and caressing them.

Lilith was extremely sensitive, and her desire was quickly awakened. Her legs parted involuntarily, and unable to withstand the passion in her heart, her butt kept moving, rubbing Orion's thighs with her already wet labia, letting out moans in her mouth.

Orion pulled his penis out of Lysinthia's mouth, placed it against Lilith's labia, and then thrust his hips, directly entering Lilith's vagina.

Soon, Lilith's vagina secreted a large amount of lubricant, making Orion's insertions smoother and his movements increasingly wild.

That night, Orion completely let go. He was in a great mood and full of energy. He made love tirelessly with Lilith and Lysinthia, barely resting all night.

Lilith and Lysinthia experienced climax after climax. The three of them in the tent indulged their desires, moaning and enjoying the pleasure of sex. They only fell into a drowsy sleep as dawn broke, exhausted.

That night, Orion did ejaculate several times and experienced multiple orgasms.

Although he ejaculated each time, his exceptional physical condition and recovery ability allowed his erection to remain indefinitely. As long as he wished, he could make love continuously for a century. This is also a manifestation of Orion's current strength.

On the second morning, after Orion woke up, he didn't get out of bed right away.

He focused his attention on his own status panel. Yesterday, he had felt an overwhelming rush of excitement at his successful breakthrough to Legendary level. After a night of passionate lovemaking, his emotions had finally settled.

His status panel had changed dramatically:

Name: Orion Stoneheart

Level: Legendary

Race: Giant

Title: Survivor

Strength: 6125/100000 (+12450)

Agility: 5400/100000 (+286)

Intelligence: 5322/100000 (+200)

Constitution: 5820/100000 (+200)

Resistance: 35% (against all negative conditions)

Bloodline Purity: 75% (Titan)

Transcendent Power: 100/1000 (Lightning Attribute)

Willpower: Low

Faith Energy: 235678

Skills:

1) Advanced Trident Mastery: Base attack damage +40%, weak-point hit damage +100%, chance to inflict bleeding and healing prohibition on hit, low chance to instantly kill bleeding enemies

2) Advanced Throwing : When using a trident or spear for ranged attacks, attack power increases by 100%, accuracy by 50%, and penetration by 20%.

3) Titan Form: A transformational skill known only to top-tier giants; upon transforming into an Ancient Titan, size and all attributes double. The effect lasts until you run out of stamina. Current effect: 20x.

4) Shadowstep: Increases Agility by 50% and attack speed by 20% upon activation, with each use offering a chance to permanently gain +1 Agility.

5) Berserk Aura: Activating Berserk Aura incites you and surrounding allies into a frenzy, boosting health, dulling pain, and negating curse effects.

6) Titan's Heart: Giants possessing Titan's Heart gain an additional 2× Strength.

7) Blood Sacrifice: A power from the ancient Titan bloodline. Upon activation, half your life force is sacrificed, unleashing an energy that instantly kills enemies of the same level with a 50% chance to kill enemies one level higher. Ineffective against opponents beyond that range.

8) Swift Charge: After studying Swift Charge, your rushing speed doubles when you charge.

9) Voice of Thunderhawk: Congratulations—you've gained the ability to communicate with thunderhawks.

10) Eightfold Spear Barrage: Unleashes a formation bristling with spears, trapping and shredding enemies. A formidable area-attack skill.

11) Aura of the Wild: Affects you and any wolf-type mounts or pets within 500 meters, fueling them with untamed ferocity, boosting aggression and banishing fear of death.

12) Triple Mirror Image: Replicates your own bloodline, creating two identical mirror images to store within your body. Summon them at will. Once an image dies, it cannot be copied again. Images can wield weapons.

Orion was delighted by the rise in Strength, Agility, Constitution, and Intelligence, along with an increase in Bloodline Purity and Resistance. Most notably, the Legendary-level attribute caps had soared to 100,000, a staggering leap from Alpha-level's 5,000.

Even more important, he now saw three new attributes on his status panel—Transcendent Power, Willpower, and Faith Energy.

"Supernatural power creates will; will harnesses faith; then faith, in turn, nourishes that supernatural power."

That was Orion's most intuitive takeaway: Transcendent Power, Willpower, and Faith Energy formed a triangular framework that underpinned a Legendary-level being's strength.

Although advancing to Legendary level didn't grant Orion any new abilities outright, his previous "Titan's Rage" skill had evolved into "Titan Form." He suspected that had something to do with his transformation into an Ancient Dark Titan to slay Lord Ariel, as well as his fresh rise to Legendary level.

Even without a brand-new skill, simply having Transcendent Power satisfied Orion. It could fuse with his other abilities. For instance, incorporating the lightning attribute into his throwing technique would endow thrown weapons with devastating electrical force.

Having finished reviewing his new status panel, Orion then turned his focus to another Lord's Stone he held. Now that he had reached Legendary level, he could clearly sense the supernatural energy within.

"I can feel dense blood-energy inside. Could it be that the Lord's Stone Arthas sold me is blood-based? Does the Necro Realm even have a bloodline lord?"

He couldn't help wondering. But it wasn't necessarily true that the Lord's Stone originated from the Necro Realm.

The more he learned, the clearer it became that one's connections determined the kinds of items one could acquire—and for Orion, Lord's Stones were still among the best, most precious finds he'd ever seen. But he was certain that, for the Arch Lords, a Lord's Stone—though valuable—was hardly the be-all and end-all.

"I've reached Legendary level," Orion said to himself, "so it's high time Moonshadow Valley and Blackstone City undergo some big changes."

He put the Lord's Stone away, took a deep breath, then woke Lilith and Lysinthia from their deep sleep.

By midday, the council had assembled once again, likely for the most complete council meeting since the Stoneheart Horde began—no one was absent. Everyone knew this was the Horde's most pivotal day.

Besides starting the council session, today was also the day Orion would be crowned as king.

Chapter 242 Building plans

Orion led Lilith and Lysinthia into the largest tent in the Horde, with everyone's eyes on them.

This meeting was more formal than usual. Beneath Orion's throne, an additional seat had been placed—Lilith's personal seat.

Since Orion's status had risen, Lilith's status soared accordingly. Though Lilith was an Alpha-level fighter before, she officially had no seat in previous councils. She simply stood behind Orion.

But now everything was different. Orion was the Giant King, and regardless of Lilith's raw power, the core leadership of the Horde had to make a place for her. It was a matter of respect toward a wife and, by extension, respect for Orion himself.

Also, for the first time, even the Lysinthia had her own seat. Having risen to Alpha level, she was placed after the four senior elders, next to Spider Queen Lorelia and Rockwell.

After guiding Lilith to her seat, Orion finally took his place on the throne. As soon as he sat, a surge of Legendary-level pressure radiated outward.

"Elders," Orion began, "the Stoneheart Horde wouldn't be here today without your tireless, dedicated efforts—and your willingness to shed blood in battle."

He gave the Horde's current successes to everyone, though it went without saying that every person there knew how big a role Orion himself had played.

"All of your struggles, all your hard work—none of it was wasted. Our Stoneheart Horde is witnessing a springtime of possibilities, our independence, and our freedom.

"I, Orion Stoneheart, Giant King and lord of the Black Forest, promise my people: as long as you remain loyal, brave, and unafraid of death, I will look among you for those who are most outstanding. And together, we will share every inch of land we conquer."

It was a massive promise, like a celebratory banquet where everyone got a piece of the cake.

It was also Orion's way of binding the elders to the Horde in both interests and heritage—using land grants as the connecting thread. Giving subordinates the right to rule over territory and develop its resources was undoubtedly the path forward, even if Orion wasn't implementing that plan immediately. Nothing, however, stopped him from presenting that grand vision now.

"Mighty lord!"

"Giant King!"

"..."

Everyone cheered over Orion's promise until he raised a hand, signaling for silence.

"There's one more thing," he said. "From this day onward, the Horde gains a new Warden: Lysinthia!"

Turning their full attention to Lysinthia, the crowd watched her rise and release a flash of Alpha-level power, making her position known.

"According to custom," Orion went on, "we'll celebrate for three days—no shortage of food and drink, and bonfires through every night!"

At those words, the tent exploded with laughter and excited chatter. Lysinthia's promotion to Alpha-level had caused some commotion before, but everything had been overshadowed by Orion's lightning storm and his one-day disappearance.

Indeed, Lilith, Onyx, and the others had been so worried that no one felt like celebrating. Hearing the news now, though, the elders—who had more or less suspected it—broke out in cheers anyway.

If Orion's breakthrough to Legendary level was a major victory for the Horde overall, then Lysinthia's success was a big deal for the elders' personal interests. Especially for the eight council elders, who stood closest to Alpha caliber themselves, this new milestone had their rapt attention.

"Despite my new rank," Orion continued, "our Stoneheart Horde's foundations are still thin. Among the nearby territories, we're likely the weakest of them all.

"Which means, Elders, that we have a lot to do and a tough road ahead. Our bloodline warriors don't have armor that's sturdy enough or weapons sharp enough. Our stable of beasts is nowhere near mass scale. And our Blackstone City is still underdeveloped, far behind somewhere like Stormrage City in the south...

"..."

He took the opportunity to outline the Horde's future direction and explain how it compared to the southern cities. He also used the moment to issue a number of appointments and directives.

For example, Orion officially established the long-hoped-for Bureau of Weapons. He put Rockwell, an Alpha-level fighter, in charge for the prestige and clout. Meanwhile, two council elders—Earthshaker and Desdemona—would serve as his hands-on deputies.

Half a day later, when the council meeting concluded and only the Alpha-level powerhouses remained in the tent, Orion spoke again.

"Elders, in at most half a month, Slagor of Poison Dragon Swamp will show up with his tribe. Right now, Blackstone City's too small. We need to reconsider how it's laid out."

As usual, Orion tossed out the challenge, got their attention, and then presented his ideas.

"My thought is this: let's keep the current Blackstone City as it is. But I want to build another city wall outside the city and enclose a larger area around it for room to grow.

"From here on, Blackstone City can't just house the races we already have. We need to make room for the lizardfolk and possibly the Thunderstorm Bearmen tribe, as well as any other races that pledge allegiance to us in the future."

He cast his gaze at Onyx, Rendall, Delilah, Thundar, Lilith, Lysinthia, Rockwell, and Lorelia—eight Alpha-level fighters who were intimately tied to the fate of the Horde.

"Besides expanding, I also want to renovate," Orion declared.

He placed some rolled-up hides on the table for everyone to see.

"We still lack a ton of things if we want the Horde to truly take off."

Onyx and Delilah were especially interested. They stepped forward to pick up a few of the hides and study them carefully.

"Lord," Onyx said, "are these building plans?"

Orion nodded, somewhat pleasantly surprised Onyx recognized what they were.

"Lord, do these buildings have special functions—like that eagle's nest in Thunderwood Forest?"

Onyx asked because he had heard of certain unique structures with unusual powers. For instance, there was said to be a strange eagle's nest perched atop Thunderpeak Mountain in Thunderwood Forest; harpies apparently gained their flight from that mysterious nest.

Orion gave a faint smile, nodding once more. Seeing that, everyone looked elated, hurrying over to the table to examine the blueprints.

Chapter 243 Expanding Blackstone City

Orion stayed quiet. What he had laid out on the table were all building plans—special structures the Horde could actually construct right now.

These five building plans—Horde Hall, Heroic Altar, Military Fortress, Mount Beast Pens, and Hall of Glory—were within the Stoneheart Horde's current capabilities.

Of these:

- The Horde Hall, Heroic Altar, Military Fortress, and the Hall of Glory were four "main" buildings that required a Lord's Stone.

- The Mount Beast Pens plan was feasible because the Horde already had a full brood of cave spiders.

Of course, Orion also had three thousand icefield snow wolves, but in order to build and empower a true Beast Pens, he'd need another broodmother-level beast. At the moment, that was out of reach.

Tamping down his wandering thoughts, Orion glanced at everyone before him.

"Since we're expanding Blackstone City anyway, we might as well seize this opportunity to really overhaul it. This is our big chance.

"We still have some time before winter sets in, so there's room in our schedule. We've got a decent number of Thunderstorm Bearmen slaves. Let's put them to work. No point letting them lounge around on a free ride."

Orion half-closed his eyes, gazing at the sunshine and skies outside the tent, his tone dipping a little.

"As for these special buildings, let's have the spiders and the obsidian golems handle it together. Right now, I don't trust the Bearmen in the cannon fodder troops to keep their mouths shut."

Hearing this, Onyx immediately understood that Orion wanted him to oversee the project.

"My lord, rest assured, I'll make sure only trustworthy folk take part in building these structures, and I'll have them swear oaths of secrecy."

Orion nodded. He truly wasn't comfortable delegating the job to anyone else.

"Moonshadow Valley will get some renovations too, but we won't change it too much. It'll remain our main place for training various troops.

"For the current Blackstone City, I plan to turn it into an inner fortress—an area for our key tribespeople. As for the new outer city, we need proper planning so that we can accommodate far more tribes(clans) in the future.

"Delilah, I need you to stay on top of that."

Delilah nodded. She knew that with Orion's strength at Legendary level, he'd now show bits and pieces of his transcendent power, and the Stoneheart Horde stood to benefit a lot because of it. Whatever Orion decided to do, no one would likely oppose him.

"My lord," Onyx asked, "are there any special requirements for materials when constructing these buildings?"

He was already thinking through the details since he'd taken on the task of building them.

"We can use the same stone we're going to use for the city walls, as long as it's decent quality."

Of course, the higher grade the materials, the better. But the Stoneheart Horde was still pretty broke.

Orion did have his own idea, though: he wanted to merge the giants' tribal relics into the Horde Hall to boost the special building's quality. But first, the hall had to be built, providing a vessel for that plan.

"My lord, have you decided on locations for these buildings?"

Again, it was Onyx asking. Truth be told, he had the sharpest eye for building projects among them.

"The Horde Hall will go on the stony wall side of Moonshadow Valley," Orion said. "After that, the only passage from Blackstone City to Moonshadow Valley will be right where the Horde Hall stands."

He made it clear he wanted the Horde Hall facing south (toward Blackstone City), with Moonshadow Valley behind it. That way, the hall could serve as both a symbolic anchor for Blackstone City and a direct link to the military camps in Moonshadow Valley and the underground fissure, both critical sources of troops.

Within Moonshadow Valley, they'd also build the Heroic Altar, the Military Base Fortress, and the Beast Pens.

The Hall of Glory—where they'd record the deeds of fallen warriors and gather faith energy—would stand in the heart of Blackstone City's inner plaza, opening to everyone on certain holy days and festivals.

For the rest of the day, Orion and the higher-ups hashed out details until they'd locked down construction sites for each special building. Everyone left with a to-do list tied to their respective corps. By the time they wrapped up, night had fallen.

Instead of returning to his tent with Lilith and Lysinthia, Orion took Dace and three more guards to patrol the western ridge near the city walls. That area bordering Moonshadow Valley wasn't just Skytalon Tribe's domain for raising flying beasts—it was also the base for cultivating magical plants and the home base for Thunderhawk Rayden.

Once upon a time, when Rayden wasn't injured, he protected the ridge himself. Ever since he got hurt, an Alpha-level fighter had been posted out here daily.

Orion's mission tonight was to check on Thunderhawk Rayden.

"Master, you came to see me!"

"Master, you're incredible—you actually made it to Legendary level!"

Sensing Orion's arrival, Rayden came dashing from the stone slab he'd been sunning on like a giant, bald rooster.

"Rayden, you're getting fatter by the day. You'd better watch it, or once your feathers grow back, you'll be too heavy to fly."

Orion pulled out a bottle of Pet Pills and tossed them into Rayden's beak.

"Master, not a chance. We thunderhawks are natural-born sky fighters—soaring is what we do! But, uh... do I really have a shot at growing feathers again?"

Rayden's mood see-sawed from excited back to a worried slump in a flash.

Orion didn't say anything. Placing his hand on Thunderhawk Rayden's back, he focused for a moment. Threads of surging electricity sparked out of Rayden and were quickly dispersed by Orion—remnants of Lord Ariel's transcendent power.

This was the root cause of Rayden's internal injuries and the reason why his feathers hadn't regrown. Before, Orion hadn't been able to do anything about it, but as a Legendary-level giant, purging it was now a breeze.

"Okay, I've cleaned out Ariel's leftover transcendent power. With your natural healing, it won't be long before you're soaring again."

At those words, Thunderhawk Rayden froze, the Pet Pills clenched in his beak.

"Master, are you serious? You're the lord and the Giant King now. Don't trick Rayden, okay?"

Orion just rolled his eyes and left the increasingly chunky thunderhawk behind, returning to his tent with his guards.

Nighttime in Blackstone City was bright and festive, lanterns lit everywhere. They were celebrating Lysintha's promotion to Alpha-level for the usual three days, three nights. And since Orion himself had never picked a day to celebrate reaching Legendary level, everyone rolled that party into these three days as well.

"Dace, Otho—don't you think Blackstone City's so much livelier than before?"

Chapter 244 Horde Hall

Early the next morning, Orion rose before dawn. Accompanied by his guards, he headed to a spot halfway up Moonshadow Valley.

Legend had it that in Orion's early days, he once trained in the Abyss there and grew rapidly in power; after returning from the Abyss, he soon became a bloodline warrior.

Several days earlier, Orion had decided to reopen this Abyss entrance so that any motivated young warriors in the Horde could venture inside. Yet various complications had caused delays—only now was he finally able to carry out that plan.

At the midpoint of the mountainside, a large group of tribespeople had already gathered outside the cave entrance by the time Orion arrived. The crowd wasn't just giants; some succubi, buffalofolk, and obsidian golems were mingled in as well.

Clearly, these youngsters hoped to follow in Orion's footsteps by exploring the Abyss—maybe they'd even bond with a powerful Abyss beast.

"Someone's coming!"

"That's our lord!"

"...!"

Orion's arrival stirred a mild commotion, which quieted as he entered the cave and started the ritual to unlock the Abyss gate. Tension hung in the air.

Moments later, the Abyss entrance opened successfully, and Orion left that area.

Two figures slipped in next to him and his four guards. Orion spotted them and brightened, hurrying over at once.

"Fergus, Tarn—you're here too!"

He clapped a hand on both their shoulders.

"The Abyss can be real dangerous," he said. "Have you two really thought this through?"

Fergus and Tarn exchanged determined looks and nodded.

"Uncle," Tarn said. "I want to sign a contract with an Abyssal dragon, just like you!"

Orion laughed. "Looking forward to it, kid. Maybe you'll even bring back a rare beast egg that'll blow everyone's mind!"

He didn't try to discourage Tarn. Some things can't be learned secondhand—no matter how many warnings a young person hears, they need to experience it for themselves.

"How about you, Fergus? What's your plan? I hear there's a Shadow Spider on the first level—it's no joke, trust me."

Fergus had grown a lot over the past year. He'd survived dark beast invasions, fought back during raids, even hunted with the Horde, and he now bore several scars.

In both composure and grit, he was far beyond the timid youth he'd once been.

"Shadow Spider is powerful," Fergus said, "but it can't leave the Abyss. I'm thinking a Bone Python suits me better."

Orion nodded. Fergus's idea seemed more practical and likely to succeed. Perhaps it was Lysinthia's influence—everyone had seen how she and Twilight Viper fought side by side in battle, piling up quite a string of achievements.

With the Abyss gate wide open again, many of the Horde's younger generation had set their sights on contracting a Bone Python.

Of course, Orion knew that even a Bone Python would be extremely deadly for youngsters. But over the last couple of years, the Horde had grown stronger; many families had managed to accumulate some dark source crystals.

Parents and elders usually gave a few crystals to their kids before letting them enter the Abyss. As a result, the new crop of young fighters was a lot tougher than those who came before. Fergus and Tarn were no exception, having received much support from Rendall and Lilith.

"Listen," Orion cautioned them both just before they departed, "once you're inside, stay sharp at all times. And if you find a beast you want to bond with, you've gotta prove your strength and your smarts!"

Fergus and Tarn nodded vigorously, then joined the others diving into the Abyss.

"Let's head back."

Orion beckoned to the guards, then walked toward a towering tree not far away. Beneath it lay a massive boulder, half-hidden in shade.

"Arch Elder!"

He called to Rendall, who stood on the boulder watching the young people file into the Abyss. Unsurprisingly, the elder's face showed quiet worry.

Orion said, "are you worried about Fergus and Tarn?"

Rendall gave a nod, then shook his head, as if weighing his words.

"This was their own choice," Orion continued. "No one can really talk them out of it. Besides, the Stoneheart Horde is home to more than just giants now. If our younger giants never produce real talent, they'll never hold their own against the other races' rising stars."

As lord, Orion was naturally eager for more gifted youth to emerge in the Horde—the more geniuses, the brighter the future. After Dirtclaw, Earthshaker, and Desdemona failed their attempts at becoming Alpha-level, Orion sensed that his current generation was nearly tapped out. The next likely wave of Alpha-level talents might well come from an even younger cohort.

"Lord," Rendall murmured, "we truly are so much stronger now than we used to be."

The elder's concerns extended beyond just Fergus and Tarn—he worried for every young fighter from all the different tribes. They were the brave ones, the Horde's tomorrow.

Orion glanced over at the Abyss gate, where a young giant and a young succubus were entering side by side.

"Arch Elder, times are different. Our people going in there now aren't going in blind. They can team up with others—and they've got dark source crystals and all kinds of supplies from their families. Their odds of taking that place by storm are definitely better."

Something lit behind Rendall's aging gaze, sparking newfound confidence. After a bit more conversation, Orion took his leave.

The reconstruction of Blackstone City had already begun, and he needed to confirm exact sites for all those special buildings. Plus, the Horde Hall was about to break ground, and he had to be there in person.

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At the old stone wall in Moonshadow Valley, crowds of people set to work. Compared to the fairly new city walls in Blackstone City, this wall was badly scarred and ragged—an ancient barricade built by the giants' ancestors, once used to seal off Moonshadow Valley in hopes of withstanding beasts and dark creatures.

Boom!

When Orion arrived, Onyx and his team of obsidian golems knocked the wall down for good.

"My lord," Onyx said, frowning as he studied a map, "this area around the wall is still pretty cramped. Should we dig back further on both sides, or shift the building outward somehow?"

"Dig around a bit," Orion replied. "Let's build the Horde Hall in the center, leaving corridors on the left and right. One corridor can serve as the main exit for regular troops, while the other—make it wider—will be for cavalry."

He pointed to the sections of rock on either side, sharing his plan. At present, their main task was the Horde Hall, which was critical as it would house the Lord's Stone.

Orion wanted it finely built, sturdy, and impressive. And given how tall most races were—particularly the giants—it also needed lofty ceilings so no one would feel cramped.

In Orion's vision, the Horde Hall would resemble a castle, divided into an inner keep and an outer keep.

It was a massive undertaking, but luckily the Stoneheart Horde had no shortage of labor—from small cave spiders to Bearman laborers who otherwise sat idle day after day.

"My lord," Onyx pressed on, "what about the basement level? How deep should we dig? Or should we stick to the blueprint?"

Rather than respond out loud, Orion bent his head and quietly conferred with Onyx.

Unlike mere tents for giants, the Horde Hall would require not just a central palace but also walls, arrow towers, battlements, the outer keep, gatehouses, underground vaults, even hidden passages.

Once completed, it'd be a kind of combat fortress within Blackstone City—when the city itself was in peril, the Horde Hall would form the last line of defense. Orion cared deeply about every detail, which was exactly why he and Onyx were on-site.

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Meanwhile, far to the north—while Orion busied himself revamping Blackstone City—a great roar echoed across a glacier. Dragon bellowed nonstop.

Roar!

The repeated thunder of the dragon cries betrayed the upheaval in Lord Glacial Dragon Jorik's mood.

"Curse that Gareth—what sort of fool just lets someone under her supervision ascend to Legendary level right under her nose?"

He spat each word in mounting rage. "Could something have happened in the south? Damn it... ROAR!"

Lord Jorik was furious—absolutely livid. When Orion traveled his territory in lightning form, he made no attempt to hide his power; Jorik sensed it even from afar.

In Jorik's view, everything that had just unfolded was meant to thwart him. He believed Gareth, after being injured multiple times, allowed one of her subordinates to become Legendary level and carve up more territory—thus blocking his path.

To invade from the north, Jorik would have to move through the Abyssal Chasm and Poison Dragon Swamp. Now both places were guarded by Legendary-level fighters, effectively shutting the door on his southern ambitions. That prospect—losing out on the limitless resources and near-endless worshippers to the south—filled Jorik with rage and resentment.

...

Down in the south, in Thunderwood Forest, Lord Gareth had also sensed Orion's presence when he streaked across Half-Moon Lake in a flash of lightning. No one was more shocked than she was.

Before this, Gareth had guessed Orion would need at least two more years to even approach the threshold of Legendary level. She never imagined he'd get there so soon, so decisively.

The moment she heard that peal of thunder—and felt that colossal pressure—she nearly thought Ariel had faked her death just to ambush her.

Only when she sensed that energy move off through the Black Forest did Gareth realize the truth. But that moment of clarity brought a wave of dread. Had she herself tried to kill Orion back then, she could only imagine what her own fate might have been.

"It defies all logic," Gareth muttered. "He achieved Legendary level right under my nose."

Honestly, Gareth still couldn't wrap her head around it. The pace of Orion's rise was insane—no one saw it coming. By the time she wanted to deal with Orion, she'd ended up helping him ascend by giving him the opportunity to seize a Lord's Stone.

On one point, though, Lord Jorik was mistaken. Gareth had never intended to create a new lord in her own domain, much less allow part of her territory to be split off. Now, the entire Four Domains and Thunderwood Forest situation was equally hard for her to stomach.

There was no denying that Orion had wrested control of the Black Forest and Poison Dragon Swamp from Gareth—an undeniable fact she simply had to face.

Granted, she had gained some new territory elsewhere in Thunderwood Forest, but Orion's brazen takeover continued to gnaw at her. More frustrating, Gareth could do nothing about it. That was the part she found most maddening.

Wanting to maintain her newly expanded land, Gareth suffered the humiliation of letting the very man who'd destroyed her Will Projection waltz out of her domain. She'd even given up Poison Dragon Swamp and Half-Moon Lake to keep the peace. And now that Orion had broken through, Gareth might be bound by a non-aggression pact with him, but it hardly put her mind at ease.

North of the Abyssal Chasm, Gareth still had to brace for Jorik's moves from the ice fields. South of Thunderwood Forest, she was pressing into the Green Insects of Lokiviria.

And right in the middle of everything, Orion had become a formidable presence. In essence, Gareth now stood surrounded by trouble on every front.

"Damn that giant... that insufferable jerk! If only he'd never—"

She cut herself off abruptly. In truth, it was precisely because of Orion that she'd gained more territory overall—even if she'd also acquired all these new headaches.

Chapter 245: From now on, we're all one family

A few days later, a group of lizardfolk arrived outside Blackstone City.

"Hahaha... Slagor, I won't lie to you. The moment you left, I knew you'd come back!"

The hearty laughter came from Rendall.

And the one Rendall had come out of Blackstone City to greet was none other than Slagor, who had led his tribe in migrating from Poison Dragon Swamp.

Slagor chuckled and shook his head. Now working alongside Rendall, he wore an awkward expression.

Back when the Ice Plains invaded, Slagor had been forced to migrate to the Black Forest. On his way out, Rendall had intercepted him with a group of cannon fodder troops, extorting a significant amount of supplies from him.

Looking back now, staying in Blackstone City from the start might have been the better choice.

"Arch Elder, is it true that Orion has reached the Legendary level?"

Before even entering Blackstone City, Slagor could faintly sense Orion's terrifying aura.

Although he had received intelligence about this beforehand, Slagor still found it hard to believe without seeing Orion in person.

For years, no one in this region had ascended to the Legendary level.

Yet Orion had done it, quietly and unexpectedly, rising to become the new lord.

While Slagor found it hard to believe, he also desperately hoped it was true.

If it was, his submission would mean securing a powerful backer for his tribe.

"All I can say is that Orion's strength is immense. You'll understand everything once you meet him."

Rendall, of course, knew what Slagor wanted to ask, but some things were better left for Slagor to witness himself.

"You little brats! What are you standing around for? Go help unload the supplies!"

"These are our allies from Poison Dragon Swamp. From now on, we're all one family!"

Rendall called out to his people, instructing them to help with the unloading.

As for himself, he threw an arm around Slagor's shoulder and led him toward the largest tent in Blackstone City.

Orion had already arrived there in advance after receiving word from the Sentinel Corps about Slagor's impending arrival.

"Slagor, at your service, my...my lord!"

"No need to be so formal. Please, have a seat."

Orion gestured to a seat beside him, indicating for Slagor to sit and talk.

As an Alpha-level warrior, Slagor automatically became a Warden upon joining the horde. He was also a member of the council, though he currently held no real power.

Orion studied Slagor and noticed that the man hadn't once lifted his head to look at him.

Amused, Orion observed how cautious Slagor was, even sitting on the edge of his seat as if ready to flee at any moment.

"My ascension to the Legendary level should be good news for you. Why so nervous?"

Orion's voice was deep, with a hint of coldness as he asked the question.

"My lord, your ascension to the Legendary level is indeed a tremendous blessing for me!" Slagor replied, standing up to speak. "It's just... it's just that so much has changed in less than a month since we last met. It's hard to..."

Orion chuckled softly and motioned for Slagor to sit back down, deciding not to tease him further.

"Tell me about the current situation in the swamp."

At the mention of business, Slagor's demeanor grew more serious, and his stuttering disappeared.

"My lord, I've led the tribe's migration, bringing the main members of the lizardfolk, swamp rats, and swamp crocodiles with me."

"As for the water pythons, swamp spiders, and some swamp crocodiles that remain in the swamp, I've stationed them near the border with the Barren Mountains, ready to follow your orders at any time."

"My lord, these particular tribes cannot survive long without water, so I didn't bring them here."

Orion nodded silently, deep in thought.

After a moment, as if coming to a decision, Orion asked, "What about the centaurs to the east? Any movement from them?"

Orion had previously declared that once he reached the Legendary level, he would deal with the centaurs who had invaded Poison Dragon Swamp.

As a lord, his words were not to be taken lightly.

Since ascending to the Legendary level, Orion had realized that every word and action of someone at his level carried immense weight.

This was tied to the collection of faith. A lord who kept their promises would gather far more faith than one who broke them.

In simple terms, a Legendary-level figure's promises were rarely broken.

This was why Orion now understood why Gareth had insisted on signing a peace treaty with him.

It was a calculated move to bind Orion's actions.

"My lord, I've only sent a few scouts to monitor the eastern region," Slagor replied. "Unless something significant happens, they won't have much valuable information to report."

"Besides, with our migration, the centaurs are even less of a threat to us now."

Slagor wasn't wrong. In fact, his tribe had gained an advantage after submitting to Orion.

By relocating closer to the Black Forest and the Barren Mountains, his people and their allied species had moved further away from the centaurs, making them much safer.

Orion remained silent, frowning as he contemplated how to deal with the centaurs.

Now that he had reached the Legendary level, he would not tolerate any foreign race encroaching on his territory—not even other Legendary-level beings.

ROAR!

Just as Orion was about to speak, a deep growl echoed from the depths of Moonshadow Valley.

Hearing the beast's roar, a glimmer of light flashed in Orion's eyes.

"My lord, could it be...?" Rendall's face turned pale. The unfamiliar Alpha-level beast aura made him think it was a creature that had escaped from the underground fissure.

"No need to worry. It's Lysinthia's Twilight Viper. It has successfully advanced to the Alpha level."

Orion explained with a faint smile of satisfaction.

"Dace, head to Moonshadow Valley and summon Warden Lysinthia."

"Otho, go fetch Thundar."

Orion issued his orders, sending the guards to summon Lysinthia and Thundar.

The Twilight Viper's advancement to the Alpha level meant it was time for it to contribute to the horde.

Orion had already anticipated this. Once the Twilight Viper advanced, it would be the perfect candidate to guard Half-Moon Lake.

Half-Moon Lake, with its vast waters, was an ideal environment for a creature like the Twilight Viper, which thrived in dark, damp conditions.

However, Orion knew he couldn't send the Twilight Viper alone.

Lysinthia, Thundar, Slagor, Thundar's cavalry, and the swamp crocodiles and water pythons from Poison Dragon Swamp were all part of the team Orion had chosen to support the Twilight Viper.

Orion understood that Half-Moon Lake, now home to numerous species that had migrated from Thunderwood Forest, required a show of strength to maintain order. Without a powerful force, it would be impossible to establish dominance.

Chapter 246 Another Abyss dragon

Moments later, Lysinthia and Thundar entered Orion's tent one after the other. Just as Orion was about to speak, Delilah slipped inside as well.

"Lysinthia, get ready. I'm sending Twilight Viper to guard Half-Moon Lake."

Hearing this, Lysinthia's pupils constricted, and her long black hair slithered like live snakes, clearly revealing her excitement. After all, Orion's order gave Twilight Viper both responsibilities and, by extension, gave her power as well.

"Master, Lysinthia and Twilight Viper stand ready at any time!"

Orion nodded, satisfied with her response. As his woman, Lysinthia hadn't refused a mission or a fight, and that attitude was certainly a point in his favor.

"Good. You can also bring along that contingent of Gorgons you converted. Let's see what they can do."

Taking the opportunity, he ordered Lysinthia to take the Gorgons she'd turned. Since Twilight Viper was being dispatched, it would need subordinates to back it up. Orion intended for those Gorgons, plus the swamp crocodiles and water pythons from Poison Dragon Swamp, to remain at Half-Moon Lake as a permanent presence.

"Thundar, you'll lead the cavalry and escort Twilight Viper to Half-Moon Lake. You have two objectives: first, intimidate all the various tribes that have migrated there and secure a sizable haul of resources for the Horde; second, test the results of the cavalry's recent training. Remember, if any tribe refuses to obey, don't bother letting them live. Wipe them out."

Orion's tone was cold, even merciless. Since his rise to Legendary level, such presence and authority radiated from him all the more.

Finally, Orion's gaze landed on Slagor, softening a fraction.

"Slagor, the swamp crocodiles and water pythons will be stationed at Half-Moon Lake to assist Twilight Viper. Make sure to handle that properly."

"Understood, my lord. Slagor will make it happen!"

Slagor nodded. He clearly recognized that Orion was reallocating power. Formerly, some of that power had belonged to him, but it was now being gradually stripped away. Although it stung, Slagor also felt strangely relieved.

As Orion's slave, he was among those Orion trusted most, so if he gave up certain privileges, he believed Orion would eventually grant him something else in return. Slagor was a clever lizardman.

"Go on and make your preparations. I'll give you three days to sort everything out."

With that, Lysinthia, Slagor, and Thundar left the tent to carry out their orders. Once the trio departed and Slagor's people had also moved on to settle in, Rendall headed out as well, wanting to handle arrangements for the latest arrivals from the Swamp. He had plenty to do.

That left only Orion and Delilah alone in the tent. Delilah sidled up behind Orion and began massaging his shoulders. After a moment of silence, Orion softly spoke.

"You stationed a number of scouts at Half-Moon Lake. Make sure they get any intel they need."

Delilah stopped kneading and leaned against Orion's shoulder, her chest pressed suggestively against him, letting out playful giggles.

Orion arched an eyebrow, his own desires piqued. Catching that subtle change, Delilah slipped smoothly into his lap, her clothes vanishing in the process.

"Rest assured, my dear lord," she murmured, hand sliding inside his underwear to grip his cock. "That's part of the Sentinel Corps' duties, after all."

...

Three days flew by.

During that time, Blackstone City underwent a flurry of construction and improvements. With the swamp folk joining in, the place grew livelier than ever. From Moonshadow Valley on out past the city walls, building crews could be seen everywhere, erecting fortifications and new structures.

Roar!

A middling roar echoed from Moonshadow Valley, adding an even more festive air to Blackstone City. Emerging from the Abyss gate came a mini-Abyss dragon, startling the bloodline warriors of various races who were hard at work.

"Another Abyss dragon?"

"And whose beast is it this time?"

Standing at the construction site, Onyx and Rendall frowned in surprise, along with everyone else who turned to look toward the Abyss. Once the small dragon fully emerged, they spotted someone seated on its back—Fergus, brimming with excitement.

"It's a giant!"

"Fergus!"

"...!"

Many of the bloodline warriors recognized him right away, and so did Rendall, who burst into a hearty laugh.

"You know that giant pretty well?" Onyx asked.

"Yes. Fergus may be adopted, but he's actually Orion's nephew," Rendall replied, full of pride.

Truthfully, Fergus's ability was only at the early Hero level, not enough to impress Onyx or Rendall on its own—but he'd somehow managed to tame an Abyss dragon as his ride in there, something they couldn't help but admire.

Though this small dragon wasn't as massive or terrifying as Orion's, it was still a formidable partner, suggesting Fergus had immense potential.

"Elder Rendall, our Horde is really blossoming!" Onyx remarked. He had been observing how Stoneheart Horde was thriving, thanks to the steady influx of different races.

Abundant resources meant that every child among those races could grow up stronger, leading to a surge of young talents. And with Orion's ascension to Legendary level, it felt like the final barrier restricting the Horde's development had snapped. Now each tribe and clan within the Horde was thriving, pulsing with new life.

"Haha! We never could've imagined days like these," Rendall agreed with a grin. "Oh, by the way—three days ago I saw a bunch of obsidian golems going through the Abyss gate, too. Prophet, you might keep your eyes peeled."

At this, Onyx's eyes brightened. He glanced back at the Abyss gate with newfound anticipation.

In the following days, Onyx supervised the Horde's building efforts while also monitoring the gate. He saw many tribespeople emerge, faces alight with pride, while others came out dejected, shoulders slumped in defeat.

"Prophet," came a voice—Dirtclaw, the deputy commander of the cannon fodder troops.

Nominally, that put him under Onyx's authority, and with no direct assignments from Delilah, he would usually hover near Onyx. "Is it possible for us gnolls to go into the Abyss too?"

"I'm not sure," Onyx replied. "Better ask the lord. For now, the gate's only open to the four main races: giants, succubi, buffalofolk, and obsidian golems. Maybe next year it'll open up to more."

Chapter 247 Keep grinding

When Onyx spoke, his voice was low. Though he showed little outward emotion, Dirtclaw could still hear the pride in his tone.

Giants, succubi, buffalofolk, and obsidian golems—those four races were the first to pledge loyalty to Orion. They'd also displayed the highest loyalty.

As the Stoneheart Horde expanded, more and more races joined. Even so, there was still a clear line between those closer to Orion and those further away. One obvious illustration was access to a precious resource like the Abyss Gate.

Even if Orion chose to open it, it naturally tilted in favor of those four core races he was closest to.

The gnolls, on the other hand, didn't hold much sway in the Stoneheart Horde yet. Dirtclaw was all too aware of that. He gazed at the distant Abyss Gate, silently giving himself a pep talk:

"I have to push harder. I have to prove myself. I have to reach Alpha level.

"Once I make Alpha, I'll be a Warden. Then the gnolls' standing in this Horde will go up.

"With better standing, we'll get more resources and more of Orion's attention.

"Dirtclaw, don't screw this up. Keep grinding!"

His eyes shone with steely resolve. Fergus's dramatic reappearance, riding an Abyss dragon in Moonshadow Valley, had been a serious wake-up call for some and a huge motivator for others.

No one felt it more than Tarn, Fergus's younger brother. Tarn had boasted he'd come back from the Abyss with his own pet dragon, only to fail to even tame a Bone Python. In fact, he couldn't get past the first level of the Abyss.

Standing in the throng, left arm injured, Tarn looked at his older brother basking in glory, clenched his teeth, and silently slipped away from Moonshadow Valley.

"That kid's young and hotheaded. Let's hope he doesn't just give up."

Orion and his guards were patrolling the western ridge of the city walls. With his sharpened senses, Orion quickly spotted Tarn in the crowd.

"My lord," one of the guards couldn't keep quiet, "we finally have a second Abyss dragon in our Horde!"

"Yes, and if we have a second, there'll be a third. Someday we'll have more than we can count."

Orion withdrew his gaze. Anyone returning from the Abyss Gate with real gains was good news for the Horde. It meant they were breaking ground on using such a special place to further the growth of their people.

"You all wait here," Orion said. Without another word, he leaped down into the underground fissure.

Spider Queen Lorelia was already waiting near the entrance, quietly awaiting Orion's arrival.

"Master, you're here."

Orion gave a small nod and strode into the dark tunnel leading to the bottomless abyss. Right before he reached it, he ran into Rockwell, who was on rotation to guard this area.

"My lord," Rockwell said, stepping out of the shadows with his stone axe slung across his back.

"That old wound of yours—are you healed up?" Orion asked.

"Thanks for the concern, my lord. I'm pretty much back to normal now!" Rockwell chuckled, looking in bright spirits.

"With the Abyss Gate open, I hear some of the obsidian golems have run into serious luck down there. Aren't you curious to check it out?"

Rockwell let out a hearty laugh, but while Orion and Lorelia continued forward, he backed away, returning to the darkness to keep watch as usual.

For Orion, gazing into this bottomless abyss no longer sparked the same fear or worry. Now, he felt more of a sense of anticipation. The thick aura of death was plain in his heightened perception.

"Have any of the little spiders come back recently?" he asked.

"They have," Lorelia replied.

Orion waited calmly for more, his expression unreadable.

"Every so often, at fairly even intervals, three Death Spiders have climbed up with the same report each time," Lorelia went on. "Master, your sister and the other elders have secured a foothold below, setting up a temporary camp."

Orion kept silent, eyes still locked on the darkness. After a long pause, he pulled out a piece of hide from inside his clothing and handed it to Lorelia.

"Copy the contents onto several more pieces. Next time you send the little spiders down, have them take this."

Lorelia glanced at the writing, then nodded in agreement. Orion turned, heading out the way he'd come, Lorelia right behind him.

"Send the spiders on more hunts," Orion said. "Use the Black Forest, Poison Dragon Swamp, and the Barren Mountains as your hunting grounds. By the time spring thaw arrives next year, I want to see the spider swarm hit at least a million."

This was Orion's directive. Poison Dragon Swamp, the Barren Mountains, and now Half-Moon Lake were all his territories, brimming with creatures that the cave spiders could hunt. Lorelia's brood no longer had a shortage of resources, so there was no real limit to how many she could raise.

"Master, I've already got little spiders joining Arch Elder Rendall's hunting parties in the Black Forest, Poison Dragon Swamp, and Barren Mountains. Should I dispatch them to Half-Moon Lake, too?"

As spider broodmother, Lorelia was eager to expand her swarm anyway. Besides the spiders stationed as guards around the bottomless abyss, the rest were out either hunting or helping the cannon fodder troops rebuild Blackstone City. The little spiders had become one of the Horde's most versatile assets.

"There's no need at Half-Moon Lake. Once Twilight Viper sets up shop, it'll provide all the resources we need from that area."

He paused, eyes flicking to Rockwell farther off. "Also, don't neglect your own cultivation. Even if I don't push for an invasion next year, someone else might come for us instead. Stay on your toes. From now on, expect battles every single year. Make the most of this quiet time."

By the time Lorelia parsed the deeper meaning behind Orion's words, Orion's silhouette had already vanished from the underground fissure.

...

A month passed in busy, boisterous activity.

In that time, Blackstone City saw extensive renovations, and the presence of the swamp tribes only heightened the energy. Construction teams were everywhere—from Moonshadow Valley all the way outside the city walls—raising fortifications and structures.

One day, Orion walked along the city wall to the western ridge. Lately, Thunderhawk Rayden's cries had turned more powerful and ringing than ever. Early that morning, Orion had barely stepped out of his tent when the whole city was already talking about the thunderhawk circling overhead.

After more than a month of recuperation, Thunderhawk Rayden's feathers had regrown. The proud, sky-soaring thunderhawk was back.

Screee!

A winged shadow streaked past the mountaintop. Spotting Orion entering its territory, Thunderhawk Rayden swooped down from the sky.

Orion looked up, bent his knees, and let crackling arcs of lightning spark across his body. In a sizzling flash, he landed right on Thunderhawk Rayden's back.

The thunderhawk jerked in startled surprise—its master had vanished from the ground and then abruptly reappeared on its back mid-dive.

Chapter 248 Swear loyalty to me

Before Orion reached Legendary level, every time Thunderhawk Rayden came to pick him up, Orion would always take a running leap before mounting. This time, Orion simply appeared on its back in a flash, which threw Rayden off.

"What are you spacing out for, you dumb bird? Do you want to slam headfirst into that mountain?"

Orion reminded Rayden. The thunderhawk snapped out of it and let out a string of piercing cries. With a quick glide, it flapped its wings and soared higher.

"Master, where to?"

"Fly north, to the ice fields. I want to see those glaciers."

He had a plan. As a lord, Orion needed to be informed about the various Legendary-level powers around him.

He'd already met Gareth, so he wasn't concerned with her right now. Next on his list was Lord Jorik in the north—rumored to be a Glacial Dragon.

Orion was eager to meet him. If it came down to it, he wouldn't mind playing the "dragon slayer." Plus, the area northeast of Poison Dragon Swamp bordered the ice fields, making them neighbors. Orion figured it was best to meet Lord Jorik personally, and maybe even lay the groundwork for future invasions.

Screee!

Thunderhawk Rayden let out a shrill cry, then shot north at top speed. With Orion on its back, it felt confident enough to soar freely, unrestrained.

Up above, the wind roared, and the clouds floated by in whorls of mist. Standing on the thunderhawk's back, Orion listened to the rush of air and watched the land blur beneath them. A certain grandeur filled him.

North of the Black Forest stretched an expanse of conifer woodland. It wasn't exactly teeming with beasts, but it wasn't empty either.

Looking down at the land below, Orion felt more than ever that it belonged to him. There'd been no such feeling on earlier flights with the thunderhawk. But now, here in his own territory, he was the one on top, the one who perceived every tiny change around him.

Suddenly, Orion understood how Gareth must've felt back then. As long as someone wasn't yet at Legendary level, you could tolerate their presence.

"Maybe that's exactly how Gareth thought of me."

He chuckled at the realization—and felt lucky. He'd managed to rise above the threshold, right under a powerful lord's nose.

...

Two weeks later, Thunderhawk Rayden flew past the Black Forest and into the Abyssal Chasm.

Gareth herself was off campaigning in Thunderwood Forest, so she wasn't there. Still, Orion's brazen flight over the Abyssal Chasm drew notice from one of Gareth's will projections.

Drifting in the sky, Orion glanced down and spotted that flicker of Gareth's presence, but paid it no mind. At his current level, snuffing out her will projection would pose no challenge.

But killing it here and now in the Abyssal Chasm would just create extra complications and cancel their pact on the spot. Then Gareth would surely harass Poison Dragon Swamp, the Black Forest, and Half-Moon Lake with all her forces, pitching the Stoneheart Horde into chaos. That would run counter to his plans for this period of growth—it definitely wasn't what Orion wanted.

"Keep going. Don't stop," he told Rayden. "Straight north."

In the Abyssal Chasm, Gareth's projection lifted its gaze and frowned.

"So Orion didn't come after the Abyssal Chasm—kept on going north. Looks like he's not here for me at all.

"The north... that's the ice fields. After all, a slice of Poison Dragon Swamp is right up against the ice fields. He must be looking for Jorik. Should I chase after him?"

...

Thunderwood Forest, Thunderpeak Mountain.

Gareth, having gotten the message from her will projection, narrowed her eyes in thought.

"Orion's gone to the ice fields? The last time Jorik sent his men to invade the Black Forest, Orion must be going up there to see what's what. Maybe to test his own strength... Yeah, that feels like him."

Gareth knew Orion's personality from meeting him a few times. He was direct, fearless, and never forgot a grudge.

Since Lord Jorik had invaded the Black Forest, Orion sure wasn't about to let that go.

As for why he hadn't come after her for a rematch, Gareth figured she had a decent guess. They'd already tangled once—she'd tried to kill him, and he'd wiped out Ridi as well as her own will projection, which settled some of that score.

Since their territories bordered each other, and both sides wanted to push south someday, Gareth and Orion had made that brief peace arrangement.

Gareth grudgingly respected Orion for leaving the Abyssal Chasm alone. It showed he wasn't looking to escalate things with her—at least for now. If Orion had tried to grab the Abyssal Chasm, there'd have been no chance for calm between them. If Orion wanted to march south, he'd have to invade her lands sooner or later.

"This works out," Gareth mused. "He needs time to build up, and I need time to stabilize Thunderwood Forest. That's a fair exchange."

...

Up north, another two weeks passed before Orion and Rayden finally entered the ice fields. Almost immediately, Orion sensed Lord Jorik's presence.

"Rayden, see that massive glacier dead ahead?"

"Yes, Master, I see it."

"Let's go!"

Rayden let out a high, shrill whistle. Once into the ice fields, the beasts were fewer, and blizzards raged across a vast expanse of white. The snowfall and icy gusts cut visibility, forcing Rayden to rely on caution.

"Master, maybe we should fly higher. These winds and all this snow... it's getting tough."

Orion didn't respond. Instead, he turned his head, glancing off to the side.

"You might as well come out. I know you're there."

The suddenness of Orion's words made Thunderhawk Rayden jolt. Adrenaline spiking, the thunderhawk shot arcs of lightning around its body to disperse the swirling snow. It circled the area warily, but couldn't pinpoint anyone.

Just as Rayden was about to speak up, a figure in white appeared in the distance—Lumi.

"Lumi," Orion called out. "Soraya mentioned you. I know you're not under Lord Jorik.

"Swear loyalty to me, and I'll bring you south. I'll grant you a far greater territory."

Chapter 249 Glacial Dragon

Facing this peculiar elemental life form, Orion's first instinct wasn't to kill her, but to extend an olive branch.

Lumi stared at Orion. She remembered him—how he once ordered Thunderhawk to drive her back with a single strike that left her injured. What shocked her more was that the Orion now standing before her was already at Legendary level.

Under a different lord's domain, a giant had actually managed to ascend to Legendary and even become a lord in his own right. Lumi found that idea mind-boggling.

"Why were you able to reach Legendary level?"

She was desperate to know because that was her own dream, too.

Orion simply smiled without answering. After a moment of locking eyes with her, he pressed on.

"Surrender to me, and I'll give you new lands to call your own."

"I haven't submitted to Lord Jorik," Lumi replied. "And I won't submit to you, either!"

With that, she dissolved into clusters of snowflakes and vanished before Orion could say anything else.

He made no move to stop her. With transcendent power now at his beck and call, he sensed Lumi's energy fading into the distance.

"What a shame."

It would've been a big advantage for both him and the Stoneheart Horde if he could've tamed an elemental being. Plus, Orion privately admitted he also wouldn't have minded conquering her with his cock—just a very male giant's urge, as he saw it.

"Master, that woman attacked our territory last time. Why let her go?"

Thunderhawk Rayden still remembered Lumi well.

"Not your concern. Keep flying."

"Oh..."

Noting Orion's closed-off tone, Rayden flapped its wings, climbed a bit higher, and sped north toward the glaciers.

Two days later, Orion had Thunderhawk Rayden come to a halt in front of a massive ice cliff.

"Stay here. Keep your wits about you."

As soon as the words left his mouth, Orion became a flash of lightning, leaping ahead toward the glacier.

Off in the distance, atop a peak of solid ice, a massive Glacial Dragon crawled out from its lair. Spotting the flickering lightning in the sky, it began to roar.

A cascading series of deafening dragon cries rang out, one after another.

"Intruder! Must be driven away!"

From somewhere in that lightning, Orion sensed a will—hostile, dead-set on expelling him.

Crackkk—crackkk!

It sounded like shards of ice scraping together, or glass shattering—a sharp, earsplitting noise. Caught in the wind, jagged sheets of ice formed a river of cold aimed straight at the lightning.

No words exchanged—Lord Jorik chose to strike first.

Rumble... boom...

High in the sky, cocooned in flashes of lightning, Orion wore a calm expression. Thunder rolled ominously as he lashed out in return.

Three thick, terrifying bolts of lightning barreled downward, shattering that crushing wave of ice. Though partially dissipated by impact, they still tore through the freezing air, beelining toward Lord Jorik on the glacier.

Roar!

Another dragon roar erupted—slightly different in timbre this time. Shrill and fierce, it practically shook the air itself. Nearby beasts on the glacier shattered under the force, their bodies destroyed even at a distance.

Outside in the periphery, Thunderhawk Rayden, hearing that roar, lost its balance and plummeted from the sky. Fortunately, it had been flying quite high, so after several seconds of free fall, it caught itself and hastily winged back south.

Meanwhile, Orion—his transcendent power swirling—met that boomsome roar head-on and snuffed it out before it could even reach him.

The three bolts of lightning he'd sent out vanished in the aftershock, and the tridents hidden within them were crushed into dust by the dragon's sonic attack.

"Dragons really are something else," Orion said to himself. He'd poured formidable energy into those three lightning bolts, yet Lord Jorik neutralized them with a single roar.

Roar!

Just then, the Glacial Dragon spread its wings and soared upward in a flash. Orion saw that at some point, a layer of glittering ice—like armor—had formed over the dragon's body. Icy wind whirled around it, charging toward the lightning-clad Orion.

"Good!"

Lightning crackled around Orion's frame. He readied his weapon, the Flame of Will, and an ice-like covering instantly formed on his own body.

"Kill!"

With a bellow, Orion sent an even brighter surge of lightning flaring across the trident's surface. A split second later, he used Swift Charge—a special power dive that blasted him straight down.

Boom!

Lightning met ice in a dull, earthshaking detonation. Ancient ice coating the glacier splintered and tumbled away in jagged chunks, setting off an avalanche.

Up above, a glaring flash burned momentarily before everything fell silent. On the glacier summit, the Glacial Dragon dropped back onto the ice, staring darkly at the fleeing streak of lightning.

Once it returned to its lair, the dragon's shape melted and shifted until it stood as a tall warrior clad in ice armor, gripping a massive sword.

Lord Jorik lowered his gaze toward his chest. The ice plating there had fractured, revealing a wound across his scales. The skin was charred and smoked faintly—that was the aftermath of Orion's lightning.

"Orion barely reached Legendary level, so how is he already this strong?"

That question was first and foremost on Jorik's mind. Whereas mere moments ago, he'd been overflowing with contempt at the idea of a giant capturing Legendary rank, the memory of Orion dropping in wreathed in lightning made him uneasy.

"A lightning-type transcendent power... so much trouble."

Lord Jorik stared at the spot where Orion had disappeared, brow furrowed. Before seeing him in person, Jorik had felt only hostility. Now that they'd actually crossed paths, he was forced to be wary.

"Guess he was here to size me up...? Damn giant... who does he think he's looking down on?!"

Long after Orion departed, Jorik finally understood why he had come. Furious, the Glacial Dragon's roars echoed across the ice.

Farther north still, Gustalon emerged from the wind, hearing that angry bellow carried on the gale. Without seeing it firsthand, Gustalon knew how furious Lord Jorik must be.

"Is the south really bursting with that many resources? Enough for a giant to reach Legendary level!"

"For my own freedom, I might want to head south too..."

He glanced toward the glaciers, then toward the south, a pensive gleam in his eyes.

Chapter 250 The neighbor on the eastern edge of swamp

Boom!

A jagged bolt of lightning ripped across the sky, striking down onto Thunderhawk Rayden's body.

Orion lifted his trident, its prongs already sheathed in a layer of frost.

Crackle...

An electric current sparked, and the frost peeled away. Flame of Will once again flared brilliantly.

"Master, you're back!"

Only after Orion dispersed the ice did Thunderhawk Rayden realize Orion had returned to its back.

"Mm. We're heading back now, but first we swing east of Poison Dragon Swamp."

Orion stowed his trident and pointed out their next destination. Thunderhawk Rayden beat its wings, picking up speed and rising higher into the sky.

"Master, did you beat that giant dragon?"

They flew for a while before Thunderhawk Rayden, sounding a little anxious, finally plucked up the guts to ask if Orion had been hurt.

"No, I didn't win."

Thunderhawk Rayden couldn't help trembling at those words.

"But I didn't lose either."

It wasn't until Orion finished that sentence that Thunderhawk Rayden felt strength flood back into its body. If Lord Jorik hadn't beaten Lord Orion, that meant the thunderhawk was free to roam the skies however it pleased—an idea that made Rayden want to sing on the spot.

"Master, hang on tight. I'm about to speed up again!"

Thunderhawk Rayden's excitement rose until it yearned to challenge the open skies. Orion gave a soft grunt in acknowledgment and fell silent, his mind elsewhere.

In his confrontation with Jorik, Orion certainly hadn't come off the worse; in fact, it was Jorik who'd been on the back foot.

Of course, neither of them had shown their true aces in the hole, both holding back part of their power. Orion attacked only once and then withdrew, never giving Jorik the chance to engage further.

"At least Poison Dragon Swamp should stay peaceful next year," Orion thought.

His reasons for coming north hadn't just been about testing himself against a Glacial Dragon—he also wanted Lord Jorik to feel the threat of his power and think twice before trying to invade Poison Dragon Swamp in the spring.

If that dissuasion worked, the Stoneheart Horde would get another chunk of time to develop. If Jorik decided to attack the Abyssal Chasm instead, that would be Gareth's problem, not Orion's.

Moreover, the skirmish gave Orion a better sense of what other Legendary-level beings might be capable of. At this point, he was pretty confident that no one in the surrounding area could actually beat him—or force him to use his unique skill, Blood Sacrifice.

In other words, Orion finally felt truly secure in this world—secure enough to survive come what may.

He quietly observed the transcendent power coursing inside him. His supernatural might created a consciousness, which harvested faith, which in turn shaped his supernatural power.

Now that he'd used some of that transcendent energy, Orion noticed its recovery rate was linked to how much faith energy he'd garnered—and that was in turn tied to the population of intelligent races in his territory.

Such deductions were still rudimentary; Orion was brand-new to Legendary level, with plenty left to learn.

"Next stop: the neighbor on the eastern edge of Poison Dragon Swamp."

Wind whipped by his ears as Orion lifted his gaze toward the east.

Past Poison Dragon Swamp lay the Desolate Plains, home to large populations of centaurs, minotaurs, and ogres—or at least that was the gist Orion had picked up when he became lightning and scouted his domain. Undoubtedly, there were other races there as well, but judging by the numbers, they didn't compare to those three major groups.

Orion didn't yet know who ruled that region. His plan now was to swing east from the north and pay them a visit—best to learn more about one's "neighbors."

As Thunderhawk Rayden gradually angled south, the landscape below changed bit by bit, shifting from glacial terrains to tundra, then snowy forests, then coniferous woodlands.

Two weeks later, once Orion spotted the scattered lakes dotting Poison Dragon Swamp, the same sense of belonging he'd felt before washed over him.

"Master, that sky down there is my domain, too!"

Quiet until now, Thunderhawk Rayden spoke up, clearly in higher spirits. In its mind, Poison Dragon Swamp belonged to Orion, so the swamp's skies belonged to Rayden. Letting out one shrill cry after another, the thunderhawk proclaimed its dominion across Poison Dragon Swamp.

By a lake hidden deep in the swamp, a hunting party comprising giants, succubi, lizardmen, buffalofolk, cave spiders, and gnolls all heard that familiar cry. Glancing upward, they spotted the thunderhawk.

Standing among them, Ursa—a half-squint to her eyes—was watching the bird in the sky.

"Check it out—that's our Horde's thunderhawk, right?"

"Sure is. Think Lord Orion's back from scouting the territory?"

Ursa, Rendall's eldest daughter, was also one of the Horde council's eight elders. She'd led this hunting group to wipe out a type of beast known as the swamp beaver. Little did they know they'd arrived just in time to witness Orion's thunderhawk ripping across the heavens with its signature cry.

The thunderhawk wasn't slowing or showing any sign of coming down; Ursa deduced Orion hadn't planned on visiting them. She let out a thoughtful hum and then spoke up:

"Send a message to the Sentinel Corps. Let them know we saw the thunderhawk streaking east across Poison Dragon Swamp—looks like Lord Orion's back on a territory patrol."

For a giant, Ursa was handling things with practiced tact. After so many meetings and battles, she'd learned a thing or two. Passing along this information immediately would put minds at ease—especially those of Onyx, Delilah, Lilith, and the other higher-ups.

After all, Orion had been gone to the north for nearly two months. Without word, the senior figures of the Stoneheart Horde might have been outwardly calm but quietly worried. Of course, Orion had left a will projection behind in the Horde, or the tension might have been even worse.

"All right, folks. Let's get these traps laid and scatter the bait!" Ursa then turned to the waiting lizardmen. "You guys, get ready. Once the traps are in place, we'll start driving the beasts!"