

Titan King 411

Chapter 411 Domain

"How did you know I was here?"

Orion pulled Lumi into his arms.

"The moment you entered the northern region, they told me."

Nestled against Orion, Lumi reached out with her icy fingers, catching a snowflake that drifted down from the sky.

"How have you been lately? I can sense you've made a lot of progress."

"The expansion of the territory broadened my domain. I'm much stronger than before."

"Domain?"

Orion lifted his head from Lumi's neck, surprised. The idea of a "domain" was new to him, and it piqued his curiosity.

"Yes, a domain. It's a power we elementals are born with, akin to the talent that you possess."

Holding Lumi close, Orion fell into thought. "Is it something like an aura or a pressure?"

Lumi shook her head, then looked at Orion intently. She found it strange—his arrival had stirred something deep inside her. Was it Orion's intense, masculine aura or his powerful cock that set off these feelings? Lumi knew perfectly well that this odd sensation was raising her body temperature.

Though Lumi didn't voice her thoughts, the sky gradually filled with snow, and that alone spoke volumes.

"My Lumi, tell me more about what a domain is."

Seeing Lumi again and pulling her into his embrace filled Orion with a sense of triumph.

"Wherever there is snow, my domain exists. In my domain, I can sense everything. The moment you set foot on the snowy ground, I knew you were here."

Orion still didn't entirely grasp what a domain meant, so he asked another related question:

"Does Gustalon have a domain as well?"

"Yes, he does," Lumi answered, nodding. "Wherever Gustalon roams, if there's wind, then his domain is there. The domain of wind is even more elusive and far-reaching."

At that, Orion suddenly realized something. "So when Gustalon turns himself into wind and vanishes, he's using the power of his domain?"

"That's right. That's exactly how one wields a domain."

"Besides elementals, can other races master this power?"

"I'm not sure."

Lumi shook her head, extending her hand. Snowflakes appeared and vanished in her palm, over and over.

"Shall we go to your place?"

Though Orion hadn't found a concrete answer, his thoughts had begun drifting toward Lumi's body. Indeed, merely seeing her had aroused his desire, and all he wanted was to make love to her.

"All right," Lumi replied, her voice low—a subconscious reaction.

Her thighs had already begun rubbing together on their own. Just picturing Orion's big cock had her vagina growing wet. Yet Lumi's face hid her inner longing well; she still looked cold and aloof, even though her desire burned fiercely inside.

Swish... Swish... Swish...

A gust of snow whipped through the air, enveloping both Orion and Lumi.

In the midst of swirling ice and snow, Lumi was suddenly struck by a playful thought. Wrapping her arms around Orion, she said, "Follow me."

Orion didn't answer. He let Lumi hold him tight.

It was a strange sensation. First came piercing cold that felt bone-deep. Then, an indescribable warmth replaced it. He and Lumi seemed to merge, losing any sense of separation, almost as if their minds and nerves were momentarily bound together.

When Orion opened his eyes again, both he and Lumi were standing inside the mountain cave where she lived.

"How long did that take?" Orion asked.

"Fifteen minutes."

Orion was astonished. He clearly remembered that this cave was very far from where he had been—normally, even moving as lightning would require half a day to get here. Yet they had made it in only fifteen minutes.

"My sweet Lumi, what was that feeling just now?"

Lumi lifted her head and gazed at him. The endearment "my sweet Lumi" stirred something within her, yet she found it strangely pleasant.

"That was my domain."

Hearing this, Orion felt a sudden clarity, though he still didn't fully understand it.

"Aren't you going in?"

Her cool voice echoed in the cavern, colored by curiosity and just a hint of longing.

Shaken from his thoughts, Orion regarded the icy beauty in his arms. Her pure appearance reignited his desire. He followed her deeper into the cave.

As soon as they were inside, Orion stripped Lumi's clothes away, laid her on an ice-carved bed, and made passionate love to her.

Gradually, even Lumi's frosty body grew warm. The cave filled with the sounds of their pleasure as time slipped away.

Half a month later, a fierce flurry of snow whirled out from the frozen plains toward the Abyssal Chasm, continuing south all the way to the edge of the black forest before finally coming to a halt.

"Go back. When you reach Legendary rank, I'll come and bring you back home myself."

"All right."

As Lumi spoke, she transformed into swirling snow and disappeared before Orion's eyes.

Orion looked up at the drifting flakes, caught one in his palm, and watched it melt on his skin. Then, he changed into lightning and streaked toward the south.

The rumble of thunder faded, yet within the flurry of snow, Lumi reappeared. Remaining on the spot, she watched the direction Orion had gone for a long, silent moment.

During these days spent with Orion, she had been completely conquered. It wasn't just his tremendous strength but also his potent sexual power. Even an elemental being like Lumi had to admit that Orion was exceptionally gifted when it came to lovemaking.

Another half a month later, in Stoneheart City, Orion emerged from the teleportation array with Lilith, accompanied by a burst of energy.

"Wow, that's so cool! We really made it here—like traveling through time and space!"

On the plaza, several hundred horde younglings shouted in unison. It was their first journey away from home, and everything excited them.

Orion glanced at Earthshaker, who was standing beside the group, and said calmly, "Take these youngsters on a tour of Stoneheart City, then entrust them to the Elder of Stewardship. From now on, they'll live in the youth camp under the horde's supervision."

Earthshaker nodded and led the wide-eyed younglings out of the subterranean castle plaza. Meanwhile, Orion, his arm linked with Lilith's, headed for the castle exit.

"Come on, I'll show you around and let you see how Stoneheart City has been rebuilt."

Lilith smiled warmly, merely nodding without saying a word.

No sooner had they stepped out of the castle than Orion's guards—Dace, Otho, Beyn, and Torba—appeared at the gate. Sensing Orion's presence, they had rushed over at their top speed.

Orion took one look at them, delighted to see they had all successfully advanced to Alpha-level.

"Good. Now you finally look like guards worthy of a Giant King."

Dace, Otho, Beyn, and Torba stood ramrod straight, four Frost Wolves crouching behind them like obedient soldiers awaiting Orion's review. This moment was one of pride and honor for them.

As the giant king's guards, they had at last achieved Alpha-level strength, no longer feeling weak or unworthy.

"All right, then come along with Lilith and me for a stroll."

At that, Orion strode off with Lilith on his arm, making his way into the streets of Stoneheart City.

"As you command. May our king's glory shine upon the entire continent!"

"As you command. May our king's glory shine upon the entire continent!"

"...!"

Hearing their echo from just ahead, Orion paused for a second and let out a slightly embarrassed smile. He didn't look back, nor did he reproach them or order them to stop.

Beside him, Lilith tilted her head, gazing at Orion. Her lips curved faintly upward, her eyes gleaming with a hint of playful amusement.

Chapter 412: Cupid Fruit

"Look! It's my honorable lord!"

"That's the giant king! He's come to inspect Stoneheart City!"

"Who's that woman beside the giant king?"

"Am I seeing this right? That's the Elder of Stewardship?"

"You fool, that's the giant king's wife. The only woman allowed to accompany Orion on an inspection would be his wife."

"..."

Gradually, as Orion made his way through Stoneheart City, crowds formed along both sides of the street to watch the spectacle. Wherever Orion passed, the roads cleared automatically. As more and more giants gathered, voices began calling out, hailing him as the Giant King.

Meanwhile, Lilith was making her first public appearance in Stoneheart City. In truth, Orion had brought her along on his inspection to proclaim her status, so that all his people would remember her face. Walking alongside Orion, Lilith was not only stunning and alluring but also exuded a warm friendliness. Whenever she saw any younglings of the horde, she would smile and wave at them.

Elsewhere, in the mysterious tavern.

On the second floor of the tavern, Delilah was lounging in a leather chair, looking quite relaxed.

"Your Majesty the Succubus Queen, Lord Orion and Princess Lilith are currently inspecting Stoneheart City. Shall we go out and... observe—er, protect them?"

Delilah shot the succubus maidservant who had quickly changed her wording a sideways glance, speaking in a lazy tone.

"Protect?"

"Do you think the giant king need your protection?"

The maidservant who had just spoken trembled in fear and kept her head bowed, not daring to speak again. Another succubus maidservant peeled a grape and placed it into Delilah's mouth. Supporting her chin with her right hand, Delilah chewed the soft, tangy grape, gazing out the window while listening to the distant cheers echoing through the city.

"Have you found those items I asked you to look for?"

After a while, Delilah withdrew her gaze and asked casually.

"Your Majesty, we've searched all through the Beastfolk and Orc territories, but haven't found the legendary pills."

A hint of anger flickered in Delilah's eyes as they narrowed.

"However, we did get a different lead. In a valley inhabited by a Beastfolk tribe, there's a magical plant called Cupid Fruit. According to the Beastfolk's account, once someone eats Cupid Fruit, then has intercourse, it can lead to conception. In the past, these fruits were regularly offered up as tributes by the Beastfolk elders."

Hearing this, Delilah's displeasure subsided, but her brow furrowed slightly.

"Did you manage to get any?"

Delilah swallowed the grape in her mouth and sat upright, fixing her gaze on the succubus maidservant who was delivering the report.

"We've already dispatched three waves of our people, Your Majesty. I promise the Cupid Fruit will reach your hands."

Delilah said nothing, lowering her head in thought. After some time, she looked up at a succubus maidservant standing behind her.

"Go and summon Dirtclaw. Tell him to come to the tavern."

Once that maidservant left, Delilah turned back to the one who had been reporting.

"You'll go there in person. I'll have Dirtclaw accompany you. Remember, make sure you bring that fruit back to me!"

By the time she finished speaking, Delilah's voice had grown cold without her even noticing.

"I swear I will complete this task!"

"All right. You may leave."

Meanwhile, in a bedroom within the castle...

While Orion and Lilith were inspecting Stoneheart City, a quiet conversation was taking place here.

"Seer, our lord has returned, and he brought that... that wife of his with him."

The old elder of the fox tribe stared anxiously at Sylvana, who was calmly sipping tea. Sylvana's serene expression made the elder even more flustered.

Until now, the only mistress of the castle was Sylvana. But from now on, the castle would welcome its true lady of the house, the rumored beautiful succubus wife of Orion.

Sylvana continued chewing on the leaves in her mouth. Rather than ordinary tea, what she was drinking was a special infusion made from leaves that helped calm the mind.

"Elder, it's perfectly normal for Orion's wife to come to the castle. There's no need to be so worried. Some things aren't worth fretting over."

After finishing her drink, Sylvana carefully placed the cup back on the table.

"Seer, but... we don't know anything about the temper of Orion's succubus wife. I'm worried she'll... she'll make things difficult for us."

Sylvana reached for the teapot, intending to pour another cup. The fox tribe's old elder moved to help, but Sylvana gestured for her to stop. Sylvana felt she needed to grow accustomed to existing in that dark void by herself, without relying too much on others' help. One day, after all, the old elder would leave her.

"She won't trouble us. Since she's Orion's wife, I'm sure she's a very tolerant woman, otherwise..."

Sylvana trailed off, for footsteps could be heard approaching from outside the bedroom.

Twenty minutes earlier, after roughly completing their inspection of Stoneheart City, Orion had scooped Lilith into his arms and leaped onto the abyssal dragon. Together with their entourage, they swiftly returned to the castle.

Upon their return, Orion entrusted all internal affairs to Lilith while he proceeded to the castle's main hall to meet with his subordinates.

"Earthshaker, I've placed that totem pole from the Beastfolk(Beastmen) territory in the military camp. Many of the Beastfolk are minotaurs. Discuss with the Elder of Stewardship how many people you'll need and how best to utilize the totem pole."

Earthshaker was overjoyed to hear this. Outsiders might not grasp the significance of a totem pole for the minotaurs, but Earthshaker certainly did.

"My lord, with that totem pole, I can organize a minotaur army to charge at the front lines for you."

This was precisely what Orion had anticipated. Among the many races inhabiting this territory, minotaurs were relatively few—only in the tens of thousands. Excluding children, the elderly, and women, there might be fewer than ten thousand eligible for a minotaur fighting force.

Though a ten-thousand-strong army was not especially large in Orion's current view, he was more than willing to see Earthshaker take the initiative. As the horde continues to grow, the populations of each race will steadily increase.

"Very well. Go make your preparations."

Earthshaker took his leave of the castle. Shortly after, Grulbane, the giant elder, requested an audience at the castle gates. Orion summoned him inside and delegated a new task.

"Grulbane, compared to Dace and the others, you're more familiar with this territory. Get ready. Three days from now, I want you to accompany me on an inspection of the entire region."

Orion planned to travel openly, letting everyone in the territory know of his existence. He wanted them to revere him, to offer him their faith, so that he could gather the faith energy of all those who supported him.

"My king, Grulbane is honored to serve you!"

Chapter 413: Weakness is a sin

Orion nodded and, after a moment's thought, continued speaking.

"Grulbane, I've found a few disciples for you. I hope you can train them."

Grulbane looked puzzled, clearly intrigued by the so-called disciples Orion mentioned. At Orion's signal, and under Dace's guidance, four giants entered the hall from outside.

"Greetings, honorable lord!"

"Greetings, honorable lord!"

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Among the four, the tallest giant was Brom, once Orion's friend—a giant who had awakened a shamanic gift. The other three young giants also possessed shamanic potential.

"I can sense the aura of witchcraft from them," Grulbane remarked.

Orion nodded, introducing the four to Grulbane and explaining the situation in more detail.

"They're the most promising potential shamans from the Blackstone Tribe. I'd like them to study under you. And not only them—you'll also be teaching any gifted younglings from the Ironbone and Starveil Giant Clans. These young giants represent the future of the Giant Tribe, and I want you to give them your all. Can you do that?"

Orion's tone grew serious with that final question.

"Honorable lord, teaching the younger generation of the Giant Tribe is my duty. I will not shirk it."

Orion laughed heartily, clearly pleased.

"Excellent. Over the next three days, I'll gather all the young giants in the tribe who possess shamanic potential and bring them to you. Their training will begin with this expedition across our territory!"

From that, Grulbane instantly realized just how large a task lay before him. He wouldn't just be teaching the four standing here—he'd be teaching all gifted Giant Tribe younglings.

Three days later, a cavalry regiment of around a hundred riders—led by Orion and his four guardians—left Stoneheart City. Accompanying them were more than thirty young giants.

"Lord, are we really taking all these tribe younglings with us?" Grulbane asked with concern as he stood by the abyssal dragon's side.

Standing behind him were the most shamanically gifted young giants in Stoneheart City, ranging from about eight to fifteen years old.

Orion patted the massive head of the abyssal dragon. Its body had grown even larger, and its strength now hovered at the peak of Alpha-level. Orion planned to let it grow a bit more before giving it a Lord's Stone.

Currently, only two in the Stoneheart Horde had hopes of reaching legendary status: Lumi and the abyssal dragon.

Of course, Gustalon was eligible too, but he wasn't Orion's mate. If he wanted a Lord's Stone, he'd have to prove himself: his battle achievements still weren't sufficient, and his loyalty remained untested. Even if he got it, it wouldn't feel justified. Gustalon needed to face more life-or-death trials before he could be acknowledged.

Collecting his thoughts, Orion glanced at Grulbane, who looked rather worried, then turned his gaze beyond him to the excited eyes of those young giants. They all gazed in awe at the abyssal dragon.

"Grulbane, stay focused. These younglings represent the future of the Giant Tribe. Do you want them to miss the golden time for laying a solid foundation by leaving them in ignorance?"

Before Grulbane could respond, Orion looked to Dace.

"Go. Split the cavalry into two groups—one to clear the path up ahead and another to stay on guard in the surrounding area. Their top priority is to protect these younglings."

Only after Dace left to carry out the order did Orion continue speaking to Grulbane.

"Grulbane, the lesson for these little ones begins with marching on foot."

Grulbane's eyes went wide, as though he'd heard something unimaginable.

"Honorable lord, you don't mean...you want them to walk the whole way?"

Orion nodded, not a hint of jest in his voice.

"Not just them—all of you. As their mentor, you must set the example and be their role model."

He spoke loudly enough that the young giants behind Grulbane could hear. Sure enough, it prompted an immediate outcry.

Orion surveyed the group, then raised his voice again:

"In this land, weakness is a sin. Because of weakness, the Giant Tribe once served as a vassal to the Blood Elves, and some of our people were even driven to the frozen tundra of the far north. You are the most promising shamanic talents of Stoneheart Horde. As long as you grow stronger, Stoneheart Horde will never again become anyone's vassal.

"Now tell me, will you bend the knee to the Blood Elves, dragons, or humans in the future?"

He began by highlighting a widely accepted truth across the continent, then recounted the Giant Tribe's former fate, tying it back to these young giants and their own futures—finally uniting it all with the destiny of the horde. Children are easily stirred by such motivational words; they're full of enthusiasm.

"That's right—we giants are strong!"

"We're the mightiest warriors on the continent!"

"Stoneheart Horde will never fall!"

...

All thirty younglings responded in different ways, but each of them showed strong resistance to any mention of being enslaved. Obviously, their morale was now sky-high.

Orion raised a hand to signal the shouting young ones to quiet down.

"Now, I'm giving you all a mission: Follow your mentor, step by step, across the territory that belongs to Stoneheart Horde. Inspect the lands you'll guard one day. Show all the outsiders and beasts that live here who the real masters of this land are.

"Speak up, younglings—can you do it?"

His voice was low and resonant, filled with encouragement.

"Yes, we can!"

"Yes, we can!"

...

All thirty young giants were brimming with excitement, their eyes glowing and cheeks flushed.

"In that case, let's set off!"

With a low roar, Orion sprang onto the abyssal dragon's back, leading the way.

Grulbane watched him, then turned back to the group of eager younglings, letting out a silent sigh. Mixed with that wry smile was the weight of responsibility Orion had placed on his shoulders.

"Hear me! Everyone line up in two columns, tallest in front to shortest in back. March behind me on foot!"

Grulbane's expression hardened as he suppressed his Alpha-level aura, taking on a commanding air. The young giants quickly fell into line, and Grulbane, saying nothing more, moved to the front.

On both sides of the young giants, two squads of Raptor cavalry spread out at a short distance, shielding them in the center. Up ahead, after dispatching a smaller team to clear the road, Dace returned to Orion's side.

Chapter 414: Are you twins?

Orion opened his eyes from his light doze and spoke calmly.

"Dace, Otho—I have a task for you. On our journey, hunt some high-tier beasts to provide more food for those younglings. They're too scrawny. Even though they're shamans, they're still giants, and giants should have strong bodies."

All four guardians nodded in agreement. And so, led by Orion, the small expedition left Stoneheart City, heading north toward the Beastfolk regions.

Not long after Orion's departure, the first visitors from beyond the city walls arrived at Stoneheart City. In a palace specifically used to receive foreign delegations, Elder of Stewardship Delilah personally welcomed the Blood Elf, Lycanor.

In truth, Delilah had never expected the Blood Elves to send someone of Legendary level such as Lycanor for this visit. Hence, there was another person present to greet her—Lilith.

Though Lilith was not Legendary level, her status as Orion's wife meant that coming forward to greet Lycanor was, in terms of etiquette, faultless.

"Honorable Lycanor, welcome to Stoneheart City!"

Lilith handled herself impressively, showing no hint of intimidation in front of the Legendary-level Lycanor.

Lycanor glanced briefly at Lilith and then at Delilah, who had received her earlier. Her eyes shone openly with curiosity.

"Are you two twins?"

"Yes, I'm the younger sister!"

"And I'm the elder sister!"

They spoke in unison, their tone and rhythm perfectly aligned.

Lycanor nodded, then pointed at a Blood Elf behind her. "You can discuss trade and any negotiations with her. I'm just here to watch."

Lilith and Delilah exchanged a look, immediately understanding Lycanor's meaning.

From there, it all went smoothly. They divided the tasks at hand: Lilith invited Lycanor to stay in the castle for a few days, while Delilah and the Blood Elf in charge of the talks went to begin negotiations.

This time, the Blood Elves had brought along some rare goods to exchange and also wanted to establish a diplomatic presence in Stoneheart City. In the future, they would open an Elven-run shop here as well. All these matters had been discussed back during the Five-Race Alliance. Likewise, a delegation Lilith had sent to the City of Blessings was already on its way.

In the castle's rear garden, Lilith and Lycanor sat facing each other—both of them beautiful women, one possessing remarkable power, the other a lofty status.

"This city is nothing like it was before," Lycanor said as she sipped her floral tea, taking in the fragrant taste. "Lord Lycanor, how is it different from before?" Lilith asked. To be honest, she herself had only arrived here a few days prior; she had never seen Starveil City in its previous state.

"It used to be called Starveil City, territory of the former Giant King, Balor," Lycanor explained. "Back then, Starveil City was much smaller, without such grand or elegant buildings. I lived in Starveil City for a short while, and the feeling was very different then."

Yes, it truly felt different. As Lycanor spoke, her gaze drifted now and then toward the four towers outside the castle. A vague sense of threat emanated from them.

Lycanor sensed that they must be powerful, specialized constructions—she had felt a similar aura only from the Blood Elves' ancient war trees. The castle itself, inside and out, radiated a profound mystery. But as a guest, she refrained from prying.

"To be honest, Lord Lycanor, I've also only just arrived in Stoneheart City. I hardly know more about it than you do," Lilith said, pouring Lycanor another cup of tea, freely admitting her own unfamiliarity with the castle and Stoneheart City.

Lycanor nodded without pursuing the point. After another sip, she spoke in a measured tone. "I sense a familiar presence here: the aura of the Beastfolk seer. Is she here as well?"

"You must mean my younger sister, Sylvana." Lilith set down the teapot, smiling at Lycanor.

"Sylvana... your sister?" Lycanor echoed.

Lilith merely smiled and summoned a succubus maidservant, instructing her, "Please invite my sister Sylvana here and let her know an old acquaintance has come calling."

A short while later, Sylvana arrived in the rear garden—filled with magical plants—supported and guided by the old elder of the fox tribe.

"It's been a while, Sylvana."

Lycanor fixed her gaze on Sylvana's unseeing eyes and didn't speak further until the other woman sat down. "Hello, Lord Lycanor," Sylvana said, standing to greet her before taking a seat again.

"What happened to your eyes?"

"I've lost my sight. The backlash of the seer's art."

Lycanor fell silent. Sylvana also said nothing. The cause was surely the last great North–South War, when she had tried to see into the future.

Lycanor was no seer, but she knew the basics: the more people involved or the stronger the individuals one sought to peer into, the more severe the potential backlash. So it was unsurprising Sylvana had paid a heavy price.

As the two of them lingered in silence, Lilith spoke. "The past is gone, yet it lingers in memory. Blood and fire alike have been covered by the blooming of magical plants. Here, you see flowers and fruit in abundance. Now, it's time for us to look ahead. Wouldn't you agree?"

She stood and poured Sylvana a fresh cup of floral tea.

"Thank you, Mistress," Sylvana said.

Lilith smiled.

Given that Sylvana lived in the castle as one of Orion's women, she fell under Lilith's purview. Yet over these last few days, Lilith had shown her no hostility, even sending her little gifts and specialties from the Black Forest.

"Look ahead..." Lycanor murmured, as though recalling something, but soon she shook her thoughts away. "Yes, we should look to the future. The Blood Elves' visit this time is all about furthering peace in the southern region."

She turned her attention to Lilith, now finding this wife of the Giant King more interesting than she'd initially thought.

"Indeed. Only through peace can we develop and allow everyone to live securely." In that moment, Lilith seemed to glow with a regal bearing. All trace of the darkness and bloodlust typical of abyssal succubi vanished.

...

In the Human Kingdom, Soaring Bird City.

"Sir Samuel, this has all been a terrible misunderstanding. I've already severely punished those dumb slaves who offended you."

Inside a makeshift tent, Torin sat across from Knight Samuel of the human delegation, goblet in hand, offering a steady stream of apologies and toasts.

Chapter 415: You may do whatever you please with her tonight

At first, when Samuel and his companions entered Soaring Bird City, they kept a low profile.

Although the guards at the camp's gate demanded some bribes, the group didn't pay much attention to it, because nobles in human territory have the right to collect passage fees and similar tributes.

Exhausted in both body and mind, they simply wanted a safe environment where they could get a few days of peaceful rest.

Who would have expected that, in less than three days, another squad of guards would show up outside their tent, demanding further "protection fees"?

Naturally, Samuel and his companions refused to be extorted, so a fight broke out.

The dispute escalated quickly, drawing the attention of Torin and a large group of fully armed mercenaries. Only then did Samuel have no choice but to reveal that they were part of an official delegation.

Torin, recognizing the potential in this news, immediately changed his attitude. He invited Samuel into his own tent, exempted all of them from any protection fees, and offered endless rounds of wine and roasted meat as an apology.

"Baron Torin, trust me: if you join us in heading to the giants' territory to escort Her Highness back, you're sure to gain the King's favor."

With Torin plying him with drink, Sir Samuel—now slightly tipsy—began explaining their mission to rescue the royal princess. He decided to share this information partly in the hope of using Torin's forces, already stationed here, to help escort the delegation to the giants' territory.

Getting to the giants' domain means passing through land inhabited by ogres. Given the ogres' volatile nature, they attack outsiders on sight, and those who lose will undoubtedly end up as their next meal.

So, the more powerful the delegation, the safer everyone will be.

A glint of ambition flickered in Torin's eyes. Giants' territory, royal delegations, the princess, the king, and noble titles—all these words strung together, stirring his mind.

In truth, Torin had little interest in rescuing the princess. But once he realized this was a chance to earn higher rank, he began to make plans.

"So the princess has been captured?"

"That's quite a stunning piece of secret news!"

"Still, it's also an opportunity. If I manage to capture the princess's heart, my territory and I might soar to new heights."

Torin continued drinking, secretly imagining all sorts of scenarios while showering Samuel with words of praise. His flattery made Samuel feel even more proud and honored.

After several more rounds, Samuel suddenly leaned in close to Torin and whispered:

"Baron Torin, believe me—your territory is about to become the most valuable stretch of land."

Hearing this, Torin's eyes widened slightly, though he forced a bitter smile.

"Sir Samuel, you must be joking. My territory is on the far edge of the human kingdom. Apart from the occasional mercenary group desperate enough to camp here, it's all forest and beasts beyond these borders."

As he spoke, Torin put on a somber expression and downed two big mugs of ale in one go.

"No, no...that's not how it is!"

Samuel, who hadn't had such a good drink in a long time, was genuinely a bit drunk now.

Of course, he also had some personal motives. He wanted to grow closer to Torin, knowing the baron might soon rise to power.

So Samuel revealed another piece of information:

"Baron Torin, you may not know this, but there's reliable news..."

Samuel's voice dipped so low it was almost inaudible. He hiccupped, gesturing for Torin to lean in.

Torin, his curiosity already piqued, moved closer, smiling intently.

"Baron, you surely haven't heard: our human kingdom has signed the Five-Race Alliance with the Blood Elves, Dwarves, Dragons, and Giants."

Samuel's voice rose and fell unsteadily as he continued in a half-drunken murmur.

"Heh... I can let you in on a little secret: Grand Duke Richard sent word through a magic device..."

"Our human kingdom is about to open a trade route to the giants' territory."

"And this route will very likely pass right through your domain."

"Just think: would that make your land extremely valuable? Wouldn't it attract swarms of mercenaries and merchants?"

"Uh... but keep this secret—don't let it spread."

Wow!

Torin's eyes went wide with surprise.

"Sir Samuel, are you certain of this?"

Any hint of drunkenness vanished from Torin. This piece of news completely overwhelmed him.

"It won't be false, Baron. Just watch. Along with the delegation, there will definitely be a team of royal officials assigned to survey the route. I'd wager a large contingent of slave laborers from the kingdom are already on their way, too."

Torin fought to contain his excitement, steadily drinking more as he spoke to Samuel with even greater respect.

Late into the night, Torin personally escorted Samuel to a larger, cleaner tent.

Inside, a naked Blood Elf lay waiting on the bed.

"Sir Samuel, the woman in that tent is yours. You may do whatever you please with her tonight. It's already late. I won't disturb you further."

With a sly grin, Torin guided Samuel into the tent. Only when he heard the sounds of passion from within did he finally step away.

Returning to his own quarters, he found Mercenary Corps Deputy Commander Mike and Slave-Hunter Captain Wyatt already waiting.

Both men had contracts with Torin and were wholly trustworthy.

"Master, that Blood Elf is your favorite woman. Are we really just giving her away like this?"

Wyatt was clearly upset. Torin had promised him that once he got tired of the Blood Elf, Wyatt could have her as his lover.

"She's just one Blood Elf. Next time we go out capturing, I'll let you pick whichever one you like."

Torin patted Wyatt on the shoulder, though his own thoughts were elsewhere.

"Master, do you think what that knight said could be true?" Mike asked, his voice raw with anticipation.

"I'm not sure. The chance it's misinformation is quite high. But since they're staying here in our camp, if he dares deceive me, however much pleasure he's having tonight, I'll make sure he pays for it twice over in pain."

The tent fell silent for a moment. After a pause, Mike spoke again, his tone grim.

"Master, if the knight's information is real, then we might be in deep trouble. If Samuel's news is true, we won't just see the arrival of the royal delegation and slave workers; countless nobles will come bearing down on us as well."

"Master, that would put us in a dangerous position."

"This territory will become a massive piece of cake, but we might end up losing our right to even share in it. With our current strength, we can't protect the slice that belongs to us."

Chapter 416: Warhammer tribe

The moment Torin thought, "I won't be able to protect my own share of the cake?" his eyes instantly turned bloodshot, and his expression twisted into something terrifying.

"This is my territory!"

"This...is...my...territory!"

Torin repeated his declaration word by word as he glared at Mike and Wyatt with a fierce, violent gaze. Confronted with that savage look, both Mike and Wyatt were momentarily stunned into silence.

No one knew how much time passed before Torin finally calmed down. The brutality on his face disappeared, though a heavy shadow still lingered in his eyes.

"We still have a chance. The kingdom's delegation...the princess... She's our opportunity!"

All at once, a spark of brilliance glinted in Torin's eyes. Faced with a seemingly hopeless situation, he found a way out—through the princess.

"It appears we must give our all to help the kingdom's delegation bring back Her Highness. This is the chance to keep our right to a piece of the pie!"

Mike and Wyatt paused at his words, then a similar excitement lit up their faces.

"Master, you mean we should seize this opportunity to side with the princess?"

Torin didn't answer directly, but his mind was already made up.

...

Half a month later, in the giants' territory.

The sun was high overhead, the ground was scorching, and the rising heat distorted the view ahead. Guard Dace, mounted on a Frost Wolf, approached the abyssal dragon.

"Lord, up ahead is the spot I once used as a base when I cleared out the territory. Shall we rest there for a bit?"

Orion lifted his eyes to the forest in the distance, then glanced back at the group of young giants following him. They were drenched in sweat.

Not bad—after traveling so far, not a single youngling had complained or slowed the team down. They were tough and tenacious, all of them good prospects.

"Pass on the order: we'll make camp in that forest patch up ahead. We'll rest for two hours and find something to eat!"

Dace nodded, replied "Yes, my lord," and relayed the command.

Near the back of the formation, Rolan walked behind everyone else, a trident slung across his back. He looked at ease, showing no signs of fatigue.

"Rolan, you're amazing. You've been carrying that heavy trident, and you're not even tired."

The youth who spoke was full of admiration, his eyes repeatedly drifting to the Bloodthirsty Trident on Rolan's back.

"You're not too bad yourself," Rolan replied, glancing at Steelblade, who also had a silver trident strapped across his back—an equally well-forged weapon.

"My father got this trident from our lord. Pretty impressive, huh?"

As Rolan's gaze fell on the trident behind him, Steelblade's eyes flashed with pride.

"My dady said the lord once used this very trident!"

Rolan said nothing more, turning away after offering a slight nod.

He and Steelblade were unlike the rest of these younglings, who all possessed shamanic talent.

The only reason Rolan and Steelblade got to travel with Orion was that Rendall had sent them over. Rolan was Orion's disciple, and walking long distances on foot was part of his training, so Orion naturally agreed.

As for Steelblade, he was Ursa's younger brother. Because he admired Orion and had taken a liking to tridents from a young age—and showed real potential—Rendall included him in the newly formed youth camp as well.

"Lord's orders: we're stopping for a break in the small forest ahead!"

As Dace spread the news, the exhausted younglings let out cries of joy. They had set out before dawn, and aside from some minced meat porridge in the morning, they hadn't eaten a thing; they were starving.

Leading them was Grulbane, who looked back at the younglings with satisfaction. He seemed to see his own childhood reflected in their faces.

Moments later, everyone settled under the shade of the trees, enjoying a wave of cool relief. Orion cast a glance at Dace, who was directing the tent setup, then turned to another guard, Otho.

"Take a small squad out and scout the area. See if you can find some fresh meat for these young ones."

Otho acknowledged the order and headed into the surrounding forest with a team of giant-blood warriors.

Meanwhile, taking advantage of the break, Grulbane began teaching the young giants some shaman basics and explaining the fundamentals of spellcasting. Since Rolan and Steelblade had no shamanic talent, they used their time to practice trident drills in the shade near Orion's tent.

"Rolan, didn't we already train this morning? Why are we practicing again now?"

Steelblade was puzzled, but he copied Rolan faithfully.

Before they left, Rendall had told him that he was to follow Rolan's lead, never letting hardship or exhaustion deter him.

"We practiced this morning as part of our daily regimen; this right now is for our personal improvement."

Steelblade responded with an "Oh," only half understanding.

In fact, over the past few years, tridents and spears had become quite popular in the Stoneheart Horde. Most young giants had quietly taken up training in one or the other.

Orion had always taught Rolan out in the open, so many giants had seen their sessions. Over time, as Rolan grew noticeably stronger, more and more younglings chose tridents or spears as their own weapons.

Their conversation drifted into Orion's ears, causing him to chuckle. He took no action, acting as though he hadn't heard a thing.

"You may go as well."

Orion waved at Beyn and Torba, indicating they should go about their tasks.

Beyn nodded, summoning a squad of bloodline warriors to patrol and keep watch.

Torba headed toward the cooking area, determined to personally prepare Orion's meal.

"Lord, the tents are up. Would you like to rest for a while?" Dace said.

Orion shook his head and motioned for Dace to step closer. "Tell me more about the surroundings."

Dace collected his thoughts. Gazing at the forest ahead, he spoke slowly.

"Lord, the area we're in now is still part of the giants' territory. We've swept through this region twice before, and the giant clans who lived here moved either into Stoneheart City or the forest just outside it."

"Once we pass through this forest and cross that mountain, we'll enter the orcs' territory."

All along the way, Orion had encountered many giants who recognized him, and, sensing his immense power, dropped to their knees in worship. In truth, not all giants enjoyed living in cities; many clans preferred settling in forests or caves out in the wild.

Orion nodded, signaling Dace to continue.

"Cross that mountain, and we'll be in what used to be the orcs' territory. That small mountain was once the boundary between the giant and orc domains. On the other side, there's an orc tribe known as the Warhammer tribe."

Chapter 417: Doesn't she worry I might actually take her up on that?

When the Warhammer tribe was mentioned, a flicker of emotion flashed across Dace's eyes, as if he were recalling a distant memory.

"Lord, this Warhammer tribe is quite intriguing. They're straightforward yet formidable."

"While we were sweeping through the orc territory, I got into a fight with their chieftain."

Dace stole a glance at Orion. He thought Orion would be interested in hearing about the outcome of that fight, but Orion remained silent, waiting for him to go on.

"I won that duel!"

"From then on, the Warhammer tribe submitted to our Stoneheart Horde and paid significant tribute."

"However, these orcs didn't want to move to Stoneheart City. They insisted on staying where they're familiar, guarding their own territory."

"Of course, half of their tribe's bloodline warriors joined our armies."

Dace snuck another look at Orion. After a moment's hesitation, he ventured,

"Lord, should we go have a look at the Warhammer tribe?"

Orion turned his gaze toward the small grove, as though looking straight through the trees and over the hill to the Warhammer tribe's distant settlement.

"Let's go take a look."

Right after saying that, Orion thought for a moment and added,

"From now on, whenever we encounter a new tribe, have Rolan and Steelblade challenge the orc or beastfolk younglings."

This idea had just struck Orion. He hoped to cultivate a resolute fighting spirit in the two youngsters, encouraging them to develop a mindset of invincibility. Whether they would succeed was a different matter.

After chatting with Dace for a while, Orion slipped into his tent and lay down to rest with his eyes closed.

The moment Orion's eyes shut, his mind set foot in the Survivor's Platform.

Orion tracked down Aerin and completed a trade with her.

By now, Orion didn't have much practical need for the items Aerin produced. He had acquired better replacements from Leonidas. Even so, something was better than nothing—Pet Pills and Toughness Potions were still very useful to his people.

After the trade with Aerin, Orion was about to redirect his attention when Aerin messaged him.

"Hulk, do you have any resources for advancing to Alpha-level?"

Reading Aerin's question, Hulk instantly realized Aerin must be at the peak of Hero level, facing a bottleneck in her progression.

"Alpha-level resources? Those are incredibly rare. What do you plan to offer in exchange?"

Orion pondered briefly and offered a vague response. He was inclined to turn Aerin down because Alpha-level resources were just as scarce for the Stoneheart Horde. On the other hand, he was curious to see what valuable items she might be willing to trade. So, he tossed out the bait.

"Do you seriously have Alpha-level resources, Hulk? You're not lying to me, are you?"

Aerin's quick reply was full of doubt.

Orion looked at her response and felt somewhat underestimated. After hesitating for a split second, he said nothing to Aerin but directly initiated a trade with her. He placed two Alpha-level crystal cores onto the trading screen, then canceled the transaction.

A minute's calm passed before Orion was bombarded by Aerin's frantic messages.

"Wow... you really have Alpha-level resources!"

"Mr. Hulk, sell me one, please!"

"How much for Alpha-level resources?"

"Honey, what are you looking for?"

"If you're willing, I'll give you anything I have—even my body..."

Seeing Aerin's replies, Orion couldn't help but laugh.

"It looks like this elf really is eager to boost her strength. She'll say anything! Doesn't she worry I might actually take her up on that?"

Orion even began to imagine Aerin's diminutive body moaning under the forceful thrusts of his cock. He shook his head to clear away such lingering thoughts, then messaged Aerin:

"I'll give you some time to think carefully about what you can offer in exchange."

"Just so you know, you'd be wise to bring me something truly precious—don't try palming off junk on me. You'll only get one chance."

After sending this to Aerin, Orion shifted his focus elsewhere.

Deep in the Forest of Nature, in a tiny elven house:

"Oh dear... what can I possibly trade with Hulk?"

"Do I really have to offer my own body?"

"No way! That's not a good idea. I won't barter away my chastity for profit!"

Aerin lay on her wooden bed, emotions running high. Then, in the next moment, she changed her tone entirely.

"Wah... dear Hulk, I want that Alpha-level resource!"

"Wah, wah... I'm going to advance into a High Elf; I want to become the Elf Queen..."

Face-down on her bed, Aerin cried out in frustration. She was feeling both complicated and impatient at once—her flurry of excited, unguarded words had led her to offer up her own body in exchange for Alpha-level resources. Still, there was also excitement: Orion genuinely had Alpha-level resources, which meant the chance for her to evolve was very real.

At the same time, Aerin felt disappointment because Orion hadn't immediately traded the Alpha-level resources to her. Once her emotions calmed a little, she recalled the rash things she had just blurted out in excitement, and her face burned bright red.

"Anyway, Hulk and I are in completely different, faraway worlds. Even if I agreed, I can't just pop over to wherever he is and sleep with him in exchange for Alpha-level resources."

"Sigh... my dear resources..."

"But I have more than just my body and beauty. Hulk said we could trade, so if I can gather something that piques his interest, we can do business."

Once Aerin's thoughts settled, she recalled Orion's final message about a possible trade. She then sprang into action inside her tree house, rummaging through every nook and cranny.

...

In the giant territory, inside a temporary tent hidden in the woods:

Orion, who was half-asleep, curled his lips into a slight smile. His chat with Aerin had put him in a good mood.

Although he wasn't truly interested in having an elven mistress, it felt good to recognize the status that came with elevated power. Obtaining alpha resources was a mere trifle for him, yet a precious treasure for countless others who could only dream of attaining it.

...

"Big Boss, are you there?"

"Big Boss, I want to trade something. I've got good stuff!"

"Big Boss, when will you be online?"

"Big Boss..."

On the Survivor's Platform, among Orion's list of friends, only Aerin and Julius Caesar would bombard him with messages like this.

"What do you need?"

"What good stuff do you have?"

Orion messaged Caesar and waited a few minutes.

Five minutes later, Caesar replied:

"Big Boss, it's been so hard waiting for you!"

"I want to buy a hundred sets of standard armor, plus weapons."

"Also, I'd like a tool for taming a war pet."

Orion read through Caesar's requests without responding right away. Fifteen minutes later, Julius Caesar initiated a trade with Orion, offering him two arrow towers.

A triumphant smile appeared on Orion's face. In exchange, he sent Caesar one hundred sets of armor and a small bell for taming pets.

Chapter 418: Do you think you can do it?

"Thank you, Big Boss!"

Orion smiled, responded with a quick "Don't mention it," and then shifted his attention.

In his transaction with Caesar, Orion clearly gained the upper hand.

However, if one party is willing to give and the other to receive, losses and gains depend on the circumstances—no one can say for sure how it will turn out.

Next, Orion got in touch with Arthas.

"Bro, are you there? I need your help!"

After finishing his exchanges with Aerin and Caesar, Orion also needed support from someone stronger than himself.

"Just tell me what's up!"

"I need you to help me purify the Lord's Stone!"

Without further explanation, Arthas immediately initiated a trade with Orion.

Orion didn't hesitate and traded over the four remaining Lord's Stones in his possession.

"Looks like the continent you're on isn't very peaceful!"

"It's all right. The war has ended for now, and I don't think there will be any large-scale battles anytime soon."

Right after Orion sent that message, Arthas initiated another trade with him.

On the trade interface, four attribute-free Lord's Stones appeared, which greatly surprised Orion.

Though puzzled, Orion still accepted the trade.

"These are ones I purified before. You're in a hurry, so take them first!"

So that was it. Orion's doubts were cleared.

He remembered clearly that it had taken Arthas several months to purify a Lord's Stone before.

It seemed that back then Arthas didn't just purify one stone—he must have purified quite a few Lord's Stones.

"Thanks!"

After expressing his gratitude, Orion received no further reply from Arthas.

Necro Realm, Bone Throne.

Arthas felt both excited and a bit dazed.

Just moments ago, after completing the trade with Orion, he noticed that a ring on his finger bone was scorching hot.

Staring at the ring, which grew hotter by the second, Arthas saw it suddenly ignite and turn to ash in the blink of an eye.

But in that small pile of ash, a sudden flash of destiny's light appeared, falling into Arthas's other hand.

And in that hand lay the four Lord's Stones Orion had just traded over.

Arthas suppressed the surge of emotion in his heart and carefully studied the four Lord's Stones in his palm.

Yet his feelings kept fluctuating—excitement, doubt, confusion, delight, then more puzzlement...

Only after a long while did Arthas cautiously put the four Lord's Stones away, afraid he might lose them.

"I've been sitting on this Bone Throne for half a month now. The Destiny Ring shattering definitely has nothing to do with me personally.

Right after I completed a trade with Hulk, the Destiny Ring suddenly changed.

The opportunity for me to become a demigod has emerged. Could it be related to Hulk?

..."

This day was of utmost importance for Arthas.

He realized that his chance to become a demigod had appeared and was contained within those four Lord's Stones.

But he wasn't sure which one of them held the key.

In the unknown void.

Thresh suddenly opened one eye and gazed toward the Necro Realm, seeing the Lord's Stones in Arthas's hand.

"Excellent. The opportunity has surfaced. It won't be long before Arthas becomes a demigod!"

No one knew where that voice came from, and soon it vanished.

Thresh closed the eye he had opened, and everything returned to nothingness.

Deep in the woods, at a makeshift camp.

Orion also opened his eyes, feeling quite pleased.

With four attribute-free Lord's Stones, his power could advance even further.

He was eagerly anticipating whether he could push his own strength to a higher level.

Right at that moment, Torba arrived outside the tent, carrying a piece of cooked beast meat.

"Lord, the food is ready!"

Orion gave a small nod and stepped out of the tent. Taking the food Torba offered, Orion took a big bite.

"Has Otho returned?"

"Yes, Lord. Otho is back. They dragged in seven black bull beasts and are currently teaching the younglings how to handle them."

Orion nodded. After quickly finishing his meal, he gave an order.

"Go fetch Rolan and Steelblade!"

Torba nodded and headed into another part of the forest.

A short while later, Rolan and Steelblade arrived at Orion's makeshift tent, one behind the other.

"Rolan greets Mentor!"

"Steelblade greets the esteemed Lord!"

Glancing at them, Orion noted that Steelblade was even younger than Rolan. Being sent out for a trial at such a young age, as Rendall demanded, had to be quite a challenge for him.

"Was the journey tiring?"

Rolan shook his head without a word.

Steelblade was about to speak but suddenly recalled his father's instructions: Whatever Rolan did, he should do as well. So Steelblade also shook his head, tightly shutting his mouth.

Seeing this, Orion found it amusing.

Steelblade's personality resembled Ursa's—honest and straightforward, yet upright.

People like that devote themselves wholeheartedly to what they believe is right.

"As you've seen, throughout the giants' territory, everyone we passed treated us with the utmost respect—there wasn't a hint of resistance.

But from here on, it'll be different. Once we cross that mountain, most inhabitants on the other side are Orcs or Beastfolk.

"I'm asking you to defeat the peers in each Orc tribe you encounter on the road ahead. Do you think you can do it?"

Receiving this personal task from Orion, Rolan and Steelblade were brimming with fighting spirit.

"Mentor, as your disciple, I'll beat them all!"

"Lord, I will, too!"

Orion nodded, then took two large chunks of roasted meat from Torba and handed them to Rolan and Steelblade.

"Go on, eat up—you'll need your strength if you plan on beating anyone!"

Rolan and Steelblade accepted the meat and left, full of excitement.

"Lord, Rolan's progress is remarkable!"

"If he waits until adulthood to complete his bloodline trial, he might even advance to Alpha-level!"

Dace passed Orion a waterskin, speaking in awe.

Orion took it and had a drink.

"The younger generation is destined to surpass ours. The Horde's accumulated resources and heavy investment are simply on another level."

Dace nodded, thoroughly agreeing.

"Ursa's younger brother is impressive, too—he's not far behind Rolan!"

Orion nodded.

Steelblade's path had been different from Rolan's. Steelblade had guidance and care from Rendall and Ursa from an early age, and his strength now came from both talent and hard work.

As for Rolan, his gifts only began to show after Orion started teaching him.

So, overall, Rolan's talent was a bit superior.

Chapter 419: Your glory shines as brilliantly as the blazing sun, illuminating the entire continent

Human Kingdom, Soaring Bird territory.

Traversing the lush forest, four knights atop beast-blood mounts gazed toward the distant Soaring Bird encampment. They halted at a crossroads, hesitating to go forward.

"Guys, we've just gotten one step closer to evil!"

The speaker was a middle-aged knight wielding a lance, clad in silver full-plate armor with a helmet on his head.

Right after the middle-aged knight's quip, the coal knight Galahad rode up beside him.

Galahad looked toward Soaring Bird City in the distance, his brows furrowed with hesitation.

"Galahad, what's the matter? Have you been here before?"

Galahad shook his head. In his memory, there had been no human encampment in this region.

"Sir Godfrey, I've traveled this road twice, and there was no camp here back then."

The knight addressed as Sir Godfrey was cheerful by nature, wearing a lively, energetic smile.

"That aligns perfectly with what I heard before coming. This territory now belongs to a Baron. Chances are that camp ahead is his newly constructed temporary outpost."

As they spoke, two more individuals stepped forward to stand alongside Galahad and Godfrey.

One of them was Garrett, the blacksmith from the Royal capital.

The other wore a white noble's outfit, with a strange one-handed sword at his waist that was red and green interwoven.

"In this recent war between the North and South, the kingdom suffered defeat and had to cede a lot of territory. This region lies on the fringes of the Human Kingdom, and it's no surprise there's no protective city wall here yet. We should be glad there's at least a place to rest. Still, Galahad's concern isn't wrong. Wherever there are nobles, oppression often follows—too many of them are bastards."

The speaker was the young man dressed in white, Lambert, who was both a knight and a noble.

Lambert lightly squeezed his mount's flanks, riding to the front. Galahad, Garrett, and Godfrey exchanged glances, nodded, and followed him.

Clearly, these four were among the Eight Great Knights. Their purpose this time was to bring Princess Ava home.

Recently, Galahad and Garrett had traveled far and wide in search of other members of the Eight Great Knights. Their efforts paid off: they found Godfrey and Lambert.

Open-hearted and uninhibited, Godfrey had joined Galahad's party without hesitation as soon as he received the invitation.

Sir Godfrey was quite powerful, in the mid-Alpha level, slightly stronger than Galahad himself. Especially noteworthy was his beast-blood mount, an extremely formidable steed.

As for Lambert, Galahad had encountered him in a chapel. Though Lambert was a noble, he was also a knight of the Light. After hearing Galahad's story, he agreed to join him.

The four pressed on, taking only half an hour to arrive at Soaring Bird City. After paying a few gold coins as a protection fee, they entered Soaring Bird City and rented a tent.

"This area is the Human Kingdom's closest point to the giants' territory. An envoy from the Royal capital will definitely pass through here. If we wait here, we're bound to run into them."

Lambert seemed displeased with the tent's temporary conditions. Unlike the other three, who sat cross-legged on the ground, he remained standing, looking slightly out of place.

"The Rose Knight Regiment's message told me to wait here for them. They'll be traveling with the kingdom's envoy."

Galahad repeated the message he had received, pulling out a piece of rock-hard bread from his pouch.

Lambert shook his head, declining the bread Galahad offered.

"If what you say is true, then the local lord of Soaring Bird City must know about the kingdom's plans to bring Princess Ava home. Asking this baron directly is our best option. You three wait here for me while I pay him a visit."

Galahad, Garrett, and Godfrey exchanged looks, falling silent. After a moment, Galahad spoke kindly.

"Would you like me to go with you?"

Lambert shook his head, smiling faintly. "No need. I'm sure you'd rather not see the typical noble routine, all pretense and empty pleasantries."

With those words, Lambert bade them farewell and left the tent.

"That guy, he's a noble himself, so he's the one being pretentious!" Godfrey muttered as soon as Lambert was gone.

Galahad and Garrett exchanged glances without comment, merely handing Godfrey a canteen of water.

Godfrey took a long swig, then tore off a bite of bread, chewing while he continued griping, "I just don't get it. How did our knightly legacy end up with a noble? Did God make a mistake choosing him?"

The coal knight Galahad quietly listened to Godfrey's complaints as his thoughts drifted. He recalled scenes of cave spiders dangling from treetops, ravenous ogres emerging from the forest, Arthur lying

dead...all those battlefield memories stained with blood that he usually avoided recalling grew clearer in his mind.

For a time, the tent fell silent.

...

Orc territory, Warhammer tribe.

"Honorable King of Giants, your glory shines as brilliantly as the blazing sun, illuminating the entire continent!"

Orion sat astride his abyssal dragon, surveying the thousand-plus Orcs prostrated on the ground before him. Leading them in their homage was Brakkar, chieftain of the Warhammer tribe.

"Rise."

Orion withdrew his imposing presence, accepting the Orcs' homage. He turned to look at Dace, leaving negotiations with the Warhammer tribe to him.

Dace nodded and stepped forward, addressing Brakkar.

"Long time no see, Brakkar!"

Brakkar lifted his head, eyeing the Alpha-level giant before him with apprehension.

"What's wrong? You've forgotten me already?" Dace asked. "Back then, I led a force to conquer your Warhammer tribe. You showed courage and even challenged me personally."

As Dace spoke, recognition dawned in Brakkar's eyes, and he blurted in surprise, "It's you—Dace the Guard! You've reached Alpha level now?"

He seemed both stunned and dejected. Brakkar remembered clearly that in his last encounter with Dace, they had actually exchanged blows, and he could hold his own for a while. But the man standing before him now was an Alpha-level powerhouse, someone he could only look up to.

Brakkar swallowed hard, bitterness welling inside him.

"Chieftain Brakkar, do you still want to go a round with me?" Dace asked with a teasing air.

Brakkar quickly shook his head, refusing Dace's challenge.

Chapter 420: I'll defeat every one I face

Suddenly, an imposing aura burst forth from Dace. He fixed Brakkar with a cold, piercing gaze.

"Chieftain Brakkar, since you refuse, then have one of your tribe's younglings step forward to accept the challenge!"

After saying this, Dace turned around and returned to Orion's side. Brakkar stood there, puzzled and unsure why Dace had spoken so abruptly.

Just then, from the group of younglings behind Orion, a giant youth carrying a trident stepped out.

"I am Rolan of the giant tribe, and I want to challenge the strongest youngling in your tribe."

Rolan's childlike voice rang in everyone's ears. Both giants and Orcs alike froze in shock. Especially the group of giant younglings behind Grulbane—staring at Rolan's back with utter disbelief in their eyes.

Rolan and Steelblade's plan for these challenges was something Grulbane already knew. Glancing at his own disciples, Grulbane explained quietly:

"For the rest of our travels, whenever we encounter a tribe, Rolan will challenge one of its younglings. If any of you want to risk your life, I can ask our lord to grant you the opportunity."

At his words, the eyes of the giant younglings lit with eagerness. Yet in the end, none of them stepped forward to volunteer.

Grulbane nodded. In the first lesson he ever taught them, he explained the way of a shaman's battle. For now, at least on the surface, they were showing restraint. Of course, perhaps they were simply afraid.

Unlike Orion's philosophy, Grulbane believed that whether they were being rational or simply cowardly, at least they had survived—and survival was what a shaman prized most.

A hush fell over the gathering. At last, Brakkar understood what Dace had meant. Meanwhile, the Orcs behind Brakkar were all whispering among themselves. Gradually, everyone's gaze fell on Rolan.

Under the scrutiny of both Orcs and giants, Rolan stood perfectly straight. His upturned eyes shone with fierce determination, and the fighting spirit in his heart had grown strong enough to burst free.

"If one of your tribe's younglings can defeat him," Orion announced, "I'll waive three years of tribute."

His words were like a weight dropping into the crowd's ears—and onto Rolan's shoulders as well. Hearing them, Rolan's posture wavered for an instant, but he quickly steadied himself.

He did not look back, yet he knew his mentor was watching, counting on him. Waiving the Warhammer tribe's tribute for three years was a clear sign of these high expectations.

"I definitely won't let my mentor down. I'll defeat every one I face!"

"Mentor, your disciple won't disappoint you!"

In that moment, Rolan's battle fervor—after a brief daze—became sharper than ever.

Standing before him, Brakkar of the Warhammer tribe stared in wide-eyed disbelief. If Dace had said those words, Brakkar might not have trusted them. But they came from Orion, King of Giants, which meant Brakkar had every reason to believe.

"Honorable King of Giants, your radiance shines upon the Orcs—upon this entire territory!"

Once again, Brakkar knelt, bowing in deference.

"You have ten minutes," Orion continued calmly. "Think carefully and send forth the bravest, strongest youngling of your tribe to challenge Rolan. Life or death—it makes no difference. If he defeats Rolan, you'll be free of tribute for three years."

Orion's words rang out again, carrying through to each Orc. This time, everyone understood clearly. It was genuine—no jest.

Brakkar got to his feet and returned to his people.

"Chieftain, send my son. He's the strongest fighter of our tribe."

"Chieftain, my boy can do it. He's only ten, but he can already hunt alone in the forest!"

"My kid's also not bad!"

...

Brakkar surveyed his tribespeople, all longing for Orion's promised reward. As for life and death or what might happen if they lost—those weren't their primary concerns. In this world, it's survival of the fittest. A youngling unable to grow stronger would only waste the tribe's resources by staying alive. And to defeat this giant youth would be a great honor for any Orc.

Ten minutes later, a young orc wielding two battleaxes stepped forth from the Warhammer tribe. He was shorter than Rolan but powerfully built, all muscle, with small, sharp tusks protruding from his lower jaw.

"I'm Rolan of the giant tribe," Rolan said, pulling out the trident from his back. "What's your name?"

"My name is Mogash, the future mightiest male of the Warhammer tribe."

Rolan's voice was firm and decisive: "I will defeat you!"

Not to be outdone, Orc Mogash raised his axes and clanged them together, producing a metallic ring. Buoyed by the sound, his fighting spirit surged.

"Are you ready?" Rolan asked.

"Bring it on!" Mogash roared in response.

No sooner had the words left their mouths than both young warriors charged at each other, and the battle began.

The moment the fight broke out, all eyes focused on Rolan and Mogash. With a sharp clang, Rolan's trident struck out first. Mogash raised his axes to block.

Boom!

Mogash was knocked off his feet, his axes clattering to the ground. One blow from Rolan had already overwhelmed him. Someone among the Warhammer tribe's bloodline warriors rushed in to catch Mogash, preventing further injury. Even so, his hands were torn and bleeding.

"Rolan is victorious!"

"Rolan just won the fight!"

"Well done, Rolan!"

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Behind Grulbane, the group of giant younglings fell silent for a moment, then burst into cheers, their voices loud with passion.

For his part, Rolan was a bit taken aback. He hadn't expected the young Orc to be so fragile.

"Rolan is the winner! You've lost your chance to avoid three years of tribute!"

"Let's be on our way!"

Orion's voice overrode the cheering of the giant younglings, carrying to the ears of every Orc in the Warhammer tribe. A flicker of frustration passed through Brakkar's gaze, but all he could do was resign himself.

"We offer our respects and bid farewell to the mighty Lord!"

"We offer our respects and bid farewell to the mighty Lord!"

...

Brakkar took the lead, and every Orc of the Warhammer tribe prostrated themselves, sending Orion off.

...

In the summertime woods, when there's no breeze, the air can feel stifling. Yet the heaviness in Rolan's heart far exceeded that of the surrounding heat.

"What's wrong? You won, didn't you? Isn't that something to be happy about?"

Orion's voice reached Rolan's ears. Ever since leaving the Warhammer tribe, Rolan had been trailing behind the abyssal dragon, looking rather dejected.