

Titan King 431

Chapter 431 431: This is a real surprise

Princess Ava lowered her head, unable to witness the fate of her guard knight.

Behind her stood Coal Knight Galahad, his hands gripping his sword, then releasing, then gripping again. Sadness and grim fury alternated on his face, he was on the brink of madness once more.

Meanwhile, in the colosseum, the Orc who had paid the price of losing a leg was granted his freedom. The iron manacles around his wrist were unlocked, and he was released on the spot.

Orion withdrew his gaze and turned to Blood Elf Lycanor, Prince Theodore, and Aldous the Ogre.

"Were you pleased with this performance?"

Before anyone could answer, Orion immediately added, "If it's still not enough, we'll move on to the next match."

Orion waved his hand, and the horn sounded again. Another Orc and another human slave emerged from beneath the colosseum. At the sight of this human warrior, Princess Ava again cried out in alarm. Clearly, he too was once part of the Rose Knight Regiment.

Prince Theodore looked at his aunt and shook his head. Reason told him it was not worth angering Orion over a few guard knights—especially since everyone had long believed those knights to be dead.

Their reappearance stirred no mercy in him. Wars invariably leave casualties, a lesson Prince Theodore had learned all too well during the North-South War.

Moreover, neither Blood Elf Lycanor nor Aldous the Ogre showed any reaction; they merely watched, unmoved. Prince Theodore studied Orion for a moment and then said nothing.

At that moment, the cheers from the colosseum rose once more. The new human knight who had come out was once again slain by the Orc slave.

To truly display their abilities, human knights need weapons, armor, and mounts all in place; and in terms of raw physique, humans simply have no advantage against Orcs, something that applies even to Prince Theodore himself. He had previously fought Aldous the ogre and relied on sacred armor to withstand Aldous's brutal strikes.

Princess Ava felt powerless. The ones dying were all the knights who once protected her. Lowering her head, she silently wept. This scene was clearly visible to Coal Knight Galahad standing behind her. Ava's sorrowful face, helpless eyes, and grief-stricken expression cut deep into Galahad's heart—and also into the heart of the knight named Godfrey beside him.

Just then, the horn resounded again in the colosseum, ushering another human knight onto the field.

"Kill him!"

"Cut off his head!"

"Run him through!"

"..."

Cries like these echoed from the stands, like the voice of death waiting to harvest a life. Orion watched with a faint smile, calmly observing the colosseum, indifferent to the carnage below.

Many races lived in Stoneheart City besides Giants—Beastfolk, Gnolls, Minotaurs... They were mostly warlike and relished violence. The bloodshed and mortal duels of the colosseum thrilled them and aligned with their temperament, which made the arena especially lively.

As Orion wondered how long this third human knight would last, footsteps broke the silence in the reception hall.

A knight in black armor with a sword at his waist came into view before Orion. Immediately, Orion realized he was a human knight who had accompanied Prince Theodore.

"Honorable King of Giants," Galahad said, performing a knight's salute. "Galahad is willing to fight in place of the remaining human knights—I ask for your permission!"

He spoke sincerely, yet his request did not move Orion in the least.

Inside, Galahad could no longer restrain his fury and resentment. He refused to keep watching Princess Ava weep, refused to see more of his former comrades butchered, and refused to remain as powerless as when Arthur went to his death.

But Orion, facing the colosseum, ignored him without so much as a glance. Standing off to the side, Drakthul, Marnok, Onyx, and Earthshaker came forward to usher Galahad out of the hall.

In truth, despite Galahad's hotheadedness, he still clung to a sliver of reason. He did not resist and did not draw his sword in Orion's presence. Drakthul and Marnok stretched out their huge hands and dragged Galahad off with as little effort as lifting a rabbit.

Just then, the colosseum erupted with fresh cheers and jeers.

"Damn it, that human is too weak—it's like he hasn't eaten in days!"

"What a pity. He did have some decent skill."

"Pity, my foot! He's got no strength at all. He deserves to get sliced in half by that Orc!"

"Well done!"

"..."

The slaying of the third human knight whipped the colosseum into a frenzy.

"Honorable King of Giants!"

As the crowd noise dipped slightly, Prince Theodore finally spoke up.

Orion raised a hand, halting Drakthul and Marnok, who were about to throw Galahad out the door. Before Prince Theodore could continue, Orion demanded, "Your Highness, is your dog disobedient? Do you need me to chain him up for you?"

This remark snapped everyone out of their stupor, making them realize how surprising Galahad's impulsive act had been.

In the reception hall, Godfrey's face was grim, Ava seemed inconsolable, and Blood Elf Lycanor narrowed her eyes in thought. Prince Theodore, however, froze momentarily at Orion's words—he had intended to speak, but now the words stuck in his throat.

"But since Your Highness has spoken," Orion went on, "I suppose I should grant you this little favor. Prophet Onyx, why don't you entertain our human friend?"

Turning the conversation on its head, Orion agreed to Galahad's request.

"Honorable—" Prince Theodore began, but Orion cut him off with a wave of his large hand. Surging with transcendent power, Orion teleported both Onyx and Coal Knight Galahad to the colosseum below.

"This is a real surprise!" Orion said. "I didn't expect a human knight to step forward for our entertainment."

Ignoring Prince Theodore's subtle shift in expression, Orion rose to his feet. The prince had apparently wished to express regret for Galahad's boldness, but Orion had sent Galahad into the arena before the apology could be spoken.

Once again atop the platform, Orion's lips curved in a mocking smile. He raised his hand, and the colosseum fell silent.

"In accordance with the colosseum's guiding rule—'victory means life, defeat means death'—the knight from the human kingdom has volunteered to fight on behalf of the four remaining human slaves.

"His opponent is our Stoneheart Horde Elder of Prophecy, Onyx of the obsidian golem tribe.

"If the human knight wins, the remaining four human slaves will walk free.

"But if the Elder of Prophecy wins, then let your cheers and shouts honor the human knight for the magnificent show he has given us with the forfeit of his life."

Chapter 432 432: I request the honor of a duel

The colosseum crowd's clamor and cheers instantly surged to a new peak.

Orion returned to his seat and looked at Prince Theodore, as well as Princess Ava by his side.

"Your Highness, what do you think of this 'fair' contest in the colosseum?"

Prince Theodore knitted his brows, forcibly suppressing a swell of fury as he inhaled deeply to calm himself. He knew full well he had been played. The King of Giants was using these human slaves to rattle his morale. If he lost his composure now, he would be ill-prepared for the upcoming trade negotiations and surely lose ground.

"Lord Orion, your Horde's Elder of Prophecy is indeed impressive. But if he happens to be cut down in his own colosseum, that would be quite a shame!"

With the situation as it was, Prince Theodore could only retort in kind, hoping to regain some footing.

Orion gave a hearty laugh and responded loudly, "I have supreme confidence in our Stoneheart Horde Elder of Prophecy!"

"How coincidental," Prince Theodore replied, matching Orion's gaze before turning to Princess Ava. "I'm just as confident in the knights of the human kingdom."

Princess Ava bit her lip and nodded, tense and fearful. Before the banquet, she had been overjoyed to see Galahad again, but after learning of Arthur's death, she was left despondent.

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"Galahad, how could you be so reckless? It's all because of me..."

Behind Prince Theodore, Godfrey stood with his hands clenched into fists, watching Galahad in the colosseum with profound anxiety.

Both Godfrey and Galahad were Alpha-level warriors, highly regarded by Prince Theodore and far more qualified to attend such an event than lesser knights like Torin or Samuel. None of them could have predicted that Galahad would lose control at the banquet.

"Damn it, I should've held him back earlier! Then he wouldn't have caused this disaster!"

Gritting his teeth, Godfrey silently prayed, "Galahad, you have to survive!"

"A duel between Alpha-level fighters—now this could be entertaining."

Aldous paused his feast long enough to look out at Onyx and Galahad in the colosseum. "Heh heh... One is Alpha-level mid-stage, the other's Alpha-level early-stage. I'm more inclined to bet on the Stoneheart Horde Elder."

Orion offered no comment on Aldous's judgment. However, the words hit both Godfrey and Princess Ava like a thunderclap. Godfrey staggered slightly, nearly losing his balance, while Ava's face went deathly pale as she tightened her grip on Prince Theodore's sleeve.

Time ticked by. A quarter of an hour later, Orion's calm voice echoed through the hall.

"It's been long enough. I trust both sides are ready."

"Then let the duel begin!"

"Ooooh—!"

Amid the sound of horns, the colosseum erupted in deafening applause and shouts.

"Kill him!"

"Prophet, chop off his head!"

"Onyx, split that human wide open with your axe!"

"..."

Clearly, every member of the Horde threw their support behind Onyx in this fight. In the arena, Galahad drew his two-handed sword while Onyx hefted his stone axe.

"I am Galahad," he said, voice low. "I fight for my comrades, and for Her Highness."

His fighting spirit burned, every drop of anger and hatred forging his resolve. Even so, Galahad maintained his knightly courtesy and proper manners. As a knight, he had no desire to see his comrades die one by one, nor to see his princess weep so bitterly in public.

Onyx crossed his battle-axe over his chest, gaze serious and voice deep.

"By My Lord's command, if you wish to save your comrades, you must do so over my dead body."

Galahad remained silent. He would fight with a knight's honor. Lifting his sword, Galahad's armor seemed to bleed from black to crimson in the span of three seconds.

Noting the change, Orion's eyes widened with interest in Galahad's gear. Nonetheless, with the battle under way, Orion said nothing further and kept his focus on the fight.

Whoosh!

Galahad's form blurred and split in two, sword-light streaking toward Onyx.

"An illusion?" Onyx said. "No time to tell them apart—so I'll cut them both down!"

Onyx, who had fought in countless wars beside Orion, showed not the slightest panic in the face of Galahad's assault.

"Double Whirlwind Slash!"

Seizing his axe in both hands, Onyx bellowed and spun on the spot. Bolstered by the power in his bloodline, the swing of his immense axe sliced through the air, conjuring a swirling whirlwind around him. The moment it formed, Onyx charged headlong toward Galahad's sword-lights.

Splurt!

The sword-light on the right flickered out the instant it met Onyx's whirlwind. Galahad, launching his strike from the left, slammed his greatsword into the vortex and cut it apart. Onyx turned to face him once more. Both fighters completed the opening exchange without claiming a decisive advantage.

In the hall, everyone watched with rapt attention. Seeing Galahad withstand Onyx's fierce attack brought a sharp exhale of relief from Princess Ava.

Next to her, Prince Theodore remained expressionless, sneaking a glance at Orion out of the corner of his eye. Orion, for his part, stared calmly at the colosseum, betraying no emotion.

The fight continued in the arena.

"That's quite a skill," Onyx remarked, then raised his massive axe for another blow. A terrifying blade-force surged out from its edge like a furious dragon's roar.

Roar!

The blade-force materialized into a rampaging draconic shape that crashed forward. Galahad lifted his sword to block but was struck full on, knocking him back.

Boom!

He landed hard, sending up a cloud of dust. Along his path, there appeared a crack roughly 30 feet deep and 300 feet long, stretching all the way from where he had stood to where he now lay.

The shocking impact hushed the entire crowd, including those watching from the hall.

"Cough... cough..."

A fit of coughing broke the silence as Galahad rose from the cloud of dust. He planted his sword in the ground before him. When the debris cleared, there was a shallow, blood-red mark stretching from the top of his head down to his chin.

Clank!

The armor on Galahad's body split into two pieces and fell to the ground. That crimson armor had protected him at the critical moment, preventing a lethal wound.

"You are strong."

"This battle-axe was bestowed upon me by my lord. That move you just survived was called 'Raging Dragon Slash.' You're the first Alpha-level warrior to live through it."

Onyx's deep, steady voice carried across the arena; the fact that Galahad had survived his strike earned the Elder's respect. Galahad raised his head, any hint of reason was gone from his eyes, now brimming with murderous intent.

Lowering his gaze to the greatsword in his hands, Galahad slowly opened his mouth and began reciting a mysterious incantation. As soon as the chant started, the fallen pieces of his crimson armor became strands of secret technique runes that fused into Galahad's sword and body.

Meanwhile, Onyx noticed Galahad's change and was not about to underestimate him. He bit his thumb and splashed blood upon the ground, drawing a deep-red formation.

In the next instant, a blood-colored Dark Armored Beetle emerged from the magical array—Onyx's Blood Spirit Summoning beast, a legacy skill bestowed by a special structure known as the Heroic Altar.

The appearance of the Dark Armored Beetle made every human envoy in the reception hall leap to their feet, staring at the colosseum in disbelief. Only Prince Theodore remained composed. He stayed seated, his expression calm, almost as if he had seen through something and chosen to accept it.

Back in the colosseum, Galahad's secret art and Onyx's summoning ritual concluded in nearly the same moment.

Galahad's sword grew even larger, and dense crimson runes spread across his body, giving him a strange and fearsome aura. Facing Onyx and the Dark Armored Beetle, Galahad—bereft of reason—did not flinch.

With a tearing sound, Galahad swung his greatsword, ripping through the air as he charged straight at Onyx and the Dark Armored Beetle.

Clang!

The sword collided with the beetle's sharp horn, but it left no mark on the beast. Meanwhile, Onyx's enormous axe followed in a brilliant lightning-quick arc, cleaving into Galahad's shoulder.

Crack!

A deep fissure opened across Galahad's shoulder. Yet almost immediately, the swirling crimson runes covering Galahad's body surged to pull the wound shut, knitting the injury in seconds. Within moments, his shoulder was restored. As if nothing had happened, Galahad launched another attack on Onyx and his Dark Armored Beetle.

"Humility Armor! Does he carry the inheritance of the ancient knights?"

Blood Elf Lycanor's exclamation rang out in the reception hall. Her people were known for their longevity, and Lycanor—being the oldest and most learned present—apparently knew something of ancient knightly traditions.

Orion and Aldous both turned their attention to her, but when they saw that Prince Theodore and Princess Ava gave no reaction, Lycanor simply ignored their stares and kept her composure, focusing on the fight.

In the colosseum, Galahad lunged again and again, sustaining wound after wound. At last, the relentless assault managed to inflict some damage on the Dark Armored Beetle—he nearly severed one of its legs.

"Go to hell!"

Seeing his battle companion injured, Onyx felt his anger flare.

"Rock-Sundering Slash!"

Seizing his chance, Onyx leapt from the Dark Armored Beetle's back into midair, raising both axes high. With a sharp tearing sound, Galahad—who had aimed another blow at the beetle—was sliced right down the middle.

This time, no matter how fiercely the runes on his body tried to mend the wound, there was no saving him. The crimson symbols spluttered and faded. At best, they had only managed to reattach a single half of his head.

"I swear by my knightly honor... that I shall treat all with humility... remain faithful to my sword... abide by the calling of my heart..."

"To bear humility, return with honor... I offer my life... for this creed..."

Those were the final words of the knightly vow Galahad had spoken upon receiving his inheritance, echoing in his mind as he slipped into darkness—into justice—into the arms of the gods.

"No..."

In the hall, Princess Ava let out a wail before collapsing into Prince Theodore's arms. Down in the colosseum, the cheers and shouts from the Stoneheart Horde swelled like a tidal wave.

"He's dead!"

"That human knight is finally dead!"

"WAAAGH... Well done, Elder of Prophecy!"

"Hail Prophet Onyx!"

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Orion wore a faint smile as he turned to Prince Theodore.

"Your Highness, my sincere apologies."

There was a subtle provocation beneath Orion's words, yet Prince Theodore remained perfectly calm. He channeled his transcendent power and roused his aunt, Princess Ava. Once he signaled one of the attendants to support Ava, Prince Theodore stepped forward to face Orion.

"Orion, you have cost the human kingdom both men and honor; worst of all, you have shamed our princess. I will not let that stand.

I challenge you. I request the honor of a duel!"

With that, Prince Theodore sprang into the air above the colosseum. Armed with his sword and clad in sacred armor, his cape rippled in the wind as he pointed his blade directly at the Giant King Orion. His voice rang out with such force that not only the colosseum crowd but also the people throughout Stoneheart City heard it.

All eyes in Stoneheart City turned skyward to behold the valiant and imposing Prince Theodore.

Orion's smile vanished, replaced by a poised and level stare. He had used human slaves and Galahad's death to crush the human envoys' morale, and now Theodore intended to humiliate Orion in return—reclaiming some measure of dignity.

Neither was acting on whim alone; there were deeper motives at play. Those few knights' lives alone would not drive Theodore to such impulsiveness.

"Orion, I request your tutelage!"

The prince's powerful voice again resounded through the air. Orion turned to the ogre Aldous, who set down his roast with a loud chew and said, "My friend, I assure you, neither the ogres nor the Blood Elves will interfere in your 'friendly exchange' with the human prince."

Hoisting his spiked club onto his shoulder, Aldous flashed a grin at Blood Elf Lycanor. Nor did he fear her, an upper-legendary being. He likely could not defeat Lycanor, but he was confident he could keep her at bay for a while.

Chapter 433 433: He's grown stronger again

Blood Elf Lycanor was holding a goblet. With a casual turn of her wrist, the wine in the cup rippled, then gradually formed a small water tornado.

Toying with the goblet, Lycanor said nothing. She looked up at Aldous once, then withdrew her gaze.

Seeing this, Orion instantly understood Lycanor's attitude.

Orion turned around and glanced at Prince Theodore, who was hovering above the colosseum, the corners of his mouth curving upward.

"Perfect timing. Let's see how my new skill, [Instant Impact], performs."

With a mighty boom, Orion transformed into lightning and, in the blink of an eye, appeared in midair over the colosseum, confronting Prince Theodore directly.

"Your Highness, are you dissatisfied with the performance I've prepared for you?"

While speaking, Orion drew out his trident, the Flame of Will.

Prince Theodore gazed at Orion, a smile tugging at his lips. In truth, on this diplomatic visit to the giants' territory, beyond his stated goals, Prince Theodore also had other hidden objectives.

He sought opportunities to gauge the approximate strength of both the ogre lord and the giant lord. After all, the powers of Ogre Aldous and Giant Orion would determine how the human kingdom should approach these two neighboring forces.

Not long ago, Prince Theodore had engaged in a fierce battle with Ogre Aldous, discovering that Aldous was almost at the upper Legendary level. Now it was time to test Giant Orion.

Previously, Prince Theodore had been waiting for a suitable excuse to challenge Orion—and the death of Galahad, as well as the humiliation of Princess Ava, now provided that chance.

"Lord Orion, our joy cannot be founded on the blood and death of others. The shadow of evil will ultimately be dispelled by the light of justice."

Upon hearing this, Orion burst into raucous laughter. In this land, the ones least qualified to talk about justice were humans, dwarves, and Blood Elves.

For over ten thousand years, the so-called prosperity and pretended righteousness of these three races had been built upon the suffering of the races north of their borders. The more brutal the northern tribes were made to be, the more despicable the actions of the three so-called 'civilized' races.

Orion did not think these three races were necessarily wrong; rather, it was that they shouldn't act like a whore and then pretend to be saintly.

"Your Highness, I have never seen the justice you speak of!"

Orion raised his trident and aimed its prongs at Prince Theodore. A tremendous force gathered, congealing into a giant spectral trident that fell from above toward the prince.

The overwhelming pressure descended, making Prince Theodore feel as though he was about to plummet from the sky. Having only recently ascended to Legendary rank, he would have been crushed by Orion's aura alone if not for the protection of his sacred armor.

After devouring four Lord's Stones, Orion had not quite reached peak Legendary rank, but he was close. Just as Prince Theodore was on the verge of collapse, runes flared on his armor, accompanied by the sound of grinding metal, and a golden shield of holy light appeared around him. This barrier freed him from Orion's oppressive force.

In the grand hall below, Blood Elf Lycanor and Ogre Aldous had been watching the battle closely.

"He's grown stronger again."

Prince Theodore might not have sensed it, but Lycanor, having fought Orion multiple times, felt it clearly. The pressure Orion exerted at this moment was a threat she had only ever experienced when facing the Elf King wielding tribal relics.

"Heh heh heh... The stronger Orion becomes, the more peace will truly come to this region. Am I right?"

Ogre Bluehide, hefting a spiked club, fixed one of his heads on Lycanor with a menacing stare while the other head grinned up at the scene of the fight.

Lycanor turned to study Bluehide carefully, a flicker of surprise in her eyes. Only now did she realize that this ogre lord, who had befriended the giant king, seemed to have been hiding his true power all along.

"Indeed. The fact that Prince Theodore hasn't opened a direct trade route through the ogre territory surely means he didn't gain any advantage over you."

Lycanor silently contemplated this newfound insight into the neighboring ogre tribe, forming a different impression of the Blood Elves' close neighbor.

"You're correct. If the two of you were weak, what would await you would be neither fairness nor mercy, but endless slave-hunting parties."

Lycanor spoke bluntly. Outwardly, humanity, dwarves, and Blood Elves appeared to have coexisted peacefully for thousands of years, but behind the scenes?

The human kingdom harbored numerous despicable slaver groups that repeatedly snuck into Blood Elf territory, capturing and killing many of them. Because Blood Elves shared elf ancestry, each one of them was strikingly beautiful, an immense temptation for humans. And that very allure gave rise to the slavers—those vile humans who abducted Blood Elves and used them as tools to vent their sexual desires.

Especially among the human kingdom's nobles, the number of Blood Elf sex slaves they kept in their palaces was astonishing.

True peace had never truly existed; it was only a façade of balance at best.

The Blood Elves were painfully aware of the humans' many sordid deeds, yet because humans possessed Saints, both dwarves and Blood Elves dared not openly oppose them. Ultimately, all of this boiled down to individual power and the overall strength of one's race.

"Hahaha... If enemies come, I've got a club. And if that's not strong enough, I've got friends!"

Ogre Aldous roared with laughter.

Boom!

Just as Aldous finished speaking, the fight above the colosseum erupted. A minute earlier, when Orion saw Prince Theodore break free from his oppressive aura, he launched a surprise attack. In Theodore's view, Orion's form only seemed to flicker, and then Orion was right in front of him.

A dull thud resounded, and Theodore was sent hurtling through the air—flung directly out of Stoneheart City. As for Orion, he stood where Theodore had been moments before, gazing off at the prince he had just knocked away.

A fierce gust howled, and Prince Theodore—his face full of shock—returned from outside the city to the skies above the colosseum. Before he could speak, Orion vanished again in a flash.

Crack!

This time, Orion reappeared behind Prince Theodore, his colossal frame bearing down like a meteor from on high. Once more, Theodore was blasted away. Meanwhile, the holy light shield that had protected him moments before was shattered under a strike from the trident.

A smile spread across Orion's face as he withdrew the trident and, in a burst of lightning, returned to the grand hall.

Moments later, Prince Theodore flew in again, his expression dark.

"Your Highness, you're no match for me."

"The human king himself might be qualified to challenge me, but you are not."

Orion's tone was both proud and dismissive, and no one in the hall dared voice a single objection.

Chapter 434 434: Your power is truly unbelievable

Lycanor's eyes were fixed on Orion, her heart shaken beyond measure.

The killing move Orion had just displayed was something he had never shown during the North-South War. Faced with such a swift attack, Lycanor wasn't confident she could withstand even one strike.

Prince Theodore remained silent. Wearing the sacred armor, he had only managed to fend off two of Orion's moves, so he had no grounds to refute Orion.

"On account of the prince, I can consider releasing the remaining human slaves," Orion said, breaking the tense atmosphere in the hall, "but you must use items of value to ransom them out of the colosseum."

With these words, everyone breathed a sigh of relief. The rules of the colosseum could not be broken; not only did Prince Theodore have to be spared, but he also had to be treated with a measure of respect.

After all, Orion wanted to develop Stoneheart City and the southern territory. The human kingdom was a vast market as well as a crucial hub. By connecting with the human kingdom, Orion could then rapidly open trade routes with the dwarves and the dragons.

"Esteemed King of the Giants, your power is truly unbelievable!"

Prince Theodore was quick to read the situation, immediately altering his attitude. His tone, and even his form of address, became more courteous.

Orion nodded with a smile, motioning for Prince Theodore to sit. In the next moment, the mood shifted, and everyone began to enjoy themselves.

Once Prince Theodore was seated, Princess Ava anxiously reached out with trembling hands, wanting to see if he was hurt.

"Aunt, I'm fine," Prince Theodore said softly, clasping Princess Ava's hands in reassurance.

"Theodore, you must be safe. You can't lose your life out here for my sake."

Ever since Prince Theodore had challenged Orion, Princess Ava's heart had been filled with worry. She could hardly imagine the consequences for the kingdom if its prince were to die in giant territory.

"I understand," Prince Theodore replied, nodding and then shaking his head.

Meanwhile, in contrast to Princess Ava's fears, Orion and Aldous were in high spirits. Under the enthusiastic hospitality of the ogre's two heads, Orion's cup was never empty.

He, too, was delighted. Moments ago, he had tested [Instant Impact] twice. This extreme crash was the epitome of a surprise attack.

Amid this relaxed atmosphere, the banquet continued, accompanied by bouts of cheering from ongoing colosseum duels. Those slaves fighting in the arena were either remnants from the North-South War or captives Orion had seized during his patrols of the territory.

Prince Theodore, Princess Ava, and Blood Elf Lycanor all remained silent as they attended the entire banquet.

By evening, with Prince Theodore accompanying her, Princess Ava finally left the colosseum. Together with the human kingdom's envoy, she temporarily took up residence in the guest house at Stoneheart City.

Inside Torin's bedroom at the guest house.

Gazing at Stoneheart City, lit by starlight and firelight, Torin brimmed with ambition. He thought of the grand colosseum and the countless spectators it could hold—both were integral to his future plans.

Torin knew all too well that once this colossal colosseum opened, it would bring its owner immense wealth. His eyes, fixed upon Stoneheart City, shone with both envy and an intense longing.

"It's truly unexpected that an Alpha-level knight would perish like that!"

"And I heard he was a knight with a legacy—what a pity."

It was Mike and Wyatt who spoke. During the day's banquet, although they hadn't been eligible to enter the reception hall, they'd still watched all the duels from a private room downstairs.

"You think the prince reclaimed that knight's armor and sword?"

Torin interrupted his two subordinates, turning an eager and urgent gaze toward Mike and Wyatt.

"Master, are you looking to acquire Sir Galahad's relics?"

Torin nodded. The bright light in his eyes made Wyatt uneasy, realizing he had guessed his master's intentions all too well.

"I failed to recognize Galahad as an ancient knight earlier. Now that I know, it's not too late," Torin said. "I'm aware of some secrets concerning the ancient knights. They're also known as the Eight Great Knights. Each one possessed a sacred inheritance, and all of them were said to be above Alpha-level."

If I can obtain Galahad's relics, there's a chance I can advance my own power. If I become an Alpha-level warrior, I'll have a leading edge in the construction and management of Soaring Bird City."

Torin grew more excited as he spoke, his eyes brimming with impatience and greed.

"But how will we get hold of Galahad's relics?"

"Are we planning to buy them from the Giant King?"

At Wyatt's prompt, Torin's active mind immediately conjured several ways to secure Galahad's relics.

"Let me think carefully. There must be a way!"

He muttered to himself while pacing back and forth in his bedroom.

Elsewhere, in Prince Theodore's quarters.

Unlike the other members of the envoy, Prince Theodore stayed in a private suite. Upon entering, he felt utterly exhausted. After Princess Ava, who had forced herself to attend the banquet, fainted in his arms, he made sure she was taken care of before turning to more pressing matters.

In the study, Sir Samuel and Damien had been waiting for some time.

"Your Highness!"

"Your Highness!"

Leaning back in his chair, Prince Theodore waved at them to sit.

"Sir Samuel, tomorrow you will accompany Damien to the negotiations between our people and the ogres and giants," he said. "Avoid conflict. Keep Damien safe."

Both Samuel and Damien nodded, accepting his orders.

"Your Highness, how should we present ourselves at the negotiating table?"

As a diplomat, that was Damien's main concern.

"For now, we have no choice but to implement our second plan: straightforward negotiations," Prince Theodore replied.

A flicker of dissatisfaction passed through Damien's eyes. Ordinary negotiations meant the human kingdom would lose significant advantages, and the nobles supporting him stood to gain far less.

"Understood, Your Highness," said Damien.

Prince Theodore accepted a specialized potion from Samuel and drank it, finally easing some of his mental fatigue.

"This time, we're not only negotiating with the Stoneheart Horde but also with the Ogre Tribe. We don't have much time. To prevent any accidents, the faster we conclude, the better."

In an instant, Samuel and Damien grasped the meaning behind Prince Theodore's words. The might of the ogre and giant lords far exceeded their expectations. Even though they were an envoy representing the human kingdom, there was no guarantee of safety.

Especially here in Stoneheart City—this was another's domain, and humans were outsiders.

Chapter 435 435: I'll make sure my cum all goes inside you today

"And one more thing: I don't care who's backing you. Since you've come out here with me, you all must adhere to the rules."

"If you want to return safely to the human kingdom, don't stir up trouble behind my back."

Prince Theodore's voice was utterly cold, brimming with regal authority in that very moment.

"Understood, Your Highness Prince!"

"Understood, Your Highness Prince!"

Damien and Samuel, hearing his words, couldn't help trembling slightly.

"Remember, until I set foot back in the human kingdom's territory, I don't want to catch even a whiff of scandal."

"If there's nothing else, go and get ready."

Damien and Samuel immediately got to their feet and withdrew from the suite. The door closed behind them, and only then did Prince Theodore raise the glass and finish the last bit of his potion.

"Though I did suffer some humiliation in front of Orion this time, I still accomplished all I set out to do."

"The stronger you are, Giant King, the more it proves the importance of what I've achieved on this trip."

"Once I return, I'll be one step closer to becoming king!"

...

In a stark contrast to Prince Theodore's current mood, darkness settled over the bedroom shared by Garrett, Godfrey, and Lambert.

Ever since Godfrey got back to the room, he had been drinking heavily, not speaking to anyone.

Garrett remained silent, collecting Galahad's belongings left behind in the chamber one by one.

Lambert stood by the window, gazing at the darkness where Stoneheart City's bonfires could not reach, lost in thought for a long time.

They had all come together because of Galahad. Now that the one who bound them was gone, the three felt as though they'd lost their anchor.

After a long while, Lambert turned away from the window to face the other two, who were quietly brooding.

"So, what do you plan to do next?"

Garrett, having just finished tidying up, sat alone on the bed. He raised his head and looked over at Lambert.

"Rescuing Her Highness the Princess and protecting her was Galahad's greatest wish. He never completed that mission, so I'll do it in his place!"

Lambert regarded Garrett steadily, neither denying nor affirming. Inwardly, he let out a soft sigh: "How do you plan on keeping her safe?"

"As for me, don't ask. I don't want to go anywhere. Do whatever the hell you please—it's got nothing to do with me anymore!"

Godfrey kept downing flask after flask, getting himself thoroughly drunk.

Lambert merely nodded and looked away, falling silent again.

...

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the castle.

Orion and Lilith had not seen each other for several days. After Orion returned to his room, he was greeted by Lilith, clad in provocative lingerie that radiated irresistible allure.

Lilith kissed Orion all over his body, and he closed his eyes, letting himself indulge in the pleasure.

Ten minutes passed before Orion felt his pants being tugged off. A wet tongue slowly traced the length of his cock, sliding down until it reached his balls.

Lilith cupped his balls with both hands, kissing them softly.

Seduced by Lilith, Orion's cock had already stiffened. He opened his eyes and scooped Lilith up, carrying her straight to the bed.

Lilith spread her legs—she had been ready for him all this time, her vagina his alone.

...

After a while, Lilith lay panting on top of Orion, her body covered in sweat, and her expression full of satisfaction. It was clear she had found great pleasure in their lovemaking.

"Honey, are you really willing to let go of your plaything?"

"Plaything"—she considered Ava no more than that.

Hearing her words, Orion lifted his hand and gave Lilith's backside a light smack.

"She's a princess of the human kingdom. Why keep her around? You planning to take care of her?"

Lilith giggled, though it was unclear whether the light smack had tickled her or Orion's answer pleased her.

"Oh, our mighty lord of the Stoneheart Horde, your performance in the colosseum today was truly awe-inspiring—worthy of reverence."

Lilith leaned down to kiss Orion's nipples. His immense strength, both in power and in bed, fascinated her and drove her wild. It fueled her willingness to be even more forward in their lovemaking.

"So, Lycanor's arrival was meant to bully you, was it?"

Orion grunted softly, hoisting Lilith up and allowing her body to settle so that her legs were spread wide again. Once more, Lilith's vagina slipped onto his cock.

"Blood Elf Lycanor is here to help Prince Theodore demand Princess Ava's return—that's the official reason. Privately, I suspect he's checking what kind of agreement the human kingdom and our Stoneheart Horde have made.

"Once they figure that out, the Blood Elf Tribe can make the necessary adjustments and better coordinate with the Stoneheart Horde."

Orion held nothing back, telling Lilith everything he knew.

"And that Ogre Lord—did you invite him as reinforcement?"

When Lilith mentioned Aldous, Orion paused for a moment before replying,

"Aldous is basically a friend of mine. The ogre tribe also needs a real ally. We just clicked right away, and without much fuss, we agreed to form a mutual defense alliance."

...

Lilith, still astride Orion's cock, rocked her body up and down while pleading in a soft voice, "Honey, I want to bear you a child."

Orion, his eyes half-lowered, opened them when she said this so suddenly. "Really?"

"Mmm...I really long to have a child!"

"In that case, let's keep going! I'll make sure my cum all goes inside you today."

...

Early the next morning, the human kingdom envoy split into two groups. Prince Theodore, along with Orion, Lycanor, and Aldous, returned to the colosseum's reception hall to watch another duel. The rest of the envoy, together with Stoneheart Horde leaders headed by Delilah and Onyx, began intense negotiations.

"Just a small token of respect—please don't refuse," Orion said, pushing a token inlaid with crystal cores toward Prince Theodore, Blood Elf Lycanor, and Aldous in turn.

The three picked them up and looked at Orion, curiosity evident in their eyes.

"These are high-tier VIP tokens for this colosseum. If you three find yourselves interested down the line, they might come in handy."

Orion offered no further details about the tokens' specific functions, since the colosseum's staff and rules were still a work in progress. At the moment, they were still in the preparatory phase, with many details yet to be finalized.

"Thank you for your generosity, Giant King!"

Prince Theodore tucked the token away and gave a polite nod. Lycanor and Aldous likewise accepted their tokens and expressed their gratitude. Compared to yesterday, the atmosphere in the reception hall was noticeably more cordial.

All four legendary powerhouses were exceptionally polite, with no sign of the previous day's hostility between Orion and Theodore.

"Respected Giant King," Prince Theodore said, "I'd like to make a deal with you personally."

Orion watched Prince Theodore, whose face was wreathed in a smile, kindness shining in his eyes. "Your Highness, I'm curious about this deal. Let's hear it."

Prince Theodore nodded and took a moment to find the right words before proceeding. "To my knowledge, in the human kingdom, many nobles keep a large number of slaves and laborers, which include giants. For the sake of peace between our races, I'm willing to help you reclaim five hundred giant slaves."

As the Giant King, Orion knew he had to respond directly to such an offer. Whether due to his own convictions or a duty to his people, there was no way to refuse.

He studied Prince Theodore intently, finding him increasingly intriguing. "Your Highness, what do you want in return?"

Prince Theodore flashed that same harmless smile again and said calmly, "Respected Giant King, all I want is to trade for Sir Galahad's personal effects."

Chapter 436 436: Blackstone Code

Orion gazed at Prince Theodore, then suddenly raised a finger.

"I want you to help me retrieve a thousand giant slaves!"

Prince Theodore smiled and nodded, showing no hesitation in accepting Orion's request.

"As you wish!"

Orion appreciated dealing with someone so straightforward; it made both business and friendship easier to forge.

Not far from them, Lycanor of the Blood Elves voiced the elves' proposal right after Orion and Prince Theodore concluded their deal.

"Lord Orion, the Blood Elves would like to trade our enchanted weapons in exchange for the golden thistle flowers that grow in giant territory."

Golden thistle flowers were a key ingredient in creating certain magical plants, and they were native to the Meadowland Plains.

Orion turned to Lycanor and shook his head, declining this trade offer. Before the end of the northern-southern war, Orion had already asked the Bureau of Weapons to assess the Blood Elves' enchanted weapons. In truth, they were not as effective as Orion had hoped.

Moreover, the enchanted weapons crafted by the Blood Elves were still inferior to the transformative weapons currently under development by the Bureau of Weapons. What was more important, once Stoneheart City opened, dwarven blacksmiths would arrive. Dwarven weapons were sturdier and would better suit the diverse races under Orion's command—especially those skilled in close combat.

"If you want the golden thistle flowers, you'll need to exchange them for moonwater."

Moonwater was a top-grade material used to cultivate various magical plants. Orion was certain the Blood Elves had a substantial reserve of it. However, Lycanor offered no reply to Orion's conditions.

Even though the Blood Elves and the Stoneheart Horde did not strike a deal this time, the banquet remained relaxed and enjoyable. Many transactions and collaborations involving the stoneheart horde, humans, ogres, and blood elves were more or less set in motion during these casual talks among several legendary figures. Prince Theodore, for his part, had brought along some highly experienced chefs who provided unique spices that elevated the level of the banquet's cuisine.

That evening, in the castle's conference hall, the attendees included Delilah, Onyx, Thundar, Earthshaker, and several other elders.

"My lord," Onyx began, "the matter we urgently need to address is improving the horde's legal code—especially in the areas of commerce and diplomacy. We need to finalize that immediately."

Earlier that day, Onyx and Delilah had met with the human envoys for a comprehensive discussion. Through this exchange, Onyx realized that, compared to the human kingdom, the newly formed Stoneheart Horde was lacking in many regulations and legal structures. Once the Stoneheart Horde and the human kingdom established formal cooperation, there would be no legal framework to manage the merchants and mercenaries arriving from all over.

Orion nodded. This issue had long been on his mind, and he had already begun making preparations. He looked over at Delilah, who offered a charming smile before producing a hefty code of law from her Bagbird pouches.

Orion accepted it, flipped through a few pages, and then pushed it forward.

"This is the 'Blackstone Code' that I asked Delilah to draft, referencing the human kingdom's and the Blood Elf tribe's legal systems."

Everyone besides Orion and Delilah stood up and gathered around the Blackstone Code.

"By the gods above, in accordance with the will of Lord Orion Stoneheart, we shall see that the glory of the Stoneheart Horde shines across the land. We will eradicate all sin and evil within the horde, ensuring every member enjoys the rights and bears the responsibilities they deserve."

"If any member is found guilty of a crime, punishment shall be meted out according to these statutes."

"Article One: Any betrayal of the horde or loss of faith will be punishable by death."

"Article Two: Any..."

As Onyx read each article clearly and steadily, the atmosphere in the conference hall grew increasingly solemn. Because this new Blackstone Code was borrowed in large part from the laws of the humans and the Blood Elves, it was not yet perfect. However, it would suffice for the imminent commercial and diplomatic collaborations.

Over the coming months and years, the details of the Blackstone Code would be adjusted bit by bit to align with the reality of life in the horde. A fully functional, enduring code of law evolves along with a society's actual needs.

Onyx spent more than two hours reciting all three hundred articles in their entirety, from horde security secrets and litigation procedures to the safeguarding of private property, marriage and family issues, inheritance, and even slavery regulations. Every aspect was covered.

Orion's Stoneheart Horde did not ban slavery. In this world, slaves were an indispensable part of society and the prevailing social structures. In fact, one could say slaves were among the greatest spoils of war.

"Everyone," Orion said, "the publication of the Blackstone Code means the Stoneheart Horde has taken a major step toward civilization."

"In addition to the code, there is a separate set of military laws. I've already had them carved onto a stone monument in our army barracks. From now on, we will act in accordance with these laws."

Onyx and the others rose to their feet. Their eyes shone with admiration and respect for Orion.

"Next, we must distribute the Blackstone Code so that everyone in the Stoneheart Horde can become familiar with it. Each elder will be tasked with this. Delilah, you will oversee the process of teaching our people about these new laws."

Delilah nodded and stowed the Blackstone Code back into her pouches.

"I know our Stoneheart Horde is somewhat special, as it's composed of multiple tribes(clans)," Orion went on. "But I can promise that, so long as their customs don't conflict with the horde's laws, each tribe's rules and traditions will still be respected."

At this, the crowd in the conference hall seemed visibly relieved. Both Delilah and Onyx carried special status in their own tribes, and sometimes their commands proved more effective than those of appointed officials.

Orion had made it clear that, within reason, exceptions to the official law would be permitted for tribal traditions. After all, no new code is perfect upon its initial enactment; the Blackstone Code would only reach its ideal form through trial and adjustment over time.

"Lord," Delilah suddenly spoke up, "there's another matter that needs our immediate attention."

Orion motioned for her to continue.

"In the past, transactions between our horde's various tribes were mostly gifts or bestowals—simple methods of exchange. All of these relied on bartering goods. But now that the Stoneheart Horde is opening its doors to the outside world, we need our own currency."

"Just like how the human kingdom uses gold and silver coins, and how the Blood Elves have moonstones and moonlight jade."

This was indeed pressing and vital. Fortunately, Orion had long since begun preparations for such an event.

"Earthshaker!"

Instead of answering Delilah directly, Orion called out Earthshaker, indicating he should handle the matter.

With a friendly grin, Earthshaker produced a Bagbird pouch and dumped its contents onto the round table in the conference hall.

Chapter 437 437: It's what you all deserve

"This is the Stoneheart currency produced by the Bureau of Weapons. It comes in three varieties: large, medium, and small," Earthshaker explained. "You can simply call them large Stoneheart coins, medium Stoneheart coins, and small Stoneheart coins.

The small ones are similar to the silver coins of the human kingdom, the medium ones are equivalent to gold coins, and the large ones are considered high-value precious currency."

As Earthshaker spoke, Orion held out his palm, letting a large Stoneheart coin drop into it.

On the front of the coin was the figure of a giant's silhouette. Below the silhouette lay the totems of the various races within the Stoneheart Horde, arranged in a rather intricate pattern.

On the back of the coin was a triangular magical formation designed to prevent counterfeiting. In fact, the materials used to create large Stoneheart coins—bones, rare ores, and crystal cores—made them extremely difficult to forge illegally.

In reality, Orion's previous visit to Blackstone City, where he had summoned Rockwell back, was precisely about having the Bureau of Weapons manage the minting of these new coins. With Rockwell's return to Blackstone City, not only could he assist Lorelia in defending the bottomless abyss, but he could also oversee the production of Stoneheart currency.

The advent of Stoneheart coins marked the establishment of the Horde's own monetary system. Though it remained quite simple for the time being, it was enough for now. Law and currency together provided the foundation for the Stoneheart Horde's ongoing progress and civilized evolution.

As for writing, it was fortunate that this continent already had a common language and common written characters, which resembled English closely enough that Orion didn't have to invent an entire written language from scratch.

Orion swept his gaze over the elders as they examined the newly minted Stoneheart coins, feeling a surge of emotion welling up inside. The Horde's ranking system had already been mostly reformed. Now, with its own currency and its own legal code, the Stoneheart Horde was on the verge of moving beyond a barbaric era.

The meeting then continued with Delilah elaborating on a few trade agreements involving mutual exchange with the human kingdom. Under Orion's guidance, many of these points were quickly finalized.

For the next half month, group meetings were held every evening.

After two weeks, Prince Theodore mounted his steed and departed Stoneheart City with the human envoys. Riding beside him was Princess Ava, clad in beautiful attire and looking noticeably more spirited than she had upon arriving.

Seated atop her horse, Princess Ava glanced back at the towering Stoneheart City, her heart conflicted with a swirl of emotions.

"So this is the place where I was imprisoned? I was raped countless times by a giant here, and I can't forget how unforgettable it all felt. How despicable that I sometimes catch myself longing for that giant to violate me again..."

"Besides those moments of twisted pleasure with a giant, several members of the Rose Knight Regiment also died in this city. I tasted pain and despair here."

"It's a land that holds both allure and deep hatred for me."

Her expression grew more distant, her face turning cold.

"Aunt," Theodore said quietly, "let's hurry back. Father is very worried about you. The Stoneheart Horde has signed alliance contracts with our Human Kingdom, with the Blood Elves, the Dwarves, and the Dragons. Right now, the Stoneheart Horde is our ally."

Theodore's words were both a reminder and a small comfort. Princess Ava was no fool. She immediately understood the meaning behind them: the kingdom would not wage war against the Stoneheart Horde for her sake. Any resentment she felt would have to remain bottled up inside.

"Thank you, Theodore," she said softly.

He shook his head. Growing up, he had received much kindness and support from his aunt. Being able to save her was a task he gladly and willingly accomplished.

Meanwhile, the ogres had gained ample benefits from the negotiations, so Orion also bade farewell to his friend Aldous. The Blood Elf Lycanor, for reasons unknown, lingered in Stoneheart City, though Orion had little interest in her at the moment.

Back inside the castle's conference hall, Orion found himself cornered once more by Onyx, who had been pressing him with matters ever since the arrangements with the humans were settled.

"Lord, according to your instructions, we've only finalized four city-building sites so far," Onyx reported. "There is one located on the border between the former giant territory and the Blood Elf territory. Two more are planned for the Beastfolk and Orc territories, respectively."

The "Ten-City Plan" was Orion's initial proposal for future development, aiming to link Beastfolk territory, Giant territory, Orc territory, and a portion of Blood Elf territory. It would provide a comprehensive pathway for the Stoneheart Horde to expand in a stable manner. But Onyx's field research revealed that only four locations were truly suitable for new cities at present.

Orion beckoned, and two succubus maidservants entered the room, carrying a sand-table map he had prepared. As Onyx continued speaking, he pointed out each proposed construction site on the map.

"Only four?" Orion murmured, and Onyx nodded.

Seeing Orion deep in thought, Onyx hesitated for a moment before sharing his own view. "Lord, I believe the Ten-City Plan should be divided into three phases."

Orion looked up, signaling him to go on.

"If all ten cities are built at once, our slaves will be scattered too thinly. By the time winter arrives and the dark beast tides descend, we might not even have finished the city walls."

"But if we focus on just these four cities, we can probably complete the walls—and maybe some principal defensive structures—before the dark beast tides strike."

Onyx's reminder about the dark beast tides was crucial. Orion nearly forgot about them entirely.

"All right, then we'll focus on these four cities for now, giving them our full attention. If you need anything, request it from Delilah."

Onyx breathed a sigh of relief, thankful that Orion was willing to heed his advice.

"Oh, yes—what should we name these four cities?"

Orion had never really thought about the names. When he first proposed the Ten-City Plan, it was just a broad goal for the Horde, ensuring no one would grow complacent. Yet, with Onyx looking at him expectantly, Orion made a quick decision.

"Let's call them Lilith City, Delilah City, Obsidian City, and Buffalofolk City."

Onyx stood there momentarily stunned, his confusion quickly shifting to delight.

"Lord, you're..."

Orion let out a hearty laugh, cutting off Onyx before he could finish. "It's what you all deserve!"

The three races—Succubi, Obsidian Golems, and Buffalofolk—had been following Orion since before he united the Black Forest. Their sacrifices and loyalty had already earned Orion's respect and the formal recognition of the Stoneheart Horde. Now that the Horde was settling into stability, it was only right that those who had pledged themselves to Orion first should enjoy extra rewards.

By giving the cities these names, Orion hoped to motivate the other races that had joined the Stoneheart Horde.

He wanted to send a message: so long as you remain sufficiently loyal and achieve enough merit in battle, there is always something better awaiting you.

Chapter 438 438: I want to challenge you in bed

"My lord, may your radiance forever shine upon the Stoneheart Horde!"

Onyx raised his clenched fist and placed it over his chest in salute to Orion. Orion smiled and waved, then continued discussing city construction plans with Onyx.

They spoke at length until dusk, when Onyx finally took his leave. Sitting alone on his throne, Orion half-closed his eyes. It was unclear whether he was deep in thought or merely dozing.

The moment he entered the Survivor's Platform, Orion was bombarded with messages from Aerin.

"Hulk, hurry and log in!"

"There's no one in my entire life I've wanted more than you. I need to make a deal!"

"As long as you give me crystal cores, I'll do anything you want. Anything at all. Don't you want to experience pure and beautiful elf sex?"

"Hulk, please, hurry and log in!"

"... .."

Orion glanced through Aerin's messages, guessing that in her desperation to strengthen herself, she'd become somewhat incoherent.

"I'm here," he replied. Within a minute, Aerin sent another message.

"Darling, you finally showed up!"

Seeing this response, Orion chuckled.

"Don't call me by such intimate names. As far as I can tell, we're only casual acquaintances at best," Orion shot back. His words struck home, and Aerin felt decidedly rebuffed.

"Hulk, where are you?" she typed. "I want to challenge you in bed!"

Orion ignored her slightly deranged suggestion and, at his own pace, sent a reply:

"First, over the next while, you'll provide me with a batch of entry-level Toughness Potions, improved to my specifications.

"Second, tell me what else you can brew. I have first priority to purchase any new items.

"Third..."

Orion laid out numerous conditions. Aerin, delighted, agreed to them all. Pleased by her cooperation, he proposed a trade. After sending some crystal cores her way, Orion also received a rare treasure from Aerin.

Seated on his throne, Orion opened his palm to reveal an egg about the size of a clenched fist. He used a fingernail to make a small cut on his skin, letting a drop of blood fall onto the mysterious elf egg.

Moments later, a bright-blue faerie larva, only about two inches long, broke through its shell and curled up in Orion's palm.

"So this is a faerie insect?" Orion mused. "According to Aerin, if properly raised, it might evolve into a Faerie Dragon. Who knows whether that's true."

After pondering for a bit, he placed the little faerie insect into a wooden box, planning to have Lilith raise it in the rear garden among the magical plants.

The insect could gather magical energy to speed the plants' growth, while the ripened magical plants would in turn hasten the insect's development. It was a neat little cycle.

...

Elsewhere, in an unknown realm called the Forest of Nature, Aerin let out a triumphant shout and leaped up from her bed woven of blossoms and vines.

She felt so exhilarated that she even performed a lively elf dance in the middle of the room. When the excitement had finally subsided, she lounged on her bed, opened her palm, and stared in joy at the Alpha-level crystal cores shining there.

Feeling the huge energy pulsing within the cores, Aerin couldn't help but whisper to herself:

"With these, I have the main materials to advance to High Elf. As soon as I gather a few more high-level magical plants, I can petition the council to help me brew a portion of the Water of Eternity. That'll guarantee a one-hundred-percent success rate for my evolution!"

"This is wonderful... I can finally become a High Elf!"

"Oh, Hulk, you're amazing. If we lived on the same continent, I'd definitely find you and use my charms to captivate you..."

...

Back in the castle of Stoneheart City, Orion returned his focus to the Survivor's Platform. Not seeing any new messages from Julius Caesar felt odd.

"Could Caesar have died?" he wondered to himself. Shrugging off the thought, he turned his attention to Arthas instead.

Onyx's reminder of the dark beast tides had tipped Orion off that he should prepare for the void passage.

Traveling to the Valkorath Realm meant informing Arthas as well as requesting a fixed-point teleportation scroll from Deputy Commander Edward.

"Bro, in two months, I'm heading to the Valkorath Realm," Orion said, getting straight to the point.

"Make sure you're well prepared," Arthas replied. "There's a war going on in the Valkorath Realm. I'll send you some information shortly—an overview of the enemies currently invading our realm.

If you need anything, just ask in the Champions Alliance channel. What's a big hassle to you might be an easy fix for us. And don't be afraid to incur favors in the Champions Alliance. The more favors you owe, the faster you'll grow."

Arthas held nothing back from Orion. After all, he knew exactly how many Lord's Stones Orion had consumed. Last time, when Orion sought him out to purify a Lord's Stone so Orion's power could increase, Arthas hadn't hesitated to give Orion some of his own reserve.

That transaction helped Orion grow stronger, and it also gave Arthas a chance to become a demigod himself. Ever since then, he and Orion had formed a deeper bond.

"I understand. Thanks for the heads-up!" Orion appreciated Arthas's kind advice, but at the moment, as the Lord of the Stoneheart Horde, Orion had no shortage of problems to handle. His territory was huge, and it would take time to absorb and manage everything properly, from population issues to shaping a unified set of values. Such matters couldn't be solved overnight.

With a sigh, he opened the public channel of the Champions Alliance and saw everyone discussing and complaining about various things:

Leonidas: "Arthas, I need reinforcements over here. Send me a Legendary-level lich. My troops are getting wiped out!"

Arthas: "I've already sent Rumbold your way!"

Arthas: "Alexander, come here. Let's work together to destroy that brood nest in the northern region."

Alexander: "Hang on, I'm in the middle of a fight!"

Edward: "Leonidas, want me to send you support?"

Leonidas: "No need. Arthas's man Rumbold just teleported in!"

Arthas: "Is the battle in the central zone looking rough, Deputy Commander?"

Edward: "Don't worry. The commander's forces are holding the line there. Nothing's going to happen to our base of operations."

Alexander: "Undead guy, get ready. I'll teleport over once I'm done here!"

Arthas: "Got it!"

...

Orion frowned as he read through his allies' conversation. He quickly realized that the situation in the Valkorath Realm wasn't particularly rosy—Leonidas and Arthas seemed to be lacking enough troops.

Even so, after reading all their messages, Orion felt a thrill at the prospect of going there himself.

Chapter 439 439: Was he joking or did he mean it?

Early the next morning, in the castle's rear garden.

Orion carefully took the faerie insect from its wooden box and placed it in Lilith's palm.

"What a gorgeous little darling!"

The faerie insect, marked with vibrant blue stripes, left Orion's hand and spun anxiously in circles atop Lilith's palm. Lilith extended a finger, teasing it while remarking on its lovely appearance.

"I recall you once raised a frost giant. Where is it now?"

Orion's memory flashed back to an egg he had gifted Lilith—a frost giant egg. He couldn't help asking about it.

"I left it in Blackstone City. It's grown so big that it's not cute at all anymore."

"I let it join the Hunting Party. It'll grow more robust that way."

Without looking up, Lilith kept her focus on the faerie insect in her hand.

"That frost giant is quite promising; it can reach Alpha-level easily if you take proper care of it."

Orion offered a gentle reminder. Lilith nodded, lightly pinching the faerie insect, unable to tear her eyes from it.

"Let this little creature live among the magical plants, and have the maidservants keep an eye on it."

Lilith waved her hand, indicating she would personally tend to it. Orion smiled softly, then turned to head back toward the castle's meeting hall.

In the meeting hall, Blood Elf Lycanor was already waiting.

"Ms. Lycanor, how are you finding your stay in Stoneheart City?"

Orion strode into the reception area and moved to the central seat, his voice resonating with warmth.

"Stoneheart City is magnificent, and its magical energy is quite dense."

Lycanor gazed at Orion, a keen light flickering in her eyes. Within this transformed city, she had discovered several unusual structures, which struck her as remarkable.

"Ms. Lycanor, have you come on behalf of the trade route?"

"Lord Orion, you're incredibly perceptive—that's exactly why I'm here!"

Orion erupted into hearty laughter, raising his goblet and draining it in one gulp.

The territory around Stoneheart City boasted two trade routes. One passed through the ogre lands and into the human kingdom, connecting to the dwarves and dragons. The other ran between Stoneheart City, the Blood Elves' City of Blessings, and the Dragons' Whitecliff City.

Orion had deduced Lycanor's intentions the moment Theodore left and she voluntarily chose to remain behind.

"If I agree to your terms, what benefits does the Stoneheart Horde gain?"

Orion was straightforward. Rather than refuse to open up this trade route, he wanted to know what was in it for him.

"We'll waive taxes on the Stoneheart Horde's goods. And if it's something we happen to need, we'll pay 10% more than the price offered by the dragons."

Lycanor answered so promptly it seemed she had planned every detail long ago.

"Wonderful. May the friendship between the Stoneheart Horde and the Blood Elves endure forever!"

Orion raised his goblet, and Lycanor mirrored his gesture, thus sealing their agreement.

"Lord Orion, I have another request: the Blood Elves would like to trade for golden thistle flowers. In exchange, we're willing to offer moonwater and crystal cores."

After finishing her drink, Lycanor brought up the golden thistle flowers again.

Orion studied Lycanor carefully. Her beautiful face was partially veiled by a few strands of wavy bangs, making her even more alluring.

"Orion, it's rather rude to stare so boldly at a lady in that way."

Lycanor noticed the desire in Orion's eyes. Her lips curved upward slightly, exuding absolute confidence in her own charm. Unlike Lilith, Delilah, or Ava, Lycanor's confidence did not solely stem from her beauty but from her formidable power.

"Hahaha... Ms. Lycanor, has no one ever told you how stunning you are? The moment I saw you, I thought about having sex with you."

Orion openly voiced the heat in his gaze. Yet, after a burst of laughter, he reined in his stare, his expression settling like that of a beast drifting into repose.

"If you're willing to provide moonwater and crystal cores, then we'll have ourselves a deal."

Quietly uttering these words, Orion unexpectedly agreed to Lycanor's proposal.

Lycanor, who had been staring into her goblet, lifted her gaze to scrutinize Orion. Based on her initial calculations, both the trade route and the golden thistle flowers would have required lengthy negotiations to hammer out specific terms. She had even prepared herself to offer her body if it proved necessary to seal the deal.

She had never expected Orion to agree to both requests so readily.

"Wonderful. Then we have a deal!"

Lycanor declared, looking at Orion with some puzzlement.

Orion offered a faint smile, as though everything was already under his control. In truth, he had analyzed the situation fully: that Blood Elf trade route would benefit the Stoneheart Horde, the Blood Elves, and the Dragons. Hoping to squeeze many extra benefits from the Blood Elves was unrealistic. Besides, the Blood Elves and Stoneheart Horde were neighbors; being too demanding could only harm their future cooperation.

Regarding the golden thistle flowers, Orion had never expected to barter them for vast quantities of moonwater. Receiving a portion of moonwater and crystal cores was already more than satisfactory.

A sudden stillness settled in the reception hall. An indescribable tension, both stifling and suggestive, slowly grew between Orion and Lycanor. After some time, Lycanor—unable to endure it—finally broke the silence.

"Lord Orion, the new Blood Elf King will ascend the throne at the start of next month. I'd like to invite you to the ceremony."

This caught Orion's attention. During the civil war, the previous elf king had been slain by the arch lord white dragon, Frostsire. No one had mentioned any successor until now. Apparently, the Blood Elves had reorganized enough to install a new monarch.

"My apologies, I'm still unfamiliar with the name of this new king."

"The new Blood Elf King is named Rommath. He was once an elf prince."

Orion nodded. He only knew the former king, Anasterian. He had never heard of Prince Rommath.

"If it's possible, I'll make every effort to attend. If commitments keep me away, I'll be sure to send an envoy."

Accepting her invitation, Orion noticed the joy on Lycanor's face as she nodded her agreement.

"Well then, Lord Orion, I plan to depart now."

Orion emptied his glass before making a gesture for her to do as she pleased.

Leaving the castle, Lycanor suddenly realized her cheeks felt hot, as though a light flush had crept across them.

"How invasive his look was, how provocative his words—he actually admitted he wanted to have sex with me. Was he joking or did he mean it?"

Murmuring her own question, Lycanor steadied her breathing and strode toward the guest house prepared for the Blood Elves.

As for Orion, after bidding Lycanor farewell, he found himself lost in silent thought.

Chapter 440 440: Patrol the western territory

"Should I go and attend the Elven Prince's coronation ceremony or not?"

"Hmm, I need to think carefully about this..."

Just as Orion was pondering, a few succubus maidservants walked in from outside the door.

"My lord, Elder Drakthul requests an audience."

"Let him in!"

Orion's voice rang out calmly. A moment later, Drakthul arrived alone in the reception hall.

"Drakthul greets our king!"

"Hmm... what is it?"

Orion snapped out of his thoughts and fixed his gaze on Drakthul.

Thanks to the formidable prowess Orion had displayed, along with the growing power of the Stoneheart Horde, the five Giant Elders who had pledged allegiance—Drakthul, Marnok, Gormathar, Veldrok, and Grulbane—were gradually becoming more loyal. In most cases, Drakthul and the others preferred calling Orion "king" rather than "lord."

"Great king, there's a situation in the territory near our western coastline."

After listening to Drakthul's report, Orion immediately thought of the Sea Tribe. He sat up straight, his eyes becoming sharper.

"Give me the details."

Drakthul nodded, organized his thoughts for a moment, then spoke at an unhurried pace.

"We've set up a number of watchtowers along the western coast of our territory.

But half a month ago, a patrol of our clansmen near the shore was attacked by the Sea Tribe.

In the following two weeks, all outgoing patrols were ambushed.

Besides these attacks, there have been ongoing provocations from the Sea Tribe in the water, telling us to get out of that region."

Drakthul finished speaking and stared at Orion, who fell into silent reflection. Orion was already aware that the Slark Merfolk's Reverse Whale clan had lost two Legendary-level strongholds in Whitecliff, and he had known they wouldn't simply let it go. He just didn't expect the Sea Tribe to make a move so swiftly.

"What's the situation now?"

Orion refrained from jumping to conclusions and instead sought an update on what happened afterward.

"Elder Marnok is stationed in the western territory and has pulled our people back to the watchtowers 10 miles from the coastline."

Orion nodded, approving of how Drakthul and Marnok had handled things.

"Someone, go summon the Elder of Stewardship!"

"Understood!" came a voice from outside, and before long, Delilah entered the reception hall.

Orion motioned for Delilah and Drakthul to take a seat and had Drakthul repeat the information about the Sea Tribe.

"I've already been alerted to the threat in the western part of the Horde's territory, and we're compiling additional intelligence. We haven't yet received reports from outside our territory."

After thinking for a moment, Orion said to Delilah, "Let the humans, dwarves, blood Elves, and dragons know about the Sea Tribe attacks. We'll see how they respond."

"I'll head to the western territory personally to keep watch, in case any Legendary-level enemies appear."

Delilah and Drakthul both nodded in agreement—anything involving Legendary-level adversaries was not within their power to handle on their own.

After Delilah reported a few more items, she and Drakthul withdrew.

"Inform Lilith that I'll be heading west to inspect the territory."

The emergence of the Sea Tribe weighed on Orion's mind. He gave this order to the maidservants at the door, then transformed into lightning and vanished from the castle.

Just beyond Stoneheart City, about 200 miles to the east, there lay a towering mountain inhabited by innumerable beasts. It was here that Thunderhawk Rayden made his home.

A massive shadow flickered across the ground. A giant python, coiled on the stone slabs as it soaked up the sun, suddenly had its heart pierced. Before it could be lifted high into the sky, it was already dead.

Rayden absolutely loved devouring snakes. In Blackstone City, there had been one enormous specimen called "Twilight Viper." If Orion hadn't intervened, Rayden would have swallowed the Twilight Viper long ago.

Returning to his nest atop the mountain peak, Rayden took about fifteen minutes to finish off the snake. Just as he was about to take a midday nap and resume his hunt later, a bolt of lightning flashed, and Orion appeared on his back.

"Rayden, it's time to get to work!"

Rayden turned, glanced at Orion, and failed to react—he thought it was just an illusion brought on by missing his master. He turned back around, preparing to continue his nap.

"We're going to investigate the territory near the western coast."

Hearing Orion's voice again, Rayden whirled around and instantly grew excited and overjoyed.

"Wow, Master, it's really you! I thought missing you so much made me see things!

"Master, you finally came to find me. Where are we going this time?"

Orion frowned at Rayden's incessant chatter and replied, "We'll patrol the western territory together."

"As you wish!"

A high-pitched screech rang out as Thunderhawk Rayden spread his wings and shot into the clouds. From different corners of this great mountain came the faint cries of other hawks, echoing Rayden's call.

"Those are your kin?"

Orion, with his sharp hearing, picked out many unfamiliar thunderhawk cries, most of which sounded female.

"Yes indeed! This region is my territory—actually, the thunderhawks' territory. Master, I've got over a dozen mates, and all of them are stunning thunderhawks. Once we get back, I'll introduce you to them.

"Master, am I not more impressive than you? I already have more mates than you. Even if I ejaculate rather quickly, I can go dozens of times in a single day!"

Rayden rambled on, leaving Orion speechless. Indeed, Rayden outdid Orion in terms of mate count.

"If any of your offspring show real potential, bring them to Stoneheart City. I'll have Lilith train them well."

"Thank you, Master!"

Rayden was thrilled, knowing Lilith was a skilled beast tamer. Should his offspring catch her eye, they would have access to endless magical plants and crystal cores—completely free.

In other words, especially talented thunderhawks would have a greater chance to advance to Alpha-level.

"Don't forget to patrol our territory more often. Our southern territory is enormous, and some troublemakers might sneak in without us knowing."

"Have you heard about the Sea Tribe stirring up trouble in our western lands?"

Thunderhawk Rayden let out a screech, feigning ignorance. Recently, he had been indulging in quite a lavish lifestyle on this very mountain, mating day in and day out with more than ten female thunderhawks, generating many offspring.

"Head a bit farther south. Let's check on that sandy stretch first," Orion instructed again.

"Understood, Master!"

Rayden beat his wings faster, climbing ever higher. Beneath the thin veil of clouds, Orion gazed down at the territory he had conquered, filled with a host of emotions.

In this lush, vibrant land, a vast surge of faith energy gathered within him.

For one fleeting moment, Orion felt like a god, surveying the world and striving to attain everlasting existence.