

Titan King 461

Chapter 461: Legendary level peak

Inside the palace, upon the throne.

With the palace gates firmly sealed, Orion summoned the Abyssal Dragon.

The Abyssal Dragon lowered its head, affectionately nuzzling Orion. Orion reached out and stroked the dragon's gigantic head, giving it two light taps.

"Xalathar, open your mouth!"

The Abyssal Dragon parted its massive jaws, and Orion tossed in a bundle of Legendary-level life essence.

"Don't let me down. Make sure you don't fail your advancement!"

Roar!

The only response Orion received was a deep growl. Immediately afterward, the Abyssal Dragon transformed into a flash of crimson light, returning to Orion's heart to advance.

For Xalathar the Abyssal Dragon, Orion's heart is the best training ground.

Once the Abyssal Dragon vanished, Orion pulled out the final white bone box, removed the chunk of life essence inside, and swallowed it in one gulp.

A tremendous surge of life energy burst forth again, coursing through every part of Orion's body. At the same time, the lightning, abyssal, and blood transcendent powers within him churned restlessly, manically absorbing that life energy.

In just a few moments, waves of energy fluctuations rippled throughout the palace.

Outside the palace, on top of the city walls.

Onyx, Earthshaker, Gronthar, Dirtclaw, and Drakthul had just rotated off duty. They gathered beside one another, leaning against the parapet, staring into the distance.

After consuming the life essences, their individual strengths had all improved to varying degrees. Onyx's aura in particular felt the most powerful, with Dirtclaw following close behind.

Under Dirtclaw's leadership, the gnoll armies charged the front lines like rabid dogs, sacrificing a great many gnolls but also reaping significant rewards. As their leader, Dirtclaw became the greatest beneficiary among them.

It seemed that when his bloodline advanced to Alpha level, something changed, and Dirtclaw's power soared in leaps and bounds, surpassing most of the Stoneheart Horde's Alpha-level beings.

"My king has issued the orders that in two days, we'll confront those fungal creatures head-on. We'll be up against slime mold mutants in numbers countless times greater than before," Drakthul said. As a giant, he would never shrink from battle—especially since he was among these elders.

Yet this would be Drakthul's first time engaging in interdimensional warfare. His confrontation with the slime mold mutants had made a profound impression.

"Such a battlefield can be terrifying, but it sure draws you in!"

Dirtclaw lounged against the wall in a free-spirited way. After speaking those words, he took the wine flask Gronthar handed him and gulped down a large swig.

"Really, it's all the same. War, no matter where it's fought, is a matter of life or death," Onyx said, withdrawing his gaze from the distance and sitting cross-legged on the wall.

Unlike Drakthul and Gronthar, Onyx, Earthshaker, and Dirtclaw were not new to interdimensional combat. In the last Godforsaken Land, they had encountered countless powerful beings and seen an even wider world.

"Have you all sensed those terrifying presences near the frontline?"

Everyone nodded in silent agreement.

"I plan to keep pace with Orion's steps. I want to climb to a higher realm," Onyx said in his slightly hoarse yet steady and forceful voice.

Once, his dream had been to become Alpha-level.

Now Onyx believed they had to set their sights even higher. He had to reach Legendary level, or else he would have nothing to offer Orion—he'd only be a burden.

Roar!

Just after Onyx finished speaking, a terrifying power surged out from the palace within the city. At the same time, Orion's roar thundered from inside—like rolling thunder.

A pressure even greater than before enveloped Cryptopolis, startling everyone.

High up in the Undead Tower, the lich Vexis awoke from her slumber. She perceived a heartbeat echoing from the palace at the center of the city—like the pounding of a giant drum—and sensed that power at once.

"That's the aura of someone at Legendary level peak!"

"Did Orion break through?"

"Excellent. That means Orion can shoulder some of my master's burdens!"

Once Vexis understood the situation, she slowly closed her eyes again, absorbing the death energy accumulated in the Undead Tower.

Before long, the citywide pressure lasted a few minutes, then quietly withdrew. Yet a faint, lingering roar still reverberated through the city, like a titan god bellowing in fury.

"Giant King Orion has grown stronger again!"

Earthshaker and Gronthar exchanged glances; among them, they felt Orion's breakthrough the most powerfully.

"Come on, let's go give the younger ones in the armies some extra drills. We can't disgrace Orion on the battlefield!" Drakthul said, rising to his feet and hurling his empty wine flask far off.

Onyx, Earthshaker, Gronthar, and Dirtclaw all got up at his words, chuckling while making their way down from the city walls.

Titanion Realm, Blackstone City.

After Lilith finished taming the ravens, Rendall set aside his city construction tasks and personally escorted her back to Blackstone City.

Once they arrived, Rendall departed again, riding his Thunderhawk to the city they were building, Lysinthia City.

At the Horde Hall's flight mount platform, Lilith rested her hand on her stomach, watching Rendall vanish into the distance.

Moments later, a burly Frost Giant bounded out from the outer fortress and came up beside Lilith, hopping around like an excited ape, celebrating his delight.

Lilith extended a hand to pat the Frost Giant, now in the midst of a growth phase.

"Whitefur, I'm back. You look bigger again!"

"Wah-ooo... Honorable Mistress, I missed you so much."

A spark of surprise flickered in Lilith's eyes. She hadn't expected the Frost Giant to have learned how to speak, how to communicate.

Just then, a squadron of succubus maidservants, who resided in the inner keep, emerged and lined up, bowing respectfully to Lilith.

"Clean everything up. I'll be staying here for a while!"

After giving her orders, Lilith followed Whitefur the Frost Giant toward the underground fissure.

Even though she was pregnant, Lilith knew the depths beneath Blackstone City were full of potential danger.

"Mistress, you've come to see Lorelia!"

At the underground fissure, the stone doors opened, and Lorelia darted over excitedly, throwing herself into Lilith's arms.

With a warm smile, Lilith steadily caught the Spider Queen, who had grown considerably taller.

Even though Lorelia had chosen an auxiliary evolution path, she had still grown in stature without anyone noticing.

Before they knew it, Lorelia was now nearly eight feet tall. If she extended all her spider legs, she would appear even taller.

"Waiting here all the time must be really boring, huh?"

"Yeah, it's basically either eating or sleeping."

Lilith flashed a gentle smile, brushing the hair beside Lorelia's ear and recalling the days long past when she had raised Lorelia.

The reason Lilith came to the underground fissure—besides checking to make sure everything was safe—was to look in on Lorelia.

Within the Stoneheart Horde, Lilith had practically raised Lorelia like her own child.

Thinking about the baby growing in her womb made Lilith want to see Lorelia too.

"Mmm... This feeling is so familiar!"

Lorelia, her face buried in Lilith's embrace, murmured softly. All of a sudden, she lifted her head, eyes wide with surprise as she stared at Lilith.

"Mistress, I can sense it: your womb carries the master's bloodline!"

"Right here... right here..."

Lorelia pointed at Lilith's stomach, bouncing with excitement, her voice full of joy.

"Mistress, is this your child with the master?"

Lilith nodded, her expression radiant with motherly warmth.

"Wow... it's our little master!"

"Let me hear what it sounds like!"

"..."

Chapter 462 462: The war we must face

Valkorath Realm, the battlefield.

Aside from Soraya—who remained in the Nest attempting to break through to Legendary level—and the fifty thousand small scorpions stationed on the city walls, Orion led everyone else to the front lines.

Five grand armies, one hundred thousand small scorpions, and five hundred thousand skeleton warriors—a total force slightly over seven hundred thousand—were all positioned to defend an twenty-mile-long defensive line.

Awoooo!

Having transformed into a Hellhound, Dirtclaw fought alongside Gronthar to hold a portion of the line. At the moment, Dirtclaw looked even more ferocious and bloodthirsty than Gronthar.

The Hellhound's body was wreathed in flames that burned through any slime molds layer in its path. Hissing sounds of scorching flesh and plumes of smoke followed wherever it went.

Hellhound tore the head off a living-flesh undead in a single bite, swallowing both the life essence and flesh in one fierce gulp.

That undead had evolved from an Alpha-level ghoul overtaken by slime molds, forming a hideous slime molds mutant.

"Dirtclaw, watch our lines—keep an eye on the defenses. Don't let those fungal creatures surround you!"

Behind Dirtclaw, Gronthar brandished a warhammer, bludgeoning any slime molds mutants that leapt forward. His booming voice reminded the blood-crazed Dirtclaw to be wary.

Awooo!

The Hellhound growled in response.

But just then, another fungal creature at Alpha level burst through the slime molds layer, lunging straight for the Hellhound.

With keen instincts, the Hellhound sprang aside and engaged that multi-armed parasitic creature in fierce combat.

Elsewhere, Onyx and Earthshaker joined forces to protect another stretch of the defensive line. Between Onyx's Blood Spirit Summoning and Earthshaker's Blood Sharing, they held their sector firmly in check.

Earthshaker's Blood Sharing skill connected more than a hundred bloodline warriors of the Stoneheart Horde in their vicinity. With this enhancement, those warriors fought with savage courage, throwing aside all fear for their lives.

"Earthshaker, don't just rely on brute force. You need to pace yourself! We have to hold out for three days—this is a long fight."

Seated atop a Dark Armored Beetle, Onyx was further bolstered by Earthshaker's Blood Sharing. Within a hundred-foot radius, anything that came near was slaughtered. They had already taken down three Alpha-level slime molds mutants.

But victory always comes at a cost. And here, defeat meant death.

Near the area Onyx defended was a giant named Veldrok. Fortune was not on their side. Veldrok was dragged beneath the slime molds layer by a slime molds mutant, where he was swarmed and killed.

Nor was Veldrok the only casualty. Countless skeletal warriors also perished when they were overwhelmed in the slime molds layer. Even the small scorpions from the scorpion tribe suffered heavy losses in the initial rush.

Hovering in midair, Orion and Vexis overlooked the entire battlefield below.

"Lord Orion, this is the war we must face."

Vexis's voice drifted into Orion's ear. She was long inured to such sacrifices beneath her feet.

In Vexis's eyes, only the final outcome of war—victory or defeat—truly mattered.

"Vexis, you handle overall command. I'll stop any fungal creatures that try to interfere."

"As you wish."

Lich Vexis gave a slight bow. She fully understood that Orion was commander here, and she must carry out his orders. Besides, the ongoing battle clearly required a powerful figure supervising from the rear. And furthermore, Vexis had her own tasks—like summoning the living dead and setting up undead formations.

Undeniably, Vexis made the perfect candidate to command.

"Go on, and leave the front line to me!"

Vexis nodded and then flew toward the rear of the battlezone.

Orion took a deep breath and raised the trident Flame of Will in his right hand. A layer of ice armor formed from that hand, covering the entirety of his armor. At the same time, Orion activated his Berserk Aura. Allies in his vicinity went into a berserk state.

"WAAAGH! Destroy every last enemy!"

With that thunderous roar, Orion shot like a meteor into a distant sector behind the slime molds layer.

Boom!

A mighty explosion rocked the battlefield as three Legendary-level slime molds mutants leapt from the slime molds layer. Their forms were a serpentine parasitic creature, an undead tyrant bristling with blades, and a flying slime mold dragons.

To confront Orion and Vexis, the slime molds brood mother had teleported these three Legendary-level mutants into the fray. Apart from the serpentine parasitic creature—which was mid Legendary level—both the undead tyrant and the slime mold dragons were at upper Legendary level.

As soon as they appeared, the parasitic serpent and the undead tyrant rushed in for the kill, charging at Orion. The flying slime mold dragons soared skyward, heading directly for where lich Vexis was located.

"Leaving so soon? Did you ask for my permission?"

Pop!

A sharp noise sliced through the air. With that single pop, Orion seemingly blinked into place above the slime mold dragons' back. At once, he unleashed a combination of lightning and sonic attacks.

Amid crackling electricity, the slime mold dragons dropped to the slime molds layer below like a mass of rotting flesh. Moments later, it broke free from the layer, took to the skies once more, and roared at Orion, none the worse for wear.

"That giant wants to die? Then let's surround him first!"

That mental vibration transmitted the fungal creatures' strategy with pinpoint clarity. They couldn't speak aloud, but they communicated telepathically.

Looking down at the perfectly intact slime mold dragons, Orion's brow furrowed. His sudden assault a moment earlier had failed to finish it off.

Given that Orion's strength stood at Legendary-level peak, and the slime mold dragons had survived his attack, it must have an extraordinarily high defense.

"Lord Orion, the slime mold dragons are formed from a bone dragon fused with slime molds. Its weak spot is in the head—its life essence is there."

Just then, lich Vexis's voice echoed from behind, guiding Orion.

"The serpent parasite and the undead tyrant share the same weakness—the skull. If you don't smash their heads and retrieve their life essences, they'll keep regenerating."

High above the battlefield, Orion heard Vexis's warning and raised his trident high. An array of tridents appeared in the void, enveloping the entire area around him. Also caught in that area were the three Legendary-level fungal creatures and a portion of the slime molds layer.

Facing three at once, Orion was brimming with confidence—this was the very battle he'd been craving since ascending to Legendary level peak.

He longed to celebrate his breakthrough by claiming the life essences housed within these three Legendary-level fungal creatures.

Chapter 463 463: Stay alert

"Today, all of you shall die!"

Perhaps driven by excitement or by a deep-rooted lust for slaughter, Orion roared toward the sky in a fury that soared to unimaginable heights. Transcendent power surged madly through every fiber of his being.

Orion's body kept growing, his frame rapidly becoming bigger and taller.

Roar, Giant!

Orion had entered his Titan Form, taking on the appearance of an ancient titan, and hurled himself toward the slime mold dragons with devastating force.

Zzzzt!

His attack carried lethal momentum: in addition to activating Swift Charge, he unleashed Instant Impact.

Sensing a mortal threat, the slime mold dragons let out a roar of its own, as though summoning death itself.

Under normal circumstances, that roar would have been terrifying, but in Orion's Titan Form, his shout also spread sonic attacks.

The two howls collided invisibly in midair, canceling each other out.

In the next instant—just as Orion drew near—the slime mold dragons withdrew every shred of exposed flesh, revealing a framework of staggeringly tough bones. Most conspicuous of all was the corkscrew-like horn spiraling from its head, menacing and jagged.

Right then, Orion teleported atop the slime mold dragons' head; his trident met the spiked horn head-on.

No deafening explosion resounded, nor did dazzling flashes of light erupt. Where the trident struck, the creature's horn was crushed like loose sand, torn to pieces. Immediately afterward, from crown to tail, Orion sliced the slime mold dragons in half like a blade passing cleanly through.

In midair, a bundle of life essence and a "survivor's chest" emerged. In the blink of an eye, Orion collected both.

Boom!

A thunderous crash sounded as the Undead Tyrant took advantage of Orion's landing, unleashing a Death Harvest.

Without Orion noticing, the Undead Tyrant had curled in on itself; countless blades on its body had locked together in a single giant whirling saw, which spun toward Orion in a vicious slash.

Having just touched down, Orion could not rely on his footing to evade. He could only thrust upward with his trident to lessen the saw's impact force.

Even so, the giant whirling blade still gouged a huge rift across Orion's back. The ice armor and Ghostbone Armor that he wore were split clean, leaving his defenses breached. Yet no blood flowed from that wound.

In his Titan Form, Orion's defenses were enormously enhanced; at present, his physical toughness exceeded even that of his armor.

A deafening clang echoed, and the whirling blade flew away. Immediately, the serpentine parasitic creature's attack followed hard on its heels.

It stretched its mouth unrealistically wide, swallowing Orion's entire arm down its throat.

Orion reacted the moment he realized what was happening. Inside the creature, he began slashing with his trident and activated Spear Barrage. An uncountable number of spider spears descended like a driving rain, piercing the serpentine parasitic creature from every angle.

But it was cunning. After landing, it rolled itself repeatedly and slithered into the nearby slime molds layer. There, endlessly replenished by that layer, its fungal creatures kept multiplying within its body, its already massive form swelling even more.

Essentially, the serpentine parasitic creature intended to harness the layer's limitless strength to wear Orion down for good. Gradually, it coiled into a dense coil beneath the slime molds layer, trapping Orion's body like a monstrous cage.

"Kill him, kill him, kill him!"

From inside the serpentine parasitic creature, wave upon wave of mental shock assaulted Orion.

"You think you can pin me down? You are not worthy!"

Roar!

The next moment, Orion bellowed in quick succession. The spider spears that had accompanied the creature into the slime molds layer now gathered around Orion once again.

Within seconds, the spears impaled the serpentine beast. During that barrage, Orion spotted his chance and once more triggered Swift Charge and Instant Impact—launching himself upward with tremendous force.

Outside, on the battlefield surface, the slime molds layer covering the ground shifted like a sheet of fabric. From beneath, lumps rose and fell, as though something below was trying to tear through.

Once, twice, three times... No one knew how long it took before the surface tore open and a figure shot upward into the sky.

Aloft, Orion found solid footing again. In his grip, he clutched yet another chunk of life essence.

Whoosh!

From behind, the Undead Tyrant—still shaped like a giant whirling blade—came spinning in for a strike it had long prepared, aiming to kill Orion once and for all.

This time, Orion was ready. Even before he broke clear of the slime molds layer, he had anticipated such a move. With a reverse grip, he used the trident to flick the massive blade aside.

It crashed down onto the ground, melted into the slime molds layer, and then vanished without a trace.

The battle ended as abruptly as it had begun.

"It ran off?"

Hovering in midair, Orion glanced down. He could no longer sense the presence of any Legendary-level foes.

"Lord Orion, it escaped!"

Listening to lich Vexis's mental transmission, Orion withdrew to the sky above his side's forward lines.

"Lord Orion, please allow me to reiterate: your power is without question! But next time, do not risk diving into the slime molds layer. Many of our allies have died there after being dragged beneath."

Orion gave no direct reply, yet Vexis seemed to sense the question in his mind and continued speaking telepathically:

"In truth, that slime molds layer is an external manifestation controlled by the four arch lord-level brood mothers."

"In there, you not only face the collective power of those four arch lords but also the endless swarm of slime molds themselves."

"If an arch lord senses your presence and focuses all her efforts on confining you within the slime molds layer, the result would be disastrous."

"This caution doesn't just apply to you—none of our warriors should venture too close to that slime molds layer."

"Otherwise, their doom is sealed."

Hearing this, Orion surveyed the battlefield. As Vexis commanded, the frontline was indeed kept about one hundred feet away from the slime molds layer. The two sides faced each other like beach and ocean: if one side became enveloped by the other and failed to retreat swiftly, they would be consumed.

"Lord Orion, you must stay alert!"

"One Legendary-level foe fled a moment ago. The news about you will doubtlessly reach its brood mother."

"Next time, if something meets you in battle, it may very well be another Legendary-level peak adversary."

At these words, Orion's brows drew slightly together, and his expression grew grim.

"The fungal creatures can share intel?"

"Yes!"

Lich Vexis's voice arrived from the rear with a faint sigh.

"These fungal creatures not only share information but can send out opponents matched to the strength you've displayed—whether to kill you outright or at least contain you."

"They aren't some mindless microorganisms; they are an enemy with high-level intelligence."

"And it's all a carefully orchestrated plan of the slime molds brood mother dwelling in their main nest."

"Be careful!"

Orion did not speak. With a silent nod, he focused on recovering his strength and observing the battlefield, stepping in on occasion to rescue any of his subordinates in peril.

Chapter 464: Winter isn't far off

The battle did not end just because the Undead Tyrant had retreated. On the contrary, even more slime molds mutants poured out of the slime molds layer.

Toward the rear of the battlefield, the cold chanting of lich Vexis rang out.

Those bloodline warriors and small scorpions from the Stoneheart Horde who had fallen rose again, struggling amid the slime molds layer once more.

As wave after wave of living corpses were summoned, the battlefront stabilized yet again.

Immediately following that, Vexis activated a soul-summoning array, bringing nearby wandering spirits into the fight in a new form.

Only after she finished did Vexis speak again, offering further explanation to Orion.

"Lord Orion, living corpses are not the end of it either."

"Huh?"

Orion grew puzzled, and Vexis's soft, eerie tone continued.

"If any living corpses are dragged into the slime molds layer, the fungal creatures can invade and claim them."

"When that happens, the summoning contract I signed with those living corpses enters a tug-of-war with the fungal creatures."

"Whoever wins will control the corpses."

"If I lose, our living corpses will become slime molds mutants."

"That, in a nutshell, is the terror of this war!"

"It's also the main reason this conflict has stalled my master for so long."

After hearing this, Orion finally understood. Vexis's explanation made it clear why this war was so difficult.

"In truth, we've gotten off easy in this region. The slime molds brood mother here specializes in parasitic and integrative breeding; she relies on external resources for her own growth."

"The Undead race's summoning arrays offer just enough of a stalemate to hold her back."

"But in other areas, the situation may be much tougher."

Orion nodded, then continued orchestrating the Eightfold Spear Barrage to deliver large-scale attacks, relieving some of the pressure on his people on the ground. At the same time, he used the intel Vexis provided to analyze the battlefield.

Time trickled by. For the Stoneheart Horde, needing to hold this line for three days was only the beginning of their ordeal.

Titanion Realm, Human Kingdom, Soaring Bird City.

Inside the largest makeshift tent in this city, Torin beamed with delight.

The first merchant caravans sent to the giants' domain had returned—Torin's own caravan included—and every member was brimming with profit.

Moreover, as the caravans resupplied and rested in Soaring Bird City, Torin could earn another lucrative bonus.

"Master, I can't believe how easily we made so much money!"

Mike from the Mercenary Corps stared at the chests piled throughout the tent; they overflowed with gold coins and various rare items, making his eyes glimmer.

"This is just the start. Once Soaring Bird City is fully built, we'll have access to even greater wealth—and influence."

At that moment, Torin's expression held more than excitement; it revealed ambition and greed.

Indeed, it was only the beginning.

Although the nobles of the Kingdom had offered support and Soaring Bird City was under normal construction, Torin himself had poured massive investments into it. The costs in gold alone were astronomical.

Finding an excuse to send Mike and Wyatt away, Torin carefully picked out some of the rarest materials from this haul—some he kept for his own use, while others he immediately listed on the Survivor's Platform.

Torin was shrewd. Even while building Soaring Bird City, he never neglected his quest for greater personal power.

According to Torin's plan, by the time Soaring Bird City was complete, he would break through to Alpha-level. With that degree of strength, he could subdue the new city. Then he could freely exploit Soaring Bird City for status and riches, continually boosting his own power. Otherwise, everything he had now would be seized sooner or later by others.

"The city wall foundation is already finished. Before long, the walls will be in place."

"All we have to do is get through this winter, and everything should develop the way I want it to."

"Just wait. My ambitions don't end here—Soaring Bird City is only the beginning!"

Stoneheart City's trade with the Human Kingdom merchant guilds turned into a win-win deal.

Stoneheart Horde and the Human Kingdom each got what they needed and were both well satisfied.

In this transaction, the Stoneheart Horde obtained a great deal of gear and farming tools from the Human Kingdom—along with an array of clever odds and ends—laying the groundwork for their next move into agriculture.

Here in the south, the land was bathed in sunshine, the soil rich and fertile; raising crops was a natural course of action.

Though Orion had stockpiled a large amount of grain through the Survivor's Platform, even that stockpile could be exhausted one day.

Hence, establishing a sustainable way to produce their own food was essential for any large faction.

In the Stoneheart Horde, agriculture would be the foundation, the lifeline that fed its people.

On the second floor of the Mysterious Tavern, Delilah sat with a trade list on her left and intelligence reports from around the territory on her right. When she set down the trade list, she turned and addressed Ursa, Thundar, Grulbane, Dace, Otho, Beyn, and Torba, who were seated properly in their chairs.

"Winter isn't far off. The dark beast tides will rise again."

The atmosphere on the second floor instantly tensed. Yet Delilah spoke with a confidence that subtly uplifted everyone, a steady maturity that was undeniably reassuring.

"Stoneheart City has me and the Four-Winged Blood Bat to guard it, so it should be no major issue."

That was the baseline—whatever happened, Delilah would remain in Stoneheart City to ensure the safety of this southern stronghold.

"Dace, Otho, you will take the Guard Corps to Buffalofolk City. Do everything you can to hold it."

"Beyn, Torba, you two head to Obsidian City."

"Grulbane, Ursa, you're going to Lilith City."

"Thundar, take your Dark Fiend and secure Delilah City."

Buffalofolk City, Obsidian City, Lilith City, and Delilah City were the four key strongholds Orion needed to connect the territory as a whole.

Before winter's arrival, each of these four would complete their walls and defensive structures.

They had to protect them from dark creatures, preventing any damage to these crucial fortifications—a formidable challenge facing Delilah, and indeed the entire Stoneheart Horde.

"Do your utmost to hold them!"

Delilah's voice sharpened slightly, underscoring how serious she was.

"Elder of Stewardship, have no worries. We pledge to accomplish this mission."

"So long as I live, no city will ever fall!"

Thundar responded first.

After that, Grulbane, Dace, Otho, Beyn, Torba, and Ursa all followed suit:

"I vow upon my life to protect the city!"

"I vow upon my life to protect the city!"

"..."

Chapter 465: The other side of the wind

Valkorath Realm, the battlefield.

The wind here is fierce. For a long time ago, Gustalon's eyes could perceive nothing but ice, snow, and towering glaciers.

After that southern invasion, his view expanded to include flowers, wheat fields, magical plants... and a variety of living creatures.

Now, the scene unfolding before Gustalon features battle flags, slime molds, parasitic creatures... and death, one after another.

Gustalon's strength has risen significantly, and he is now not far from the Alpha peak.

Bluntly put, aside from Soraya—who has gone into seclusion to break through to the Legendary level—Gustalon is currently the most powerful Alpha-level fighter under Orion's command.

As the battle continues, what Gustalon sees turns blood-red, and it also turns into death.

Hoo!

A sudden wind blade appears out of thin air and slices an approaching slime molds mutant clean in half.

Just as the severed mutant is about to drop into the slime molds layer to regenerate, a ferocious gust of wind sweeps in and whips it into the sky.

Another wind blade flashes out, cracking open the slime molds mutant's head and revealing the life essence hidden within.

With a slight gesture, Gustalon summons the life essence into his hand.

Gustalon can't recall precisely how many Alpha-level slime molds mutants he has killed over the past two days.

As an elemental being, Gustalon's memory is excellent; he never forgets anything he has seen. Whether it is the northern ice sheets, the Black Forest, Thunderwood Forest, or the giants' territory in the south—wherever Gustalon has traveled, he remembers it all.

Naturally, he also remembers the creatures living in those regions.

All of them have become part of Gustalon's ever-expanding vision.

But in this war, one familiar face after another vanishes.

For reasons he cannot fully explain, Gustalon feels anger welling up.

Compared with his previous carefree, arbitrary slaughters, Gustalon now kills with a sharper focus. His wind blades have become even more lethal.

In absolute silence, Gustalon merges into the wind, hunting down the nearest slime molds mutant.

"Elemental life really is the darling of this world!"

"Lord Orion, your subordinate has finally understood the other side of the wind—slaughter, destruction, and death."

"Wind is a weapon that sweeps away all obstructions!"

Orion makes no reply. He, too, is keeping an eye on Gustalon.

From this moment on, Gustalon's name has been added to Orion's short list of those likely to reach Legendary level soon.

"Xalathar, Lumi, Gustalon, Soraya—who will surprise me first?"

Orion looks forward to it. From this latest battle, he has acquired two more clusters of Legendary-level life essence.

He intends to repay one to Leonidas, and he will hold onto the other in case his subordinates need it.

After Gustalon, Onyx and Dirtclaw also have a shot. As long as they stay alive through this defensive engagement, they'll get their share of Alpha-level resources, which will be quite substantial.

All Orion's subordinates will see their powers rise.

"Stepping up to the Legendary rank still requires having your own territory. That's the tricky part."

"Lumi and Soraya already have their territories; their barriers are gone."

"But Xalathar and Gustalon might be difficult!"

The effect of life essence is essentially the same as that of a Lord's Stone.

Orion knows this all too well.

The key to achieving a flawless ascension to Legendary level is holding a lordship, and lordship depends on having territory.

When traveling to this place, Orion had not assigned any lands to Xalathar or Gustalon, so if they want to advance perfectly into the Legendary tier, they'll have to take a roundabout path.

"Seems like building additional cities needs to happen sooner rather than later."

Orion has already formed a plan in his mind.

Once Soraya advances to Legendary level, he will begin claiming land in the Valkorath Realm for them to build new cities of their own.

Afterward, he will carve out territories within the Valkorath Realm to grant to his subordinates who have grown stronger. That way, each can ascend to the Legendary level perfectly while also gaining lordship. This smooth path will pave the way for them to break through to the Arch Lord tier someday.

This is the solution Orion has come up with.

"Marnok!"

Just then, a roar from the battlefield below catches Orion's attention, pulling him from his musing.

The one shouting is Drakthul, an elder of the giants, who is coordinating with an Alpha-level giant named Marnok.

Marnok is pulled into the slime molds layer by a tentacled slime molds parasitic creature, and his fate hangs by a thread.

By the time Orion catches sight of it, it's too late—Marnok is lost entirely, consumed by the slime molds layer.

Whish, whish, whish!

Orion wields the spider spear, cutting away the part of the slime molds layer that engulfed Marnok. Yet when Drakthul manages to drag Marnok free, he is already devoid of life.

Orion's expression grows grim. Over the last two days, two of his Alpha-level subordinates have died here—and both were giants.

Marnok and Veldrok were from the Starveil giants, and now both have perished on this battlefield.

With Marnok's demise, Orion dares not let his mind wander again. He refocuses on the battle ahead.

Farther back, lich Vexis resumes chanting incantations, raising Marnok's corpse as an undead soldier to rejoin the fight.

For every bloodline warrior in the Stoneheart Horde, this conflict is downright maddening. They are like lumps of meat in a frying pan, each drop of their energy slowly squeezed dry.

Were it not for the half million skeleton warriors and one hundred thousand small scorpions fighting alongside them, and without a rotation scheme allowing them to rest in turns, many bloodline warriors would not have endured this far.

The Valkorath Realm has two suns.

Bathed in sunlight, life ebbs away. Higher beings and slime molds alike contest with all their might.

Even now, after so much combat, the slime molds layer shows no sign of retreat.

That is the enemy Orion and his Stoneheart Horde must continue to face.

Until the third day, at the rear of the battle line, a cloaked skeleton arrives, leading a legion of skeleton warriors that stretches out of sight.

"In accordance with my master's orders, Lord Orion, we have come to relieve you."

"In seven days, you will resume your defense of this place."

Orion nods, fixing the cloaked skeleton with a brief, calm gaze.

"This front is now yours."

He then sends word to lich Vexis. Only after the cloaked skeleton's forces assume their positions do the Stoneheart Horde bloodline warriors pull back in an orderly retreat.

Half a day later, Orion leads his subordinates back to Cryptopolis.

Within the palace, Orion sits on his throne; to one side, the lich Vexis stands in silence.

Before them, assembled and awaiting his address, are Gustalon, Onyx, Earthshaker, Gronthar, Dirtclaw, Drakthul, Gormathar, and Thunderclaw.

Orion's gaze sweeps across them all, lingering on the empty spot where Marnok and Veldrok once stood.

"The departed have gone on. They rest in honor. We shall attend their funeral rites together in just a little while."

Chapter 466: More cautious

Inside the palace, apart from Orion's slightly somber voice, there was no other sound to be heard.

"Prophet, give me a report on the Horde's losses at the frontline this time."

Onyx stepped forward, his voice carrying a hint of gravity.

"Lord, in this battle, our Stoneheart Horde lost two Wardens—Marnok and Veldrok, both elders."

"The two main cannon fodder troops suffered nearly 30% casualties, while the bloodline warriors from the other three armies lost about 10% of their numbers."

"In total, we lost 24,000 bloodline warriors."

"Of the 100,000 sand scorpions, more than 40,000 were killed, leaving fewer than 60,000."

To suffer such heavy losses after just three days of defense was something no one present had anticipated—except, of course, Vexis.

It was only after Onyx finished reporting the casualties that the Lich Vexis spoke up.

"Lord Orion, we need to adjust our approach to combat."

This was, in fact, Vexis's first time commanding the Stoneheart Horde's bloodline warriors in battle. The small scorpions were manageable—once given orders, they would charge forward fearlessly. But commanding living beings was another matter. While Vexis wasn't inexperienced, she had yet to build a rapport with the Stoneheart Horde's armies.

"Ms Vexis, please speak plainly."

Orion's tone was calm, carrying a subtle hint of seeking advice.

He knew full well that, as the supreme commander of this group, he couldn't lead from the front lines. His role required him to intervene at any moment to hold back the strongest fungal creatures. As a result, he often couldn't personally direct the battles, leaving the responsibility to Vexis, a fellow Legendary-level powerhouse.

"Stoneheart Horde has five armies, all composed of intelligent beings from different races, each one a bloodline warrior," Vexis began. "For warfare, they offer greater flexibility in deployment, a better grasp of our tactical plans, and more autonomy. Moreover, their development cycle is longer, so putting them on the frontline is unwise."

Her voice was steady and composed, offering Orion rational counsel from a place of calm objectivity.

"Lord Orion, we need cannon fodder—units without fear, who will charge into battle the moment they're given an order, like our skeleton warriors. They may be weak, but their numbers are vast, enough to blanket the battlefield. And when they fall, I can raise them as undead to keep fighting for us."

Everything Vexis said pointed toward Soraya, the broodmother of the scorpion tribe.

"For the battles ahead, I suggest breaking up the five armies and turning them all into commanders. Let them lead the scorpion cannon fodder and skeletons into combat. This way, we can minimize unnecessary losses. Lord Orion, if your subordinates keep fighting on the frontline, it's a tremendous waste. A few more battles like this, and they'll all die, only to be turned into my undead."

Her words were heartfelt, a valuable suggestion made for the greater good.

Orion scanned the elders standing in the palace, many of whom he had personally trained. Raising an Alpha-level warrior for the Horde was no easy feat.

"Ms. Vexis, what we lack right now is time!"

Indeed, Orion was only now realizing how desperately short of time they were. Soraya's advancement to Legendary level required time. Hatching a large batch of small scorpions required time. Strengthening the Horde's bloodline warriors required time. Even establishing territory and building cities required time.

Still, in response to Vexis's proposal, Orion made his decision.

"From now on, the five armies will rotate to the frontline. The next to go will be the cannon fodder troops led by Onyx."

Onyx stood and replied, "As you command."

"Prophet, split the cannon fodder troops into smaller units and assign them to follow Vexis's orders. The other armies will follow this plan as well, rotating to the frontline in turn."

This approach aimed to reduce losses across the armies and ease the pressure on the bloodline warriors, giving them time to grow stronger. However, the cost would fall heavily on Soraya's scorpion tribe. She had brought 150,000 small scorpions, of which 40,000 were lost in the last battle, leaving around 110,000. With the new batch she'd begun hatching since arriving, the total came to roughly 120,000.

A cannon fodder troop, 120,000 small scorpions, undead armies, and skeleton warriors—combined, they could still hold the line.

After making these arrangements, Orion glanced at Vexis. She nodded silently, saying nothing more.

Next, Orion discussed some detailed logistics with the group before moving on to the distribution of spoils. As per custom, he kept 40% of the life essence for himself and distributed the rest.

"Go now. Take your rewards and urge your tribes to train hard. We're racing against time—every bit of strength you gain increases your chances of surviving on the battlefield."

Gustalon, Onyx, and the others responded to Orion with affirmations of obedience before filing out. The defensive battle had yielded significant gains, and they needed to cultivate and consolidate their strength immediately.

"Lord Orion, I'll return to the undead tower to absorb the power of death," Vexis said. "Call for me when it's time for the next frontline deployment."

Orion nodded, watching her depart.

Once everyone had left, Orion leaned back on his throne and let out a long breath. This had been his first battle since reaching the peak of Legendary level. Though he'd gained two Legendary-level life essences, the fight had been perilously close.

"This time, the enemy sent three Legendary-level powerhouses right off the bat. Do they have more of them than we do? Not only are their numbers greater, but their variety is staggering. We'll need to be more cautious next time."

Having reached the peak of Legendary level, Orion's confidence had soared—until this battle tempered it, bringing him back to a state of calm and composure.

After reflecting on his own strength and combat experience, he immersed his mind in the Survivor's Platform and accessed the public channel of the Champions Alliance.

Earlier, during a conversation with the group, Arthas had reminded him to keep an eye on the team's public channel, where much of their communication took place. Orion had already planned to check it regularly anyway.

Now, with the battle over, he was curious to see how the others were faring in their regions.

Chapter 467: Horn of Harvest

Leonidas: "Damn it, those disgusting slimes—their invasions are getting fiercer again!"

Alexander: "Leonidas, how about we team up when you get a breather and take down the slime molds' brood mother together?"

Leonidas: "Let me get through this wave first!"

Arthas: "The worst of the surge is over. Hulk took out two upper-tier Legendary-level slime molds over here—probably scared them off."

Kraken: "Wow! He killed two upper-tier Legendary-level enemies in a row?"

Arthas: "Yeah... Hulk's already hit Legendary-level peak!"

Leonidas: "Squiddy (Kraken), hold the line and keep pushing!"

Kraken: "Big boss, I'm doing my best!"

Edward: "Don't let your guard down—the slime molds' onslaught isn't over yet!"

...

After carefully reading through his allies' chat, Orion gained a clearer picture of the overall situation.

Hulk: "A big part of why I've progressed so fast is thanks to Arthas's support!"

Leonidas: "You bastard, Arthas—are you cheating for Hulk just to get Legendary gear?"

Arthas: "Kiss my ass. Not everyone's as stingy as you."

Arthas: "Besides, the Deputy Commander hasn't set any restrictions."

Edward: "Advancing to Arch Lord is the benchmark. I only care about results, not the process."

Arthas: "See? The Deputy Commander's spoken. Haven't you faced reality yet?"

Leonidas: "Arthas, just you wait!"

...

The back-and-forth between Arthas and Leonidas left Orion both amused and exasperated. Meanwhile, Kraken, who must have been incredibly envious upon hearing Orion had reached Legendary-level peak, hadn't said a word since.

Just then, Orion noticed a private message from Arthas.

"Come to Bone City tomorrow when you've got a moment!"

Orion's eyes narrowed slightly. Arthas hadn't specified what it was about, which puzzled him.

"Alright, I'll be there first thing tomorrow!"

Trusting Arthas implicitly, Orion agreed without hesitation.

After wrapping up with Arthas, Orion initiated a trade with Leonidas, sending over a clump of Legendary-level life essence.

"Bro, you're seriously a genius with crazy potential. I've got to admit privately—you're a cut above Kraken. Results this fast? Impressive."

Leonidas spoke freely, unrestrained among close friends.

"Bro, you'll have to wait a bit for the other life essence. I'm keeping one clump on hand for emergencies."

"No worries, just let me know when you've got it. My losses here are pretty heavy. If it weren't for the bigger picture, I wouldn't even ask."

Orion believed him. Leonidas's urgent need for life essence likely meant several of his Legendary-level subordinates had fallen.

In the Valkorath Realm, aside from survivors like Orion, most Legendary-level fighters weren't overwhelmingly powerful and lacked trump cards. Many couldn't take on foes above their rank or handle multiple enemies at once.

Losses were inevitable when facing fungal creatures, especially for Leonidas's beast subordinates, who took time to replenish once lost.

After finishing with Leonidas, Orion turned to the last person who'd messaged him—Julius Caesar, who'd been absent for a while.

"Big boss, you there?"

"Big boss, do you have any medicine that can regrow limbs?"

...

Caesar had sent eight messages in total, all asking about buying medicine. After some thought, Orion pulled a bottle of healing potion from his storage ring and initiated a trade with Caesar. Having opened plenty of survivor chests, he'd amassed a decent stash of miscellaneous items, including some high-quality healing potions. He decided to gift one to Caesar.

Caesar accepted the trade, indicating he was online.

"This potion should regrow severed limbs after you take it. It's yours."

"Are you the one who got hurt?" Orion asked, showing concern—for both Caesar's sake and his own. Caesar had a knack for luck, often stumbling across valuable items. Orion hoped to benefit from that in the future.

And if Caesar proved to have enough potential and decent character, Orion wouldn't mind investing in him, much like Arthas had once invested in Orion.

Orion's journey to this point had been bolstered by significant help, especially from his Champions Alliance allies—along with Aerin, Scarecrow, and others. Over time, he'd come to appreciate the value of friendship.

"A heartfelt thank you! I ran into a red dragon while out on a mission—lost a leg and an arm!"

Orion was speechless, offering silent sympathy. Red dragons, a branch of the dragon clan, were typically formidable.

Most adult red dragons were Legendary-level. For Caesar to escape with his life, it must have been an Alpha-level dragon with impure blood.

After a few more words of comfort, Orion shifted his focus, musing to himself:

"The winter in Black Forest is coming soon. Scarecrow should be taking a break, right?"

As if on cue, just as Orion thought of Scarecrow, the Survivor's Platform pinged with a delayed trade notification—Scarecrow had listed grain for sale. Orion glanced at the prices; they hadn't gone up a bit. He swept up everything Scarecrow had listed and sent a message.

"Friend, war's broken out on my end. I'm in dire need of grain."

Scarecrow didn't reply but promptly listed more grain for Orion, who didn't hesitate to buy it all.

"I've sold you all my reserves. The rest I've got to keep for other friends—hope you understand!"

True to form! That was Orion's take on Scarecrow. This wasn't their first trade; they'd grown familiar with each other.

"I get it. I'm already thrilled to snag this much grain!"

After replying, Orion initiated a trade, gifting Scarecrow a batch of C-grade crystal cores. Accepting them, Scarecrow returned the gesture, trading Orion a stash of magical grain. These fell into the category of magical plants—regular consumption could boost magical affinity.

But it didn't end there. After the grain trade, Scarecrow sent Orion an invitation:

[Scarecrow invites you to join the Horn of Harvest public channel. Accept?]

Orion didn't hesitate, opting to join.

"This channel's got a ton of grain merchants. You can hit them up for grain. Just a heads-up: the folks here are a mixed bag, so watch yourself and don't get scammed!"

No doubt, this was a new circle—a network of grain traders. It was a resource, a pipeline. Scarecrow pulling Orion into the Horn of Harvest was a huge favor.

"Thanks a ton!"

Orion expressed his genuine gratitude. Scoring a new grain-buying channel was a pleasant surprise for the day.

"Buying grain—any type. Serious sellers, hit me up privately or start a delayed trade."

Orion posted a request in the Horn of Harvest public channel. After waiting a few minutes with no bites, he logged off the Survivor's Platform.

Chapter 468: Body of faith

Stoneheart City, Mysterious Tavern

The Mysterious Tavern, a unique structure built by Orion, was an oddity in its own right. It possessed a strange, mystical quality that drew rangers to its doors. Since Stoneheart City hadn't yet activated a cross-realm teleportation array, the rangers it attracted were limited to those from the Utessar continent.

Sir Godfrey, a knight, was one such ranger from this land.

At this moment, the tavern hosted only a handful of patrons. They sipped their drinks while watching a sultry succubus dancer perform a provocative striptease on the central stage.

"Succubi have such killer figures—way more alluring than Blood Elves!"

"It's an absolute feast for the eyes!"

"..."

Shouts and cheers echoed through the tavern from time to time, livening up the atmosphere of the Mysterious Tavern.

"Drinks are on me today!"

Sir Godfrey set down his goblet, his gaze fixed on Delilah, the veiled woman before him. He could sense the powerful aura radiating from her, and his muscles tensed as he focused his mind.

"No need to be on edge—I mean no harm," Delilah said, though Godfrey didn't dare lower his guard. This wasn't a human kingdom, after all; it was giant territory.

"Madam, do you have business with me?" Godfrey asked politely, his tone cautious and measured.

Delilah nodded and gestured toward the seat across from him. Godfrey quickly stood, offering a knightly salute before inviting her to sit.

Once they were both settled and their drinks refilled, Delilah spoke in a soft, casual tone.

"This wine may be freshly brewed, but the tavern's cellar is something special. In time, the drinks here will only grow richer and more fragrant."

Godfrey nodded, offering no opinion. He studied the mysterious proprietress of the tavern, silently speculating about her intentions.

"Winter's almost here. If you set out for the human kingdom now, you'd never make it back in time," Delilah said, her voice low and laced with a hint of seduction. "Sir Godfrey, are you planning to stay in Stoneheart City for the season?"

Godfrey nodded without hesitation, his decision firm.

"Yes, I'd like to stay."

A faint smile curved beneath Delilah's veil.

"Under the Five Races Pact and the agreement between the human kingdom and the Stoneheart Horde, any foreign powerhouse staying in Stoneheart City is obliged to assist us in fending off dark creatures. Sir Godfrey, as a knight, will you honor our pact and agreement? Are you willing to join the fight against the dark creatures?"

At that, Godfrey rose to his feet and performed a solemn knightly salute.

"It's every knight's duty to resist dark creatures from beyond. I'd be honored to assist the forces here in combating them."

His stance was clear, though he'd been clever with his wording—he'd assist the forces here, not just anyone unrelated.

Delilah let out a soft, melodic laugh. She took an invitation letter from a nearby maidservant and placed it on the table beside Godfrey.

"Sir Godfrey, this is an official invitation from Stoneheart City, personally signed by the Stoneheart Horde's Elder of Stewardship. During your time fighting the dark creatures, we'll provide you with weapons, supplies, and proper support. Three days from now, please report to the castle's reception hall on time."

With that, Delilah stood and ascended to the tavern's second floor.

Winter was approaching, and with it, the dark beast tides. She was already preparing for what lay ahead.

Valkorath Realm, Bone City.

This was Orion's first visit to Bone City, the stronghold governed by Arthas. Compared to Cryptopolis, Bone City was grander and more imposing, its interior bristling with countless undead turrets and magic towers. The walls were cleared of all personnel—save for Orion and Arthas, no outsiders remained.

"I had my suspicions, but I didn't expect you to be **this** strong after reaching Legendary-level peak," Arthas said.

"I owe a lot of my own rapid progress to the life essence you've sent my way." Orion said.

Arthas shook his head, gazing into the distance.

"Helping you is helping myself. Unlike us undead, you can directly use life essence to grow stronger. For us, it's a process of conversion."

Orion's eyes widened in realization. No wonder Arthas had been able to spare so much life essence—it wasn't that he had an endless supply, but that he couldn't convert it fast enough, letting it pile up.

What Orion didn't know was that Arthas had sent Leonidas several times more life essence than he'd given Orion.

"Now that you've hit Legendary-level peak, life essence isn't as critical anymore," Arthas said, shifting the conversation abruptly as he turned to face Orion. "Do you know the difference between a lord(Legendary-level beings are often called lords)and an Arch Lord?"

Orion shook his head. He considered mentioning territory size or the number of powerful subordinates but dismissed those ideas as incomplete.

"Faith energy?" he ventured tentatively.

"Yes—and no," Arthas replied, leaving Orion even more perplexed.

"You should know that the population of intelligent beings in a territory affects the amount of faith generated, which in turn influences the recovery and volume of transcendent power," Arthas explained. "On a surface level, the difference between an Arch Lord and a regular lord lies in the size and prosperity of their territory. But the real distinction is in the quantity and purity of faith energy."

Arthas fixed his gaze on Orion, speaking deliberately.

"To become an Arch Lord, you need to gather more faith energy. Then, using that as your foundation, you must condense it into a cohesive whole, forging your own body of faith amidst boundless devotion. Once that body of faith takes shape and radiates the light of belief, you'll ascend to Arch Lord."

It was clear Arthas was guiding Orion, sharing hard-earned wisdom. This advice alone would save Orion from countless missteps.

"That said, to collect more faith energy, you'll need a larger territory and more subjects," Arthas continued. "With your current strength, the Valkorath Realm is your best shot."

His tone was confident—this was the fastest, most practical path for Orion to reach Arch Lord.

"Northeast of Cryptopolis, there's a vast plain. I've left that land open for you." Arthas said.

Orion had a hunch that ever since he'd hit Legendary-level peak, Arthas had been quietly clearing obstacles to pave his way toward Arch Lord.

"Thanks," Orion said sincerely.

Arthas's face-to-face guidance was like a lighthouse, illuminating the path ahead for this next leg of his journey.

Chapter 469: How can stoneheart city grow?

In the blink of an eye, seven days had passed.

Orion and Lich Vexis once again led their armies to the front lines, relieving the undead forces that had been holding the position.

"Lord Orion, per my master's orders, we've left you with 200,000 skeleton warriors."

"Thank you!" Orion said.

The cloaked skeleton in charge nodded silently before turning and departing the battlefield without a word.

"Compared to him, you and Rumbold seem downright friendly," Orion quipped to Vexis as he watched the cloaked figure leave.

"In our world, coldness and solitude are just part of daily life," Vexis replied without turning around, her gaze fixed on the slime mold layer ahead as if searching for something. "When you're quiet for long enough, you stop feeling the need to talk much."

"Same as always—I'll hold the front line, and you handle the big picture from the rear. Prophet, if Vexis gets caught up in the fighting, step in and take command."

Vexis nodded, and Onyx, standing behind Orion, responded with a steady "Yes, sir."

Orion transformed into a bolt of lightning and took his position at the front, hovering in midair. He opened his senses, scanning the nearby area for any hint of a Legendary-level presence lurking in the shadows.

Seeing the slime mold layer surge forward like waves on the ocean once more, Orion couldn't help but feel a twinge of awe.

Countless slime mold mutants leaped from the layer, hurling themselves at the skeleton warriors and small scorpions. The scene was mesmerizing, almost soul-shaking.

As his senses swept across the battlefield, a flicker of confusion crossed Orion's eyes. This time, the slime mold brood mother hadn't sent any Legendary-level mutants to this sector, which left him puzzled.

"Lady Vexis, no Legendary-level slime mold mutants have been teleported here. Have you seen this happen before?" Orion asked, projecting his voice to her, hoping to unravel the mystery.

"Yes, it happens often," Vexis replied. "But whenever fungal creatures show up, they tend to launch targeted ambushes against us. So, Orion, please be extra cautious!"

Ever since Orion had taken down two upper-tier Legendary-level enemies in their last encounter, Vexis had come to realize just how much stronger he was than her. Unconsciously, she'd begun to view him as someone on par with her master.

The North, Slime Mold Main Nest.

While Orion and Vexis conversed, Brood Mother Gloob was already communicating with another brood mother from a different region.

"Blobby, we need a Vine Splitter up north. There's a powerful giant here we need to ambush and take out," Gloob's voice transmitted through the slime mold layer like a radio signal, reaching Brood Mother Blobby, who was overseeing the southern invasion. Along with the message went footage and data from Orion's previous battles.

"Alright," Blobby responded. "In half a day, I'll send a Vine Splitter your way. In exchange, you'll need to send me a parasitic creature."

Gloob considered the offer for a few seconds before replying, "Deal. I want to drag that powerful giant into the slime mold layer and turn him into one of us."

Stoneheart City, Mysterious Tavern, Second Floor.

For quite some time now, Delilah had been running things from this spot. She loved the tavern's atmosphere—it was her domain, and here, she was queen. The Stoneheart Horde had grown to depend on her; she'd become its indispensable steward.

"How can Stoneheart City grow?" Delilah murmured to herself. She dreamed of turning it into a bustling metropolis, rivaling the Blood Elves' City of Blessings or the human kingdom's Utessar Kingdom. She wanted the entire continent to know that the Stoneheart Horde wasn't just a band of savages—they had their own civilization.

Recalling the future Orion had described, the plans he'd laid out, Delilah couldn't help but feel a surge of excitement for what lay ahead.

"Growth takes money, and it just so happens we've got plenty of it!" she said. This was a realization she'd come to recently—money was the key to development.

Delilah reached over to a nearby chair and picked up a Small Stoneheart Coin, studying it closely.

"Is this money?" she wondered. Yet something nagged at her. It didn't feel quite right. This "money" came too easily—all it took was ordering the blacksmiths to forge more.

"No, wait. Development hinges on population. The more people we have, the more taxes we can collect. But population needs food to sustain it. So where does the food come from? Do we grow it ourselves or buy it from the humans and blood elves? And then what?"

Truth be told, Delilah was grappling with a critical question—one tied to the Stoneheart Horde's future. Her thinking was still rough around the edges. Concepts like livelihood, economy, urban planning, infrastructure, or citizen welfare hadn't fully taken shape in her mind.

Building a thriving city or nation wasn't something that happened overnight. It wasn't as simple as opening up trade and watching prosperity roll in. Some habits and shared understandings needed time to evolve, shaped gradually through subtle influence.

The races of the Stoneheart Horde needed the slow, steady guidance of major civilizations like the humans, dwarves, and blood elves to shed the barbarism born from the pressures of survival.

Orion had recognized this too, but he was just as powerless to rush the process.

To help the Stoneheart Horde cast off its backward, savage reputation sooner, he'd joined the Five-Race Alliance and launched cross-realm invasions. Delilah, however, hadn't yet grasped that beyond material wealth, talent was the true engine of progress—the key to driving the city and the Horde forward.

And talent? It had to be attracted, sought out, nurtured through education, and cultivated from within.

Under Delilah's management, Stoneheart City was making steady progress, whether in preparing to face dark creatures or laying the groundwork for growth—one step at a time.

Valkorath Realm, Battlefield Front Lines.

Two full days had passed since Orion arrived at the front.

On the Stoneheart Horde's side, crossbows fired relentlessly, and massive boulders coated in burning oil crashed into the slime mold layer, igniting walls of flame. Countless slime mold mutants charged

through the fire without a shred of fear, their blood and mucus staining the ground red and splattering across every bloodline warrior on the battlefield.

Unlike the bloodline warriors or the small scorpions, the slime mold mutants' roars were wilder, devoid of any emotion. On the battlefield, they were nothing more than war machines stripped of pain or fear.

War banners snapped in the wind, drums rumbled low and steady, and shouts rose and fell in waves. Orion's ears rang with the sounds of blades hacking, axes cleaving, swords thrusting, and spears stabbing.

Suddenly, a Legendary-level fungal creature's aura pulsed from within the slime mold layer. Orion, ever vigilant, locked onto it like a hunter spotting prey, his gaze zeroing in on the source.

Chapter 470: A premeditated strike

A parasitic creature slowly emerged from the layer of slime molds, its green eyes—composed of countless tiny compound eyes—fixed intently on Orion.

Orion's entire body tensed. He wasn't sure who this parasitic creature was targeting, and his mind wavered, hesitating to act immediately.

Raising his trident, Orion pointed it directly at the creature, ready to unleash [Instant Impact] at any moment.

Just then, the slime mold parasitic creature's body began to shift—its blades clicked together, forming a massive spinning blade that hurtled toward the bloodline warriors of the Stoneheart Horde.

At that moment, Orion had no choice but to intervene.

Boom!

Orion charged forward, swinging his trident and sending the giant blade flying off course.

But in that instant, something unexpected happened.

Whoosh!

Countless blood-red vines suddenly sprouted from the slime mold layer, blooming like a flower and ensnaring Orion in their grasp.

In the next moment, the flower snapped shut, shrinking into a tight bud that imprisoned Orion and swiftly retracted back into the slime mold layer.

"Damn it, the enemy's sent a Vine Splitter!"

The exclamation came from Lich Vexis, whose figure soared into the air, arriving at the frontline of the battlefield.

But Vexis didn't dare advance further. She knew full well that Vine Splitters were peak Legendary-level threats.

If she rushed in recklessly to save Orion, the Vine Splitter might shift its focus and prioritize her instead.

In that case, not only would she fail to rescue him, but she'd also get herself killed—a loss far outweighing any gain.

Moreover, Vexis had the critical task of overseeing the battlefield. She couldn't afford to let the slime mold layer exploit a gap in their defenses and breach their rear lines.

"To ambush Orion, the slime mold broodmother actually deployed Vine Splitters," Vexis muttered to herself.

As she furrowed her brow, weighing her options, two more Legendary-level auras emerged from the slime mold layer.

"How is this possible?"

"One peak Legendary and three upper-tier Legendary powerhouses!"

Vexis had never witnessed such an assassination lineup before.

"This is a premeditated strike—they want Orion dead!"

In an instant, Vexis reached her conclusion.

Without hesitation, she retreated to the rear.

Closing her eyes, Vexis used a secret technique to relay the situation to Arthas.

"I understand. Hold the line and don't let the slime mold layer break through," came Arthas's response.

"As for Orion, trust him. He's far stronger than you realize."

At the heart of the battlefield, in Bone City, Arthas slowly opened his eyes, gazing toward the distant slime mold layer.

"What a bold move!"

"To trap and kill Hulk, they've brought a Vine Splitter and three Legendary-level parasitic creatures."

"It seems you've sensed the threat Hulk poses—and you think he's dangerous!"

"But Hulk is far more powerful than you've anticipated."

"Heh heh heh... an opportunity has finally presented itself!"

From the Survivor's Platform, Arthas quietly sent a message to Alexander.

"The chance is here. Come over."

Moments later, Alexander replied:

"To avoid detection, I won't use the teleportation array. I'll head there myself."

...

On the walls of Bone City, Arthas stood with his sword in hand, his aura steadily building.

North of Cryptopolis, at the frontline of the battlefield, Orion was dragged into the slime mold layer. By the time he realized he'd been lured into a trap, it was too late.

Three massive vines erupted from the ground beneath the slime mold layer, coiling like giant pythons intent on strangling him.

At the same time, three upper-tier Legendary-level parasitic creatures burst out of the slime mold layer, attacking Orion from different angles.

WAAAGH!

Faced with such an onslaught, Orion no longer held back. With a furious roar, he activated Titan Form, transforming into a towering titan.

In an instant, Eightfold Spear Barrage materialized around him—a dense array of spears, shooting out in every direction like a porcupine's quills, leaving no blind spots.

Simultaneously, Orion triggered Instant Impact and activated Berserk Aura, pushing himself into a frenzied state.

"You think you can trap and kill me? Let's see if you've got what it takes!"

Orion's voice carried a mix of madness and the unshakable confidence rooted in his bloodline.

He appeared behind one of the parasitic creatures, thrusting his trident toward its neck while his left fist smashed toward its head.

Bang!

Yet, this seemingly lethal strike was dodged.

The impact sent a shockwave rippling outward, knocking the parasitic creature back into the slime mold layer.

Orion saw it clearly: just as the creature was about to be struck down, a thin green shield flickered over its body.

His fist had shattered the shield, but the creature itself survived.

"These bastards came prepared!"

Indeed, the last parasitic creature that had faced Orion and survived had shared its intel.

This time, the assault was led by a Vine Splitter.

Not only could Vine Splitters spawn countless vines to attack and ensnare their enemies, but they could also draw energy from the slime mold layer to grant their allies a protective barrier.

This was what made Vine Splitters so terrifying—and why so many Legendary-level fighters in the Valkorath Realm had fallen to their precise ambushes.

In the early stages of the war, most of Leonidas, Arthas, Alexander, and Edward's Legendary-level subordinates had been killed this way, their bodies overtaken by the slime molds and turned into enemies.

"Giant, you're strong. I see the shadow of a Titan in you. I'll give you a chance—surrender, and the great Brood Mother will grant you eternal life!"

An aged female voice echoed through the confined space, attempting to sway Orion.

But surrender was out of the question.

When his first strike failed, Orion commanded the Eightfold Spear Barrage to tear through the encroaching slime mold layer, carving out space to fight.

"Hahaha... surrender? Never!"

Crackle!

Orion transformed into a bolt of lightning, launching Instant Impact once more and charging at another parasitic creature.

A deafening explosion followed as the targeted creature was sent flying.

But at that moment, Orion sensed a powerful presence descending upon the area—an aura so immense it bordered on demigod-level.

...

In Bone City, atop the walls, Arthas's eyes snapped open.

As he did, he drew his longsword.

"Now's the time!"

Roar!

A sound erupted from Arthas's throat.

From his body emerged a colossal skeletal figure, crowned and wielding a giant sword.

The skeletal apparition towered over the battlefield, blotting out the sky. The moment it appeared, day turned to night.