

Titan King 531

Chapter 531 531: Colosseum

"I can sense your low spirits, but that kind of mood doesn't suit the succubus queen I know!"

Orion lowered his head and kissed Delilah.

He continued until Delilah was getting into it, then stopped at the critical moment.

Delilah lifted her head, eyes wide, looking at Orion in confusion.

What's going on? Go on, keep going.

That was the meaning in Delilah's eyes, but what she got in return was Orion's upturned lips and mischievous grin.

"You've done a lot for the Horde recently. Don't you want something in return?"

Delilah's hazy eyes went blank for a moment. She had never thought about it.

She couldn't remember when it began, but she'd already seen the Stoneheart Horde as something that belonged to both Orion and herself.

Managing her own enterprise—did it require compensation?

No, it didn't.

That was Delilah's answer, and it was exactly what Orion most wanted to see.

"It's yours now."

Orion took out a storage ring and slipped it onto Delilah's finger.

During his time in the Valkorath Realm, Orion had traded with Arthas and Leonidas for a total of five storage rings.

Soraya and Lilith each had one. Now Delilah had one as well.

As the grand steward of the Stoneheart Horde, keeping important resources and key items on her at all times was the best arrangement.

"This is a storage ring, and I've placed a gift inside it for you."

After putting the ring on Delilah, Orion casually mentioned it.

Delilah raised her palm, trying to sense it curiously.

Suddenly, she shuddered all over, stiffening in Orion's embrace.

"Th-this...this is..."

Orion gave a faint smile and continued on Delilah's behalf.

"It's what you deserve."

"Managing the Horde has delayed your cultivation and cost you some time. I hope you can be the next one in the Stoneheart Horde to reach Legendary level."

"When that day comes, I'll crown you as the true Succubus Queen."

Inside the storage ring lay everything Delilah would need to cultivate to Legendary level.

This was Orion's reward to Delilah, and the Stoneheart Horde's token of gratitude.

Delilah's contributions couldn't be measured in battle achievements alone.

After her initial shock came a wave of gratitude, followed by teary eyes, and in the end, a joyful smile shining through the tears.

"Honey..."

In the next moment, Delilah became incomparably enthusiastic. Overcome by passion and gratitude, she used her kisses and her vagina to express her thanks to Orion.

Orion had no objection to Delilah's initiative. He simply lay back and let Delilah straddle his cock, indulging their desires to the fullest.

Once they finished making love, Delilah lay in Orion's arms, letting his large hands continue roaming across her body.

"There's a human lord named Torin who wishes to see you."(*'lord' is just a status, not a reflection of his strength*)

"His territory used to be in the area bordering the ogre lands and the human kingdom, called Soaring Bird City."

"Based on intelligence from the Sentinel Corps, his territory is already occupied by someone else."

"In other words, he has nothing."

"He offered three items as tribute in hopes of meeting you."

Delilah, eyes half-closed as she enjoyed Orion's caresses, recounted each thing that had happened recently.

"Are the items that human lord offered really valuable?"

Orion withdrew his hand and went to sit on his throne, his tone quite calm.

He knew Delilah well enough: if there were nothing of value to catch his attention, she wouldn't have bothered mentioning it.

"One of the things he offered is similar to the items you ordered everyone to search for."

As she spoke, Delilah extended her hand, and a Bagbird pouch on the floor flew into her palm.

A moment later, a miniature building appeared in Delilah's hand, which she presented to Orion.

[Colosseum]

Type: Special Building

Item Description: A special place representing defiance and courage in the evolution of civilization.

Note: The colosseum can convert eligible slaves into gladiators.

Seeing this item made Orion's heart pound.

It wasn't that he was surprised about the [Colosseum] itself; there was a more pressing thought: survivors.

That human might very well be another survivor.

Of course, it was also possible that he wasn't, and that Torin just happened to have collected the [Colosseum] by accident.

But such a possibility seemed slim.

"What was that human's name again?"

Orion's voice sounded once more, tinged with an inexplicable emotion.

Delilah, familiar with him, was puzzled by this. She looked up at Orion in confusion.

"Torin. He's the lord of Soaring Bird City."

"Do you know where Soaring Bird City is located?"

"Yes. It's the first stop you'd reach when coming from the human kingdom."

"Have him come see me tomorrow. I want to know what he's after."

Tempering his curiosity, Orion calmed himself again.

If Torin truly was a fellow survivor, Orion would examine him and put him to use.

If not, Orion could just capture him, make him sign a slave contract, and get to the bottom of his reasons for wanting a meeting.

"Some mercenaries have headed toward our other four cities. Should we drive them away?"

This was Delilah's next concern. The four cities the Stoneheart Horde planned were still under construction, and she couldn't guess the mercenaries' intentions.

"Just keep an eye on them. There's no need to force them out."

"We just have to make sure they don't walk off with our territory's resources for free."

"What about the other two items Torin offered?"

Orion was curious what else Torin had to bring.

Delilah rummaged in the Bagbird pouch and came up with a magic gem and a bottle of mysterious perfume.

With a single glance, Orion lost interest.

The magic gem wasn't of a particularly high grade—though it was still relatively rare within the Stoneheart Horde. As for the mysterious perfume, it was clearly intended as a gift specifically for Delilah.

In other words, aside from the colosseum, Torin's contributions weren't that impressive.

That implied Torin's personal inventory wasn't especially deep—he might even be on the verge of poverty.

Of course, Orion could guess Torin had no idea of the [Colosseum]'s real significance.

Otherwise, there was no way he'd hand it over.

"This works out nicely. The colosseum we built previously can be upgraded and condensed at the same time."

Orion pondered silently.

Stoneheart City, outer district.

Inside a Blood Elf shop, Taran and Thalion stood at the counter, staring at a pair of enchanted gauntlets, utterly unable to look away.

"Dear warrior, these gauntlets were crafted from the silk of elastic spiders. They're inscribed with a high-level magical formation blueprint, providing a burn effect on your attacks..."

"If you want to purchase them, it'll cost a thousand silver Blackstone coins (also known before as Stoneheart coins)." (Blackstone coins come in three varieties—gold, silver, and copper.)

The Pandaren Taran nodded. He carried plenty of Blackstone coins, partly earned by exchanging loot for currency with the Horde, and partly from the army's salary.

"What do you think? Are you satisfied with these gauntlets?"

Chapter 532 532: You're afraid?

Giant Thalion scoffed at these gauntlets. In his view, a true warrior should wield a battle-axe, a warhammer, or perhaps a trident—not something that looked so flimsy and harmless.

However, the Pandaren Taran was a special case: he enjoyed smashing his enemies' heads with gauntlets. That was his personal preference.

On the battlefield, Taran would also use a long, spiked staff—a weapon capable of delivering truly brutal power.

"I like them. But I'd like to buy a few more pairs. I've got some kin who need gauntlets too."

The Blood Elf behind the counter brightened when he heard this, only to look dejected right afterward. They had only one pair of gauntlets in stock and nothing more.

"Elf, wrap up these gauntlets for my friend Taran!"

Seeing that Taran was pleased, Thalion swept a large handful of gold Blackstone coins onto the counter, intending to buy the gauntlets and present them to Taran.

"One pair isn't enough. We'll go check the dwarven stalls later."

Taran simply nodded, not refusing the gift. He was already thinking of the dwarves' stall.

The dwarves had only just arrived in Stoneheart City. Though they had no actual storefront yet, they'd set up a temporary booth in the outer-city square and were already catching plenty of attention.

Once Taran and Thalion left, the Blood Elf clerk turned and went into the shop's back room.

"Send word back to our kin: Stoneheart City is in need of a new batch of enchanted weapons."

"Warhammers, battle-axes, greatswords, spiked clubs, gauntlets, tridents...we need to keep a bigger stock of them all."

Truth be told, weapons were in short supply within the Stoneheart Horde.

Although the Horde produced and researched its own standard-issue arms, those were reserved for the various armies. None were allowed to flow outside.

That wasn't the real crux, though. The crucial part was that nearly everyone in the Stoneheart Horde fought.

Apart from the bloodline warriors who had actually joined the armies, people of all races had a constant need for weapons, whether for training or hunting.

As a result, the Horde as a whole faced a weapon shortage.

Blood Elves, humans, and dwarves had caught on to this and had collectively come to Stoneheart City to do business.

The Blood Elves had already taken a small bite out of the market for weapon sales.

In the outer city, at the Mysterious Tavern.

As Stoneheart City grew livelier and more prosperous, more patrons were drawn to the Mysterious Tavern.

Individuals like Torin, Mike, and Wyatt, whose strength was insufficient, could only join the other mercenaries in drinking and revelry on the first floor.

On the second floor, there were only two or three patrons, including the Alpha-level knight Godfrey.

As for the third floor, you could only go up if you were Legendary-level.

On that third floor, by a window, the dwarf Harbek smacked his ale-drenched beard happily. After a moment, two patches of flush the size of oranges appeared on his cheeks, and with a loud belch, he shook off his daze.

"Excellent ale. Bring me another cask!"

The succubus maidservant standing by nodded and left to fetch his drink.

While he waited, Harbek popped a piece of beast meat from the plate into his mouth and turned back toward the bustling Stoneheart City below.

"Fine ale, tasty meat, great place!"

Harbek took an immediate liking to Stoneheart City, enjoying the lively atmosphere and the high-tier entertainment available.

"How does it compare to Thunderhold City of the dwarves?"

A voice spoke up by his ear. Before he could respond, Orion was already sitting on a chair opposite him with a casual air.

Orion's body dwarfed Harbek's. When he sat across from Harbek, he completely blocked the dwarf's view.

"It doesn't compare at all."

Harbek's pleasant mood soured at having his leisure interrupted, even if the one intruding was the lord of the city, the Giant King.

"Tonight's drinks are on me," Orion said.

He stretched out a hand, picked up a piece of roasted meat, and tossed it into his own mouth.

Up on the tavern's third floor, aside from the succubus maidservants, it was just him and Harbek, the dwarven emissary. This was as good a place as any for an unofficial meeting.

"That's more like it! Ten more casks like that last one, and I guarantee I'll be drunk tonight."

Orion lifted a hand, giving the order, and then he turned to see Harbek sizing him up.

"You're afraid?" Orion asked casually.

Although Orion spoke lightheartedly, Harbek's heart tightened.

"You...you've advanced... you're at the peak of Legendary level?"

Harbek himself was an upper-tier Legendary-level warrior, having invested centuries into achieving that status. Yet the Giant King before him was reportedly quite young—probably under a hundred years old—and he'd already achieved Legendary peak.

"Does it matter? Compared to an ancient being like the White Dragon Frostsire, we're all basically the same."

Orion's face was calm as he spoke, utterly composed.

"The same, my ass!"

Dwarves were famously hot-headed and straightforward, and Harbek hid none of his thoughts, blurting out the profanity without hesitation.

"Hahaha... 'my ass,' says the dwarf. I like it!"

Harbek grew animated at Orion's gleeful teasing but had no retort.

"Giant King of the Stoneheart Horde—surely you didn't summon an old-timer like me just for a few drinks?"

"Of course not. I came to see what high-tier treasures the dwarves brought this time."

This first exchange of goods between the dwarves and the Stoneheart Horde definitely included some valuable items not available to the public—intended only for the highest echelons of the Horde.

It made perfect sense for these things to be under the care of Harbek, an upper Legendary-level elder of the dwarves. That was why he'd come in person.

Straight to the point, Orion's words prompted Harbek to narrow his eyes in thought. A moment later, he decided not to hide anything, taking out a storage ring and setting it on the table.

With a slight motion of his hand, Orion drew the ring toward him. He didn't immediately inspect the contents inside but instead turned it over to study it.

"Was this crafted by the dwarves?"

"Of course!"

"Decent craftsmanship."

"Only 'decent'? Do you have any idea how difficult it is to cut void crystals? Or how challenging it is to inscribe spatial magical formations inside them?"

Harbek spoke proudly. Dwarves considered the storage ring one of their crowning achievements. At least, that was true here on the Utessar Continent (as humans, dwarves, blood elves, and others referred to this land).

Just a quick glance told Orion that this storage ring's capacity was nothing compared to the ones he'd purchased from his "bros" in the Champions Alliance.

"How do you plan on selling these rings?"

At the mention of selling storage rings, Harbek shook his head so vigorously he resembled a bobblehead doll.

"As allies, dwarves can present you with one storage ring as a gift. But as for selling them? That's impossible."

Orion was intrigued.

"Why is that?"

"Because we already have so few storage rings. Even among us dwarves, they're in short supply."

Chapter 533 533: Another survivor

Harbek felt a bit helpless. If there'd been a way to mass-produce storage rings, the dwarves would've made a fortune ages ago.

"Can't this thing be produced in large quantities?"

"It can, but do you have any void crystals?"

"No, I don't."

"Exactly."

So, it boiled down to lacking rare production materials—in this case, the void crystals.

"What's inside looks good. I'll take it all. What is it your dwarves want in Stoneheart City?"

Orion put away the ring Harbek had given him. Inside that storage ring were three thousand sets of fine armor, plus matching weapons. Orion was very pleased with that gift, so as a show of reciprocity, he asked the question just now.

It seemed they both knew better than to haggle over the merchandise. After a brief silence, Harbek answered calmly.

"In the busiest quarter of Stoneheart City, dwarves want our own building—inside it, we'll construct a smithy and a shop.

"Without your orders or an official decree from the Stoneheart Horde, no one is allowed to enter that building at will.

"A dwarven smithy demands respect, and it must be absolutely safe."

He spoke with intense sincerity and seriousness at the end.

"As you wish."

The dwarves' request was not much different from what the Blood Elves had asked for. Effectively, they wanted a specialized embassy.

Harbek breathed a sigh of relief; he had expected this Giant King might act like a human, trying to bargain incessantly. He never imagined Orion would be so direct—so direct that he couldn't figure out a reply.

"Then let's drink to that—to the dwarves and the giants finding mutual accord!"

"May peace and prosperity ever watch over our two races!"

Orion raised his cup. His straightforwardness also cut off any notions Harbek might have had about asking for more.

"May peace and prosperity ever watch over our two races!"

Seeing the matter settled, Harbek had no choice but to lift his cup and follow suit.

"Still, let me make something clear."

"Taxes must be paid on any business enterprise."

"I do not wish to see any issues arise from the dwarves over such a fundamental principle."

Before Harbek could say a word, Orion continued:

"If the Dwarves and the Stoneheart Horde establish formal relations, I'll waive the first year of taxes for your people."

Having first delivered a veiled warning and then offered a benefit, Harbek's opinion of the Giant King changed yet again.

"The dwarves will abide by the Stoneheart Horde's laws and principles, as well as honor our treaty. If enemies from outside threaten the Horde, we'll assist to the best of our ability."

"In return, we hope the Stoneheart Horde will cloak our people in protection within the bounds of principle, ensuring their safety in our shop."

Give and take—that's how it went. Harbek's request was entirely reasonable.

"Of course."

Orion agreed wholeheartedly. After all, the Stoneheart Horde also sent its own envoys to other races' lands; they likewise needed respect and protection there.

"Three days from now, I'll open our colosseum in the inner city to welcome both the dwarves and the dragons. I hope you'll be there on time."

With that, Orion's entire figure vanished before Harbek's eyes, leaving nothing behind but the faint crackle of electricity on the third floor of the Mysterious Tavern.

Harbek gazed at the spot where Orion had just been sitting, dazed for a long while.

"From here on, there truly might be five major races in the South, not just four.

"The existence of the Five-Race Alliance is no coincidence. It looks like the Blood Elves must've seen something coming."

This thought floated through Harbek's mind. He planned to spend a few months in Stoneheart City, then journey on to visit his old friend Lycanor among the Blood Elves. Perhaps he'd glean more information on these developments.

Early the next morning, in the castle's reception hall.

Summoning Torin here was actually a fairly grand gesture, considering he was merely the nominal Lord of Soaring Bird City. In other words, the Stoneheart Horde was granting him a bit of face.

"So you're the one who wanted to see me?"

A terrifying pressure accompanied those indifferent words from atop the throne. Torin, kneeling, didn't dare lift his head to meet Orion's gaze.

Inside, Torin was more than a little resentful—it was humiliating to be forced to kneel. But his greater feelings were fear and anxiety.

"For the sake of my future, my survival, I have to keep calm. Keep calm when facing these powerful natives!"

Torin kept repeating this to himself, trying his best to remain composed and steady.

"Honored Giant King, Torin from Soaring Bird City wishes to offer you some rare treasures in exchange for your trust and favor."

Torin was no fool. Once he learned that Orion had agreed to see him, he realized his gifts must've worked.

Moreover, he knew the colosseum miniature and magic gem were likely what had piqued Orion's curiosity. The perfume, as far as Torin was concerned, was a gift suited for the ladies.

"Show me your tribute."

Orion did not lift the oppressive weight on Torin; he merely loosened it a touch.

At Orion's prompt, Torin set out five ornate boxes in front of him. Delilah stepped forward, picked up the wooden boxes, and delivered them one by one to Orion.

With each box taken from him, Torin's heart pounded more anxiously. He wasn't sure whether the Giant King would value the treasures he regarded so highly.

Seated on the throne, Orion opened each box in turn, narrowing his eyes slightly.

In the first box were eight miniature structures, all arrow towers, lined up neatly like a set.

In the second box lay a piece of ore. Orion recognized it as magic crystals—just what the Bureau of Weapons needed for its transformative weapons research.

The third box contained a larger miniature building. Judging by its shape, it seemed to be some sort of altar.

The fourth box housed an egg, although its signs of life were very faint.

Inside the fifth box was a contract—a contract that promised Orion 30% of the future profits from Soaring Bird City.

Orion's interest landed on that document. After reading it, he sank into thought, and a hush fell over the hall.

Obviously, from Torin's offerings alone, Orion had deduced that Torin was also a survivor. For now, it was unclear whether he might be friend or foe.

Still, Torin's ambitions meant he would inevitably become Orion's adversary one day. Both possessed aspirations, and only one survivor could ultimately rule this continent.

So yes, Torin would eventually be an enemy.

As for how Orion dealt with enemies, killing them outright was often the simplest solution.

But at the moment, Torin was linked to Soaring Bird City, which lay on the border between ogres and humans. Since Orion had his own designs on this continent, Torin could serve as an important piece on the board.

Torin's rise would surely spark turmoil within the human kingdom.

Interests, turmoil, a forward base, the continent...those words roiled in Orion's mind, making him hesitate.

Should he kill Torin or not?

Chapter 534 534: Contract

Delilah felt somewhat curious—not about Torin, but rather about Orion.

She knew Orion to be an intelligent giant. He only wore that contemplative, half-lidded expression when he was torn between choices, creating a tense atmosphere. It was one of the small habits Delilah had observed in him.

"I'm very pleased with the tribute you've presented."

After a long silence, Orion's voice finally came from the throne. Torin's body froze, then slackened, as though narrowly escaping disaster.

"However, I don't understand the meaning of this contract. From what I've heard, Soaring Bird City is no longer under your control."

Orion picked up the contract from the fifth box. His deep voice resounded with effortless authority. Weighed down by that power, Torin didn't dare lift his head and look Orion in the eye.

Fear gnawed at Torin. He dreaded the possibility that Orion might fly into a rage and kill him on the spot.

Giants were notorious for terrible tempers, for being bloodthirsty and brutal. Should that happen, no one would avenge him; indeed, the human kingdom might well celebrate his demise, since it would leave Soaring Bird City open to the noble families' ambitions.

"Most...esteemed Giant King, this contract doesn't refer to my present situation; it refers to a year from now."

Torin did his best to keep his voice steady, but the giant's commanding presence made it difficult.

"A year from now, is it? Interesting. So, human, what exactly are you hoping to obtain from me?"

Orion was growing curious about the boldness behind Torin's scheme.

"Honored Giant King, as you can see, I have nothing left at present. But my caravan and I can help the Stoneheart Horde purchase certain items forbidden by the human kingdom for export—treasures such as magic equipment, human slaves, seeds, and grain. If you're willing to pay enough gold, we can carry it out."

"I can also help recover more of your kin—those giant slaves and war prisoners lost elsewhere."

"In the future, my Soaring Bird City will become the Horde's most loyal ally..."

Torin unveiled a range of what he could do, some of it wishful talk, some feasible. Still, he never once said what he wanted in return.

"Human, you've shown me your value. Now tell me—what do you want from me?"

Orion's tone hinted at a slight eagerness, letting Torin believe the Giant King might be keen on hearing his request.

"Honored Giant King, I want to obtain Knight Galahad's armor and sword."

A sharp light flashed through Orion's eyes; he had guessed as much. Torin sought Galahad's relics to gain a knight's legacy—an easier route toward Alpha-level in the absence of any direct supply of Alpha-level resources.

It wasn't a bad idea.

Unfortunately, Galahad's relics had already been traded back to Prince Theodore.

"Knight Galahad, you say?" Orion replied calmly. "Pity—you're too late. Prince Theodore reclaimed his belongings some time ago."

Hearing that, Torin's face fell. A silent sigh of regret swept over him, and the slump of his shoulders made him look almost stooped.

Silence filled the throne room for a while. Torin abruptly realized he was allowing his mind to wander at such a critical moment and jerked himself out of it with a shiver.

"Honored Giant King, Torin and Soaring Bird City yearn for your protection."

Torin's voice turned urgent, quickly expressing a second request.

"Oh? And just what sort of protection did you have in mind? You realize the Stoneheart Horde and the Humans are allies—we won't be starting a war with humanity."

Sensing Orion might be misunderstanding, Torin hastened to clarify:

"Honored Giant King, what I mean is, I'm willing to pay generously to hire powerful bloodline warriors from Stoneheart City to safeguard the goods of my caravan."

"I'm also prepared to sign specific trade agreements with the Stoneheart Horde, so that you can meet your needs."

Orion had to concede that Torin was quite clever, managing to propose this scheme out of sheer desperation.

Silence settled briefly throughout the hall.

In truth, Orion was satisfied with how the negotiations had gone. Torin needed him, which kept Orion squarely in the dominant position. His current pause was calculated to make Torin believe he was weighing it over.

"As you wish," the Giant King finally pronounced. "I'll have the Stoneheart Horde's Elder of Stewardship draft the necessary agreements with you."

Brimming with relief, Torin trembled anew. This time, however, it was from excitement.

"Honored Giant King, Torin will carry out your orders without fail."

That seemed to conclude their meeting. Torin was eager to take his leave of the castle, feeling stifled in the giant's presence.

Just then, Orion's impassive voice sounded once more.

"Knight Galahad's relic may have gone back to Prince Theodore, but I do happen to have Arthur's sword right here."

"Interested?"

With a clang, Orion tossed out a golden longsword that landed at Torin's feet.

"Knight...Arthur's...Sword?"

In no time at all, Torin's demeanor shifted from confusion to amazement—then to unbridled joy. It all happened in under half a second.

"Honored Giant King—"

Before Torin could finish, Orion cut him off in an uncompromising tone:

"Starting next year, you'll tribute five rare treasures to me every year. Just like those you offered today, remember: no cheaper than this batch."

"Agree, and the sword is yours."

To take it or not... Torin needed only three seconds to decide. He reached out and seized the golden sword.

"Excellent. Words alone are meaningless—sign this contract."

A scroll dropped in front of Torin. After reading it, he immediately signed.

"Hahaha...what an interesting human!" Orion laughed heartily. "Delilah, I'll leave the rest to you."

Orion's laughter still echoed through the palace as he vanished from sight.

"This way, Lord Baron," Delilah said with a seductive smile. It felt to Torin as if he had no control over his body. Like a puppet on invisible strings, he rose and followed her out.

Only when the succubus maidservants addressed him outside the castle did Torin come back to himself.

In that instant, he realized he was drenched in sweat from head to toe.

Chapter 535 535: I'm more dangerous

That was the terror of feeling one's body out of personal control, unable to decide one's own life or death.

"Lord Torin, Her Majesty has instructed: if you wish to speak with her, you may seek her at the Mysterious Tavern."

...

Torin couldn't recall what else the succubus maidservants said. After meeting up with Mike and Wyatt, he practically collapsed into their arms.

"Take me back to the inn where we're staying. I want to get some proper rest."

In the outer city's commercial district.

With the arrival of humans, blood elves, dwarves, and dragons, numerous shops had sprung up throughout the district. Goods from the northern and southern territories of the Stoneheart Horde lined every shelf, dazzling visitors at every turn.

"Just look, Kadir. This right here is the kind of utopia people like us dream of!"

Fatty Nico glanced left and right. To him, the prosperity before his eyes was the best possible reward. Only the vibrancy of this place reminded him how wise his decision had truly been.

"Do you know what real bustle is?"

"More people? More trading? That alone doesn't count as bustle!"

"Different races, marketplaces, shops, slave markets, streets crisscrossing each other, countless merchants, upscale lodging in the inner city, block after block of standalone buildings in the outer city..."

"Hordes of travelers, crowds bright and busy—even the very air is tinged with the scent of gold coins."

Kadir made no comment on Nico's monologue. Indeed, the prosperity of Stoneheart City far exceeded his expectations.

Here, gold was everywhere.

Kadir's eyes now held less of the sorrow that came with losing his family's lands and more of the eagerness to find new hope after traveling afar.

"Come on, let's go check out the shops together."

In business, you have to know yourself and your market if you want to reap the biggest profits. On that point, Nico and Kadir thought exactly alike.

They left their inn, not only intending to see what stores existed and which goods were lacking, but also to gather information in hopes of purchasing land and storefronts here.

"Let's go—first, let's visit the stores run by the Stoneheart Horde. I hear they sell plenty of northern minerals and rare beast pelts."

At the mention of goods and trade, Fatty Nico's excitement grew palpable.

"Gold... gold... there's gold everywhere!"

Kadir cast a glance at the old steward behind him, then the three of them walked into the commercial district that Orion had planned out for Stoneheart City.

Of course, it wasn't just outsiders from other lands strolling these streets. The local residents of Stoneheart City were also curious about the newly arrived shops and stalls of other races.

Recently, the Stoneheart Horde's citizens had plunged into a frenzy of near-constant shopping.

Inside the castle, Delilah returned after leaving briefly, finding Orion once more seated on his throne.

From beginning to end, Torin had never even gotten a proper look at the Giant King's face. That was the crushing disparity in strength between them.

"I get the feeling he's not as valuable as you might think," Delilah remarked.

She was perched on Orion's lap, letting him fondle her breasts, his hand even sliding into her panties.

"No, you're wrong. He's worth more than you imagine."

"He's ambitious, competent, and able to swallow his pride."

"Someone else took over Soaring Bird City, yet he still dared venture straight to our Stoneheart Horde, seeking shelter. That alone proves he's clever."

"His methods and his tribute—those are secondary. The main thing is Soaring Bird City itself."

Orion withdrew his hand from Delilah's clit, and she looked momentarily disappointed.

Raising his head, Orion gazed out in the direction of the human kingdom.

"Soaring Bird City is crucial for us. Thirty percent of the city's profits is no small thing; it'll let the Stoneheart Horde set down roots there."

"With Torin running interference, the Sentinel Corps can use Soaring Bird City as a springboard to truly infiltrate the human kingdom."

"And if we ever need it in the future, Soaring Bird City will act as our forward base for invading human kingdom."

None of this surprised Delilah. Ever since Orion had accepted her sexual advances in the Black Forest, inside the succubus treasure vault, Delilah knew this Giant was brimming with ambition.

Legendary level was not Orion's limit.

Nor would this region, originally once held by orcs and beastfolk, ever satisfy Orion Stoneheart's appetite.

"And there's one more thing—our colosseum is about to open soon."

"The colosseum needs beasts, foreign races, and slaves."

"Torin said it himself, he can get us countless slaves. If he really can, then I'll buy them."

"Why would we ever turn away a convenient slave supply market?"

Orion drew Delilah back into his arms, kissing her hair and cheeks.

"Honey, I feel that human is quite cunning—vicious, even."

"I'm aware. His capabilities make him a good hunting dog for us. It'll be so much simpler to let him handle business among the humans, won't it?"

"What if those nobles in the human kingdom discover what's going on?"

"And what if they do? Would we admit anything? This is all Torin's doing—what's it got to do with us?"

Suddenly, Delilah understood perfectly.

Torin was a pawn to be used or discarded at will, and one who would never receive formal acknowledgment, either.

"He has no way out now."

"By choosing to collaborate with us, he's already stopped thinking of himself as a human."

"Racial identity and moral codes can't hold him back anymore."

"He's dangerous—but I'm more dangerous."

Riiiiip!

Orion tore Delilah's dress in one brutal motion, pinning her beneath him.

Three days later, at the Colosseum.

Two days earlier, Orion had fused one of the special [Colosseum] structures into the existing arena. At present, the Colosseum had changed yet again.

There were now many more seats, easily accommodating a crowd of three hundred thousand. An expert eye would discern that the interior had been altered by some spatial remodel—inside, the Colosseum's space was over half again as large as it appeared from without.

But the largest changes lay underground. Two additional underground floors had appeared.

The first basement floor was reserved for gladiators, including a prep area, training zone, rest hall, private chambers, armory, and a conversion site. Frankly, it resembled a small fortress all by itself.

The second basement level went even further, designated for raising, training, and detaining beasts.

"What a magnificent building—like a miracle."

In the stands, Nico and Kadir each clutched a ticket, a small square plate of special crystal, instantly recognizable.

Chapter 536 536: This place is a gold mine

"What kind of material is this made of? Looks like impressive craftsmanship!"

Fatty Nico held the ticket high, examining it meticulously.

"If the Colosseum is open, then there's bound to be a bookmaker taking bets!"

Putting the ticket away, Fatty Nico suddenly stood, his tone full of conviction. He rose, searching for where the betting might take place.

Sure enough, at the top of each section in the stands was a small counter, behind which stood an attractive, seductive succubus. Locals from the Stoneheart Horde who knew the arena well were already heading there to sign up for the challenge or place wagers on the outcomes.

"Kadir, they're taking bets! They're taking bets!"

Nico grabbed Kadir and tried to make his way up to the highest row of seats.

But Kadir shrugged off Nico's tug.

"You go yourself!

"You know you're going to lose, so why go throw away your Blackstone Coins?"

Nico shot Kadir a glare, left him behind, and squeezed through the crowd toward the top. Surprisingly, his plump body seemed far more agile here than one would guess.

"This place is a gold mine—and a money pit!"

"If you don't figure out how to position yourself, you'll lose your shirt."

Kadir sat up straight, directing his gaze toward the tall building that formed the front of the Colosseum.

"Not many people there, but the lights are bright."

"The Giant King is probably sitting in that spot, watching the entire Colosseum."

"Word has it this Colosseum was opened to welcome the dwarves and the dragons."

"That means some big shots from those two races have arrived in Stoneheart City."

He tore his eyes away, lost in thought. He didn't dare make a show of staring at the Colosseum's VIP area. A curious gaze toward someone like the Giant King might invite unknown fury.

Regardless of the faction, every leadership circle had its share of violent types—a faction's razor's edge, the weapon they raise against their enemies.

"Stoneheart City, the Stoneheart Horde...how should I get my foot in the door?"

Kadir began pondering deeply. His family had no future left in the human kingdom. Now that Stoneheart City was thriving, he was already thinking about making it his permanent home.

Unlike Kadir, Torin, Mike, and Wyatt, seated on another side of the stands, looked out at the huge, bustling crowd with excitement and anticipation.

Just yesterday, Delilah had negotiated a slave deal on Orion's behalf with Torin.

"Master, if this Colosseum stays open indefinitely, the demand for slaves is going to be enormous."

"They'll need tons and tons of slaves!"

The speaker was Wyatt, commander of the slaver band. As a slave leader, he knew all too well that their fortunes were looking bright.

"Master, from now on we won't have to pay tribute with our slaves to those damned nobles."

Torin remained silent. Delilah had gifted him the ticket in his hand—it was for a decent seat in the VIP area.

A trace of excitement curved Torin's lips; his expression was equal parts sinister and fanatical.

"The Stoneheart Horde doesn't lack other races. What they lack is humans—human slaves."

"And for our's group, human slaves are as plentiful as you'd like."

"Don't have any now?"

"Go catch them. Rob them. Trick them..."

"The human kingdom is basically an empire, with countless towns. So if a few people vanish from some slum, who'll really notice?"

A fiery madness glinted in Torin's eyes, growing stronger by the second.

"To fuel my own rise, sacrificing a few human slaves is hardly worth mentioning."

"Master, we're short on manpower. It'd also be best to keep it all discreet," Mike remarked. He was a mercenary who'd handled plenty of missing-person cases. So he knew that if they kidnapped a slave connected to someone important, it would be a real headache.

"This time, once we return to Soaring Bird City, we'll no longer be short on gold.

"With gold, how can we ever be short on manpower?"

Torin turned, gazing at Mike with a burning look.

Mike blinked, then realized what Torin meant. Yes, their trip to the giants' territory wasn't just about currying favor with the Giant King for protection. They'd also come to acquire goods.

As soon as they got back to Soaring Bird City and resold what they'd obtained, they'd have all the gold they needed. And with enough gold, manpower wouldn't be an issue.

"Master, your foresight is impressive!"

Facing Torin's calculating expression, flattery was indeed the wisest course. That was how Mike survived.

"Master, the challenge is starting!"

Wyatt drew Torin's attention. In the center of the colosseum, a metal cage holding dark creatures was already being raised from below. Opposite it stood a giant from Stoneheart City, ready for battle.

"Under the rules, whoever kills these dark creatures gets to keep the dark source crystal."

"If a challenger fails, they have to die in battle—the dark creatures move on to the next challenger."

"Mmph...mmph...mmph!"

As soon as the war horn blew, the cage for the dark creatures opened. The Giant challenger hoisted a huge axe and charged in with a roar.

James lucked out by getting in first, as a challenger.

As one of the Giant King's childhood playmates and rivals, James feels he's quite the disappointment.

Orion's already become the Giant King, whereas he's still stuck at hero level peak.

The only reason James had advanced that fast was from fighting in several wars against the dark creatures. Last year, he'd even followed Orion to Valkorath Realm, where he gained further experience battling fungal creatures. Now he was hero level peak.

All he needed was enough battle achievements to exchange at the Horde for Alpha-level resources. But he knew he still had more work to do.

James was aware that his innate talent wasn't remarkable. His potential alone might not be enough to break through to Alpha-level.

However, surrender was out of the question—he planned to keep striving, to emulate Gnoll Dirtclaw.

James believed he'd become just like Dirtclaw, advancing to Alpha-level and joining the council someday.

For a giant to take a gnoll as his role model was neither unusual nor shameful within the Stoneheart Horde.

After all, wherever a powerful being went, respect always followed.

Chapter 537 537: Cheers

[Sprint Crash!]

James surged forward, raising his gigantic axe high. The tip of the blade lunged straight toward a Three-Tails Night Stalker of the hero-level peak.

[Mighty Sweep!]

The Night Stalker's tail lashed out behind it, knocking James back.

James adjusted seamlessly, ramping up his strength in a sideways sweep.

Then came a spinning cleave!

A deep grunt and a furious roar sounded together as the colossal axe collided with the Night Stalker.

Slash!

The more James fought, the fiercer he became, feeling his blood boiling in every vein.

At this moment, he was certain the Giant King Orion was watching him.

Seizing the advantage, James unleashed every ounce of his power. Blood coursed through him, activating his awakened bloodline skill, [Death Execution].

In this state, James was fearless, his senses sharpened.

"Die!"

Death Execution was James's most formidable move. The bloodline's energy wrapped around his massive axe, making the blade instantly triple in size.

Screeech!

The colossal axe came crashing down, splitting the Three-Tails Night Stalker clean in half.

"WAAAGH..."

James raised his axe high, saluting Orion's vantage point.

Stepping toward the Night Stalker's corpse, James removed the dark source crystal and headed back to the stands.

Having finished his fight, he now became a spectator.

"Ha ha ha... Giant King Orion, do you see that giant's axe? It was forged by us dwarves!"

"That war axe rings a bell. I recall it was crafted by one of our dwarf smiths."

Harbek was thrilled. The giant who'd just taken the field was using a dwarven-forged weapon. That alone felt like free publicity for dwarven craftsmanship.

"Is that right? It looks like your people's handiwork is indeed popular."

Orion didn't seem overly impressed. He remembered he had once gifted James a hero-level war axe himself.

Why James wasn't using that weapon was something Orion had no information about.

Even so, Orion was pleased.

Because James was improving!

In Orion's earliest tribe, many giants had failed to keep pace with Orion's progress or with the Horde's growth.

They either retired, died in battle, or simply fell behind.

Plainly put, most of the elders from his parents' and sister's generation had either stepped down or were simply gone.

Of those who grew up alongside Orion, few remained in his presence.

Now, James was one of them.

In the Blackstone Tribe, genuine ascension only truly began in Rolan's generation.

Right from the start, they enjoyed Orion's and Arch Elder's protection.

Their potential and their environment for growth far exceeded what previous generations had.

Up to now, not many in the Blackstone Tribe had managed to become Alpha-level beings. In fact, they were extremely rare.

There was a reason for this: the potential of the previous two generations was exhausted.

Only when Rolan and other younglings matured would the Blackstone Tribe experience its real surge of talents and power, triggering an era of monumental growth.

Until then, every bit of investment was just laying groundwork.

Seeing James pulled Orion into a brief moment of reflection, causing him to zone out slightly.

"Giant King Orion, are you thinking about how to buy more weapons from us dwarves?"

Orion smiled, tacitly allowing Harbek to believe what he wished.

Only after Harbek emptied his giant goblet in one gulp did Orion speak, in a casual tone.

"The dwarven people and the Stoneheart Horde's territory lie far apart. Selling more weapons to us would be beneficial for both sides."

That was a fact, and Orion did want to reason with Harbek.

However, at times, reason wouldn't necessarily work.

"Yes, it's beneficial for sure, but you don't understand."

"I don't understand?"

"Exactly. You have no idea. If we sell more weapons to you, humans and blood elves won't be happy."

Harbek, somewhat drunk, let slip some candid words.

Of course, nobody could be sure whether he did so deliberately or not.

Orion poured an entire barrel of ale down his own throat by way of reply.

Balance!

Clearly, dwarves weren't just smiths by trade—some among them were quite astute.

The Five-Race Alliance traded and exchanged goods with one another, but they also deliberately controlled the scale of that trade, hoping to maintain a certain equilibrium among the races' strength.

This was a stance championed by many conservative factions who valued stability.

"So, the dwarves are happy with this arrangement?"

"Or, do the dwarves feel satisfied with the volume and scope of trade they have with the Stoneheart Horde?"

Before Harbek could respond, Orion asked in an inscrutable tone.

"Do you want to keep others happy, or do you want to keep yourselves happy? What would you choose?"

At some point, Orion had set down his barrel, staring intently at the dwarf before him.

Harbek, pinned by that question and that gaze, grew uneasy.

This unease didn't stem from fear or danger, but from wrestling with the right or wrong of his choices.

The atmosphere grew tense and stifling.

"Come on, cheers!"

"To the friendship between the Dwarves and the Stoneheart Horde!"

"I believe weapons forged by dwarves will surely capture the hearts of giants and every other race in the Horde."

Orion raised his goblet in a toast, breaking the momentary silence.

Sometimes, knowing when enough is enough is simply the best course.

"Cheers!"

Harbek grinned, sidestepping the previous awkwardness. He raised his goblet to drink with Orion.

"This challenge is a treat from me to our guests and to my people."

"Mr. Harbek, don't you plan to let your people take part?"

"Oh, right, we mustn't forget Lord Bloodscale!"

Orion reminded Harbek of the dwarves, and also acknowledged the dragon representative, Bloodscale.

Bloodscale was a blood dragon, more or less a dragon-kin mutation, only at the Alpha peak level.

He sat among them in the capacity of a dragon emissary.

Normally, he wouldn't be qualified to sit as an equal with Orion or Harbek.

Even so, Orion and Harbek both chose to overlook him most of the time.

High status without matching strength often leaves one feeling overshadowed, and this truth applies everywhere.

"Dwarves can join?"

"They must! But remember, our colosseum has one rule: only by killing your opponent can you walk out."

Orion's lips curved in a faint smile. Though he claimed he was informing, he was actually goading.

"Giant King Orion, are you looking down on dwarves?"

"Dwarves never fear combat, for we possess the sharpest weapons."

Orion nodded and remained silent, a wry smile suggesting he awaited Harbek's next move.

"Tordek, step forward!"

"Show everyone in Stoneheart City the might of the dwarves."

From a row of attendants emerged a solemn dwarf named Tordek.

He stood out markedly, for his weapon was a warhammer taller than he was.

Tordek headed for the Colosseum, dragging his warhammer along behind him.

Chapter 538 538: Beware the threat from the deep seas

"Not bad at all!"

That was Orion's commendation for the dwarf Tordek.

Tordek was a dwarf at the peak of hero level, yet the force emanating from him seemed like it could rival Alpha-level dark creatures. In other words, when facing hero-level dark creatures, Tordek was certain to win.

However, Orion didn't dwell on that point. No matter a dwarven warrior's victory or defeat, the moment one stepped into the arena, it would trigger the crowd's frenzied cheers and a storm of betting.

"Excuse me. We, the dragons, would also like to send our dragonblood warriors to the challenge."

Seeing the dwarves make a move, Bloodscale likewise reached a decision. With a motion of his hand, two dragonblood warriors stepped out from behind him and headed side by side to the Colosseum's preparation area.

In truth, facing these two formidable Legendary-level beings left Bloodscale feeling slightly uneasy.

"Bloodscale, how's Jorik been lately?"

Orion sounded surprised. According to the pact he'd established with Glacial Dragon Jorik, there was a high chance Jorik would personally come for this trade. Yet here stood Bloodscale in Jorik's stead.

"Reporting to Giant King: My lord is stuck in Whitecliff and cannot leave so easily."

Orion and Harbek narrowed their eyes the instant they heard this.

"The Sea Tribe's begun their invasion again?"

Harbek was the one asking.

This alone showed that dwarves could be more than just hotheaded—they also tended to be somewhat impatient.

"Yes. Right after the dark beast tides subsided, the Sea Tribe set its sights on the dragons. Countless waves have been stirred up by the Sea Tribe, and the ocean is already approaching Whitecliff City."

Just mentioning the Sea Tribe's invasion brought an edge of anger to Bloodscale's voice. Having said that much, Bloodscale then passed along Glacial Dragon Jorik's message.

"Lord Jorik wanted me to warn you: beware the threat from the deep seas. Apart from our dragon territories, the sea tribe is bound to take action in other waters as well."

Orion and Harbek gave no response, both falling into silence.

For the time being, the Sea Tribe's hidden threat appeared to target only the dragons. In the regions occupied by dwarves, humans, blood elves, and the Stoneheart Horde, the Sea Tribe's incursions amounted mostly to a lot of noise with little follow-through. As long as one remained far from the coastline, it was unlikely to face any attack from the Sea Tribe.

But for the dragons, it was a whole different story. The Sea Tribe would deliberately raise monstrous waves to launch invasion after invasion.

Orion had no knowledge of the grudge between the Sea Tribe and the dragons, nor any clue why the Sea Tribe focused so pointedly on them. Absorbed in thought, Orion suspected the dragon race had hidden something significant when forming the Five-Race Alliance.

Meanwhile, the Colosseum shook with an uproar.

Dwarf Tordek was matched against a hero-level Dark Fiend—a creature that was practically immune to physical attacks from anyone on its level. But Tordek faced the Dark Fiend with unshakable confidence.

Clearly, it wasn't his first time confronting a Dark Fiend.

"It's a Dark Fiend!"

"That dwarf's up against a Dark Fiend—no way he survives!"

"The Dark Fiend disregards blades, ignores attacks. How's he going to handle that?"

"I'll put my money on the Dark Fiend!"

"Hey, you little dwarf—use that hammer on that damned dark creature! I'm betting on you!"

"..."

Jeers, gasps, and whistles erupted from the stands, fueling Tordek's excitement.

Tordek lifted the flask at his waist and took a strong swig.

"With some booze in me, I'll hammer it to death!"

"For the dwarves!"

"For the Bronzebeard Clan!"

He dragged his warhammer forward, its heavy scrape echoing clunk, clunk, clunk.

As soon as the cage holding the Dark Fiend was opened, Tordek launched his charge.

Roar!

The Dark Fiend howled, spotting the enemy rushing toward it. It bared its sharp, serrated fangs and extended its hook-like claws, anchoring them to the ground before springing forward like a coiled spring.

At the same moment, Tordek leapt the instant he neared the Dark Fiend, hoisting his giant hammer high in midair. The Dark Fiend pounced, only to meet the hammer head-on.

Boom!

It was a muffled collision—hammer against Dark Fiend.

"He's done for! The little dwarf's about to die!"

"Oh no, I'm losing my blackstone coins!"

"How foolish, that dwarf!"

"..."

These thoughts fluttered through the crowd the moment hammer slammed against beast. But those ideas were swiftly scorched to cinders by a sudden flash of flame.

Splurt!

Rumble!

Without warning, Tordek spat a mouthful of ale. It drenched the hammer, igniting in a fierce blaze that instantly set the warhammer aflame—and with it, the Dark Fiend.

Roar!

A chilling howl rang out as the creature writhed amid the fire, the clang of hammer blows echoing like the pounding of a forge. When the fire finally died and the echoes faded, only the dwarf remained, upright and alone.

"Damn it, my blackstone coins!"

"He won!"

"No way—a dwarf actually beat a Dark Fiend. What on earth was that move?"

"..."

In the stands, the vast majority of onlookers were left speechless by the spectacle. Nico and Kadir were just as stunned, Nico especially.

"Hahaha... I bet correctly again!"

Though Nico had nailed his wager once more, he truly hadn't expected a dwarf to be so savage and wild in battle.

"That much was obvious!

If dwarves didn't have ways to handle the different dark creatures, they'd never have managed to occupy that rich southern territory for so long.

Nico, your stack of Blackstone Coins keeps on growing."

There was surprise in Kadir's eyes, but even more a simmering desire—for the very Blackstone coins in Nico's possession.

"Don't even think about it. These coins are the fruit of my foresight and luck. They're mine! All mine!"

Nico knew better than anyone what his friend Kadir's temperament was like. He stuffed the Blackstone coins into his coat, glaring defensively at Kadir.

"Nico, it's time to stop. Even the keenest insight can fail once in a while. Lady Luck isn't going to smile just on you forever! Warriors who survive the battlefield or the Colosseum can defeat more than death—they can also destroy luck itself."

Kadir reined in the greed he felt for those Blackstone Coins. In his view, any fortune gained through gambling meant little.

"What's a loss here or there? Who hasn't lost a bet before? As long as you win more than you lose overall, you still come out ahead."

Nico brushed off Kadir's lectures. He had his own take on winning, losing, and wealth.

"Are dwarves always this savage?"

Back in the reception hall, Orion withdrew his gaze from the arena and glanced at Harbek, who wore a triumphant grin.

"Savage?"

No—that's courage, that's strength, that's ingenuity."

Harbek wouldn't accept Orion's notion of dwarven savagery.

Under his breath, he muttered that dwarves weren't brute beasts—only ogres were, and maybe the giants right in front of him.

"Lord Bloodscale, your draconic warriors are up next!"

Bloodscale nodded confidently. The dragons had fought dark creatures countless times over the years; both sides knew each other's way of battle all too well.

Chapter 539: That's their fate

"Giant King Orion, this is truly a bounty for us!"

Up until now, the dwarf Harbek finally recognized Stoneheart Horde's generosity this time around.

Orion stayed silent, scanning the Colosseum's stands.

Today, the Colosseum was at full capacity—with 300,000 spectators.

Men, women, the young and the old—all sorts of people had come to broaden their horizons.

Feeling the crowd's enthusiasm, Orion showed a trace of satisfaction and delight on his face.

Population, commerce, and entertainment, to some extent, are symbols of prosperity.

If prosperity is just a small circle, then true flourishing is the larger environment.

Once you have prosperity, can real flourishing be far behind?

...

"Master, you predicted everything correctly. Shall we go place a bet?"

From the stands, Wyatt asked Torin in a voice filled with excitement.

Moments ago, Torin, relying on his insight and experience, had accurately predicted James and Tordek as the victors.

Wyatt, driven by excitement, urged Torin to place more wagers so they could reap more money.

In truth, Torin was indeed tempted.

He knew that if you become the bookmaker at the Colosseum, you're almost guaranteed to profit.

After watching two rounds of duels, he was sure this challenge was Stoneheart Horde's way of distributing benefits to their people.

"Here—bet on the challenger from the dragon race to win!" Torin had already decided to wager on the challengers every time.

There might be surprises, but in the long run, he felt it was a safe bet.

"Master, why don't we also sign up for the challenge?"

"Any victory would bring a hefty reward—dark source crystal!"

Wyatt's words enticed Torin again.

All three of them—Torin and his two companions—were hero-level fighters; Torin stood at the peak of hero-level.

"Go see if we can participate, too."

Ultimately, Torin couldn't resist.

Following the order, Wyatt stood and squeezed his way eagerly toward the registration area.

In the subsequent match, the half-dragon challenger from the Dragon race also took down the dark creatures in a single strike.

Those first three battles immediately lit up the atmosphere of the Colosseum.

The carnival belonged to all members of the Stoneheart Horde.

The Colosseum's challenges ran one after another well into the evening. Stoneheart was ablaze with lights.

Indeed, it was dazzling.

Humans and Blood Elves had brought various types of magic lamps from their own territories, bathing Stoneheart City in brilliant illumination.

All around the center of Stoneheart, in the trees and among magical plants, lantern bugs flew by from time to time, adorning the city with a brand-new sight.

These lantern bugs were initially brought back by Orion from Soraya City in the Valkorath Realm. At the time, he had purchased them in bulk through Aerin.

In her Forest of Nature, Aerin launched a large-scale bug hunt to fulfill Orion's big order.

In short, Stoneheart City was no longer dependent on bonfires to drive away the darkness, nor did it rely as much on firestones.

However, firestones themselves still served as a very efficient energy source, which could be exported to other factions—dwarves skilled at forging would surely appreciate these resources.

Nighttime, the castle.

Inside Sylvana's bedchamber, Orion had just finished making love to her.

"I will take all Beastfolk bloodline warriors with me!"

Beastfolk, aside from giants, formed the largest population in the southern territory of the Stoneheart Horde.

Orion had unified them by force, for Beastfolk had long inhabited the Meadowland Plains, deeply rooted there.

Apart from Sylvana's branch, as well as subsidiary Beastfolk under the Starveil Giants, Orion had heavily suppressed the majority.

Most of those Beastfolk had been conscripted into cannon fodder troops. Those were the ones Orion was talking about.

His words sought Sylvana's opinion.

She was Orion's woman and warranted a measure of respect.

Moreover, Sylvana was a beastfolk herself, and many in the Beastfolk community regarded her as their new leader.

"They can go wherever. That's...their fate!"

Sylvana spoke with her eyes closed, breath ragged, her words coming out in fragments.

That answer clearly pleased Orion.

After the three-day challenge at the Colosseum concluded, Orion planned to lead Lilith, Rendall, Grulbane, Dace, Otho, Beyn, Torba, Thundar, Ursa, and others back to the Valkorath Realm.

This time, the armies he rotated in would be mostly Beastfolk, along with some Orcs.

Orion intended to use fungal creatures in that other world to reforge Beastfolk faith—he wanted them to realize they were fighting on behalf of the Stoneheart Horde, and more specifically, for him, Orion.

Of course, Orion also had other motives.

He aimed to use war to weed out the stubborn diehards, while giving younger, still-impressionable Beastfolk a chance to be immersed in Stoneheart Horde's culture and spirit, ultimately ensuring they merged seamlessly with the Stoneheart Horde.

"You don't care about their fate?"

Orion reached out to stroke Sylvana's ear—her most sensitive spot.

"I do care!"

"But the Beastfolk's fate largely rests in their own hands."

"Fate is merciless, and Beastfolk must shed blood and lay down their lives to earn the Honey King's trust."

Honey King was the new nickname Kitsune Sylvana had given Orion.

Of course, she only used it during their lovemaking. Whenever Sylvana climaxed, she would call him by that name without realizing it.

"Hahaha..."

"Sylvana, you're so perceptive. It'll make your life easier, and you'll gain even more."

Orion pressed Sylvana down again and drove his cock back into her pussy.

...

Ogre territory, eastern region.

While Orion and Sylvana were making love, his ogre friend was having a far worse time.

This was a flat open area, cut into three segments by a winding, branching river.

The river acted as a boundary, dividing the territories of the insectoids, the ogres, and the lizardfolk.

The lizardfolk were among those who had followed the white dragon Frostsire southward to invade, though they had been assigned to the central war zone.

After the north–south war ended, the lizardfolk leader Ssorin received a large piece of territory.

Through subsequent conquests, they kept pushing southward until reaching Lokiviria's land.

The two sides fought fiercely, and eventually Lokiviria ceded part of her territory. Surprisingly, the pair then joined forces.

They formed an alliance because they now shared a common enemy.

That enemy was their neighbor—the ogre tribe.

Ssorin, the lizardfolk lord, was a mid-level Legendary fighter, gifted with natural advantages that made him more powerful than Lokiviria.

"Ganging up on me two-on-one is disgraceful and vile!"

"Have you no respect for the pact anymore?"

"Lokiviria, I regret ever allying with you!"

Aldous swung his spiked club with transcendent power, temporarily halting Lokiviria and Ssorin.

They had battled for a full day and night, and Aldous was clearly showing signs of fatigue.

"You fool of an ogre—don't you realize?"

"After the north–south war, we were no longer allies!"

"Hand over some of your territory at once, or this fight doesn't end here."

Chapter 540: Will he get dragged into this?

"Damn it, he made me bleed!"

"Kill him, and after that, I'll do whatever you say!"

It was a rare sight indeed: the larger, fiercer head of the two-headed ogre was the one speaking up at this moment.

"You idiot, if you'd listened to me earlier, we wouldn't be dealing with this lizard right now!"

By "lizard," he meant Ssorin, the lizardfolk lord.

In reality, aside from lacking wings, Ssorin wasn't much different from a dragon.

And for someone at Legendary level who could temporarily fly with transcendent power, lizardfolk lord Ssorin had few weaknesses in battle.

"Insectoid Lord Lokiviria, you're absolutely right!"

"This war won't be ending here!"

"Big guy, we're leaving—heading west. I've got friends over there."

It was quite a comical scene: while Aldous was still talking, Bluehide already began running off. After all, they shared the same mind!

The rest of the ogre tribe fled with them.

"Lokiviria, you promised me this region was mine!"

Watching the ogres retreat, lizardfolk lord Ssorin was overcome with joy.

Through a single fight, he'd gained even more territory.

"I keep my promises; I never go back on my word!"

Lokiviria also gazed after the ogres, looking toward the western reaches of the continent—toward the lands of that Giant King.

"Will he get dragged into this?"

Lokiviria wasn't sure.

Lokiviria had been oppressed by Ssorin and lost part of his territory.

Seeking revenge, Lokiviria designed this whole plan so the ogres would suffer losses.

Now, Lokiviria wanted to involve that Giant King too.

Aside from the far southern lands—populated by humans, dwarves, blood elves, dragons, and the Stoneheart Horde, who were at peace—everyone else on the continent was still warring.

Once he arrived in the south, Lokiviria found himself under pressure from every corner.

He needed to shift that pressure elsewhere and find a powerful ally.

If the Giant King entered the stage, Lokiviria might ally with him again.

...

Valkorath Realm, Soraya City.

Through a burst of teleportation energy, Orion arrived here with Lilith, Rendall, and others.

Even though she was pregnant, Lilith had also come to the Valkorath Realm. Orion had made that decision after careful thought.

"This is Soraya City!"

"Secure your troops. Have them stand by right here and wait for further orders."

Ignoring the curious glances from the crowd, Orion gave the order and then led Lilith toward Dusk Castle.

At the castle gates, Soraya was already waiting with a broad smile.

"Soraya is delighted to see my lord and my lady!"

Orion nodded. But before he could speak, Lilith stepped forward and took Soraya's arm.

"Soraya, just call me Lilith!"

"You're also Orion's woman and the Warden of the Stoneheart Horde."

"We've come here this time, and I need your support."

Soraya's smile grew even brighter; Lilith's friendly approach put her at ease.

Moreover, Soraya couldn't sense any envy or jealousy in Lilith—at least not visibly.

"Of course. We need to support each other."

Soraya gave Orion a quick sidelong glance. Seeing no reaction from him, she took Lilith by the hand and led her into the castle.

...

Returning to the Valkorath Realm left Orion somewhat awestruck.

He'd assumed that, aside from the central area having some flora, most of the Valkorath Realm was wasteland and deadlands.

Now, however, he saw tender green grass everywhere. Even the sky seemed tinged with a faint green hue.

"The methods used by a few allies in the Champions Alliance are beyond my current abilities."

Within the castle, in a certain garden, grew numerous magical plants and swarms of lantern bugs. Orion also spotted a few rare elemental sprites.

"Those magical plants and the group of elemental sprites were gifts from a VIP guest who arrived last time at Soraya City," Soraya explained.

"He said these little sprites would help Moonveil Plains recover more swiftly."

Orion nodded, understanding that it must be Deputy Commander Edward's doing.

Only a mage who advanced to demigod level—the likes of Deputy Commander Edward—could pull off something this substantial.

"Tell me about the battles as of late."

Withdrawing his gaze from the elemental sprites, Orion turned his attention to Soraya.

Lilith stood off to one side, playing with the sprites, content to observe.

"Lich Vexis is leading the undead armies and the majority of the small scorpions in pursuit of the fungal creatures."

"During that time, Lich Vexis was ambushed twice but managed to kill the assassins both times."

"We received a large haul of life essence from the front lines, which I've kept in storage."

As she spoke, Soraya presented two boxes, handing them to Orion.

They contained Legendary-level life essence, the spoils of Lich Vexis's victories.

Soraya clearly knew she had no right to handle something so valuable.

Orion stowed away the bone-crafted boxes, realizing that Vexis truly was carrying out Arthas's orders and wholeheartedly supporting Orion with no selfish motives.

It was yet another favor he owed.

"You two continue chatting—I'm going to check things out in more detail."

Putting aside his mixed feelings, Orion headed toward another wing of the palace.

Seated on the throne, Orion focused his mind on the Survivor's Platform and accessed the public channel of the Champions Alliance.

Leonidas: "The slime molds broodmother got pulled away, and I've totally lost my drive!"

Leonidas: "Alexander, what are you up to?"

Alexander: "I'm no longer in the Valkorath Realm!"

Leonidas: "You're not guarding the western region anymore?"

Alexander: "With the slime molds broodmother gone, the slime molds layer won't pose me any real threat.

Alexander: "Hulk and Kraken can handle the rest. Do you plan on settling down in the Valkorath Realm and lazing around?"

Leonidas: "Retire? I haven't advanced to demigod yet! I've got plenty to do!"

Alexander: "As long as you know."

With that, Alexander's one-liner left Leonidas somewhat gloomy.

But Leonidas, being the restless type, bounced back fairly quickly.

Leonidas: "Squiddy (Kraken's nickname), how're things going on your end?"

Kraken was evidently in the midst of fighting, as it took a long while to respond.

Kraken: "Boss, I've hit the peak of Legendary level!"

Leonidas: "Holy fuck, you've finally caught up to Hulk! Keep going—I'm counting on you to grab that freebie from Deputy Commander."

Kraken: "Boss, I won't let you down!"

...

Reading the conversation, Orion was also amazed.

That's fast!

Kraken's rate of advancement didn't lag much behind his own.