

Titan King 561

Chapter 561: Where did you come from?

"Kill them quickly and sever the connection between mind and body."

"Or else, die together with them in a self-detonation."

That final method was also how the normal mages of the Radiant Continent defended their last bit of honor.

"Sever the connection between mind and body?"

Orion questioned these words, wondering what exactly counted as severing. Instant kills? Or perhaps annihilating the soul?

"Controlling the mind of the corrupted being, or cutting off the link between its mind and body—both can work. Lightning-element magic and control-type skills are particularly effective against wicked mages."

In truth, as a lower-tier Legendary mage, Gandalf was not entirely clear on the deeper meaning of "corruption." He was only repeating the conclusions his predecessors and comrades had drawn.

However, at the mention of lightning-element magic, Orion's eyes lit up. His primary focus was precisely lightning-element transcendent power. Although supernatural power and magic were different systems, the way their power was unleashed was largely the same.

Just as Orion was about to continue asking questions, he suddenly looked up into the distance.

"Lord Orion, what is it?"

"The enemy has arrived!"

Gandalf was at first puzzled, but then, as though something clicked, his expression became grim.

"Wicked mage Gavriel is coming?"

That severity in Gandalf's voice was his usual habit. Every major mage lingering outside Desolation City was stronger than he was. If not for the magical towers of Desolation City empowering him, he would never have endured long enough for reinforcements to arrive.

"Lord Orion, what should we do?"

No one answered Gandalf's question—Orion, standing beside him, had already transformed into crackling lightning, flashing into the distance. By the time Gandalf caught sight of Orion again, he was nearly out of view.

A trace of conflict flitted across Gandalf's eyes, but only briefly. He then flew off in pursuit of Orion's fading silhouette.

"Where did this beast come from?"

"So many beasts... They'll definitely boost my supply of corruption. I can corrupt them, then bind them under contract as new slave-beasts!"

Originally a wind mage, Gavriel had crumbled the instant he learned this world's source power was being siphoned away. Over time, he could no longer sense much wind element, driving him further into despair. His power grew weaker by the day.

Growing weak, being abused, and becoming a mere servant or tool—Gavriel refused to accept that fate. So he opened his mind of his own accord, embracing the malignant power of corruption.

In truth, high-tier mages of the Radiant Continent possessed potent mental strength, which made them difficult to corrupt while on their guard. But some, after learning that the world had lost all hope, chose depravity and utter surrender.

At least in this decaying world—in these final moments—they could still remain above others, standing at the pinnacle, with control over everything.

"Heh heh heh... Tina, Ladir—take your subordinates and set up that corruption formation on the ground. All these spider beasts are ours."

Following Gavriel's orders, two mages on flying mounts gathered a few thousand men and began carving out the magical formation.

However, in the next instant, Gavriel's face twisted in alarm.

Rumble...!

Lightning flashed, thunder roared. Gavriel sensed Orion's presence.

With a low boom, a colossal black wind blade formed and tore through the air. It was a mutated wind-element spell, filled to the brim with evil power.

When the wind blade clashed with the lightning, the shockwave ripped a gaping hole in the sky. Beneath roiling black clouds, a giant advanced through the air, trident in hand.

"I've never seen a wind blade like that before!"

"It's brimming with corruption!"

Orion's voice was deep and powerful.

Gavriel was only at mid-tier Legendary, a great deal weaker than Orion. Yet Orion didn't underestimate him, because during that moment of impact, Orion had felt a tinge of divine power within the malignant energy.

That meant the evil lingering in this world came from a Reaper. Whether that Reaper was a demigod or a true god was anyone's guess.

"Who are you? Where did you come from?"

Wicked mage Gavriel was wary, well aware that there were no giants in the Radiant Continent. In other words, this giant was from another world.

With a sharp tearing sound, Orion stretched out his hand, gripped Gavriel's head, and crushed it before he could so much as react. As for Gavriel's body, the trident had already obliterated it.

A mid-tier Legendary-level wicked mage—dead, just like that.

Orion felt no shock from this. The one who was stunned was Gandalf, who arrived moments later. Silence weighed heavily on the air, as though someone had pressed pause on both time and space.

"Gavriel... is dead?"

No one knew how long it took, but eventually Gandalf, dressed in white robes, managed to speak the words in disbelief.

"His strength wasn't all that impressive. He couldn't even withstand one blow."

Orion had killed the enemy with a single attack. He didn't bother to consider that, being able to fight arch-lords head-on, he was on a level that no ordinary Legendary being could even dream of challenging.

"Gandalf, can you tell me what this is?"

Orion opened his hand. Resting on his palm was a small black crystal.

"That's a spiritual crystal. It can be embedded in a staff to help a mage cast more powerful spells. But it's corrupted now, Sir. You'd best not use it carelessly."

Unwittingly, Gandalf—this white-haired elder—had begun addressing Orion with the utmost respect. Yet as soon as he said those words, Gandalf felt he'd spoken out of turn. Could such a terrifying individual possibly fear spiritual contamination?

Orion nodded, frowning in thought. A moment later, he lifted the black crystal and touched the trident in his right hand.

What happened next was incredible.

The black crystal melted like a liquid, absorbed by the Flame of Will.

Boom!

A cluster of black flames rose from the spear tip of the Flame of Will—not bright, not fierce, yet strangely ominous.

Sensing the changes in the weapon, Orion's eyes lit up with delight. The Flame of Will had evolved after absorbing the black crystal.

The Flame of Will had grown again.

[Flame of Will]

Type: Trident

Quality: Alpha level

Special Effect 1: Ignite – Enemies struck by this weapon have both body and spirit ignited.

Special Effect 2: Shatter Ice – Grants its wielder a layer of ice armor, which can be willingly shattered. The shards can then launch an additional attack.

Weapon Description: A weapon ignited by willpower. It is very unique.

Chapter 562: Everything you wished for will come true

Although the weapon hadn't changed much from before, Orion knew it was no longer the same.

First, the trident's initial skill, Ignite, had been greatly enhanced. A fifty-percent chance had become one hundred percent, and now it could also Ignite an enemy's mind.

Then there was the second skill, Shatter Ice. A thought from Orion, and an even colder, more durable layer of ice armor formed over his entire body.

"Cool. This is excellent!"

Raising the trident, Orion observed the flames at its tip that refused to be extinguished—an unmistakable sign that the Flame of Will was evolving.

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"Lord Orion, what is it?"

"Ah... nothing. My weapon seems to have quite the craving for these crystals. Looks like I'll be busy for a while."

The mention of crystals and corruption made Gandalf hesitate. However, when he saw Orion's excitement and anticipation, he said nothing in the end.

"Gandalf, leave those people down there to you.

"And about that magical formation—I want to destroy it. You likely understand it better than I do."

Pointing his trident at the wicked mages on the ground who had abandoned their carving of the magical formation and were fleeing for their lives, Orion entrusted all the cleanup to Gandalf.

In truth, Orion had wanted to capture those mages himself and use them as sacrifices to turn the deceased elders Marnok, Veldrok, and Thunderclaw into Skeletal Knights.

But because the mental strength of those mages was so formidable, a single misstep or lapse in control could trigger their self-destruction. Orion had no wish for accidents during a ritual, so he gave up that plan.

In the end, these wicked mages of the Radiant Continent would be of little use beyond offering up their spiritual crystals.

It was only when Orion shifted Gandalf's attention to those underlings that Gandalf snapped out of his daze.

Too powerful!

This giant could crush equals in one blow—unbelievably powerful!

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"Gandalf, you should know better than I that you're praying to a great being for aid.

"He has answered, so I've come.

"Everything you wished for will come true!

"You, and the people behind you, will be taken in. You will all be reborn."

By now, Orion had figured it out: this mage named Gandalf must be a devoted follower of Deputy Commander Edward. Gandalf prayed to the demigod Edward, and after Edward heeded his call, Orion was sent to the Radiant Continent.

Orion's goal was to act on behalf of the Deputy Commander and bring about the destruction of the Radiant Continent, fulfilling Gandalf's wish.

As for saving it—that was impossible. Unless the god who had stolen the world essence chose to return it, the Radiant Continent's fate could only be destruction.

But Orion suspected that the world essence had long since been devoured.

In a flicker of lightning, Orion vanished into the cave spiders' Nest.

"Lorelia, come out. You'll lead the army on the front lines."

Using his trident, Orion rapped against the cave spiders' Nest. Lorelia poked her head out, looking at Orion with wide eyes.

"Are you familiar with Soraya? She's another broodmother of the horde and is now a Legendary-level powerhouse. Do you want to be replaced by her?"

Orion was stating a fact while also goading Lorelia. She was raised by Orion and Lilith, who had no children of their own at the time, and both treated Lorelia like their own child.

When a child grows, any parent hopes above all for safety and good health. But after growing up, children must learn independence and how to hunt. Orion believed this was a stage Lorelia needed to experience.

"Up ahead are a few wicked mages carrying spiritual crystals inside them. I need those."

"Go on—find me more spiritual crystals."

Orion was instilling in Lorelia the notion that she was fighting not just for herself, but for him as well.

"As you wish. Lorelia will definitely bring you more spiritual crystals."

With Orion giving her a direct order, Lorelia's timid display vanished. She immediately grew serious, commanding several Alpha-level guardians and moving toward the battlefield.

"You go as well," Orion continued, "watch over her, ensure she stays safe, and make sure no enemies slip away."

Gustalon nodded, turned into a gust of wind, and concealed himself in the air to follow.

Orion sat down cross-legged, stroking the Flame of Will in his hands and liking it more the longer he looked at it.

Titanion Realm, Soaring Bird City.

Mike had finally returned to Soaring Bird City after delivering the message to Rose Manor. Before he could even take a sip of water, Torin summoned him to the temporary tent.

"Well? What's the situation?"

Mike swallowed hard, his throat bobbing in thirst. Wyatt quickly passed him a jug of water, and Mike guzzled over half of it, breathing easier at last.

"Master, good news!"

Before Torin could press him for more details, Mike spoke excitedly.

"Her Highness the Princess asked me to inform you that she's already aware of what's happening here."

Hearing that, Torin breathed a small sigh of relief, though his mind tensed again soon after.

"Does the Princess have a next move in mind?"

Mike nodded and spilled all he knew.

"Her Highness will send a squad from the Rose Knight Regiment to stay in Soaring Bird City. Although we won't be able to command them, there's no question they'll be our allies."

Torin was thrilled. This was the best news he had heard for some time.

"Master, I've picked up on another piece of information."

"Go on—what is it?"

Torin, too excited, grabbed Mike by his collar. Realizing his own eagerness, Torin let go, smoothing Mike's clothes while speaking in a calmer tone.

"Have another drink and catch your breath, then continue."

Mike showed his gratitude with a look, sipped some water, and went on.

"This Rose Knight Regiment is being led by Lambert, a fellow knight. He was the one who accompanied His Royal Highness the Prince on that trip to the Giant territory to bring back the Princess.

Master, we know him, and he's friendly to us. Remember, when they first came to Soaring Bird City, he visited you personally, and you two had a pleasant chat."

Prompted by Mike, Torin recalled the noble-like knight who had first arrived in Soaring Bird City.

"Him?"

Torin felt a mix of surprise and delight, but also a little anxious. He had already accepted part of the knight's legacy himself, and being a knight too, he worried Lambert might recognize that.

Half thrilled and half uneasy—that was Torin's mindset now.

"Do you know when this knight will arrive in Soaring Bird City?"

After mulling it over, Torin asked another crucial question.

"Probably in the next few days. Right before I left, the Rose Knight Regiment was assembling."

Upon hearing that, Torin nodded, deep in thought.

"Now go. Take stock of the benefits reserved for Princess Ava's share. Keep a close eye on it. No one is allowed to touch it without my explicit order."

Chapter 563 563: Mighty being

Radiant Continent, where the flames descend and the battle blazes on.

This is a sight of combat that Orion has never laid eyes upon before!

Those fire-element mages, corrupted and mutated, unleash searing flames among the cave spiders, tearing the battlefield apart until everything in view seems like a scorching inferno.

Fireballs streak through the air, flames surge in storms, and in this white-hot confrontation, death and screams resound as though the world is unleashing its final burst of passion.

Magnificent magic, colossal destructive power—this is the brilliance of the Radiant Continent mages!

Yet this splendor, under the overwhelming numbers of cave spiders, is like sparks in the darkness: flaring brightly for a moment before being snuffed out.

"I can imagine that when this continent was at its peak, this must have been a cradle of magic, a sacred land in your hearts."

Standing on the back of a giant cave spider, Orion looks out at the continuous eruptions of fire on the front lines and shares these thoughts with Gandalf.

This is a world of magic, and also a world in decay.

If this place were in its prime, even sending a million cave spiders wouldn't guarantee Orion's safe return.

"But that glory is in the past!"

"When this world is finally destroyed, perhaps no one will remember this stretch of history anymore."

Mage Gandalf feels a surge of conflicting emotions. He longs to bury this sinful, filthy world quickly, yet at the same time, he's still deeply attached to it.

"Gavriel's death—does it mean Elowen has realized the danger?" Orion is now invading Archmage Elowen's territory.

However, when Orion and his forces reached the area, there was no sign or trace of Elowen.

Along the way, they encountered numerous low to mid-tier wicked mages who attacked them, allowing Orion to witness all sorts of bizarre magic and summons.

"She definitely fled!"

"These wicked mages will abandon everything if their lives are in peril. Unless they have no way out, they're not going to face you in a decisive battle."

Wicked mages may not fear death, but no one wants to die in vain.

Avoiding a stronger opponent is the choice most people would make.

If there truly is no escape, that's when they fight for their lives.

"Have you ever tried to fight back?"

For some reason, Orion suddenly asks Gandalf this question.

"Fight back against these wicked mages?"

"Of course we have, but we just don't have the strength."

Orion shakes his head, realizing Gandalf misunderstood.

"I mean, way back in the beginning."

"Did you ever resist that mighty being who invaded the Radiant Continent?"

By "mighty being," he refers to the evil being that siphoned away most of the world essence.

Hearing this, Gandalf falls silent.

"Lord Orion, do you think weak existences like us even have the power to resist?"

"Long ago, the mages stronger and more capable than I either left or tried to. Those who remained have either fallen into corruption or been killed."

"If not for..."

Gandalf's voice grows quieter and trails off entirely.

He's not being dramatic; some truths are just too heavy to speak aloud.

"Let's head straight for the central region."

"Our sweeping advance won't go unnoticed, so they've surely gotten word by now."

"Let's get there and take them all out in one go!"

Hunting each enemy one by one is safer but would drag things out.

Forcing these Legendary level adversaries to gather might create a bit more trouble—though only a minor inconvenience.

In Orion's eyes, Legendary level mages are no more than slightly larger ants.

Orion is powerful enough to challenge an arch lord, and he wants to deal with the Radiant Continent in the most time-efficient manner possible.

He's not inclined to waste too much time on them.

He has plans to return to Stoneheart City and join Aldous in settling another war.

Time is running tight.

"Lord Orion, won't it be too dangerous for us to do this?"

Gandalf knows Orion is strong, but there are four Legendary level mages left on the enemy side. Even if Gandalf manages to hold off one, Orion will still have to face three.

From Gandalf's perspective, that's a losing battle.

"No matter. The sooner we finish them off, the sooner you can all be ushered into a new world, right?"

Gandalf watches Orion's figure as he strides forward, feeling for a moment that Orion is almost awe-inspiring.

"All right."

In the central region, after wicked mage Gavriel fell in battle, Corvinus, Alaric, Thornas, and Elowen received the news not long afterward.

They've been on high alert, maintaining contact with each other all this time.

Everyone in Radiant Continent knows that it's a hopeless realm, and every inhabitant dreams of escaping it.

This includes the five Legendary level mages—Corvinus, Alaric, Thornas, Elowen, and the late Gavriel.

After their minds were corrupted, the strongest among them, Corvinus, offered sacrifices to a certain evil being in exchange for the chance to leave the Radiant Continent.

Whether this entity is an arch lord or a demigod, even Corvinus doesn't know.

But he does know the condition for leaving: helping that evil being siphon what remains of the world essence.

That is also why Corvinus and the others have been gnawing away at the World Tree.

In the central region of the Radiant Continent stands an unimaginably tall mountain.

It's more accurate to call it a magic tower rather than a mountain.

After most of the world essence was drawn away by that mighty being, the pioneers of Radiant Continent set up a powerful magical barrier around the World Tree to slow the world's collapse and grant the survivors more time to escape.

However, Corvinus, Alaric, Thornas, and Elowen accepted a deal with a certain evil being, agreeing to extract the remaining world essence so they could leave this realm sooner.

"They're already surging toward the central region!"

Outside the barrier near the World Tree, the four mages stand facing different directions, continually corroding the barrier's power.

One of them, a mage whose form is hidden beneath a cloak, speaks in a low voice about Orion and his legion of cave spiders.

"Corvinus, just how much longer are we going to waste time?"

"If we delay any further, the enemy will be right at our doorstep!"

The other two grow restless, trying to dissolve the barrier's magic while directing anxious glances at Corvinus.

Unlike the others, Corvinus isn't wearing a mage's cloak. He's naked from the waist up, skin stretched tight over his bones.

He's gaunt, with hair and beard dyed an eerie shade of gray-green.

Chapter 564 564: Snake Pits

"What are you afraid of?"

Even if that Giant from another world is a peak Legendary-level foe, there's no need for us to cower. One of you can keep that old fool Gandalf occupied, while the remaining three of us surround and kill that Giant. Victory isn't out of the question."

Corvinus's voice is sharp, sending a chill down anyone's spine at first sound.

"Once we shatter the barrier and siphon the remaining world essence, we'll gain that being's guidance."

"We're all already corrupt, our power source is the same as theirs, so when the time comes, we'll usher in a new beginning."

"A vibrant world—tell me you don't crave that?"

Speaking of the future, Corvinus narrows his eyes, which glow with a wicked green light.

"Besides, isn't the reason you all came here to lure that otherworldly powerhouse my way?"

"Relax. In the end, we'll sacrifice those worthless stragglers that follow along, and summon that being's avatar."

"Then that Giant from another realm will undoubtedly die."

"Kehehe..."

Corvinus's voice grows louder and more maniacal, as though he can already see a future that pleases him immensely. The other three let out their own eerie chuckles in response.

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Titanion Realm, Lysinthia City.

Battle erupts once more; this time, the attacking Merfolk come in even greater numbers. The Alpha-level warriors hidden among them have increased from three to seven.

However, Lysinthia City still has its arrow tower as a stronghold, plus defenders Lysinthia, Twilight Viper, Rockwell, Clawpincher, and thunderhawk. For now, the Sea Race's relentless waves cannot break through.

"These Sea Race forces are endless. Their Merfolk warriors seem to multiply no matter how many we kill. Just how many armies do they have left?"

Rockwell stands beside Lysinthia. He's been through countless bloody wars, yet the continual surge of enemies undermines even his confidence.

Each time the Sea Race returns, they bring more Merfolk warriors and additional Alpha-level fighters.

Once or twice is manageable, but every attack is like that. It's impossible for Lysinthia City's forces to hold out forever.

"Don't panic—the prophet has sent reinforcements again. They're already on their way."

Lysinthia's voice is cold as she gazes at Mist Bay with a furrowed brow.

Among those present, she knows the Sea Race best. The oceans belong to them; the northern seas are under the Tidefang Clan's dominion. Put plainly, the Sea Race attacking Lysinthia City now may not even qualify as a true vanguard.

There's a strong chance the Sea Race lord who rules this stretch of sea has no idea a war has broken out in Mist Bay.

It's possible the conflict at Lysinthia City is nothing more than a personal campaign launched by the local Merfolk leader.

Lysinthia suspects this, and indeed, it reflects the reality.

"Reinforcements? Did the prophet send Lorelia and her little spiders?"

Rockwell, having guarded Blackstone City for so long, knows its military structure well. Ever since Stoneheart Horde expanded its territory, its armies have scattered to defend various regions. Blackstone City in the north is no longer well-stocked with troops, leaving only a few forces available to deploy.

"No, the troops are coming from the northern Snake Pits. They're already on the move!"

Lysinthia glances north, anticipation visible in her eyes.

After all, controlling snakes is her specialty. Once the snake armies arrive, she won't even need to take action herself; the Gorgon behind her can do plenty of damage.

"The northern Snake Pits? So it's that same snake legion from back then?"

Rockwell's faint surprise reveals he's already guessed their origins. Blackstone City was invaded by a swarm of snakes once before, leaving him with a strong impression.

"There's also an Alpha-level fighter named Gurnar coming along." (For clarity: the serpentfolk assassin Orion killed before was Ridi, while this newcomer is fiend serpent Gurnar, noted for his cunning and discernment.)

As for how many reinforcements fiend serpent Gurnar will bring, even Lysinthia can't say for certain.

"To be honest, I've never visited the Abyssal Chasm up north! And there's also the northern ice plains—that's part of our Horde territory too!"

Rockwell heaves a sigh, astonished at how vast the Stoneheart Horde has grown without his noticing. There are swaths of land he's never even set foot in.

Though he speaks with wonder, his tone resonates with unmistakable pride. Both Lysinthia and Clawpincher can clearly hear it.

"Get ready—the Sea Race is going to launch another assault!"

At Lysinthia's warning, she raises her sword in command. Rockwell tightens his grip on the stone axe in his hand, eyes sharpening in a flash.

"Come on, then. Let me cut down another Alpha-level Merfolk and rack up more merits."

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Radiant Continent, where beasts swell in waves.

Having seen so many dense fungal creatures in the past, Orion no longer feels any awe at the sight of a million cave spiders sweeping across the land.

Instead, Lorelia—hidden amidst the spider legion, orchestrating the battle—seems overjoyed.

In that unstoppable tide, she reaps lives like a Reaper.

It's a thrill she's never experienced until now.

"Hehehe... So this is how exhilarating it feels to lead my children on a campaign across the land! From now on, I've got to follow my master and invade every unruly foreign world we come across!"

Admittedly, she's gotten carried away after this effortless first victory. Orion, however, welcomes it. From a certain angle, Lorelia is developing her own combat confidence and style.

Commanding the army in person and triumphing stirs pride in her. It sparks delight in battle and a craving for plunder.

That's why at this very moment, she steps forward to present Orion with a Bagbird pouch, wearing a look as if to say, "Master, look at all these treasures—praise me, please!"

Orion can see the unprecedented joy on her face.

"Master, these are the spoils of war for you, from Lorelia!"

Truth be told, Lorelia understands she's only reached this point because the Stoneheart Horde has constantly nurtured and supported her.

A huge portion of the Horde's early resources was invested in her.

Now she's discovered she can hunt on her own—she can give something back. That genuine sense of fulfillment is impossible to hide.

"Well done."

Orion takes the Bagbird pouch, smiling slightly as he praises her.

Chapter 565 565: I believe she can

"From now on, if you want any resources, you'll need to exchange them using your battle achievements.

Earn more battle achievements and strive to get the resources you need from me to advance to Legendary level.

Show everyone else in the horde that our Lorelia has truly grown up!"

Orion reached out and placed a hand on Lorelia's head when she leaned in for an intimate moment. She ended up pouting, her head pinned in place.

Transitioning from being nurtured to giving back to the horde brought Lorelia a sense of unfamiliar but genuine joy.

"Master, don't worry. I'll definitely gather more resources for you."

Orion nodded and gave her a reminder.

"Alright, off you go. And don't get distracted when commanding the battle."

Lorelia froze for a moment, looking a bit reluctant, then returned to the front lines.

"Lord Orion, are you sure your pet can really reach the Legendary level?"

Ascending to Legendary is notoriously difficult in any world. The fact that Orion could so casually offer Legendary-level resources to Lorelia left Gandalf in disbelief.

"Others might not make it, but I believe she can."

Orion took out a spiritual crystal from his Bagbird pouches, fused it into his trident, and spoke with absolute conviction.

In the early stages, most of Orion's accumulated resources had been poured into Lorelia. This cave spider broodmother's potential and talents had grown substantially without anyone noticing. Others might not have paid much attention, but Orion, as her master, was fully aware of it.

Lorelia's strength wasn't weak at all. She was already at Alpha rank, poised to break through to Alpha peak any moment, then charge straight for the Legendary level. This was one of the main reasons Orion had brought her out to gain experience—he wanted Lorelia to develop more combat expertise and broaden her horizons, fueling her desire to keep improving her strength.

In this way, Lorelia would have a far better chance of hitting Legendary level and increasing her odds of success. Unlike the other Alpha-level members of the Stoneheart Horde, Lorelia had been lavishly fed with resources since she was young. Her potential far surpassed Rendall's or Onyx's.

Moreover, Lorelia was the broodmother raised by the Stoneheart Horde from the very beginning. Her deep bond and loyalty to the horde ran even deeper than Soraya's. Also, the horde elders—Lilith, Delilah, Rendall, Onyx, and the others—definitely trusted Lorelia more than Soraya.

Lorelia had always guarded the underground fissure. She might have seemed lazy and carefree, but in reality, she had been carrying out Orion's orders all along. This was a big reason Orion, Lilith, Rendall, and Onyx favored her so much.

Now that Stoneheart Horde's territory was expanding rapidly, Orion desperately needed a Legendary-level being he could personally groom, someone to guard Stoneheart City.

Yes, guard Stoneheart City.

Ever since last winter, there had been no Legendary-level being stationed at Stoneheart City in the south. It was fine for a short while, but eventually, the lack of a powerful presence would draw unwanted attention from other races.

Moreover, the horde couldn't afford to leave the void passage in the southern territory unguarded year after year.

Lastly, Orion wanted to keep mounting cross-realm invasions in the long term. That meant someone needed to free him from everyday responsibilities while also holding the territory. Valkorath Realm had Soraya; Blackstone City had Lumi. Meanwhile, for Stoneheart City, Orion was placing his hopes on Lorelia.

As for Gustalon and the abyssal dragon, the former was unusually gifted and extremely powerful—Orion needed his assistance in otherworldly campaigns. Orion could summon the abyssal dragon at will, and it provided a critical edge in certain environments.

Collecting his thoughts, Orion shot Gandalf a quick glance and spoke in a calm tone.

"Legendary level might be the pinnacle of existence here on the Radiant Continent, but in other worlds, there are plenty of Legendary fighters."

He left it at that, offering Gandalf only a subtle hint. In truth, Gandalf had already been extraordinarily lucky to be scouted by the Deputy Commander.

"How far are we from the central region?"

"At our current marching speed, we can get there in no more than a month!"

A month still felt a bit slow. Orion frowned, pondering the matter seriously.

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Stoneheart City, mysterious tavern.

Delilah sat alone by a window on the third floor, watching a nearby store under renovation across the street. In truth, "renovation" might be too strong a word: Nico and Kadir were simply carving a sign in Common Tongue outside the store.

The shop Nico and Kadir ended up buying turned out to be just a short distance from Delilah's mysterious tavern. For the past few days, Delilah had personally watched Fatty's General Store be built from scratch.

"Compared to those horde members who only know how to fight, these two are surprisingly cunning and capable!"

Delilah murmured to herself. She reached out, picked up a glass, and took a sip of the orange-red liquor inside. Both the glassware and the drink came from human merchant caravans—Delilah, as Stoneheart City's de facto ruler, had been gifted several sets.

"People, goods, trade, food, slaves... So this is what civilization feels like?"

Delilah ran her fingers along the goblet. Observing the day-to-day life of Stoneheart City, she was delving deeply into what defines a faction and its civilization.

But at that moment, a figure appeared in the shadows, interrupting her thoughts.

"What is it?"

"Your Majesty, we've received news from Soaring Bird City."

"Speak."

"Some lizardfolk have been spotted wandering near the ogre territory and human kingdom lands. A merchant caravan apparently captured a few of them. These lizardfolk have arrived in Soaring Bird City and are being taken deeper into human kingdom territory."

The mention of lizardfolk made Delilah think of that powerful ogre lord. He had spent several days eating and drinking on the tavern's third floor before returning to the ogre territory. Now that lizardfolk had shown up in the borderlands between humans and ogres, the implications were numerous.

"A very clever move, indeed. They opened up the trade route and diverted the lizardfolk's wrath onto the human kingdom, easing the ogres' burden for now.

That two-headed ogre lord is truly shrewd, not at all like those brainless, violent ogres."

Delilah shook her head, realizing how shallow her previous assumptions had been.

In the north, she had met a wise giant who had overpowered her with strength and also conquered her in bed.

In the south, she saw a ferocious-looking ogre who was actually brilliant.

"You really can't judge anything by its appearance, can you?"

After a long pause, Delilah sighed, reminding herself to always look deeper into the essence of things.

"Is there more?"

Chapter 566 566: A straightforward idea

"Soaring Bird City has sent another new caravan on its way to Stoneheart City."

This news did not catch Delilah's attention at first. However, the shadow's next words made her rise abruptly from her seat.

"Your Majesty, in the human caravan, we've discovered a succubus slave."

A flash of killing intent crossed Delilah's face, her gaze cold and chilling.

"Is she one of the scouts we sent out—a member of our own tribe?"

Delilah's voice was frosty as she pressed for more details.

"No, she isn't, Your Majesty."

"Not one of ours?"

That unexpected answer made Delilah look back at the shape in the darkness.

"Your Majesty, that succubus slave does not belong to our particular bloodline. She's from a different, entirely new branch."

Silence fell. The shadow's words shocked Delilah into a long pause. After a while, Delilah's slightly excited voice broke the quiet.

"You're telling me there's another succubus bloodline out there?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Where is their tribe located?"

"We don't know yet. Our scouts couldn't get too close to the succubus slave—the humans were guarding her closely."

Delilah was clearly dissatisfied with this answer.

"Find out. Put all our efforts into tracking them down."

"Your Majesty, the caravan is currently on its way here, and as you know, we have priority purchasing rights for any slaves. That includes this succubus."

The shadow's words made Delilah's eyes light up. She immediately understood his message. By using the Stoneheart Horde's priority purchase rights, they could buy that succubus openly and avoid a lot of trouble.

"Excellent. Still, keep searching for the rest of her tribe's whereabouts."

"Understood."

Only when the silent figure disappeared did Delilah's expression of excitement fade a little.

Among the original four core races of the Stoneheart Horde—giants, succubi, buffalofolk, and obsidian golems—giants and succubi had always been the most numerous.

Of course, that was only in the context of what used to be the Black Forest.

As Orion's power grew and his territories expanded—and as new races joined—the status of these four races within the massive faction gradually became less pronounced, limited mainly by their small populations.

The giant tribe was doing fine; after absorbing the southern Starveil giants, their numbers soared, and they also boasted the highest number of Alpha-level beings, securing their place as the Stoneheart Horde's leading race.

However, the succubi, buffalofolk, and obsidian golems found themselves overshadowed. Their inherent advantages were less noticeable. Although these three races had also been trying to grow their numbers over the past few years, real results take much longer to see.

For the succubi and buffalofolk, birth rates were not too low, so they could gradually expand. But as for the obsidian golems, their low birth rate and slow maturity made any short-term population growth nearly impossible, keeping them extremely rare even among the four major races.

At present, other groups like gnolls, beastfolk, orcs, and bear-men boasted far larger populations under the Stoneheart Horde's banner. Even the Blackstone tribe—Orion's own group—remained in a long growth phase despite heavy resource investment. After all, newborns need a significant amount of time to mature.

Now that their scouts had potentially located another group of succubi, Delilah was convinced that if they could absorb these new succubi, the status of her own race could rise within the Stoneheart Horde.

"A new succubus lineage... Where are they hiding?"

...

On the Radiant Continent, the fighting erupted once again; beasts were swarming like an unstoppable tide.

"Squeak, squeak—devour them!"

"Yes, just like that! Surround them all and tear them to pieces!"

"You idiots... shoot silk webs... trip him up..."

Lorelia was perched high on her nest, enthusiastically commanding the battle with a bow in hand, occasionally firing a poisonous arrow herself.

A million spiderlings swept forward like a flood, repeatedly encountering resistance from wicked mages and vile beasts along the way, all of whom ended up devoured down to the bone.

"Esteemed Orion, in no more than seven days, we'll reach the central region."

Gandalf's voice had become more respectful and more energetic. It had been a very long time since he'd witnessed such a one-sided battle. Since joining Orion's expedition, Gandalf had barely needed to lift a finger; every foe was simply overwhelmed.

"Seven days? Sounds about right."

Orion muttered, extending his right hand. In a flash, the trident Flame of Will appeared. Flames danced at the tip of the spear, and together with his wind-whipped cloak, Orion looked even more imposing and fearless.

"Gandalf, keep an eye on Lorelia. The army should keep moving forward. I'll go deal with the troublemakers myself."

With that, Orion transformed into lightning and zoomed away. Gandalf was alarmed; he immediately guessed what Orion intended to do.

He wanted to caution him, but it was too late.

"That's too risky! Lord Orion, are you really that confident?"

Gandalf couldn't bring himself to stop Orion—after all, Orion was the true commander of this army. Charging ahead by himself, Orion's plan was obviously to settle scores with Corvinus, Alaric, Thornas, and Elowen before the main force arrived.

It was a straightforward idea: defeat the four of them early to avoid heavy losses.

His reasons were many. One of them was that battles between Legendary-level combatants lead to massive collateral damage.

The enemy had four Legendary-level mages, and Orion couldn't contain or kill all four at once if they fought simultaneously. If he didn't handle them beforehand, a single large-scale spell from any of these foes might decimate the spider swarm or even Lorelia herself.

Even though a million spiderlings sounded impressive, they were still relatively fragile against powerful magic. Orion wanted to minimize losses by taking the initiative now with his current strength.

...

Elsewhere, outside the World Tree's barrier.

The already unstable barrier, weakened by the combined corrosive efforts of Corvinus, Alaric, Thornas, and Elowen, stood on the brink of shattering at any moment.

"Just a little longer—no more than half a day—and we'll succeed!"

"Once we extract the world essence, we'll be picked up and taken away!"

Corvinus's voice was both excited and eager. He was on the verge of leaving this hopeless world, planning to join the new faction from another realm. It would be a fresh start.

Just then, Corvinus sensed a formidable presence headed swiftly toward the central region.

"Oh shit. That giant from the other world is on his way!"

"Alaric, Thornas, Elowen—stick to the plan. You three go stall him!"

Chapter 567 567: Absolute defense?

Corvinus steadied the magical formation while shouting a warning to the other three.

Alaric, Thornas, and Elowen heard him and reached out with their senses. Before long, they too detected Orion's presence.

"There's only one aura. That old fool Gandalf didn't follow him!"

"Perfect. Let's take this chance to surround and kill the intruder."

"Agreed!"

Meanwhile, lightning cracked and thunder boomed as Orion caught sight of an enormous mage tower in the distance. It loomed like a mountain, its peak blazing with magical radiance. A faintly transparent barrier flickered overhead—so weak that it looked ready to vanish at any moment.

"Excellent. They're all gathered here."

A cold gleam flashed in Orion's eyes, and he sped up his flight.

However, just as he was about to reach the tower, three mages intercepted him.

"Stranger from another world, this is not your place," a sinister voice hissed in Orion's ear.

Three figures appeared roughly three hundred feet away, arranging themselves in a triangular formation to trap him. Simultaneously, a pyramid-shaped magical barrier rose around Orion, shutting him in completely.

"Thornas, stop talking to him," Elowen snapped. "He's already locked inside our magical formation. As soon as we pin him down until Corvinus finishes corroding the World Tree's barrier, we'll all join forces to kill him."

It was the same Elowen whom Orion and Gandalf had gone looking for previously. Wicked mage Gavriel's death had terrified her into fleeing here for protection.

Orion eyed the barrier, its surface crawling with dark magical runes that rippled like waves. Raising his trident, he slashed the air, unleashing a lightning-charged spear that slammed into the barrier. It only stirred a circle of ripples before vanishing.

"Heh heh heh... Don't waste your energy," one of the mages cackled. "Just wait quietly for your death. Our formation here is an impenetrable shield formed by three Legendary-level mages working together. Even if you've reached the peak of Legendary, you can't break it."

"At our level, this is absolute defense!"

Alaric was the one who spoke, a mage clad in robes and wielding a staff. He chanted continuously, clearly serving as the keystone of this barrier.

Orion remained impassive, gazing at the three of them as though they were already corpses.

There were just three Legendary-level mages blocking his way, plus the one whose aura came from the tower—a mage busy corroding the World Tree's defensive shield.

"That's fine. As long as they haven't run, I can deal with them."

After making a quick mental calculation, Orion glanced at the trio staring him down, then curled his lips in contempt.

"Absolute defense? You've got to be joking. There's no such thing as 'absolute defense' in this world."

He activated his Titan Form, letting power surge through every inch of his body. Gathering his Eightfold Spear Barrage, he conjured countless spears in rapid succession. They vanished and reappeared, merging again and again until a single crimson trident took shape at Orion's side.

"Not good—pour in more mana!" Alaric shouted. Thornas and Elowen responded immediately, channeling greater energy into the magical barrier.

In that instant, Orion's crimson trident coalesced fully.

Boom!

The scarlet trident streaked toward Alaric's position. Startled, Alaric instinctively triggered his own protective magic, enveloping himself in fiery armor adorned with constantly shifting runes—both gorgeous and ominous.

The massive blow rocked the magical barrier with violent ripples, but it didn't shatter immediately.

"It held!"

"That was close—nearly gave me a heart attack."

Seeing that the barrier remained intact, Alaric, Thornas, and Elowen all exhaled in relief. But then a roar rang out as Orion vanished from his original spot and reappeared right in front of Alaric.

Thud!

Empowered by Swift Charge and Instant Impact, Orion slammed the trident into the barrier directly before Alaric.

For a moment, Alaric's eyes went wide, his pupils unfocused.

"This can't be!"

Crack, crack, crack!

The barrier splintered like glass. Before Alaric could react, Orion's left hand shot forward and crushed his skull.

"Absolute defense? Doesn't exist."

Bang!

Thus fell Alaric, one of the five arch wicked mages. After collecting the spiritual crystals that dropped from him, Orion slowly turned.

His cold gaze now rested on Thornas and Elowen. The killing intent rolling off him startled the pair from their momentary daze.

"Run!"

"Flee!"

Thornas and Elowen moved in perfect unison, bolting in opposite directions. The terrifying clash they'd just witnessed convinced them that Orion wasn't a mere Legendary-level foe. His power felt more like that of an arch lord, inspiring only desperation.

"You think you can run? Too late!"

Orion activated Instant Impact once again, appearing behind Elowen in a blur of movement. The trident thrust forward, skewering her clean through.

"Don't... kill me... Please, spare my life!" Elowen's eyes momentarily flickered with terror, then despair, followed by frenzied malice.

A red light flared deep in her gaze—she tried to self-destruct.

Splurt!

Orion was faster. The instant before her body could detonate, he crushed her torso, snuffing out her final attack. Then he whirled around, flitting across the battlefield to chase down Thornas.

"Hahaha... If I'm going to die, I'm taking you with me!" Thornas screamed. Just as Orion closed in, Thornas blew himself up in a violent burst of magical power.

In a thunderous roar, the Legendary-level mage self-destructed, leaving behind a gigantic sinkhole that obliterated the surrounding terrain. Standing in its center, Orion shook off the remnants of his shattered ice mail. About a third of the magical armor he'd conjured was gone.

Clearly, Thornas's self-destruction had not caused Orion any real harm.

"Such a waste—no spiritual crystal from that one," he said with a regretful sigh.

"Indeed a shame," came a deep, raspy voice. "If he hadn't blown himself up, I could have claimed even more power and life force from my sacrifices. But it no longer matters."

High atop the mage tower, wicked mage Corvinus slowly lowered his staff, a smile spreading across his ancient, weathered face. While Orion was fighting with the three mages, Corvinus had taken the opportunity to complete his sacrificial ritual.

"Giant from another world, you're tougher than I expected. But there's a power here greater than anything you can imagine. Hahaha..."

Chapter 568 568: Bizarre ability

At Corvinus's laughter, a colossal magical formation emerged, centered on the mage tower. All the magical energy and evil beings in the surrounding area were sacrificed.

The air was sucked dry, the ground heaved upward, and every wicked creature within a few miles turned to ash.

Even Orion felt the pull of the sacrificial ritual. He flickered out of sight and quickly escaped its boundaries.

The sacrificial ritual proceeded swiftly. Once it could absorb no further offerings, a mysterious figure in a black cloak and brandishing a scythe appeared in midair.

"Esteemed Nero, welcome to the Radiant Continent!"

Corvinus's voice brimmed with reverence. The stranger before him, named Nero, was the one who had agreed to guide him.

Nero lowered his gaze, looking down at Corvinus in silence. After a moment, Nero turned his head to Orion.

"Esteemed Nero, he is the enemy—the one who kept me from extracting the world essence for you."

Nero still did not speak aloud, but as soon as Corvinus finished, Nero's gaze toward Orion grew icy, filled with killing intent.

"Pathetic giant. Do you think you're worthy of contending with me for the world essence?"

Though Nero's lips never moved, his voice rang out clearly.

"Is this reaper-like figure an Arch Lord?"

"No, not an Arch Lord. It's only at the peak of the Legendary level!"

Orion frowned, wary of the being summoned before him.

Though it was indeed a peak Legendary entity, its aura gave Orion the impression of facing an Arch Lord.

There was no time to dwell on it further—the reaper was already charging at him, scythe in tow.

"What's there to fear? Giants never back down!"

Orion had slain Arch Lords before; he would not fear this mysterious reaper. While he felt some apprehension, he refused to retreat.

Clang, clang, clang!

Metal crashed against metal—such was the impact of their force—and the weapons vibrated and collided.

Orion and the reaper named Nero met in a head-on clash with no immediate victor.

"This is just an avatar!"

"An avatar of a Arch Lord!"

After colliding, Orion sensed something amiss about Nero.

The scythe-wielding powerhouse was not the true body; he was purely an avatar. Furthermore, Orion could vaguely detect a presence in Nero similar to Leonidas and Arthas.

"Good insight—you've managed to sense that this is only my avatar!"

A raspy, emotionless voice spoke by Orion's ear. It was Nero.

"You're at the peak of the Legendary level, and there's Titan blood in your veins. I must admit I underestimated you before. Now I'm giving you a chance—leave this place, and I'll forgive your offense."

Though Nero's words were devoid of emotion, his tone was lofty and condescending.

"Hahaha! You already know I have Titan blood, yet you think I'd just walk away? Ridiculous!"

Orion laughed aloud.

Although Nero's avatar was only at the peak of the Legendary tier, its true power was that of an Arch Lord. This was why Nero treated Orion with such contempt.

With a ringing crash, Orion and Nero collided again, both knocked back in opposite directions.

Orion realized that at his current strength, he couldn't easily overpower Nero, meaning this foe had to be formidable even among Arch Lords.

"Not bad. You're a peak Legendary, and you can withstand my attacks, so you're clearly able to fight above your rank."

"But you're still unworthy of contending with me for the world essence."

Nero hefted his scythe once more, charging at Orion. In response, Orion moved his palm, producing a cluster of Legendary-level life essence, which he sacrificed directly to the [Titan Emblem].

In less than the space of a single breath, Orion felt a mysterious power surge through him. The blood and life force within his body, along with his transcendent power, roiled fiercely.

"WAAAGH!"

Facing this mysterious reaper, Orion knew he could no longer hold back. With a thunderous boom, the flames on his trident flared as though drenched in oil, blazing intensely.

Enveloped in flame, Orion activated Instant Impact and lunged at Nero.

Crack, crack, crack!

With the bolstered might of his Gigantic Form, Orion's strength skyrocketed. The trident in his hands pushed forward without pause, splitting Nero's oncoming scythe bit by bit.

Then the trident pierced Nero's body, and streaks of flame burst from within. Nero's form ignited instantly!

A loud crackling filled the air as Nero's avatar was defeated in a single blow.

"Is he dead?"

Orion hovered in midair, watching Nero's burning avatar plummet to the ground.

"Hahaha... Did you really think my attack would end here?"

"What a foolish notion!"

Suddenly, Nero's voice echoed by Orion's ear again. Without stopping to think, Orion stabbed backward with his trident.

Yet there was nothing behind him.

"You're finished!"

"Accept the spiritual contamination of the Mortis clan, hahaha..."

A heartbeat later, Orion staggered. A searing pain tore through his head, and the world began to spin.

Thud!

His transcendent power went haywire, and Orion plummeted straight to the ground.

Within his consciousness, a pitch-black reaper dragging a scythe raced toward the depths of Orion's mind, laughing all the while. As it advanced, it emitted waves of mysterious mist, dispersing into eerie runes that hid themselves throughout his consciousness.

"Hehehe, whoever is corrupted by the Mortis clan—no matter their race—becomes our slave, forever enslaved to us..."

"The Radiant Continent's world essence is mine, and the world you inhabit shall also belong to the Mortis clan."

"It's all ours..."

The reaper sprinted onward, screeching and releasing more spiritual contamination. However, upon entering Orion's innermost consciousness, it spotted two brilliant flashes of blades and an extraordinarily massive heart.

"What is tha—"

Before it could even complete the sentence, the reaper was annihilated by those dazzling blade flashes.

Outside, Orion ceased his convulsions. The ferocious and agonized expression on his face gradually receded. He opened his eyes and fixed a cold gaze on Corvinus in the distance, who wanted to approach yet did not dare.

"Esteemed Nero, is that you? Have you already claimed the giant's body and soul?"

Corvinus ventured hesitantly, but Orion gave no reply.

In the next moment, Orion was behind Corvinus, driving his trident through Corvinus's skull.

Having disposed of Corvinus, and gathered up the spiritual crystals, Orion carefully examined his own state.

"So this is spiritual contamination?"

"Is this power what destroyed the Radiant Continent?"

"It corrupts the mind and consciousness directly... what a bizarre ability!"

Orion felt fortunate that the two blade flashes bestowed by the commander had saved him. Otherwise, his victory would not have come so easily.

Chapter 569 569: Demigod phantom

Orion closed his eyes, sinking into deep meditation as he continued probing his mental space.

Although Nero's spirit form had been severed, Orion's mind was already corrupt.

Scanning his consciousness, Orion couldn't shake an indescribable feeling.

"What a strange power!"

He frowned. With his current strength, dealing with spiritual contamination was still a bit beyond his ability.

An arch lord is capable of condensing a body of faith, which is essentially a fusion of faith and spirit.

If Orion possessed a body of faith, he could simply sweep it through his mental space to rid himself of those lurking malevolent elements.

"It seems I'll have to return to the Valkorath Realm as soon as possible and use the Purification Tower to cleanse this corruption."

Having sorted out the situation and decided on a plan, Orion stood and flew straight up to the top of the magic tower.

There, the nearly transparent barrier still loomed, unbroken.

He stared at it for a while, then thrust his trident forward.

Boom!

The trident was deflected, leaving Orion thoroughly astonished.

This barrier was unexpectedly sturdy, making it impossible to destroy by brute force.

"Could it be that this barrier can only be worn away gradually?"

Recalling what he had observed earlier, and combining that with the current state of the Radiant Continent, Orion quickly deduced the barrier's defensive nature.

After the Radiant Continent's apocalypse, ancestral mages sacrificed their lives and magic to forge this barrier.

It's not that it can't be shattered by force; it's simply that Orion's offensive power isn't high enough yet.

That left just one option: find mages who specialize in magical formation, and let them gradually erode the barrier piece by piece.

In fact, that is exactly why Corvinus and the others had been unable to extract the world essence this whole time.

"Seems we'll have to wait for Gandalf!"

A few days later, Gandalf and Lorelia arrived at the base of the magic tower, leading their cave spiders armies as they advanced unimpeded.

"Lord Orion, they're all gone?"

Gandalf couldn't detect the presence of Corvinus and the others, indicating they no longer existed on the Radiant Continent.

In such circumstances, there are only two possibilities—either they left, or they died.

"Their spiritual crystals are already fused into my weapon!"

Orion lifted his trident as if showing off.

During the past few days of waiting, he had merged all the spiritual crystals he obtained into the Flame of Will, strengthening the trident further.

"Wow..."

"Lord Orion, your power is beyond belief."

Gandalf could only offer sincere praise, lacking better words to describe his current feelings.

"Heh heh heh... They were simply too weak!"

Orion put away his trident, saying nothing of Nero's avatar.

He knew perfectly well that the Deputy Commander must have anticipated exactly this situation when sending him here.

"How should we break through this magical barrier?"

Orion pointed at the barrier protecting the World Tree, shifting this troublesome question over to Gandalf.

"It's a defensive barrier, and the only way to break it is by wearing it down with magic," Gandalf replied.

"A barrier like this will fall in, at most, one day."

He reached out, touching the luminous barrier, his eyes filled with a wistful sense of nostalgia.

"It's all over now," Gandalf sighed, channeling his magic into the barrier to begin its dissolution.

...

"Master, here are some trophies Lorelia wants to offer you!"

Lorelia came bearing gifts, her face beaming with delight.

The joy and sense of victory in the wake of such a conquest had her riding high.

"Master, next time Lorelia wants to follow you again and fight in other worlds."

Orion put away the Bagbird pouches Lorelia handed him, offering her a compliment that left her positively gleeful.

"You've been doing well lately—how are our little spiders holding up?"

The moment he mentioned losses, the previously exhilarated Lorelia immediately looked crestfallen.

"Master, we've lost nearly 40% of our little spiders!"

As the cave spiders armies forged ahead, they hadn't encountered any massive opposing armies, but there had been no shortage of wicked mages along the way.

Between the wicked mages and various beasts that used self-destruction tactics, the little spiders took severe casualties.

In a sense, Lorelia had paved the entire path with their blood and flesh.

"Once we're back, the horde will allocate you some resources and restore your spider numbers," Orion reassured Lorelia, then shifted his attention to Gustalon.

"My lord, I traveled all across this continent but found no valuable minerals or magical plants—nor anything else of real worth. All the evil beings here simply devour one another."

"There's nothing of any value."

Scouring the land for special resources was another task Orion had assigned Gustalon, but it turned out this was a barren continent indeed.

No wonder it had been abandoned—if it were resource-rich, it wouldn't be in such dire straits now.

One day later, the magic barrier dissolved.

"Lord Orion, the barrier is broken!"

"The World Tree is inside!"

Gandalf's voice rang out. Orion, who had been resting with his eyes closed, opened them and looked at the World Tree.

Once a majestic sight, it now stood at only 2 feet tall, and 99% of it had withered away.

There were no leaves—just a trunk about to lose all traces of vitality.

Gold-colored magical sigils stretched across the bark, dimming and flaking off in places.

This was Orion's war trophy.

Just as Orion prepared to step forward and study the remains of the World Tree, a shadow darted out from its withered trunk, coalescing into a mighty figure.

Its eyes glowed crimson beneath a hooded cloak, and its lower half was concealed, revealing nothing.

"A demigod phantom!"

Orion's pupils shrank instantly. His body went rigid and ice-cold, as if sensing the threat of death.

Lorelia, standing behind him, felt the same. Countless little spiders trembled, completely immobilized by the crushing power radiating from the demigod phantom.

That release of pressure alone claimed even more spider lives.

"It's just a phantom!"

In this critical moment, the familiar voice of Deputy Commander Edward rang out, and Orion felt a wave of relief wash over him.

A hazy figure emerged from Gandalf's body; Deputy Commander Edward's powerful presence enveloped Orion, Gandalf, Lorelia, and the others.

"Heh heh heh... Who would have thought that by leaving behind a little world essence here, I'd lure out a demigod-level being?

Devouring you is far more beneficial than that scrap of world essence," boomed the shadow, its echo a deafening roar.

"What a coincidence—I want to devour you too."

Deputy Commander Edward's voice was every bit as lofty, devoid of emotion.

As soon as he spoke, the two demigod phantoms collided with brute force, both trying to use their divine power and faith to grind each other out.

In the end, neither one could claim victory.

Chapter 570 570: Remnant of the world tree

"Very well. Your skills are impressive!"

"Tell me your name!"

The shadowy figure's tone softened somewhat. After realizing it couldn't devour Deputy Commander Edward's demigod phantom, it began probing for the Deputy Commander's background.

"Hmph, Banish!"

Deputy Commander Edward paid no attention to the shadow and merely snorted coldly, unleashing his ultimate move.

As soon as Deputy Commander Edward finished speaking, a dimensional rift appeared behind the shadow—dark and unfathomable.

"Spatial power!"

The shadow screeched, and its phantom rapidly expanded like a patch, attempting to cover and mend the rift.

"Banish!"

However, Deputy Commander Edward's voice rang out again, and the fluctuations of his divine power grew increasingly violent.

"Banish!"

"Banish!"

After three consecutive cries of "Banish," the shadow could no longer resist the spatial forces and was dragged into the dimensional rift.

"Damn you—I'll remember your aura!"

"I, Ashen Mortis, swear on the name of the Mortis clan that I will find you and devour you."

Accompanied by this menacing threat, the demigod named Ashen and his phantom were pulled completely into the dimensional rift, vanishing without a trace.

"Your body seems to have some issues. Make sure you visit the Purification Tower soon."

Deputy Commander Edward's demigod phantom was growing weak. Right before disappearing, he offered Orion a reminder.

Orion nodded slightly.

Not until he could no longer sense any demigod aura did he finally allow himself to relax.

"Is it... over?"

No one knew how long it took before Gandalf's shaky voice finally broke the silence.

Ever since that sinister demigod phantom had appeared, Gandalf, Lorelia, and Gustalon had been utterly overwhelmed, incapable of the slightest resistance.

Gandalf, at least, was a legendary-level mage; after the demigod's aura faded, he gradually managed to steady himself.

As for Lorelia and Gustalon, they remained in a state of shock.

"It's all over!"

"You're about to be guided to a new beginning, and the sins of the Radiant Continent have been washed away."

"This world itself is also about to vanish completely."

Orion's voice was calm. Beneath that composure, though, lurked a deep-seated fear of demigod power.

Honestly speaking, if Orion had faced a demigod phantom by himself, he wouldn't have stood a chance.

"Go set up the Source Siphon Array. Once it's in place, you'll be able to leave the Radiant Continent!"

Orion spoke up to remind them. They were now at the final step, and the remaining world essence within this world was his hard-earned bounty.

"Understood, Lord Orion!"

Gandalf was a mage with strong mental power. After hearing Orion's words, he had already recovered completely.

He walked to the World Tree, took out a collection of magical materials, and began building the formation.

"Lord Orion, do you want to extract the world essence directly, or would you prefer sealing it into this dying World Tree?"

Before constructing the magical formation, Gandalf consulted Orion for his decision.

"What's the difference?"

Orion wasn't too familiar with world essence, so he didn't know which choice to make.

"Taking the world essence out directly makes it more convenient for your immediate use."

"If we seal the world essence into the World Tree, this portion of the World Tree's remains will become an extraordinarily precious material."

Gandalf pointed at the World Tree and explained further to Orion.

"Precious material?"

Orion genuinely had no clue, so he pressed for more details.

"Yes. The World Tree itself is among the most mysterious and creative substances in existence."

"Sealing the world essence within it would allow you to harness part of the World Tree's abilities."

"This remnant of the World Tree could serve as a top-tier material for crafting and alchemy, with numerous special applications."

"Without the world essence, this World Tree would turn to ash and be completely useless."

Hearing Gandalf's explanation, Orion quickly made up his mind.

"Seal the world essence into the World Tree."

To be honest, while world essence could strengthen one's power, it couldn't push Orion to become an arch lord.

At best, it might help elevate one of his subordinates to an Alpha peak.

However, Orion already had abundant resources—dark source crystals and life essence were more than sufficient.

So, he chose the World Tree's materials without hesitation.

Moreover, Gandalf's reminder triggered two other thoughts in Orion's mind.

The first concerned something that happened in the Valkorath Realm, where, after slaying a broodmother evolution, he not only received legendary equipment rewards through Deputy Commander Edward but also gained a cluster of life essence, a survivor's treasure box, and a mysterious liquid in a bottle.

Orion had already opened the survivor's treasure box and obtained a defensive piece of Alpha gear, which he gave to Lilith, who was pregnant.

As for the bottle, it contained a rare liquid that belonged specifically to the slime molds race—a type of miraculous water that enabled super evolution. Both the broodmother of the slime molds and her broodmother counterpart had evolved by devouring that water.

Naturally, the broodmother evolution Orion faced later had done the same.

That was the first matter, and it wasn't really connected to the World Tree's remnants.

The second matter was something from long ago.

Back then, Saintess Violet of the Garland Tribe had willingly transformed herself into a seed so she could bear Orion's offspring. To this day, there had been no response from that seed.

After Orion subdued the Thunderwood Forest, the remaining members of the Garland Tribe also joined the Stoneheart Horde.

From the tribe's surviving elder, Orion learned about a method to hasten the seed's growth: planting it.

Because the Garland Tribe were plant-based spirits, when Violet turned into a seed, the normal approach was to wait patiently for her natural awakening.

However, there was another, more radical method—planting the seed into suitable soil, letting it sprout and grow anew. Once the seed sprouted, Violet and her child would emerge from whatever new life form it became.

Of course, a key condition was necessary for that planting. The seed couldn't be grown in ordinary soil. According to the Garland Tribe elder, it required either seven-colored earth or specially cultivated soil rich in life energy.

Orion hadn't managed to find either the seven-colored soil or that life-energy-rich soil.

But now he'd found a piece of the World Tree that still held a trace of vitality.

What exactly is the World Tree?

It's the origin of an entire world, an even deeper source of life than any special soil.

In other words, this segment of the World Tree is an excellent environment for nurturing the seed.

When combined with that seed, the World Tree remnant, and the miraculous water from the slime molds, the three items together would be enough to let the seed of Violet take root and sprout.

That way, there'd be no need to wait many years. In just a year or two, Violet would likely return with her child.

This had always been a significant, deeply personal matter on Orion's mind—one that had left him anxious for quite some time.