

Village Head 1131

Chapter 1131: Clear Bloodbane Poison, The Unfathomable Kind Travellers

"The poison affecting your king is called Clear Bloodbane," Knight Mayril interjected, her tone cold.

"When ingested or placed on the skin, it's a slow-acting poison that seeps into the bloodstream over several minutes. It attacks the entire nervous system, numbing the body to the heart. The victim remains fully conscious but is unable to move or speak until they are enveloped in extreme coldness and eventually die."

"Your king thought he was strong enough to delay the poison, but he hadn't felt anything because it was slowly spreading. The Sovereigness created this poison, and the cure can only be found within the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled. You shouldn't waste your time-it's hopeless. If you love your king, allow him to rest in peace or end his suffering swiftly," Knight Mayril added, shaking her head with an expression full of pity, though she struggled to hide the faint smile threatening to emerge.

"Shut your twisted bark, you insolent fool! I wasn't addressing you!" The prismerion commander spat out, his eyes filled with hatred.

"Tsk! Tsk! You should understand how challenging it is to heal someone with a Voidheart through ordinary means due to the dense Vylkr energy flowing within them. It's irritating to burden our kind travellers with such a troublesome task," Mayril clicked her tongue and replied.

Her gaze suddenly sharpened on the Prismerion Commander. "And I'll cut off your tongue the next time you utter such brazen words. You should be thankful I don't want to display such an unsightly scene before our benefactors."

The prismerion commander shivered under her gaze and lowered his head, his eyes trembling with fear. He realized the knight he had spoken to so rudely could eliminate their entire forces in the blink of an eye.

Another voice abruptly broke the tense silence.

"Knight Mayril is right. You shouldn't weigh down our kind travellers with such a

troublesome task. If the Tidal Depths Kingdom cannot cure King Izak of this poison, then it means he's fated to die," Knight Darian sighed, his expression filled with pity.

"I stand on behalf of the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled Territory and send my condolences to the Tidal Depths Kingdom."

"I stand on behalf of the Bastion of Ashen Hope Territory and send my condolences to the Tidal Depths Kingdom."

Knight Mayril and Knight Darian bowed toward the barely breathing Izak, and the forces behind each of them followed suit, bowing respectfully in his direction.

'It seems the relationship between these three forces is much worse than we initially determined,' Orion thought, observing the scene with a raised brow.

Hearing their words and witnessing the scene, the prismerion commander's hatred grew. His teeth clenched, and suddenly, he coughed violently, red blood mixed with an inky black

substance drifting away in the water around them.

"Commander..." The soldiers from the Tidal Depths Kingdom hurried to his side, their expressions filled with concern.

The prismerion commander raised his hand to show he was all right and quickly calmed his emotions. It would be disastrous for the Tidal Depths Kingdom's forces if he let his anger get the better of him.

After steadying himself, he looked up at Iris and Aurora once more.

"Please, kind travellers, I beg of you. Surely, you can save my king with your strength," he pleaded.

Although Brane, Fifi, and the others were also taken aback by the unfolding scene, they realized they had gained a clearer understanding of the relationship between the three forces. Unable to maintain her composure after witnessing the suffering of one of her race members, Iris cast brief glances towards Aurora.

With her strength, Iris might be able to heal Izak using the techniques she had mastered. Yet she subtly glanced at Aurora, the only one capable of restoring Izak to perfect health.

Despite her emotions, Iris understood her place. She said nothing to Aurora, whom she had once revered as the Princess of the Garden and now saw as a goddess.

Sensing the glances directed at her, Aurora let out a brief sigh. Suddenly, she received a mental message from Orion:

'We can use this opportunity to heal everyone. It's best we further demonstrate our generosity and kindness in the spirit of Paradise.'

Aurora mentally nodded and stretched out her hand, waving it forward.

A stream of milky energy mingled with an inky black brilliance emerged from her hand, weaving its way towards Izak. The energy seeped into his lungs and spread through his injuries.

The prismerion commander, startled by the sudden scene, almost backed away in fear but halted, watching in shock and disbelief as Izak's body began to heal.

The greenish hue on Izak's skin faded, his injuries closed, bones were regenerated, and severed flesh and muscle reformed, covered by smooth skin as if he had never suffered any brutal wounds.

In an instant, Izak was fully restored to health.

The scene was nothing short of astonishing, and disbelief rippled across the faces of the three forces present.

Then, something equally extraordinary occurred!

Another stream of milky energy mingled with an inky black brilliance enveloped the rest of them, healing their injuries and soothing their pain. Every discomfort vanished, and their bodies were restored to total health.

"My injury is gone! Even the pain has disappeared! My body feels sturdier than before!"

"Unbelievable! My broken arm is healed, and my injury from training ten days ago has vanished!"

"I was barely holding on after one of the Tidal Depth Kingdom soldiers sliced into my intestines, hoping I wouldn't collapse on the way back, but I can definitely feel it has been healed now! This is incredible!"

A clamorous wave of voices erupted around them as the members of the three forces realized not only were their battle injuries healed, but every previous ailment and injury had

disappeared.

They jubilated even more loudly upon realizing their bodies had also become sturdier.

"This..."

Knight Darian and Knight Mayril, their hands pressed against their protruding breastplates, stared at Aurora in shock. While the others only felt their bodies becoming sturdier due to their lower strength, the knights could sense the immense changes within them.

Izak's eyes cleared, and as he sensed the Clear Blood bane poison dissipating and his body fully restored to health, he bowed respectfully to Aurora.

The entire force of the Tidal Depths Kingdom followed suit, bowing respectfully toward her.

"Thank you for your goodwill, kind traveller. As the ruler of the Tidal Depths Kingdom, I promise I will do whatever it takes to repay this debt of goodwill," Izak said, his voice filled

with emotion.

He had been on the brink of death moments ago, and now, not only was he revived, but his entire force was also healed. How could he not feel emotional?

Knight Darian and the forces of the Bastion of the Ashen Hope Territory bowed toward her.

Knight Mayril and the forces of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled Territory also bowed.

All three forces stood in awe of Aurora's power, keeping their lips sealed for fear of offending such a formidable figure.

"I am merely an individual from Paradise, carrying out its will. You should be grateful to Paradise's benevolence," Aurora said, shaking her head.

"Goddess... is Paradise where you come from?" Izak asked hesitantly. Whether he intended it or not, Izak now regarded her as one. And he wasn't far from the truth! Hearing Izak's question, Knight Darian, Knight Mayril, and everyone present perked up,

awaiting her response.

These mysterious travellers were even more unfathomable than they initially thought, and they were eager to know what kind of place could produce such formidable individuals. "Yes, we are from Paradise. That much I can reveal. However, information about Paradise is prohibited from being shared with outsiders," Aurora replied.

Izak, Knight Darian, and Mayril nodded understandingly, exchanging subtle glances at the other mysterious travellers. They couldn't help but feel their curiosity about this 'Paradise'

grow.

With such a grand name, it clearly wasn't a simple place!

"May I know your name, kind traveller? So I might engrave the name of the one who saved my life into my heart," Izak asked.

"My name is Aurora. However, you may call me Warrior Aurora," she responded, enjoying playing the mortal role despite her status as a goddess.

Izak nodded, muttering her name a few times and engraving it in his heart.

"Please follow me. I will lead the way forward," Izak said, turning and bowing respectfully to the rest of the mysterious travellers. "If you wish to visit the Tidal Depths Kingdom, please send us a message. I will personally come to lead you there. I hope we will meet again in the

future."

Though both the forces of the Bastion of the Ashen Hope and the Wailing Gnarled Territory forces were fully healed, Izak was focused on drawing these mysterious figures to the Tidal

Depths Kingdom, regardless of the risks or costs.

Orion, Fifi, Brane and Zara nodded in response.

After receiving their answer, Izak turned and led the way forward, with Aurora and Iris at the centre of the Tidal Depths Kingdom's forces, which surrounded them protectively. They needed to show they were still capable, even though they were now indebted to these

powerful beings.

Chapter 1132: Between A Rock And A Hard Place

Knight Darian advanced slightly and bowed toward Orion and Fifi.

"If you find the comfort and arrangements of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled Territory unsatisfactory, please send us a message. My leaders and I will escort you to the Bastion of the Ashen Hope, where your treatment will be more satisfactory," he said.

He then returned and bowed respectfully toward Brane and Zara. "Please follow me, kind travellers. I will lead you to the Bastion of the Ashen Hope Territory," he said, turning around to lead the way forward.

Brane and Zara moved beside them with a nod to Orion and Fifi. The forces of the Bastion of the Ashen Hope surrounded them protectively as they made their way forward.

"Don't listen to anything that liar says, kind travellers. I assure you, our treatment will be far more than satisfactory," Knight Mayril quickly interjected, attempting to diminish Knight Darian's words.

Allowing such thoughts to linger could be dangerous; considering these travellers' strength, forcing them to stay at the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled would take considerable effort if they chose to leave.

"Please, follow me. I will lead the way," Knight Mayril continued, directing Orion and Fifi as she turned and moved ahead.

Orion and Fifi were encircled protectively in the centre of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled forces, with headless winged spawns surrounding them and pushing their way through the numerous tainted beings.

All six had split into pairs, joining the three different forces. Though the forces' members were of lower strength, their survival in this pocket dimension for so long demonstrated their capabilities, so Orion and the others held them in high regard.

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According to Knight Mayril, the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled was located in the southern part of the sea, hidden within a massive forest of petrified trees beneath the water. Initially, Orion and Fifi had imagined it would resemble the tree nymph forests on the farm in Paradise, but they soon realized just how far off the mark they were.

The forest was composed of densely packed, giant underwater trees. The trees were ghostly white and eerily beautiful, with long, gnarled roots stretching for miles. They seem to wail and groan, bending under the pressure of the water.

It was unlike any forest they had ever seen.

Knight Mayril halted at the entrance and turned toward Orion and Fifi.

"Do you know how to return these tainted beings to your companions or command them to wait outside? Please, don't misunderstand, kind travellers. We just cannot enter the Forest of the Wailing Roots with tainted creatures, or we will face serious repercussions," she said hesitantly, glancing at the headless, winged spawns.

Orion frowned at her words. He was curious about what kind of repercussions they might face if they entered with the headless winged spawns, but he wasn't foolish enough to cause trouble upon his arrival. However, he remained sceptical about trusting her completely or if the spawns would even listen to his commands.

Before Orion could decide, the headless winged spawns gathered together, swimming towards one another. Their movements startled the forces of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled, prompting them to enter into a defensive formation.

Orion and Fifi were also taken aback by the sudden actions of the headless, winged spawns, unsure why they had reacted in this manner.

"Kind travelers..." Knight Mayril started to say, her face pale with concern. But something inexplicable occurred before she could finish speaking and before anyone could react.

The headless winged spawns swam uniformly and entered Orion's and Fifi's shadows. Their shadows rippled briefly before stabilizing.

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Orion and Fifi could only stare at their shadows in utter disbelief, trying to comprehend what had just happened.

'Is this a new Divine skill Aurora is practising?' Orion wondered, looking at his shadow with growing curiosity.

Aurora was still working on her first Divine skill, Eternal Chaos Legion, so it made sense that she was discovering new ways to utilize it while mastering its ins and outs.

Nonetheless, Orion could only imagine how powerful this Divine skill would become once she learned the laws of the universe and incorporated them into it.

Suddenly, a surge of new information flooded Orion's and Fifi's minds.

After processing it, Orion felt his heart warm with appreciation for Aurora's efforts to ensure their safety. Fifi felt the same as a fellow sister and warrior.

As Orion and Fifi gathered their thoughts, Knight Mayril and the rest of the forces of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled stared at them, wide-eyed and shocked, their expressions almost comical in their disbelief at the unprecedented turn of events.

A terrible chill ran down their spines, and even some with icy skin couldn't help but shiver at what they had just witnessed.

Some had counted the number of tainted beings protecting them-about three hundred. All those tainteds had vanished into the shadows of the two mysterious travellers. If those tainteds could emerge as they had seen before, did that mean each of these travellers now had more than a hundred taints protecting them?

As this realization dawned on some of the nymphs, their expressions paled with fear and hesitation.

Knight Mayril also realized this and couldn't stop her body from trembling. She held her hand out, staring at her quivering palms.

That's right! She had just invited such powerful individuals into their territory!

Knight Mayril tightened her grip on her wrist, trying to steady herself.

"Is something wrong, Knight Mayril? I can't help but feel as though we are no longer welcome in the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled Territory," Orion asked, his tone laced with confusion and mild indifference.

Orion sensed the fear, caution, and hostility in the nymphs' gazes around him and felt slightly amused.

Aurora might not have intended it, but her actions had further heightened the inhabitants' wariness toward them. From what he could deduce, their presence filled the nymphs with as much dread as the tainted creatures themselves.

On one hand, this was a good thing, as it would make them think twice before trying anything foolish. It would also save time learning about this Pocket Dimension and its current state and establish a formidable presence in the hearts of its inhabitants.

This would be the foundation for bringing them out of this hellish pocket dimension and into the outside world under Paradise's rule.

However, it could also backfire on them. Nonetheless, Orion believed that once they revealed Paradise's existence and the world outside this pocket dimension, extending an olive branch, they might be able to prevent any negative consequences.

It was still unknown whether the forces' leaders knew they were trapped within a pocket dimension, but it would facilitate his plans considerably if they did.

"I..." Knight Mayril quickly regained her composure before continuing, "Did they enter your shadows?" She glanced at Orion's and Fifi's shadows, waiting for their response.

Orion and Fifi nodded.

"You said that if we wanted to cross into the Forest of Wailing Roots, we needed to put them away, so we did. Yet, it seems there are more problems to encounter before making our way in," Orion said, his voice tinged with displeasure.

"We haven't even arrived at the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled yet, and we're already feeling unwelcome. Perhaps we should have gone with the Bastion of the Ashen Hope Territory from the beginning," Fifi said, her tone indifferent.

Hearing their response, Knight Mayril gulped. She tried to speak, but her words were stuck in her throat as they continued. She was tongue-tied, unsure of how to respond. Should she, a respected figure within the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled Territory, who had sworn to protect their territory from the tainted and the harbingers and fight for survival, allow such terrifying figures into her home?

Or should she foolishly let them leave, giving another territory a chance to form a relationship with them, thus sparing them from an unknown potential crisis?

It was like holding onto the tendrils of a docile tainted, inviting it into your home, hoping it wouldn't go insane and destroy everything.

At this point, she either had to take the risk or pull back completely.

After a few seconds, Knight Mayril bit her lip, feeling the pain in her chest as her emotions surged turbulently. She exhaled and made her decision.

Knight Mayril bowed respectfully toward Orion and Fifi. "I apologize for showing you such an unsightly display. Please, let's continue," she said.

Orion nodded at Knight Mayril, then glanced at Fifi and said, "We shouldn't rush to the Bastion of the Ashen Hope. They might not be much better than the Bastion of the Wailing

Gnarled."

Fifi nodded silently.

After receiving their response, Knight Mayril's heartbeat slowly calmed, her emotions stabilizing. She turned around, signalling her forces to resume formation, then drew her sword and led the way.

The rest of the forces circled around Orion and Fifi in a protective formation, drawing their weapons. Although they doubted the two mysterious travellers didn't need their protection, they kept their thoughts to themselves and continued to advance.

Orion and Fifi observed curiously, wondering why they had drawn their weapons if they were entering supposedly safer territory.

Suddenly, a root from a nearby tree shot in their direction, answering their question.

Chapter 1133: Meeting The Sovereigness Of The Bastion Of The Wailing Gnarled

Knight Mayril swiftly swung her crude sword, dissecting the root in two.

Several more roots shot out, but with the forces of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled-fewer

than a hundred nymphs-the roots were swiftly cut apart, allowing them to continue advancing undeterred.

Orion was surprised by the attacks, wondering why they were happening in the first place. This was, after all, the nymphs' home, and many tree nymphs were among the forces present. He couldn't understand why they couldn't just control the trees, preventing them from attacking until they arrived at their destination.

Could it be that these trees were indeed as unique as he had imagined?

Orion pondered this.

Fifi had come to the same conclusion.

Not only had she worked in the Village before the inception of Paradise, but she also had tree nymph sisters and a stepdaughter she had taken in as her own. It would be strange if she hadn't thought the same.

Soon, they passed through a barrier.

Orion and Fifi were taken aback; they hadn't even realized they were walking through a barrier until they had passed through it with the rest of the force. The environment before them was similar, with ghostly white twisted trees and roots stretching out for miles, much like those outside. The critical difference was that this area was devoid of water.

The ocean had been pushed back and restrained by a powerful barrier, fortifying the surrounding area.

In other words, there was land on the seabed.

Orion marvelled at how powerful the barrier must have been for him not to sense it.

He realized that if he had unknowingly passed through such a strong barrier, it was possible he could walk into a poisonous trap next if his keen senses failed him again. This heightened his suspicion of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled.

"Be careful. Keep an eye out for even the slightest change," Orion sent a message to Fifi through the 'Eternal Heart Covenant' art.

Although Orion trusted Seraphina's inventions, it was better not to be overconfident. He wanted to ensure no one could overhear their conversation before speaking.

"Okay," Fifi responded, her tone firm.

They walked for about forty-six minutes before arriving at their destination.

It was an enormous fortress with walls spanning hundreds of meters in height. Made from unknown materials, the walls were ghostly white as if trying to blend into the surroundings despite their massive structure. In front of them was a protruding fortress section, sealed by enormous metallic gates tens of meters tall and several meters wide.

It would take more than ten people to open each gate unless someone with significant strength handled them.

Knight Mayril, Orion, Fifi, and the forces of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled halted a slight distance from the gates.

Orion noticed a few figures at the top of the walls, peering down at them before withdrawing. Suddenly, the right side of the gates creaked open.

A terrible noise echoed through the surroundings, indicating that the gate hadn't received proper maintenance.

Two rows of nymph warriors, each dressed in bulging pauldrons and breastplates identical to the forces beside him, marched out in a military column. They halted and turned to face each other, hands firmly gripping their weapons.

A nymph, guarded by four others-two behind and two in front-stepped out from the enormous gates and stopped at the edge of the column.

Orion took a closer look at the nymph who had emerged and noticed that, apart from the tree nymphs and those with icy features, there was another kind of nymph with smooth, hardened features and jagged shoulders. Despite the challenge of seeing through their armour, their dual skin tones were distinct, as those of the other nymphs.

Knight Mayril turned and bowed respectfully to Orion and Fifi. "Welcome to the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled," she said. "Please wait here. I'll be back shortly."

Orion and Fifi nodded in understanding. They knew she needed to make arrangements before they could be allowed in.

Knight Mayril sighed in relief, turned, and walked towards the enormous gate. She quickly arrived beside the nymph at the centre of the four guarding her.

"Your Sovereigness," Knight Mayril greeted, bowing.

The Sovereigness looked at her curiously and responded, "It seems I underestimated your capabilities, Knight Mayril. For you to return unharmed and with so many of your forces intact must mean the mission was a success. With such tremendous merit, I will ensure you are promoted." Her tone was filled with praise, and her expression was full of awe.

Even the surrounding warriors couldn't help but flicker their gazes toward Knight Mayril, a mix of curiosity, confusion, and bewilderment in their eyes.

Knight Mayril immediately shook her head. "The mission was unsuccessful, Sovereigness. King Izak is alive and well," she said, biting her lip.

A heavy silence enveloped the area.

Knight Mayril trembled in fear.

"I remember that King Izak had ingested the poison before I left, leaving the matter in your hands. Even if you failed to kill him, which would be understandable, given the vast difference in strength, considering the poison, he shouldn't have escaped unscathed," the Sovereigness said, her cold tone causing Knight Mayril's hair to stand on end.

The soldiers couldn't help but glare at her with hostility.

"The mission was going as planned. However, we found ourselves..." Knight Mayril gestured towards Orion and Fifi.

The Sovereigness narrowed her eyes at them. She hadn't initially paid much attention to them, assuming they were spoils of battle. However, on closer inspection, she noticed that the two individuals weren't restrained by the forces but were surprisingly guarded by them.

At first, the Sovereigness was furious, but as Knight Mayril continued to explain the details of everything that had transpired, the Sovereigness's eyes widened in shock. She froze in place, her words stuck in her throat.

The soldiers around her couldn't help but tremble slightly and swallow hard. Previously, they were disappointed and displeased with Knight Mayril's words, thinking she had either betrayed them or was too incompetent to handle the task assigned to her.

But after hearing her explanation, a heavy dread settled over them.

"...Is everything you've just said true, Knight Mayril? You know if it's false, your punishment will be far worse than death," the Sovereigness asked, having regained her composure, her firm gaze fixed on Knight Mayril.

"Yes, it's all true. I would never lie or do anything to put the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled in harm's way," Knight Mayril swiftly replied, nodding in affirmation.

"You've returned with such dangerous individuals to our territory, and you still dare to say that," the Sovereigness responded, her tone filled with irritation.

She understood Knight Mayril's complicated situation and mentally applauded her for her

actions.

However, the risk of bringing these mysterious and dangerous strangers into their territory was too risky. It would have been much wiser to send a messenger to inform them beforehand or to escort the strangers to the Bastion of the Ashen Hope under the pretence of preparing more suitable arrangements for their arrival while claiming she was on her way to personally

welcome them.

Then, they could have assessed the situation before taking any action.

However, it was too late to turn back now.

"Forgive me, Sovereigness," Knight Mayril said, bowing even deeper. She might have fallen to the ground if not for her protruding breastplate.

The Sovereigness ignored her plea. "Lead the way. Let's go properly greet these mysterious travellers," she said.

Knight Mayril quickly straightened her posture and turned to lead them forward.

The four stony nymphs continued to guard the Sovereigness as she approached them.

Orion and Fifi observed the discussion unfolding between Knight Mayril and the icy nymph, who appeared to be the leader.

[Energy Level - 1,600 BEM.] After seeing the nymph's base energy measurement, Orion toggled off the energy reading function. Astonishingly, her strength was even higher than King Izak's.

This made Orion wonder how the nymphs in this pocket dimension could harness Vylkr energy

to grow stronger while the tree nymphs in Paradise could not. He was one of the few aware of the situation and intended to discover its secrets.

This was one of the reasons he had decided to follow the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled.

Soon, Knight Mayril and the Sovereigness arrived before the group.

The icy nymph, guarded by the stony nymphs, had an upper deep purple skin tone. Her hair was of a similar colour, tied in a low knot, each strand thick and visible to the naked eye. Resting atop her head was a dull golden crown with far fewer jewels and embellishments than

King Izak's.

She wore a similarly protruding breastplate and full-plated armour, heavily inscribed with enchantments, unlike the lighter enchantments on the forces Orion had followed. Her face bore the marks of someone who had seen life's harshness, much like King Izak and some of the warriors Orion had encountered.

A greatsword hung on her back, and, combined with the natural height of a nymph, gave her an imposing presence.

Chapter 1134: Meeting The Sovereigness Of The Bastion Of The Wailing Gnarled (2)

There was little to differentiate her and the other icy and rocky nymphs from the tree nymphs except for the texture of their hair and skin.

Knight Mayril stepped forward and introduced her. "This is Sovereigness Nadia, the Supreme Ruler of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled," she said, then looked toward Orion and Fifi.

Realizing her intentions, Orion introduced himself calmly, "I am Orion."

"I am Fifi," Fifi added with a nod.

"I welcome you to the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled Territory, kind travellers. I assure you that our hospitality rivals that of the Bastion of the Ashen Hope Territory or the Tidal Depths Kingdom," Nadia said, a light smile on her lips. "However, I ask that you please remove your masks so I may see your faces and confirm your identity myself."

Orion and Fifi noticed that Nadia's smile seemed forced, as though she was trying to maintain it. The scene felt unnerving for both of them, who were used to the gentle nature of the tree nymphs, who only became violent when someone attempted to harm their trees.

Orion speculated that it might be because her nature differed from Anara's and the others, but they quickly dismissed the thought. After all, they were members of the same race. Even if there were differences, they couldn't be that great.

He had also noticed the same thing with Knight Mayril, a tree nymph, as she swiftly reined in her emotions when they got out of control.

He couldn't help but admit that the Tidal Depths Kingdom and Bastion of Ashen Hope forces' quick reining in of their emotions and welcoming them into their territories seemed too easy. Blaming it solely on their shrewdness or deep survival instincts was impossible.

Orion removed his mask, revealing his face.

Fifi did the same.

'So they are truly human,' Nadia thought. She nodded appreciatively and said, "Thank you for answering my request. You don't need to hide your face. I assure you that the residents of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled do not discriminate against other races, especially those who saved the lives of our forces. So you can rest assured about your safety if you choose not to wear your masks."

She assumed Orion and Fifi had hidden their faces to keep their racial identities a secret. As for their identities, Nadia didn't consider them part of any current known forces. If they were, their existence would have been revealed long ago, not remained hidden until a crucial moment like this. Other thoughts crossed her mind regarding their true identities, but she pushed them to the back of her mind.

While Nadia misunderstood why they wore their masks, Orion chose not to explain and simply shook his head.

"I understand. However, we will still wear our masks," Orion said.

They placed the Energy Mask Spectrometer back on their faces.

The mask was their only means of communication with the others who had gone with the other forces. Additionally, with its capabilities to analyze and make safer decisions without effort, they couldn't take it off without a good reason.

Despite this, Nadia maintained a struggling smile on her face.

"Alright. Please follow me, and I will escort you into the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled," Nadia said, turning to the side and gesturing forward.

Orion and Fifi nodded.

With a wave of her hand, Nadia signalled the forces around them. Instantly, the troops withdrew and marched toward the enormous gates.

Knight Mayril bowed respectfully to Orion and Fifi, then to Nadia, before turning around and hastening to lead the forces forward.

Once more, Nadia signalled the stony nymphs behind her. They immediately marched forward and positioned themselves around Orion and Fifi, two standing behind and two in front.

Nadia then turned and led the way through the column and into the gates. They first passed through two smaller gates with a metallic net roof, above which nymphs guarded the area with crossbows and long spears. Their eyes, filled with curiosity and caution, were fixed on Orion and Fifi.

It felt like the guards were ready to attack if given the order.

Soon, they passed through another heavily fortified gate, leading to several tunnels.

They saw Knight Mayril and her forces being led into one tunnel.

Orion and Fifi were taken through another.

After several minutes, they reached the end of the tunnel and emerged onto a busy street.

Orion frowned at the sight before him. The street was filled with partly or fully armoured nymphs, with only a few wearing dresses or paired with pants from unfamiliar fabrics. However, even those wore metallic armguards and carried weapons.

As they moved forward, the surrounding nymphs halted their activities and bowed in their direction, casting curious glances at Orion and Fifi. Once they passed, the nymphs returned to their previous activities but continued sending wary and inquisitive looks their way.

As they ventured deeper into the street, the same scene repeated, allowing Orion to confirm that all the nymphs were armed and dressed in a similar manner.

"Is the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled full of nymphs who are armed and ready to fight?" Orion asked.

"Yes, every resident of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled is a trained soldier, prepared to fight and sacrifice their lives to ensure its survival," Nadia responded, glancing back at Orion.

"With the situation becoming more difficult after the fall of several bastions in recent years, everyone, no matter how small or close to their last root must be ready to fight and give their lives for the next generation. Of course, this is not the entirety of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled. This fortress only serves as its protection. We'll reach the main Bastion soon, so please be patient."

Orion nodded. 'So this is only a fortress,' he thought. Still, he couldn't help but feel pity for how difficult their lives must have been, pushed to this point. He knew that if Anara were here to witness this and hear Nadia's response, she wouldn't hesitate to bring them to Paradise to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of its farms and gardens.

Orion shared the sentiment but chose to keep observing before taking any action.

Fifi nodded at Nadia's words. As one of the best warriors of Paradise, Fifi could easily distinguish an ordinary person from a trained warrior, and she could distinguish fake from genuine.

From the way the nymphs moved to positions where they could quickly draw their weapons, their respectful greetings, and the discreet glances they exchanged as if communicating, Fifi could tell every nymph present had survived numerous life-and-death battles.

After several minutes, they arrived at their destination.

Orion and Fifi looked at three massive circular platforms, about fifteen meters wide, floating within enormous ornate cages. Surrounding each cage were swirling metal rings infused with glowing inscriptions and runes, hovering slightly above the metal and constantly flickering.

A mysterious large formation of runes was slowly rotating at the top of each cage. Two heavily armed nymphs guarded the entrance of each cage.

Several nymphs were making their way in and out of the entrance. The crowds parted upon noticing their arrival. Nadia swiftly led the way through one of the entrances. They passed two more heavily armed nymphs guarding the platform from within and quickly climbed the stairs to stand on the platform.

The platform was infused with numerous inscriptions, runes, glyphs, and other mysterious carvings radiating a soft glow.

"This is the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled's teleportation platform. From here, we'll easily travel beneath the fortress," Nadia explained.

'A teleportation platform,' Orion thought as he curiously observed the platform beneath his feet. Paradise could instantly transport its forces across vast distances or to other Runaway Cities with something like this.

He made a mental note to inquire about it later.

'Do you understand what a teleportation platform is?' Fifi asked, struggling to grasp Nadia's words. Since Orion hadn't asked any questions, she assumed he already knew.

Orion quickly explained.

After he finished, a look of surprise appeared on her face. Fifi nodded and fell silent, saving her questions for later, knowing this wasn't the time to inquire further.

After Nadia finished making her preparations, she looked at them and said, "Please remain calm throughout the process and don't resist the pressure to avoid unfortunate accidents. It

will only last five seconds."

"Okay," Orion nodded in understanding.

Fifi did the same.

Suddenly, the carvings on the ground lit up with a bright, milky hue, and the large formation above them began rotating faster until it spun so quickly that it seemed stationary. Then, a mysterious pressure pressed down on Orion and Fifi. However, since they had been

warned, they didn't resist. Their vision became hazy as the bright milky hue intensified, shooting upward. It completely enveloped Orion, Fifi, Nadia, and the stony guards. Soon, the light began to dim, and the formation above slowed down.

On the platform, Orion and the others had vanished into thin air.

Chapter 1135: Territories Of The Forces

A bright light shone from a hovering stone platform at the centre of a vast hall, spreading an immense glow that enveloped the entire space. A large formation of runes, glyphs and various inscriptions, rotating swiftly above the platform, emitted an overwhelming pressure that filled the room.

Soon...

The rotating formation began to slow down, and the bright, milky light dimmed until it vanished, revealing Orion, Fifi, Nadia, and the stony guards.

The teleportation had lasted precisely five seconds, just as Nadia had said.

Orion curiously surveyed his surroundings. The hall was vast, supported by massive stone pillars. Two rows of soldiers were stationed on both sides of the floating teleportation platform and at the entrance of the large mixed wooden and metallic gates in the distance. With a glance, Orion discerned they were currently underground.

"This is the Crown Palace within the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled," Nadia explained. "Due to the impromptu nature of your arrival, my soldiers will lead you to two rooms where you can rest before moving you to a more comfortable one. It will only take less than thirty minutes, so there's no need to worry."

Orion nodded. "There's no need to prepare two rooms for us; one room will do."

A brief look of realization flickered across Nadia's face before disappearing.

"Oh, I apologize for my lack of insight. I didn't realize the two of you were in a relationship," Nadia said, slightly bowing. "In that case, I'll ensure a larger room is prepared for both of you."

Orion nodded silently.

Fifi snorted in response. Even though she knew her physique was intimidating, she hadn't lost her womanly charm.

She wasn't sure if it was due to her unique genetics as one of the few humans in Paradise. In fact, she had managed to inspire various female warriors, including her sisters: Gina, Sura, Ursa, and Tala. Tala was the only one intensely focused on surpassing her physique and capabilities.

With her talent, Fifi knew she could slowly catch up but not surpass her, as she wasn't planning to remain idle or halt her training anytime soon.

Still, Fifi could sense that Nadia wasn't referring to this, and it only took her a few seconds to figure it out. After all, it wasn't the first time she had heard such comments.

Nadia swiftly gestured to the guards standing nearby.

Ten of them stepped forward, arriving before them.

"Take them to our best guest rooms. Ensure they are protected and all their needs are satisfied," Nadia commanded.

The ten guards nodded firmly and approached Orion and Fifi, leading the way.

Orion and Fifi nodded at Nadia in appreciation before following the guards.

Nadia exhaled in relief at their appreciative nods. Although they didn't seem dangerous from their previous conversation, their mysterious appearance still made her immensely wary of their identities.

Nadia pushed the thought to the back of her mind and gestured to one of the stony guards beside her. "Inform the head maid that I want to see her personally," she ordered.

The stony guard nodded firmly and swiftly left to fulfil the command.

...

Far to the southwest,

Brane and Zara stood before an enormous trench carved into the seabed like a massive scar, stretching outwards like a labyrinth canyon etched deep into the earth. Within the canyon were many underwater volcanoes, steadily expelling fumes of smoke that rose to the ocean's surface, obscuring the rest of the canyon.

"Is this where the Bastion of the Ashen Hope is located?" Brane asked, casting a look at Knight Darian.

Knight Darian nodded with a smile. "Yes. Follow us, and we will lead the way to our destination. Entering the wrong path, accidentally crossing over a vent, or being near a massive explosion can lead to certain death. I understand you are confident in your strength, but I'd appreciate it if you would avoid reckless actions," he said.

"Can you also command them to stay close and follow our movements?" he asked, glancing at the numerous headless winged spawns behind them.

Brane and Zara nodded. They could sense the trench's extraordinary nature and were willing to follow calmly, considering their current location.

Zara was also beginning to glimpse fragments of the future. Despite her growth, the doors she could now make out were fewer than before, frustrating her momentarily before she calmed down.

However, hearing his question, they frowned. They had no way to command the headless, winged spawns behind them and were unsure if the creatures would even listen.

Suddenly, as the thought crossed their minds, the headless winged Vylkr spawns grouped together, stunning them before splitting in half and plunging into the rippling shadows.

They disappeared, leaving only two behind.

To their astonishment, the two headless winged spawns merged with Brane's and Zara's bodies, seeping through their clothes and bronze armour like an extra layer of protection. Stunned, Zara raised her hand and clenched her fist, feeling the formidable power within her grasp.

Seeing the inky black layer of skin wrapped around his body and his wife's, Brane felt a similar surge of strength.

"Even though we told them we want to achieve this on our own, it seems they aren't willing to let us put ourselves in danger," Brane said tiredly, sending a message to his wife through the

mask.

"Maybe this won't affect our chances of attaining godhood. After all, being protected by such a unique goddess is a privilege, and I'm sure it will enhance our qualities rather than hinder us. Compared to Orion, Aurora is a much more reliable and amiable individual, so it's best we trust her foresight," Zara responded.

They both glanced at the immense volcanic trench before them and quickly realized why the headless, winged spawns had wrapped around their armour, giving them an extra layer of protection and enhancing their strength.

They refocused their gaze on Knight Darian, whose mouth was wide open, along with the forces of the Bastion of the Ashen Legion, who had backed away and stood in an attack formation. Their trembling hands gripped their weapons tightly, some not even holding them

properly.

"I apologize for the disruption, Knight Darian, but I'd appreciate it if we could continue immediately," Brane said, clearing his throat.

Knight Darian and the others snapped out of their trance.

"...Are... the... two... of... you... feeling... alright?" Knight Darian asked, his voice trembling with each word.

"We are both fine," Brane responded, nodding firmly.

"I assure you, there's nothing wrong with us," Zara nodded.

Hearing their response, Knight Darian breathed a sigh of relief and smiled slightly. "Alright, stay close." Patting his protruding breastplate, he gestured for the rest of the forces to return to the formation and swam down the trench.

The others followed closely behind.

Far Southeast,

Izak and the forces came to a sudden halt.

Aurora and Iris, following behind, also stopped.

"Is this the Tidal Depths Kingdom?" Aurora asked, glancing curiously around her

surroundings.

She had already dispersed the Eternal Chaos Legion and recovered the energy she had spent, with the rest stored within her staff before entering the territory.

Iris also looked around curiously.

Surrounding them was a vast seabed with formations of crimson coral reefs, as well as several other colours and beautiful natural formations. But the only thing that seemed out of place in this stunning landscape was the surprisingly large number of tainted beings swimming at a distance around them-some were heavily chained to the seabed, while others freely roamed. Each bore the same resemblance as the residents of the Tidal Depths Kingdom before them, but they appeared to ignore their presence as though they weren't even there. Aurora and Iris found the scene too astounding to process.

"We are only at the entrance. You might not be able to see the Tidal Depths Kingdom due to the illusionary barrier protecting it, but it will open in a few moments for us to pass through," Izak responded with a slightly proud smile.

Though he couldn't read their expressions, he could tell by the curiosity in their voices that he had managed to astonish the mysterious travellers before him.

However, her following words made his thoughts come to a grinding halt.

Aurora nodded and replied, "I asked because I can see the barrier and the Tidal Depths

Kingdom." She advanced a few steps and halted before stretching her right arm forward.

At first, it seemed like a simple gesture, but then the other side of her arm rippled through the water and vanished into thin air.

A sudden, tense silence enveloped their surroundings.

.....

Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled Territory,

In a wide, stony room with beautiful paintings depicting layouts of trees, mountains, and rivers on the walls, seemingly attempting to create the illusion that the room was within a vast forest, a large, comfy king-sized bed made from tree branches stood at the centre. Soft-textured linens covered it, and five chairs were arranged around a table in what appeared to be a dining area on the other side of the room. An adjacent room held a small pool, seemingly a bathing area.

Orion lay on the bed, amazed at how similar it felt to his comfy bed at the manor, though a few stiff areas still needed fixing.

Chapter 1136: Tainted Heart

Fifi sat beside him on the bed. They had arrived fifteen minutes ago, and after surveying the room and finding nothing suspicious, she decided to join Orion and relax.

Suddenly, a knock echoed from the other side of the room.

Orion raised an eyebrow and sat upright. "It seems they arrived earlier than expected."

With a nod, Fifi said, "I'll go check." She stood up from the bed and walked towards the door. Opening it, she found a nymph dressed in a dark grey, knee-length dress with a blue hood over her head, bowing low as she entered the room.

Fifi frowned at the sight and glanced outside, noticing that the guards who had been standing at the entrance just a minute ago were no longer there.

Still frowning, she closed the door and turned to the nymph, who had stopped a few paces from the entrance and bowed again.

Orion had also risen from the bed.

Fifi joined him, standing by his side.

[Energy Level - 1,400 BEM]

Both Orion and Fifi raised their brows as they observed the energy level displayed, realizing that the figure before them must be someone of importance within the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled.

"Are you the one sent by the Sovereigness to escort us to our new room?" Orion asked, breaking the silence.

The nymph quickly shook her head. "Please forgive me for the sudden intrusion, kind travellers," she apologized, then introduced herself.

"I am Mira, Lead Artificer of the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled. I heard of your arrival and couldn't contain my curiosity, so I came to see you myself." She raised her head slightly, her shimmering blue eyes meeting Orion's and Fifi's.

"So you came here without the Sovereigness' authorization?" Orion asked.

Mira hesitated for a moment before nodding. "I apologize if I've offended you. But knowing the Sovereigness, it was highly likely she would prevent me from seeing you during your stay. So I took the opportunity to visit at such an unexpected time," she admitted, her voice trembling.

Orion's words reminded her of the potential consequences of her actions. Still, she gritted her teeth and regained her composure, awaiting their response.

Orion studied Mira, inwardly contemplating. He wasn't sure if this was the Sovereigness' way of approaching them without jeopardizing the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled or if Mira had genuinely come of her own accord.

Regardless, he was intrigued by her title as the 'Lead Artificer of the Wailing Gnarled' and curious about what she wanted.

"Okay, be quick and tell me about your reasons for wanting to see us," Orion asked, his tone indifferent.

"I have a question, and I hope you'll satisfy my curiosity by answering it," Mira said, her voice regaining some steadiness but still faint.

"Go ahead," Orion responded.

"Kind travellers, are you powerful?" Mira inquired.

"Yes, we are," Orion replied, narrowing his eyes at her.

"How did you become powerful with the Voidheart?"

"Voidheart?" Orion repeated, his tone laced with confusion.

He recalled the term mentioned by Knight Mayril during their meeting with the forces but had set it aside to investigate later. Now, it had reemerged, and he was curious.

Mira raised her head and looked at Orion and Fifi in shock. "You don't know what a Voidheart is?" she asked, astonishment apparent in her voice.

Orion shook his head. "I don't. What is it?" he asked, his voice tinged with curiosity.

"I hope Miss Mira can provide some insight into what a Voidheart is," he added.

Mira remained silent, shocked by his words. The information she had received didn't match what she was hearing, making her doubt everything she knew about these mysterious individuals.

'No, they can't be lying! There's no reason for them to deceive me! But if that's the case, then...'
Mira thought, her mind racing toward a troubling conclusion.

'If they don't know about the Voidheart, how did they achieve such strength?' Mira continued to ponder.

Orion and Fifi waited patiently for her to regain her composure. They had seen this kind of reaction before when they first learned about the existence of the Devourer Bracelet, so they were in no hurry.

Finally, Mira spoke. "The Voidheart is an artefact embedded within the wielder's body. It functions as both a regulator and a filter for Vylkr energy. Its primary purpose is to siphon the Vylkr energy coursing through the user's body, filtering out the corruption of Deathplague to prevent it from overwhelming their body and soul, which would transform them into an unrecognizable monster like the tainted."

Hearing her explanation, Orion and Fifi frowned.

A Vylkr energy regulator!

Deathplague!

Tainted!

Apart from the latter two terms, they were familiar with a Vylkr energy regulator-like the Vylkr Fusion Armlet, an enhanced version of the Devourer Bracelet, which also functioned as a Vylkr energy regulator. Mira's explanation confirmed their suspicions.

However, Orion was still unclear about Deathplague and the tainted. From Mira's explanation, it seemed like something everyone in the pocket dimension knew about, so

instead of asking further, he asked, "Can we see the Voidheart?"

Mira hesitated for a moment before nodding. Straightening her posture, she fixed her eyes on Orion and Fifi. Even though she couldn't see their faces, she felt more at ease with their

response.

It seemed her gamble was about to pay off.

She removed her blue hood, untied the sash around her dress, and let it fall to the ground before slowly opening her dress.

Mira had a half-blue upper body and a deep orange lower skin tone. Below her ample chest on the left side was a metallic plate extending from under her breast to the upper side of her waist. The metallic-like plate protruded slightly and seemed to be made from Vylkr alloys.

After taking a breath, Mira placed her two right fingers on the surface of the metallic-like plate. Instantly, numerous runes and inscriptions flickered across its surface, glowing brightly for a few seconds before fading into nothingness.

A clicking sound echoed through the air, and the metallic-like plate, which had been large enough to cover the lower left side of her body, began to shrink. It transformed into a small rectangular metal bar that landed in her right hand.

Orion and Fifi could finally see what had been hidden beneath the plate's compartment.

Mira's skin below her left breast appeared to have been carved out and replaced with metallic ribs forged from Vylkr alloys.

Encased within the artificial ribs was a metallic ring adorned with flickering runes and inscriptions, which held a beating black heart that emitted a faint dark hue.

Thin, vein-like conduits resembling organic veins surrounded and connected the black heart. These conduits were linked to a small orb-like structure, seemingly a fusion of mechanical and biological elements, within another metallic ring just above the black heart. The conduits branched out from the orb, stretching up her chest, connecting to her natural heart, and extending across her entire torso, melding seamlessly with her flesh and body. Only after Mira removed the metallic plate could they see the subtle scar tissue around the area, evidence that part of her body had been reconstructed to implement the structure before

them.

Orion and Fifi couldn't help but stare in astonishment at the two hearts within Maria's body and the scene before them.

"This is the Voidheart," Mira said, pointing at the orb-like structure. She then shifted her hand toward the black heart and the vein-like filaments. "This is the tainted heart, which serves as a reservoir for the collected Vylkr energy and Deathplague."

"Lastly, these are the filament networks attached to the heart and arteries, directly linking to the bloodstream and vital organs. They absorb the Vylkr energy throughout the body, sending it to the Voidheart, which filters out the corruption and stores the energy within the tainted heart. Once filtered, the pure Vylkr energy is gradually reabsorbed into the body, enhancing its

capabilities."

After finishing her explanation, she placed the rectangular plate close to her chest. It immediately flew out of her hand, expanded, and resealed the compartment.

Orion and Fifi remained silent.

"Unfortunately, that's all I can reveal for now. Many other details would take time to explain and be difficult to understand unless you're familiar with the Voidheart. And there's no time for that, as the guards will return soon. So, I'd like to hear how you became so powerful," Mira said, adjusting her dress before picking up her sash and tying it around her waist. She then picked up her cloak and put it on, though she didn't pull the hood over her head this

time.

Her deep blue irises locked onto Orion and Fifi, briefly glancing at the complex workmanship on the Armlet on her right hand.

"Actually, it's going to take some time if we want to explain how we achieved our strength,"

Orion said, calming his emotions.

He recalled that only ten minutes remained before the individual sent by the Sovereigness would arrive to escort them to their new room.

Chapter 1137: Plans For A Crucial Meeting

If Mira became startled and attempted to leave quickly, it would confirm the Sovereigness hadn't sent her. But if she stayed for some reason, it would validate his suspicions.

Mira's expression briefly showed realization before she replied firmly, "You don't need to worry. I've made sure to delay their arrival, so we have fifteen more minutes alone."

"No, that won't do. How we became so powerful isn't something that can be explained quickly. Besides, we still have many questions about what you've just said," Orion replied, shaking his head in refusal.

"How about this: I'll meet with the Sovereigness and request a personal meeting with you to continue this conversation." His interest had shifted from her true motives to unravelling the mysteries of the Voidheart.

Explaining how they became powerful was common knowledge in Paradise. Since he intended to assimilate the residents of the Pocket Dimension into Paradise, he didn't mind revealing this information in advance.

"Yes, I have many questions as well. Besides, I'm certain the Sovereigness would agree to an official meeting between us. Learning how we became powerful could benefit the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled," Fifi added.

Hearing their response, Mira lowered her head, biting her lip in thought. After a few seconds of silence, hesitation clouded her expression.

"No, it's too dangerous. I'll be in trouble if the Sovereigness finds out I came to meet you alone. Just say you overheard the term 'Voidheart' during your travels and are curious about it. I'm sure she'll lead you to me; this way, it won't be as direct," Mira replied, shaking her head and explaining her plan.

Orion frowned, wondering if his assumptions were wrong and if Mira had snuck in alone. He pushed the thought aside.

"Alright, I don't see any issue with doing it that way as long as we meet," Orion responded, nodding.

Mira exhaled in relief. "Due to time constraints, I can't stay much longer, but I hope we meet again soon to continue where we left off. I'll take my leave now," she said, bowing slightly.

With that, Mira turned and swiftly exited the room, the door clicking shut behind her.

After a minute of silence, Fifi spoke up. "From her explanation, it seems like the inhabitants of the Pocket Dimension are capable of producing their own Vylkr energy, and the Deathplague is a direct consequence of this phenomenon," she said, her tone serious.

They hadn't encountered any Vylkr vines since entering the Pocket Dimension. The closest thing to possessing Vylkr energy was the tainted and the forces residing within it. Mira's astonishing explanation had answered many of their lingering questions.

"I was thinking the same. We will piece everything together soon," Orion responded, breaking from his contemplation.

He turned toward Fifi after noticing her silence.

"Is there something else on your mind?" he asked, his tone curious.

Fifi nodded firmly and replied, "I've been thinking: if tree nymphs are required to return and stay within their tree after a certain amount of time, where do the ice and rock nymphs reside?"

Orion furrowed his brow. "We'll save that question for later. I'm curious about it, too," he responded decisively.

He had been so focused on establishing a connection with the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled and the dangers they might face that he had almost overlooked the small details.

Fifi nodded in agreement.

Within a large vaulted chamber, with a high arched ceiling supported by thick, giant pillars adorned with colourful curtains, murals, and paintings across every corner of the walls, a large round table stood at the centre of the hall. Around it were six nymphs seated in six heavy, high-backed chairs.

A large lantern hung from the ceiling, illuminating the chamber and the six nymphs below. These were Sovereigness Nadia and the High Advisors of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled. Nadia had just finished explaining to her high advisors the information Mayril had given her and what she had learned about Orion and Fifi. The air was tense as the Advisors absorbed her words, each lost in their own thoughts.

After several minutes, the silence was abruptly broken.

"King Izak will surely be more cautious after this failed assassination attempt, so we need to figure out another way to ensure he is killed, leaving the Tidal Depths Kingdom without a ruler. Apart from that, Knight Mayril must be punished for such a grievous offence," said a water nymph with pale white upper skin and beige lower skin, dressed in a long, beige flowing gown. Her voice was edged with anger and coldness.

Her name was Tahira, the fifth-seat high advisor.

"How can she be punished when she didn't do anything wrong? Although she made a few errors in judgment, like not sending someone to inform us first, it can be easily forgiven due to the circumstances. Besides, would it have been better if they had followed the remaining forces?" replied a tree nymph with dark upper and amber lower skin tone, dressed in a long, flowing dress with blossom designs that concealed her entire figure. She frowned as she spoke.

Her name was Elindra, the fourth-seat high advisor.

"I understand what you're saying, but do you think it's proper for her to continue freely after this? There must be some form of punishment to prevent others from repeating such actions. Otherwise, they may keep bringing unknown individuals, thinking they are aiding the Bastion," Tahira countered.

"Enough! There will be no punishment for Knight Mayril, aside from a few restrictions, which will serve as a warning to others," Nadia interjected firmly, silencing the discussion.

Then she added, "I called you all to hear your suggestions on how we can subdue the mysterious arrivals if they threaten the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled and also to figure out where they came from."

"Are they survivors from other forces?" asked a tree nymph with vibrant golden-yellow upper skin and brown lower skin, dressed in a pale golden-yellow flowing gown like the others.

Her name was Faelara, the third-seat high advisor.

"That isn't possible. As we all know, the few remaining Bastions were destroyed several years ago, and for them to have survived alone until now without contacting other forces is

impossible," Nadia replied, shaking her head.

"Then, if they're neither from another territory nor sent by the Harbingers, they couldn't have just appeared out of thin air," Faelara responded, a deep frown forming on her face.

"We still aren't certain whether the Harbingers sent them, and considering our unique circumstances, we also can't rule out the possibility that they did appear out of thin air," Nadia responded.

When she finished speaking, a sudden silence enveloped the room once more.

"If that's the case, we should send them to the Abyssal Grove to properly gauge their strength so that we can prepare for any sudden attacks during and after their stay," suggested a rock nymph with pale grey upper skin and light green lower skin, dressed in a light green flowing gown embroidered with mountain and ocean designs.

A white veil covered her head, and her eyes narrowed as she pondered the situation.

Her name was Livia, the second-seat high advisor.

After learning that the mysterious arrivals had a horde of tainted beings protecting them, they were apprehensive about approaching them carelessly. But they also didn't want to let the matter linger for long.

"Or do you have something else planned?" Livia asked, focusing her gaze on Nadia.

Nadia nodded in response. "Yes, I have something planned. If their words are truthful and intentions are vile, things will play out as I've foreseen. However, if it fails, we'll know they are lying, and then we'll lead them into the Abyssal Grove," she said.

Nadia shifted her gaze toward the rock nymph seated beside her.

"What are your thoughts on this, Gladra?" she asked, her tone curious as she awaited the response.

The rock nymph, Gladra, was the first-seat high advisor.

However, Gladra shook her head in response. "I'm just as confused and bewildered as the rest

of you. While I believe the best course of action is to send them to the Abyssal Grove, I also think it's wise to wait and gauge their intentions," she said, her voice tinged with weariness but still carrying an edge.

"Our sisters have been wailing in pain for a long time, and we are all reaching our limits."

Nadia nodded. "King Izak wouldn't hesitate to retaliate, even with the arrival of these mysterious individuals. So, it's best we send scouts around the territory to watch for any strange gatherings of tainted hordes or bizarre sightings that could endanger the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled," she said, igniting a ripple of responses from the others as they discussed ways to handle the sudden circumstances.

They could sense the winds changing, realizing that the sea was stirring up for another storm.

And to avoid being swept away by its impact, like the forces before them, they knew they needed to be prepared.

Chapter 1138: The Awaited Meeting

A barefoot rock nymph with pale yellow skin and a lower white skin tone dressed in a white shirt and black fitted pants led Orion and Fifi to their new room.

The room was similar to the previous one they had stayed in but much larger. It contained an extra-wide pool and a room filled with crude weapons hanging on the sides—a training

room.

Orion wasn't sure if the room could withstand their strength, but he wasn't interested in testing it since he didn't plan to stay for an extended period.

"This is your new room. Fresh fruits and wine are prepared on the table if you're hungry. We don't have any magical beasts' meat in the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled, so I'm afraid we can't provide that. However, the Sovereigness has already arranged a trade for some magical beasts' meat from the Bastion of Ashen Hope, which will take a few days. So, please be patient, travellers," Felissa said, bowing slightly to Orion and Fifi.

Felissa was the head maid of the Crown Palace, sent by Nadia to escort them to their new room once it was ready. Her expression was dull, and her eyes carried a hint of tiredness. To most, she resembled any other nymph in the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled.

However, Orion and Fifi saw her astonishingly high energy level.

[Energy level - 1,660 BEM]

This was sixty BEM higher than Nadia, the Sovereigness of the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled, who stood at [1,600 BEM]. The revelation confirmed to Orion that his suspicions were not unwarranted. For a force to survive this long within such a pocket dimension, they must have hidden cards and couldn't reveal everything to strangers like them.

Orion slightly shook his head. "You can inform the Sovereigness that there's no need to go that far. We are satisfied with the fruits and wine and will let you know if we need anything else," he responded.

A sudden brightness appeared in Felissa's curious expression as a smile formed on her lips.

"Okay, I will do so. The Sovereigness will be here within an hour so that you may begin your conversation. I'll be leaving," Felissa said, bowing respectfully to Orion and Fifi before turning around and exiting the room, closing the door behind her.

Orion approached the table and picked up one of the fruits from the two medium-sized baskets.

The fruit was pale grey with an oval, curved shape at its bottom, reminding him of the Kalna fruits in Paradise, except for its colour.

Out of curiosity, Orion removed his mask, brought the fruit to his mouth, and bit off a piece. As he chewed and swallowed it, he instantly froze in place, his eyes widening in shock.

Noticing Orion's sudden stillness, Fifi frowned and asked worriedly, "Is something wrong?" "Try this and tell me what you think," Orion replied, regaining his composure and turning his head toward Fifi. He stretched the half-eaten pale grey fruit out to her.

With a frown, Fifi took the fruit and bit off a piece. As she chewed and swallowed, her eyes widened in shock, just as Orion's had, and she froze.

"This..." Fifi muttered, unable to finish her sentence, staring at the bizarre fruit in speechless stupefaction.

"I felt the same way," Orion said with a nod, noticing Fifi's reaction.

Although the fruit tasted more sour than an unripe Lipry fruit, what shocked them was that after eating it, they felt the Vylkr energy within their bodies replenishing.

It felt as though they were consuming Vylkr vines!

It was pure, raw vylkr energy!

Fifi, who had exerted a slight effort to bring the team down into the ocean, immediately directed her Vylkr energy toward her Vylkr Fusion Armlet, further strengthening it and hastening the Vylkr energy's absorption into her body.

Orion also felt the Vylkr energy gathering, strengthening his body and slowly being stored within his Vylkr container.

"These fruits can satisfy our hunger and help us refill our Vylkr energy simultaneously," Orion said, nodding at Fifi. He picked up the wine, poured it into a wooden cup, and drank it out of curiosity.

An excited expression instantly appeared on Orion's face.

"Quick, try the wine too," Orion said, handing the wine to Fifi.

Without hesitation, Fifi drank the wine. As she sensed the ferocious Vylkr energy surging through her body, she directed it toward her Vylkr Fusion Armlet.

An excited expression also spread across Fifi's face.

The effects of the wine and fruit were similar to those in Paradise, capable of rejuvenating a person's body and soul despite being slightly different. But wasn't this the joy of every warrior? Eating and drinking while feeling your strength grow rapidly without constantly eating awful Vylkr vines.

There were even warriors who only utilised vials provided by the Research centre to grow stronger because they couldn't handle the taste of the Vylkr vines!

Orion's doubts about the forces within the pocket dimension resurfaced, growing even stronger.

'It seems the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled holds greater secrets than I assumed,' Orion thought, his resolve hardening. No matter what happened, he would bring the nymphs into Paradise, even if it meant using Aurora's spawns for aid.

After organising his thoughts, Orion sat in the comfortable chair and continued to dine on the feast before him.

Fifi sat beside him, joining him without any reservations.

...

After thirty minutes, a knock echoed through the room.

Fifi stood up, approached the door, and opened it.

An ice nymph with deep purple skin on her upper body and rich brown skin on her lower half stood at the door. She wore a black long-sleeved flowing shirt with shoulder and armguards on both arms, purple fitted pants, and matching string sandals.

It was Nadia who had changed from her armoured attire into something more casual. She nodded at Fifi and stepped into the room.

Fifi closed the door and returned to sit beside Orion.

"How are you liking your new room?" Nadia asked, her voice tinged with curiosity.

"It's nice," Orion replied.

"That's good. If there's anything we can do to improve it, please let us know so we can act

immediately," Nadia said.

Although Orion's response wasn't entirely to her liking, she remained intent on ensuring they had the best possible stay.

"If you don't mind, I'm here so we can begin the meeting," Nadia added.

"Please, let's start," Orion responded, not wanting to delay any longer.

Nadia nodded and sat in one of the three chairs facing them.

"What is the first thing you'd like to know?" Nadia asked, her tone curious.

"How many forces are currently in this ocean?" Orion asked.

"Only three: the Bastion of Ashen Hope, the Tidal Depths Kingdom, and the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled. The Tidal Depths Kingdom is a coalition of four former Bastions that united under one

rule to protect each other just a few years ago. Other forces died out one by one many years ago, with the most recent loss occurring five years ago," Nadia replied. "Although I was informed of this earlier, to know so little means you must have truly come from a distant place," she said, frowning.

"You're right. It's farther than you can imagine," Orion nodded.

Fifi nodded as well.

"Can I ask where exactly you came from?" Nadia inquired.

"We are from Paradise. As you can imagine from its name, it's a place where many races live together in harmony without worrying about the tainted beings or danger. I dare say it's the safest place in the entire world," Orion responded, his voice filled with confidence.

"Oh, we also have tree nymphs, but unfortunately, there aren't any ice or rock nymphs. I can take you to Paradise directly if you want to leave immediately if you want to see and confirm for yourself. I'm sure the tree nymphs would love to see their long-lost sisters," Orion added, his gaze fixed on Nadia.

He subtly began revealing his offer of bringing them to Paradise sooner rather than waiting until he uncovered more of their secrets.

The more secrets Orion unearthed within this pocket dimension, the more it pointed toward

Naka. Although he didn't fully understand its restraints or whether the Key to Ilse's Golden Palace could still work if the pocket dimension closed, he wasn't willing to take any chances. He had already discussed with the others the possibility of forcibly bringing all the forces to Paradise if persuasion didn't work.

It wasn't kidnapping, but doing the right thing and asking questions later!

A brief look of surprise flashed across Nadia's face before it shifted into a frown. She

struggled to believe that such a place could exist, but the thought of her long-lost sisters filled her with pain.

"Are the tree nymphs in your force slaves?" Nadia asked, her tone were slightly tense.

Orion raised a brow and responded, "No, they are not slaves. In fact, they are among those with the highest privileges in Paradise."

His words were true. The tree nymphs held the highest privileges since they were just a village. Despite Zogar and the former Village Chief Brane's strength, they were never mistreated.

Instead, they were shown the utmost respect, to the point that Anara's approval was needed before any significant changes were made within the farm.

Chapter 1139: Cursed From The Beginning

Stunned, Nadia scrutinized the two mysterious individuals seated before her once more. She found it difficult to detect any falsehood in Orion's voice and could only wonder if he was tricking her.

After all, how could tree nymphs not be exploited but instead enjoy the highest privileges within a force containing so many powerful individuals?

Obviously, he might be trying to lower her guard, enticing her to come to this 'Paradise' willingly. It might be a trap, and there was no way she would fall for it.

"I wonder why you're asking such a question, Miss Nadia. Are there perhaps..." Orion's words trailed off, unfinished, yet their meaning was clear to everyone present.

Fifi couldn't help but adopt a more serious expression.

Noticing the tense shift in Orion's tone, Nadia inwardly scoffed but decided to play along. She nodded and began explaining the nymphs' situation to Orion.

"From my current information, more than half the nymphs within the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled serve as slaves in the Tidal Depths Kingdom and a few in the Bastion of the Ashen Hope. If your words are truthful, then surely you wouldn't allow such injustice and would ensure they are released, with the ruler of both forces punished," Nadia responded, her voice tinged with sorrow.

Orion remained silent momentarily before nodding, "Alright, I will see what I can do and thoroughly investigate this matter before making any decisions."

He quickly messaged Aurora and Brane, informing them of the situation. Fortunately, he received a prompt reply that they were already looking into it.

Nadia nodded in acknowledgement. Even though she didn't take Orion's words seriously, she hoped he might help resolve the situation. Still, she was torn about believing his words about this 'Paradise.'

"Is there anything else you would like to know?" Nadia asked.

"I would like to know about the tainted origins and why they resemble the resident forces," Orion asked, voicing one of the questions troubling him as he awaited her response.

"They resemble us because they 'are' us. Alongside the innate energy we are all born with, another energy manifests as we grow stronger: Vylkr energy. This energy is so violent and chaotic that it begins to corrupt our bodies, causing the Death plague to manifest. To prevent falling victim to the Death plague, we rely on the Voidheart, which regulates and filters Vylkr energy," Nadia explained.

"But not everyone can endure this process, and even those who can eventually reach their limit succumb to the Death plague. In its early stages, they are afflicted with strange impulses and a primal desire to consume everything around them."

"Then, their features transform, becoming monstrous, and they gradually lose the ability to form coherent sentences. As time passes, they barely resemble anything of their former selves until they completely transform into a tainted."

Orion and Fifi were astounded as they listened to Nadia's words. Although they had already uncovered that the Death plague was a natural consequence of the races here producing Vylkr energy within their own bodies, its effects were far more severe than expected.

"However, once an individual begins to transform, there are only two ways to completely halt the transformation and free themselves from the fate of becoming a tainted," Nadia added.

Orion's ears perked up at her words. "What are they?"

"The first is to kill themselves and offer their heart and other vital organs for the sake of future generations. Due to the ongoing transformation, these organs can resist the Vylkr energy, and the Death Plague, helping us grow stronger. Therefore, they are valuable resources for each force and ensure our survival," Nadia explained. "The second is to force one's way into the Mirror Realm."

Hearing Nadia's explanation, Orion's heart stirred.

"The Mirror Realm? How is that possible? Could there be a god here helping them suppress the effects of Vylkr energy and delaying their transformation?" Orion's mind raced, trying to come up with an answer, but he arrived at nothing.

Orion composed himself and asked, "How do you force your way into the Mirror Realm?"

"Fortunately, I haven't entered the Mirror Realm yet, and I hope I never will. However, I know that only those in the final stages of corruption, on the verge of transforming into a tainted, can find their way there-sometimes through dreams or visions."

"If they succeed, they can reverse their transformation, regaining a stability of mind. But if they fail, they lose their sanity and are forcibly expelled from the Mirror Realm. Then, we hunt them down before they cause harm to nearby forces or bolster the Harbingers' ranks."

A sad smile curved on her lips as she finished.

"Who are the Harbingers?" Orion asked.

"I don't know who or what they truly are. Unfortunately, no one does. All we know is that they command the tainted and may hold the secrets to curing the Death plague," Nadia replied, a flicker of hope in her eyes before it dimmed.

"But countless races have tried to break into the Harbingers' domain, and everyone has perished-from the strongest to the weakest-until they were wiped from existence. The Bastion of Wailing

Gnarled, Ashen Hope, and the Tidal Depths Kingdom are the only remaining forces, and unless we do something, we too will face erasure sooner or later."

A sudden silence enveloped them.

After hearing Nadia's detailed explanation, which confirmed his suspicions about the strangeness of the Pocket Dimension, Orion fell into deep thought.

'A Mirror Realm within a Pocket Dimension, and one that even mortals can access under certain conditions?' Orion wouldn't have believed such a thing possible if he hadn't heard Nadia's confirmation.

Nadia remained silent, allowing them to process her words. Yet, her curiosity about them grew, and she sensed they might genuinely be from a place free of the tainted Harbingers, though her doubts about them lingered stronger.

"I want to learn more about the Voidheart and how it works," Orion asked.

Nadia nodded and explained what she knew about the Voidheart, her words mirroring what Mira had previously mentioned.

"If you want more in-depth knowledge, I can arrange a meeting with our Lead Artificer, Mira.

She will be able to answer all of your questions."

"Can you set that up right after this?" Orion asked.

"Of course. I'll arrange it immediately after our meeting," Nadia nodded.

"I'd also like to know if you can tell us how these fruits are produced," Orion added, picking up a fruit from one of the baskets across the table and placing it in front of Nadia. Nadia's face flashed with surprise as she noticed the two empty medium baskets and the wine jar. She had been so focused on the discussion that she hadn't noticed.

'They ate everything, even the wine,' Nadia thought, astonished. The feast was meant to last a few days, so seeing it finished within an hour left her speechless. Regaining her composure, Nadia replied, "This is called the Kalnir Nourishing Fruit, one of our primary sources of sustenance here in the ocean. They are cultivated by none other than the tree nymphs, my sisters."

'I knew it,' Orion thought. The shape of the fruit resembled that of a Kalna fruit, confirming his suspicions with Nadia's words.

'Did the properties of the fruit change because they can naturally generate Vylkr energy? If that's the case, then harnessing other energy types affects the properties of the fruits. But why wasn't the change this drastic when the tree nymphs began harnessing Celestial energy?' Orion pondered. 'Or was it due to their strength?'

Since Vylkr energy was on par and even more incredible than Divine energy, higher than any other energies within the first ten ranks, except the Primordial energy, it made sense that the Kalna fruit would undergo such a significant change.

Orion couldn't help but wonder what might happen if the tree nymphs began harnessing Divine energy or became divine apostles. Would the Kalna fruit gain a unique property like the Kalnir fruit, or would it transform in another drastic way?

Orion was curious to find out.

Orion took out the Kalna fruit he had previously removed from his mountain before the meeting began. "Do you recognize this?" he asked, handing the fruit to Nadia.

Nadia eyed the fruit with a frown, sensing a familiarity with it.

After a brief hesitation, Nadia took it and scrutinized it before glancing back at Orion, her eyes

betraying her curiosity.

"You can go ahead and taste it," Orion encouraged, smiling slightly.

Nadia returned her gaze to the fruit and took a bite. Instantly, her mouth was filled with a

tingling sweetness that tantalized her taste buds, and a refreshing feeling spread through her entire body, improving her mood.

As she chewed, she felt a sudden warmth in her cheeks and realized tears were streaming down her face.

Startled, Nadia quickly reached up to wipe away her tears, not wanting to display such vulnerability in front of the individuals before her. But no matter how much she tried, the tears continued to overflow.

"What's wrong with me?... My heart feels immense happiness and pain at the same time... I don't know which I should focus on first," Nadia said, her broad smile contrasting with a pained gaze.

Chapter 1140: Nadia's First Glimpse Of Paradise

Her stiff expression revealed the depth of her emotions for the first time.

As though unable to control herself, Nadia continued eating the fruit, her emotions increasingly tumultuous.

After a while, she calmed down, wiped the remaining tears from her cheeks, and held a small piece of the Kalna fruit in her hand, fixing her gaze on Orion.

"Can you tell me where you got this fruit?" Nadia asked, her voice tense. She was clearly determined to secure this information no matter what.

Fortunately, Orion had no intention of withholding it.

"This is called the Kalna fruit and is cultivated in Paradise by the tree nymphs," Orion replied.

Upon hearing his words, Nadia's body briefly trembled.

'How is this possible?' she thought as she examined the Kalna fruit in astonishment. She couldn't comprehend how tree nymphs could create something devoid of Vylkr energy.

The fruit provided the same nourishment as the Kalnir fruit, yet it was tastier and more satisfying.

Despite her confusion, the familiarity of the fruit made Nadia trust Orion's words without doubting his sincerity. Taking a deep breath to calm herself, she asked, "Is it possible for me to follow you back to Paradise when you leave? I want to see and confirm this for myself."

"Didn't you hear me correctly before? We can leave for Paradise anytime you want and return instantly," Orion said with a light smile.

Nadia was stunned by his words. She recalled that he had mentioned this earlier, but she hadn't taken him seriously, thinking he was just trying to entice her into joining Paradise. Now, however, she was willing to give it a try.

"Alright then, let's do it. Please, take me to Paradise," Nadia responded firmly.

Orion nodded and stood up from his seat. He placed his right hand into his pocket, summoned the miniature mountain, retrieved a golden key, and re-summoned it. With the golden key in his right hand, Orion extended his arm.

The surrounding space rippled, manifesting a folded space before him. Orion felt the key insert itself into an invisible door lock in the air and, without hesitation, turned it to the side, following the sequence Ilse had taught him.

Nadia watched with curiosity. As the space rippled before her, she instinctively stepped back, her senses warning her of an impending danger. Her body tensed as she observed Orion's strange movements.

Soon, Orion withdrew his hand, and the key dissipated into golden light, transforming into a squared, massive door spilling intense, blinding golden light from within.

Orion turned to Nadia and said, "Let's go. This door will take us to Paradise."

Nadia hesitated for a moment before nodding and stepping forward.

'No matter the outcome, I need to see this for myself,' Nadia thought. 'If it's true, the entire Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled will undergo an astonishing transformation. But if I've willingly walked into a trap, I can only blame myself for being so easily deceived.'

Despite her slight hesitation, Orion was satisfied with Nadia's firm resolve as she stepped beside him.

"I've informed everyone not to disturb us until we're finished, so you don't need to worry about anyone interrupting until I return," Nadia said, her gaze fixed on both Orion and Fifi.

They quickly understood the intent behind her words.

Orion focused on Fifi and said, "We'll be back soon."

Fifi nodded in acknowledgement.

"Follow me," Orion said, leading the way into the massive, spatially squared door. Nadia nodded and followed closely behind him.

Watching the two vanish before her eyes, Fifi sighed and sank into her thoughts. After a brief pause, she contacted the remaining others for an update on their current situation.

'I'll speak with Seraphina later to see if she can add a visual feature that enables us to view what another individual is experiencing,' Fifi mused. She knew it would be a difficult feature to implement, but Seraphina would likely take it as a challenge and try to make it work.

She also wanted to test several functions of the mask, such as the disguise feature that allowed them to change their appearance.

However, because Orion was unsure of the dangers they might encounter, he decided it was best not to entirely deceive the residents of the pocket dimension to gain their trust and eventually bring them to Paradise.

...

Orion and Nadia stepped through the door and emerged in an enormous city filled with countless concrete buildings, each designed with eye-catching architecture and adorned with precious stones- many of which Nadia had never even known existed.

The stones sparkled more brilliantly than the gems on her crown, which now seemed dull by comparison. To her surprise, there was no ocean, just an immense landscape.

Nadia gazed around the vast city, unconsciously imprinting its grandeur into her mind.

The large, square golden door disintegrated into specks of light, merging and transforming into the golden key. The key landed smoothly in Orion's hand as though recognizing him as its owner.

Orion swiftly pocketed the key.

Finally, Nadia couldn't hold back her curiosity. "Is this Paradise?" she asked, her tone filled with wonder.

Though it was far more impressive than anticipated, her curiosity about Orion and the others grew, especially since the place seemed devoid of people. From her current position, she could barely sense anything.

Contrary to her expectations, Orion shook his head. "No, it's not."

"Then where are we?" Nadia asked, frowning; caution filled her voice. Her body tensed, awaiting his response.

"Paradise is not far from here; we'll be there soon," Orion replied, deliberately avoiding her question.

He wasn't sure how Nadia would react if he told her they were currently in the private domain of a goddess. What if she didn't understand the concept of a divine being, or worse, reacted unpredictably to such knowledge?

Regardless, Orion didn't want to escalate the situation. He planned to gradually introduce her to Paradise, starting with the tree nymphs, allowing her to gain some familiarity before

revealing more.

Orion quickly activated the One-Winged Sky Art and used it on Nadia, lifting them both into the air before she could respond.

"What's going on? What is this?!" Nadia exclaimed in shock as she soared above the city, which stretched far beyond the horizon.

A sudden chill ran through her body as she looked down from above. Realizing she had fallen into a trap, her fear turned into anger.

"Let me go! I knew this was a trap!! You bastard! I'll kill you!! I'll slaughter you!!" Nadia screamed, her voice filled with fury, even as her expression betrayed her fear.

Nadia wasn't afraid for herself but for her sisters in the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled. She remembered that another one of these mysterious individuals was still in their territory, unmonitored.

She cursed herself for ever believing that such a 'Paradise,' where races lived in harmony with tree nymphs enjoying the highest privileges, could exist.

Orion frowned as he listened to her words. 'So aggressive,' he thought.

While the tree nymphs could get angry like anyone else, it was never to this extent. Orion

hoped they wouldn't remain so hostile, especially since he didn't want Grace to be influenced by such behaviour.

Realizing she couldn't free herself from the strange restraint holding her in place, Nadia stopped struggling but kept her fierce gaze locked on him.

They soon arrived near the magnificent castle in the city's centre. They descended before a grand golden archway adorned with beautifully carved rubies and gemstones and intricately sculpted sculptures of mythical beasts and sea creatures Nadia had never seen before. Without hesitation, Orion pushed open the door and stepped through, with Nadia floating

beside him.

A flash of blinding sunlight briefly met Nadia's eyes before they found themselves on the other side.

"Where are we?" Nadia asked, bewildered. Her eyes were wide with astonishment at the vast forest before them.

Unlike their previous location, Nadia felt a strange familiarity with the greenery, though she remained doubtful.

As her gaze shifted to the side, her expression turned to shock as she noticed the edge of the land. Beyond it lay a cloud-filled plain. It took a moment for her to realize that they weren't plains but actual clouds held back by a powerful barrier.

Suddenly, the realization hit her; they were no longer on the ground.

They were high up in the sky.

'How is this possible? Can travelling between different territories be this easy?' Nadia

wondered, struggling to understand how they had moved so effortlessly from the seabed to the land and now to the sky. She soon noticed she could move freely, but that was the least of her concerns.

"Welcome to Paradise, Miss Nadia," Orion said with a smile.

"I'd appreciate it if you promised not to scream as I lead you to your sisters," he added.

Nadia focused on him, hesitating briefly before nodding. "Alright, I won't." Orion nodded in approval and swiftly activated the One-Winged Sky Art again, soaring into

the air with Nadia.