

Village Head 1151

Chapter 1151: The Lady Of The Depths

Orion, Nadia, and Seth swiftly crossed through the primordial barrier.

Nadia stared wide-eyed in surprise as she took in her surroundings. They were genuinely high up in the sky. Fortunately, Orion had mastered the One-Winged Sky Art to perfection, so unless he willed it otherwise, Nadia could move as she wished while being held up in the air beside him.

And she did.

Nadia looked behind her, staring in shock at the array of clouds. It was as if the immense land suspended in the air, from which she had just emerged, had vanished into thin air. It was even more remarkable than their Bastion.

As they approached the ground, her eyes widened further, taking in the numerous mountain ranges, the vast desolate plain, and the enormous hole stretching far into the distance. It was almost impossible to understand how vast it was, yet here it was-right next to her.

Nonetheless, something else caught her eye.

Soon, they arrived before an enormous tear in space, as though it had been carved into the atmosphere.

"Is this the gateway to the pocket dimension, the land where I and the others reside?" Nadia asked, her tone curious.

Orion nodded. "Yes," he responded. "We need to get everyone out as fast as possible because we aren't certain when it will close."

Hearing Orion's words, Nadia's expression grew serious, and she nodded in understanding. "If that's the case, then you have my support in doing whatever is needed to get everyone out of the pocket dimension," Nadia said, nodding firmly.

Orion nodded in acknowledgement. "Let's get going then," he responded. He nodded at Seth and flew into the torn space with Nadia.

Seth watched them vanish into the pocket dimension with a worried expression.

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Orion and Nadia soared through the air, over the ocean, heading toward the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled. Suddenly, Orion halted, sensing something in the distance.

"What's that?" Orion asked, stopping mid-air and staring ahead.

Nadia frowned and looked in the same direction Orion was focused on.

It appeared like a figure was following them in the water, peeking at them. At first, Orion thought it was tainted, but its movements were far too coordinated to be considered one.

"Let's go check it out," Orion said.

Nadia nodded in agreement.

They flew forward and quickly arrived at the source. The head peeking out of the water belonged to a woman who appeared entirely made of water. Surprisingly, she didn't flee but remained in her position, her blue eyes fixed on them, waiting patiently.

"Excuse me, can you please tell me who you are?" Orion asked, his voice tinged with curiosity as he looked at the woman. However, instead of responding, she dived back into the water.

Orion's expression morphed into confusion as a frown appeared on his lips.

"Do you know who she is?" Orion asked, shifting his focus to Nadia.

"I don't know who she is. I've never seen or heard any records about something like this," Nadia responded, shaking her head. Though the figure resembled a nymph, she couldn't sense its aura, making it hard to discern what it indeed was.

Orion nodded and refocused on the water before him. "If that's the case, I'll follow her to investigate. If you want, I can send you back to the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled so you can return home and begin conversing with the rest of your sisters," he suggested.

"You must be joking, Supreme Leader. I've lived in this ocean my whole life, yet I've never encountered anything like this. How can I ignore it and return to the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled?" Nadia replied, shaking her head. "I'm just as curious as you to uncover the mystery behind her and discover if she's truly a nymph."

Orion was thoughtful for a moment, then nodded. "Let's go and stay close to me."

Nadia nodded in agreement.

They both dove into the water, where the mysterious figure waited. She glanced at them briefly before turning and swimming away as if leading them somewhere.

Orion frowned. He knew it wasn't wise to follow an unknown entity into unknown territory, especially in such a perilous place as this pocket dimension, where much remained undiscovered. However, he needed to explore and gather as much information as possible. Orion summoned and donned the Morphic Puppet as armour, then wrapped himself in the headless, winged spawn Aurora had left under his control, realizing the need for additional protection.

Nadia was stunned by the sudden appearance of the Morphic Puppet and the winged spawn, initially thinking Orion was transforming into a tainted. She instinctively tried to distance herself, but Orion used his One-winged sky art to hold her in place.

She sighed in relief, realizing it was still him, though she couldn't help but stare at him in shock and bewilderment.

Once fully equipped, Orion nodded in approval. The double-layered protection was enough to ensure his safety unless he encountered a divine being.

"Stay still," he said, turning to Nadia and commanding a headless, winged spawn to cover her entire body like armour.

Nadia froze as the spawn melded against her skin. Without Orion's prior warning, she might have thought he was trying to restrain her, so she waited patiently until the process was

complete.

Within seconds, it was done.

Nadia's body was encased in sleek black armour, and even her head was covered by a thin layer of material that protected her vision. Feeling the immense strength coursing through her as if she could split the ocean with a single swing, she looked at herself in astonishment.

"What are they?" Nadia asked, turning her gaze to Orion.

"They're spawns created by one of the divine beings residing in Paradise for our protection. As you can tell, they're very versatile, suited for defence and offence," Orion explained. Now that Nadia was fully intent on joining Paradise, he saw no reason to hide this information from her. Keeping secrets would do more harm than good; it was best to let her understand how secure Paradise was to strengthen her conviction in joining.

Hearing his words, Nadia's eyes widened with an indescribable shock filling her expression. These spawns were made by a divine being! She had sensed their extraordinary strength and couldn't help but wonder how powerful the divine being responsible for their creation must

be.

Not only that but according to Orion, this was just one of the divine beings residing in Paradise. Nadia couldn't help but gulp.

How many are there?

If something happened to Orion and the others, wouldn't that mean that Paradise and its divine beings would rescue them? As these thoughts raced through Nadia's mind, she didn't feel fear- instead, she was incredibly excited.

As someone just joining Paradise, wouldn't that mean she was also protected by these divine beings?

The thought of having such a strong backing was reassuring. Even if she were to die in battle, she felt comforted knowing that Paradise's forces would avenge her death.

If Anara had been here and could read Nadia's thoughts, she would have immediately dragged her to Paradise and ensured she didn't leave for an extended period. Fortunately, she wasn't.

"Let's go," Orion said, refocusing on the water woman in the distance. She had paused during their conversation, curiously observing their new armour.

As if sensing they were done, the woman began swimming forward again.

Orion swam ahead.

Nadia nodded, her eyes fixed on the woman as she followed behind him.

The woman's speed increased, prompting Orion and Nadia to quicken their pace. Soon, they were swimming through the ocean at breakneck speed. Fortunately, with the aid of the headless winged spawn armour, they could keep up.

They passed numerous underwater mountains, eventually arriving before a wide cave on one of the mountains.

The woman swam into the cave.

Orion and Nadia halted before it.

"Do you recognize this place?" Orion asked, glancing at Nadia.

"I don't. I had always been focused on the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled and ensuring our

survival in this ocean against other bastions and the tainteds. We explored the ocean but never ventured too far, fearing we might encounter something we couldn't handle," Nadia

responded, shaking her head.

Orion nodded in understanding. He had expected this answer. Similarly, his village had never ventured beyond the Dreylal mountain ranges due to the fear of encountering dangerous three-star Vylkr vines or something worse.

It made sense-no one could guarantee survival on such a risky journey. Only those crazy or fearless enough would dare leave the village to chase opportunities.

With a decisive nod at each other, they both swam forward, entering the cave. They were strong enough to see through the darkness, so it posed no obstacle to them. After several minutes, they finally reached the end of the cave, and before them was a wide

hallway separated by a powerful barrier keeping the water from entering.

They hesitated for a second before they both entered through the barrier.

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Chapter 1152: The Place Where It All Began

Orion and Nadia entered a wide passageway lined with glistening white tiles and towering pillars. The mysterious woman was no longer in sight, but with only one path ahead, they continued forward.

After a few minutes, they spotted a large wooden door in the distance.

The woman was standing beside the door as if awaiting their arrival. Without a word, she slipped through the narrow cracks in the centre of the door and disappeared inside.

When Orion and Nadia reached the door, Orion frowned, scrutinizing it momentarily before stepping forward to push it open. However, it didn't budge. The door had no locks or handles, making it impossible to figure out how to open it.

After a brief hesitation, Orion clenched his fist and sent it hurtling toward the door.

BANG!!

The entire hall shook as vibrations rippled through the air, and cracks appeared where his fist landed. Seeing that his punch had dealt some damage, Orion pulled his fist back and punched again.

BANG!! BANG!!

BANG!! BANG!!

After several more punches, Orion had only managed to create a hole large enough for a head to fit through. He frowned, stepping back. Despite using his full strength, it felt like the door absorbed his attacks, reducing the damage he could inflict.

Nadia frowned as well. The sheer force behind Orion's punches had sent shivers down her spine, yet the damage was minimal.

At that moment, Orion and Nadia realized something was wrong with the door.

Orion thought momentarily, then stretched out his hand and summoned his crimson greatsword, shrinking it to about 1.2 meters. With the sword's appearance, Aerialia also appeared.

Aerialia glanced at Nadia before focusing on the door. Orion had already informed her about the situation in the pocket dimension, so she was aware of their current predicament.

"Be careful. There's something strange about this door and what lies beyond it," Aerialia warned, her expression serious.

Orion subtly nodded in acknowledgement. He stepped forward, placed the tip of the crimson greatsword against the door, and pushed it in. As he expected, the blade sliced through the door like a hot knife through butter.

With a swift motion, Orion swung the sword horizontally, then vertically, carving a wide entrance into the door.

Nadia's eyes widened in surprise at the sharpness of the mysterious artefact Orion had just summoned.

'It seems the Supreme Leader is even more formidable than I thought,' Nadia thought as she glanced at Orion.

From his ability to impregnate a race like the tree nymphs to ruling such a vast empire at a young age and possessing such strength and numerous treasures, she couldn't help but

marvel at the many secrets she had yet to uncover about him.

Obviously, she could tell this was just the tip of the iceberg.

Noticing Nadia's curious gaze from the side, Aerialia frowned. She hoped she was mistaken, that a race with no concept of male and female relationships wasn't developing any inappropriate thoughts.

"Let's go," Orion said, gesturing for Nadia to follow him as he stepped through the newly created entrance.

Nadia nodded and swiftly followed after him.

They stepped into a dark room and halted, attempting to look around. However, unlike the outside darkness, their gazes couldn't pierce through the shadows to see even a short distance ahead.

It felt as though they had reverted to the senses of mere mortals.

"There's a powerful restriction here," Aerialia muttered, directing her words to Orion.

Orion frowned at her remark. This place seemed abandoned from his perspective, yet such a potent restriction was still active and working.

"What is this place?" Nadia asked, her voice filled with a mix of anxiety and curiosity. Her body tensed as she scanned the room, searching for the source of the restriction that restricted their vision. Even without being told, she could sense the strange surroundings. "I've analyzed it, and it seems it doesn't affect magical weapons," Aerialia added.

Orion nodded subtly in understanding. He stretched out his hand and attempted to cast the Celestial Amber Forged technique, hoping to create a ball of fire to light up the room, but nothing happened. His celestial energy was sealed.

He then checked the Vylkr energy stored within his Vylkr container and activated his gift, producing a brief spark of lightning that flickered across his fingers. It seemed the restriction only affected other forms of energy, leaving the Vylkr energy untouched.

Though he was tempted to transform into his lightning form to illuminate the room, he was cautious. They didn't know what lurked within or the true purpose of the mysterious water woman bringing them here, so he refrained from acting rashly.

Fortunately, Nadia also had raw Vylkr energy flowing through her, so he wasn't concerned about her safety.

"Stay close to me. Let's explore this room and, hopefully, find her again. We'll ask who she is and why she brought us here," Orion said, glancing at Nadia.

Nadia nodded. "I'll follow your lead, Supreme Leader," she responded.

They moved forward cautiously, sticking close to one another.

Before long, they arrived at a table cluttered with alchemical and experimental tools. Orion scrutinized the room with a growing sense of foreboding in his heart.

Meanwhile, Nadia curiously examined the contents of the table.

As they continued to walk forward, they encountered numerous small and large tables filled with similar and even stranger alchemical and experimental tools. They were empty and appeared abandoned, but somehow neatly kept without a speck of dust on it as though whoever had once used this place had taken all the materials with them, leaving only the equipment behind.

Suddenly, a flood of memories surged within Orion's mind, and he abruptly stopped. He clenched his fists, gripping his crimson greatsword tightly. His eyes widened in shock and disbelief as he looked around.

"This place..." Orion muttered, his voice cracking as if he couldn't finish the sentence. Even Aerialia, floating beside him, widened her eyes with the same emotions mirrored in them. They recognized this place from one of the memories of Aegis of the Arctic Deity. No matter how much they wished to forget it, they couldn't. After all, this was where everything that tied intrinsically to their current selves began.

This was Naka's laboratory!

Nadia was about to ask why they had stopped when she saw the expression on Orion's face.

"Supreme Leader, is everything okay?" she asked, her tone filled with worry. He looked as though he had seen a ghost, though all she could see were tables and equipment.

"I'm fine. I just remembered something," Orion replied, reassuringly nodding.

Nadia nodded. While curious about what memory had caused him such distress, she didn't press him for details since he hadn't elaborated.

"Let's keep going. We might find her soon," Orion said, gesturing for Nadia to follow him as they moved forward.

Before long, they reencountered the mysterious water woman. This time, she stood before another door. Without hesitation, she pushed it open and walked inside.

Seeing this, Orion sighed in relief. At least he wouldn't have to break down another door.

Orion and Nadia approached the door and walked through it. Unlike the outside, this room was illuminated by soft, luminescent white light. There were fewer tables and equipment

here.

Near the far edge of the room, at the centre of the room, was a cylindrical containment chamber about seven feet tall. It was made of reinforced, glass-like material with a faint green tint. Thick metal bands wrapped around the top and base of the tube.

A faint mist clung to the glass, obscuring what lay inside. Once again, their senses were restricted, preventing them from seeing clearly through it.

The mysterious water woman stood beside the containment chamber.

Orion and Nadia approached her.

"Who are you?" Orion asked instantly, wasting no time. For the woman to know this location,

lead them to Naka's laboratory, and move through it so freely, he realized she was no ordinary

figure.

Contrary to his expectations, the mysterious water woman didn't respond. Instead, she turned her head upward, past Orion, and looked directly at Aerialia. Her expression suddenly

became cautious.

Orion's expression stiffened. This entity could see Aerialia.

Aerialia, whose gaze was now locked with the woman's, was equally stunned.

Does that mean...

"Orion, leave this place immediately," Aerialia ordered, her voice authoritative and serious.

However, the moment her words fell, the mysterious water woman's body began to expand rapidly, transforming into a massive body of water that blocked the entrance to the door and surrounded them. Only the three of them and the cylindrical containment chamber remained untouched by the water.

Nadia, who had been trying to peer through the faint mist to see what lay within the chamber, was taken aback by the sudden change in the atmosphere. She was shocked that the mysterious water woman had attacked and felt they had entered a trap.

"Supreme Leader, what do we do?" Nadia asked, her voice tense as she turned to Orion, who

remained calm and composed as always. She sensed that he might have a way out of their current dilemma for some reason.

Chapter 1153: Divine Embryonic Seed

"Don't worry, she isn't going to harm us," Orion said, calming Nadia down.

The mysterious water woman had only acted aggressively after Aerialia had warned him to leave, so he could only deduce that she was trying to block their escape route. Fortunately, Orion had no intention of fleeing or getting violent with her, so he stayed put.

Seeing his calm demeanour, Aerialia frowned but then exhaled, realizing Orion had already decided.

After a brief hesitation, Nadia nodded. Although she was still sceptical, especially considering the massive body of water surrounding them and threatening to submerge them at any moment, she trusted Orion's words.

"What is she looking at?" Nadia asked, her previously troubled expression shifting into a

frown.

The mysterious water woman's expression was complicated. Her gaze was fixed on the empty space beside Orion, and Nadia could sense something was off.

Hearing her question, Orion wore a conflicted expression. Aerialia was only significantly known to a few within Paradise, mainly his wives since she helped train them. He hesitated to reveal her presence to Nadia.

Sensing Orion's dilemma, Aerialia decided to step in. "You want to solidify her loyalty to Paradise, right? This is the best way to do it," she said.

It would be problematic if Nadia grew suspicious of them because of this secrecy. Though Nadia had intended to pledge her allegiance to Paradise, it was primarily because of the tree nymphs. True submission would take time, but her revelation could accelerate that process.

In an instant, Aerialia revealed herself to Nadia.

Nadia, who was about to speak to Orion, sealed her lips and stared wide-eyed at the now- visible Aerialia, hovering beside him with a vibrant, otherworldly glow. Her expression shifted to one of fear and confusion.

She couldn't help but wonder about this woman's identity and how she had managed to remain hidden from her senses. She immediately grabbed Orion and distanced herself from Aerialia and the mysterious water woman, her mind racing to comprehend what was happening. Her heart pounded in her chest, and she could feel the blood draining from her face.

"Ahem! There's no need to be afraid, Miss Nadia. She's part of Paradise," Orion cleared his throat and gestured toward Aerialia.

Nadia was taken aback. She gulped, realizing Paradise was far more intricate than she had initially thought.

Aerialia glanced at Nadia, giving her an approving nod before refocusing on the mysterious water woman.

"I am Aerialia, goddess of the Hunting Moon and one of the divine beings tasked with protecting Paradise," Aerialia introduced herself. "Now that I've made my introduction, why don't you reveal

your identity, goddess, and explain why you brought us here and your relationship with 'Naka'?" Her tone was stern, tinged with ire as she finished.

Upon hearing her words, Nadia's eyes nearly bulged out of her head, and a sudden, sharp pain surged in her chest, causing her to collapse to her knees and cough violently.

Immediately, Orion knelt beside her to check her condition. "Are you okay?" he asked, his expression full of concern.

Nadia tried to nod but ultimately shook her head.

A goddess? One of the divine beings protecting Paradise?! Just after Orion mentioned one of Paradise's divine beings, another mysteriously appeared beside him. Nadia was far from okay -her emotions were spiralling out of control.

Orion frowned as he sensed the erratic double heartbeat pounding heavily in her chest. "Take a deep breath and exhale," he instructed.

Nadia nodded and took several deep breaths. Soon, her breathing steadied, and her expression softened. However, within moments, her eyes grew dizzy, and she fainted.

Orion swiftly caught her before she could hit the ground. He tried to wake her, but all his efforts were futile. Realizing she was unconscious, Orion lifted her into his arms and stood up, arriving beside Aerialia. His crimson greatsword hovered at his side.

Aerialia glanced at the unconscious Nadia in Orion's arms.

Perhaps she had overestimated her.

Aerialia focused on the mysterious water woman, who had yet to answer her question.

"You must have led us here for a reason, right? However, we can't help you unless you introduce yourself," Orion said, his expression solemn, awaiting her response.

After a brief hesitation, the mysterious water woman nodded in understanding and opened her mouth to speak. However, no words emerged. Instead, a calm but nervous feminine voice sounded within their consciousness.

"... Can't speak..." the mysterious water woman said.

"You're unable to introduce yourself, or can't you speak at all?" Aerialia asked, frowning.

Was Naka so powerful that he had reduced a goddess to this? If so, it was hard to fathom how much stronger he had become since then.

The mysterious water woman nodded in response.

Realizing the reason behind her silence, Orion's expression turned thoughtful.

"Do you know who Naka is? Can you tell us anything about him?" Orion asked.

The mysterious water woman nodded, then shook her head.

Orion and Aerialia exchanged tense glances, their expressions tightening.

"Why did you bring us here?" Aerialia asked, narrowing her eyes at the goddess. She remained sceptical of their purpose in this location if the goddess couldn't provide relevant

information.

Contrary to their expectations, the mysterious water woman turned and pointed at the containment chamber.

"Mirror realm... goddess... please save her," her voice echoed in their consciousness once more.

Her words stunned Orion and Aerialia, their expressions morphing into confusion. They turned toward the containment chamber, narrowing their eyes.

Soon, the mist within the chamber dissipated, revealing its contents.

Suspended in the viscous liquid was a protective cocoon of inky black light wrapped around a translucent pearl-like seed at the chamber's centre. Smooth yet rough ridged veins surrounded it, with numerous fine silken threads of divine energy branching from the veins.

These threads pulsed rhythmically with a faint tremble, mimicking the soft beat of a heart. Glowing runes, inscribed with intricate patterns, flickered atop and beneath the cocoon as though they were on the verge of fading out at any moment.

Aerialia's eyes widened in shock for the umpteenth time, her expression shifting from realization to astonishment.

Chapter 1154: Divine Embryonic Seed (2)

"Do you know what this is?" Orion asked, turning his attention toward Aerialia, noticing her reaction.

Aerialia gave a solemn nod. "This is a Divine Embryonic Seed, one of the main requirements for an already dead divine being who managed to preserve their divine soul to be reborn anew. Surprisingly, this one seems contaminated with raw Vylkr energy and has likely been here for a long time," Aerialia replied, scrutinizing the Divine Embryonic Seed with a sharp gaze.

"The divine laws within it also appear to be unstable. I can't tell how long it will remain active before it enters a dormant state,"

A look of realization crossed Orion's face. He swallowed and asked, "Does that mean you could potentially reconstruct your body with it?"

Contrary to his expectation, Aerialia shook her head. "Every divine being I've encountered has a self-tailored rebirth technique they use to cultivate their Divine Embryonic Seed. Attempting to influence it could push it into a false dormant state, leaving it highly susceptible to external influences. Its growth would be stalled until it awakens from dormancy."

"Attempting such a thing would be risky, making me vulnerable to external forces. Also, the Vylkr energy would likely make any of my attempts impossible, so it would be a waste of time," she explained. "And in this case, it already appears to belong to someone seeking rebirth."

A Divine Embryonic Seed can also be made using the children of the divine being as ingredients since they are the closest thing to the divine being. This process is more straightforward and allows them to attain the same constitution they were familiar with. It is less time-consuming and has a higher success rate of reconstructing their body.

For instance, when Aerialia tried to take over Aurora's body during their first encounter, she easily suppressed her soul because Aurora was the perfect divine embryonic vessel for her resurrection, made from her essence and tailored to be like her. Before she stopped.

However, only a few gods are willing to commit such horrendous acts. Most would only consider it a last resort, while many, like Aerialia, would never attempt such a thing, even if left with no other choice.

Many don't have these seeds in abundance because a Divine Embryonic Seed is delicate and requires constant care, rare materials, and immense resources.

They prefer reincarnating back into their race, as it's a much easier process. They wouldn't willingly spend time on something like this unless, like Aerialia, their children had been wiped from existence and they had found a way to save their divine souls from total obliteration.

As Orion finished speaking, the immense water surrounding them churned violently for a moment before settling as if calm by Aerialia's following response.

The mysterious water woman pouted, her expression irritated, as though annoyed by the emotional roller coaster through their conversation.

Aerialia focused on the mysterious water woman, narrowing her eyes in suspicion. "Does this belong to you?" she asked.

The mysterious water woman swiftly shook her head and replied, "Mirror realm... goddess..." Her voice echoed in their consciousness.

Aerialia's gaze sharpened, her brows furrowing in thought as she nodded in understanding.

'So, this belonged to the divine being responsible for creating the mirror realm and helping the inhabitants of the pocket dimension suppress the effects of the death plague. It seems things are not as straightforward as they appear,' she thought.

Orion wore a mixed expression, both thoughtful and troubled, as he came to the same conclusion. Even if they had expected to uncover an enormous secret, it wasn't something they could stomach in minutes.

"What exactly are we supposed to rescue her from?" Aerialia asked, her tone serious.

This was her most important question. They couldn't ignore the possibility that this goddess had been here for a long time, possibly since the pocket dimension was still active. For her to survive this long and suppress the effects of the death plague indicated that she was powerful. As a divine being in her current state, she should have understood her limits and perhaps Paradise's.

Also, she wouldn't be surprised if Naka was directly involved. It seemed almost laughable for them to think they could rescue someone from a foe or force that even she could not escape.

To their surprise, the mysterious water woman raised her hand and pointed her finger toward the sky. "...Heaven," she whispered inaudibly, though her voice rang clearly within their consciousness.

And one more time since discovering one of Naka's laboratories, Aerialia's and Orion's expressions froze, their faces morphing into a mix of shock, realization, and horror. In an instant, their expressions became unreadable.

Suddenly, a burst of laughter escaped from Aerialia's lips. "Hahaha," she chuckled, her lips curving into amusement. "I see. For some reason, this goddess you speak of has gotten herself entangled into a mess with the divine mystery, and now you want to rescue her and bring her here to use the Divine Embryonic Seed so she can be reborn, starting anew and escaping whatever mess she's gotten herself into."

Aerialia's gaze suddenly sharpened, her voice turning into a growl. "How foolish do you think we are to meddle in something like this? Do you even have compensation for making such a

request?"

After Aerialia finished speaking, the immense body of water surrounding them retracted into the mysterious water woman. She knelt on the ground, prostrating herself before them.

"...Servitude..."

Aerialia's eyes flickered with surprise before her expression twisted into anger. "Do you think that's enough? I'm unsure whether you're even a goddess, a demigoddess, or something else entirely. And you think your servitude is enough for compensation?" she retorted, her voice laced with irritation.

She then turned her attention to Orion and said, "Let's go. It's dangerous to continue this conversation with her. We'd better focus on rescuing this pocket dimension's inhabitants and bringing them to Paradise before the portal closes, saving Ilse the stress in case something unexpected happens." She locked her gaze with Orion.

Chapter 1155: The Dangerous Agreement

Orion shook his head. "Let's hear the rest of what she has to say. This isn't something we should ignore."

"Are you out of your mind?!" Aerialia exclaimed. "This isn't something we should involve ourselves in. As a mortal, you can't comprehend the powers of the divine mysteries. Even when I was alive, this is the kind of situation I wouldn't dare entertain rashly."

She wished she could grab Orion and drag him out of this place, but she couldn't. So, instead, she used her authority over the Crimson Greatsword, bringing it horizontally before him, blocking the path between him and the mysterious water woman.

"But still, we can't turn back now. We knew that gathering information about Naka and his whereabouts would be challenging. Isn't it better to do so with some support rather than wait for another opportunity we can't be sure will come?"

"Also, meeting this goddess could be beneficial-we might learn how she suppresses the effects of the Death Plague. As for why the residents of the pocket dimension naturally produce Vylkr energy... that should be obvious by now," Orion said, glancing at their surroundings before refocusing on Aerialia.

"Regardless, any information we obtain here would be invaluable for Paradise's

development. I'm willing to take my chances and see what kind of mess she's gotten into with the divine mysteries," he added.

Aerialia clenched her teeth, conflicted. On one hand, she understood Orion's valid reasoning. On the other, as a goddess who had witnessed the terror of divine mysteries firsthand, how could she easily agree with his judgment?

It was like watching a newborn trying to jump into a battlefield filled with Aurora's headless winged spawns and being asked to trust his judgment. She wouldn't let such a reckless thought fester in his mind if she could help.

"I refuse," Aerialia replied, her tone leaving no room for debate.

Hearing her words, Orion sighed. He knew Aerialia was looking out for him and Paradise, but as the Supreme Leader, there were times when he needed to make a decision and take a risk.

Staring into Orion's eyes and seeing their conviction, Aerialia clenched her teeth harder. She turned her head away, licking her lips in frustration.

"If you have a death wish, just remember-you have a family. And if you die, I'll ensure you're reincarnated and eternally imprisoned in Paradise," Aerialia said.

Orion smiled, nodding in response. He focused on the mysterious water woman and said, "We'll help you rescue this goddess. But I'll clarify, we're not confident we'll succeed. So, if we fail, I want the Divine Embryonic Seed."

The mysterious water woman swiftly jumped in front of the containment chamber protectively and shook her head in refusal.

Aerialia raised her brow, realizing what Orion was attempting to do. She wanted to speak but sealed her lips shut, her fists clenching.

"If we fail, I doubt you'd be able to find anyone to aid you or anyone at all, except for the tainteds swimming around. That would mean the Divine Embryonic Seed will enter dormancy sooner or later and become useless. So, wouldn't it be better to give it to us so we can put it to good use?" Orion added.

"Also, we might be aware of the divine being responsible for your goddess's current situation... It's Naka, isn't it? I'm sure you're familiar with him, given your reaction. We're also searching for him to repay him for all the injustice he has caused."

Orion observed as the mysterious water woman trembled slightly at the end of his words, her expression shifting to one of contemplation.

"Okay..." the mysterious water woman nodded, her firm gaze fixed on Orion.

Orion shifted his attention to Aerialia, but she looked away in annoyance.

Refocusing on the mysterious water woman, Orion asked, "Can you show us a way into the Mirror Realm?"

From what he'd learned, one needed to naturally produce Vylkr energy to enter the Mirror Realm and be on the verge of transforming into a tainted. However, Orion was unwilling to undergo such a process.

The mysterious water woman nodded. She gestured toward the door, signalling her willingness to lead the way.

Orion quickly understood and nodded back.

"And the equipments here..." he asked. "It would be a waste to let it continue sitting unused. I

have people who can utilize it. I can help you clear out the area."

The mysterious water woman's voice echoed in their consciousness, "...Useless..."

Orion smiled, certain that Seraphina would be pleased with his findings.

They needed to begin the evacuation of the residents within the pocket dimension immediately so he could proceed with his next plan to enter the Mirror Realm. The best thing he could do now was handle this matter carefully.

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Bastion of Wailling Gnarled Territory

Fifi sat comfortably in her seat, biting into a Kalnir fruit delivered to her. Around her were numerous nymphs, including those fully armed, all encased and restrained in ice. In one corner of the room stood several strange nymphs with abnormal body parts, restrained by headless, winged spawns.

Fifi glanced at them a few times with a frown before an expression of contemplation crossed her face.

Apart from the chair and table, the room itself had been destroyed as though a fierce battle had occurred.

"Where is our sovereignty? What have you done to her?!" demanded a barefoot rock nymph with an upper pale yellow skin tone and lower white skin tone. She was dressed in a white shirt and black fitted pants; her voice was laced with rage and disbelief. Her piercing gaze was fixed on Fifi, and she held her gleaming sword tightly in her cold grasp.

This was Fellssa, the head maid of the Crown Palace, who had led Orion and Fifi to their room. Several hateful gazes were also fixed on Fifi, their expressions filled with a desire to tear her apart.

"Haven't I answered that they'll return in a few hours?" Fifi sighed. It had already been a day since Orion and Nadia left for Paradise after entering the pocket dimension.

Without the key to the Golden Palace, which Ilse had entrusted to Orion and Aurora, Fifi couldn't go outside to find out what was happening. So she stayed put, conversing with others about their discoveries and progress within the other bastions.

Fifi had learned a lot, especially about the existence of the Arch-Knights; it was revealed that they were the backbone of the bastions. Each was at the level of a Four-Star Warrior, with

each corps numbering hundreds to a thousand.

Initially, Fifi had been astonished to learn this, but she realized it made sense, given how readily the bastions had welcomed them into their territory. Fortunately, the bastions were overconfident. No matter how powerful or the size of their numbers, their plans were futile with a goddess like Aurora on their side.

Now, with Brane and Zara securing control of the backbone of the Bastion of Ashen Hope and Aurora doing the same with the Tidal Depths Kingdom-despite being besieged by their entire corps, numbering in the thousands, yet emerging victorious without lifting a finger- all that remained was for Orion to return to the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled so they could begin

the evacuation.

Fifi hated to admit it, but she was beginning to get impatient. The more she learned about this pocket dimension, the sooner she wanted to leave.

"And you expect us to believe you? We've been like this for three hours, and you keep saying our Sovereigness will return soon," Felissa retorted angrily, screaming at Fifi. She was also irritated that they had been defeated by her ice powers, which felt like an embarrassing blow.

"If anything happens to her, I promise you'll regret it. And if you're waiting for reinforcements from your companions, forget it. We'll defeat you and pry the information from your lips, even if it costs us our live-"

Before Felissa could finish, Fifi used her gift to freeze her lips, silencing her like the others. Fifi had been hoping to get information about the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled from her, but it

was futile.

Fifi was about to speak when she suddenly paused, exhaling in relief. She dispelled the ice restraining them, except for the Arch-Knights in the corner of the room.

Felissa and the others fell to the ground, confusion and doubt filling their eyes as they looked

at Fifi.

"What? Didn't you say you wanted to see your Sovereigness?... She's back, so you should clean up this room quickly, or else start preparing an explanation for why you decided to lead an attack against her esteemed guest," Fifi said nonchalantly, sipping her wine. Felissa's eyes widened in surprise. Hesitation flickered across her face before she turned to the other armed nymphs.

"I'll check if her words are true and the Sovereigness has returned. You all keep a close watch on her and make sure she doesn't leave the room," Felissa said, swiftly rising to her feet and

exiting the room.

Chapter 1156: Returning To The Bastion Of Wailing Gnarled

The nymphs in the room blinked in confusion. They couldn't fathom how they were supposed to confront someone who had single-handedly overpowered them with just a wave of her hand.

Standing up from the ground, they focused their gazes on Fifi's light smile, their bodies trembling in fear. Gripping their weapons tightly, they anxiously awaited Felissa's return. Fortunately, after fifteen minutes, the door swung open again, and Orion, Nadia, and Felissa stepped into the room. In an instant, all the nymphs fell to their knees, bowing and greeting them.

"Your Sovereigness!"

Nadia surveyed the destruction in the room with a deep frown. A shiver ran down her spine as her gaze flickered toward the subdued Arch-Knights in the corner, held at bay by the headless winged spawns.

However, given her recent experience, her reaction was more restrained than it might have been.

Under the astonished gaze of the armed nymphs, Nadia swiftly approached Fifi and bowed. "I apologize if my subordinates caused any disturbance. I ask that you not hold it against them. They were only doing their duty," she said, her tone respectful.

Fifi was slightly surprised by Nadia's sudden change in demeanour. The difference between the emotionless, expressionless Nadia she had met hours ago and the one now before her, showing a mixture of conflicting emotions, was impossible to miss.

Fifi glanced at Orion's calm demeanour with a hint of realization in her eyes, then refocused on Nadia and nodded in understanding.

"You don't need to apologize. I don't hold anything against them. In fact, I would've been troubled if they hadn't noticed their Sovereigness's absence for several hours," Fifi said, concluding her words with a slight chuckle.

Nadia sighed and nodded silently, relieved she hadn't irritated the formidable warrior, one powerful enough to accompany the Supreme Leader of Paradise.

Meanwhile, Felissa held her right cheek, now marked with a palm imprint, with a dumbfounded expression. As the head maid of the Crown Palace, she frequently interacted with the Sovereigness and was well aware of how shocking this new behaviour was.

'No, this isn't the Sovereigness! These people must have done something to her!' Felissa thought, her mind racing as she shot a piercing glance at Fifi and Orion.

"What are you all still waiting for? Leave this room immediately! I will address you all later!" Nadia commanded.

The armed nymphs nodded in response and swiftly exited the room one by one in an orderly manner, leaving only Felissa behind.

Orion's gaze finally landed on the fifteen fully plated armoured nymphs restrained by the headless winged spawns in the corner of the room.

[Energy Level - 4,240 BEM]

[Energy Level - 4,289 BEM]

[Energy Level - 4,348 BEM]

.....

To his surprise, they were all at the level of four-star warriors, with the strongest at 4,400

BEM.

"Who are they?" Orion asked, gesturing toward the group with a frown as he looked at Nadia. "They are part of our Arch-Knights corps, Supreme Leader," Nadia quickly responded. She turned to the subdued Arch-Knights and ordered them to "Introduce yourselves quickly." Supreme Leader? Felissa's eyes widened in shock, her mind grinding to a halt.

What stunned her even more was how Nadia, who had previously treated the backbone of the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled with respect, now addressed them with such an irritated tone.

'The Sovereigness has definitely been brainwashed! That was the only explanation for what was happening, or else why would she address a man she had just met as 'Supreme Leader'?' Felissa felt the urgent need to inform the High Advisors and the rest of the Arch-Knights corps about this, or it would be too late for the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled to act before the truth was revealed.

The subdued Arch-Knights, whose lips were bound, were confused and unsure of how to speak. They furrowed their brows, uncertain if the Sovereigness could see their dilemma. Fifi quickly controlled the headless winged spawns, freeing the Arch-Knights from their bondage.

Once free, one of the Arch-Knights stood up.

"I am the commander of the Arch-Knights of the Dead Roots corps, and the others behind me are my subordinates," she introduced them, bowing respectfully. Her most lifeless gaze flickered with a conflicted mix of emotions as she glanced at the spawn standing behind her.

Nadia looked to Orion, awaiting his response. Although he had informed her of what had transpired while she was unconscious, she knew there were still many things he hadn't revealed.

However, she didn't dare ask. After learning about the existence of the tree nymphs in Paradise, she wasn't foolish enough to disrupt their impending reunion with the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled.

"While you discuss the arrangements with the High Advisors, I would like to speak with the lead artificer you mentioned earlier," Orion said, deciding to use the opportunity to meet

Mira.

Nadia nodded quickly. "I will take you there myself. Please follow me," she replied.

Fifi finished her last Kalnir fruit, stood up, and followed beside Orion.

Seeing this, Nadia turned to Felissa. "Make sure they don't cause any trouble and gather them in one place until I'm ready to meet with them," she ordered.

"I will do as you command, Sovereigness," Felissa nodded firmly.

With that, Nadia exited the room with Orion and Fifi.

Felissa watched them leave with a determined expression on her face.

Fifteen minutes later,

Nadia halted before a door. "This is the place," she said, glancing at Orion and Fifi behind her.

She gently knocked on the door.

"I'm coming," a familiar voice called out. Several hurried movements could be heard from the other side.

In a moment, the door swung open.

"Who's there?" Mira asked, her words catching in her throat.

"Sovereigness, you're back?!" she exclaimed, but her voice almost faded as her eyes flickered

toward Orion and Fifi.

Nadia nodded. "I left to quickly handle an important matter. Has there been any strange rumours about me spreading around the bastion?" Her voice carried a hint of suspicion as she

raised a brow.

"Ye-No... I'm not aware of any strange rumours. I'm just surprised you returned so quickly," Mira said, shaking her head hastily. "Can I know why you're looking for me? Is it because..."

She trailed off, glancing uncertainly at Orion and Fifi.

She wasn't sure whether to feel relieved or terrified at their presence.

Nadia frowned but quickly composed herself. "Can we come in?"

"Of course," Mira nodded, smiling as she pushed the door open.

Nadia, Orion, and Fifi stepped inside.

Contrary to their expectations, the room had empty tables, and several metallic-like suitcases were piled in the corners. It was as though the entire place had been cleared out. "What's going on? Where is your research equipment?" Nadia asked with a deep frown.

"I... I packed them away. I heard that the Sovereigness had been taken by... our mysterious guests, so I decided to secure my research materials and equipment for future generations. Fortunately, nothing happened to you, so I'll start unpacking them immediately," Mira explained quickly, her expression shameful as she lowered her head.

Nadia's brows twitched with irritation. She could only guess who might have spread such a rumour, even if it was twisted from a partial truth.

"I'll see that whoever is spreading this dealt with swiftly. In the meantime, I've brought our

two esteemed guests so you can help them understand more about the void heart. You only need to unpack the necessary equipment for now. I'll return after I meet with the High

Advisors," Nadia instructed.

Mira nodded several times in quick succession. "Okay," she replied.

Nadia turned to Orion and Fifi. "I'll be taking my leave. I'll return to inform you of the meeting's results after I'm done," she said respectfully, offering a bow before turning and exiting the room, closing the door behind her.

Left alone with Orion and Fifi, Mira stepped back and gulped. She noticed the Sovereigness's surprisingly respectful gesture toward them but was only slightly stunned before she quickly

got to work.

Mira swiftly unpacked a few of the large metallic-like boxes, bringing out several pieces of equipment and her research materials and placing them on the tables.

She then approached them. "Ahem! It seems the plan worked out," she said with a tight smile. "...Would you like to continue from where we left off, or are there specific questions you'd like to ask?" She couldn't see their faces through their masks, just like before, and the tension in

her body grew.

"I'd like to ask a few questions first," Orion responded.

"Oh? What is it?" Mira asked, her expression curious.

"I want to understand how you're able to produce Vylkr energy naturally," Orion said.

He was convinced that the residents' ability to generate Vylkr energy wasn't as natural as it seemed, and he wanted to uncover how it worked.

With Seraphina's help, the research centre's expertise, and Aurora's expertise, they might find

a way to eliminate the transformation into the tainted and harness Vylkr energy without relying on the Vylkr vines.

Chapter 1157: Mother Seed Cells

Hearing his question, Mira furrowed her brows, surprised that he would start with such a complex topic. Still, it wasn't beyond her capability to explain.

"To understand how Vylkr energy is naturally produced in our bodies, we need to examine it on a cellular level. Within us, there are cells called Mother Seed Cells, or 'MSCs.' These are unlike any regular cells and are typically clustered near vital organs, particularly around the heart and nervous system," Mira explained.

She paused, unboxing and turned to face Orion and Fifi. "... I'll share a secret. These unique cells don't produce Vylkr energy out of thin air. Instead, they act as conduits for energy transformation, harnessing a particular type of powerful energy from the environment and converting it into Vylkr energy."

Orion's expression became thoughtful as he processed her words. He had been right; the residents' ability to produce Vylkr energy wasn't as natural as it appeared. However, in a way, it wasn't entirely unnatural either-just more complex than expected.

"I know this is different from what I initially told you, but you wouldn't have understood if I had started this way," Mira added before continuing her work. "Vylkr energy is extremely fierce and dangerous, so for our bodies to naturally produce it from thin air, we need to possess a powerful constitution, but we don't."

"The structure of the MSC is unique, with a nucleus containing an unknown fragment wrapped in a protein we call 'strangikyn.' All we know about this fragment is that it acts as a miniature reactor. There's also a specialised mitochondrion called the 'Vylkr mitochondrion' and a cytosol with a high concentration of proteins called 'Vylkr enzymes,' which act as catalysts for energy conversion."

"This unknown energy is first absorbed by the Vylkr enzymes, then passes through the unique nucleus, where it's amplified and infused with properties of the unknown fragments, and into the Vylkr mitochondrion, which synthesises it into raw Vylkr energy."

"The energy is then released into the bloodstream, spreading throughout the body and enhancing the overall constitution. That's how we can produce Vylkr energy naturally," Mira added.

"As for how we eventually transform into Tainted... Remember when I said that we don't have the right constitution to support the production of Vylkr energy?" Mira continued, "When the Mother Seed Cells produce too much Vylkr energy, the unknown fragment in the nucleus becomes unstable, leading to the unstable replication of cells, which creates Tainted cells."

"The Tainted cells are infectious-once they spread into the bloodstream, they infect healthy cells, turning them into more Tainted cells and generating chaotic Vylkr energy. Though the MSCs are safe from corruption, it doesn't matter because the body starts undergoing physiological and molecular changes, eventually transforming into a Tainted."

"The Void Heart not only serves as a regulator but also as a filter and stabiliser. It purifies the cells, and Vylkr energy neutralises its chaotic elements, preventing further mutation of the Tainted cells and reducing the risk of corruption. That's all we've discovered with our equipment," Mira said, her expression serious.

Ten minutes later, Mira had explained everything she knew about the Tainted and the Void Heart.

"Is the cell only capable of utilising that unknown, powerful energy?" Orion asked curiously. "No. It can utilise nature energy and others, but the conversion is ineffective compared to this powerful energy. That's why it's preferred. I think I kept it here somewhere," Mira responded.

"Have you discovered how those on the verge of becoming Tainted can enter the Mirror Realm?" Orion asked.

Contrary to his expectations, Mira shook her head and responded, "We haven't been able to observe such a phenomenon with our equipment." She added, "Ah, here it is. It took considerable effort for us to collect such a small sample." She handed Orion a small vial from a sealed metallic case.

"Please, be careful with it," Mira said lightly.

Orion accepted the vial curiously, but upon grasping the container tightly, he couldn't sense anything inside, causing him to frown.

"It's sealed with a powerful barrier to prevent anything from escaping. Since we sacrificed so much to obtain it, we had to ensure it wouldn't be lost," Mira explained as if sensing Orion's thoughts after noticing his silence.

A look of realisation appeared on Orion's face. "Can you help us open it then? If I can sense it, I may be able to tell if it's one of the top-ranked energies and help you identify it," he asked, fixing his gaze on Mira.

As the Supreme Leader of Paradise, who had encountered many distinct races, Orion was confident he could recognise many of the top-ranked energies. He believed that if he could sense the energy needed for the conversion, he might be able to identify it.

"I... appreciate the offer, but only four are in the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled. If we're going to open it, we'll need to follow a special procedure to prevent any chance of it escaping," Mira responded, pursing her lips.

"You don't need to worry. We have our own research team that would be happy to assist you with this. We'll do whatever we can to help gather another batch if anything happens," Orion responded. "This will help foster a closer relationship between us."

Mira furrowed her brows at Orion's words. Though the unknown powerful energy was difficult to collect, with extra help, it wasn't impossible.

It would be great if they could exchange this to build a stronger bond with such powerful figures. From the Sovereigness's earlier demeanour, they were already on good terms, so taking advantage of this offer wasn't bad.

"You're not going back on your word, right?" Mira asked. She still needed to be sure that he would keep his promise.

"I promise," Orion replied.

"Alright, hand it over," Mira sighed, her shoulders slumping in defeat as she stretched out her hand and took the vial back from Orion.

Mira channeled her nature energy into the vial, causing various complex runes to light up around it within seconds. Taking a deep breath, she brushed her finger over the first triangular rune and tapped the top of the vial. She gently pressed her finger on the next symbol, aligning it with the previous one.

A faint whirring sound emerged as if the gears inside were roaring to life. With a soft click, the vial was unsealed.

Mira gently unscrewed the cap and pulled out a small glass container, revealing a tiny, powerful wisp of milky white energy.

Upon seeing the wisp, Orion and Fifi's eyes widened in dumbfoundedment.

The wisp of energy that Mira had spoken of, now before them, was unmistakably divine energy. They had never expected the Mother Seed Cells to harness divine energy for conversion into Vylkr energy.

'It makes sense,' Orion thought, his expression growing solemn.

He could finally understand how they had grown so powerful without the help of the Vylkr fusion armlet and why they needed the help of a divine being to suppress the transformation

into Tainted.

Orion's mind flashed to the contaminated Divine Embryonic Seed. Unfortunately, he still lacked enough information to form a conclusion.

Suddenly, Orion's mind wandered back to Aurora's previous failed divine constitution and the events surrounding her birth before her ascension.

He realised that this was what Naka had been researching, though it ultimately resulted in failure. The thought of what would have happened if Aurora hadn't passed her trial sent a

shiver down his spine.

Troublesome! He couldn't even imagine it.

"Are you done sensing it?" Mira asked, her voice tinged with anxiety as the tiny milky wisp of divine energy slowly dissipated.

"I'm done. You can seal it back," Orion responded with a nod.

Without responding, Mira quickly resealed the vial and returned it to its box. She raised her head and looked at Orion and Fifi. "So, can you sense what kind of energy it is?" Her voice was filled with anticipation.

"Yes, we're very familiar with it," Orion replied with a firm nod.

"Really? You are not joking, right?" Mira's eyes widened in shock, and her body trembled with excitement.

"I wouldn't dare joke about something like this. It's called divine energy, one of the highest energy ranks," Orion explained. "Once everything is settled and the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled is prepared to move to Paradise, I'll ensure you have as many wisp of divine energy as you need for your research."

Mira froze, her expression shifting into disbelief. "This... is divine energy?" she asked, her voice quivering, her hands trembling as she stared wide-eyed at the box in her hand. Who would have thought that the powerful energy responsible for producing Vylkr energy,

the one the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled had been researching for countless years to unlock its secrets, was of divine nature? The very energy used only by the gods since ancient times!

Mira's mind stopped as she processed the rest of Orion's words.

"What do you mean by moving to 'Paradise'?" she asked.

She knew that Paradise was the name of the land they came from, but she was surprised and confused about why they would be moving there.

Chapter 1158: The Bastion Of Wailing Gnarled Uprooted

"You will understand soon, once the announcement is made," Orion responded.

Seeing that he was keeping quiet about the matter, Mira furrowed her brows in frustration. She let it go for now and placed the matter in the back of her mind.

They continued their discussion for another twenty minutes before concluding the conversation.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the entrance.

"I'll check who it is," Mira said, swiftly opening the door. "Your Sovereigness," She greeted.

Nadia nodded in acknowledgement and walked into the laboratory.

Mira quickly closed the door and followed behind her, her mind racing.

Nadia stopped in front of Orion and Fifi.

"I've finished the discussion with the High Advisors. They were sceptical of my claims but wouldn't dare challenge my authority. We've agreed that all the citizens of the Bastion of Wailling Gnarled will pledge allegiance to Paradise and become its citizens. However, a few High Advisors want to join you in eliminating the Harbingers and their spawns before leaving this place."

"They've sacrificed too much to abandon it and would rather die trying to eliminate them. I'm certain many of our soldiers and Arch-Knights will feel the same once the announcement is made. I hope you can understand their reasoning," she explained.

"I understand. Don't worry; if they want to join us, they are free to do so. I promise no lives will be needlessly lost under my care," Orion replied.

He had decided to launch a frontal assault on the Harbingers' lair, as the mysterious water woman had revealed that the way into the Mirror Realm was in their hands. However, Nadia was unaware of this as there was no reason to inform her.

Since he was going there anyway, he might as well let them come along. This would allow them to confront the Harbingers and spawns that had caused their suffering, which might restore their sense of respect and reverence-something that could be incredibly useful. Nadia's expression brightened with happiness, and she bowed deeply to Orion and Fifi. "Thank you. The Bastion of Wailing Gnarled will never be able to repay the aid you've given us."

"You're joking. Since the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled has decided to join Paradise, any debts owed before are wiped clean. Those under Paradise owe nothing but loyalty," Orion replied with a smile.

Nadia returned his smile and nodded. "I will lead you to the gathering ground where the announcement will occur," she said.

Orion nodded.

Nadia turned to Mira, "Pack everything you deem necessary and prepare to leave for the gathering ground. I will be making an important announcement soon," she said.

"Understood, Sovereigness," Mira responded, snapping out of the daze she had been in from everything she had just witnessed. Her emotions swirled at the monumental event about to shake the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled, but she quickly composed herself.

"I will lead the way," Nadia said, refocusing on Orion and Fifi. She led them forward, and they followed her out of the room.

Mira quickly got to work, packing her belongings.

....

Orion and Fifi stood on a floating stone, hovering a few meters above the ground. Below them stretched a sea of individuals - nymphs and a few other races - numbering in the millions. It was impossible to count them all as they filled every corner of the massive underground grand hall, which seemed specifically designed for this purpose.

Facing the crowd was Nadia, with the five High Advisors standing behind her. Nadia had just finished delivering her speech to the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled citizens and was about to introduce Orion and Fifi.

"This is Orion, the Supreme Leader of Paradise, and Fifi, his formidable companion. They will lead us out of this dreaded ocean," Nadia announced loudly.

Immediately, a wave of commotion and murmurs spread through the crowd.

"My goodness! The Sovereigness is actually smiling... That's not like her, is it? Are you sure the Sovereigness hasn't been hypnotized?"

"What are you talking about? Of course, it's the Sovereigness! Who would dare impersonate her in front of such a large crowd? You should focus on the important matter at hand... Are we finally going to leave this dreaded region once and for all?"

"Wait... How could any force willingly accept us and offer such immense benefits?"

"I don't believe the Sovereigness is lying to us. Her character is as unpretentious and unyielding as an underwater mountain. She would do anything to protect us! Besides, the Arch-Knights are present and would be the first to sense if something was wrong. Since they haven't acted, she's telling the truth, and there is a place like Paradise."

"Hahaha! I'm willing to take the risk if we can finally leave this ocean alive! I don't care what happens next-we're facing death one way or another. And if you don't want to leave, you can stay behind and participate in the assault on the Harbingers' lair. Although I trust the Sovereigness's words, I doubt you'll make it out of there alive!"

At the forefront of the crowd, Felissa stood with several Arch-Knights beside her. Her expression was shocked, realizing she had misjudged the situation.

Supreme Leader of Paradise! This was even more unbelievable than she had expected. She would have dismissed anyone making such an announcement as delusional. However, watching her Sovereigness speak from the arena, she was unsure how to feel.

Still, after witnessing Fifi's abilities, she couldn't help but cling to the hope rising in her heart. After all, who wouldn't take the chance if it meant escaping this cursed ocean?

Mira felt similar emotions, but unlike the others, her heart stirred at the thought that Orion would help her gather as much Divine energy as he had promised.

'But doesn't that mean Paradise must possess a divine being for him to recognize it so

quickly?'

A chill ran down Mira's spine as the thought crossed her mind. If that were true, the Sovereigness's sudden change was because she was also aware of this truth.

Suddenly, Nadia cleared her throat again, silencing the crowd.

"Everyone, go and prepare yourselves. As long as you can manage it, there is no limit to what you can carry. We leave in four hours!" Nadia announced loudly with a smile.

As her words concluded, the Bastion of Wailling Gnarled citizens began to exit through the enormous gates at the four corners of the massive underground grand hall, one by one.

...

Four hours later, the nymphs had packed their belongings and valuables and returned to the massive underground grand hall. From the young to the elderly, all waited anxiously as Nadia, the five High Advisors, and Orion and Fifi entered the hall.

"You may begin, Supreme Leader," Nadia said, shifting her gaze toward Orion with a smile.

Orion nodded and stepped forward. Standing before the vast crowd stretched beyond the doors, he pulled a golden key from his pocket and extended his hand.

The surrounding space rippled and folded, eliciting surprised gasps from the crowd.

Sensing the key was inserted into an invisible lock, Orion turned it according to a complex sequence. Soon, he let go of the key as it dissipated into golden light. He stepped back as the light coalesced, forming a massive, square door and spilling an intense, blinding golden

glow.

Witnessing the intense scene, the entire hall erupted into a clamour of murmurs. Those who had previously doubted the Sovereigness's claims suddenly believed, and a surge of anticipation and curiosity about Paradise rose in their hearts.

Orion swiftly enlarged the portal to fill the space between the two pillars beside them, allowing access through either golden door. He turned toward Fifi and nodded, giving her the

stage.

Fifi nodded back and took the lead.

"I want everyone to carry their belongings and valuables orderly and follow me!" Fifi's voice thundered across the hall. She turned around and walked through the golden door first.

The citizens nodded in understanding. Grabbing their belongings, they began stepping in an orderly fashion toward the golden door, utilizing both sides of the entrance.

This process continued for four days until every citizen of the Bastion of Wailling Gnarled who was prepared to leave passed through the golden door.

Once everyone was through, the large, square golden door disintegrated into specks of light, transforming back into the golden key, which landed in Orion's palm. He swiftly pocketed the key, sending it into his miniature mountain.

"Are you certain that warrior Fifi will be able to handle them all?" Nadia asked, looking at Orion with a complicated expression.

Even though she trusted their abilities, she doubted whether Fifi could manage over nine million nymphs and a few hundred thousand from other races.

"I'm sure she will," Orion responded with a nod.

Iris would also be there, taking care of the other population that had entered from the Tidal

Depths Kingdom side. Fortunately, Aurora had handled every single issue perfectly, and all that remained was the Bastion of Ashen Hope.

At this point, Orion was anxious they wouldn't have enough time. He didn't want to find out what might happen if the pocket dimension were to close abruptly. He had to get there as

soon as possible.

Chapter 1159: The Bastion Of Wailing Gnarled Uprooted (2)

Nadia nodded, relieved after hearing Orion's reassurance.

"I will lead the way to where the others are waiting," Nadia said with a nod. She turned and exited the underground grand hall, with Orion and a few guards following her toward the ocean bed.

Within twenty minutes, they arrived.

Nadia and Orion stood atop the walls of the fortress, looking down at the multitude of nymphs who had decided to remain and battle the Harbingers.

Gathered on the broad plain within the massive forest of petrified trees beneath the ocean were armed nymphs clad in suits of armour, numbering up to hundreds of thousands and lined up in an orderly manner. Their gazes were sharp, their expressions hardened.

The atmosphere around them was eerily cold, carrying a lingering scent of death. With a single glance, it was clear they were battle-hardened warriors who had faced countless brushes with death.

Standing at the forefront were Gladra, the first-seat high advisor, and Faelara, the third-seat high advisor-the only high advisors who had chosen to stay and join the battle against the Harbingers.

They were clad in their suits of armour forged from Vylkr alloy, with their weapons sheathed beside their waist. Behind them stood the six Arch-knight corps of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled army:

The Frost Spine Corps!

The Dead Roots Corps!

The Mountain Blade Corps!

The Spiked Branch Poison Corps!

The Gnarled Shield Corps!

And lastly, the Stone Gale Corps!

Each corps comprised five hundred to a thousand nymphs, totalling about six thousand Arch-knights. Every one of them was a formidable four-star warrior. This powerful force could subdue any Grade One Runaway City and even a Grade Two. Their confidence and pride in their strength were well-founded.

"Is this everyone?" Orion asked,

"The others will be arriving soon," Nadia said.

Orion raised an eyebrow, nodding in understanding. Initially, he thought this was the entirety of their forces, but it seemed he was mistaken. His curiosity grew as he wondered if the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled possessed other hidden, powerful forces.

Suddenly, the soft chimes of a bell reverberated through the surroundings, echoing five times before fading. Then, something extraordinary happened, causing Orion's eyes to widen in shock and surprise.

The petrified trees within the massive forest, inside and outside the powerful barrier, began to tremble. Their roots lifted from the ground, and from their branches down to their roots, they shuddered as they stomped against the soil, marching forward in multitudes.

The ground shook with each step as the entire forest came alive.

"Our tree nymph sisters, who were on the verge of transforming into tainteds, sealed themselves within their trees to halt the transformation. They fragmented their consciousness to protect us and this territory," Nadia explained, her voice quivering with emotion.

Orion realized why Knight Mayril had advised him to put away the spawns before stepping into the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled. It was to prevent her sisters, whose sole purpose was to protect the territory, from mindlessly attacking them.

Still, even that precaution hadn't been enough to suppress the catastrophic effects of their transformation into tainted, as they were still attacked by numerous roots along the way.

"Is there a way to heal them and help them return to normal?" Orion asked, his tone and expression solemn.

He recalled that nymphs didn't need sleep to revitalize their bodies, meaning these nymphs had spent every single second in such a state. As someone with a beloved daughter from a similar race, he was willing to take any chance to see if they could recover.

"...Unfortunately, there's no way to help them recover... They have fused with their trees, and attempting to draw them out would result in instant death. You don't need to waste Paradise's precious resources or trouble yourself finding a solution. They knew the outcome when they made their choice," Nadia responded.

She turned to Orion and bowed. "Thank you," she said gratefully.

Nadia felt that fortune had finally favoured them, allowing Paradise to have such a caring leader and one of her sisters to have him as her husband. Remembering that he could even transcend their biology to have a child with one of them, Nadia felt he was genuinely deserving.

Orion responded with a nod. Inwardly, he was already focused on speaking with Aurora about the matter, hoping she might have a way to solve it.

The forest continued stomping forward until it arrived and halted behind the mass. The numbers were countless, stretching far into the distance; they couldn't see the end of the line from their vantage point atop the fortress walls.

"This is everyone," Nadia said, returning to her previous position.

Orion nodded in understanding. Setting his thoughts aside, he said, "Stand still."

Nadia nodded, standing still in her position and looking at Orion curiously.

Instantly, a wave of headless Vylkr spawns surged out of Orion's shadow and poured into hers. This continued for a few seconds before it stopped, leaving only two headless, winged spawns for him and a hundred and forty-eight for Nadia to utilize.

Nadia was startled by the sudden occurrence and immediately looked into her shadow with a chill in her heart. She recognized that with this method, it would be easy for someone to assassinate anyone they wanted after a casual meeting, even without speaking to them.

It was truly a terrifying method!

Nadia couldn't help but feel a bit of anticipation and anxiety about finally meeting the goddess responsible for creating such a technique. She wondered if she could stand before such a ruthless divine being.

Then, Orion taught her how to utilize them. It took only ten minutes for her to grasp it.

"You should lead them toward the Harbingers' domain. If you encounter any issues, use the spawns to protect yourselves. I will meet you there. There's somewhere I need to be first,"

Orion said.

Nadia nodded in understanding. "Alright, I hope you can return soon," she said, not probing further about where he was going, as she trusted his words. She didn't believe Orion would leave them stranded.

With a nod, Orion rose into the sky and shot off into the distance.

Nadia watched as he disappeared before focusing on the troops before her.

Those gathered below couldn't fully understand what was happening above and could only watch in amazement and wonder as Orion flew up, passed through the barrier and vanished

into the distance.

Taking a deep breath, Nadia's face became stern as she spoke loudly. "Today, we face our greatest and easiest challenge. It is a battle that will reverberate through the ages of the Bastion of the Wailing Gnarled and mark its end! Now, let us show the Harbingers the strength of the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled and Paradise! March onwards to battle!" she roared with emotion.

"For the Bastion of Wailling Gnarled! For Paradise!"

"For the Bastion of Wailling Gnarled! For Paradise!"

"For the Bastion of Wailling Gnarled! For Paradise!"

The nymphs let out a loud battle cry. Several soft chimes of a bell resonated in the sky, causing the trees to stomp heavily against the soil.

Nadia utilized the information that Orion had shared with her and summoned the headless,

winged spawns to lift her from the ground. She summoned several more to protect them from above, mindful of not getting too close and drawing the attention of her sisters, who had fused with their trees below.

At first, the soldiers below were stunned by the emergence of the headless, winged spawns. However, after realizing that their Sovereigness orchestrated it, they finally understood why Orion had left despite promising to accompany them on the battlefield.

If these things were as powerful as the Arch-knights had explained, they didn't need to fear being attacked by tainteds on their way into the Harbingers' domain.

And according to the information they had received, this wasn't even a fraction of Paradise's strength.

Their confidence surged, and their battle cry caused the atmosphere around them to tremble as the powerful barrier dissolved, allowing the water outside to surge in, flooding the territory. Soon, the entire Bastion of Wailing Gnarled was submerged in water.

This signified the end of their journey within this dreaded ocean and their courageous will to sacrifice their lives on the battlefield.

Nadia observed the submerged underwater fortress with a complex swirl of emotions in her eyes. However, these emotions swiftly vanished and were replaced with a firm resolve. With the forces rising alongside the sea warriors, Nadia unsheathed the greatsword hanging

on her back and swam forward.

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Orion's figure blurred across the ocean floor as he swiftly followed Brane's direction until he arrived at a labyrinthine canyon with many underwater volcanoes steadily expelling plumes of smoke to the ocean surface, obscuring the rest of the canyon in the process. Orion instantly spotted a group of individuals in the distance and swiftly approached them. He immediately recognized them as he arrived before them.

It was Knight Darian, and behind him were three figures with disfigured limbs resembling the Arch-knight. Seeing their energy levels, Orion was immediately sure of his guesses. Surprisingly, their energy levels were much higher than that of the nymphs.

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[Energy Level - 4,900 BEM.]

[Energy Level - 4,989 BEM.]

[Energy Level - 4,978 BEM.]

Orion was also curious about their gills but decided to put the matter at the back of his mind for another time.

Knight Darian and the others quickly spotted Orion's arrival and rushed forward to meet him.

"Great warrior," Knight Darian greeted with a respectful bow.

The Arch-knights also did the same, their eyes fixed on Orion curiously, wondering if he was as terrifying as the two elder couples who had taken the entire bastion hostage. After all, he was their leader.

Orion nodded. "Take me to them," he said, getting straight to the point.

Knight Darian inwardly sighed in relief as he was too nervous to begin a conversation. He nodded silently and turned around, gesturing to the Arch-knights to follow suit as he led the way into the volcanic canyon.

Orion followed closely behind as they navigated the many twists and turns within the labyrinthine canyon. The earth was dark, and a perpetual mist of ash suspended in the water column, reducing visibility. However, this didn't hinder their vision or speed, as though they were already familiar with the path ahead.

Soon, they passed through a powerful barrier that separated the water from the space within. The ground was littered with sharp shards of volcanic glass, and the walls were streaked with scorching lava flows, radiating immense heat that made each second feel like being stuffed into a furnace.

"There are traps laid everywhere, so please just follow-" Knight Darian abruptly stopped mid-sentence, his eyes widening in shock at the sight behind him.

Orion was hovering in the air, following them from above. He quickly activated the One- Winged Sky Arts, lifting Knight Darian and the three Arch-knights into the air to follow him. Initially, they were stunned by the sudden turn of events but swiftly understood it was Orion's doing.

"You can point out the fastest route from here, and I'll take us there," Orion said, not wanting to waste any more time.

Knight Darian nodded firmly and pointed in the direction they needed to go. Without hesitation, they flew towards it.

Orion, Knight Darian, and the others crossed over a molten crevasse on natural stone bridges above rivers of flowing, cooled lava and an ashen plain where the ground was covered in a thick, dark grey layer of volcanic ash. The entire plain was dotted with skeletal remains.

Soon, they arrived at a fortress built into the side of a towering cliff carved from the black stone of the canyon itself. They halted before the Bastion's large, magically reinforced entrance gate.

The gate stood over forty meters high, and the cliff walls were lined with defensive fortifications, with numerous soldiers on the lookout. When they arrived, the soldiers noticed Orion and Knight Darian and quickly sent word to their superiors.

After two minutes, the gate was pulled open, and Brane and Zara walked out, followed by a hulking figure about 8 feet (2.4m) tall.

It was Gaverick, the former Emperor of the Bastion of Ashen Hope.

Gaverick's gaze was fixed on Orion, scrutinising him from head to toe as they approached.

"Supreme Leader," Brane and Zara greeted respectfully.

Orion nodded and turned his attention to Gaverick. "Is he the one?" he asked, his tone curious.

Brane and Zara had already informed him of everything during the Bastion of Wailing Gnarled migration, so there was no need for further discussion. He was simply here to open a gate to the Golden Palace.

Brane nodded, gesturing toward Gaverick.

"I am Gaverick, the former Emperor of the Bastion of Ashen Hope," Gaverick stepped forward to introduce himself, then stepped back.

Orion scrutinised Gaverick for a moment, then nodded. "Let's go and complete what we came here for," he said.

Brane nodded and led the way into the fortress alongside Zara. Orion followed behind them. Knight Darian greeted Gaverick with a wry smile, gesturing for him and the Arch-knights to go first.

Gaverick snorted in response and followed. His eyes remained fixed on Orion, his mind racing with thoughts.

Knight Darian sighed and followed them inside as the large fortress gate shut behind him.

Gaverick was an orphan, a common title in the dreaded ocean. While other orphans possessed extraordinary evolutionary traits, granting them gills and enhancements capable of withstanding the crushing depths, he was just human-plain and unremarkable.

That is until he received his first void heart and awakened the Absolute Heart Flame, a rare lineage passed down from the founder of the Bastion of Ashen Hope, one of the greatest human warriors in the ocean depths.

Without hesitation, the Bastion conscripted him into its ranks, as anyone capable of wielding the founder's lineage was guaranteed a higher rank in the army. However, the power the Absolute Heart Flames granted was raw and unrefined.

Compared to his peers, Gaverick was still weak. But he refused to falter. He poured his soul into studying strategy, learning battle tactics, and mastering the nuances of warfare.

His strategic mind and ability to anticipate enemy movements earned him a small but loyal following. His unit, composed of outcasts and overlooked warriors like himself, grew to a thousand strong, united by a shared desire to prove their worth.

Their chance for glory came when they were assigned to join an assault mission on one of the Harbingers. Gaverick meticulously planned the operation, drilling his men rigorously until they were exhausted but prepared.

However, no amount of preparation could have readied them for the Harbinger's overwhelming power. The battle was a massacre; the entire assault team, including his unit, was decimated within mere seconds.

Gaverick was the only survivor.

He dragged his battered body back to the Bastion, expecting to be met with ridicule, shame, and scorn. But instead, he was met with something strange and unexpected: admiration. They hailed him as a hero, the man who had stepped into the domain of a Harbinger and returned.

To the people, he had accomplished a legendary feat by strength and luck alone. Their admiration gladdened his once troubled heart.

Encouraged to prove himself worthy of their praise, the intensity of his training increased. New warriors flocked to him, hoping to be a part of his next heroic venture. Again, he led his ranks into battle against the Harbinger, only to face the same devastating outcome.

Once more, he returned, battered and crushed, expecting scorn. But again, the Bastion hailed his return, celebrating his survival as though he had won.

At that moment, Gaverick realised something. He understood that he wasn't a hero because he defeated the enemy but because he returned, reminding them of hope. The people were holding onto the ashes of past heroes, clinging to the dream that someone-anyone-might someday save them from their dreadful plight.

It was hilarious! Gaverick laughed.

They didn't need victory; they needed only the symbol of it.

After all, a speck of flame holding its own against a terrifying ocean storm could be considered a powerful flame.

On his next mission, Gaverick abandoned any idea of conquering the Harbinger forces.

Instead, he fought simply to reduce the tainted, knowing that every weakened enemy and harvest brought hope closer for the Bastion. His actions inspired others, who soon began

doing the same.

However, they failed miserably. Gaverick alone succeeded consistently. As his skill grew, so did his pride and obsession with strength, and soon, they began to take root in his heart. Gaverick understood that the burden of this role was his to bear, and with every return, he stoked the flickering flame within his heart. As years passed, his fame grew. He rose through the ranks, becoming the de facto leader of the Bastion of Ashen Hope forces.

His love life was ignited. His unit had grown exponentially into a feared battalion. He was offered titles, honours, and the people's loyalty. In time, he claimed the seat of power as the new Emperor of the Bastion of Ashen Hope.

However, after receiving the mysterious travellers and witnessing their terrifying strength, despite the failed plan that had cost him everything, Gaverick reflected upon his entire life for

the second time.

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"Is this everyone?" Orion asked, standing in an arena, his eyes fixed on the massive gathering

of the entire citizenry of the Bastion of Ashen Hope, mainly comprised of humans, followed

by nymphs, Prismarions, Merfolks, and other distinct races.

Brane directed the question to Gaverick.

"Yes, this is everyone," Gaverick responded with a firm nod. Standing beside him were his two wives, the former queens, and behind him were the high advisors, except Raydon, the fourth- seat high advisor, and Cora, the second-seat high advisor, whose statuses were currently

unknown.

Although unsure about what had happened to them, they had all accepted their fate under the opponent's terrifying strength. Their attention was fixed on the Supreme Leader, and they wondered how he would transport this many people to Paradise and its location.

Paying no attention to their gazes, Orion removed the golden key from his pocket and placed it within an invisible lock in the folded space before him, repeating his previous actions.