Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

chapter 81-90

Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

By now, all six of my goblins were equipped with E-tier weapons.

Gopuro wielded his trusty Big Iron Axe, while Gopuran carried a One-Handed Iron Sword. Gopushadow had his Twin Iron Daggers, and Gopugiga was equipped with a Big Iron Shield. Meanwhile, Gopuflammy carried an Iron Hammer, and Gopuberry had her bow.

However, I had something even better prepared for this expedition.

A D-tier weapon.

It was another axe, which I had just purchased from the Daily Equipment Shop after spending a few more points on refreshing its inventory.

And its name was...

[Blazing SkullCleaver]

Type: Weapon

Rarity: D

Attribute: Fire

Description: A two-handed battle axe imbued with the power of fire. Its keen edge can cleave through flesh and armor, while the flames sealed within its blade await the command of their wielder.

Effect: +5 ATK, +5 SPD

Special Effect:

- Grants the holder the skill [Whirling Flame Lv. 1].

- When wielded by someone with a Fire mana attribute, all damage output increases by 10%.

....

[Whirling Flame Lv. 1]

Description: By channeling mana into the weapon and unleashing a powerful slash, the wielder sends out a spinning wheel of fire that rushes toward the target, tearing through enemies and leaving them engulfed in flames.

Mana Cost per Slash: 30

...

Holy crap...

That was my reaction when I first saw the weapon and read its details.

Previously, F-tier weapons had cost around 10 points, while E-tier weapons usually cost about 100. But this monster? It had robbed me of a whopping 2,230 points!

That was more than twenty times the price of an ordinary E-tier weapon!

Of course, I had a pretty good idea why the price had skyrocketed so dramatically. It was probably because of this new feature called [Attribute].

In a sense, this was no longer just an ordinary weapon. It was a magical weapon capable of unleashing elemental attacks!

Does this mean that elemental weapons will start appearing at D-tier?

If so, I couldn't wait to see what other kinds of weapons the shop had to offer.

Also, that reminded me of something.

When I upgraded my Castle System Shop to Level 3, the system had also added several types of elemental stones to its shop as another basic materials.

I wondered if those stones had something to do with weapons like this. Perhaps they were materials used to forge weapons or imbue them with elemental attributes?

Unfortunately, I didn't have enough information to be certain.

Still, one thing was clear. Despite its ridiculous price, I had to buy this axe.

After all, I wanted my goblins to be as well-equipped as possible before sending them into a potentially dangerous situation.

*****

Now, as for who would receive this precious new weapon, the answer was obvious.

My favorite axe wielder, Gopuro!

Gopugiga stepped forward, carrying the newly purchased weapon in his massive hands before presenting it to Gopuro.

It was an enormous axe indeed, looking huge even in Gopugiga's hands.

The long handle stretched nearly as tall as Gopuro himself, while the broad, heavy axe head made an ordinary iron axe look like a child's toy.

Its head was made of iron, but the metal was much darker than that of ordinary iron weapons, polished to a glossy sheen.

Meanwhile, faint orange patterns ran along the blade and curled around the handle, glowing like embers buried beneath a layer of ash. Every so often, the patterns pulsed with a faint reddish light, as though a small fire were burning just beneath the surface.

The moment the axe came into view, it immediately caught Gopuro's attention.

His eyes widened, and he stared at the weapon with an intensity that was almost frightening. For a moment, he didn't even seem to breathe.

Whoa, buddy...

It was almost as if the dude had fallen in love at first sight!

Meanwhile, Gopugiga seemed a little reluctant to hand it over. Although he followed my orders without complaint, I could practically see the disappointment written across his face.

Haha, I totally understand.

This is one monster of an axe, after all!

Honestly, I couldn't blame him. A weapon like this was bound to be tempting, especially for a goblin who loved fighting as much as he did.

Unfortunately, Gopugiga wasn't the best candidate for this particular weapon.

His maximum MP was currently only 20 points due to the side effect of his passive skill, which wasn't even enough to unleash a single slash of [Whirling Flame]. Each activation cost 30 mana, after all.

Giving him the axe would be like handing someone a fancy sports car without the keys.

Sorry, Giga. I'll find you a better weapon that's more suitable for you soon.

But for now, this axe belongs to Gopuro.

Besides, there was another reason I had chosen him.

Gopuro had already spent plenty of time wielding his Big Iron Axe, and through repeated use, he had learned the skill [Big Slash Lv. 1] and could now unleash it while wielding other weapons.

It was time to pass that weapon along to someone else and give another member of the tribe a chance to learn the same skill.

With that in mind, Gopuro eagerly accepted the Blazing Skull Slasher. He then handed his old Big Iron Axe to Gopugiga, who finally seemed to recover from his disappointment.

The moment the exchange was complete, Gopuro raised his new weapon and let out a booming laugh.

"Muahahaha! Thank you, Big Boss! With this, I can defeat a Colossal Bear all by myself! No, ten Colossal Bears!"

The guy was practically roaring with excitement.

Haha, alright! I'm glad you like it!

But ten Colossal Bears?

I doubt it.

I couldn't help feeling pleased with myself, though.

With Gopuro now wielding a D-tier magical weapon, our group's overall combat strength had increased considerably. And if he managed to master [Whirling Flame], he would gain a powerful ranged attack that could prove invaluable against enemies like the Dark Giant Spiders.

More importantly, I couldn't help feeling excited about seeing [Whirling Flame] in action myself. This would be my first chance to witness real magic in this world.

Hehe, I wonder how powerful it'll be...

Though, of course, I hoped Gopuro wouldn't get too carried away and charge headfirst into danger just because he had a new toy.

****

Now...

With the equipment sorted out, the group turned toward the stream and looked upstream, in the direction of the Bright Red Nose Tribe.

The excitement gradually faded from their faces, replaced by the same grim determination I had seen earlier.

We all knew there could be terrible dangers waiting for us ahead.

Gopuran tightened her grip on her sword and glanced at the others.

"Everyone ready?"

"Yes..." the others answered, their voices unusually solemn.

I took one last look at my six goblins, making sure everyone was armed and prepared.

Then, with their weapons in hand and their expressions resolute, we finally set off toward the Bright Red Nose Tribe.

Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

And so, with all six goblins armed and ready, we continued following the stream toward the Bright Red Nose Tribe.

The farther upstream we traveled, the more uneasy things became.

The smell of blood grew increasingly strong.

Not that I could smell it myself, of course. But judging from the reactions of my goblins, the stench was becoming unbearable.

"Guh... This smell terrible..." Gopuro muttered, wrinkling his nose.

Gopuberry had already covered her nose with one hand, occasionally gagging as we pressed onward. Even the others looked increasingly uncomfortable.

And then there was the water.

Its color was growing darker, too.

The stream, which had already been stained red when we first discovered it, had gradually taken on an even deeper hue. The water now looked almost crimson, with dark streaks swirling beneath the surface as it flowed downstream.

Damn... Just how many goblins died here?

A heavy feeling settled over me.

We continued onward, carefully making our way through the increasingly dense vegetation. The stream wound between tangled tree roots and moss-covered rocks, carrying more than just blood downstream.

Fragments of flesh and severed body parts drifted along the current, occasionally catching against rocks or becoming lodged between exposed roots. Flies and other insects had already gathered around them, feasting on what remained.

The farther we went, the more frequently we encountered such gruesome remnants.

And yet, we still hadn’t reached the source.

Just how bad is it up there...?

I couldn’t shake the growing sense of dread creeping over me.

Then, all of a sudden, Gopuro raised his hand, signaling for everyone to stop.

"Big Boss... We are here."

His voice was unusually quiet.

For a moment, none of the goblins moved.

I could see the tension in their faces as they exchanged uneasy glances. Even Gopuro, who was usually the most courageous guy, seemed hesitant to take another step.

Gopuran swallowed nervously.

Gopuberry tightened her grip on her bow.

And Gopushadow, who had been watching the surrounding forest with sharp eyes, slowly lowered his stance, ready to react at the slightest sign of danger.

...

I couldn't help feeling nervous myself.

"Stay alert," I reminded them through [Ruler's Voice]. "We don't know what we're about to find."

"Yes, Big Boss," they answered, their voices low.

Gopuro took a deep breath before cautiously stepping forward. Using the haft of his axe, he slowly pushed aside a cluster of thick branches and tangled bushes blocking our view.

The foliage rustled.

A few leaves drifted to the ground.

And then...

We saw it.

The Bright Red Nose Tribe.

Or rather...

What remained of it.

...

Damn...

Is that it?

The Bright Red Nose Tribe?

I could see it clearly now through Gopuro's eyes.

The settlement occupied a fairly large clearing surrounded by a rough wooden palisade. Several wooden huts stood within the enclosure, their simple roofs made from logs, branches, and thatched leaves. Near the center of the settlement stood a very tall crude flagpole, from which hung a piece of leather that had been stretched out and fastened to a wooden frame.

Some red symbols had been painted across its surface, presumably the sigil of the tribe.

Under ordinary circumstances, it might have been a rather unremarkable sight. A large goblin settlement, nothing particularly impressive, but still a place where its inhabitants could live, hunt, and raise their young.

But now...

Everything was covered in blood.

The wooden fences were smeared with dark red stains. Several sections had been smashed apart, leaving broken stakes scattered across the ground. Most of the huts had collapsed, their shattered remains strewn across the clearing.

And the bodies...

There were bodies everywhere.

Goblin corpses lay scattered throughout the settlement, hundreds of them, some sprawled across the ground, others slumped against the wooden fences or tangled among the wreckage of their homes.

Some had been torn apart so brutally that it was difficult to tell where one body ended and another began. Limbs lay scattered across the dirt, while dark pools of blood had soaked into the ground beneath them.

One goblin lay facedown near the entrance, one arm stretched toward the broken gate as though he had desperately tried to crawl to safety. Another had collapsed beside a hut, his body twisted at an unnatural angle.

And already, nature was reclaiming the dead.

Black crows crowded the broken palisade and hopped between the corpses, tearing at exposed flesh. Their harsh cries echoed throughout the settlement as they fought over scraps, forming a dreadful chorus above the ruins.

And the crows weren’t the only scavengers.

Flies buzzed above the bloodstained ground, while countless insects crawled over the remains.

Even from where we stood, I could already tell just how horrendous it must have been.

*****

For a moment, I couldn’t think of anything to say.

I had expected something bad. After all, the stream had already given us a pretty clear warning. But seeing the settlement with my own eyes was another matter entirely.

Suddenly...

"Eugh!"

Gopuberry clutched her stomach and vomited her breakfast onto the ground. Gopuflammy wasn't faring much better, while even Gopuro struggled to keep his stomach settled.

Well, as horrifying as the sight was, I had more important things to worry about.

What the hell happened here...?

Through Gopuro's eyes, I surveyed the ruined settlement, taking in the shattered fences, bloodstained huts, and countless bodies scattered across the clearing.

Was this really the work of the Dark Giant Spiders?

Or had another goblin tribe attacked them?

I couldn't say for certain. There were clear signs of a violent battle, but I couldn't determine what had caused such devastation without examining the scene more closely.

And more importantly...

Were there any survivors?

Please... Let there be someone left alive.

I wanted to believe that at least a few goblins had managed to escape or hide during the attack. But looking at the sheer scale of the carnage, it was difficult to remain optimistic.

"Everyone, stop here," I ordered through [Ruler's Voice]. "Don't rush in. Watch the surroundings first. We need to make sure nothing dangerous is still lurking nearby."

"Understood, Big Boss," Gopuran replied quietly.

The others tightened their grips on their weapons and scanned the settlement.

For the next few minutes, we watched and listened.

I carefully examined every visible corner, searching for any sign of movement beyond the crows picking at the dead.

A broken door creaked in the breeze.

A loose piece of thatched roofing rustled against a wooden beam.

Somewhere deeper in the clearing, a crow let out a harsh caw before returning to its meal.

But that was all.

Nothing suggested that any other living creature remained in the settlement.

After several minutes, I reluctantly concluded that the immediate surroundings appeared deserted. Whatever had attacked the tribe was nowhere to be seen.

At least, not from where we stood.

Hmm...

Although I still wasn’t entirely convinced it was safe, we couldn’t remain at the edge of the clearing forever.

"Alright, let’s go in," I ordered. "Gopugiga, take the front with Gopushadow. Keep your eyes open, and don’t charge ahead recklessly."

"Understood, Big Boss!"

The two goblins moved to the front, Gopugiga holding his Big Iron Shield ready while Gopushadow kept his twin daggers at the ready.

"Gopuberry and Gopuran, stay in the middle. Gopuro and Gopuflammy, guard the rear. Don’t let anyone get separated."

"Yes, Big Boss!"

The six goblins quickly arranged themselves into formation.

Then, with the formation in place, we cautiously advanced into the bloodstained settlement.

Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

The crows’ harsh cries echoed overhead as we finally stepped into the settlement. Their calls were unsettling enough on their own, but the sight waiting inside was far worse.

"Ugh... This smell..."

Gopushadow immediately covered his nose, and the others quickly followed suit.

Nearby, a crow perched on the chest of a dead goblin. It tilted its head, pecked at the corpse a few times, then pulled out an eyeball and swallowed it before returning for another bite.

Gopuran grimaced and quickly looked away.

"Eugh..." Gopuberry gagged, then dry-heaved.

I couldn’t blame her.

If I had a stomach, I’d probably be vomiting my guts out, too. The scene was straight out of hell, horrifying enough to make me wish I could look away. Unfortunately, I had a more important task than sparing myself the sight.

I needed to figure out what had happened here.

"Everyone, keep your eyes open. Check the surroundings, but don’t wander off on your own."

"Yes, Big Boss."

The goblins carefully scanned the ruined settlement, staying close to one another. Meanwhile, I examined the scene through Gopuro’s eyes, paying particular attention to the wounds on the bodies.

Most of the corpses were covered in horrific injuries. Deep gashes tore across their torsos, while narrow puncture wounds pierced their chests and abdomens. Some had suffered so many strikes that it was difficult to tell where one wound ended and another began.

Despite the sheer number of injuries, they shared a peculiar consistency. The cuts were long and deep, while the puncture wounds looked as though they had been inflicted by something sharp and pointed. It was almost as if the victims had been repeatedly slashed and stabbed by an enormous, curved blade.

Could these have been caused by the Dark Giant Spiders?

"Gopuro, examine those wounds carefully. Do they look familiar? Are they similar to the injuries caused by Dark Giant Spiders?"

The goblin crouched beside a nearby corpse and studied the damage. His expression gradually hardened.

"Yes, Big Boss. These definitely look like spider wounds."

"You're certain?"

"I'm certain."

He pointed toward a deep gash running diagonally across the goblin's torso.

"From what I know, Dark Giant Spider front legs are very big. They are sharp and curved, like giant dagger blades. They use them to slash prey or stab through bodies."

He moved to another corpse and inspected the wounds.

"See? These look like when spider stabs with front legs. And cuts like this..." He gestured toward the long gash on the first corpse. "Same as when spider swings its legs to slash. I have seen these attacks before. I'm very sure."

I see...

So their front legs function as natural weapons, and the wounds match the way they attack...

That was already strong evidence.

But the real horror lay in the sheer force behind those attacks.

As I continued investigating, something else caught my attention near one of the damaged huts.

A thick wooden pole lay broken across the ground which had been cut cleanly in two.

But the thing was... it was made from really strong and dense wood!

The pole was nearly as thick as a tree trunk. Yet Its cut surface was surprisingly smooth, with none of the splintering or ragged fractures I would have expected if it had simply broken under pressure.

Whatever had struck it hadn't merely damaged the pole. It had sliced straight through it.

I couldn't help recalling Gopuro's [Big Slash Lv. 1] when I saw this.

When he unleashed that skill with his axe, he could deliver a devastating strike capable of cleaving through a large tree. Judging from the damage, whatever had severed this pole possessed comparable cutting power.

Damn. These spiders must have some seriously insane attacks huh?

...

"That aside, Gopuro," I asked as we continued exploring the settlement, "do Dark Giant Spiders use webs? You know, to trap their prey or something?"

I hadn't seen a single strand of sticky web anywhere in the settlement.

So... are these spiders not the kind that spin webs?

As expected, Gopuro shook his head.

"No, Big Boss. They're not like ordinary spiders. I've never seen them shoot out webs. At least, not that I can remember."

"I see..."

That was useful to know.

At least I wouldn't have to worry about accidentally walking into some enormous web stretched between the trees. Not with these particular spiders, anyway.

Still, the fact that they didn't use webs hardly made them any less terrifying.

*****

However, there was still one thing I couldn't understand.

The Dark Giant Spiders had slaughtered an entire tribe, smashed through its defenses, and left hundreds of bodies scattered across the clearing.

And yet, despite searching the area as we ventured farther inside, I still hadn't seen a single Dark Giant Spider corpse.

Not one.

Wait. What?

I went over the scene in my mind.

This was a large tribe. Its settlement was spacious, its defenses were substantial, and the sheer number of dead goblins suggested that it had possessed a considerable population.

Surely, with so many goblins fighting back, they should have managed to kill at least one of their attackers.

Right?

Unless...

"Hey, Gopuro. How strong was the Bright Red Nose Tribe, exactly?"

"Very strong, Big Boss," Gopuro replied. "Much stronger than the White Whiskers Tribe. That's why I suggested we recruit them in the first place."

"And just how strong are we talking about?"

"Well..." Gopuro paused, apparently trying to recall what he had heard. "I'm not entirely sure, but I've heard that their chieftain is incredibly powerful. Some goblins say he's already above Level 50. Others claim he's almost Level 100!"

"What?! That high?!"

"Yeah!" Gopuro confirmed enthusiastically.

Damn...

Above Level 50? And possibly approaching Level 100?

Come to think of it, I hadn't paid much attention to the natural evolution system of the goblins living in this forest. I knew they could evolve into stronger forms as they gained levels, but I hadn't considered just how far that process could take them.

Curious, I asked Gopuro to tell me more about goblin evolution and their level system.

Fortunately, he knew enough to give me a fairly detailed explanation.

Goblin evolution followed several major level thresholds: Level 10, Level 25, Level 50, and finally Level 100, which was also the level cap for this evolutionary line.

And the evolution path went like this:

Goblin → Hobgoblin → Hulkgoblin → Hulgagoblin → Hulgagigogagoblin.

(In goblin language, they relatively translated to: Goblin -> Tall Goblin -> Strong Goblin -> Big Strong Goblin -> Strongest Big Goblin)

Of course, reaching those thresholds was no easy feat. Due to harsh living conditions and constant dangers, most goblins in this forest never made it particularly far along the evolutionary path. The majority of tribes were led by Forest Hulkgoblins, and only the more powerful tribes had Forest Hulgagoblins among their ranks.

As for Forest Hulgagigogagoblins....

There was only one known to exist in this forest.

It was the leader of the Bloody Face Tribe, the strongest goblin tribe in the region, was said to be a Level 100 Forest Hulgagigogagoblin.

So, if the rumors were true, the Bright Red Nose Tribe's chief was at least a Forest Hulgagoblin...

Then how come they couldn't kill even a single spider?

Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

However, there was another detail worth considering.

The goblins' natural evolution line was much weaker than the one my system had granted my citizens. In other words, being high-level didn't necessarily mean a goblin was particularly strong.

Take Forest Hobgoblins, for example.

Each level-up only gave them around two points in their core attributes. Meanwhile, my Super Forest Goblins had been gaining around ten.

As a result, a naturally evolved goblin might reach a very high level, but its overall stats wouldn't necessarily be that impressive compared to those of my citizens.

Still, a Forest Hulgagoblin above Level 50 shouldn't be underestimated either. Even if it gained far fewer attribute points per level, the chieftain should still have at least a hundred combined points across its core attributes.

With that kind of strength, it should be able to take on a Colossal Bear alone without too much trouble.

Not to mention, the Bright Red Nose Tribe had plenty of other strong goblins as well.

So why weren't there any dead Dark Giant Spiders here?

That was really strange...

"Hmmmm..."

I fell into thought while my goblins continued searching the settlement.

Soon, several possible explanations began to form in my mind.

Theory Number One:

Could it be that the Dark Giant Spiders' corpses automatically disappeared when they died?

Like in some video games, where monsters turned into light particles and vanished the moment they were killed?

If that were the case, it would explain why we couldn't find a single spider corpse here.

Theory Number Two:

Could the spiders be taking their dead back with them when they retreated?

That was certainly possible.

But then, there was Theory Number Three...

And this was the possibility I feared the most.

Perhaps... the Dark Giant Spiders had grown much stronger.

And by now, they were already powerful enough to raid a large tribe like this without suffering a single casualty.

If that were true, then we were in serious trouble.

I sincerely hoped that wasn't the case. If the spiders had already reached that level of strength, our situation would become much, much worse.

Still, I didn't think it was very likely.

Judging from the wounds on the goblins' bodies and the destruction they had caused, the spiders were undoubtedly powerful. However, their raw attack power didn't seem to be all that much greater than that of a Colossal Bear.

Perhaps Gopuro, with his new Blazing SkullCleaver, could already unleash a similar level of destructive power.

Unless...

The spiders were extraordinarily fast? Or perhaps they possessed incredible regenerative abilities, thick armor, or some other trait that made them exceptionally difficult to kill?

There were plenty of possibilities.

I needed more information before I could draw any conclusions.

...

Thus...

"Gopuro," I called out. "When the spiders attacked your tribe, did you guys manage to kill any of them?"

I was hoping he could tell me something that would help verify my first theory.

Unfortunately...

"I... actually don't know, Big Boss." Gopuro shook his head. "When they attacked, it was a one-sided massacre. We could only run."

"What about you, Giga?" I turned my attention to Gopugiga. "Have you ever seen a dead Dark Giant Spider?"

His answer was no different.

"Hmmmm... now that you mention it, Big Boss, I've never seen one of those monsters die before. In fact, we're not even supposed to fight them. If we see one, we're supposed to run away."

"What?!"

That surprised me.

Not even fight back?

Just run?

How did that make any sense?

Even if the Dark Giant Spiders were monstrously strong, surely a powerful tribe with dozens of warriors should be able to put up some resistance. They should at least try to fight back instead of simply running away!

Unless...

Suddenly, another possibility popped into my mind.

"Wait a minute." I quickly asked, "Even if you haven't seen a spider die, you've at least seen them alive before, right?"

"Yeah..." Gopuro nodded.

"Yes," Gopuran added. "They're absolutely terrifying..."

Her body shivered slightly as she recalled the horrifying memory.

"And what did you feel when you saw one?" I asked. "Did you notice anything unusual?"

At my question, all the goblins suddenly fell silent, as though something had just clicked in their minds.

For a few moments, nobody said a word.

Then Gopugiga finally broke the silence.

"Big Boss, I remember it now. That time, I was already prepared to fight back. But when those monsters got close to me and stared at me, I just..." He hesitated, seemingly struggling to put the feeling into words. "It was like my body stopped listening to me. I felt this terrible sense of doom, and every instinct I had kept screaming at me to run. It felt like if I stayed and fought, I would definitely die. It's like..."

"...like there's no chance of winning at all..." Gopuro finished, his expression grim.

"Yeah... like we're already dead the moment they look at us with those terrifying red eyes..." Gopuberry added quietly.

Aha...

I see.

With that important information, I felt like I was getting very close to the answer.

It seemed the Dark Giant Spiders possessed some kind of negative aura that inflicted fear on their enemies, suppressing their fighting spirit and making it difficult for them to resist the urge to flee.

Now that was an interesting ability.

And a seriously troublesome one, too.

After all, it didn't matter how strong someone was if they couldn't even bring themselves to fight. If an entire tribe fled without putting up any resistance, then it made sense that not a single spider corpse had been left behind.

But on the bright side, this was actually somewhat good news.

At least it wasn't something like infinite regeneration, unbreakable armor, or some other ridiculously overpowered ability that would make these monsters practically impossible to deal with.

Yeah... fear was dangerous, but it wasn't necessarily unbeatable.

And now that we had a better idea of their tricks, we could start thinking about how to counter them.

Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

Chapter 85: Searching for Survivors

Still, now that I had some idea of how the spiders had managed to wipe out this entire tribe without suffering any casualties, there was something else I wanted to understand.

Looking at the scene before me...

The horrible carnage spread across the ruined settlement...

Just what had those monsters wanted in the first place?

The first possibility that came to mind was food. However, I wasn't sure if that was really the case.

After all, if they were simply hunting for food, there was no reason to massacre an entire goblin tribe like this.

In nature, predators rarely killed more prey than they needed to eat. Sure, there were exceptions, but generally speaking, hunting was about survival, not mindless slaughter.

After all... if they killed off all their prey, what would they eat in the future?

Then... what else could explain this?

Perhaps it was a matter of territorial expansion?

But the spiders hadn’t even made this place their new nest. They had simply appeared, wiped out the goblins, and then disappeared without a trace.

So that didn’t seem to make much sense either.

Then... perhaps they were simply bloodthirsty monsters that took pleasure in killing other creatures?

Like... some kind of twisted demons that slaughtered anything unfortunate enough to cross their path?

The thought settled heavily in my mind.

Still, I couldn’t afford to dwell on it forever.

We had already spent quite some time searching the settlement, and so far, we hadn’t detected any immediate danger. Perhaps it was time to split up and begin searching for survivors in the surrounding area.

Of course, that carried its own risks.

Splitting up meant dividing our fighting force, leaving each group more vulnerable if we ran into trouble. However, we couldn’t afford to waste the entire day searching every corner of the settlement together.

We needed to cover as much ground as possible, as quickly as possible.

And most importantly, we had to return to the castle before nightfall. The Dark Giant Spiders usually attacked around midnight, and I wasn’t about to take any chances.

After explaining my plan, the goblins agreed without hesitation.

"Alright, then. We’ll split into three teams of two."

I quickly arranged the teams.

Team 1: Gopugiga and Gopuberry.

Team 2: Gopuro and Gopuran.

Team 3: Gopuflammy and Gopushadow.

Each team had its own strengths, and I hoped that would be enough to keep them safe while searching for survivors.

Besides, even when they were separated, they could still communicate indirectly through me. With [Vassal's Eyes] and [Ruler's Voice], I could keep track of what was happening and relay messages between them whenever necessary.

And if any team ran into trouble, I could immediately call the others over to provide assistance.

"But don't wander too far from the settlement," I warned them. "Stay within a reasonable distance of one another. If anything seems suspicious, report it immediately. Don't try to be heroes."

Yeah... because even the fastest responses needed time.

If the situation turned bad enough, a few seconds could make all the difference.

"Yes, Big Boss!"

The goblins answered in unison.

With that, they split into their respective teams and began searching the surrounding area.

Meanwhile, I kept my attention divided between them, watching and listening through their senses. Thanks to the recent upgrade, my [Vassal's Eyes Lv. 2] could now connect me to three citizens simultaneously. That was precisely why I had decided to divide my goblins into three separate teams.

Hopefully, we would find some survivors.

****

And just like that, our search began.

Gopugiga and Gopuberry stayed within the Bright Red Nose Tribe's territory, carefully searching the ruined settlement for any survivors.

After all, what if some goblins had managed to hide somewhere? Perhaps there was a secret hiding place within the settlement, or maybe a few survivors had taken refuge beneath the collapsed huts? Or a storage place?

It was worth checking every possibility.

Meanwhile, the other two teams ventured a little farther out to search the surrounding forest. If any goblins had managed to escape the massacre, they might have fled into the woods and hidden there.

However, as time passed, our search yielded little success.

Gopushadow's team eventually discovered another small group of goblins not far from the settlement, but unfortunately, they were all dead. Judging from their positions, they seemed to have been killed while trying to flee.

Not a single one had survived.

The other team met with a similar result.

We found more bodies scattered throughout the forest, but not the survivors we were desperately hoping to find.

...

But then, just when hope was beginning to fade, when I was starting to suspect that we might not find a single living goblin in the entire area, Gopuro suddenly stopped in his tracks.

He seemed to have noticed something.

"Big Boss!" he called out. "I'm detecting something! There's a faint scent of goblin blood a little to the east!"

My first thought was that they had discovered yet another group of murdered goblins.

But then Gopuro added something unexpected.

"And this blood smells really strong! It must belong to the tribe's chieftain!"

"Wait, what?!"

I was taken aback by this new information.

"What the hell? You can even tell how powerful a goblin is just by smelling its blood?"

"Well..." Gopuro hesitated. "Normally, goblin blood all smells pretty much the same." he admitted, scratching his head. "But this one's different. It's much stronger! It's like... the smell of a leader, you know? When I caught the scent, I suddenly felt my blood heating up, too. It's hard to explain, but there's definitely something different about it!"

Hmmmm...

I couldn't help feeling intrigued.

For some reason, these goblins were starting to seem more and more like hunting dogs. First, they could track the scent of blood from a considerable distance, and now they could apparently distinguish the blood of a powerful leader from that of an ordinary goblin?

Just how many surprises did their noses have in store for me?

However, Gopuro wasn't finished.

"But there's another smell, too..."

His expression grew more serious.

"It's blood, but... it's nasty. There's something really unpleasant about it."

That immediately caught my attention.

Wait, what?

Another smell?

And not just ordinary blood, but something that smelled particularly foul?

"Gopuro, can you tell what kind of creature it belongs to?" I asked. "I mean, does it smell like any animal you've encountered in the forest?"

My first thought was that it might belong to another creature, perhaps a Colossal Bear or one of those Horned Wolves.

However...

"I'm not sure!" Gopuro replied. "It doesn't smell like any animal I've ever encountered in this forest. Nothing I recognize."

He then turned toward his sister.

"Puran, can you smell it, too?"

Gopuran paused and took a few deliberate sniffs of the air.

"Yeah, I can smell it."

Her expression quickly changed, her brows drawing together as she tried to identify the unfamiliar scent.

"Big Boss, there's something wrong with this smell. I can't explain why, but it gives me a really bad feeling!" the goblin girl said.

"Urgh... my hair is standing on end just thinking about it," Gopuro added, rubbing his arms.

And apparently, that was enough information for me to put two and two together.

I already had a pretty good idea of what that meant.

An unfamiliar scent that didn't belong to any ordinary animal in the forest.

A foul smell that made even my goblins feel uneasy just by detecting it.

There was only one creature I could think of that fit that description.

Damn...

Seriously?

"Dark Giant Spiders..."

Gopuro and Gopuran exchanged glances, their eyes widening as the realization struck them at the same time.

"But I thought Dark Giant Spiders don't appear during the morning!" I exclaimed.

So what was this? An exception?

Or was the whole thing about spiders never appearing in the morning actually just bullshit?

Either way, there was potentially great danger ahead.

But at the same time, the Bright Red Nose Tribe's chieftain might be there as well, assuming Gopuro's nose was reliable enough.

At his level, perhaps the chieftain could still survive an encounter with those monsters.

I couldn't rule out either possibility.

Thus, I was once again faced with a difficult decision.

Should I have the team investigate the source of the smell, or should I order them to retreat?

The two goblins seemed to be struggling with the same dilemma. They knew how dangerous the spiders were, but the possibility that the tribe's chieftain might still be alive made it difficult to simply turn around and leave.

"Big Boss... what should we do?"

Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

I quickly gathered the other two teams and explained the situation to them. After a brief discussion, we agreed to investigate the source of the smell.

After all, for Gopuro to detect the scent of blood from those Dark Giant Spiders, or whatever those monsters were, the creatures had to be injured and bleeding. Or possibly dead.

Perhaps the Bright Red Nose Tribe's chieftain had already managed to kill some of those spiders and was now hiding somewhere nearby?

That was my best guess, anyway.

Of course, there was another possibility I didn't particularly want to consider. What if the spiders had killed the chieftain instead?

Well... all I could do was hope for the best.

"Be careful," I warned my citizens. "Don't rush into anything. If you encounter any living spiders, retreat immediately. Your safety comes first."

"Yes, Big Boss!"

With that, we set off toward the source of the scent.

The goblins followed the trail, tracking the powerful scent of goblin blood alongside the foul stench of the spiders' blood.

Then, after walking for a while, we finally reached our destination.

Through one of my citizens' eyes, I looked down at the scene from atop a tall tree.

It was a clearing that looked as though a terrible battle had taken place there. Several trees had been snapped in half, bushes lay flattened against the ground, and broken branches were scattered everywhere. Deep gouges marred the earth, while several nearby tree trunks bore enormous cuts, as though something had sliced through them with terrifying force. Probably the spiders' doing.

And in the middle of that ruined clearing...

Five Dark Giant Spider corpses lay scattered across the ground.

...

Damn.

So these are the Dark Giant Spiders?

Oh my...

They were every bit as horrifying as my goblins had described.

Their bodies were covered in dark, almost pitch-black chitin. If it were nighttime right now, these things might have been practically invisible against the darkness. Even beneath the bright morning sunlight, their exoskeletons seemed to swallow the light rather than reflect it.

Their eight legs were ridiculously long, each stretching well over three meters. Judging by their proportions, their bodies might have reached three or even four meters above the ground if they stood upright.

And their front legs...

Good grief.

They really did resemble enormous curved blades, each one tapering to a wickedly sharp point.

But perhaps the most unsettling feature was their eyes.

Even in death, their clusters of crimson eyes was still faintly glowing with a sinister light. It was almost as though some trace of their terrifying presence still lingered within those lifeless bodies.

Then there was their blood.

Thick, black liquid oozed from their wounds and pooled across the ground. Whenever sunlight touched it, the blood sizzled, releasing thin wisps of smoke into the air.

And the stench...

Well, I couldn't smell it myself, but judging by my citizens' reactions, it was absolutely horrible.

Gopuro and Gopuran both looked deeply uncomfortable, while several of the others were already pinching their noses.

Yeah...

These things were seriously disgusting.

Unfortunately, the spiders weren’t the only ones lying dead in the clearing.

There were goblin corpses everywhere too, many of them. The bodies were scattered everywhere, and were already attracting crows and insects.

And judging by the state of their bodies, they’d all been killed by the spiders.

****

For a moment, all six of my goblins froze.

Even though the spiders were clearly dead, the sight of those enormous bodies seemed to bring back some rather unpleasant memories. My citizens stared at the monsters, their expressions tense, and none of them seemed particularly eager to approach.

I couldn’t really blame them.

They had already experienced how terrifying these creatures were firsthand. Seeing five of them lying dead in one place was probably reassuring, but it was also a reminder of just how dangerous their enemies had been.

Fortunately, after a little while, they began to relax.

The spiders weren’t moving.

Not one of those terrifying creatures showed the slightest sign of getting back up.

Only then did my citizens finally release their pent-up breaths.

"Big Boss!" Gopuro exclaimed, his voice suddenly filled with excitement. "The chieftain must have done this! He must have killed the five spiders!"

"Yeah," I replied. "It certainly looks that way."

Still...

To think that someone could slay five Dark Giant Spiders of this size....

Damn...

Hulgagoblins really are something else, huh?

I became even more curious about this chieftain now.

If he had genuinely managed to take down five of these monsters, his strength might have been far beyond what I'd initially imagined. Perhaps he really was approaching Level 100, just as the rumors suggested.

That was a frightening amount of power.

But as I continued examining the battlefield, I noticed something else.

There was no sign of a goblin corpse that looked as though it belonged to the chieftain.

Sure, several evolved goblins lay among the dead, but the strongest-looking ones appeared to be Hobgoblins or Hulkgoblins at most. None had the imposing build I'd expect from a powerful Hulgagoblin chieftain.

Hmm... That's strange.

I quickly asked my citizens to look around as well, just in case I'd overlooked something.

Their findings were the same.

None of the bodies appeared to belong to the chieftain.

Well, that was good news, wasn't it?

If the chieftain wasn't among the dead, then there was still a chance he was alive. Perhaps he'd survived the battle but suffered serious injuries and was now hiding somewhere nearby.

Yeah...

That must be it...

I was just beginning to feel a little more hopeful when Gopushadow suddenly called out.

"Big Boss, look! Over there! Under that spider!"

I immediately switched to his vision.

And then I saw it.

Beneath the massive body of one of the Dark Giant Spiders, a green arm protruded from underneath its dark exoskeleton.

A very, very large green goblin arm.

It was even thicker and more muscular than Gopugiga’s arms, with several tribal tattoos running along its surface.

Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

Oh, no.

My heart sank.

"That’s the chieftain!"

Or at least, it had to be.

There was no way an ordinary goblin could have an arm that enormous. Judging by its size alone, this had to be someone important.

But the arm wasn’t moving.

It lay completely motionless beneath the spider’s massive body, with no apparent sign of life.

A terrible thought immediately crossed my mind.

Was he crushed to death beneath that thing?

After all, even a Hulgagoblin wouldn’t necessarily survive having several tons of spider dropped on top of him. Whatever his level, there had to be limits to what his body could withstand.

Damn it!

Just when I thought we’d found a survivor!

But before I could say anything else, Gopuro suddenly leaped down from the tree and rushed toward the exposed arm.

"Big boss, I will help the chieftain!"

"No! Puro, wait!" I shouted in panic.

Too late.

Fuck! This reckless idiot!!!

Gopuro was already racing across the clearing!

However...

The moment he entered a radius of roughly five meters around the spider's corpse, he suddenly stopped.

His entire body froze.

"Huh? Puro? Are you alright? Puro?" I asked in panic.

"B-b-big Boss? H-h-help!" Gopuro stuttered.

And for a few seconds, he just stood there, frozen in place, staring at the spider's body as though he'd encountered an invisible demon. Through his eyes, I could see the creature's clusters of crimson eyes staring directly back at him.

And to be honest, that was quite a terrifying sight.

A shiver seemed to run through my very bricks.

But then, all of a sudden, Gopuro stumbled backward and fell onto the ground.

The next instant, he scrambled away at lightning speed, practically paddling himself backward with his hands and feet. He didn't stop until he'd put several more meters between himself and the corpse.

Only after reaching what he apparently considered a safe distance did he finally manage to calm down.

"Fuck! That was freaking scary!"

"Puro! How can you be so reckless?!" Gopuran exclaimed as she jumped down and hurried over to scold him, radiating the energy of a furious little sister.

The others quickly joined in. Some reprimanded him for rushing ahead, while others asked whether he was alright.

Gopuro could only sit there, panting heavily, drenched in cold sweat and his face as pale as a green ghost.

...

Meanwhile, I finally understood what had happened.

I see...

So this is the fear aura.

How interesting.

It seemed my earlier hypothesis had been correct. These spiders could release some kind of aura that filled their enemies within a certain radius with overwhelming fear and despair, crushing their will to fight before they even had a chance to act.

Some victims might freeze in place, unable to move even as the spiders approached to kill them. Others might turn around and flee as fast as their legs could carry them.

Either way, the result was pretty much the same.

They lost the will to fight before the battle had even truly begun.

And the truly terrifying part was that the aura apparently wouldn't disappear even when its owner died.

Even now, anyone who approached one of these corpses could still be affected by that dreadful presence.

Hmm... That's a nasty ability.

Well, fortunately...

I already had something that might help us deal with this problem.

****

"Lord's Blessing Lv. 2... Activate! Blessing of Protection! Target: Gopugiga!"

As soon as I issued the command, Gopugiga's enormous body was enveloped in a soft golden glow. The light shimmered across his muscular frame, giving him the appearance of someone blessed by a holy power.

"Alright, Giga. You can go in now!"

"Yes, Big Boss!"

Gopugiga confidently strode toward the nearest Dark Giant Spider corpse.

For reference, [Blessing of Protection] had the following effect: Prevents new negative effects from being applied to the target. Reduces the effectiveness and damage of existing negative effects by 50%.

In other words, Gopugiga should now be immune to the spiders' fear aura.

At least, that was my understanding of how the skill worked.

And as expected, he continued forward without any trouble.

Five meters.

Three meters.

One meter...

Before long, he was standing right beside the enormous spider corpse, showing absolutely no signs of fear. He even leaned forward to examine the creature more closely, seemingly unconcerned by its rows of crimson eyes.

Very good! It works!

I was quite pleased with the result.

The only downside was the cost. Maintaining the blessing consumed a whopping two Castle Points every second. That was a rather hefty price to pay, especially if I needed to protect several citizens at once.

But whatever.

I still had plenty of points left.

"Alright, Gopuro! Gopuflammy! You two, go help him. I'll protect you with the same blessing."

"Yes, Big Boss!"

After activating the blessing on both of them, I watched as the three goblins gathered around the spider corpse.

Their task was simple: roll the enormous creature aside and free the goblin chieftain beneath it.

Meanwhile, I watched, hoping the chieftain was still alive.

"Alright! On three!" Gopuro announced, positioning himself beside the spider's body.

Gopuflammy planted her feet firmly against the ground, while Gopugiga crouched down and braced his massive arms against the creature's hard exoskeleton.

"Three! Two! One! Hup!"

"HNRRGGGGHHHHHH!!!"

The three goblins pushed with all their might!

At first, the spider corpse barely budged. Its enormous body was ridiculously heavy.

Needless to say, this thing was heavy as fuck.

For a moment, I even considered sending a few more goblins over to help.

But in the end, that wasn't necessary.

My citizens weren't exactly ordinary goblins anymore.

With Gopugiga's monstrous strength, Gopuro's powerful physique, and Gopuflammy's considerable might, the three of them gradually managed to shift the corpse.

It was like watching three people attempt to roll an enormous boulder, except the boulder had eight legs and looked absolutely revolting.

Still, after a few more grunts and one final burst of effort, the spider finally began to tip over.

Rumble!

Its massive body rolled to the side and crashed against the ground, sending a small cloud of dust into the air.

"There! We did it!" Gopuro exclaimed.

"Good job, everyone!" I praised them.

Now then...

Let's see what happened to the chieftain.

With the spider corpse out of the way, all of us immediately turned our attention to the patch of ground beneath it.

However...

There was no chieftain.

Instead, lying on the bloodstained ground was just a single severed arm.

Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

"What? There's just an arm?!" Gopugiga exclaimed, staring at the severed limb in disbelief.

"Wait a minute... Where's the rest of him?" Gopuro stared at it for a moment. Then, all of a sudden, his expression twisted in horror.

"Oh no! He got eaten!"

...

For a moment, I was just as confused as they were.

But after thinking about it for a little longer, I realized something. And honestly, it was a huge relief.

"Hey, you three! Get out of the spider's aura range first!" I hurriedly instructed them.

Only after making sure they'd retreated to a safe distance did I continue.

"And no, silly. He wasn't eaten. If anything, this probably means he's still alive!"

"Oh!"

Gopuro's expression immediately brightened as he understood what I meant.

The others caught on a moment later, their faces lighting up with relief. They exchanged smiles, clearly happy at the possibility that the chieftain was still alive.

Yeah...

The chieftain was probably still alive!

He'd lost an arm during the battle, but if the rest of his body wasn't lying beneath that spider, then there was a decent chance he'd managed to escape.

Which meant we still had a chance to find him.

"Puro," I called out.

"Yes, Big Boss?"

"Can you still detect the chieftain’s scent? He’s injured and missing an arm, so he should be bleeding pretty badly. Follow the scent of his blood. It might lead us straight to him."

"Got it! I’ll give it a try!"

Gopuro immediately closed his eyes and concentrated, relying on his keen sense of smell.

For a few moments, he remained completely still.

Then his nose suddenly twitched, and his eyes snapped open again.

"This way!" he announced, pointing deeper into the forest.

"I can smell it now! It’s very faint, though. Really faint."

I followed his gaze.

But then...

"Oh! That direction!" Gopuberry suddenly exclaimed.

Her expression darkened.

And soon, for some reason, the other goblins started reacting similarly, their earlier relief quickly fading.

"Shit..."

"Seriously? Of all places..."

One after another, my citizens began looking increasingly uneasy.

Apparently, there was something dangerous in that direction. Something they recognized, and something they really didn’t want to run into.

Unfortunately, from my perspective, all I could see was more forest.

Huh? What’s going on?

"What’s wrong?" I asked. "Where does that direction lead?"

Gopuran turned toward me, her expression serious.

"Big Boss, that’s the territory of the Horned Gray Wolves!"

Oh?

The moment she said that name, my brief sense of relief vanished, replaced by a familiar feeling of uneasiness.

Wait. The Horned Gray Wolves? The same kind of beasts that almost killed my Puro and Puran???

Before I could ask anything else...

"Quick! We need to hurry!" Gopuro shouted. "We have to save the chieftain!"

"Yeah! Let’s go!" Gopuran nodded.

Without wasting another second, the six goblins took off running, rushing deeper into the forest and toward the territory of the Horned Gray Wolves.

*****

Meanwhile...

Deep within the territory of the Horned Gray Wolves, at the foot of a rocky hill, a terrifying battle was still underway.

On one side stood a group of roughly twenty goblins.

And standing in front of them, shielding the smaller goblins behind his massive frame, was a single, gigantic goblin with a bright red nose.

The chieftain of the Bright Red Nose Tribe.

To put it simply, this guy was an absolute monster.

Standing over four meters tall, he was built like a mountain of muscle. He looked less like a goblin and more like a giant orc, with a physique that wouldn’t even have looked out of place on a professional bodybuilder who’d somehow injected himself with a hundred times the usual dose of steroids.

In comparison, the largest goblin standing behind him was barely half his height.

In his right hand, the chieftain gripped an enormous greatsword made from wood and bones, over three meters long. Its jagged blade looked almost like a giant saw, and the entire weapon was soaked in blood.

However, his left arm was gone.

In its place was a gruesome stump, fresh blood dripping steadily onto the ground.

His body was also covered in many other wounds. Deep slashes ran across his chest and shoulders, while vicious bite marks covered his arms and legs. Some of the injuries were still bleeding heavily, and his breathing had become rough and labored.

Honestly, he looked like he might collapse at any moment.

Yet even in that terrible condition, the gigantic goblin refused to back down. He stood his ground, his remaining hand gripping the bloodstained greatsword as he glared at the creatures surrounding him.

More than thirty Horned Gray Wolves had encircled the goblins, herding them toward the rocky foothill and cutting off any chance of escape.

Their gray fur bristled as they prowled across the uneven ground, their hungry eyes fixed on the exhausted goblins. Saliva dripped from their open jaws, revealing rows of sharp fangs, while low growls rumbled from their throats.

They were ready to pounce at any moment.

And yet, despite being so hopelessly outnumbered, the goblin chieftain showed no sign of retreating.

At his feet already lay the corpses of more than six Horned Gray Wolves.

Some had been cut open by his enormous greatsword. Others had been torn apart so brutally that their bodies were barely recognizable.

One of them had even been sliced cleanly in half.

The sheer brutality of the scene said enough about just how terrifying this giant goblin could be when he fought.

And it was all thanks to him that the twenty or so goblins behind him had survived this long.

They'd managed to escape the Dark Giant Spiders, but their troubles hadn't ended there. During their desperate flight, they'd accidentally wandered into the territory of the Horned Gray Wolves.

And now, instead of those terrifying spiders, an entire pack of hungry monsters stood between them and survival.

The chieftain tightened his grip on his greatsword.

He could barely keep standing, much less fight another prolonged battle. But he didn’t move.

He remained in front of his people, refusing to give the wolves even an inch.

Because as long as he was still alive, he wouldn’t allow those monsters to lay a single claw on the goblins behind him.

Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

"Chieftain... what... what do we do now?"

The one who spoke was an elderly-looking goblin with a frail, wrinkled face. Tattoos covered nearly every inch of his body, and he was adorned with so many bone accessories that he almost looked like a walking collection of trinkets. In one hand, he held a wooden staff topped with a skull.

Throughout the battle, the old goblin had kept one hand extended toward the chieftain, continuously sending waves of green energy into his enormous body.

Under the effects of that green light, the chieftain had managed to keep fighting despite his terrible injuries.

Apparently, that old dude was a shaman.

And judging by the strength of his healing magic, he wasn’t just any ordinary shaman. He was a high-level goblin shaman with some rather potent healing and support abilities.

Unfortunately, even his magic wasn’t enough to turn the tide of this battle.

The Horned Gray Wolves continued to advance, step by cautious step.

They weren’t rushing in recklessly. Instead, they maintained their distance, watching the injured chieftain with sharp, intelligent eyes as they searched for an opening.

One wolf eventually lowered its body, preparing to charge.

But before it could make a move, the chieftain suddenly swung his greatsword.

SHING!

A powerful wave of slashing energy shot from the jagged blade, tearing through the air toward the approaching wolf!

The wolf reacted almost instantly, leaping backward just in time to avoid the attack. The slash passed harmlessly in front of it before dissipating into the distance.

Even so, that single strike was enough to make the surrounding wolves hesitate.

None of them dared to approach any further. After all, they knew that if they got too close, they might end up like the six wolves already lying dead before them.

Apparently, Horned Gray Wolves were extremely intelligent and patient hunters.

Rather than mindlessly throwing themselves at their prey, they had learned from their previous failed attacks.

They understood that the goblin chieftain was still dangerous.

But they also knew he was running out of time.

All they had to do was keep their distance and maintain the encirclement. Eventually, his strength would run out, his injuries would take their toll, and he would collapse from exhaustion or blood loss.

Then, they could finish off the remaining goblins without risking their own lives.

It was a simple but effective strategy.

And judging by the chieftain’s grim expression, he was well aware of it, too.

"Shaman."

His deep voice broke the tense silence, though his eyes never left the wolves surrounding them.

"I’ll charge into their formation and buy you some time. Meanwhile, take everyone and run."

"What?!"

A young goblin girl immediately stepped forward.

She was a skinny Hobgoblin, barely over 1.5 meters tall, with one leg badly injured and tears streaming down her face.

"No! Chieftain! We can’t! We can’t leave you behind!"

The other goblins quickly joined her, their voices filled with desperation.

"Chieftain!"

"Please, reconsider!"

Some of the Hobgoblins, along with a few regular goblins, even stepped forward with renewed determination.

"Please, let me fight alongside you! I’m not afraid!"

"Me too! I’ll fight!"

"These are just wolves! They’re not those damn spiders! We can beat them!"

For a brief moment, the goblins seemed ready to throw themselves into battle alongside their leader.

However...

"No, my warriors."

The chieftain’s voice was firm.

"If you truly have the courage and strength to fight, then use them to protect the others. When I’m gone, you must lead them away and keep them safe."

He tightened his grip around the hilt of his greatsword.

"Protect the Bright Red Nose Tribe!"

"But..." the young goblin girl was till protesting, her voice trembling. "We can’t just..."

"Silence!"

The chieftain suddenly roared, making the surrounding goblins flinch.

"Don’t make me repeat myself! The future of our tribe is at stake! Don’t throw your lives away for nothing!"

"But..."

The girl bit her lip, struggling to hold back her tears.

She wanted to say something. She wanted to argue, to beg, to find some other way out of this nightmare.

But no words came.

In the end, she turned toward the elderly shaman and grabbed his arm with both hands.

"Shaman, please! Please say something! You can’t let him do this!"

However, the old goblin remained silent.

He slowly turned his face away from the girl, unable to meet her tearful gaze, and heaved a deep sigh.

Because deep down, he knew the chieftain was right.

As the tribe’s shaman, his duty was to put the survival of the Bright Red Nose Tribe above everything else.

Even above the life of its chieftain.

Even if that decision meant abandoning someone he had served for years.

"I’m sorry..." The chieftain’s voice suddenly softened. For the first time, a hint of sorrow crept into his expression. "I failed to protect you all. I failed our tribe."

His enormous shoulders trembled slightly.

"When those monsters attacked us... I was afraid. I was so afraid that I couldn’t save everyone."

He lowered his gaze for a moment, recalling the terrible massacre.

"So many of our people died because of me..."

"No..." the young girl whispered, shaking her head desperately. "It’s not your fault! We’re not blaming you, Chieftain! Please..."

Her voice broke, and she could no longer hold back her tears.

But the chieftain did not reply.

Instead, he called out to the old friend standing behind him.

"Shaman." His voice was deep and steady once more. "I entrust my daughter to you."

The old goblin’s expression tightened.

For a moment, he said nothing.

Then he slowly nodded.

"Yes. I will take care of her."

Hearing his answer, the chieftain finally let out a breath.

That was enough.

He had no regrets about leaving his daughter in the shaman’s care.

At least now, he could fight without worrying about what would happen to her.

The elderly shaman then reached into the pouch hanging at his waist and pulled out a handful of strange red-colored dust. The particles shimmered in the sunlight like some kind of magical fairy dust.

"Chieftain," he said solemnly, "this is all I have left."

He opened his palm, revealing the mysterious substance.

"It will temporarily unleash your body’s full potential, giving you an enormous burst of strength. But the effect will only last twenty seconds."

The shaman paused, his expression growing even graver.

"Once those twenty seconds are over, your body will suffer a severe backlash. You’ll become much weaker than you are now."

"Haha... That’s enough."

The chieftain laughed, seemingly unbothered by the warning.

"Do it!" he commanded.

The old shaman closed his eyes and began murmuring an incantation over the red dust.

A faint magical glow gathered around his fingers.

Then, with a sudden flick of his hand, he scattered the dust toward the chieftain.

The particles drifted through the air before settling across the giant goblin’s battered body.

And the moment they touched his skin...

"AAAAARRRRRGGGHHHHH!"

The chieftain let out a deafening roar!

His entire body convulsed as an overwhelming surge of energy erupted from within him.

His eyes flashed a dangerous crimson.

Then, he transformed!

The muscles across his enormous frame began to swell even further, bulging beneath his skin as thick veins rose across his arms, chest, and shoulders. They looked like giant vines winding around a tree trunk, threatening to burst under the pressure.

His already massive body grew even larger.

Another meter in height!

In the blink of an eye, the towering goblin had transformed into something even more monstrous than before.

The ground beneath his feet cracked under the sudden increase in his weight.

Even the surrounding Horned Gray Wolves took a few cautious steps backward, their ears flattening as they stared at the terrifying creature before them.

The chieftain raised his greatsword.

His breathing had become a thunderous growl, and the muscles in his remaining arm bulged as he tightened his grip around the weapon.

Then he roared a command.

"NOW, GO!"

His voice shook the rocky hillside.

"I'LL CREATE A PATH!"

Before anyone could respond, the chieftain swung his jagged greatsword with all his might!

BOOM!

A massive wave of slashing energy tore across the battlefield, rushing toward the pack of Horned Gray Wolves!

Most of the wolves reacted quickly enough to leap aside.

But not all of them were so fortunate.

Two of the slower wolves were caught directly in the path of the attack.

In an instant, their bodies were bisected by the overwhelming slash, falling apart before they even had a chance to howl!

Blood splattered across the rocky ground.

And just like that, a gap appeared in the wolves' encirclement.

The chieftain didn't hesitate.

With a thunderous roar, he charged straight into the opening!

His enormous body barreled forward like a living boulder, his footsteps shaking the ground as he rushed toward the startled wolves.

"RAAAAAARRRR!"

"FOR THE BRIGHT RED NOSE TRIBE!"

Behind him, the other goblins finally moved, following their chieftain toward the opening he had created.

Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

The chieftain charged straight into the wolves' formation, his enormous body barreling forward like a runaway boulder.

The Horned Gray Wolves reacted immediately.

Several leaped toward him from different directions, their jaws wide open and sharp fangs gleaming in the sunlight.

However...

"RAAAAAHHH!"

The chieftain swung his greatsword in a wide, brutal arc.

SLAAASH!

Another wolf was caught in the path of the jagged blade. Its body was torn apart by the sheer force of the attack, blood spraying across the rocky ground.

But the chieftain didn’t even spare it a glance.

He had no time to waste.

His only goal was to open a path for his people to escape!

"RUN! EVERYONE, RUN!"

The surviving goblins immediately scrambled toward the opening he’d created.

Some limped, while others stumbled over the uneven ground, desperately trying to keep up with those ahead of them. They were terrified, of course, but they understood what their chieftain was doing.

He was risking his life to buy them these precious few seconds.

They couldn’t afford to waste them!

Unfortunately, the Horned Gray Wolves weren’t about to let their prey escape so easily.

One of the wolves suddenly broke away from the pack and sprinted toward the fleeing goblins. Its powerful legs carried it across the rocky ground, rapidly closing the distance to the nearest straggler.

The goblin barely had time to turn around.

"AHHHH!"

The wolf lunged, its jaws snapping toward the goblin’s head.

However, before it could make contact...

BOOM!

A massive shadow suddenly appeared beside it.

The chieftain had arrived!

Moving with astonishing speed for someone of his size, the gigantic goblin launched himself at the wolf and drove a devastating kick into its body.

CRAAACK!

The impact was horrifying.

The wolf’s body buckled around the chieftain’s foot before being blasted sideways, its ribs shattering under the tremendous force. It crashed into the ground several meters away and slid across the rocks.

By the time it came to a stop, it was already dead.

The goblin who had nearly been killed stared at the scene in stunned disbelief.

"Don’t just stand there! RUN!"

The chieftain’s furious roar snapped him back to reality.

"Y-YES!"

The goblin hurriedly scrambled away, not daring to look back.

Meanwhile, the chieftain’s gaze swept across the battlefield, searching for any other wolves trying to intercept his people.

There!

Another wolf was rushing toward a group of fleeing goblins.

The chieftain reacted immediately and hurled his greatsword.

The enormous weapon spun through the air, its jagged blade flashing beneath the sunlight.

WHOOSH!

Before the wolf could react, the greatsword slammed into its torso and pierced straight through, lifting the unfortunate creature off its feet.

The wolf crashed to the ground with the massive weapon still embedded in its body.

Another enemy down!

But...

It still wasn’t enough.

No matter how strong the chieftain was, there were simply too many wolves.

And he couldn’t be everywhere at once.

While he dealt with one enemy, another was already preparing to strike somewhere else. Every time he turned his attention to one part of the battlefield, danger was brewing somewhere else.

Then, from the corner of his eye, he spotted another wolf darting toward a wounded goblin who had fallen behind the others.

The poor fellow tried to crawl away, but his injured leg refused to cooperate.

"HELP!"

The wolf pounced.

Its jaws clamped around the goblin’s head.

CRUNCH!

The goblin’s scream abruptly stopped.

His body went limp, and the wolf tossed him aside before immediately turning its attention to the other fleeing prey.

"NOOOO!"

One of the goblins witnessed the gruesome scene and let out a desperate cry.

But there was no time to mourn.

The wolves were still coming.

And then...

Another wolf spotted the young goblin girl running near the rear of the group.

The chieftain’s daughter.

She was struggling to keep up with the others, her injured leg slowing her down. Blood and tears streaked her face, and she was breathing so hard that every step seemed to take a little more effort than the last.

The wolf locked onto her and charged, its enormous legs pounding against the rocky ground as it rapidly closed the distance.

The girl heard the movement behind her and turned around.

Her eyes widened.

"Ah..."

The wolf was already upon her.

The chieftain saw everything.

His heart nearly stopped.

"DAUGHTER!"

He immediately tried to rush toward her.

But before he could take even two steps...

THUD!

A wolf slammed into his right side and sank its teeth deep into his remaining arm!

"ARGHHH!"

The chieftain roared in pain.

Almost at the same moment, another wolf darted in from the opposite direction and clamped its jaws around his left leg.

Its powerful bite locked the limb in place, making it difficult for him to move.

"YOU BASTARDS!"

The chieftain struggled violently, trying to shake the two wolves off.

But the beasts seemed to know exactly what they were doing.

One had pinned down his weapon arm, while the other held his leg. Their combined weight dragged him off balance, slowing him just enough to keep him from reaching his daughter.

And then a third wolf joined in.

It lunged at his other leg and sank its fangs into the flesh.

CRUNCH!

The chieftain’s massive body staggered.

For the first time since his transformation, he was forced down onto one knee.

"NO! LET GO!"

He roared and tried to wrench himself free, but the three wolves held on with terrifying tenacity.

Their claws dug into the ground as they pulled in different directions, keeping the gigantic goblin pinned in place.

He was strong. Far stronger than any ordinary goblin.

But even he had his limits.

And right now, he couldn’t even get back on his feet.

Yet through all the pain and struggle, his eyes never left his daughter.

The wolf was almost upon her.

Its claws extended as it prepared to pounce, ready to tear into her fragile body.

"Damn it!"

The chieftain’s eyes widened in horror.