

Ocean Lord 241

Chapter 241: Solin's Persuasion, Unexpected! Severed Arm

(2)

Although it was only Tier 3 with 3 stars, its self-destruct power was enough to threaten enemies of Tier 4.

Two hundred self-detonating water spiders rushed forward, killing seven or eight thousand skeleton monsters, with a casualty ratio as high as 1:40. Among them, three thousand were elite skeleton monsters under Solin's command.

Solin was initially surprised but immediately commanded the Skeleton Wyverns circling in the air to take out the remaining two hundred self-detonating water spiders.

Under the Necromantic Breath, the self-detonating water spiders didn't even have a chance to self-destruct and were melted into a puddle of blood.

Seeing this, a hint of regret flashed in Ji Chen's eyes.

If these remaining two hundred self-detonating water spiders could successfully self-destruct, they could have taken out at least thousands of elite skeleton monsters.

Seeing the skeleton wyverns take off again without attacking other troops, Ji Chen understood what Solin had in mind.

But he couldn't hold back any longer.

With a thought, mana surged from his body.

He directly unleashed the Tidal Domain, rising into the air.

The water from the swamp surged from all directions around him. Seeing the swamp water floating around him and emitting a nauseating smell, Ji Chen frowned slightly. Without further delay, he immediately manipulated the water into blades.

Thousands of water blades took shape and descended from above.

Most struck the skeleton monsters, while some were aimed at Solin.

Solin watched hundreds of water blades coming at him, his mind shaken. He quickly drew the sword from his waist.

This finely crafted longsword had a golden gem embedded in the hilt that emitted a golden light, forming an inverted half-circle shield above his head.

Clang! Clang! Without exception, every water blade was deflected by the golden shield, leaving Solin unharmed within it.

Ji Chen's eyes widened. Soon, his gaze fixed on the sword.

That sword was definitely no ordinary item.

Currently, his Tidal Dominator was an orange legacy-tier class. Each water blade he condensed possessed the destructive power of a red legacy-tier skill.

The fact that the golden shield could withstand hundreds of water blades and remain unscathed meant that the sword must be a high-level treasure.

It might even be more powerful than the Dragon Slayer Great Sword...

Thinking this, Ji Chen's expression grew serious.

Solin watched as the water blades were deflected and the golden shield remained untouched, and he felt a sense of triumph.

This longsword had been acquired by him when he was still a weak white skeleton many years ago, found by chance in the red desert.

For hundreds of years, he had not seen any attack capable of breaking through the golden shield generated by the sword. It seemed this time was no exception.

Solin raised his head to look for signs of human disappointment but was puzzled to find the human's face carried a hint of a smile instead.

Had this human lost his mind?

Then Solin saw Ji Chen pointing at the battlefield. When he turned to look, he was instantly infuriated.

The water blades falling like a storm couldn't break the golden shield, but they were efficiently attacking the skeleton army.

Water blades that rivaled red legacy-tier skills in damage were causing the skeleton monsters to die or be wounded with each hit.

Countless skeleton monsters fell under these water blades, one after another.

Damn it!!

This cunning human!

Even Solin couldn't help but feel a pang of sympathy as he saw advanced skeleton monsters falling one by one under the onslaught of water blades that were as powerful as red legacy-tier skills.

In his eyes, a fierce flame of gold burned with intense hatred for this human.

In his rage, he swung the longsword in his hand towards Ji Chen from a distance.

A crescent-shaped golden sword light was flung from the tip of his sword with astonishing speed, faster than a bullet. In an instant, it leapt to Ji Chen's face.

Ji Chen's pupils contracted greatly. Watching the swiftly approaching sword light, he only had time to slightly tilt his body before being hit.

Ah—

Even with his formidable willpower, he couldn't help but cry out in pain. He tightly clenched his right hand, which was covered in blood from his severed left arm.

The golden sword light directly severed the portion of his left arm below the break, and the severed arm fell to the ground.

Hearing his cry of pain, a few heroes who were fighting turned instinctively to look. Seeing the scene of Ji Chen's severed arm, they were instantly horrified.

"My lord!"

"Lord!"

"Don't worry about me! Keep fighting!!!"

Ji Chen clenched his teeth tightly, suppressing the urge to cry out in pain. Through gritted teeth, he managed to utter his words.

"But..."

"This is an order!!!"

Upon hearing this, the few heroes hesitated briefly before gritting their teeth and continuing to fight, their attacks more vicious. The look in their eyes as they gazed at Solin became filled with murderous intent.

Veins and tendons stood out on Ji Chen's forehead, his whole body covered in sweat. But he didn't pay attention to his severed left arm; he simply stared fixedly at that longsword.

What kind of treasure was this longsword? It was so powerful that he had very little reaction time before being struck.

Feeling the intense pain surging from his left arm, Ji Chen's anger flared up, and a sense of determination surged within him.

Fuck, let's see whether you kill me first or I crack open your turtle shell and turn you into a sieve!

His mana started to deplete rapidly. Water condensed into dozens of massive swords, each over ten meters long, and they shot downwards.

Thud—

The giant swords collided with the shield, emitting a tremendous sound. The intense surge of energy caused the skeleton monsters within dozens of meters to be thrown back, breaking apart in mid-air.

Successive massive swords struck the shield.

The shield remained unscathed, but Ji Chen was undeterred. He brought out a mana pendant to frantically replenish his mana. Mana flowed out of him like water, continuously forming massive swords that were then brought down.

Twenty massive swords, leaving the shield untouched.

With fifty massive swords, a few faint white marks emerged.

Upon unleashing two hundred massive swords, a nearly invisible fracture materialized on the shield.

As four hundred massive swords descended, the fracture widened, becoming visible to the naked eye.

At this moment, Solin swung out another golden sword light. However, it was blocked by the shield bracelet Ji Chen had preemptively obtained from Alice. The fatal blow was deflected.

[Shield Bracelet (Damaged)]

[Tier]: 3-Star Treasure

[Effect]: When subjected to powerful attacks or when life is threatened, actively or automatically generate a shield around oneself to resist magical and physical attacks.

Although it blocked the attack, due to the overwhelming energy, the 3-star treasure shield bracelet was directly damaged and turned into a disposable consumable.

Seeing this, Ji Chen, who was experiencing physical pain, felt a pang of heartache.

Fifty thousand gold coins just flew away like that!

As a result, his gaze towards Solin became even more hostile.

If he didn't manage to kill Solin right here and now, he would have his name spelled backwards!

Countless massive swords had fallen, and all Ji Chen knew was that his mana was nearly depleted, and there was not a drop left in the mana pendant.

But Solin's golden shield was now covered with cracks, resembling a spider's web, densely woven and on the verge of shattering.

Ji Chen took a deep breath and controlled the remaining dozen massive swords, dropping them one by one.

When he dropped the twelfth massive sword, with a cracking sound, the shield burst with a resounding explosion, dissipating its energy into the air.

Solin finally revealed his true form, and his voice sounded extremely sinister.

"Human, you truly don't know your place... Since it's come to this, I can only ensure that your soul is utterly obliterated!"

"Skeleton Wyverns, annihilate them all! Spare none!!"

The Skeleton Wyverns, which had been hovering in the sky all this time and had remained motionless even during the intense attacks, now dived down as ordered. Their mouths slightly agape, as if the next second would unleash a breath of death.

Only about sixty-five massive swords remained in the sky now, while fourteen Skeleton Wyverns descended. One massive sword could kill one of them, leaving around eight still intact, enough to inflict significant damage.

The heroes had almost exhausted all their abilities.

The few Dragon Blood Murlocs and Elemental Sea Pixies capable of aerial attacks attacked the descending Skeleton Wyverns, but the effect was minimal.

Under the suppression of tiers, levels, and skill damage reduction, these attacks only slightly slowed down the wyverns' descent.

Alice's face turned pale, her mana nearly depleted. Yet, despite the risk of mana exhaustion, she forced four of the Skeleton Wyverns to lose control of their bodies, causing them to crash heavily onto the ground, incapacitated by severe injuries.

But there were still four remaining!

At this point, Ji Chen had already landed on the ground to conserve mana. Clutching his severed arm, he looked up at the four growing black dots and took a deep breath.

He exerted his last remaining traces of mana.

Today, he couldn't possibly die here like this!

Chapter 242: Sudden Outburst! Sandstorm, Sword of Warlords

Four Skeleton Wyverns swooped down, their sharp claws cutting through the crowd like twin circular saws, leaving trails of blood and dismembered limbs in their wake.

At the same time, a surge of necrotic breath gushed out, indiscriminately assaulting both the forces of the Ocean Crown and the skeleton creatures.

Against attacks from fifth-tier units, they were still far too fragile.

Creatures like Murloc Rangers and Half-Orc Warriors, which were of third-tier, were instantly melted into pools of blood by the breath, leaving not even bone fragments behind. Even the Naga Berserkers and Dragon Blood Murlocs, fourth-tier units, could only endure for a few seconds before falling into the puddles of blood.

In just one wave of attacks, the Ocean Crown had suffered losses of at least a few hundred troops, with countless more injured.

Seeing this, Ji Chen realized that he couldn't wait any longer. He exhausted his final reserves of magic, condensing them into four massive swords, and struck down the last four Skeleton Wyverns.

As the last of the Skeleton Wyverns fell, the morale of the Ocean Crown's troops suddenly surged.

Ji Chen's relief was palpable as he saw the last few threatening Skeleton Dragons meet their demise.

However, the pain from his left arm made him furrow his brows again.

He certainly didn't want to end up like Yang Guo from the wuxia novel *The Return of the Condor Heroes*!

But fortunately, this was a fantasy world with various self-healing skills, spells, and alchemical potions and treasures. Moreover, he had seen many potions and items that could mend bones and flesh in chat channels and forums.

As long as he had enough coins and resources for trade, he wouldn't have to worry too much about being crippled.

Even so, he couldn't let the mastermind behind his condition escape punishment.

With this thought, Ji Chen's gaze locked onto Solin, his eyes filled with murderous intent.

Now, in addition to conquering the Skeleton Realm and dealing with the future threats from the Ocean Crown, he had one more reason to kill Solin.

Now that his magic was completely depleted, due to overuse and exhaustion, he entered a period of magical fatigue.

So Ji Chen couldn't launch an immediate attack, but he could still command the forces of the Ocean Crown to engage the skeleton army head-on and then eliminate Solin.

Solin saw all the Skeleton Wyverns fall and couldn't help but feel a pang of pain.

These were creatures he had painstakingly cultivated for hundreds of years to rule the Skeleton Realm. Each of them had the power to annihilate a low-grade bone forge. However, they had all been wiped out in one fell swoop. This loss hurt him more than losing a few skeleton camps or commanders.

The desire to kill this human intensified within him. Fie urged all the skeleton creatures to continue their assault and even summoned several nearby skeleton camps to come to his aid.

It could be said that the two sides were now thoroughly locked in a relentless battle, entering an endless cycle of death and survival.

From daytime to evening, the sky gradually darkened.

If observed from above, one could see a scene of carnage and destruction throughout the camp, with piles of corpses and blood-soaked earth. Every step taken was on shattered bones, and blood had soaked into the ground, rendering it moist.

Ji Chen directed his troops to charge the enemy formation. The skeleton legion had been reduced to a mere remnant, leaving only a few hundred defenders around Solin, struggling to hold on.

Whether out of fear or caution, Solin had been hiding within the skeleton horde, refraining from making a move. As soon as Ji Chen launched the massive swords, Solin rose again.

Boom, boom, boom...

Just as he was about to launch a final assault, harnessing the culmination of his efforts, he suddenly heard a series of sounds.

Listening carefully, his expression changed dramatically.

It was the sound of hoofbeats!

Soon, a squad of over a thousand Skeleton Knights appeared at the camp's gates, followed by tens of thousands of skeleton creatures.

Ji Chen quickly realized that these were the Skeleton Knights sent by Yasca for reinforcement. How coincidental, they arrived at this exact moment!?

Looking at Solin, who was now defended by fewer than three hundred skeleton guards, Ji Chen was almost about to burst out in curses.

They were just a hair's breadth away from twisting Solin's head off and kicking it like a ball.

As resentful as Ji Chen might be, he had no choice but to abandon the idea of continuing the attack and order his troops to retreat.

The objective had shifted from wiping out the skeleton army and killing Solin to how to survive.

A squad of over a thousand Skeleton Knights was more than enough to break through their ranks.

Solin displayed excitement at the sight of this well-timed squad of Skeleton Knights. Despite his reluctance to face reality, he had to admit that this human had pushed him to his limits, almost to the point of desperation.

But that was no longer important. As long as the Skeleton Knights charged, everything would turn for the better!

The opportunity to cleanse the humiliation was at hand!

Ji Chen's side was now on the defensive, his mind racing to find a solution.

Solin shifted from offense to defense, preparing to counterattack.

Yet neither side realized that a subtle change had occurred in the sky.

Tonight's blood moon was particularly enchanting, casting the entire sky in an intense crimson hue.

Just a few kilometers away from the skeleton camp, within the red desert, a cacophony of eerie screams erupted, and countless skeleton creatures wreathed in blood-red flames, like a tsunami, surged towards the swamp.

This sudden commotion instantly grabbed the attention of both Ji Chen and Solin. Seeing the vast horde of skeleton creatures charging towards them, their expressions changed in unison.

Solin's face turned grim, while Ji Chen's was filled with wild exhilaration.

The reason for this divergence lay in their positions in relation to each other.

The main gate of the skeleton camp faced the red desert, and Solin was near the gate, while Ji Chen's group was situated within the camp's interior..

Chapter 243: Sudden Outburst! Sandstorm, Sword of Warlords (2)

Although unsure of how these peculiar skeletons came about, it was evident that they were not allied with Solin's faction.

As the saying goes, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend".

Perhaps the key to breaking the stalemate lay within these peculiar skeletons.

Solin's heart raced with astonishment as he witnessed the mutated skeletons approaching from a distance as if witnessing something unimaginable.

"How is this possible? These mutated skeletons have never ventured beyond the desert before. Why are they suddenly taking the initiative?"

Could it be... that the disturbance happened at that very spot!? However, I've visited there previously, and everything appeared unchanged!"

As the mutated skeletons drew nearer, a sense of retreat crept into Solin's mind. He realized he was in an unfavorable position, trapped within the skeleton camp and separated from both the humans and the mutated skeletons.

Turning his gaze, his eyes widened in disbelief.

The human actually gave him a farewell gesture and then fled with his army!?

Ji Chen gazed at the sea of mutated skeletons and then at Solin, his lips curling into a smile.

Truly, fortune favors me!

This wave of mutated skeleton forces numbered at least over a hundred thousand.

As the saying goes, "Let dogs bite dogs, let the wicked be punished by their own kind."

Without further hesitation, he decisively commanded his army to move, leading them along the side and away from the bone bridge they had built.

Before departing, he ordered the Elemental Sea Pixies to demolish the walls on both sides of the breach, sealing it shut. After crossing the bone bridge, they further destroyed it, leaving it in a state of disarray, cutting off Solin's escape route completely.

Seeing the skeleton camp suddenly erupt in chaos, Ji Chen nodded in satisfaction.

The next course of action was to keep a safe distance and watch from the other side of the river. Once the turmoil inside subsided, he would return to clean up the mess and eliminate Solin once and for all.

However, when he turned his gaze back to his own troops, his joy was short-lived as he let out a heavy sigh.

The army that had entered the mystic realm with over 4,300 units was now severely depleted.

After numerous battles, and especially after the desperate struggle against Solin, they were left with less than 800 soldiers, each bearing wounds.

Of the 400-plus Naga Berserkers, only slightly more than 100 remained.

Nearly 500 Dragon Blood Murlocs had dwindled to just over 100.

Only 150 Elemental Sea Pixies were left, and most of those who perished had been melted by the necrotic breath of the skeleton wyverns, leaving nothing but bone fragments behind.

The Murloc Rangers numbered less than fifty now, nearing the brink of extinction.

The Self-Detonating Water Spiders were completely wiped out.

And as for the Half-Orc Warriors, only three hundred remained. Since entering the mystic realm, over seven hundred of them had been lost in this unfamiliar land.

This time, one couldn't help but describe it as an immense tragedy.

Of the original force of over four thousand troops, most had perished, and their combat effectiveness was now barely recognizable.

Ji Chen suddenly felt that the gains from this journey into the Skeleton Realm might not outweigh the losses.

Now', all he could hope for was that the rewards he would gain after killing Solin would make such losses worthwhile.

The sound of bones grinding against bones, the clash of swords and knives, the galloping of skeleton knights, and the explosion of spells filled the skeleton camp.

It continued until the Blood Moon slowly disappeared into the horizon, hidden within the dark clouds. Afterward, as the encampment returned to tranquility.

By this point, the Crown of the Ocean's army had rested and recharged for several hours. Under Ji Chen's lead, they once again entered the skeleton encampment.

Before them lay a battlefield in unparalleled chaos and devastation.

As far as the eye could see, nothing but bones. The sheer quantity of bones submerged one's lower legs, and in some places, bone piles even reached several meters high.

The skeletons still standing numbered merely two to three hundred, but even their damaged bodies indicated they had survived only by sheer luck.

A quick look from Ji Chen revealed Solin's presence near a towering mound of bones, where he leaned against it, clutching a sword.

Solin's condition wasn't great either. His armor was sliced and battered, riddled with gashes and holes, exposing parts of his skeleton underneath. His crown was nowhere to be seen.

Most notably, the flickering golden soul fire in his eyes had diminished significantly, signifying his weakness.

As if sensing Ji Chen's presence, Solin slowly lifted his head, his voice dripping with malevolence.

"Damnable human! I should have pursued and killed you personally from the start. Otherwise, I wouldn't have ended up in this predicament.

If I were to recover, I would muster the entirety of my clan's power to exterminate you, then invade the world and fulfill my grand ambitions."

"But you have no chance anymore."

Ji Chen coldly and dispassionately cut off his words, his right hand swiftly conjuring a staff into existence.

[Amplifying Staff]

[Tier]: 2-star Treasure

[Effect]: When held, increases the power of the next spell by 30% at the cost of a 30% increase in mana consumption, [10/10] per day.

Since acquiring this staff, it had remained unused.

Now, it was fitting to use the Skeleton King's life force as the staff's first activation.

Without giving Solin a chance to speak further, Ji Chen immediately tapped into the half-recovered mana and infused it into the Amplifying Staff.

A spear-like staff over ten meters long took shape slowly, then shot out with explosive force.

Solin raised his sword again, and the golden shield materialized once more.

However, this time, a single massive spear managed to crack the shield slightly.

The strength of the golden shield seemed to be related to the user's condition.

Without hesitation, Ji Chen continued to condense the second massive spear and launched it.

More cracks appeared on the shield.

The third spear.

The fourth spear.

Until the seventh massive spear, the golden shield shattered with a tremendous explosion, sending Solin crashing into the bone hill, causing a flurry of bone fragments.

Ji Chen coldly chuckled, waving his hand and consuming the last three uses of the Amplifying Staff, forming the final three massive spears.

He aimed them at Solin within the bone hill.

“Ding- You have killed the Skeleton King: Solin (Red-Legacy Tier, Level 50).”

“Ding- You have completely eradicated the elite Skeleton Legion of the Skeleton King: Sohn.”

“Ding- Your level has increased (31—>35), current level: 35.”

Defeating a higher-level monster leader brought Ji Chen an experience boost that propelled him up four levels at once.

A surge of potent energy flowed into his body, revitalizing and healing every part of his being. Not only did his mana gradually replenish, but the intensity of his magic also increased slightly, and both internal and external injuries on his body began recovering rapidly.

After a few minutes, Ji Chen let out a contented sigh.

His entire body felt as comfortable as if he had undergone a massage, alleviating the exhaustion accumulated from days of battles and travel.

However, his left arm remained empty and hollow.

It seemed that a simple level increase wasn't enough to restore a severed limb. He would have to wait until he left the realm and find items capable of healing such injuries.

Coming back to his senses, Ji Chen stepped on a ground littered with bones, approaching the battered remains of Solin's body.

He crouched down and picked up the sword that had cost him his left arm.

This sword had an impeccable appearance. Even after enduring multiple attacks from Ji Chen, it remained utterly unscathed. Its clear blade reflected a chilly glimmer under the moonlight.

The blade bore intricate and mysterious patterns that stretched from the hilt's golden gemstone to the tip.

The hilt was wrapped in a layer of exceptionally comfortable leather. Ji Chen casually swung it a few times and instantly fell in love with the sword.

Putting aside its power, the sword could fetch an exorbitant price at any auction for luxury weaponry.

Moreover, it was a high-tier treasure.

Ji Chen immediately examined it, absorbing the sword's information.

[Sword of Warlords]

[Tier]: 7-star Treasure

[Effects]: ?Sword of Kings (Raises friendly morale by 35 when equipped, units never retreat)

?Wind of Kings (Your troops remain eternally loyal, significantly enhancing attraction when recruiting others)

?Self-Recovery (When equipped, accelerates the recovery of any injury, weakens negative effects)

[Skills]: ?Void Sever (Shoots out a crescent-shaped sword wave, highly lethal) ?Earthbound Shackles (Condenses a shield, resisting a considerable amount of damage and powerful attacks [based on the user's strength and condition])

[A highly mysterious long sword, perhaps it can guide you to a certain place...]

Chapter 244: Seven-Star Treasure, Mysterious Palace (1)

Wow, that's a Golden Legend, What the...! A 7-star treasure!

In general, treasures were categorized from 1 to 7 stars, where 7 stars represented the highest commonly encountered level, and anything beyond that was deemed legendary.

This sword was a 7-star treasure, making it a top-tier item.

Compared to the 6-star Dragon Slayer Great Sword, the Sword of Warlords had more additional effects and even came with two skills.

One could unleash sword energy, while the other could generate a golden shield.

To be honest, these two skills made Ji Chen's battle against Solin ten times more challenging.

Without this Sword of Warlord, Ji Chen would have found the battle considerably easier.

However, it was the final additional effect that caught Ji Chen's attention.

@ Self-Recovery (When equipped, it accelerates the recovery of any injuries, weakening negative effects)

Accelerating recovery from any injuries...

So, could it heal severed limbs?

Ji Chen decided to try it immediately, gripping the Sword of Warlords tightly.

Just after around ten seconds, he felt an itching sensation at the wound on his left arm. It was as if a thousand ants were crawling on it, their tendrils constantly touching the injury, gradually heating up.

Lifting his arm and examining it closely, he noticed that the dried-up wound had developed tiny red buds of flesh, and the pallid bone displayed a more lively state.

At this rate, it would likely take about a week for his severed left arm to fully regrow, restoring it to its original state.

Seeing this, Ji Chen finally let out a sigh of relief. Although he knew beforehand that there were treasures and potions that could restore severed limbs, suddenly losing an arm still gave him a fright.

Gripping the Sword of Warlords, Ji Chen meticulously combed through Solin's remains and the surrounding area, swiftly locating his target.

A sparkling, crystal-clear, red gemstone lay quietly beneath a few pieces of white bone, resembling a crystal.

This was Solin's Heroic Soul Essence!

[Red Heroic Soul Essence]

[Tier]: Special

[Effect]: Can immediately promote a hero with the potential for a Red-Legacy Tier to that level.

A red Heroic Soul Essence!!

This was a big discovery!

This meant that the Crown of the Ocean would have an additional hero of the Red-Legacy Tier!

After searching around, he found the scabbard, but it had already been damaged, leaving only half of it.

Clearly, this scabbard wasn't a treasure. It was merely used for embellishing the Sword of Warlords.

Confirming that Solin had dropped only the Sword of Warlords and a red Heroic Soul Essence, Ji Chen shook his head with a hint of disappointment.

Evidently, as the ruler of this realm, Solin only possessing only these two items, it was difficult to comprehend how this Skeleton King ascended to power.

If he had heard Ji Chen's sarcastic comment, Solin would have probably leaped up from the ground in anger.

After a hearty round of internal sarcasm, Ji Chen weakly gestured with his hand, commanding his army to start cleaning up the battlefield and searching for any valuable spoils of war.

Several hours later, the other gains from this battle were laid out before them.

Besides an Intermediate-grade Bone Forge, there were five blue Heroic Soul Essences, twelve green Heroic Soul Essences, and twenty-seven white Heroic Soul Essences.

These Heroic Soul Essences were all obtained from the Skeleton Commanders under Solin's command during this battle.

Although this quantity didn't match the number of Skeleton Commanders they had encountered earlier, there were still a few white ones missing. Yet, they were unwilling to invest more time and effort sifting through the immense heap of bones.

Adding up what they had obtained so far:

Ji Chen's collection of Heroic Soul Essences now numbered thirty-seven white, eleven green, and five blue.

At this moment, Anina walked over, holding a green Heroic Soul Essence in her hand.

Facing Ji Chen's slightly puzzled gaze, Anina casually explained, "This belongs to the Skeleton Commander guarding this Skeleton Camp."

At her words, Ji Chen remembered that when he had eliminated the Skeleton Commander overseeing this encampment earlier, Solin's unexpected appearance had disrupted the proceedings, causing him to overlook gathering the essence

Adding this one to the count, the current total of green Heroic Soul Essences should be twelve.

After cleaning up the battlefield, Ji Chen once again picked up the Sword of Warlords. With a thought, he infused it with mana.

The golden gemstone on the sword hilt suddenly emitted a brilliant light, projecting a map in front of him. The map displayed a marker suspended in the air.

Ji Chen focused his gaze and quickly drew a conclusion.

The marker represented a location within this realm, seemingly deep within... the red desert?

Both on an emotional and logical level, Ji Chen believed it was essential for him to journey to that location. After all, the 7-star treasure had provided a hint, suggesting there could be unforeseen rewards awaiting him.

With the death of the Skeleton King Solin, his most elite legion had turned to dust, and the remaining skeletons within the realm had scattered. The only concern now was the mutated skeletons.

Glancing at the deepening sky, Ji Chen decided to wait until dawn before setting off.

The next morning, as soon as Ji Chen woke up, he immediately checked the progress of his left arm's recovery. The wound had grown new skin like fresh leaves on a withered tree branch, appearing pale and delicate, almost like the skin of a baby. It didn't look as ugly anymore.

The Ocean Crown's army began their journey. After walking several kilometers, they left behind the gray and decaying swamp, entering the red desert once more.

Ji Chen opened the map again.

The marked location was deep within the desert, a considerable distance away from the swamp. The journey ahead was quite distant.

Fortunately, it wasn't too far from the Mystic Realm Gate, so after exploring that place, they could proceed to leave this place..

Chapter 245: 7-Star Treasure, Mysterious Palace

After briefly identifying the direction, Ji Chen and his group headed towards the location marked on the map.

Two days later, at noon, the group arrived at a seemingly ordinary desert. The surroundings were filled with rolling sand dunes, with nothing else noteworthy.

Ji Chen looked at the map and rubbed his chin, confirming that this was the designated spot. He spoke loudly, "Spread out and search this area!"

Upon his command, the hundreds of Crown of the Ocean's soldiers dispersed in all directions, initiating a thorough search.

Two hours later, the troops searching in the southeast discovered something unusual.

It was a stone platform mostly buried under gravel, with a rectangular indentation on top.

After pondering for a moment, Ji Chen inserted the Sword of Warlords into the crevice. The blade seamlessly fit, creating a perfect match.

A rumbling sound reverberated as the ground shook intensely, creating whirlpools on the gravel surface, sucking in the surrounding debris.

Ji Chen's expression changed slightly. He attempted to pull out the Sword of Warlords, but it was as if the blade had been glued in place, not budging at all.

He had no choice but to temporarily lead the troops away from the area.

Just as they retreated to a safe distance, the ground's shaking reached its peak. The surface was filled with countless sand whirlpools, as if gigantic beasts were turning their bodies underground.

Amidst the group's astonishment, towering spires and halls emerged from the ground. Gravel flowed down the angled roofs and gaps, creating colossal sandwaterfalls that descended from the sky.

Half an hour later, the commotion around gradually subsided.

Before them stood a colossal palace crafted from rock, with towering spires and halls casting expansive shadows, reaching hundreds of meters high.

Tall, brown stone columns lined both sides, extending all the way to the grand entrance of the palace, adorned with exquisite stone carvings on the columns, gates, and outer walls. Bas-reliefs and sculptures depicted the extraordinary nature of this palace.

It resembled a palace that a titan giant would inhabit.

There was such a grand structure hidden beneath this desert?

With just a glance, Ji Chen knew that this had no connection with the Skeleton King Solin or the skeleton race.

If someone possessed the ability to construct such a palace, how could their strength be so meager!?

“Don’t stand there staring, quickly go over and examine this palace.”

Ji Chen’s voice snapped the group of heroes out of their daze. Seeing him already walking forward, they quickly followed suit.

Ascending a pathway paved with rocks, towering stone columns stood on either side, adorned with diverse and grotesque statues.

The only similarity was that these statues were all bound by chains, as if they were forcefully imprisoned here.

The statues depicted various races—humans, dwarves, elves, orcs, and other less recognizable beings, such as winged serpents with multiple tails, nightmarish insects with hundreds of legs, and even one-legged bovine creatures treading on lightning.

None of these seemed ordinary.

Gazing upon the statues, each revealing expressions of resentment, anger, despair, or numbness, Ji Chen contemplated silently.

The group arrived in front of the massive gate.

On the left side of the gate, there was a stone platform where the Sword of Warlords had been placed. Ji Chen gently removed it, freeing the sword.

Observing this, Ji Chen’s curiosity heightened even further.

Utilizing a 7-star treasure as the means to unlock this palace—what a remarkable display.

Didn’t this indicate that there might be even more precious items inside?

Within this grand creation, there might be immense surprises that he couldn’t even fathom.

However, the towering gate, dozens of meters high before him, resembled an insurmountable obstacle. How could they possibly open it?

Creak-

Just as Ji Chen raised his head to contemplate, the gate slowly swung open on its own, revealing pitch-black darkness within.

Logically speaking, since the Sword of Warlords was a key, there shouldn’t be any danger for those who opened it with the key.

Moreover, Solin, the previous bearer of the sword, must have known about the existence of this palace. If he could live up until a few days ago, there should be no issue.

After realizing this, Ji Chen felt more reassured. He led the troops inside.

Once all the soldiers had entered, the gate behind them closed automatically, as if isolating the space. The outside winds, which had been whispering, vanished completely, leaving the surroundings in utter silence, where only the sound of one's own breath could be heard.

As Ji Chen was about to take out some torches for illumination, a burst of light suddenly illuminated the surroundings, making it as bright as day.

It was a spacious circular hall with towering walls forming a ring around it. Colorful paintings adorned the walls, and above was a circular dome that reached several hundred meters high, revealing a vast expanse of stars.

Ji Chen gazed at the colorful paintings for a while before realizing the true nature of this palace.

This was... a prison!

A prison for incarcerating powerful individuals from various races!

This matched with the exterior stone columns; the statues of different races on the columns were bound by chains, implying imprisonment.

This conclusion left Ji Chen even more astonished.

Such a grand palace turned out to be a prison.

At this moment, a question arose in his mind: who was responsible for constructing this prison?

However, the paintings within the hall didn't reveal any information about the prison's owner. Ji Chen temporarily set aside this question and looked around.

This hall had only one passage connecting to it.

Without pausing, Ji Chen led the group into the passage.

Though it was called a passage, it was dozens of meters high and several dozen meters wide, as if designed for some colossal being to traverse.

After walking through the passage for a while and seeing that there was no end in sight, Ji Chen furrowed his brows. He raised his hand to signal the troops to halt and turned to question a few of the heroes.

"How far have we walked along this passage?"

"Reporting, my lord, we've covered about three to four kilometers."

Seven to eight kilometers?

The furrow between Ji Chen's brows deepened.

Although the palace was grand and immense, it shouldn't be as long as seven or eight kilometers.

Could it be... similar to the high tower in the ancient land of the divine realm on King Kong Island?

In fact, as soon as they entered the hall earlier, they had stepped into a different space. Therefore, they couldn't use the exterior to gauge the space's size.

The interior might be of normal size, or it could be several times larger than its exterior, perhaps even a hundred times larger.

The person who built this prison clearly possessed a power as vast as the cosmos.

Continuing through the passage, they arrived at the end after more than ten minutes.

This space was even more towering and massive than the previous hall, with a dome of stars stretching hundreds of meters high.

As Ji Chen's gaze shifted to the interior, his pupils contracted, and his heart started pounding wildly.

The scene before his eyes left everyone in a state of stupor.

Within this space, near the walls, stood over a hundred birdcage-like metal enclosures, varying in size from large to small. Some reached up to a hundred meters, connecting the heavens and the earth, while others were only a few meters tall.

And within these metal enclosures were dozens of "prisoners".

As Ji Chen's vision focused on these prisoners, his astonishment deepened.

Aren't these the same races as the statues outside?

Humans, dwarves, elves, orcs...

The winged serpents with multiple tails...

The nightmarish insects with hundreds of legs...

The one-legged bovine creatures treading on lightning...

Some were of normal size, but others were enormous, resembling hills or even canyons.

For example, the nightmarish insect looked like a centipede but had numerous legs extending in all directions, reaching hundreds of meters in length.

And the one-legged bovine creature, unintentionally flashing with lightning, had a leg that seemed to support the sky itself, bearing a hill-sized body. It was the largest among these "prisoners".

What the heck!

Could this be real?

Does this world really have such bizarre races?

Perhaps sensing their presence, two prisoners within cages slowly opened their eyes, awakening from a slumber that had lasted for who knew how many years.

Upon seeing Ji Chen's group, they too fell into a stupor.

However, their faces soon displayed a hint of wild joy.

It was the expression of those who saw hope—a chance to be rescued and to gain freedom..

Chapter 246: Epic Tier: Elin and Thotmudo

Among the two prisoners who had awakened, one was an elf, and the other was a dwarf.

At this moment, they both looked at Ji Chen with a fiery gaze, their eyes fixed firmly on him.

As if they had just laid eyes on an unparalleled treasure.

Ji Chen even got a slight shiver from that look in their eyes.

The elf was fine, an alluring female elf that could easily make any man's heart race. Her graceful figure and enchanting appearance were partially revealed beneath a robe that seemed to have been through a lot, along with a veil that added an air of mystery.

The dwarf, on the other hand, seemed almost stereotypical. He sported a scruffy beard, and his clothing looked as if it hadn't seen a wash in centuries. However, beneath those worn clothes, his robust muscles spoke of explosive strength.

"That cute little stranger over there, yes, you, look here," the female elf's sultry voice echoed, causing Ji Chen to unconsciously shift his gaze from the dwarf to her.

When Ji Chen's gaze met hers, the exposed eyes of the female elf squinted, giving off an alluring and pitiable impression.

"Dear little one, can you see how long I've been trapped here? It's been such a long time. Poor me. Could you help me out of this cage?"

"As long as you free me, I promise to 'reward' you generously."

With a subtle intention, the pink eyes of the female elf swept over Ji Chen's body, filled with a teasing allure. She shifted her posture, revealing more of her snow-white skin and enticing curves beneath the slightly drafty mage robe.

Had an ordinary person been present, a few words and gestures from her would have left them completely captivated.

However, having been around Alice, Ji Chen's resistance was naturally much higher. At this moment, he felt only a slight flutter in his heart, quickly suppressing it, and calmly responded,

"Free you? But if you're imprisoned here, you must have done something wrong, right?"

Seeing Ji Chen's composed demeanor, the female elf couldn't help but reveal a hint of surprise, yet she appeared more aggrieved than anything.

"Where have I done anything wrong, dear? I'm just an innocent elf who was randomly captured by some wicked individuals. Young sir, you're really misunderstanding me."

Wicked individuals?

Could they be the ones who built this prison?

Ji Chen felt somewhat uncertain. However, he quickly realized that he shouldn't easily believe the words of this alluring female elf, who radiated endless temptation.

If she was imprisoned within such a magnificent prison, she certainly couldn't be an ordinary elf. Releasing her without careful consideration might lead to unexpected consequences. Secretly, he tried to access her information panel.

[Elf Hero: ???]

[Race]: Elf

[Level]: 79

[Tier]: Epic (Gold)

[Skills]: ???

Oh, so she's a level 79 Epic-tier hero. He thought...

Level 79?! Epic tier?!

Ji Chen looked incredulous, closing and reopening the information panel, only to find the same information displayed again.

Subconsciously, he cleared his throat.

Although he didn't know the exact hierarchy of the Epic tier, it was most likely even more powerful than the Legendary tier.

Furthermore, being at level 79, it was already among the pinnacle existences of the 7th tier.

Perhaps sensing the change in Ji Chen's expression, the female elf spoke with a smile.

"Young lad, you were looking me up, weren't you? By now, you probably have a rough idea of my strength, right?"

"If you help me escape, I can use my power to do a few things for you. As a level 79 Epic tier, I should still have a fair amount of strength if I were to be released, shouldn't I?"

More than just a fair amount of strength, she could practically conquer anything in her path.

Ji Chen silently ridiculed in his mind. He couldn't fathom how a creature like her had been imprisoned here.

Internally rolling his eyes, he kept his composure and smiled, countering with a question.

"Forgive my impudence, but may I know your name, milady? And to which faction of race do you belong?"

"I am Elin Apocalis," the female elf replied with a beaming smile. "And I'm an elf!"

"I'm well aware that you're an elf; after all, your ears give it away. What I meant to ask is, which specific faction of elves do you belong to?"

“Which faction of elves?” Elin’s perpetual smile finally froze for a moment.

“Young lad, I don’t quite understand what you mean. Aren’t all elves just elves?”

“Oh?” Ji Chen feigned astonishment. “Don’t you know that the elven race has long since split into dozens of different groups? Though it might sound unfortunate, that’s indeed the case...”

Briefly, Ji Chen explained the current state of the elven race as he understood it.

Three thousand years ago, the elves were still a united whole, living together as one race.

However, some incident had caused irreconcilable conflicts within the elven race, leading to the division into several factions under the leadership of a few powerful elven figures. Over time, these factions further fragmented.

The establishment of the Elven Empire today represented the strongest of these factions.

Initially, this information was presented in the game’s lore, so Ji Chen remembered it quite well.

However, looking at this female elf’s demeanor... Could she really be unaware of this?

Did that mean she was at least three thousand years old!?

Ji Chen came to this conclusion, his gaze at Elin involuntarily changing.

He had previously speculated that Elin had been imprisoned for a few hundred years, but now it seemed that this span of time needed to be extended to several thousand years.

“Split apart?” After listening to Ji Chen’s explanation, Elin murmured to herself, then gritted her teeth in anger. “Those bastards! If I had known, I should have taken care of those idiots first to eliminate any future trouble....”

Chapter 247: Epic Tier: Elin and Thotmudo (2)

“Hahaha!! Elin, you little bitch. The day has arrived that the Elven race has split!”

Watching the show from the sidelines, the dwarf burst into laughter at this moment. He laughed so hard that he bent over, pounding the ground with his hands.

Elin shot an annoyed look at the dwarf, struggling to maintain a gentle expression. “Thotmudo, can you please shut up while I’m talking to this young brother?”

“Sure.” Unexpectedly, the dwarf named Thotmudo readily nodded, covering his mouth. However, his laughter couldn’t be contained for long. He burst into laughter again.

“I just can’t help but laugh when I see it. Ah- I’m an innocent elf-” The dwarf began to imitate Elin’s previous actions in a mocking tone, which appeared incredibly comical. The effect of mockery was at its maximum, immediately breaking through Elin’s defenses.

“You, mutated dwarf, if I were to get out, I would make you taste the pain of being pierced by the Thousand Vine!” Elin exclaimed in anger.

“Hey, pointy ears! We dwarves can knock you elves flat with a single blow, and you’d be unrecognizable even to your own mothers!!” Thotmudo countered with unwavering determination.

As Elin and Thotmudo suddenly engaged in an argument, Ji Chen, caught in the middle, wore a puzzled expression.

It seemed that the complex relationship between elves and dwarves in many fantasy worlds was reflected here as well, just like water and fire.

Since Thotmudo could be imprisoned here, he probably wasn’t an ordinary dwarf, right?

Ji Chen looked closely.

[Dwarf Hero: Thotmudo]

[Race]: Dwarf

[Level]: 78

[Tier]: Epic (Golden)

[Skills]: ???

Well, it was another formidable figure that couldn’t be provoked, no less than Elin.

Nevertheless, as Ji Chen observed the elf Elin and the dwarf Thotmudo engaging in their heated argument filled with mentions of body parts and family ties, it reminded him of middle-aged men and women quarreling on a street corner.

“... Perhaps your dwarven race has also abandoned honor, split into various factions, and even started killing each other!!”

“Impossible, absolutely impossible! The great dwarves would never split or harm their fellow brethren! Human, tell us, how is the dwarven race faring in the outside world?”

Both Thotmudo and Elin turned to look at Ji Chen.

Ji Chen hesitated for a moment. He didn’t know much about dwarves, but he was certain...

“Dwarves have indeed split, even more so than elves. There are different factions like Black Iron Dwarves, Mountain Dwarves, Ice Dwarves... They’ve even had wars amongst themselves. Many dwarves lost their homes and became mercenaries...”

“Hahaha! Thotmudo, did you hear that? Dwarves have split even more than elves, even to the point of killing each other and becoming mercenaries! The honor you speak of is practically worthless!” Elin mocked loudly without mercy.

In essence, it was a competition to see who could degrade the other more.

Elves might have split, but at least one faction established a prosperous empire that was well-known in the world.

Dwarves, on the other hand, not only split but were far from the status of elves.

The difference between the two was clear.

Upon hearing Ji Chen's response, Thotmudo looked disbelieving, collapsed to the ground, and muttered to himself, "How could it be? How could dwarves split and harm their fellow brethren? This can't be true..."

Looking at Thotmudo's expression of shattered belief, Ji Chen felt a twinge of sympathy.

However, being an epic-tier hero, Thotmudo swiftly collected himself. He gazed at Ji Chen with sincerity and expressed, "I must witness the condition of the dwarves firsthand to be convinced. Human, I seek your assistance in escaping this place. If I manage to break free, I shall surely express my gratitude generously in due time."

In the future?

Ji Chen couldn't help but smirk.

Empty promises like these were hard to believe.

As if in agreement, Elin immediately burst into a scoffing laugh. She mocked, "Thotmudo, do you think anyone would believe what you're saying? Everyone knows that the dwarven race is notorious for being stingy. You'll probably disappear without a trace the moment you step outside."

Thotmudo, exposed, blushed and stubbornly raised his head, his voice full of determination. "Impossible, absolutely impossible! I, Thotmudo, always keep my promises. I walk the talk."

Elin gave him a disdainful look and then turned to Ji Chen with a smile. Her voice softened, "Young brother, unlike Thotmudo, this old guy with a twisted heart, I, as an elf, absolutely keep my promises."

"I have several high-tier treasures hidden outside, any one of which, once revealed, could drive people crazy. If you help me escape, I'll immediately fetch them and present them to you as a gift!"

"High-tier treasures?"

Seeing Ji Chen finally respond, Elin spoke up immediately.

"That's right, they're all top-tier 7-star treasures. It took me a lot of effort and resources to obtain them, and they possess formidable power."

Upon hearing this, Thotmudo couldn't hold back either and hurriedly added, "I also have a few 7-star treasures. Human, you should know that dwarves excel in forging, right? I'm a legendary-level blacksmith among the dwarves, a rarity even among our race. If you help me escape, and if you provide the necessary materials, I can craft ten treasures for you without charge!"

Legendary blacksmith!?

Ji Chen inwardly took a deep breath, nearly giving in to the temptation immediately.

Legendary blacksmiths were extremely rare. Starting from the novice level, a blacksmith would have to progress through intermediate, advanced, expert, master, and grandmaster levels before reaching the legendary tier.

Master-level blacksmiths could already receive VIP treatment in a kingdom or principality. What about a legendary tier?

In other words, legendary blacksmiths were like finding a needle in a haystack, even rarer than a three-legged horse.

“You see, I am more sincere than that pointy ears, right?” Thotmudo gloated, glancing at Elin. Seeing her stunned expression, he felt even more pleased.

“Seems like a good deal...”

“It would be such a long wait for you to forget ten treasures.”

Elin immediately retorted, gritting her teeth. She threw her chips on the table again, “As long as you help me escape, I can offer you three thousand beautiful elves to serve as your harem. You can revel every night, live a life of luxury, just like a human king.”

Tsk~ When treasures are lacking, do you resort to using allure?

It was truly amazing, oh wait, no, it was despicable.

Ji Chen had no doubt that Elin could actually make this happen. A level 79 epic-tier elf powerhouse was still among the most elite even in the present.

Such matters were, to put it mildly, insignificant to her.

Ji Chen felt a slight twinge of temptation, but he only showed a hint of interest on his face and said lightly, “Seems like this might be a good deal...”

His attention shifted back to Thotmudo, waiting to see what card he would play next.

Come on, unleash it all, go all out!

Now Ji Chen held absolute control, ensuring he would gain the maximum advantage.

Thotmudo’s face turned red with frustration. He knew that dwarves were definitely not as appealing as elves in terms of appearance, so he angrily shouted, “Damn pointy-eared elf, if you’ve got guts, challenge dwarves head-on! Don’t resort to these lowly tactics!”

Elin covered her mouth and sneered, “Appearance is also a weapon, clever people know how to use it better. If you’ve got the guts, why not use such methods too!?”

“You despicable...”

Watching the two of them suddenly argue again, Ji Chen shook his head with a slight headache.

He simply plopped down on the ground and began to watch the show.

Actually, in Ji Chen's heart, he was more inclined to help Elin escape.

After all, she was an elf, and according to previous information, she likely held a high status as an elf powerhouse from thousands of years ago.

Moreover, the Crown of the Ocean had some connection to the elven race in terms of commerce.

So, by rescuing her, he could significantly strengthen the relationship between the Crown of the Ocean and the elven race, gaining more benefits.

Besides, acquiring the friendship of an epic-tier elf powerhouse was also a substantial wealth.

However, at the same time, Ji Chen had some reservations.

This place was a prison, housing prisoners.

And prisoners were likely here due to certain crimes, Elin included. He wasn't sure why she qualified to stay in such a luxurious prison.

This factor left him hesitating..

Chapter 248: Terms of Compromise: Thotmudo's Agreement

"Can you both pause for a moment? I have some questions I want to ask you."

Ji Chen's words caused Elin and Thotmudo to stop. After all, Ji Chen was the first person to arrive here in thousands of years, and he was their only hope of escaping, so they showed him respect.

Elin quickly spoke, "Feel free to ask any questions. As long as it helps me get out of this damn place."

Seeing this, Ji Chen nodded and voiced his curiosity, "What are the reasons that led to you being confined in this place? Or what crimes led to your imprisonment here?"

"Prison?" Elin raised her eyebrows, surprised. "Where did you hear that? This place is far from being a prison! It's a workshop where that damned pervert keeps experimental subjects. It's an experimental facility!

Metal cages hold us captive, continuously draining our energy to maintain and reinforce the seals. After thousands of years, instead of weakening, the seals have only grown stronger. It's inhumane!

More importantly, I didn't even do anything wrong! At most, I just exchanged a few words with that pervert and got locked up here! Just a few words, and they imprisoned me for thousands of years!! How is this fair?!"

Elin's emotions escalated as she spoke, her face showing a mix of frustration and innocence, revealing the weight of her grievances.

Listening to her, Ji Chen was somewhat taken aback.

Being imprisoned for just exchanging a few words? That was truly harsh.

"And what about Thotmudo?"

Upon hearing this, the dwarf Thotmudo spoke in a subdued tone, “I didn’t do much either, just stole a few materials from that pervert.”

Though Thotmudo’s expression was similarly filled with grievance, Ji Chen had a feeling that the so-called “materials” were not ordinary things.

“Who is this pervert you’re talking about?”

“A perverted old lich of the worst kind! The creatures and races imprisoned here, aside from a small number who were innocently caught, are all its experimental subjects and materials.”

Hissing-

Ji Chen was familiar with liches, a highly advanced type of undead creature. Each lich was a formidable spellcaster of the undead, possessing great expertise in experiments, alterations, and dark rituals.

Ji Chen gestured toward the monstrous bug in the distance.

“What is that thing?”

“That’s a hatchling of a Void Crawler, capable of freely navigating the Void. Its vitality is extremely robust. It was here when we arrived and is currently in a dormant state.”

Moving through the Void without constraints?

Ji Chen’s gaze became somewhat awed. The Void was utterly unsuitable for the existence of living beings, teeming with void fissures and vortices. A single misstep could lead to being engulfed and torn apart.

Even as a hatchling, the Void Crawler was dozens of meters long. Ji Chen couldn’t help but wonder how terrifying it would be in its mature form.

“And what about that creature with wings and a serpent tail?”

“I know!”

Thotmudo chimed in this time, despite Elin glaring at him fiercely. He didn’t seem to mind and continued, “It’s called Selim Angel.

It’s a Sea Naga with a mutated bloodline. It had been imprisoned here long before we arrived, likely for tens of thousands of years. About three hundred years ago, it chose to enter a deep slumber to slow the loss of its life force.” Sea Naga?

Did that have some connection with the Naga Berserker?

Ji Chen nodded in understanding.

However, even so, he was still deeply shocked.

Being able to capture and imprison 79th-level epic-tier Elin, along with 78th-level epic-tier Thotmudo, as well as so many formidable and intimidating creatures, the strength required for such an act is truly unimaginable.

What concerned him the most was whether the lich was still alive.

If it found out that its experimental facility had been invaded, wouldn't it imprison Ji Chen here as well?

Thinking about this, he couldn't help but shiver.

When he raised this question, Elin and Thotmudo waved their hands dismissively. "That perverted lich hasn't appeared since imprisoning us here. Maybe it has already died outside. After all, even a powerful lich wouldn't want to abandon so many experimental subjects."

Ji Chen found their explanation quite reasonable.

In addition to the Void Crawler and the Sea Naga, within the numerous metal cages present here, with only about a dozen being empty, there were also dozens of curious creatures and races confined in various conditions.

It must have taken considerable effort and time for the lich to capture them all.

After much contemplation, Ji Chen spoke with a thoughtful tone, raising his head and looking determined. "How can I save you?"

Upon hearing this, Elin and Thotmudo's eyes lit up, their faces filled with boundless joy.

They quickly responded, "Deeper within lies the lich's central laboratory, where the control mechanisms for the metal cages and the sealing mechanisms are located.

However, before releasing the seal, you must deactivate the automatic defense array left behind by the lich. Otherwise, both you, and us, who are currently weakened, will be killed by the array..."

Suppressing their excitement and exhilaration, Elin calmly recounted the details as best as she could.

Seeing the opportunity to break free from their cages and gain the long-awaited freedom, Elin and Thotmudo, despite their high-level strength, appeared much like ordinary people.

The longer their lifespans, the more they felt despair in this seemingly endless imprisonment.

Ji Chen nodded, firmly capturing all the details that Elin had shared in his memory..

Chapter 249: Terms of Compromise: Thotmudo's Agreement (2)

"That's all. Besides these, the Lich probably left some things inside. You're free to search."

Ji Chen's eyes brightened as he heard this. The Lich left something behind? Well, his fatigue seemed to vanish instantly.

A Lich capable of imprisoning so many powerful beings would surely leave behind something valuable.

He wasn't too greedy, a few legendary treasures would be sufficient.

"So, there are no guards here?"

Elin shook her head. "No, that perverted Lich had confidence in its own seal and didn't leave any guards here."

"But if you are talking about security, it seems it created a batch of low-tier mutated skeletons within the native skeleton realm outside, disguising and guarding the existence of this experimental workshop."

"Since you managed to enter, you must have encountered them."

Mutated skeletons?

Ji Chen suddenly realized that those mutated skeletons were created by the Lich, no wonder they even attacked Solin.

Suppressing his thoughts, he turned his attention back to Elin and Thotmudo, his expression serious.

"Next, it's time to discuss the rewards I can receive for helping you break free from your predicament."

Hearing this, both the elf and the dwarf grew serious. They understood that nothing comes without a cost and that rewards often come with sacrifices.

After a moment of contemplation, Elin spoke slowly, "The previously mentioned reward still stands. I can give you two powerful Seven-Star treasures. Once I break free from the suppression here and regain some strength, they can be retrieved through a void tunnel. Besides, you should be a lord, right?" Elin's eyes flashed with shrewdness.

Ji Chen nodded without hesitation.

Seeing this, Elin became more confident.

"In that case, you mentioned before that the elven race has established a formidable empire. As a lord, you wouldn't refuse help and support from an elven empire, would you?"

Even Ji Chen had to admit that this condition carried weight, and he had no doubt about its sincerity.

The assistance of the Elven Empire, even if only temporary, could already give the Crown of the Ocean a significant boost.

It was a condition he couldn't refuse.

But still, it wasn't enough!

Looking at the confident Elin, Ji Chen shook his head.

"Besides these, I have one more condition."

"What is it?"

Elin, a truly epic-level elven hero, maintained her composure upon hearing this and decisively replied.

“It’s this: if my territory or I face some catastrophic crisis beyond my ability to handle, you must do everything in your power to help me resolve it.”

“Oh?” Elin narrowed her eyes and, after a brief consideration, agreed, “Fine, I accept this condition.”

“Under the name of the elven hero Elin Apocalis, I pledge that when you or your territory are in crisis, I will do my utmost to assist in resolving it. Is this sufficient?”

Years of captivity had fostered an intense yearning for freedom within her. No one understood how terrifying it was to be trapped in a tiny prison for thousands of years, especially with a chattering dwarf that almost drove her mad.

Now, with a glimpse of hope for escape, her initial reservations had significantly diminished.

Seeing Elin’s enthusiastic acceptance, Ji Chen also nodded, not seeking further conditions.

The key to a successful negotiation lies in balancing gains and forging good relationships with powerful allies.

With the deal completed with Elin, it was now the dwarf Thotmudo’s turn.

“Is it my turn now? Hurry up, you guys!” Thotmudo, seeing Elin being able to leave, grew increasingly impatient. He acted like a mischievous child, urging them incessantly.

Ji Chen could only walk over with a helpless expression. “Lord Thotmudo, you may state your conditions.”

“I don’t possess any treasures or the like,” Thotmudo stated confidently from the outset. “Given that the pointy-eared one made a promise earlier, I can’t back down either. I can craft five treasures for you, with a quality of up to 6 stars, anything within my forging capabilities.”

“Treasures up to a maximum of 6 stars? Can’t you make 7-star ones?”

“Hey, human! Do you think 7-star treasures grow on trees? Even for a legendary blacksmith, crafting a 7-star treasure requires a tremendous amount of effort!”

“True, but didn’t you say you could help craft ten items before? How come it’s been halved?”

“Ahem, I spoke without thinking.” Thotmudo’s face turned red, and he thickened his skin, “I’m already so old, making ten items would be the death of me!”

Elin's observation was accurate; dwarves were known for their unpredictable nature, and their commitments couldn't be accepted at face value.

After a moment's thought, Ji Chen had Anina bring over the Dragon Slayer Great Sword and the severed sword tip. "Lord Thotmudo, can you repair this treasure?"

Thotmudo's interest was piqued as soon as he saw the Dragon Slayer Great Sword. Although he couldn't touch it due to the seal, his eyes lit up, fixed intently on it. Soon, he relaxed his expression. "Of course I can. Although it's quite severely damaged, it's relatively intact. It shouldn't pose a big problem for me."

At these words, Ji Chen also smiled. "Then repairing this great sword shall count as the first treasure."

"Now, for the second condition..."

"I want you to impart some of your forging techniques to the Crown of the Ocean!"

"Impossible, absolutely impossible!" Thotmudo practically jumped up, his face turning red as he immediately raised his voice in refusal.

"The forging techniques of the dwarven race must never be passed to the outside world!"

Ji Chen maintained an unsurprised expression; Thotmudo's reaction was quite intense.

Dwarves were renowned for their stubbornness and self-centeredness; their trustworthiness was questionable. They were hesitant to craft equipment even for substantial compensation, let alone share their forging techniques with other races.

"Hence, I merely mentioned a segment—nothing intricate. I solely require fundamental forging skills, and I promise to maintain utmost secrecy about them."

"That won't work either! Regardless of the extent, it goes against our ancestral teachings!!!" Thotmudo stood his ground firmly, clutching his beard as he protested.

"I see... In that case, we won't be able to continue our discussion." Ji Chen sighed with a look of regret, turning to walk away slowly.

"Hey, hey, human, don't leave!" Seeing Ji Chen about to leave, Thotmudo grew anxious, shouting loudly, "It's just this one thing that's not possible. Apart from that, everything else is fine!"

"Other than forging techniques, do you have anything else to offer?" Ji Chen turned around and inquired.

“I do, I do...” Thotmudo’s face turned even redder, unable to fathom what else he could offer.

“You see, you can’t even come up with anything yourself.” Ji Chen shrugged and turned away, walking further.

With the Crown of the Ocean’s group in tow, they headed towards the core laboratory, moving farther away.

Thotmudo became increasingly frantic upon seeing this. He widened his eyes and shouted, “I can craft six treasures for you!”

Ji Chen didn’t look back.

“Seven items!”

“Eight items, that’s the maximum!”

Ji Chen remained unfazed, his pace uninterrupted.

“Nine items... ten items!”

“Eleven items should be enough, right!?”

Ji Chen still didn’t turn around; he even began chatting and laughing with Alice and the others.

“Thirteen items, fifteen items!! Alright, alright, I agree with you!!!”

Ji Chen raised his right hand to signal the group to stop, then walked back with a cheerful smile, meeting Thotmudo’s sulky expression.

“All, Lord Thotmudo, you truly are an incredibly generous and helpful dwarf.”

“I’m delighted to have such a dwarf friend; it’s my fortune.”

Thotmudo glared, ignoring the flattery, his face stern as he gritted his teeth. “Cunning human! I knew you were trying to scare the great legendary blacksmith, Thotmudo!”

After grumbling angrily for a few sentences, Thotmudo finally calmed down.

With a sincere tone, Ji Chen said, “Look at it from a different perspective—using some basic forging techniques to break free from millennia of imprisonment, isn’t that worth it?”

“If you hadn’t encountered me today, you might have been trapped here indefinitely. Without any surprises, you would have been unable to escape, and your formidable forging skills would have been buried in this cold place forever. Isn’t that a pity?”

This somewhat flattering explanation seemed to calm Thotmudo down somewhat.

However, he still grumbled discontentedly, “Quite the silver-tongued human; indeed, you humans love to argue.”

Seeing this, Ji Chen chuckled again.

“Add another additional condition: after you’re freed, you’re not allowed to harm me or my troops.”

Thotmudo widened his eyes once again, but eventually, he crossed his arms and muttered, “Hmph, the great legendary blacksmith Thotmudo disdains attacking a group of weaklings!”

Chapter 250: Laboratory: Krieg’s Chamber of Secrets

On one side, Elin looked at Thotmudo’s embarrassed expression and couldn’t help but burst into laughter.

As an elf, it seemed as if they were naturally at odds with dwarves. Seeing the dwarf on the losing end brought Elin great joy. Her gaze towards Ji Chen also became more favorable and friendly.

“Well then, I hope that after you come out, you’ll be able to keep your promise.”

“Rest assured, with you making Thotmudo suffer like this, this sister will definitely fulfill my promise.” Elin readily agreed.

Thotmudo furrowed his brows and almost got into an argument with Elin again, but he still said, “Regardless, since a promise has been made, Thotmudo will definitely honor it.”

Ji Chen also nodded. “I’ll go and lift the seal now. You two wait here for a while.”

Both of them nodded in unison, suppressing their excitement and enthusiasm. After being imprisoned for thousands of years, a little more time didn’t matter.

Before leaving, Elin seemed to recall something and said seriously, “Remember to be cautious. Don’t release the other prisoners. Many of them have lost their sanity over the long years, or they’re driven solely by the will to kill. Once they are set free, the consequences could be unimaginable.”

“Even in our prime, we might not have been able to defeat them.”

Seeing Elin’s serious expression, Ji Chen also grew a bit more solemn and nodded. Then, without wasting any more time, he led his army towards the direction of the core laboratory.

The cage that held Elin and Thotmudo was located relatively closer to the front of this space. This seemed to indicate that their imprisonment time was relatively short. The farther they walked, the longer the duration of imprisonment.

Whether these countless creatures and races had slipped into a profound slumber or perished altogether, they presented a lifeless demeanor, devoid of vitality. Yet, the imposing forms still triggered an unsettling feeling, as though an innate dread of monumental beings had settled in.

Ji Chen and his group walked for dozens of minutes before reaching the other end of the space and entering another entrance.

They traversed a corridor that stretched for hundreds of meters, arriving at a heavy stone door.

Ji Chen’s expression became serious. Instead of immediately opening it, he retreated a hundred meters with his army and then had the eight Murloc Rangers step forward to push the door.

Creak...

The frictional sound produced by the opening stone door resonated far within the enclosed passageway.

After observing for a while and confirming that there was no danger, Ji Chen approached with his army, feeling relieved.

Through the opened door, they were greeted by a rather horrifying sight.

It was a rectangular chamber that was several times the size of a soccer field.

On the left side of the chamber, there were stone tables arranged, each laden with glass jars containing various organs submerged in green liquid.

In the center of the chamber stood several stone beds stained with dried blood.

Restraints soaked in fresh blood were affixed to them. Black and red dried blood was embedded in the crevices and patterns.

The wall to the side was neatly lined with various types of torture devices, a diverse collection comparable to an exhibition of such implements.

Taking in all of these elements, a shiver ran down Ji Chen's spine. That Lich was truly deserving of being called perverse by Elin and Thotmudo. Indeed, he was quite twisted.

Temporarily ignoring these things, Ji Chen began to search for the controls to the seal and the magic array. While Elin mentioned that there should be controls here, she didn't specify what they looked like or where they were. Ji Chen dispatched his heroes and soldiers to search around while also checking if there were any valuable items left behind.

One hour later.

The last unit returned under Alice's lead, shaking her head as she addressed him, "My Lord, we haven't found the control switch, nor have we discovered anything valuable. This place seems to be merely an experimental site."

Hearing this, Ji Chen couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed.

Setting aside the fact that they didn't discover the control switch, there wasn't even a solitary item left behind?

The Lich had tidied up quite thoroughly!

Looking at the room filled with jars containing limbs and organs, Ji Chen fell into deep thought, pondering the details he might have overlooked along the way.

Time for a perspective shift.

If he were the Lich, he probably wouldn't have left the most precious experimental materials and the core of the magic array, the switch, so simply in this place. No matter what, he would've added some extra security measures.

Perhaps, apart from this room, there was another hidden chamber.

With this thought in mind, Ji Chen decisively gave the order again.

“Search one more time. Inspect every inch carefully!”

“If you find something that seems like the target, don’t touch it and notify me immediately!”

The heroes turned serious and focused, guiding their armies to different areas and initiating a thorough search.

And this time, the search bore fruit.

Three hours later, Benbo hastily ran back from a corner of the room to report.

“Lord, I found a spot that might be the switch!”

Ji Chen’s spirits lifted, and he promptly had Benbo guide him.

Guided by Benbo, they arrived at a row of metal shelves on the right, which held assorted torture devices.

The passage of time had corroded these metal shelves to the point of decay, and the instruments on them were scattered on the ground, piled up in disarray.

It was precisely due to the corrosion of the metal shelves that a slightly recessed brick on the backwall became visible.

Ji Chen’s expression brightened..