

Ocean Lord 251

Chapter 251 - 251: Laboratory: Krieg's Chamber of Secrets (2)

This looks like some kind of hidden compartment that can be activated by pressing it.

Ji Chen didn't let his guard down in the slightest. He left a Murloc Ranger behind and led the rest of his troops back to the stone door, preparing for any unexpected situations.

After the Murloc Ranger pressed the brick, accompanied by a scraping sound, a section of the wall on the side slowly opened to both sides, revealing an entrance.

Ji Chen didn't immediately approach. Instead, he let the Murloc Ranger go in to investigate.

A few minutes later, the Murloc Ranger emerged, unharmed, and signaled that there was no danger.

Seeing this, Ji Chen walked over with a relieved expression.

In this Lich's laboratory, being cautious was of utmost importance to him.

This was a smaller room, about the size of a basketball court, but it was filled to the brim with bookshelves. The bookshelves were crammed with all kinds of books. If it weren't for the crystal sphere floating above a device in the middle of the room, one would think it was a library rather than a laboratory.

The purpose of the crystal sphere was already very clear.

[Control Nexus]

[Tier]: Special

[Usage]: Able to activate cages, seals, and formations

Ji Chen walked in, ignoring the Control Nexus for the time being. Instead, he walked up to a stone table and casually tried to pick up a few sheets of parchment stacked together.

Clatter-

The sheets of parchment instantly turned into powder, piling up on the table.

Ji Chen's face showed a hint of surprise, then he shook his head.

It seemed that even the hidden parchment here couldn't withstand the erosion of thousands of years, turning into dust.

As expected, Ji Chen casually touched other sheets of parchment on the table, even the books on the bookshelves. At the moment of contact, they all turned into piles of powder.

Looking at this, he couldn't help but feel a hint of regret.

Knowledge was one of the most precious treasures, and the books that carried knowledge also had extremely high value. The fact that a powerful Lich had collected them in this hidden chamber meant they weren't ordinary items; they were naturally of an invaluable level of existence.

If he could learn a few powerful spells or abilities from these books, wouldn't that be fantastic?

As Ji Chen thought about this, he destroyed all the books on the bookshelves as if satisfying his destructive desire.

Suddenly, when a rather inconspicuous book turned into a pile of powder, a complete sheet of paper with a golden glow mixed in.

Ji Chen's eyes lit up.

he had hit a jackpot!

He carefully pinched it between his fingers.

The texture was somewhere between paper and hard leather, with a pleasing touch.

On the sheet of paper with the golden glow, intricate and mysterious patterns and designs were engraved. At first glance, it felt extraordinary.

[Archlich Krieg's Alchemical Notes]

[Tier]: Special

[Insights and experiences of Archlich Krieg Theredell regarding alchemy, containing methods for crafting various special alchemical creations] Archlich?

Krieg?

Ji Chen's eyes flickered slightly.

If his guess was correct, Archlich Krieg Theredell should be the owner of this laboratory, the twisted Lich mentioned by Elin and Thotmudo.

The alchemical notes of an Archlich – this was getting interesting.

Without rashly using or further examining the alchemical notes, Ji Chen felt that Krieg might have left some traps on this record. He remained vigilant in the face of a powerful Lich.

Carefully tucking the notes into his backpack, he continued to search the hidden chamber.

At this point, his interest was thoroughly piqued by this precious find.

Who knew, there might be more of Krieg's belongings or secrets waiting for his discovery in other parts of the laboratory.

Feeling frustrated with his own slow progress, Ji Chen enlisted the help of the other heroes in the mission to destroy the books. In an instant, valuable books turned into ashes, and the small dark chamber was filled with dust.

Soon, good news came from the other side.

“Lord, I found a badge!”

Ji Chen hurriedly walked over and took the crystal badge handed to him by Anina.

The badge didn't possess Lich elements; instead, it depicted an image of a griffon wielding a sharp sword in its claws.

[Royal Griffon Knight Order Badge]

[Tier]: 4-star treasure

[Effects]: 0 Increases magic resistance by 20% @ Increases flight speed by 50%

[Skill]: Life Shield (provides a sturdy shield to withstand massive damage)

[A badge from a certain empire's Royal Griffon Knight Order in the Northern Continent, possessing considerable power]

What a good find!

Ji Chen was delighted. This was a badge that could provide significant benefits, especially with the Life Shield skill, which aligned perfectly with his intentions.

Ever since he lost an arm due to Solin's sword energy attack, he had been extra cautious about his personal safety, wanting to equip himself with life-preserving gear.

This time he lost an arm, the next time he might lose his head.

So, life was more important.

Equipping the badge immediately made him feel much safer.

Once again, the badge heightened Ji Chen's mood.

In just a short ten minutes, he had acquired an invaluable alchemical note and a 4-star life-saving treasure badge. The value of these gains was almost greater than before.

Ji Chen was about to make a fortune in this small hidden chamber!!

Coming back to his senses, Ji Chen praised Anina for her actions and highly admired her for finding such treasures.

This instantly caught the attention of the other heroes, and they were all energized. They focused their attention on searching the bookshelves and corners, hoping to find something of high value to earn the Lord's appreciation.

In the small hidden chamber, it turned into a bustling construction site, with dust flying around.

If someone knowledgeable were to see them turning these immensely valuable books into dust, trampling them underfoot, they would undoubtedly exclaim about the wasteful destruction and perhaps wish to stab them to death.

Soon, the "construction site" brought more good news.

This time it was Benbo who found something – two silver parchment sheets. Although their appearance wasn't as mystical as Krieg's notes, they had an impressive look.

Temporarily leaving the hidden chamber, Ji Chen held the two parchment sheets in his hand and examined them closely.

[Skill Scroll: Mana Reflux]

[Tier]: Red-tier skill

[Effects]: Allows comprehension of the red-tier skill: Mana Reflux (after casting a red-tier spell, recovers 35% of expended mana)

[Skill Scroll: Triple Casting]

[Tier]: Orange-tier skill

[Effects]: Allows comprehension of the orange-tier skill: Triple Casting (able to consecutively cast three skills not exceeding the orange-tier level)

Holy shit!

In the midst of bewilderment, Ji Chen was accompanied by a surge of ecstasy.

What kind of godlike skills were these?

One red-tier skill and one orange-tier skill—enough to blind the eyes.

What was even more important was that both of these skills were Archmage-level skills. Each of them was a skill that mages dreamt of having.

If he casually took one out, it would undoubtedly drive the mages crazy.

Taking a deep breath, Ji Chen suppressed his excitement and put these two skill scrolls into his backpack without using them immediately.

In this world, learning and comprehending any skill required a process. It wasn't as simple as in a game, where you could learn it with a mere click or a string of text in a skill bar.

Skills were something that a living being learned from the depths of their heart, integrated into their soul. The more powerful the skill, the more time it took to comprehend.

When Ji Chen initially accepted the Tidal Lord profession and comprehended the profession skills, he underwent a complete transformation and learning process from the inside out.

Similarly, in the ancient land of the divine realm, he spent a considerable amount of time to acquire the rewards left behind by the deities.

And these red-tier and orange-tier skills would undoubtedly require a substantial amount of time to comprehend as well. It wasn't suitable to choose to learn them in this kind of place.

However, it could be foreseen that once he mastered these two skills, his strength would undergo a tremendous transformation.

As he carefully stored the skill scrolls, he couldn't help but be amazed by the immense wealth of Archlich Krieg. These immensely valuable skill scrolls were simply intermingled among the books. Could even a Icing be as affluent as this?

After obtaining these two skill scrolls, Ji Chen suddenly entered a state of wisdom.

It was as if he had no more desires.

Because he felt that there couldn't possibly be anything more valuable in the hidden chamber.

However, a voice as melodious as heavenly music reignited the flames in his heart..

Chapter 252 - 252: New Hidden Chamber, Krieg Theredell

“Lord, we've discovered another hidden chamber!”

His spirit was lifted, and without caring about anything else, he entered once again. He saw the group of heroes gathered in a corner.

Seeing Ji Chen approach, they quickly made way, revealing a dark and ominous opening.

“How was this opening discovered?”

“Lord, this opening appeared when I accidentally touched a spot beneath the stone table.” Alice pointed to a slightly sunken area beneath the stone table, crouching down to show where it was.

Ji Chen nodded. It was highly likely that this was another secret compartment set up by the ArchLich Krieg Theredell.

This opening was only slightly taller than a person and just wide enough for two people to walk side by side. Inside, there was no illumination, pitch-black and utterly devoid of light.

However, this extreme darkness did not extinguish the excitement in his heart.

A hidden chamber within a hidden chamber – this was enough to make anyone even more excited.

Ji Chen couldn't help but wonder. Items as precious as the red and orange skill scrolls, the alchemical notebook, and the 4-star treasures were considered highly valuable even on the outside. Yet, they were merely placed within the outer hidden chambers.

So, what kind of treasures could be concealed within this even more secretive chamber?

Just the thought of it aroused even more anticipation.

“For now, let's leave the newly discovered hidden chamber aside and thoroughly scavenge this place.”

“Conduct a more thorough examination to check if there are any other undiscovered secret compartments or mechanisms!”

The heroes followed orders and began searching fervently once again.

Just as they were putting in their utmost effort in the search, within the spatial confines where various experimental materials were imprisoned, Elin Apocalis and Thotmudo were waiting eagerly.

Seeing Ji Chen and the others hadn't returned yet, the impatient Thotmudo paced restlessly in the cramped cage, occasionally glancing towards the passageway.

“Thotmudo, stop pacing around like that. You're making me dizzy,” Elin said somewhat irritably. “We've been here for so long. What difference does it make if we wait a little longer?”

“I know, pointy ears,” Thotmudo replied, intending to retort, but he realized he didn't have the mood to continue arguing. He scratched his head in frustration and said anxiously, “You know that twisted ArchLich's mind is cunning and bizarre. He might have left something behind as a last resort. If that human gets into any trouble because of that, then our hope of escaping... might be gone!

He's the first human... creature to come here in thousands of years. He might also be the last for thousands of years to come!"

Elin fell silent for a moment, and a trace of worry flickered in her eyes.

But soon, she regained her composure and furrowed her brows. "I don't think we need to worry so much. You must have sensed the anomaly on that human, right?"

Hearing this, Thotmudo's expression turned serious. "You mean that strange aura?"

"Yes, although it's very faint and hidden, I can confirm that this aura might be related to those entities." Elin nodded solemnly. "If that's the case, then this human might be protected and favored in some way. He can't die so easily." Thotmudo pondered for a moment and found the logic to be sound. As one's power grew, they would increasingly uncover the concealed facets of this world. The deeper their understanding, the greater their reverence for those enigmatic elements and beings.

If that human truly was a favored individual, his potential would indeed be unimaginable.

After pondering for a while, Thotmudo suddenly realized something and stared wide-eyed as he asked with a loud voice, "So, does that mean you readily agreed to that human's conditions earlier because you saw his immense potential!?"

Upon hearing these words, Elin looked at Thotmudo with surprise, covering her mouth and giggling. "I thought you would only realize that after we get out."

"Damn it! Crafty pointed ears! If you had told me earlier, I wouldn't have gone through that bargaining ordeal!" Thotmudo exclaimed frustratedly.

"So that's why dwarves have ended up in the state they're in today – there's a reason behind it-"

Having searched here for a long while, Ji Chen and his companions ultimately couldn't find anything more. Things that could withstand thousands or even tens of thousands of years of the passage of time were truly rare.

They directed their gazes towards the pitch-black entrance.

This time, just the same as before, Ji Chen allowed a Murloc Ranger to enter first to probe for any potential danger.

As for the Crown of Omniscience, it had turned a pale white due to the unique energy permeating this laboratory when they entered, rendering it completely non-functional.

Ji Chen had no choice but to rely on this human detection method to scout for danger.

However, what surprised everyone this time was that the Murloc Ranger sent in to explore emerged from the tunnel in just two to three minutes.

“There’s a courtyard inside, leading to an underground area that’s impossible to see the bottom of.”

This was how Benbo conveyed the meaning of the Murloc Ranger’s findings.

After a brief moment of contemplation, Ji Chen decided to personally investigate.

The group of them held torches and began to enter in an orderly manner.

Within the pitch-dark passage, even with the light of the torches, it remained quite dim. The firelight cast their silhouettes onto the walls, creating flickering shadows.

Unlike the previous narrow passageways, this one slightly descended as they proceeded. After less than a hundred meters from the entrance, they arrived at a circular courtyard with a diameter of over a hundred meters. Spiral stairs were affixed to the well walls, disappearing into the indiscernible darkness above..

Chapter 253: New Hidden Chamber, Krieg Theredell (2)

From the edge of the steps, looking down into the pitch-black darkness below, Ji Chen couldn’t shake the feeling of an eerie breeze rising from the depths, sending shivers down his spine.

Almost instinctively, the heroes all furrowed their brows, facing an imminent threat.

“My lord, there must be something unusual down there. We must proceed with caution,” Alice whispered softly, her voice surprisingly loud in the hushed environment.

Observing the serious expressions on the faces of the heroes, Ji Chen nodded with gravity.

“Stay vigilant, everyone, and be ready to flee from here at a moment’s notice.”

“Yes!”

The heroes nodded in unison, their agreement understood.

Seeing this, Ji Chen distributed the torches and began descending the steps towards the well.

These steps lacked any handrails, pure stone columns embedded in the walls, some of which were even weathered and broken in places.

Ji Chen’s face was taut, every creaking sound of the swaying columns testing his heart.

After descending several dozen meters, the bottom was still not in sight, as if they were entering an abyss that could swallow them whole.

The further they descended, the more Ji Chen’s heart pounded, yet the prospect of valuable discoveries pushed him onward, gritting his teeth.

By the time they had descended over ninety meters, the illumination of the torches finally revealed the bottom of the well.

Still circular in shape, the well’s base held an altar adorned with intricate and mysterious patterns, featuring an alchemical apparatus upon it.

Hovering above the apparatus was a crystal sphere, much like the one in the chamber filled with books.

Everyone was momentarily frozen, their faces marked with puzzlement and bewilderment.

How was there another Control Nexus here?

Initially puzzled, Ji Chen quickly pieced it together.

The Control Nexus in the chamber filled with books was a decoy!

And the Control Nexus here was the real deal.

Setting up two Control Nexuses, one real and one fake, was likely the contingency left behind by the ArchLich Krieg Theredell!

In general, if an outsider sought to break the seal and cage, they would most likely “luckily” stumble upon the chamber of books and assume the Control Nexus there to be genuine, never suspecting the possibility of it being fake.

Subsequently, Krieg had deliberately followed this train of thought, intentionally placing a false Control Nexus in that location.

With this approach, if anyone manipulated the fake Control Nexus, triggering certain countermeasures, the consequences were evident.

Surely, the mechanisms left behind by an ArchLich were sufficient to bury all intruders here.

However, Ji Chen’s arrival this time inadvertently bypassed this trap.

Initially, he hadn’t rushed to manipulate the fake Control Nexus. Instead, he fervently searched the chamber of books from top to bottom, which led him to inadvertently discover the hidden mechanism to unlock this well, thus unveiling the genuine Control Nexus concealed within.

After realizing this, Ji Chen still felt a lingering fear. Was it good luck or a fortunate accident that led him to this discovery? Or was it his greed that inadvertently helped him evade a crisis?

Reflecting on the events once again from beginning to end, Ji Chen became even more cautious.

“Search the bottom of this well thoroughly once again!”

“Pay attention to whether there are any other hidden compartments or mechanisms.”

With the command given, the troops mobilized once more, conducting a meticulous search.

Two hours later, after numerous searches confirmed the absence of other hidden compartments or mechanisms, Ji Chen finally breathed a sigh of relief. He walked up to the altar and stood before the Control Nexus.

The crystal sphere hung silently above the apparatus, emitting faint sparks of lightning between the two.

This nexus was the true core of the entire laboratory, controlling all the cages and seals, as well as the activation and attacks of the magical arrays.

Once controlled, this nexus effectively granted command over the entire laboratory.

As there seemed to be nothing else in the well, Ji Chen's disappointment was mild, yet he didn't waste time. He attempted to use the Control Nexus to release Elin and Thotmudo from their seals and cages.

As his hand touched the crystal sphere, he felt a barrier about ten centimeters away from the sphere, an invisible membrane preventing him from reaching it. In that instant of contact, Ji Chen's consciousness merged with it.

He found himself in what seemed like a field of stars.

Within this starry expanse were over a hundred particularly prominent dots, arranged in specific sequences and positions.

Ji Chen knew that these dots represented the various cages and seals in the adjacent rooms.

Some dots were already white, indicating they held no "prisoners", while others were red, signifying prisoners were held within. The sizes of the dots varied, reflecting the sizes of the corresponding cages.

Searching among these white dots, it was relatively easy to find the ones belonging to Elin and Thotmudo.

It was quite straightforward because Elin and Thotmudo were among the most recent arrivals here, so the dots representing them were positioned on the outer edges. Additionally, the cages holding them weren't large, making them the smallest batch.

Soon, Ji Chen located their dots along the edges.

Just as he contemplated releasing their seals and cages, the starry field before him suddenly froze, like a computer interface stuck in place, rendering him unable to operate.

Danger!

A profound sense of peril surged, causing Ji Chen to shiver involuntarily.

No, he had to withdraw immediately!

He attempted to retract his consciousness from the Control Nexus, only to find that he had lost control. He and the starry field were both stuck.

"Kekeke, after so long, finally, some prey takes the bait. Millennia of time, truly a torment for us!

Furthermore, it's a human possessing remarkable adaptability and immense potential! The carefully designed traps have indeed not been in vain."

Whispers of sinister, cunning voices echoed in his ears, immediately invoking thoughts of an evil presence.

And Ji Chen knew exactly who this presence was.

It was the ArchLich Krieg Theredell! The master of this laboratory!

Krieg's sharp voice resonated within the starry field.

"Human, you believed you were clever, that you had seen through the traps and managed to escape, but you surely didn't anticipate that the previous traps were merely preparations for this one."

"All the previous series of 'baits' were set to arouse your greed, to make you lower your guard, step by step, into my trap.

Now, do you find yourself filled with regret and frustration?"

Ji Chen was quite annoyed and really wanted to swear.

But the starry expanse froze along with his consciousness, rendering him unable to speak.

This Krieg was incredibly cunning. After all, who wouldn't have lowered their guard slightly when faced with something so valuable?

Nobody would have anticipated that his consciousness would be hidden within the Control Nexus.

Speaking for over ten minutes, as if he were expelling everything he had to say accumulated over the millennia, Krieg finally stopped.

"...However, all of this will come to an end now. After obtaining your body, the mighty ArchLich Krieg Theredell will rise again, and his name will once more spread across the void!

And you offering your body to Krieg should feel immensely honored and fortunate!"

Ji Chen's heart had sunk to the depths.

So, this was Krieg's plan: to return to the world using his body.

Through Krieg's monologue and the events that had unfolded, Ji Chen had come to understand certain things.

It turned out that during the thousands of years Krieg Theredell, the ArchLich, was missing, he hadn't left or abandoned this place.

Likely due to some circumstance, his life and body had suffered irreparable damage. He had hastened his return here, transferring his consciousness into the prepared trap within the Control Nexus. There, he lay dormant, awaiting for the 'prey' to take the bait.

Who would have known that for thousands of years, no living beings had entered here until Ji Chen became the first "lucky one".

After grasping the situation, Ji Chen didn't know what to say.

At this moment, he felt like a lamb waiting to be slaughtered, unable to do anything.

"Kekeke, let me take a good look at your body and see to what extent it will help me recover.... Ah ah ah! What is this?!"

Chapter 254: Elin and Thotmudo Escape Captivity, You Tell Me We're in a Weakened State?

Ji Chen tried every method but couldn't move or control himself. He slumped down in resignation, thinking that this time he had truly failed.

Just as he was about to give up. Suddenly, he heard Krieg's howling voice, as if he had seen something unbelievable.

“Impossible! A human like you, how could you... be favored by... What merits and abilities do you possess!!

I refuse to accept this! After scheming for so long, I was just one step away from returning to the world. I refuse to accept it!!!

Wait!! Spare my life, I'm willing to be your servant... Ahhh!!”

Before the words even finished, Krieg's voice vanished without a trace, and the stars began to flow again.

At this moment, Ji Chen realized that he could move his consciousness, so he quickly withdrew from the Control Nexus. He saw the group of heroes looking at him with concern.

When Alice and the others saw Ji Chen interacting with the Control Nexus, they took the initiative to guard the surroundings to prevent any disturbances.

But after a few minutes, they noticed that Ji Chen hadn't come out, didn't respond to calls, and his brow was furrowed. They quickly realized something was wrong.

However, they didn't dare to move his body, fearing that it might harm him, so they could only anxiously watch.

Then, they saw Ji Chen slowly open his eyes and immediately gathered around, asking with concern, “Lord, are you alright?”

“I'm fine.” Ji Chen waved his hand and tried to process what had just happened.

The consciousness of ArchLich Krieg, hidden within the Control Nexus, seemed to have tried to take over his body but inexplicably failed.

This time, he clearly heard the word “favored”.

Ji Chen opened his personal panel and looked at the Sea Favor under the Lord's Talent section. Could it be what Krieg was referring to?

He felt uncertain deep inside.

Yet, amidst the uncertainty, he had a vague sense that this might involve a higher-level existence that could utterly destroy Krieg's consciousness without any resistance.

With the crisis averted, Ji Chen's tense emotions relaxed, and he couldn't help but make a sarcastic comment.

First, he encountered the evil god named Alexei at the Black Skeleton Pirate Crew's base, wanting to forcibly convert him to the cult. That alone was frustrating enough.

And now, this ArchLich Krieg Theredell had crossed the line even further, actually coveting his body and trying to claim it as his own.

Looking at the still worried group of heroes, Ji Chen let go of his worries and briefly recounted what had just happened, causing their faces to change drastically.

“Lord, it’s my fault. I failed to protect you properly!”

Daro took the initiative to step forward and take the blame.

“Indeed, if anything happened to you, we wouldn’t be able to explain to the residents of the Crown of the Ocean, nor could we justify it to ourselves. We would only be able to apologize with our lives.” Benbo also expressed his guilt with a troubled expression.

“It’s not your fault, no one could have anticipated that Krieg would be so cunning and set up such a complex trap.”

Ji Chen’s expression turned serious. “I’m going to touch the Control Nexus again. If you notice anything unusual about me, immediately pull me away.”

“Understood!”

Seeing this, Ji Chen once again extended his hand towards the Control Nexus, and his consciousness entered the realm of stars once more.

Nervously waiting for a while, Ji Chen realized that Krieg had indeed vanished. With this realization, he finally relaxed and the previous worries vanished as well.

Previously, he had been concerned that at some point in the future, Krieg might return here and find out that it was Ji Chen who had intruded and helped Elin and Thotmudo escape. He had feared the possibility of retaliation.

However, now that Krieg was gone, he had no more lingering concerns.

The best way to deal with the threat of retaliation was to eliminate the threat itself, once and for all.

Ji Chen didn’t waste any more time. First, he deactivated the magic formation, then he located the positions representing Elin and Thotmudo. He released their cages and lifted the seals.

Without further delay, he withdrew his consciousness from the starry space, leading his army back through the atrium, the hidden library, and the laboratory, returning to the space where Elin and Thotmudo were held captive.

From a distance, Elin and Thotmudo had already emerged from their cages and were stretching their bodies.

Seeing Ji Chen’s return, they walked over eagerly.

Elin had a smile on her face. “I never thought a human like you could actually find the Control Nexus and come back safely.”

Hearing this, Ji Chen immediately asked, “So you knew all along that Krieg had left a trap, and you just watched as I walked right into it?”

“Oh, you’ve got it all wrong,” Elin protested, her expression slightly wounded as she pouted. “I just had a feeling that someone as cunning as Krieg would probably have a backup plan in place, but I genuinely didn’t know the details. If you phrase it like that, you might make me sad-”

Ji Chen looked at Elin as she held her chest, giving off a pitiful, heartbroken appearance, but he just furrowed his brows and didn’t say anything more.

Deciphering this millennia-old elven woman was quite the challenge. Determining which of her statements held truth and which were fabrications proved to be a puzzle he couldn’t solve.

Furthermore, now that she had broken free from the seal, her power as a level 79 Epic-tier entity was gradually being restored.

When she was confined within the cages, he had absolute control and authority. However, outside of those confines, he would lose that absolute dominance.

Seeing that Ji Chen wasn’t pressing the issue further, Elin’s cheerful smile returned, and she seemed quite content..

Chapter 255: Elin and Thotmudo Escape Captivity, You Tell Me We’re in a Weakened State? (2)

Ji Chen shook his head and turned to Thotmudo, who had been silent all this while. He saw the dwarf hero with a pained expression, suddenly speaking in a hushed tone.

“Human... are you... alright?”

!!!

Ugh-

Ji Chen furrowed his brow deeply, feeling a bit nauseated.

You might not imagine how unusual it was for Thotmudo to speak in such a hushed manner.

It was like a burly and brawny figure, usually fierce and tough, was now speaking in a delicate and soft manner.

The contrast was astonishing.

Even though Ji Chen had a strong natural resistance, he was struggling to contain his urge to vomit.

He could only suppress the desire to retch and managed to force a smile, saying, “I’m... fine...”

Ji Chen could endure, but Elin had already burst into laughter without any restraint.

“Hahaha, Thotmudo, what’s gotten into you? You actually spoke with such a disgustingly sweet tone. It truly broadens my horizons.”

“If other dwarves saw you like that just now, they might start questioning life!”

“Hu-man-, are you- alright-,” Elin mimicked Thotmudo’s posture and speech, bursting into laughter once again, reaching a level of eerie sarcasm.

Thotmudo’s face was now entirely dark, reverting to his previous irritable appearance. His messy hair became even messier, and he seemed on the verge of a physical confrontation with Elin.

However, Ji Chen intervened just in time to prevent a clash between them. Now was not the time for them to quarrel in a cell. Two top-tier epic heroes fighting could lead to catastrophic consequences.

“Let’s get out of here quickly. You both must want to leave this place as well, right?”

At these words, Thotmudo finally calmed down, a hint of excitement gleaming in his eyes as he nodded.

As for Elin, she had been laughing so hard earlier that she nearly collapsed, clutching her stomach and leaning against Ji Chen to prevent herself from falling to the ground.

At this moment, she also snapped back to reality and likewise nodded in agreement with the statement.

Seeing this, Ji Chen didn’t hesitate. Leading the army, he walked towards the massive doors.

The enormous stone doors gradually opened, and a streak of red light slanted in along with the sound of the wind.

Emerging through the stone doors to the outside, they were met with an endless expanse of red desert. The sky remained blood-red, an eerie and desolate sight.

Yet, even faced with this, Elin and Thotmudo were filled with unparalleled excitement and exhilaration.

They spread their arms wide, gazing up and laughing heartily, allowing the wind and sand to brush against their bodies.

“For thousands of years, we’ve finally escaped this prison!”

“The taste of freedom!!”

Ji Chen and the others stood aside, silently watching them release their pent-up emotions.

It was hard for them to fathom the feeling of being imprisoned for thousands of years and finally gaining their freedom. After all, they had only spent less than a day inside.

After a while.

The two had exhausted their emotional outburst, and they concealed the remaining excitement and exhilaration within their hearts.

They turned and walked over to Ji Chen’s side.

With a smile, Elin said, “Sorry for the spectacle. It’s my first time outside in so long, so I’m a bit excited.”

Ji Chen nodded without saying anything.

At this moment, the palace behind them slowly sank into the ground, buried under endless rubble, leaving no trace of its existence.

Seeing this, a thought crossed Ji Chen's mind, and he said, "Now that we're out, I should leave this realm quickly. After all... we don't know when that Lich might return."

Naturally, Lord Krieg had already met his demise, but Elin and Thotmudo were unaware of this fact. Ji Chen decided not to inform them, considering the situation.

With Krieg's death, this laboratory had naturally become ownerless.

In that case, why shouldn't he seize the opportunity and claim it for himself?

After all, the "experimental materials" confined within this laboratory constituted a treasure trove of immeasurable value.

As long as he possessed the Sword of Warlords, he could come here at any time and acquire wealth from this repository.

Upon hearing Ji Chen's words, Elin and Thotmudo, who had been enjoying the outside world, nodded gravely.

Breathing in the air of freedom, they were determined not to be locked up again in the small cage they had endured.

"Alright, we've just broken free from the seal. We're still in a weakened state for now, so we can't open a Void Passage temporarily. We can only exit through the portal you entered."

Just as Ji Chen was about to respond, he suddenly heard a warning from one of his subordinates.

"Skull horde detected from the north!"

Looking into the distance, they saw a large group of skeleton creatures appearing on the northern sand dunes, seemingly out of nowhere.

This posed a problem.

Ji Chen gazed at the sea of skeletons rushing towards them, feeling somewhat troubled.

The size of this force seemed to be at least a hundred thousand skeletons. In the past, he wouldn't have worried much, but after the battle with Solin and the significant losses suffered by the Royal Griffon Knight Order, they were now reduced to a size of fewer than a thousand troops, making it extremely difficult to hold them off.

"Lady Elin, Lord Thotmudo, the number of this approaching skeleton sea is quite substantial. It might be prudent for us to temporarily avoid their onslaught."

"Why should we hide? We don't need to evade such a number of low-level skeletons."

Elin waved her hand dismissively, looking at Ji Chen. “Do you have a staff? Without a staff, things might feel a bit awkward.”

Ji Chen was taken aback and rummaged through his backpack. He then handed over the only staff he had—the Amplification Staff.

Elin accepted it casually, weighed it in her hand, and nodded. “It’s not great, but it’ll do.”

After saying that, she held the staff and walked forward about a dozen meters, calmly facing the incoming skeleton horde.

Her composure wasn’t a facade; she genuinely appeared unperturbed.

Neither joy nor sorrow, devoid of any emotion.

Elin’s steps came to a halt as she gripped the staff.

Suddenly, an immense and substantial surge of energy erupted from Elin’s body, sweeping in all directions. Countless pieces of debris were lifted up, forming rings of sand waves.

The crystal at the top of the Amplification Staff emitted a glowing radiance as the energy surged into it, shining like a beacon in the dark night.

In an instant, this area was filled with a vast expanse of energy akin to the sea.

Ji Chen, standing behind, suddenly felt his breathing become constricted, as if the air were continuously compressing him.

It wasn’t just him; even heroes like Alice were struggling, gritting their teeth to persevere. Only Thotmudo seemed unfazed, standing nonchalantly with his hands behind his back. He commented with a hint of disdain, “It seems that after thousands of years, those pointy-eared folks haven’t made much progress in their strength.”

Perhaps sensing their predicament, Elin moved her staff slightly, and Ji Chen and the others immediately felt a release of pressure from their shoulders, as if the burden had lifted.

Crack!

A cracking sound emanated from the crystal at the top of the Amplification Staff, and a fissure appeared.

It couldn’t withstand the overwhelming power and had cracked on its own!

Elin let out a soft sigh, a hint of dissatisfaction in her eyes. Shaking her head, she raised the staff, allowing a surge of energy to flow into the air.

In an instant, a massive blue magic circle, over fifty meters in diameter, appeared in the blood-red sky. It was adorned with intricate arcane symbols and patterns.

Just as they thought it was the end of it, another similarly sized red magic circle appeared beside the blue one, aligned side by side.

Elin gently tapped the staff towards the skeleton horde. Instantly, countless white dots flashed within the blue and red circles. Ice spikes and fireballs emerged densely, trailing paths as they crashed into the sea of skeletons.

Swish-

Boom—

Above the desert, a symphony of ice and fire unfolded.

Though the fireballs were only the size of fists, they detonated like high-yield explosives, their intense heat instantly melting the skeletons within a ten-meter radius.

The ice spikes, though only as thick as three fingers, moved so quickly that they left behind faint traces. Silently, they pierced through the skeletons, and many of them continued running for over ten meters before collapsing and disintegrating.

Within the magic circles, ice spikes and fireballs continued to shoot out endlessly, bombarding the skeleton horde with ferocity.

Watching this spectacle, Ji Chen was utterly dumbfounded.

You're telling me they're in a weakened state!?

Chapter 256: Return: Two Treasures

In her weakened state, being capable of unleashing such potent spells, wouldn't it be even more catastrophic when she was at her peak?

Ji Chen felt that he had gained some preliminary understanding of the strength of epic tier, high level heroes.

In summary, epic tier heroes are truly terrifying-

Under the two magic arrays that could shoot out infinite fireballs and ice spikes, the battle quickly came to an end.

The magic arrays gradually dissipated in the air, leaving behind only debris scattered on the ground and a pockmarked surface.

Elin came back, somewhat embarrassed, and handed back the amplification staff, "This staff couldn't withstand my power and got damaged."

At that moment, Ji Chen glanced and felt a sudden throb in his brow.

My goodness, this couldn't even be called a staff anymore; it had clearly turned into a torch. The gem on top had shattered completely, leaving only a small fragment at the bottom. The staff's body was also covered in dense cracks, as if it was about to disintegrate in the next moment.

Seeing that Elin took care of the wave of skeleton sea creatures, Ji Chen didn't say much. He shook his head nonchalantly and took it back, "It's okay, it's just a 2-star treasure, nothing important. Alright, let's not waste anymore time and leave here quickly."

Both Elin and Thotmudo nodded.

The group began to move on.

Before heading to the Mystic Realm Gate, Ji Chen made a detour to the place where the bodies of the fallen half-orcs were buried. He dug them out from the gravel, wrapped them in shrouds, and brought them back to be buried in his territory.

After another day and night of continuous travel, Ji Chen and his group returned to the front of the Mystic Realm Gate. The massive red vortex was still spinning silently on the hill.

The blood-red hue and unsettling ambiance of the realm bore resemblance to the environment around them, causing unfamiliar individuals to believe they were entering another perilous zone. However, Ji Chen and his companions were aware that this was the sole gateway to the Crown of the Ocean within their domain.

Behind the vortex lay a vibrant sea island with sunlight, sandy beaches, azure skies, and gentle sea breezes. Gone were the eerie blood moon, desolate deserts, and endless hordes of skeletons.

A rough estimate showed that they had spent nearly a week in this realm. Even Ji Chen himself was starting to feel eager to return home.

Elin looked at the Mystic Realm Gate and smiled, “It’s been thousands of years since I’ve been to the outside world. Now, I’m looking forward to it, and I’m curious about what your territory looks like.”

Even Thotmudo, who had always been at odds with Elin, agreed and nodded, “Human kid, let’s get out of here as soon as possible. I don’t want to stay in this broken place for even another minute.”

Ji Chen chuckled. “I believe the Crown of the Ocean won’t disappoint you. In that case, let’s go out now.”

With that, he took the lead and walked into the Mystic Realm Gate, disappearing in an instant.

A flash of white light, and a bright scene unfolded before his eyes—lively forests, sprawling cities, and numerous Ruins Guardians guarding the entrance.

More importantly, as soon as he returned here, Ji Chen felt much more comfortable, and his familiar and formidable power quickly returned to him.

A small number of lizardmen stationed there saw his return and respectfully approached to greet him.

“How many days have passed since I entered the Mystic Realm Gate?”

“Reporting, Lord, it has been six days.”

Six days. It seemed that the flow of time in the main world and the Mystic Realm was consistent.

“What has happened in the Crown of the Ocean during these days?”

“Nothing, everything is progressing as planned.”

Upon hearing this, Ji Chen nodded, waved for them to step back, and turned his gaze.

By now, Elin and Thotmudo had also come out of the Mystic Realm Gate and were looking around with curiosity.

“Is this your territory? It doesn’t seem to have many people or buildings, a bit desolate.”

“No, the Crown of the Ocean is on the main island. This area is just waiting to be developed.”

Compared to Elin, who was observing the environment, Thotmudo, once out of the Mystic Realm Gate, focused on the Ruins Guardians standing on both sides.

His tone was somewhat solemn as he said, “Human, where did you get these Ruins Guardians from? They are quite extraordinary.”

“These big fellows were found in an ancient land of the divine realm.”

“No wonder...” Thotmudo suddenly had a realization. “The ability to seamlessly incorporate alchemical techniques into these guardians like this is something only deities can effortlessly accomplish.”

After speaking, he looked earnestly at Ji Chen and pointed to the Ruins Guardians, asking, “Could you lend me one of these alchemical guardians for research?”

Research?

Ji Chen was slightly surprised, but quickly understood.

“Of course, besides these Ruins Guardians, there are also the Ocean Guardians and Sky Guardians. I can lend you one of each.”

Dwarves were not only renowned for their exceptional forging techniques but also their alchemical skills.

If he could study the technology behind the creation of these alchemical guardians and replicate it, it would be beneficial for the Crown of the Ocean.

Upon receiving Ji Chen’s prompt agreement, Thotmudo nodded and was keen to begin his research right away. However, his weariness from the journey and the immediate impracticality of research restrained him from doing so at that moment.

Once all the troops were confirmed to have returned, Ji Chen walked up to the Mystic Realm Crystal and closed the Mystic Realm Gate.

As the energy output ceased, the massive vortex slowly dissipated.

This also meant that their journey in the Mystic Realm had finally come to an end.

Ji Chen had to admit that the experience of this journey in the Mystic Realm had far exceeded his previous expectations..

Chapter 257: Return: Two Treasures (2)

Originally, he thought it would be a simple task to subdue the Skeleton King. Little did he know, he got lost in the red desert for several days. After finally making his way out, he was unexpectedly caught off guard by the Skeleton King Solin, who severed his arm.

Then, by slaying Solin, he obtained the 7-star treasure, the Sword of Warlords. Following the map's guidance, he entered Krieg's laboratory and encountered Elin and Thotmudo, two epic-tier powerhouses imprisoned for thousands of years. They struck a deal.

Little did they know, when they found the Control Nexus, they were unexpectedly manipulated by the slumbering Krieg. If it weren't for the intervention of "providence", he would have already been overtaken, body and soul, resulting in spiritual death.

These past few days were truly full of twists and turns. The Crown of the Ocean lost over half of its forces, two treasures were rendered unusable, but the gains were equally remarkable.

Dozens of Heroic Soul Essences, several Bone Forges, two Skill Scrolls, a 7-star treasure, a 4-star treasure, an invaluable alchemical notebook, and the highly promising pledges from Elin and Thotmudo.

In other words, this journey into the realm was not only free from losses but also turned out to be quite lucrative—bloody well lucrative!

Thinking about how he would soon acquire two 7-star treasures from Elin, Ji Chen's mood instantly brightened, and his steps became much lighter.

With his army and Elin's group, they headed towards their territory.

Passing through forests and beaches, they returned to the Crown of the Ocean after days of separation.

In just a few days, the Crown of the Ocean had undergone many changes. The number of structures had increased, and the flow of people had become denser.

A thriving vitality emanated from every corner.

From the desolate subsidiary island to the prosperous main island, only a forest and a beach separated them.

Observing the bustling crowd, ships docked at the harbor, and clusters of buildings, Elin was slightly surprised.

It wasn't because of the prosperity. As an epic tier elven powerhouse, she had seen all sorts of bustling cities.

She had even overseen the construction of an elven city herself a long time ago, so naturally, she wasn't easily impressed by a domain of this scale.

What truly surprised her was the diverse array of races coexisting in this territory—humans, sea-dwellers, half-orcs, lizardmen...

Not only did they appear to be free of conflicts, but they also coexisted harmoniously?

This territory was rather intriguing...

Ji Chen instructed Daro to lead the army in finding a place to bury the fallen half-orc warriors. Afterward, he returned and smiled.

"How's it looking? The Crown of the Ocean seems decent, doesn't it?"

“Well, it’s passable, better than most territories,” Elin replied.

Ji Chen was momentarily taken aback, then chuckled.

Who was Elin? She was an elven hero who had lived for thousands of years, with experiences far beyond the ordinary. Giving such an evaluation to the Crown of the Ocean was already quite a concession.

In comparison, the dwarf Thotmudo straightforwardly remarked, “I wouldn’t even want this kind of territory if it were given to me.”

Ji Chen’s expression darkened immediately. He couldn’t help but feel that the reasons for Thotmudo and Elin being imprisoned were somewhat reversed. It should have been Thotmudo who got imprisoned for his blunt remarks.

“Anyway, Lady Elin and Lord Thotmudo, feel free to move around. As long as you don’t enter restricted areas, you can roam freely in the rest of the territory. The Crown of the Ocean will provide you with accommodations and food.”

Neither of them refused. Even though this was just a relatively small island, it was enough to let them experience a taste of freedom.

Of course, Elin and Thotmudo went their separate ways.

Elin ventured into the lush jungle, while Thotmudo headed straight for a Ruins Guardian and began his first study and research in thousands of years.

Following the terms of the deal, Elin needed to provide Ji Chen with two 7-star treasures.

However, Elin was currently in a weakened state and unable to activate the Void Tunnel to retrieve them. She could only fulfill her promise once she recovered.

On the other hand, Thotmudo needed to repair the Dragon Slayer Great Sword and create four treasures with a maximum rating of 6 stars. Additionally, he would impart basic forging techniques. He could start working on these tasks at this time.

Two days later, Ji Chen and Thotmudo stood in front of the blacksmith’s workshop, gazing at the Dragon Slayer Great Sword placed on the anvil. The broken edge of the blade looked particularly glaring.

Thotmudo stroked his newly tidied beard and spoke after a moment, “Repairing this sword isn’t overly difficult, but it requires several materials.” “Namely, Mithril, Crystals, and Molten Iron.”

He knew about Mithril and Crystals; there were quite a few of them. But what was Molten Iron?

Seemingly sensing his confusion, Thotmudo casually explained, “Molten Iron is a rather rare type of iron. Its ore is found near magma deep underground. Only it can perfectly restore this sword.”

Near magma deep underground?

Didn’t that mean the lava rivers near the Lizardmen Kingdom below ground might produce it?

Leaving the blacksmith’s workshop, Ji Chen immediately mobilized the Lizardmen to search for Molten Iron ore.

Ever since he conquered the four major Lizardmen Kingdoms, his commands in the underground world were as unbreakable as divine decrees. Tens of thousands of Lizardmen immediately began their search, and he believed results would come soon.

When Ji Chen hurriedly returned to the Lord Manor, Elin was already waiting.

After resting for two days, Elin's strength had only recovered to around twenty or thirty percent. Yet, even in her weakened state, she exuded a terrifying aura. When her power surfaced, it was akin to a mountain descending.

If Ji Chen was comparable to a swiftly growing small lake, then Elin could be likened to a vast and expansive sea.

The former had boundless potential, but the latter appeared more substantial and spectacular.

"Lady Elin, I hope these two days of rest have treated you well."

"Very well. Although this place of yours isn't large, the scenery is quite pleasant. I'm quite satisfied."

Elin smiled lightly and quickly got to the point.

"Now that my strength has sufficiently recovered, I can open the Void Tunnel and fulfill the promise I made earlier."

With that, a tremendously terrifying energy emanated from her. She slightly raised her right hand, and her index finger drew a line in front of her.

The space was disrupted, and under certain rules, it began self-repairing.

Yet, Elin abruptly halted this process and harnessed the energy. Within the fissure she had etched in space, she formed a rectangular Void Tunnel.

In a flash of white light, two spheres of green radiance flew out of the tunnel, hovering in the air.

After completing all this, Elin immediately waved her hand to close the tunnel, but a few drops of sweat had already formed on her forehead.

Clearly, her recovered strength was insufficient to sustain the tunnel for an extended period.

Among the two spheres of green radiance, one was a mask engraved with intricate patterns, with a texture resembling a mask. The other was a silver ring carved with mysterious runes.

At first glance, both items appeared exceptionally extraordinary.

[Illusory Mask]

[Rating]: 7-star treasure

[Effects]: ? Mana Recovery (Increases mana recovery speed by 400%)

? Charisma (Significantly increases charisma, enhances chances of persuasion and convincing)

[Skills]: ? Concealment (Able to alter appearance, body shape, voice, aura; can hide information panels and even the soul)

@ Disguise (Able to mimic other creatures, imitating their appearance, body shape, aura, and even soul)

[Elin Lin Apocalis' mask, the Elven hero, possesses powerful concealment effects, seemingly still retaining her aura...]

[Once worn, even your mother wouldn't recognize you standing in front of her.]

[Void Ring]

[Rating]: 7-star treasure

[Effects]: ? Void Sight (Able to see through some illusions and illusions)

[Skills]: ? Blink (When used, can instantly teleport to any location within ten kilometers, cooldown time: 30 minutes)

@ Void Tunnel (Able to create a short-lived, continuous Void Tunnel, passable by living beings, cooldown time: 72 hours)

@ Void Restoration (Able to draw power from the void, significantly accelerates self-injury and mana recovery)

[Elin Lin Apocalis' ring, the Elven hero, possesses powerful life-preserving abilities...]

[Void Tunnel is currently being established...]

Holy crap!

Ji Chen's pupils suddenly contracted, and he was utterly stunned.

This was just too damn powerful!

Chapter 258: Illusory Ring: Hero Promotion

Seeing Ji Chen's astonished expression, Elin couldn't help but feel a sense of pride. "These two treasures are quite powerful, aren't they? I expended a tremendous amount of effort and resources to acquire them from elsewhere... Ahem, I mean, I obtained them, and even among 7-star treasures, they can be considered top-notch."

"The Illusory Mask is a remarkable treasure that conceals one's identity and presence from the world. When you wear it, even if you stand before the most familiar people, you won't be recognized.

As for the Void Ring, for strong individuals like us, it might not be as precious anymore, but for someone like you who is still in the growth stage, it's a life-saving treasure that significantly enhances your survival rate."

As the conversation shifted, Elin suddenly spoke with a serious tone, her words carrying weight.

"I must admit that you possess undeniable potential, but that's just potential. During your journey of growth, countless beings with formidable potential have fallen due to various reasons.

Only those who survive until the end have the chance to become strong.

These two treasures aren't the strongest, but they are the most suitable for you at the moment. I hope you understand."

Ji Chen looked at the two treasures suspended in the air and nodded in agreement, a sense of gratitude welling up within him.

As an epic tier powerhouse, Elin could easily have chosen two 7-star treasures to fulfill her promise without much thought, casually appeasing the situation.

Even if she had done so, Ji Chen wouldn't have had any means to object. After all, the gap in strength between them was immense at this point – the combined power of the entire Ocean Crown wouldn't be sufficient to challenge a few of her skills.

However, Elin chose not to take that approach. Instead, she meticulously selected these two items.

Even he had to admit that these two treasures had a high cost-effectiveness and were in line with his preferences.

One concealed his identity, allowing him to deceive enemies and remain hidden in the world.

The other provided a means of escape and instant evasion from dangerous situations, accompanied by long-distance teleportation capabilities.

As Elin had said, perhaps they weren't the absolute strongest, but they were undoubtedly the most suitable for him.

Gazing intently at Elin, Ji Chen earnestly expressed his gratitude.

Seeing his reaction, Elin smiled and nodded before transforming back into her quirky elven appearance.

"Opening the Void Tunnel took quite a bit of effort from me. I need to continue resting now. You can continue handling the affairs of the domain. Goodbye!"

With that, Elin hummed a tune as she walked out, presumably heading to some spot on the island for leisure.

Watching Elin depart with such carefree grace, a hint of envy stirred within Ji Chen.

No need to be concerned about complex domain matters, no requirement to factor in the influence of various factions, and possessing personal power capable of traversing the majority of the world.

Wasn't this the lifestyle of a triumphant individual?

However, soon, this envy transformed into motivation. When the Ocean Crown became an immensely powerful domain that could operate autonomously without his intervention, he could also lead such a life.

Ji Chen placed the Illusory Mask into his backpack and wore the Void Ring on his finger. Feeling the cool sensation of the ring against his skin, a sense of security washed over him.

A thought of trying something out crossed Ji Chen's mind.

Without any delay, he activated the ability of the Void Ring. The next moment, Ji Chen's figure vanished and reappeared on a mountaintop enveloped in mist.

The sensation shifted from warmth and comfort to coldness.

Yet Ji Chen didn't mind in the least. On the contrary, he eagerly looked around, quickly recognizing a familiar and warm cave nearby. Confirming that he had arrived at the mountaintop of the northeastern peak of the main island, he felt a sense of familiarity.

This location was not more than ten kilometers in a straight line from the Lord Manor of the Ocean Crown, or at least seven to eight kilometers.

In other words, as long as the straight-line distance between two places didn't exceed ten kilometers, regardless of whether it was upward or downward, the Void Ring could transport him there.

Ji Chen was in high spirits.

With this Void Ring, unless he encountered insane level powerhouses, surviving was nearly guaranteed!

After a brief stay on the mountaintop, he waited for the cooldown of the Void Ring's teleportation ability and used it once again to return to the Lord Manor.

As soon as he returned, he spotted Wilus looking around. Ji Chen spoke up, breaking the abrupt silence.

"Wilus."

The sudden voice startled Wilus, causing him to turn around. Seeing Ji Chen appear behind him, Wilus wore a bewildered expression. "My Lord, how did you suddenly appear here? There was no one here just a moment ago..."

"No need to worry. It's a skill from a treasure I recently acquired." Ji Chen briefly explained, then asked, "Is there something you need from me?"

Suppressing his surprise, Wilus responded, "My Lord, as you instructed earlier, I've completed the task of selecting residents with exceptional potential."

Hearing this, Ji Chen nodded in realization. He had given the order to Wilus to select twenty residents from various professions who possessed outstanding life skills just two days ago when he had returned.

The intention behind this was to use the Heroic Soul Essences obtained from the Skeleton Secret Realm to transform these chosen residents into heroes.

From the Mystic Realm, Ji Chen had obtained a total of 37 white Heroic Soul Essences, 12 green ones, 5 blue ones, and 1 red one dropped by Solin.

Ji Chen planned to allocate a portion of these Heroic Soul Essences to the development of his domain, cultivating a group of heroes specialized in various life skills.

"Bring them here now."

"Yes!" Wilus replied, saluted, and quickly left the room. In a little over ten minutes, he returned with twenty residents in tow..

“My Lord, I have brought the people as you requested. Please consider them.”

Ji Chen nodded and swept his gaze over them.

The twenty residents appeared quite apprehensive. They entered with heads bowed low and now, seeing Ji Chen scrutinizing them, they seemed even more nervous and uneasy.

Some of their faces were slightly pale, and they clutched their clothes, their hands and feet trembling.

These residents were extremely anxious, their minds a blank slate. Before them stood the supreme being of this territory, the one who held dominion over all races and beings under the Crown of the Ocean. In their hearts, he was akin to a deity.

Approaching closer, only casting a cautious glance, they discovered that Lord was truly majestic. A sense of nobility and dignity naturally emanated from him, evoking a sense of reverence within them.

When Master Wikis had instructed them to greet him, fear had rendered them incapable of speaking. They could only bow their heads like ostriches.

Seeing them in this state, Ji Chen felt somewhat amused and exasperated.

He sighed inwardly, realizing that he had unintentionally become the elevated lord in their eyes.

“Don’t lower your heads any longer. Each of you should introduce yourselves, starting with you.”

The male resident pointed out by Ji Chen immediately raised their heads. His face might have appeared strong and robust, yet his expression was nervously reminiscent of young child.

“My name is Halwei, a shipwright from the Crown of the Ocean. I’m responsible for ship repairs...”

Halwei quickly finished his introduction, and Ji Chen smiled, nodding and patting his shoulder, causing Halwei to feel unexpectedly honored.

Seeing Halwei receive such special attention, the residents behind him became increasingly excited and anxious as they awaited their turn.

“Lo-lord, my name is Kali. I am an intermediate tailor responsible for crafting clothing for the residents...”

“I am...”

One resident followed another, quickly stating their skills and responsibilities.

At this point, Ji Chen finally understood how underdeveloped the Crown of the Ocean’s aspects of daily life were.

These twenty residents were among the strongest in terms of life skills.

Yet, their skills were only at the intermediate level, and there wasn't a single one with advanced skills.

This gave him a glimpse of how much lower the majority of residents' skills must be, possibly even lacking basic skills.

The entire Crown of the Ocean, excluding the Lizardmen race, had a population exceeding ten thousand, but only about two hundred possessed life skills. This proportion was far below the average level of other players.

The growth of daily life and military strength had diverged, leading to a somewhat imbalanced progression.

Realizing this, Ji Chen began to take it more seriously.

This batch of Heroic Soul Essences might be able to alleviate this distorted state.

Looking at the twenty residents before him, Ji Chen's expression turned serious.

"Since you have been called here, you should understand the reason I've summoned you, right?"

The twenty of you, are you willing to become the pioneering group of lifestyle heroes in the Crown of the Ocean?"

These words hit them like a heavy hammer, leaving their minds momentarily blank. "Lord, are you speaking the truth?"

"Of course, when has this lord ever deceived you? Well then, do you not want to?"

"No, no, no!!! We want it!!!"

Even the most foolish person knew the concept of becoming a hero. They all nodded vigorously in unison.

Seeing this, Ji Chen didn't waste any time. He directly took out twenty white Heroic Soul Essences and used them on each of them.

Soon, the panel of the Crown of the Ocean displayed twenty white lifestyle heroes, accompanied by a system upgrade.

"Ding- Due to the promotion to hero, intermediate shipwright Halwei has been promoted to advanced blacksmith."

"Ding- Due to the promotion to hero, intermediate tailor Kali has been promoted to advanced tailor."

"Ding-..."

Ji Chen felt a sense of joy.

Could it really be done this way?

Becoming a hero while also having the possibility to raise life skill levels?

This was an unexpected delight.

Upon closer inspection, not everyone could be upgraded. Out of the twenty people, thirteen had a quite high probability of upgrading.

Out of the 37 white Heroic Soul Essences used, 20 were consumed, leaving 17 remaining, and none of the green or higher-tier Heroic Soul Essences were used.

Ji Chen decided to use them all to enhance military strength.

From the existing forces of the Crown of the Ocean, he selected seventeen to become white heroes, twelve to become green heroes, and five to become blue heroes, totaling thirty-four.

After a round of selection, he chose the Naga Berserker, Dragon Blood Murlocs, Elemental Sea Pixie, Lobster Rider, Murloc Rangers, Elite Pirates, and Half-Orc Warrior—seven unit types.

Other than these seven, the rest weren't quite suitable for cultivating hero units.

For example, the Self-Detonating Water Spider. Should they cultivate a hero unit only to blow it up?

As for the Ruins Guardians and other alchemical creations, Heroic Soul Essences couldn't be used at all.

Selecting individual units to become hero units from these military forces was also straightforward: selecting the highest-ranked ones would do.

After a final round of busy work, among the four unit types—Naga Berserker, Dragon Blood Murlocs, Elemental Sea Pixie, and Lobster Rider—each gained one blue hero, two green heroes, and three white heroes.

Among the remaining three unit types—Murloc Rangers and Half-Orc Warriors—each gained two green heroes and two white heroes.

As for the last group, the Elite Pirates, only one white hero was added.

There was no particular reason; there weren't many pirates, and their tier was relatively low, so one white hero was enough to lead them.

The distribution of white and green Heroic Soul Essences was complete, leaving only one blue and one red.

The sole remaining blue Heroic Soul Essence was set aside for now. He would wait until Sparrow returned from his expedition with Raymond before being using it for promotion.

As for that precious red Heroic Soul Essence, Ji Chen already had a plan for it.

At his call, a familiar and graceful figure appeared at the doorway.

“Lord, is there something you need from me? I was actually thinking about going to the beach.”

The newcomer was none other than the Siren hero, Alice. She wore a meticulously modified maid outfit that made her look incredibly adorable. Her long legs, adorned with white silk stockings, were both charming and alluring.

Ji Chen thoroughly appreciated the results of his excellent design and aesthetics.

Maid outfit + white silk stockings, an unparalleled combination!

“Ahem, I called you here for a reason.” Ji Chen withdrew his gaze and produced the red Heroic Soul Essence. “I intend to promote you to the level of a Red-Legacy tier hero, which represents the pinnacle of your potential.”

Hearing this, Alice’s initial reaction wasn’t one of happiness or acceptance; instead, there was concern and a faint sense of refusal.

“Is it really okay to use something so precious on me? After all, you had to work hard to defeat the Skeleton King Solin to obtain this, and your arm was even injured in the process.”

Her gaze turned towards Ji Chen’s left arm, which had already fully regenerated. The snowy-white skin contrasted with the slightly darker right arm, creating a distinct difference.

Ji Chen raised his left hand and shook it, casually saying, “Other than the difference in skin color, my left arm is just the same as before. And in that battle, without you, Alice, I’m afraid we would have already perished in a foreign land.”

When Solin’s barrier shattered, more than a dozen Skeleton Wyverns launched an attack. If it weren’t for Alice’s song creating a distraction, he might have been blown away by a single breath, let alone defeating Solin.

Alice had accompanied Ji Chen through the most difficult period at the beginning, enduring so many battles. In terms of merits and position, she was undoubtedly at the top of his list.

Moreover, he also wanted to see what Alice would become when she ascended to the level of a complete Red-Legacy tier hero. How her strength would change.

Alice wasn’t someone who hesitated or was shy; she had always been quite obedient to Ji Chen. Soon, she agreed.

In the palm of her hand, the crimson Heroic Soul Essence, as clear as a ruby, transformed into a beam of light that enveloped Alice, shooting straight into the sky.

A magnificent evolution unique to the Sirens was unfolding within the column of light..

Chapter 260: Mind Control, Peeping Tom

Alice’s evolving aura immediately caught the attention of many.

Amidst the lush forest, beside a spring, Elin, her pair of alluring and fair legs dipped into the water, looked up sensing something. She saw the pillar of light leading to the sky from the Crown of the Ocean.

“Hmm? Is that pretty little Siren? Seems like she’s found a good lord.”

Beside the blacksmith's forge, Thotmudo, sweating profusely, put down his tools in front of a Ruins Guardian. He glanced at the pillar of light that pierced the castle's roof, his eyes filled with contemplation, then shook his head. "I'm just a dwarf who knows how to forge iron; it's got nothing to do with me."

Anina, Daro, Benbo, and other heroes gazed at the pillar with envy. They secretly made up their minds to work even harder to strive for a promotion opportunity in the future.

The other ordinary residents of the Crown of the Ocean cheered joyously, knowing that another powerful hero was there to protect them.

The lizardmen, who had recently come to the surface, felt a mix of emotions at the sight, their expressions filled with awe. Only now did they realize that the underground world they once deemed vast was actually quite confined. They couldn't help but feel grateful to be under the protection of the Lord, who had brought them to a broader world.

The Crown of the Ocean's army roared in unison, offering their congratulations to the territory's newfound strength.

Lord's Castle.

The pillar of light gradually dissipated, revealing Alice's figure.

"Ding' Siren Hero: Alice has been promoted to the Red-Legacy Tier Hero."

"Ding' Purple Skill: Temptation Song evolved into Red Skill: Mind Control."

"Ding' Purple Skill: War Song evolved into Red Skill: War Sonata."

"Ding' Purple Skill: Ocean Nobility evolved..."

"Ding' Acquired new skill: Mind Storm (Red Skill)."

A series of system notifications suddenly flashed before Ji Chen's eyes, nearly dazzling him. After he regained his composure, he immediately opened Alice's interface.

[Alice (Hero)]

[Race]: Siren

[Level]: 35

[Tier]: Red (Legacy Tier)

[Potential]: Red (Legacy Tier) {Max Reached}

[Skills]: Mind Control (Red Skill), War Sonata (Red Skill), Ocean Nobility (Red Skill), Siren's Body (Red Skill), Mind Storm (Red Skill)

[Unit Trait]: Siren Bloodline

All four existing skills had been upgraded to Red Tier, and a new skill had been added.

Ji Chen wasn't in a hurry to check the new skill; he first focused on the two offensive skills that formed the core of Alice's power.

[Mind Control (Red Skill, consumes mana to capture enemies with an enchanting and tempting song, permanently bewitching them, imprinting a soul mark to turn them into soul servants, able to control enemies from a soul level [quantity and tier depend on level and mana strength, current maximum controlled quantity: Tier 1 – 10,000 units, Tier 2 – 5,000 units, Tier 3 – 2,500 units, Tier 4 – 1,250 units, Tier 5 – 625 units, Tier 6 and above temporarily unable to control]]]

[War Sonata (Red Skill, boosts allied forces and confuses enemies, increasing allies' attack and movement speed by 80% for a duration, dispelling pain within the duration, causing enemies to have a chance to fall into states of fear, panic, and dread)]

A notable boost on the epic tier!

As the name suggests, Mind Control can now permanently control enemies, assimilating them. No longer confined to short-term control or confusion like before.

This skill could be considered Alice's current and even future most potent ability, transforming her from a primarily supportive hero into a commanding one.

Moreover, its potential was immense.

At Tier 1, she could control 10,000 units; as the tier increased, the quantity halved directly. However, even at Tier 5, she could still control an impressive 625 units.

Thinking about this, Ji Chen couldn't help but feel excited. She could forcibly take control of Tier 5 units; this skill was incredibly dominating.

With 625 Tier 5 units under her control, whether they were from the wilderness or the enemy, she could directly dominate and turn them into her own forces, making them Alice's soul servants.

In other words, Alice alone could assemble a formidable army.

This skill, which allowed for forceful control, strangely evoked a sensation akin to NTR!?

His focus shifted.

Seeing the skill War Sonata.

Compared to Mind Control, although War Sonata was also formidable, it ultimately lacks the same brilliance. There is indeed a discernible difference between red-tier skills.

Ji Chen skimmed through, finally looking at the new skill that piqued his interest.

[Mind Storm (Red Skill, consumes a significant amount of mana to create a mental storm, inflicting strong soul impact on enemies within the range, causing them to experience negative effects such as fear, panic, confusion, and mental shock, and even directly annihilating souls)]

A super AOE psychic damage skill.

Its effect was outstanding as well; this kind of AOE skill on the battlefield was undoubtedly a force that could instantly change the course of battle.

All three evolved skills were incredibly powerful without exception.

Truly worthy of the legendary Siren race!

Ji Chen closed the interface and looked at Alice with a smile. Alice was also very excited at this moment.

“Alice, how do you feel now?”