

Ocean Lord 261

Chapter 261: Mind Control, Peeping Tom (2)

“My lord, I feel an incredible surge of power coursing through me, increasing by over tenfold! It’s hard to believe that I’ve rapidly reached the peak form of the Siren Clan, almost like a dream,” she exclaimed, gazing at her hands in astonishment.

“This is not a dream, this is reality,” Ji Chen gently grasped her delicate hands, his expression serious. “This is what you deserve. I won’t mistreat anyone by my side, especially you.”

Upon hearing this, Alice’s cheeks turned slightly red, and she lowered her head in embarrassment.

Promoted to the Red-Legacy Tier hero, Alice’s appearance had also undergone some changes.

Her skin, originally fair, had become even whiter, like ivory, with a delicate and charming glow.

Her figure was more immaculate, the carefully modified maid uniform outlining her curves perfectly. The slightly conservative style only enhanced her astonishing charm.

But the most significant change was in Alice’s demeanor. If she used to resemble an imperial princess—noble, elegant, and intellectual—now she seemed like an untouchable fairy: sacred, refined, and ascetic.

Even though she wore a maid’s outfit, it gave off the sensation of top-tier attire.

This made Ji Chen sigh.

Truly, good looks were a force to be reckoned with; everything looked good on her.

And with her sacred aura and the shy blush on her face, the two combined to create a strong chemical reaction.

It felt as if a goddess had descended to the mortal realm but had been tainted by a mortal, causing embarrassment.

This struck Ji Chen right in his sweet spot. His heart itched, and his gaze grew even hotter.

He really wanted to defile her...

Feeling Ji Chen’s intense gaze, Alice became even shyer, burying her head in his chest, unable to lift it.

Amid her surprised cry, Ji Chen’s mischievous smile spread as he princess-carried her and headed towards the room.

By the time Ji Chen stepped out of the lord’s castle, the sun had climbed high, marking noon. Enjoying a relaxed lunch, attended to by diligent maids, he later led a few squads of guards to a pond and waterfall situated approximately two to three kilometers away from the Crown of the Ocean.

“Maintain a perimeter guard and make sure nobody interrupts me.”

Upon receiving his orders, the guards dispersed, forming a protective circle around the waterfall, extending a hundred meters away. They swiftly cleared the area of any creatures within that range and maintained a watchful eye on the surroundings.

Ji Chen stepped on the water's surface and reached a stone platform beneath the waterfall, where he sat down cross-legged.

He took out two skill scrolls from his backpack—Skill Scroll: Mana Reflux (Red-tier skill) and Skill Scroll: Triple Casting (Orange-tier skill).

With other matters settled, it was time to start learning these two formidable skills.

He put away the Triple Casting scroll for now and then gently held the Mana Reflux scroll, focusing his mind on it.

The scroll instantly burst open, transforming into a golden light that flowed into his body.

In an instant, a wealth of knowledge and energy flooded in, almost filling his entire mind.

Ji Chen closed his eyes tightly and began to wholeheartedly learn and comprehend.

Two hours later.

“Ding- You have comprehended the techniques and usage of the Red-tier skill: Mana Reflux.”

A shockwave radiated from his body, blowing outwards and creating ripples in the surroundings.

Ji Chen slowly opened his eyes, a glint of insight shining within.

Checking his personal panel, he noticed the addition of “Mana Reflux” under the skill section.

The skill's level was only red-tier, and for Ji Chen, who was already at the Orange-Legendary Tier, the difficulty of learning it wasn't significant. He quickly grasped its essence.

The real deal was up next. He took out the Skill Scroll: Triple Casting.

After a short rest, he activated it and began to comprehend.

However, this time it wasn't as easy as before.

A sea of knowledge and energy surged into his mind frenziedly, almost causing him to burst.

Triple Casting was one of the top-tier skills, even among orange-tier skills. It wasn't flashy, allowing the caster to use three powerful skills in succession. Simple and direct, the effects were outstanding.

Four or five hours later.

Ji Chen's still form suddenly shook violently. A surge of mana erupted from him, creating a torrential mana storm. His clothes unexpectedly burst, shattering into hundreds of pieces.

A shockwave spread out, causing the surrounding water to explode, splashing high into the air. The waterfall above him also scattered in all directions, only continuing to flow down after a long while.

“Ding- You have comprehended the techniques and usage of the Orange-tier skill: Triple Casting.”

“Phew-”

Ji Chen opened his eyes, reining in his mana, and let out a heavy breath.

Standing up from the stone platform, he stretched lazily, making a crackling sound.

Feeling his greatly enhanced mana reserves, he wore a satisfied smile.

He almost wanted to burst into laughter.

To comprehend an orange-tier skill in just a few hours, what did they call that? A genius!?

Suddenly, he felt a chill. He looked down and realized his clothes had torn apart at some point, leaving only a few tatters hanging from his shoulders.

A gentle breeze blew by, rustling the leaves with its passage.

Ji Chen’s face reddened, and he cleared his throat. He took out a set of clothes from his backpack and put them on.

“Whoa, you got dressed so quickly?”

An unexpected voice came, startling him. He almost didn’t catch his breath.

He turned his head and saw Elin sitting on a tree branch beside the pond. She had her legs crossed and wore a disappointed and regretful expression.

Ji Chen’s expression turned dark. Did this old lady, who was at least several thousand years old, peek at him from the very beginning?

She waited until he finished dressing before speaking, yet she still had that regretful look. Was she some kind of pervert!?

Hearing the commotion, the guards at the perimeter hurried over. When they saw the elven woman sitting on the tree branch and Ji Chen’s dark expression, they became anxious.

“My lord, we failed in our duty. Please punish us!”

Ji Chen sighed and waved his hand. “If you were able to detect her presence, I would’ve held you in higher regard.”

Clearly, with Elin’s strength, it was practically impossible for the guards on the perimeter to detect her, let alone stop her.

“You all wait for me outside.”

“Yes!”

Only Ji Chen and Elin remained on the scene.

Elin agilely leaped down from the tree, landing steadily on the ground, and approached him.

“I just sensed the fluctuations of mana here, so I came to take a look out of curiosity. I definitely didn’t intentionally spy on you!”

Elin was casual in her speech, even though she said that, the cunning glint in her eyes betrayed her thoughts.

1 did peek, but 1 won't admit it!

Observing this, Ji Chen's brows furrowed as he candidly remarked, "An elven powerhouse with millennia of experience, engaging in the act of a peeping tom... One can't help but ponder how your fellow elves would perceive such behavior."

"Oh! Yeah, that's true..." Elin first seemed a bit troubled as she touched her hair, but soon she straightened up and laughed mischievously with her hands on her hips. "There aren't many elves from my time who are still alive, so you don't have to worry about that."

"Oh no, I didn't peek at you! Don't falsely accuse a good elf!"

Observing Elin's smug expression, Ji Chen's anger started to rise.

Had he not been aware of the undeniable fact that he couldn't possibly defeat this elf who had lived for several thousand years, he might have contemplated the idea of playfully hoisting her up and giving her a playful swat.

He mentally cursed her for a moment and then suppressed his anger, saying, "It's better if you didn't..."

Sensing Ji Chen's growing anger, Elin cleared her throat twice and somewhat embarrassedly said, "Don't blame me, it's just that your physique is too good. 1 couldn't resist taking a look. You have to understand the strong desire of an elven woman who's been locked in a cage for thousands of years without seeing any humanoid males."

"Is Thotmudo a man!?"

"Is a dwarf even considered a human?"

H ii

Ji Chen was left speechless, he could only adjust his clothes again and watch Elin warily.

Being a man, he needed to ensure his well-being while out and about, making sure not to let a mischievous female elf cause any trouble..

Chapter 262: Resurrection, Gnome Merchant Ship (1)

Three days later, Elin suddenly proposed the idea of leaving.

At the harbor, a seafaring vessel was finalizing its preparations before setting sail.

On the dock, Ji Chen and Elin stood facing each other.

"Don't you want to stay a little longer? After all, your strength hasn't fully recovered yet."

Elin, who had always been clever and mischievous, had a rare serious expression at this moment. She smiled and shook her head, "Although 1 haven't fully recovered now, there aren't many people who can threaten me."

She calmly uttered such domineering words, and the people present had no objections or reservations.

As a fully leveled Epic-tier hero, she had the confidence and capabilities to say such things.

“I’ve been here for so many days. It’s time to go out and see what the outside world has become. Moreover, with the Elven race divided as it is now, as an Elven hero, I need to see how this group of Elves has changed. And I don’t even know if those people and things are still around...”

As she spoke, a hint of nostalgia appeared on Elin’s face.

Ji Chen remained quiet. He was uncertain about the answer to this question, yet it was evident that not many people or things could endure the passage of thousands of years.

Not only considering a span of thousands of years, even the power held for a few hundred years would suffice to utterly obliterate any remnants of a person’s presence.

Elin continued:

“This time I’ll also make a trip to the Elven Empire. I’ll fulfill the second condition we agreed upon before, but it will take some time.”

The initial requirement for aiding Elin’s escape included acquiring two 7-star treasures, while the second stipulated the Elven Empire’s support for the Crown of the Ocean.

This latter condition held significantly more significance than the former.

Although Elin was a powerhouse among the Elves, it was not possible for the Elven Empire to immediately provide support for an unfamiliar territory. It would definitely require some time to coordinate.

At this moment, shouts from sailors came from the ship.

“Milady, the ship is ready, and we can set sail at any time!”

Elin glanced and then extended her hand, passing something over. Ji Chen took it, and in his palm lay an exquisite emerald-green jade token.

“As long as you immerse your consciousness within it and call out my name simultaneously, I will sense it. I’ll swiftly tear open the space, establishing a passage to come to your aid.

However, I have a busy schedule, and crafting an extended void tunnel over a long distance requires considerable time. Therefore, after you make the call, you’ll need to endure for a bit. Don’t let me arrive only to find your lifeless body...”

This was the last promise made between Elin and Ji Chen, agreeing to help him or the Crown of the Ocean once.

A level 79 Epic-tier significant promise held substantial weight.

Ji Chen chuckled with a relaxed tone.

“Don’t worry, I have confidence in my own strength, and I hope I never have to use this.”

“Heh, I hope so too.” Elin smiled softly, “Well then, I’m leaving.”

After saying that, she didn’t show any reluctance, turned around elegantly without hesitation, and without looking back, boarded the ship.

With the sailors’ calls, the ship’s sails unfurled and fluttered in the wind. The vessel slowly left the dock and sailed into the distance.

Ji Chen lingered for a while, turning away only after the ship disappeared beyond the horizon.

Arriving at the blacksmith’s workshop, Thotmudo was busy working on the remains of a dismantled Ruins Guardian, producing clinking sounds from time to time.

“Master Thotmudo, Lady Elin has left.”

Thotmudo set down his tools and showed a rare expression of joy on his face.

“That pointy-eared one finally left? That’s great! I can finally have some peace!”

In response to this, Ji Chen could manage a polite smile. Although it seemed a bit awkward, he could empathize with Thotmudo’s demeanor to a certain degree.

Elves and Dwarves weren’t just incompatible; they had many conflicts between their races.

And the two powerhouses of their respective races, facing each other and verbally abusing each other for thousands of years, had long reached their limit of tolerance.

Both parties were akin to barrels of gunpowder, ready to explode at the slightest spark.

With Elin’s departure, it was advantageous for Ji Chen’s upcoming work.

“Master Thotmudo, regarding the matter of you imparting forging techniques?”

As soon as he heard these words, Thotmudo’s expression immediately hardened, his face turning sour as he fell silent.

Seeing this, Ji Chen furrowed his brows.

Could it be that he’s trying to back out?

If Thotmudo was determined to back out, there wasn’t much Ji Chen could do about it.

After all, just like Elin, Thotmudo was also an Epic-tier hero, an existence not to be trifled with.

After a while, Thotmudo let out a heavy sigh.

“You human kid, you must ensure that the forging techniques I teach you won’t be spread around, and most importantly, don’t mention that it was Thotmudo who taught it to you. If other Dwarves were to find out, I’d lose face.”

Ji Chen immediately spoke solemnly, “Master Thotmudo, I guarantee that your forging techniques will absolutely stay within the Crown of the Ocean, the New Moon Islands, and the Stormy Sea!

And I won't let anyone else know that it was you who taught us! I swear by the Lord of the Crown of the Ocean!"

Seeing Ji Chen's serious and sincere expression, Thotmudo felt a bit reassured and weakly waved his hand.

"Alright, bring the people who need to learn from me over."

When hundreds of humans and thousands of Lizardmen appeared here, Thotmudo's eye twitched, and he burst into anger.

"You human kid, you didn't mention there would be this many people!"

Chapter 263: Resurrection, Gnome Merchant Ship (2)

"Human is one thing, but why are there also Lizardmen!?"

"I'll only teach a maximum of a dozen! Otherwise, no deal!!!"

Thotmudo's angry roar echoed throughout the Crown of the Ocean.

Ji Chen felt a wave of disdain in his heart.

Why won't he teach such a small number of people? This dwarf is truly stingy.

After the final round of bargaining and careful selection, a group of one hundred apprentices began to follow Thotmudo to learn the dwarf's forging techniques.

Amidst the bustling sounds of the blacksmith's workshop, two advanced buildings were completed in the Crown of the Ocean.

One was the five-star Elemental Arrow Tower, and the other was the Resurrection Altar.

The Elemental Arrow Tower was located on the cliff to the southeast of the Crown of the Ocean, with a high elevation and excellent visibility.

With a height of dozens of meters, the Elemental Arrow Tower firmly controlled the northern port area, the lord's castle to the northwest, the beach area to the west, and a large expanse of sea to the southeast.

Once enemies entered its range, they would be subjected to a relentless barrage like a storm. With a range of up to three kilometers, enemies would have no chance to escape.

The Resurrection Altar, although not leveled, was an extremely useful special building. It was constructed not far from the lord's castle, nestled within the tightest defenses.

Ji Chen stepped onto the altar to inspect its information.

[Resurrection Altar]

[Tier]: Special

[Effect]: Capable of resurrecting units

[Usage Restriction]: [2/2] times per month, each resurrection [1 unit to 5000 units]

[Currently Resurrectable]:

[Naga Berserker *324]

[Dragon Blood Murlocs *385]

[Elemental Sea Pixie *368]

[Murloc Prowler *301]

[Self-Detonating Water Spider *205]

[Resurrection Cost: 10,000 units of wood, 10,000 units of clay, 10,000 units of fiber, 500 units of crystal, 500 units of mithril]

Recently deceased armies of the Crown of the Ocean were prominently displayed, and the numbers were mostly accurate.

It seemed that only slain Self-Detonating Water Spiders could count towards the resurrection quota, while those that self-detonated did not.

In addition, Half-Orc Warriors seemed not to be counted because they weren't recruited from the camp.

Adding up these resurrectable units, there were approximately 1600 units, far less than the resurrection cap of 5000 units.

But Ji Chen didn't have time to think too much. He directly consumed one usage, resurrecting these armies.

The altar emitted a brilliant glow, shining even in the daytime, with an extraordinary radiance. The abundant resources stacked on the altar swiftly melted, transforming into luminous figures over time.

Due to the size of the altar, only eight were resurrected in each batch, lined up in four rows, making way for other resurrected units.

First to be resurrected were the Naga Berserkers, these strong and sturdy serpent-tailed warriors remained an indispensable main force of the Crown of the Ocean.

Next were the relatively smaller Dragon Blood Murlocs, possessing dragon might and tridents with firepower rivaling that of crossbows. They were responsible for long-range ground and aerial combat, as well as suppressing weaker enemies.

Following them were the Elemental Sea Pixies. No need to say much about them, they were the spellcasting team, causing mass destruction with each spell.

Then came the Self-Detonating Water Spiders...

Several hours later.

When the last Self-Detonating Water Spider with its distended abdomen walked down from the altar, the light from the altar quietly dissipated.

And on the open ground ahead, the resurrected army had once again filled the space, neither more nor less than before.

The residents watching this scene from the side were already filled with fanaticism.

“Am I seeing things? Those soldiers that seemed to have gone to the Mystic Realm with the Lord and died there... they actually came back to life!?” “Good heavens, only gods can resurrect the dead like this!”

“I understand! Even if they die in battle, as long as Lord is present, they can be revived! What incredible power!”

“Hail to Lord!”

Ji Chen acknowledged the cheers from the residents with a suitable response, enhancing their spirits, and then allowed them to go their separate ways to resume their tasks.

Looking back at the armies that were once again replenished, he felt somewhat relieved.

The army was the cornerstone of the Crown of the Ocean’s continuous progress and development. Without an army, even with great wealth, it would be impossible to hold on.

Returning to the Lord’s Castle.

Ji Chen rummaged through his backpack, taking out six miniature exquisitely carved skulls.

Bone Forge.

During this visit to the Skeleton Realm, he had obtained these Bone Forges. There were a total of 5 low-level Bone Forges and 1 intermediate-level Bone Forge. Their value was self-evident.

Just as he was considering when to set sail again and sell these Bone Forges.

A hurried sound of footsteps suddenly came from outside the door.

“Lord, an armored ship from the Stormy Sea has arrived. The beings on board claim to be part of a gnome merchant fleet and are requesting entry for trade with you!”

A gnome fleet?

Ji Chen was somewhat surprised.

Gnomes were not an unknown race. Renowned for their unattractive appearance across various worlds, gnomes were a race skilled in invention and creation and were extremely enthusiastic about commerce.

Greedy, stingy, cunning, meticulous, and enamored with gold.

Whether this personality trait nurtured their business talents or their business talents made them this way was irrelevant.

At this moment, Ji Chen was very interested in this sudden arrival of the gnome merchant fleet.

Since it was a merchant fleet, there should be some good items among them.

He wasn’t afraid that the gnomes would demand exorbitant prices, he was worried that they wouldn’t have anything valuable to offer.

“Guide the ship to the harbor, I will personally meet them!”

“Yes!”

After a slight adjustment of his appearance, Ji Chen, accompanied by his heroes and several units of his army, headed to the harbor.

When dealing with a race like the gnomes, it was necessary to display some degree of force to gain their respect.

Soon, an armored battleship slowly approached the harbor under guidance.

The armored battleship’s dimensions exceeded those of a regular three-masted warship by three times, yet it remained just slightly smaller than the New Moon.

The entire hull was made of metal, and the black shell appeared dominant and imposing under the sunlight. Gears, pipes, and lights were spread throughout, giving off a steampunk style.

At the top of the hull stood three thick chimney-like structures, emitting wisps of white steam from their tops.

But what caught the most attention were the four quadruple gun turrets on the deck, resembling the main guns of a battleship. The barrels were thick enough to fit a person.

Apart from these main cannons, the ship’s sides were adorned with numerous smaller-caliber secondary guns, amounting to around forty to fifty cannons. The arrangement of long and short barrels resembled the spines of a hedgehog.

Whether intentional or not, these barrels were faintly aimed at various important structures and the defending forces within the harbor.

“Woo woo woo—”

The armored battleship gradually came to a halt, the anchors at the bow and stern were simultaneously dropped, securing the battleship on the water’s surface. The previously seamless hull suddenly split open, and a metal staircase extended from the turning gears, connecting to the dock.

Then, several beings standing at only around 1.2 meters tall descended from the staircase.

Sporting a light green hue, elongated noses, wrinkled skin, and clothing adorned with conspicuous jewelry, they seemed to be making every effort to attract attention.

Yes, no mistake, with such an ugly appearance and a nouveau riche temperament, they were definitely gnomes.

At this moment, the leading male gnome lifted his head and, upon seeing Ji Chen, eagerly walked over with a quick pace.

“Oh- my friend, you’re really tall, just like Le Ruwa!”

As they approached, the male gnome performed a somewhat comical bow that seemed quite amusing.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am Ernesto Goldshimmer, the consul of this gnome merchant ship. I’ve come with a thirst for gold!”

My dear human friend, I might just have some rare items you need here, or perhaps, you have some things I want to purchase.”

Hearing this, Ji Chen was momentarily taken aback. The name and intent were so straightforward. Should he call it candidness or simply diving straight into the money pool?

But this suited his intentions perfectly. He didn’t want to waste precious time on formalities either.

He smiled slightly and returned the gesture with equal simplicity.

“I am Ji Chen, the owner of the New Moon Islands and the Lord of the Crown of the Ocean. I welcome your arrival..”

Chapter 264: Greedy Ernesto, Tyrant Azure Dragon

“New Moon Islands? Crown of the Ocean?” Ernesto deeply inhaled and had an intoxicated expression on his face. “I can smell the scent of gold coins from these names, my friend!”

Ji Chen arched an eyebrow, showing a hint of surprise, before offering a warm smile. “Maybe we should skip the formalities and dive right in. Master Ernesto, could you kindly share what merchandise you’ve brought?”

Upon hearing this, Ernesto’s expression grew even more eager, and he exclaimed, “I love customers like you! Rest assured, the items the gnomes have brought will surely satisfy every customer!”

After a pause, he added, “As long as you have enough gold coins.”

“Get ready, everyone! Lower crate number 1! The customer wants to see the goods!”

“Understood!”

A section of the deck on the front part of the gnome merchant ship split open suddenly, revealing a platform that slowly rose. On the platform was a three-meter-tall metal cube-shaped crate with the number “1” spray-painted on top.

Gnomish sailors on the ship’s deck skillfully attached the crane’s hook to the metal crate’s top ring, lifting it and carefully setting it down on the dock.

The dull thud of it hitting the ground indicated that the crate itself and its contents were not light.

Right after that, Ernesto approached and briefly explored the crate’s surface. Suddenly, a smooth area revealed a circular aperture. A beam of light emerged, scanning Ernesto from top to bottom. With a subtle click, it slid open sideways, unveiling the space inside.

Ji Chen raised an eyebrow; this was quite the high-tech safe.

In a world largely characterized by a medieval setting, this demonstration of advanced technology appeared somewhat incongruous.

Ernesto opened the crate and made a gesture of invitation. “Please, have a look inside to see if there’s anything that interests you, honored customer.”

Ji Chen nodded slightly and looked inside.

Upon opening one side of the metal crate, three shelves were revealed. Each shelf held several items—weapons, armor, blueprints, and more. While they varied, they were all of a similar value and tier.

Ji Chen only glanced casually, and his expression grew somewhat disdainful. None of these items could be considered treasures; they didn't catch his interest.

"I'm not particularly interested in these items. Do you have anything better?"

Upon hearing this, Ernesto's excitement grew even more. He knew he was dealing with a significant customer and quickly said, "Of course, we won't disappoint you! Gnomes will ensure that you're pleased!"

"My comrades, bring over crate number 2—no, 3! Our customer wants to see it!"

The crane on the gnomish merchant ship lifted the Number 1 crate back up and lowered the metal crate marked with the number 3.

Similar to before, Ernesto opened the crate, revealing its contents.

Ji Chen's expression changed slightly, finally sparking his interest.

As a gnome merchant envoy, Ernesto was skilled at reading people's reactions. He quickly noticed Ji Chen's shift in expression and smiled, taking an item from the shelf.

It was a round glass sphere with a miniature model of a spring inside.

[Natural Spring]

[Tier]: 3-Star Treasure

[Effect]: Upon usage, a freshwater spring is formed (daily output sufficient for five thousand people to drink)

[A natural treasure essential for water-scarce territories like deserts and islands]

Oh? This seemed rather promising.

Seeing this spring treasure, Ji Chen remembered what Wikis had reported a few days ago about the freshwater issue concerning the Crown of the Ocean.

The primary water sources for the Crown of the Ocean were the lakes atop the northeastern peaks and various rivers.

As the Crown of the Ocean developed rapidly and its population grew from hundreds to thousands, and then from thousands to tens of thousands, the demand for freshwater increased significantly. Relying solely on the surface water sources of the island was becoming insufficient to support further expansion of the territory. Even though there was abundant groundwater beneath the islands, how to extract it posed a challenge.

Therefore, to ensure the future expansion of the Crown of the Ocean, finding ways to acquire easily accessible water sources became an important concern.

“A 3-star top-tier treasure like the Natural Spring can solve the daily drinking water problem for five thousand people. It’s truly an excellent treasure for territories lacking freshwater!”

“Words of a child have no value! A fixed price of fifteen hundred thousand gold coins!”

Wasn’t that daylight robbery?

These gnomes were quite cunning.

Ji Chen nearly wanted to curse out loud. Selling a 3-star treasure for fifteen hundred thousand gold coins was outrageous. He recalled that previously, he had bought a 3-star treasure shield bracelet from a player for just fifty thousand gold coins. Now, the price had increased several times over. This was simply absurd.

Though he had money, he wasn’t a fool.

The value of this treasure was at most eighty thousand gold coins.

With this in mind, Ji Chen decisively rejected the offer with a resolute tone.

“Master Ernesto, the price seems rather exaggerated and far exceeds its actual value.

Although the Natural Spring is a valuable natural rarity, especially for islands, the Crown of the Ocean, despite being located on an island, isn’t deficient in freshwater resources. The challenge lies more in the extraction process and associated costs.

Thus, it’s not worth spending so many gold coins on it. But if you insist on such an exorbitant price, the Crown of the Ocean won’t welcome you.”

As his words fell, the atmosphere around them instantly grew tense.

Seeing Ji Chen’s resolute rejection, Ernesto couldn’t help but furrow his brow, his mind beginning to calculate.

This was quite different from what he had initially thought, wasn’t it?

Chapter 265: Greedy Ernesto, Tyrant Azure Dragon (2)

Given the expansive and bustling domain, along with a considerable force of troops and heroes, one would expect this lord to be quite prosperous. Why then is he unable to produce a mere fifteen thousand gold coins?

After all, the previous customer spent a full one hundred and sixty thousand gold coins, crying and begging before getting anything from him.

Hmm, even though that transaction was completed under the aim of a cannon.

Alright, it admits that its initial offer was slightly high, but did he really need to reject it so firmly?

Looking at this island, spanning at least hundreds of square kilometers, covered in lush forests and abundant resources, combined with Ji Chen’s resolute attitude, Ernesto started believing his words.

His tone inevitably softened a bit.

Well, when dealing with a promising new customer, a small loss can be tolerated.

With this thought in mind, Ernesto's eyes shifted for a moment, and he theatrically held onto his body, wearing an expression of lament.

"Dear friend, saying such things hurts our hearts. Honest and fair gnomes sell things at a value highly compatible with their worth, not a coin more!

Well, even though I'd incur losses, the gnomes are willing to make concessions for a dear friend. Perhaps we can discuss the price a bit further."

Value highly compatible with their worth, willing to make concessions for a dear friend?

What bullshit!

If gnomes were deemed honest and fair, wouldn't that make humans seem like complete saints!?

Ji Chen secretly mocked in his heart, though his expression had softened somewhat. He extended three fingers.

"Oh? One hundred and thirty thousand gold coins, this price might..."

"It's thirty thousand gold coins!"

Upon hearing this, Ernesto leaped up with his hair standing on end, resembling an alarmed dog.

"Impossible, no gnomish merchant could accept this price! This is a 3-star top-tier natural treasure, not some street stall junk!! If it were sold at such a pitiful price, even the God of Trade would weep!"

Going from fifteen thousand to thirty thousand, even the simplest-minded ogre would realize it's unfeasible! How much profit would it lose?

Watching the hopping gnome consul, Ji Chen said calmly, "Since you think it's not feasible, then what price do you consider suitable?"

"It must be at least a hundred and twenty-nine thousand eight hundred! This is the best price gnomes can offer!"

Once more, he found a new understanding of Gnomes.

Indeed, they were greedy and miserly!

Not even Gavroche could compare to one percent of them.

Unconsciously, Ji Chen's interest in this transaction waned.

After much contemplation, he suddenly remembered something.

Why am I seriously doing business with this group of gnomes?

After all, my true secondary profession is being a pirate!

"No, it has to be cheaper, or we might as well part ways!"

Ji Chen gritted his teeth, a look of refusal apparent.

Observing this scene, Ernesto's heart was slightly delighted. His face portrayed a mixture of difficulty and distress. He sighed heavily, as if giving up on something.

"Well then, since you put it that way, in order to maintain our relationship, we'll lower the price by another seven thousand gold coins! One hundred and twenty-two thousand eight hundred!"

"Deal!"

One party handed over the money, the other handed over the goods.

Ji Chen obtained the 3-star natural treasure, the Natural Spring, but his possession of over six hundred thousand gold coins diminished by one-fifth in an instant.

Yet, he didn't feel the least bit heartbroken. After all, he'd get it all back sooner or later. He might as well put this money away for safekeeping.

Once he had it all figured out, Ji Chen continued to purchase goods from Ernesto, further reducing his wariness. Gold coins flowed out like water.

After completing another transaction with Ernesto, Ji Chen remarked casually, "Since your crates are numbered, doesn't that mean the higher the number, the rarer and more precious the contents?"

Already captivated by countless transactions and gold coins, Ernesto now seemed to have become close friends with Ji Chen. He hesitated only briefly upon hearing this before responding.

"That's correct. The higher the crate number, the more precious the items inside, and the higher the level of protection!"

"Oh? Level of protection?"

"Yes, each crate requires my personal authentication to open, otherwise, it can only be forcibly broken open. But do you think it's easy to use violence to break them open?"

"Could there be something special about these crates?"

After reaching several transactions with Ji Chen, Ernesto was in a great mood. He spoke as if showing off, "Each crate combines the alchemical and mechanical technology of the gnome race. They're not only made from special metals, they're incredibly sturdy and resistant to physical and magical attacks. Ordinary methods won't affect them at all.

Even if you forcibly break them open from the outside, once the internal mechanism detects a breach in the shell, it'll trigger a powerful explosion, destroying everything inside!

BOOM- and it'll turn enemies into smithereens as well! How about it? Don't you think it's a genius idea?" Ernesto made an explosion gesture, his expression excited and flamboyant.

Glancing at the crates, Ji Chen pondered.

Though he didn't know what "powerful explosion" meant, he knew it wasn't something to take lightly.

“Alright- let’s continue our great and gold-scented transactions!

Do you require anything else, esteemed customer? On this occasion, we’ve traversed the ocean from the Eastern Continent to our gnome homeland on the Western Continent, Gigantooth City. If you happen to overlook this chance, the next trading opportunity won’t arise for several months!”

Bringing his attention back from the crates, Ji Chen contemplated for a moment. “I need powerful units, preferably of the ocean type, and the higher their tier, the better.”

Upon hearing this, a glint of excitement flashed in Ernesto’s eyes, and he rubbed his hands together.

“Lord Ji Chen, I happen to have a unit that perfectly suits your needs.”

“Minions, bring out crate number seven for me!”

After more than ten minutes, a two-meter tall, wide, and long metal cube was placed on the ground by a crane.

Unlike before, this crate had three layers of protection, each requiring scanning and a key to open.

This piqued Ji Chen’s curiosity. A crate with such tight security, what kind of unit core could be inside?

Ernesto unlocked the outermost layer of defense, unveiling a tidy arrangement of compartments in a 2×2 grid. He then proceeded to open the leftmost compartment in the second row.

A unit recruitment core about the size of a human head appeared, containing a miniature giant creature.

“Hey there, the goods have arrived. Please check if they meet your satisfaction,” Ernesto said as he carefully took out the core and placed it on a soft cushioned shelf.

Ji Chen stepped closer to take a closer look.

[Tyrant Azure Dragon]

[Race]: Azure Dragon

[Tier]: Fifth Tier, 5-star

[Initial Level]: 20

[Skills]: Frost Breath (Red skill, capable of spewing a breath of frost that inflicts tremendous damage on enemies’ bodies and souls)

[Savage Fangs] (Red skill, the specialized mouth enhances terrifying biting force, significantly boosting armor-piercing ability)

[Death Pursuit] (Red skill, swimming speed increased by 100%, additional 100% speed increase when chasing enemies)

[Azure Dragon Bloodline] (Red skill, attack and defense increased by 150%, resistance to various negative effects increased by 50%)

[Serpent’s Slumber] (Red skill, capable of entering a state of slumber, greatly enhancing recovery ability while this state constricts breath by 99%)

[Unit Characteristics]: Ferocity (when entering a combat state, all attributes increase by 100%)

[An anomaly among the Azure Dragon clan, particularly adept at slaughter and combat, possessing immense power akin to towering waves and terrifying bursts of strength]

Upon seeing this creature, Ji Chen's immediate thought wasn't about obtaining it, but rather how much money he could get for it.

Fifth Tier, 5-star, starting at level 20, and with five red skills, this unit was no less impressive than a hero unit's special effects.

The Furious Azure Dragon unit practically had "invincible" written all over it.

It was a presence far more formidable than the double-winged skeletal wyvern under the command of Lich King Solin, surpassing it by several magnitudes in power..

Chapter 266: Assassination, Triple Tsunami

Ernesto noticed Ji Chen's surprised expression and smiled somewhat smugly. "This Tyrant Azure Dragon recruitment camp core is one of my ace commodities, and even in the outside world, it's considered a priceless gem." "So, what's its price?"

Ji Chen suppressed his inner curiosity and voiced the question.

After all, no matter how good something was, if the price didn't match, it was of no use.

"Oh, my friend! I knew you would be interested in it. After all, who wouldn't like such a powerful military unit?" Ernesto replied.

"I'm offering it at a fixed price of 1.8 million gold coins!"

Even though Ji Chen had mentally prepared himself for a high price, hearing this figure still sent a shiver down his spine.

1.8 million, wasn't that nearly the same as the quantity of two Edward's Treasures?

This quantity of gold coins, when piled together, could practically create a small lake of wealth. It would be sufficient to purchase twenty or thirty blueprints for 5-star Elemental Arrow Towers, acquire 360 3-star Artifact Shield Bracelets, secure hundreds of 1-star Artifacts, and amass a vast quantity of valuable resources.

Did this gnome really dare to set such a price? Did he intend to bankrupt him?

Did he not fear he couldn't swallow so much?

Although Ji Chen didn't have a clear concept of the price of a fifth-tier military recruitment camp core, based on Ernesto's character and previous behavior, this price was definitely inflated, likely several times higher than the normal price.

"I can't accept this price. Can it be lowered?"

Ernesto's face displayed a hint of regret as he said, "Lord Ji Chen, our gnome pricing is always spot-on. This price aligns perfectly with the value of this military recruitment camp core."

The price of the same item could vary depending on the location and the person selling it.

If it were in the hands of a land-based lord, the price would plummet.

If a lord controlled both land and sea territories, the price would significantly increase.

If it were in the hands of an island lord, the price would multiply several times over.

However, if it were in the possession of a lord like Ji Chen, who had an urgent demand and was extremely wealthy, the price would overflow without limit.

This principle was fundamental to Ernesto's approach to conducting business: setting prices according to the buyer's willingness and ability to pay.

"Then there's nothing more to be done." Ji Chen shook his head.

"That's such a pity."

Ernesto quickly came up with an idea, wearing a sly smile.

"My dear friend, if you don't have enough gold coins right now, you can make up the difference with other items of similar value. Of course, the value of these items will be assessed fairly by the gnomes.

The gnomes also offer loan services. As long as you mortgage something of sufficiently high value, such as land, rights to ports, labor force, real estate, ships, and so on, you can obtain varying amounts of loans!"

Goodness, these gnomes have so many tricks up their sleeves besides regular trade?

Loans, mortgages, human trafficking...

If he hadn't known better, he'd think they were part of the underworld.

Seeing Ji Chen's silence, Ernesto assumed he was hesitating and thinking, so he enthusiastically explained.

"Your Excellency, these islands of yours hold significant value, and their geographical location is excellent. If you mortgage the ownership of the other islands, you can get a loan of 300,000 gold coins! The ports can also be mortgaged, but the amount is slightly less, only 80,000 gold coins.

As for those half-orcs, lizardmen, and kobolds, they are all decent labor. If you sell us the ownership of them for the next twenty years, you can also mortgage them for tens of thousands of gold coins.

As for the monthly interest, it's not high, just 9 percent."

After hearing these words, Ji Chen's understanding of these gnomes and his worldview were once again thoroughly refreshed.

They intend to use several islands as collateral for a loan of 300,000 gold coins, 80,000 for the ports, and they're even considering mortgaging the population. And the amount they want to mortgage was so little!

In addition, the interest rate was outrageous. If he were to get a loan of 500,000 gold coins, the monthly interest would be 4,500 gold coins, which amounts to 54,000 gold coins a year.

What ultimate unscrupulous merchants!

No, they were already unscrupulous to begin with, their greed surpassing that of humans by a few degrees.

“I’m sorry, I can’t accept this,” Ji Chen said, suppressing his anger and refusing.

His thoughts grew even stronger.

“Very well, if Your Excellency were to change your mind, please do let me know,” Ernesto said regretfully.

Ji Chen paid no further attention to these gnomes, only instructing his troops and heroes to wait here until the gnome merchant ship departed. Then, he left with an unhappy expression.

Ernesto watched the departing figure with full confidence.

It believed that this human would empty his pockets to purchase this precious military recruitment camp core.

However, to Ernesto’s disappointment, even until the afternoon when the gnome merchant ship was informed to leave immediately, there was still no sign of Ji Chen.

He couldn’t help but feel a bit disappointed.

But on second thought, the pure profit from this transaction alone was over two hundred thousand gold coins. It could be considered a huge profit!

One such transaction was worth several other transactions. It truly hoped to encounter more such naive customers!

They weren’t too afraid of retaliation from these naive customers. After all, this fully armed gnome merchant ship was not just for transporting goods; the alchemical cannons on board were enough to deter any incoming enemies and blast them to pieces!

“Hahaha, my little ones, let’s go!”

With Ernesto’s triumphant laughter, the gnome merchant ship slowly left the port, heading towards the distance..

Chapter 267: Assassination, Triple Tsunami (2)

But what they didn’t know was that in a dense forest on the island behind them, Ji Chen and his group were watching their departure.

“Has the army secretly followed them?”

“Yes, all the Lobster Knights are closely trailing them, but the Naga Berserkers and Dragon Blood Murlocs couldn’t keep up and have fallen far behind.”

“In that case, let the Naga Berserkers and Dragon Blood Murlocs return. Only the Lobster Knights should track them. But be sure not to let those greedy gnomes discover you and disrupt my plan.”

“Understood!”

Watching the gnome merchant ship disappear quickly on the horizon, Ji Chen's eyes were filled with determination.

This group of gnomes was destined to taste the harsh reality of society and learn what awaits those who are so arrogant and greedy.

Two days later.

On a calm night.

The gnome merchant ship sailed leisurely on the sea, gnome warriors patrolling the deck, and the large lamps on the ship's deck scanning the surrounding sea, guarding against possible threats.

The main cannon had been shut down, but dozens of secondary cannons on the sides of the ship were on alert, ready to fire at any moment. This clearly indicated the tight defense of the gnome merchant ship.

On the lookout tower, two gnomes wearing special night vision equipment were lazily looking around.

“Thor, why do we have to stand here like idiots on such a quiet night while those fools are sleeping in the cabin? It's so unfair.”

“I feel the same way, but it's the Consul's orders, and I can't do anything about it.”

“Damn it! I don't understand. We have such powerful firepower on this ship. How could there be something foolish enough to provoke us? These thick gun barrels can shoot alchemical bombs that are enough to kill any enemy!”

“That's true. This is the power of technology. We gnomes have always been the ones provoking others, and no one dares to provoke us!”

“I really want to go downstairs and have a hot soup for the night...”

“Wait a minute, Zik, did you hear that? What's that sound?”

At the mention of it, the gnome named Zik suddenly perked up his ears and listened carefully.

He heard some slightly unusual ocean waves.

“Isn't it just the sound of slightly larger waves? Thor, did the sea breeze mess with your brain, giving you hallucinations?”

However, a gnome named Thor became somewhat alert. He adjusted the angle of the large high-intensity spotlight at his side, aiming it towards the direction of the unusual sound. What he witnessed was nothing short of horrifying.

At the far-reaching end of the spotlight's beam, on the northern side of the distant sea, a tsunami several tens of meters high and several kilometers wide was sweeping towards the gnome merchant ship.

Their pupils suddenly contracted. Thor, who reacted swiftly, promptly pressed the alarm button and used a loudspeaker to broadcast his voice to the others.

“Alert! Tsunami approaching from the north!”

“Alert! Tsunami approaching from the north !!!”

The shrill alarm echoed across the sea, instantly turning the previously calm gnome merchant ship into chaos. More than ten floodlights were turned on, illuminating the northern sea until the light was blocked by the tsunami.

“Oh my god, why is there no wind and rain, but such a huge tsunami suddenly appears!?”

“What should we do? With such a high tsunami, we’ll be swept into the sea!”

The gnomes panicked at the sight.

They had seen plenty of enemies, and dealing with them was as simple because they could use powerful cannons. But facing such a “natural disaster”, they were somewhat at a loss.

“Don’t panic!”

At this moment, a sharp voice sounded on the deck, and Ernesto’s figure appeared in the cockpit, calming down the panicked gnomes.

“Our ship’s propulsion is powerful enough. We can easily avoid the tsunami before it arrives!”

“Full speed ahead with power level five!”

With a swift command, the gnome merchant ship’s smokestack billowed out a thick plume of smoke, while the stern propellers spun into action, propelling the vessel swiftly forward.

At this speed, it was several times faster than the fastest wooden sail warships, and it was steadily accelerating.

In just a dozen seconds, they would be out of the path of the oncoming tsunami.

But before the gnomes could celebrate, they saw the tsunami slowly deviate from its original course and, by sheer chance, head in the direction where they were now. Moreover, it seemed to be accelerating again.

Helplessly, the gnome merchant ship accelerated once more, escaping from the tsunami before it arrived.

“That’s great, this way we can safely avoid the tsunami... Wait, what!?”

The gnomes stared in disbelief as if they had witnessed something unbelievable.

The tsunami, which was supposed to pass hundreds of meters away from the rear of the gnome merchant ship, suddenly changed direction and headed towards their stern.

Although the deviation was not significant, about thirty degrees, it was enough to make them question their sanity.

“This can’t be possible!”

Ernesto screamed, his eyes widened in disbelief. But he quickly realized what was happening.

Someone was targeting them!

At this point, there was not much time for contemplation. There was only a distance of two or three kilometers between them and the tsunami, not enough for the ship to escape.

Gritting his teeth, Ernesto shouted, “Activate the Gnomish Energy Shield immediately!”

“Yes!”

Almost instantly, a stream of blue energy surged from a concealed source on the ship. As it reached a position approximately ten meters above the lookout tower, it unfurled like liquid, slowly shaping itself into an inverted bowl that tightly cocooned the entire gnome merchant vessel, sealing it off from the outside air.

In the blink of an eye, the tsunami, carrying a mighty force, collided with the shield.

Boom!

Spray soared into the sky and rained down.

The tremendous impact threw the gnomes into disarray, leaving them dizzy and disoriented.

The gnomes crashed onto the deck, the ship’s hull, and blood spilled everywhere.

From the outside, it appeared as though the shield had been struck by a massive hammer, covered in cracks, but it had successfully blocked the tsunami’s attack.

Seeing this, the surviving gnomes cheered.

“Technology is power! Long live the Gnomish Energy Shield!”

“Long live Lord Ernesto!”

Ernesto, holding onto the railing, stood up and adjusted his tilted hat, relieved as he observed the situation outside.

However, before he could say anything, two more massive tsunamis suddenly surged from the distant sea, even larger than the initial one.

The tremendous impact from the first tsunami had temporarily robbed the gnome merchant ship of most of its power. Now, it could only move at a snail’s pace. Helplessly, they watched as the next two tsunamis struck the energy shield, one after the other.

Boom!

Crash!

Boom!

Two deafening impacts, accompanied by the sound of shattering glass, shattered the shield under the force of the third tsunami.

Billions of tons of seawater covered the entire gnome merchant ship, causing it to tilt to the left, with the sea nearly reaching the deck.

The gnomes on the deck were swept away in an instant, disappearing into the pitch-black sea.

The seawater crashed violently against the cockpit, and the colossal impact immediately shattered the specially fortified transparent glass on the right side. The shattered glass fragments resembled sharp blades, creating a tumultuous scene within the cockpit.

in an instant, blood and flesh splattered.

Fortunately, the gnome merchant ship's hull was made of metal and had undergone special reinforcement. Apart from severe damage to the structures above the deck, the keel and hull suffered little harm.

After the tsunami swept through, the ship wobbled unsteadily, revealing a chaotic deck.

"Damn it!"

Inside the cockpit, amidst the wreckage, Ernesto once again leaned against the wall, covering his bleeding forehead. He struggled to stand up.

When the shield broke from the tsunami's impact just moments before it struck, Ernesto had crouched down behind the wall, avoiding the glass shards. However, even with this precaution, he was still hit by the immense force, sending him crashing into the opposite wall, dazing him.

But inside the cockpit, apart from it, the rest of the gnomes were already beyond death.

At this moment, Ernesto's vision was blurred, and he felt dizzy and disoriented.

As his vision gradually cleared, he suddenly spotted figures walking on the distant sea surface, illuminated by the few remaining high-intensity lights.

Ernesto's eyes widened with anger as he tried to identify who was responsible for causing this catastrophe!

Chapter 268: Alchemy Death Cannon, Treasure Key

Fragments, Gloria

But what disappointed Ernesto immensely was that he didn't recognize this person at all.

As a gnome merchant who traded along the coasts and islands of the Mid-Ocean, he had made his fair share of enemies over the years, but few ever sought revenge.

Although Ernesto appeared greedy and cunning on the surface, he was clever enough to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

Powerful forces and races were not something he would provoke, and while they might find gnomes distasteful, they usually didn't stoop to seeking revenge due to the gnomes' significant influence.

As for those with low or middling power, they were often suppressed and dared not retaliate, enduring their losses in secret.

It could be said that gnomes occupied an ecological niche perfectly suited for their survival, showing respect to the powerful and looking down on the weak, living quite comfortably.

No matter how Ernesto racked his brain, he couldn't recall when he had offended such a formidable figure.

The person before him was an old man, hunched and with a weathered appearance. The wrinkles on his face outnumbered those of a gnome, and he wore a luxurious velvet robe. In his hand, he held a gem-studded staff, and a profound magical energy surrounded him.

A single glance revealed him as a formidable individual.

Ernesto's expression shifted rapidly, from anger to astonishment, and finally to respect. It took less than three seconds.

Ignoring the wailing gnomes and the chaos all around, he hurried to the deck, his expression full of reverence as he gave a distant salute to the old man.

"Esteemed lord, may I ask why you suddenly attacked us? There doesn't appear to be any enmity between us."

However, the old man did not respond or move, but his murky eyes deliberately and unintentionally fixed on Ernesto, exerting immense pressure on him.

After a long while, the old man finally spoke, his hoarse voice clearly audible.

"Oh? Are you sure?"

Ernesto was momentarily stunned. He had an excellent memory and was certain he had never encountered this powerful individual, let alone offended him.

Wiping the sweat from his forehead, he forced a smile. "I'm certain I've never met you, sir. Could you be mistaken?"

As he watched Ernesto's forced smile, the old man, in his heart, couldn't help but chuckle.

This old man was none other than Ji Chen. Shortly after dispatching the Lobster Knights to track Ernesto, he had followed closely behind. It wasn't until the gnome merchant ship had left the Stormy Sea and moved far away from the Crown of the Ocean that he revealed himself.

This appearance of the old man was naturally the ability of the 7-star artifact, the Illusory Mask.

The Illusory Mask's skill of disguise allowed Ji Chen to completely alter his physique, appearance, voice, and more, essentially transforming him into a completely different person.

For the sake of better action, Ji Chen had deliberately disguised himself as a formidable old man, and the effect was ideal. It immediately frightened Ernesto.

With a single word, his unique hoarse voice rang out.

"I don't think I've made a mistake. Do you remember what you did before? For the sake of profit, you actually killed my descendants."

Ji Chen intentionally spoke vaguely.

Sure enough, upon hearing these words, Ernesto was instantly stunned. His face turned ugly, as he struggled to recall how many people he had killed for the sake of profit.

Naturally, he took the old man as an elder of one of those victims, seeking revenge.

Damn it!

It never expected those lowly mudfoots to have such a powerful protector. Its luck is truly terrible!

With this thought, Ernesto's expression became even more respectful, and he lowered his posture.

"Esteemed strong one, please allow me to explain."

"Oh? Is there anything to explain?" Ji Chen remained unperturbed, appearing quite confident, as if he had everything under control.

Seeing this, Ernesto became even more convinced. He flattered, "I deeply regret what happened and feel immensely guilty. However, once someone dies, they cannot be resurrected. Even if you were to kill me, it wouldn't bring your descendants back to life.

Moreover, killing me would inevitably make you the target of some vengeful gnomes. So, killing me yields the lowest benefit.

So, you might as well spare my life. I'm willing to compensate for my recklessness and cleanse my sins."

"Oh?" Ji Chen's face displayed a thoughtful expression as if he were pondering this proposition.

But in his heart, he was laughing.

This was just what he wanted.

Directly killing Ernesto was, in fact, the least profitable option.

As long as he could maintain his disguise perfectly, he could make this greedy gnome return everything, with interest, and perhaps even gain more.

"You make some sense. Although the one you killed among my thousands of descendants was nothing remarkable, it did tarnish my reputation, and for that, punishment is necessary.

I've heard that gnomes are skilled in trade and possess quite a few valuable items. If you can present something that satisfies me and redeems your wrongdoing, sparing your life won't be a big deal."

Upon hearing this, Ernesto felt a glimmer of hope and quickly nodded.

"I will not disappoint you, esteemed sir! I guarantee your satisfaction!"

"Hurry and hoist up Cargo Crate Number 7!"

Externally, the gnome merchant ship appeared to be in poor condition, but the internal damage wasn't as extensive as it appeared. Surprisingly, the hoist and cargo holds were still operating efficiently, showcasing the prowess of gnome technology.

The ship's structure, though battered in appearance, was relatively intact, and even the sturdier cargo crates had only suffered superficial damage.

Once Cargo Crate Number 7 was hoisted up, Ernesto promptly opened it, hesitated briefly, and then used a key to unlock the right side of the first row of cabinets..

Chapter 269: Alchemy Death Cannon, Treasure Key

Fragments, Gloria (2)

He took out a beautifully crafted parchment and held it with both hands, presenting it.

“Lord, this is a five-star blueprint for a building. Please take a look.”

Upon hearing this, Ji Chen’s interest was piqued, and he slightly raised his staff.

The parchment floated up and drifted in front of him.

[Building Blueprint: Alchemy Death Cannon]

[Level]: Five Stars

[Effect]: Can launch alchemical shells, inflicting massive explosive damage to enemies.

[Required Resources for Construction]: 30,000 units of iron, 10,000 units of crystal, 10,000 units of mithril, 10,000 units of gold.

[Occupied Area]: 30x30x75

[Attack Range]: 100-5000 meters

[Explosion Range]: Radius of 75-100 meters

Well, that’s quite something.

Compared to the Elemental Arrow Tower, which was also a five-star building, it was no less impressive. It even excelled in attack and damage range.

“Hmm, not bad,” Ji Chen said lightly, placing the blueprint in his bag and then back into his backpack. “Is there anything else?”

Ernesto’s expression gradually froze.

He instantly understood that Ji Chen wanted more.

In his heart, he cursed the greedy fellow. Wasn’t a five-star blueprint enough?

But after all, his life was in someone else’s hands, so he had to force a smile.

“Ahem, of course, there’s more.”

Ernesto turned around, trembling hands unlocking the first row on the right with a key.

He took out a gigantic golden crystal, the size of a human head.

“Ahem, this is an energy gem produced in the Dosantos Mines of the Western Continent. An ordinary energy gem the size of half a fist can provide energy consumption for a gnome merchant ship for several months. This exceptionally large energy gem can even match the value of several ordinary cargo-laden merchant

ships as an energy hub for an alchemical workshop.” Ji Chen raised an eyebrow in slight surprise, taking the energy gem as well.

Sensing the immense energy within it, he nodded in satisfaction.

“Not bad.”

He put it into his bag, then looked back at Ernesto, his message clear: What else?

Seeing this, the greedy gnome couldn’t help but feel angry.

Was it fair to bully a gnome like this?

A five-star building blueprint and a massive energy gem weren’t enough to satisfy this old man’s appetite!

He was greedier than the gnome himself!

Finally, Ernesto couldn’t help but speak out, “Lord, I believe these two items are enough to compensate for your loss. You see…”

“Do you really think my reputation is only worth these two measly items?”

Gnomish mother fucker!

How can you call it junk when you’re so earnestly tucking it away like this?

Even though Ernesto had done it countless times before, it couldn’t help but silently curse Ji Chen’s shamelessness and thick skin.

“Of course not, I’m willing to compensate you with more. Please, don’t be angry.”

Ernesto turned away with a mournful expression and directly opened the remaining two cabinets in crate number seven, taking out the last two items.

One was the recruitment core for the Tyrant Azure Dragon, and the other was a metal fragment that seemed unremarkable.

This aroused Ji Chen’s curiosity. Among the other three items – the five-star building blueprint, the energy gem, and the Tier Five military recruitment core all of which were highly valuable, what made this fragment deserving of a place alongside them in crate number seven?

[Gloria Elf Treasury Key Fragment]

[Level]: Special

[Description]: Collect seven key fragments to form a complete key that can open the doors of the Gloria Elf Treasury.

The Gloria Elf Treasury key fragments?

He was utterly perplexed.

Perhaps seeing Ji Chen’s confusion, the greedy gnome merchant seemed resigned, gritting his teeth.

“Lord, if you’re willing to stop after taking these four items, I’ll tell you about this key fragment!”

Ji Chen squinted his eyes, contemplating.

He spoke slowly, "Alright, as long as you provide me with this information, I, under the name of Gaspar Nunez, guarantee that I will cease my demands." Hearing this, Ernesto's heart filled with joy. Strong individuals cared greatly about their reputations. If he guaranteed it in his own name, it should be genuine.

He nodded vigorously, trying to access his memories as he said, "I acquired this key fragment when I was traveling as a merchant in the Northern Continent. I unknowingly purchased it from a destitute human noble's son. That gambling-addicted human noble sold it to me for a mere five gold coins, unaware that he was selling the qualification to enter an elf treasury!

According to ancient texts, Gloria was an ancient elf city, one of the three major cities of the ancient elves during the era of intertribal competition tens of thousands of years ago. It can be considered one of the origins of the present-day elf race.

But this ancient elf city has long since declined due to wars and other reasons, fading into the mists of time, leaving no trace. Even the current elf race might not be able to find it.

As one of the three major cities, even though it's lost, it still contains some ancient alchemical techniques, rare elven treasures, and immovable strategic facilities from ancient times," Ernesto said, a hint of greed flashing in his eyes. "Moreover, according to records, Gloria still has an extremely well-preserved elven treasury, containing countless strategic resources. It's rumored that whoever obtains the strategic resources inside this treasury can create an empire out of thin air, armed with millions of soldiers, and dominate the continent.

Therefore, possessing a key fragment like this is equivalent to having the qualification to enter the treasury, and its value is immeasurable." Is there really such a thing?

The ability to arm millions of soldiers and even establish an empire? How terrifying must the quantity of resources inside that treasury be?

As he pondered, Ji Chen's thoughts began to wander.

But he quickly snapped back to reality.

"If what you're saying is true, why don't you go open it yourself?"

At these words, Ernesto looked embarrassed and stammered, "Since this elven city has been lost, no one knows where it is. Even the descendants of the ancient elves, the current elven race, can't find it, let alone other races.

Moreover, opening the treasury requires seven key fragments. One of them is in my possession, two are known to be in the hands of the elves, one is with the dwarves, and one sank into the Western Central Ocean decades ago.

As for the remaining two fragments, there's still no information about them. They're probably buried in some corner of this world.

And if the elven race found out that I had one of the key fragments, they would send armies to hunt me down," Ernesto said hesitantly, feeling much relieved.

Although he felt a bit reluctant, he had finally parted with the hot potato.

Upon hearing this, Ji Chen's expression darkened. Wouldn't the elves come after him too if they found out?

But then he realized that he currently looked like an old man named Gaspar Nunez. What did that have to do with him, Ji Chen?

No problem, but for the sake of keeping the information confidential and ensuring one hundred percent security, he would have to deal with the individuals who knew about this information...

Ernesto looked at Ji Chen, who had no expression on his face, and cautiously asked, "Lord, I've told you everything I know. Can we go now?"

Ji Chen smiled faintly. "Of course, I am a man of my word. If I say I'll let you go, then you're free to leave."

"Thankyou, sir!"

"Anyone who's still alive, return to your positions, power up the energy engines to the maximum, and leave at full speed!"

The gnomish merchant ship once again emitted wisps of white smoke and sped away as if it wanted to install two more propellers.

Ji Chen remained in place, watching the gnomish merchant ship grow smaller and smaller as it sailed away. A cold smile crossed his lips..

Chapter 270: Backstabbing, Successful Ship Hijacking,

Mysterious Slaves

On the gnome merchant ship, Ernesto frequently looked back, seeing Ji Chen's figure still standing in place, showing no intention to chase. He breathed a sigh of relief, wiping the cold sweat from his forehead.

Having escaped from danger, amidst the feeling of fortunate relief, it couldn't help but start to feel a heartache. Looking at the now empty cargo hold number 7 was enough to bring tears to his eyes.

Besides the loss of cargo, the gnome merchant ship had also suffered significant damage in the recent attack. Repairing it would be quite an expense.

Adding to that the compensation for the deceased gnomes, the overall losses this time amounted to at least a million gold coins, nearly emptying his pockets of the earnings he had cunningly accumulated over the past few years. These years of toil seemed to have been in vain!

Thinking about this, Ernesto couldn't help but feel resentful. If it weren't for the sudden appearance of that old guy named Gaspar Nunez just now, he wouldn't be in this predicament.

He knew he wouldn't dare to seek revenge, but venting a few curses wouldn't hurt.

Suddenly, an evil thought crossed Ernesto's mind, and a sinister smile appeared on his face.

Since the key fragments of Gloria Elf Treasury were now in Gaspar Nunez's possession, deliberately spreading this information would surely drive the elves into a frenzy.

No matter how powerful Gaspar was, he couldn't be stronger than the entire elf race. Even if he didn't die, he would undoubtedly suffer a significant setback.

Though it wouldn't compensate for his lost gold coins, at least he could take some satisfaction in this revenge.

With this thought in mind, Ernesto made up his mind.

As soon as he returned to Gigantooth City, he would secretly put this plan into action.

No one could provoke gnomes and get away unscathed!

Just as he was imagining...

At that moment, a loud roar came from the stern of the ship, and the gnome merchant ship, which had been sailing at full speed, suddenly slowed down, coming to an abrupt halt. The sudden stop made Ernesto curse loudly.

"Damn it, you idiots, did you break the ship!? If you did, I'll sell you all, and it still won't cover the cost!"

Soon, a gnome sailor rushed in and reported, "Lord Consul, two of the three propellers at the stern have stopped rotating. Currently, the ship's power has decreased by 70%. It's likely a malfunction caused by the recent attack." "Likely? I don't need 'likely'. Go and inspect it immediately, find out the exact cause, and report back to me immediately!"

"Yes!"

Watching the gnome sailor rush off, Ernesto couldn't help but feel a sense of unease.

Twenty minutes later, the gnome sailor returned. "Those two propellers are completely damaged and cannot be used anymore. We can only repair them once we return to the harbor. Right now, we can only activate two backup small propellers, which can resume at most one-third of our power."

Upon hearing this, Ernesto erupted in anger.

"Damn it, those gnomish mother fuckers! How could there be a problem at a time like this? This is just bad luck!

Then immediately activate the backup propellers and head back as soon as possible!"

"Yes!"

"Wait!" Ernesto stopped the gnome sailor and thought for a moment before adding. "Raise the alert level on the entire ship, and tell all the surviving gnomes to stay alert!"

Instinctively, Ernesto sensed that something was amiss, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it.

Looking through a drafty window frame at the pitch-black sea outside, a sense of unease washed over him.

The alchemical cannons that had once been his pride and joy couldn't provide any sense of security in this pitch-black sea that didn't allow a hint of light to penetrate. It seemed like a giant maw of a beast ready to swallow them whole. In the abyss-like darkness, the gnome merchant ship sailed

slowly on the sea. The remaining few headlights anxiously scanned the surroundings, while the gnome sailor on the lookout tower stared wide-eyed at their surroundings.

However, the lights and their gazes could only survey the surface of the sea, unable to penetrate beneath it.

Inside the gnome merchant ship, the sonar detection room suddenly blared with a shrill alarm.

“Warning! There are numerous unidentified objects approaching from below the water! Suspected enemy!”

“They’re moving fast and are less than five kilometers away from us!”

This news quickly reached the control room.

“What? Are you sure you didn’t make a mistake?” Ernesto, who had felt that something was amiss all along, jumped up from his chair and questioned.

“Esteemed Consul, we’re certain there’s no mistake. These rapidly approaching unidentified objects are highly organized and in a tight formation. They’re definitely not ordinary sea creatures or schools of fish. There’s a sense of order to them!

Their numbers reach into the thousands, densely packed around us. Our propulsion is damaged, and we can’t break free from their encirclement in time!” The gnome sailor panicked.

“Damn it, I knew something bad would happen!” Ernesto raged. “Immediately activate the main cannons, secondary cannons, and the deep-sea alchemical bombs! Fire as soon as they get close, and blow those damn things to smithereens!”

“Let them know the might of gnome technology!”

“Yes, sir!”

Soon, on the deck, four excessively large-caliber main cannons slowly rotated on their mounts. Simultaneously, the sturdy barrels began to elevate.

After adjusting all the firing parameters, with a puff of white smoke and a burst of flames, alchemical shells shot out from the barrels, tracing graceful arcs in the air as they headed towards the approaching threat in the distance..