

Village Head 1021

Chapter 1021: Paradise's Plans

Upon hearing Greroth's response, Orion felt even more disappointed. It seemed that the divine beings were indeed in hiding. As for why they had taken such actions, there was only one possible conclusion Orion could fathom: the Vylkr spawns.

Considering the strength the Vylkr spawns had displayed against Aegis of the Arctic Deity, it wasn't challenging to entertain the idea that there might be more out there with enmity against the gods and other divine beings.

Nonetheless, they were fortunate that the only divine being they had encountered had fled, while the others had chosen not to approach this place yet for reasons unknown. It was a tricky situation that he had to handle with care.

"How long would it take to reach the Wandering Wolf Borough Runaway City?" Orion asked.

"Five months," Greroth responded.

"That far?" Orion asked, his brows raised in surprise. He knew that Patriarch Rylan and the Four-eared Elves had taken eight months to reach their location.

Still, he had suspected that was because they had travelled along the riverside and faced numerous Vylkr vines, making the journey long and treacherous. He had never expected it to take five months to reach the Wandering Wolf Borough Runaway City.

Greroth nodded, "Are you also interested in attacking the Wandering Wolf Borough Runaway City?" He asked, curious.

He wondered whether Orion also wanted to retaliate against the Wandering Wolf Borough Runaway City for their actions. Although it seems unreasonable since no one knew their existence, he knew he wasn't in a good position to offer his own input, so he held his words back.

"No, there's no need to fight. Since the Wandering Wolf Borough Runaway City is in such a desperate corner and needs the Divine Artefact, we'll deliver it to them to establish a good relationship," Orion responded.

"Are you just going to hand over the Divine Artefact like that?" Greroth frowned.

He could sense that there was more meaning behind the masked man's words, but he couldn't grasp what it was. However, one thing he could vaguely ascertain was that they possessed the same prowess as a Grade Two Runaway City.

As for whether they would be willing to hand over the Divine Artefact to someone else, that was something he heavily doubted.

Orion nodded. "We are not lacking in artefacts and have no use for this one in particular, so we don't see any reason not to utilize it in such a way, especially since they need it much more than we do," he responded calmly.

Greroth was stunned. He couldn't believe what he had just heard. Who could let go of a Divine Artefact just like that?

Unless they weren't thinking clearly enough to understand that a Divine Artefact was worth more than any relationship, Greroth could only conclude that they were insane.

Even if they weren't using it, wasn't it a much better decision to lock it up for future use? Nonetheless, a thought suddenly emerged in his mind.

"If this is what you have in mind, then why don't the Trekking Flamingo Runaway City help you accomplish this? The Wandering Wolf Borough Runaway City wouldn't take kindly to your approach, regardless of your intentions," Greroth responded agitatedly.

Even though he had lost his limbs and understood that he wouldn't live much longer, his foremost concern was to guarantee the future of the Trekking Flamingo Runaway City. As such, he couldn't help but see this as an opportunity to handle such a task.

"Why should we trust you with such an important matter?" Seth snorted.

He knew Orion's plan and agreed with it. Since they couldn't gain information about the divine beings, it meant they were about to enter deep waters. They had every reason to be cautious and focus on making alliances, not enemies.

Greroth remained silent. He didn't have any way to guarantee that he would remain truthful to his words and not turn against them. He closed his eyes and said, "Although I am ready to face my end, I'll do whatever it takes to ensure that the Trekking Flamingo Runaway City is safe and able to ascend into a Grade Two Runaway City. So, even if you don't trust me, I hope you can at least spare the inhabitants and instead utilize them to fulfil Paradise's desires."

Although he didn't know what Paradise's plan was, he could tell from the eagerness of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City and the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City to wage war against them that submitting to Paradise would have its benefits.

Moreover, he doubted that the Wandering Wolf Borough Runaway City would keep true to their words and help them after this event.

It was the only way forward he could think of; at least he would be able to ensure that the legacy of the Trekking Flamingo Runaway City didn't end with his reign.

"I'll reconsider sparing the lives of its inhabitants since it won't be wise to recklessly exterminate such a force when they can offer other uses. However, the Trekking Flamingo Runaway City leaders will be stripped of their positions, and it will no longer be the Runaway City you know. But, one that belongs to Paradise," Orion responded.

He had merely said those words previously to threaten Greroth, which had succeeded. He naturally had plans for the Trekking Flamingo Runaway City since they would help Paradise achieve more than the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise and Sleeping Fox Runaway City could accomplish.

The less that is known about Paradise's strength, the better. So, the last line of defence, should they encounter any formidable enemy, should be Paradise itself, and the first should be the Runaway Cities under their control.

Greroth opened his lips to speak but then slowly sealed them and nodded. "Thank you."

"Based on the Trekking Flamingo Runaway City performance, we will reconsider restoring you to your previous condition. For now, you'll remain here until further notice," Orion said, standing up from his seat.

"That concludes our meeting," he added before turning around and walking out of the room, with Seth following behind him.

It was only after the door's closing reverberated through the room that Greroth regained his composure with a complex mix of emotions in his gaze.

Chapter 1022: Paradise Representatives

"Will goddess Ilse truly be able to replicate the divine artefact?" Seth asked.

This was one of the most crucial details for Orion's plan to succeed. He knew Orion was trying to build a good relationship with Ilse to persuade her to stay in Paradise. He was slightly worried about the effort involved, fearing the plan might fail and render their efforts useless.

"She will," Orion responded, his tone confident. How can she continue to call herself a goddess if she can't? It will work depending on whether they have a god or someone skilled enough to confirm its authenticity. If that's the case, we can gauge the kind of force we're dealing with, which will benefit us regardless. We can proceed as planned if they can't distinguish the original from the replica."

A look of realization emerged on Seth's face as he nodded in understanding. Their conversation fell silent as they descended the stairs, passing through various building sections until they exited.

When they arrived outside, they noticed several individuals gathered: the Pixies, High Prince Alden and High Princess Morgana, Prince Delmy and Princess Lemy, the Prismerions, former clan leader Olivia Quarwraith, and Jadues Quarwraith, Ralias Prismaflow and Dialia Prismaflow, each accompanied by a Vylkr warrior standing within the defensive line.

Several pieces of luggage containing their belongings were by their sides as they prepared to venture into the outside world to fulfil the tasks given to them by the Key Leaders of Paradise and resume their roles within the Runaway Cities.

"Are all of you prepared?" Orion asked, his gaze sweeping across the individuals before him. They all nodded readily in response.

Orion gestured for them to follow as he rose and ascended into the sky. They had all been taught the flying technique months before, so he needed to witness how far they had progressed. It was a life-saving technique that would make him feel more secure about their safety.

Seth and the Vylkr warriors followed closely behind Orion, ascending into the sky alongside the Pixies. The Prismerions exchanged glances, gritted their teeth, and, despite some difficulty, grabbed their luggage and began their ascent, determined to catch up with the others.

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Upon arriving at the Sleeping Fox Runaway City, Orion and the others descended onto the tower.

Lakul and the Sleeping Fox Runaway City leaders stepped forward to greet them. They bowed respectfully before straightening their postures.

Orion nodded, then gestured for High Prince Alden and the Pixies to step forward. "They will be your leaders. High Prince Alden will be the Supreme Leader of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City. High Princess Morgana will become the Supreme Chief of Commerce and the Market Burrows. Prince Delmy will take over as Supreme Master of Natural Resources, and Princess Lemy will become the Supreme Chief of Diplomacy and Envoy."

"Once they settle in, the next batch of leaders will replace the remaining positions. I expect you to teach them how to govern the Sleeping Fox Runaway City without any mistakes. If they fail, it will mean that the Sleeping Fox Runaway City is not worth Paradise's resources, and we will have to find its worth-none of which will include a future for the city itself," Orion explained.

Hearing his words, everyone present understood the underlying meaning. They would be fools unworthy of their positions not to.

"I swear to do my best to train them to handle the Sleeping Fox Runaway City with ease," Lakul said, nodding his head seriously.

He was already grateful they hadn't killed him and taken control directly, which would have been the best course of action to ensure no lingering danger during their reign. This decision showcased Paradise's confidence in handling emerging issues, viewing them as a force under their control rather than a waste of time.

Lakul had repeatedly witnessed Paradise's overwhelming power and had already decided to serve faithfully, seeing this as a blessing in disguise.

"What are you still standing there for? Show them where they will be staying," Lakul commanded, directing his gaze towards the guards surrounding them.

Eight guards immediately stepped forward and quickly escorted High Prince Alden and the others to the rooms where they would reside.

As all this transpired, the Sleeping Fox Runaway City leaders couldn't help but linger their gazes on the unknown races they had never seen or heard of. They acknowledged their ignorance, knowing they lacked information about several Runaway Cities. Nevertheless, it served as an eye-opener, providing a glimpse into Paradise.

Another thing that piqued their interest was the slender, slick bracelets on the warriors' wrists, resembling the Devourer Bracelet. Along with these, the oversized, bulging weapons strapped to their backs and waists intrigued them. They had their own ideas about what these items could be, but none were brave enough to ask, so they kept their lips sealed, only stealing brief glances.

They were sure Lakul had also noticed these strange sights but had chosen to remain silent.

"Wait, now that you're here, why don't I use this opportunity to give you a tour of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City? I know you're busy, and such an opportunity might not come again for me to personally show you around," Lakul said with a smile, observing that they were about to leave.

Even if he understood that he was probably wasting his time, he could only hope to help build familiarity between the Sleeping Fox Runaway City and Paradise's authorities. The only way to accomplish this was to create shared memories.

He also knew that the Wanderlust Traveling Tortoise Runaway City would likely be planning something similar, so trying it wasn't a bad idea.

Unfortunately, Lakul could not see behind their mask; otherwise, he would have noticed the subtle glint of anticipation in their eyes when he spoke.

Orion was about to refuse but held back his words. He had planned to secretly return to the Runaway Cities and look at each one himself for the safety of the future leaders and his own

personal interest. Still, getting a tour of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City wasn't a bad idea to become familiar with it.

As silence permeated the atmosphere, Lakul remained silent, his smile strained. He waited for Orion's response, beads of sweat gathering on his forehead.

This was the first time he felt his existence depended on giving a tour of the Runaway City.

Orion nodded, breaking the silence. "Okay. We can use this opportunity to look around the Sleeping Fox Runaway City before we leave."

Lakul's expression immediately brightened, "Follow me; I'll lead the way," he said, walking toward a platform at the tower's entrance that would take them down. Three gods' chosen accompanied him.

Orion and the others followed, arriving at the platform. It was wide enough to accommodate all fourteen of them. Once everyone was on board, the platform descended automatically, passing through several levels within the tower until it reached the Royal Den, the head of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City.

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Lakul guided Orion and the others through the Sleeping Fox Runaway City, starting from the neck and upper regions, where nobles, high-ranking families, and influential individuals resided. They then moved to the market burrows located at the chest and forearms-this area served as the Runaway City's economic heart.

Next, they explored the Communal Warrens at the back, divided into upper, middle, and lower sections. The upper warren housed the wealthiest residents, while the lower warren, with its dilapidated conditions, resembled a slum the deeper one ventured.

Continuing their tour, they visited the Bastion located at the legs. This area served as the city's defence zone, armoury, primary training ground, and others housing many of the gods' chosen. It was also the most fortified location after the Royal Den.

As they ascended back upwards, they passed through the underbelly-an underground network used for discreet movement between areas. The abdomen, the most crucial part of the Sleeping Fox

Runaway City, was responsible for its maintenance and functionality. Among the locations they visited, Orion marked the abdomen for a later visit to better understand its inner workings.

The Tail, also known as the Sky Spire, served as a high vantage point apart from the Ears, providing a sweeping view of the surrounding environment. It also housed most of the gods'

chosen residents.

Lakul spent five and a half hours guiding them through the Sleeping Fox Runaway City, focusing on the most prominent areas. He knew giving a complete tour in just a day or two was impossible, but he was satisfied with the brief overview.

"Whenever you're free and want a closer look at the forge palace, I'll ensure you get a detailed tour," Lakul offered sternly. Despite the Supreme Leader of Paradise's varied questions about each location, most inquiries centred on the forge palace.

Lakul wasn't surprised-it controlled the very structure of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City, making it a natural point of interest for anyone eager to uncover its secrets.

Chapter 1023: Increased Resources, Devouts!

Orion nodded in understanding. While not entirely satisfying his curiosity, the tour had piqued it further. He was deeply intrigued by the area's existence and eager to determine if they could create their own Runaway City in the future.

Orion made it a personal mission to return when he was free of his schedules to delve deeper into it, along with the other three Runaway Cities under their forces.

They were just as interesting as the inhabitants living within them.

"Why is this area so bleak? Is there something wrong?" Orion's gaze swept the Market burrow, the supposed bustling heart of the Runaway City. Instead, it lay nearly deserted. Various races, from the dominant Sloth Demons and Foxkins to Nimvires and other minor races, walked around with looks of despair on their faces.

Some of them even appeared weak and cast curious glances in their direction as they walked by.

Hearing Orion's question, Lakul smiled wryly. "It's been several months since we last traded for resources. Recent events and the war have left us with no choice but to divert our resources towards the gods' chosens, and other necessary areas, leaving little remaining for the denizens," he explained.

Although he had planned for this journey, all the events that had transpired since they stepped into this territory had left them continuously depleting their resources until there was barely any left for the Sleeping Fox Runaway City denizens.

Orion immediately furrowed his brows, remembering that he hadn't yet given the orders to distribute the harvest from Paradise to the Runaway Cities below.

"Ahem! If that's the case, you don't have to worry. I'll ensure the resources are delivered to the Sleeping Fox Runaway City to stop the crisis from escalating. If anything else needs to be handled, report it to your new leaders, and they will take care of the rest," Orion responded.

There was no need to reveal that he had already allocated resources for them, having foreseen an event like this. Instead, he would use this situation to display Paradise's magnanimity. "Thank you, Supreme Leader," Lakul said, bowing deeply and sighing in relief. He had feared that Paradise would weaponize this situation against them, but his concerns appeared unfounded. This realization elevated Paradise's image in his eyes once more.

"There's no need for thanks," Orion responded sternly. "The Sleeping Fox Runaway City is now part of our forces, so we will do whatever we can to take care of it as long as it remains useful."

Lakul nodded, his expression filled with gratitude.

"THIEF, STOP HIM!!" a voice suddenly resonated across the atmosphere.

Orion, Lakul, and the others turned their attention toward the commotion, their eyes fixed on the unfolding scene.

A man from the fox-kin race, dressed in torn rags, clutched a slab of meat. He was being chased by an older fox-kin man and a Nimvire man, who quickly outpaced the older man and tackled the thief to the ground.

Bam!

"I've finally caught you today. I'll make sure the patrolling guards lock you up and end your menacing of our district," the Nimvire said, eyes full of rage as he securely held the thief. He raised his fist and sent it crashing down onto the man's face, knocking out a tooth.

From the looks of it, the Nimvire appeared to be a warrior, while the fox-kin below him possessed some strength but was still unable to protect himself from the onslaught, showcasing his relative weakness. Soon, the older man arrived, took the slab of meat into his arms, and kicked the man on the ground.

The entire scene, combined with the scent of rusty metal that filled the air, gave Orion a brief understanding of the harsh life within the Sleeping Fox Runaway City.

"What are you waiting for? Stop this nonsense!" Lakul turned toward the guards accompanying them and screamed.

Although the poor conditions in Sleeping Fox Runaway City were known, they did not want to show such a scene to their esteemed guests.

Two of the gods' chosens immediately dashed toward the unfolding chaos. They quickly pinned down the thief and the man while another held onto the older man, lifting him into the air and causing the slab of meat to fall to the metallic ground.

"Wait! Please stop! We didn't do anything wrong! This thief has been terrorizing us! He's the cause of this mess!" the old man screamed at the top of his lungs, his eyes widening with fear as he recognized the individual who had just grabbed him.

A gods' chosen!

The two other men were also filled with fear. Immobilized on the ground, they were unable to speak. They sensed the approaching figures and looked in their direction, causing their expressions to pale in fright even further.

"Send them to the dungeon and lock them up for three years-make it five before releasing them," Lakul ordered angrily, then redirected his attention to Orion. "I'm deeply sorry that you had to witness such a barbaric sight, Supreme Leader. Allow me to lead you back to the Royal Den before you leave," he said, his expression strained as he patiently waited for a response.

This wasn't the kind of shared memory he wanted to create for them!

Orion, however, shifted his attention to the two gods' chosen taking the men away. "Hold up, there's no need to send them to the dungeon," he said, then redirected his gaze to Lakul, who looked confused by his actions.

Although their presence had already drawn a few curious gazes from the stalls and shops around them, onlookers were watching from a distance, not daring to approach. With the appearance of the gods' chosen and the unfolding scene, the crowd gradually increased, with each person observing intently.

The two gods' chosen loosened their grip on the men. However, rather than running away, the men prostrated on the metallic ground, their foreheads pressed against it. They didn't dare run, fearing their actions might anger the formidable individuals before them, leading to even more severe punishment.

"Supreme Leader-"Lakul began, sweat beads forming on his forehead as he fixed a trembling gaze on the masked figure. Before he could finish, Orion raised his hand, immediately silencing him.

Without acknowledging Lakul further, Orion stepped forward, rising to a point where everyone could see him clearly.

A significant part of their strategy was capturing the Runaway Cities and integrating their denizens, ensuring they would willingly work for the good of Paradise. Now that he was here, Orion saw this as a golden opportunity.

Clearing his throat, Orion's voice resonated through the crowd. "Denizens of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City, I see your suffering and understand your pain. You have been abandoned, left to fend for yourselves in this ruined world with leaders who have failed you!" His voice

boomed, capturing the attention of everyone present.

He continued, introducing himself, "I am the Supreme Leader of Paradise, the force now shaping the fate and destiny of this Runaway City—and of you. In Paradise, there is no hunger, no suffering, no fear. I have come to extend this grace to you. From this day forward, devout yourself to Paradise;

you shall want for nothing! However, to receive these promises, you must pledge yourselves to Paradise-heart, soul, and body."

As Orion concluded, his gaze swept over the crowd, absorbing their reactions. Though he might have exaggerated slightly, the core of his message was true. By dedicating themselves to Paradise and demonstrating their willingness to support its plans for the Sleeping Fox Runaway City, they would escape their former hardships and enjoy a dramatically improved

way of life.

Lakul, initially struck by fear from the Supreme Leader's commanding presence, stood frozen as though hit by a bolt of lightning. His hands clenched into tight fists, veins bulging, before he finally released them, his shoulders slumping in resignation.

He had already surrendered his authority and everything else, rendering him no different from the denizens of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City in the eyes of Paradise. What more could

he do?

Lakul knew that Orion's words were aimed at him as well:

'Devote yourself to Paradise, and you shall never want again!'

The words echoed repeatedly in his defeated mind, slowly dispelling his despair.

Yet, after a few moments, several voices of disagreement cut through the silence.

"I heard that the war was ordered by Paradise, so you're the one responsible for my son's death!" an elderly woman cried out from atop a building behind a stall. Her voice, laced with fury, echoed through the streets. "He had two wives and six children. Now he's gone, and both his wives are in a coma! How are you going to fix this? Can you bring my son back to life?" Her eyes, burning with a mix of grief and rage, locked onto the figure of the inky black-masked man from a distance.

"My friend works with the resource management team," a middle-aged man with a gaunt frame shouted, his voice trembling with indignation. "He told me that all our resources have been steadily

depleting due to the various phenomena created by Paradise! I doubted him at first, but now you're here, asking us to devote ourselves to Paradise! How shameless can you

be?"

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His emaciated form, with faint lines of his bones showing through his clothes, only heightened the intensity of his accusation.

"You are the cause of our problems! Why should we trust you?" shouted a young woman clutching her child tightly, rage etched across her face.

As the voices of disapproval rose, others joined in, their distrust and anger boiling to the surface.

However, amid all this, Orion remained calm. He waited until they had finished voicing their complaints before raising his right hand, signalling for silence. The crowd slowly quieted down.

They knew they didn't have the strength to confront the individual before them directly, especially with the presence of the gods' chosen beside him. Reluctantly, they swallowed back their words and listened to what he had to say.

"I understand your doubts and know that trust is not given easily, so I will not ask for it lightly. However, you must understand this: the Sleeping Fox Runaway City intruded upon Paradise's territory uninvited, daring to covet those under our protection. You can all still stand here today because of our mercy and patience. Had we chosen to act without restraint, you would have been wiped away from existence!" Orion announced.

Hearing Orion's words, the crowd immediately grew pale. Those who had spoken took steps backwards, attempting to flee, fearing they had brought unquenchable wrath upon themselves. However, his following words caused them to halt.

"However, that is not the path we choose to take. Instead, we offer you a chance at a better life, not because we have to, but because I believe in the potential of every soul present. We can transform the Sleeping Fox Runaway City into something far greater than its present state, but only if you stand with us!" Orion declared.

"In two days, Paradise will replenish the resources of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City, and you will see that my words are not empty promises. However, if you still do not accept my offer with open arms, the resources given to you will be wasted. Should that happen, the next time you see me, it will be with a sword in my hand."

After finishing his speech, Orion turned and walked toward the prostrating men. He picked up the slab of meat and looked at the man who had stolen it.

"Raise your head," Orion ordered. He had no doubt that his actions would help Paradise's representatives settle into the Sleeping Fox Runaway City, so he was determined to see it through.

Sensing that the mysterious masked figure was speaking to him, the man slowly lifted his trembling form from the ground, his ears drooping low, as he raised his head toward the formidable individual before him. To his surprise, the slab of meat was tossed his way. Instinctively, he caught it and looked upwards with a stunned expression.

"You live in hardship, fear, and uncertainty throughout your life. If you can abandon your worries and everything else and believe in Paradise. I promise you that this is nothing but a speck of dust compared to the abundance of glory that awaits you ahead," Orion said, his voice firm.

Though the man could not see through Orion's mask, his words left him rooted in his position. His hands unconsciously let go of the slab of meat as he stared wide-eyed at Orion.

Bang!

He immediately smashed his head against the rough metallic ground. "If everything you've said is true, I want to follow Paradise! Please, Supreme Leader of Paradise, I no longer want this life!" the man pleaded, his voice filled with emotion.

Witnessing the man's actions, Orion responded, "Are you willing to pledge your heart, soul, and body to Paradise and work for its good?"

"Yes! I am willing!" the man responded, frantically nodding his head.

"Alright," Orion said before shifting his attention toward Lakul and gesturing for him to come forward.

With his mind racing over why the Supreme Leader had called out to him, Lakul gritted his teeth and walked forward.

"I want this man to be put in charge of the distribution of the resources provided by Paradise when they arrive in two days," Orion said, his attention on Lakul, who had arrived beside him.

Upon hearing his words, Lakul, Seth, and the others accompanying them couldn't help but look at Orion, stunned. This was a delicate matter concerning Paradise and the Sleeping Fox Runaway City, yet he had just handed it over to a nobody like that!

However, the kneeling man was most stunned, his expression filled with disbelief.

Lakul opened his mouth to speak but quickly closed it, realizing the implications of his actions. He nodded his head in response. "I'll do as you've commanded, Supreme Leader," Lakul responded, his head lowered in respect.

Orion shifted his attention back to the kneeling man. "What do you think? Though you will receive some assistance to handle this overwhelming task, do you believe you can manage it?" he asked.

Initially stunned by what he had just heard, the man quickly regained his composure and focused on the masked figure before him. "Yes, I will. Supreme Leader of Paradise, thank you!" he responded, pressing his forehead against the rough metallic surface again.

As the scene unfolded, from the bustling streets to the stalls and the towering buildings behind them, an eerie silence enveloped the surroundings. The crowd was filled with stunned silence, envy, and a bewildering blend of emotions.

Before their eyes, they had just witnessed a street thief ascend to a position of remarkable authority, a level they could scarcely dream of simply because he had pledged himself to

Paradise.

What kind of trade was that? It was absolutely astounding!

However, none had the will or courage to voice their dissent. Instead, the scene quickly escalated:

"I'm willing to pledge my body, soul, and mind to Paradise!" a voice rang out from the top of

a building. The speaker leapt down, landing before Orion and immediately prostrating. "Please, Supreme Leader of Paradise, accept my allegiance!"

Chapter 1025: Drawing In The Spies

"Me too! I'm willing to devote everything I possess for the sake of Paradise!" another voice cried out, joining the plea.

"I also want to-"

Soon, a wave of fervour swept through the crowd. One by one, the denizens screamed at the top of their lungs, begging to be granted the same transformation that had just elevated the street thief. The scene became a clamour of pleas as everyone rushed to offer their devotion. Only a few remained standing, their expressions a mix of awe and hesitation. They watched the fervent display, their faces reflecting the internal struggle between joining the crowd and committing themselves to Paradise.

Witnessing the scene, Orion smiled. He had intended to use this opportunity to make the denizens of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City see Paradise in a favourable light, sowing a seed that would enable Paradise's representatives to thrive once it germinated. However, it appeared he had accomplished far more than he expected.

This wasn't merely a need being met but a leaking dam that would gradually submerge the entire Sleeping Fox Runaway City. Those who still harboured doubts about Paradise would be drowned by their own people until they were convinced that there was no other way to survive in this ruined world than to reach for the lifeboat that was Paradise.

Soon, many individuals surrounded Orion, prompting Seth and the others to form a protective circle around him, holding the crowd back.

Seth snorted in annoyance before activating his gift, creating a scorching steam stretching outwards, pushing the people back and preventing them from approaching further. His eyes, however, kept shifting towards the individuals already kneeling before Orion.

Within the protective circle, Orion focused on the few individuals who had managed to rush forward and prostrate before him, along with two other men near the former thief. Just as he was about to speak, a man, appearing to be a wingless Sloth Demon, sprang up from the ground, his hand clutching a gleaming dagger aimed at Orion's exposed neck.

However, with Orion utilizing the two Vylkr containers in his mind, the man's actions were excruciatingly slow.

Orion swiftly stretched out his hand, grabbing the man's wrist before the dagger could close in. "Did you really think I didn't notice you the moment you appeared?" Orion asked his hand tightening and slowly crushing the man's wrist. "Tell me, were you sent by the Journeying Jaguar Runaway City?"

He had already detected numerous individuals with abnormally high BEM that didn't match that of the ordinary denizens within the Sleeping Fox Runaway City. However, to draw them out, he needed to ensure he had focused all their attention on him. This was also part of the reason he had decided to continue his speech.

Fortunately, they had taken the bait.

"Arrrggh!!" the man groaned in pain, his expression twisting into fear as he realized his presence had already been noticed. His sleeves fell back, revealing the Devourer's Bracelet on his wrist.

At this moment, Lakul and the others realized what had just transpired.

"SUPREME LEADER!!"

Seth released his gift into the surroundings almost instantly, causing a ring of molten lava to form around their position. The approaching denizens, already terrified of the Vylkr warriors' terrifying strength, immediately turned heel and ran away to hide, afraid of what was about to happen.

Seth turned around and attempted to approach before being halted by Orion.

"I can handle this," Orion said, shifting his attention back to the man in his grasp. He activated his gift, causing tiny streaks of lightning to emerge from his palm and wreak havoc within the man's body, tearing and searing his flesh and bones. "If you don't want to talk, that's okay. I'll capture all of you and rip the information I need out of your tongues."

Contrary to his expectations, the man bit his tongue, causing blood to roll down his lips before his body began to gradually swell. Realizing what would transpire, Orion let go of the man and immediately utilized his lightning to construct a sealed cage around the grotesquely swelling body. Then, in the next second--

BAMM!!

The body burst with a shocking explosion. Fortunately, the lightning cage contained the explosion and its aftereffects, with only a whipping gust of wind spreading outwards in every direction.

At this moment, Seth could no longer restrain himself and rushed forward. "Are you okay, Chief?" Seth asked, arriving before Orion.

Orion nodded, his gaze fixed on the specific groups of individuals—both men and women- already fleeing after realizing their plans had been thwarted and their presence discovered. "I need you to apprehend all of them. The more survivors there are, the better," Orion commanded, retracting his lightning to reveal the charred body parts of the dead assailant. Seth nodded. A puddle of molten lava emerged from his body, transforming into his exact replica. Swiftly disappearing in one direction, he disappeared in the other, swiftly tailing the fleeing assailants.

Lakul arrived, his expression filled with fear and worry. "Supreme Leader, these aren't the Sleeping Fox Runaway City's gods' chosens. They are traitors bribed by the Journeying Jaguar Runaway City to work for them. Please, this wasn't my intention. I would never plan for something like this to happen!" he said, his voice trembling with emotion.

Orion nodded, his eyes narrowing as he regarded Lakul. "You don't need to worry," he said, "I knew you might have trouble apprehending these spies. But understand this, if you are even slightly involved in this event, I'll be forced to take more severe measures to handle this issue."

Even though he was dissatisfied at the fact that the gods' chosens weren't as loyal as Paradise warriors, he knew that their actions were not without reason. They needed immense resources to grow stronger, resources that a Grade One Runaway City like the Sleeping Fox Runaway City could not provide.

Their only hope lay in allying with a Runaway city capable of meeting their needs—a Grade Two Runaway City and higher. Only those genuinely loyal or unable to advance further would choose to remain.

Chapter 1026: Drawing In The Spies (2)

Hearing Orion's words, Lakul immediately collapsed to his knees. "If I have plotted such a thing, then you can torture and kill me as you wish. However, I promise this was unexpected and wasn't orchestrated by me," he pleaded, knowing he was the one who had insisted on giving them a tour, making him a suspect in this event.

Soon, the two Seths landed before them, one carrying five unconscious individuals and the other holding two. Each appeared from a different race: Sloth Demon, Foxkin, Mirvire, and another unknown race that wasn't a natural denizen of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City. Each was bound by searing chains of molten magma.

The other Seth transformed into a floating pillar of molten magma, creating more chains to collect the incapacitated assailants from his counterpart.

"These are all of them. I don't know if there are more hiding, but they will need to reveal themselves before we find out," Seth said. With the Energy Mask Spectrometer, they quickly located the spies, sparing them tremendous effort.

"Send them to the Outward Stronghold for interrogation. Increase the level of their torture and the others so we can see if they are ready to speak," Orion ordered. He couldn't wait for those with gifts capable of reading minds to grow stronger so they would aid them in breaking through a warrior's mental fortitude and directly gaining the needed information.

Seth nodded solemnly. He cast his flying technique and soared into the sky, swiftly followed by the numerous unconscious prisoners.

"I'll leave him in your care, Lakul. The tour ends here, and we will be taking our leave," Orion said, gesturing for the other Vylkr warriors and the Prismerions to follow him as he ascended into the air and swiftly disappeared into the sky.

One by one, they all ascended into the sky.

After six minutes of sensing their departure, Lakul raised his head and straightened his posture, his expression full of relief. Just a few minutes earlier, he had thought he would finally meet his end.

"...Emperor Lakul," the man said, his voice trembling as he realized that the Sloth Demon before him was the Emperor of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City.

"Cough! I'm no longer the Emperor of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City. You can call me Mr. Lakul from now on. Come on, let's go. The Supreme Leader of Paradise has chosen you because he expects great results from you," Lakul said, almost choking on the man's words. He then turned to the three gods' chosens, "Handle the mess here and ensure everything is back in order. Also, secure the area, and only return when you are certain no more spies are around."

The gods' chosens nodded solemnly in understanding.

Lakul grasped the man with his hand, spread his wings, and ascended into the air, soaring towards the direction of the Royal Den.

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"She is Olivia Quartzwraith, and she will be your new Supreme Leader. This is Jadues Quartzwraith, and he will be your new Supreme Master of Commerce and Trade. He is Ralias Prismaflow and will be your new Supreme Chief of Diplomacy and Envoy. She is Dailia Prismaflow, your new Supreme Master of Natural Resources and the Garden," Orion announced, pointing to each of them.

He wanted to bring a tree nymph along to handle the Natural Resources and Garden position, but first, he needed to ensure their security.

He also wanted to take the opportunity to examine the Garden and the Forgepalace within the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City closely. These were the only places he didn't have a full report on, and Isadora had advised that it was best he visited them first, as they were the most sensitive areas within the Runaway City. This intrigued him.

After he finished speaking, Eleanora quickly gestured to the guards to come forward and show them the way to their rooms.

Eleanora then stepped forward and bowed. "Supreme Leader, I would like to give you a tour of the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City now that you're here," she said, her voice filled with anticipation.

They had been waiting for nearly six hours for the Paradise representatives' arrival, and she presumed that Lakul might have already taken the upper hand by giving them a tour of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City. Since she had this idea in mind from the beginning, she decided to try it.

"Unfortunately, I won't be joining you on this tour. However, I am interested in looking at the Garden before I leave," Orion responded.

When Orion began to speak, the anticipation in Eleanora's gaze dimmed, but it swiftly reignited as he completed his words. "If that's the case, I'll lead the way. Please follow me," Eleanora said, internally breathing a sigh of relief as she turned and stepped forward. Orion nodded and followed behind her. He had already sent a message to Seth to dispatch six warriors to sweep through the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise and the Trekking Flamingo Runaway City, as the denizens were incapable of handling such a task.

He would have sent more, but it was best to keep their numbers limited to avoid alerting the spies and driving them further into hiding, which would endanger Paradise's plans.

Orion also doubted that many spies might have come from other Runaway Cities. If the Jonerying Jaguar and the Wandering Wolf Borough Runaway City could do so, then what was stopping the more formidable Runaway Cities from doing the same?

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Upper Shell of the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City

The Garden

Eleanora led the way through a tightly secured corridor, guarded by two to three fully armed gods' chosens at each entrance. Soon, they halted before a large round iron gate filled with intricate carvings and runes.

Eleanora reached into her cleavage and pulled out a rune-engraved stone key, glowing with a faint, otherworldly hue.

"Is that the key used to open the entrance to the Garden?" Orion asked, his gaze fixed on the rune-engraved stone key in Eleanora's hand.

Eleanora nodded, "Yes, it's beautiful, isn't it? It was made by the High Dryads, a race from the Grade Two Migrating Deer Archipelago Runaway City, as repayment for helping them secure some crucial information they were desperately searching for," she responded with a smile.

Chapter 1027: Three Terraced Layered Garden

It is rare for a Grade One Runaway City to possess a Garden of their own, making it invaluable among other Grade One Runaway Cities. Unfortunately, this has led to the downfall of many, turning the Garden's existence into a tightly kept secret. Even when shared, it is only with other Runaway Cities with whom they have a rigid, secure trade contract.

"Oh? What kind of information did the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City secure?" Orion asked, intrigued by this new piece of information.

The Migrating Deer Archipelago Runaway City!

He was certain that the High Dryads were beings similar to the tree nymphs, capable of utilizing nature energy. Of course, he was aware he could be wrong, having already

encountered the 'Drakmin' -the half-minotaur, half-dragon race-but he was confident his thoughts weren't far off the mark.

"Unfortunately, I'm not aware of what this secret is. It happened during the reign of the second Supreme Leader before me, Empress Althea. According to the records, one of Empress Althea's sixth husbands, whom she deeply loved, died securing this information for them. To repay her fairly, they constructed a Garden for the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City."

"It was only after her reign that the Garden was fully constructed. It was said that although it didn't bring back her husband, it saved the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City by making us

self-reliant and allowing us to concentrate on forming trade deals in other areas," Eleanora responded, shaking her head with a defeated expression.

She was disappointed in her inability to provide the necessary information and hoped to use this opportunity to form a better relationship with the Supreme Leader of Paradise.

Orion nodded, assimilating the new piece of information. "Okay, let's continue then," he said.

Eleanora nodded thoughtfully and placed the key near the centre of the round rune stone. A faint mist immediately emerged and encircled it, revealing a keyhole at the centre of the stone. Without hesitation, she inserted the key and stepped back.

Suddenly, the round rune stone began to disintegrate, falling onto the ground in piles of broken rocks. The rocks then reformed, taking the shape of a stone entity. The entity held the stony key, which had merged with its hand, tightly in its grasp. It stood to the side of the now-opened entrance, unmoving.

"This is the Guardian of the Garden; we call him the 'Stony Watchman.' According to the records, he was made to withstand attacks up to the level of an Ascendant-ranked god's chosen. He can also prevent anyone who the wielder of the Garden's Key has ordered to wait outside. Anyone attempting to forcefully enter will be met with a swift attack with the force of an Ascendant, making him the perfect defence mechanism in case someone tries to break into the Garden," Eleanora explained with a smile, anticipating the question Orion was about to ask as she noticed his gaze focused on the stony entity.

If any other figure had ordered her to take them to the Garden, she would have swiftly commanded the Stony Watchman to attack, buying herself time to enter the Garden and protect herself until the gods' chosen or Sy'ra arrived to capture the intruder. However, she couldn't dare try such actions in the presence of the Supreme Leader of Paradise.

Orion nodded, his eyes shimmering under his mask as he stared at the vigilant Stony Watchman. He wondered if Seraphina and the Healers' Association could recreate something like this. As he pondered this, Orion couldn't help but sigh lightly.

Seraphina might one day ask him to create another association dedicated to researching such things, as their tasks had already expanded beyond the responsibilities of the Healers' Association. Nonetheless, he felt satisfied that they had established an authority for themselves, slightly below that of the key leaders.

Eleanora led the way forward, stepping through the gate. Orion followed behind her.

Suddenly, the Stony Watchman reformed back into a brick wall, stepping onto a stony cobblestone pathway stretching out about 1.5 meters in length before him. At its edge were many vibrant flowers, vines, and other plants Orion had never seen, each growing with an otherworldly light. Even in the distance, he could see other plants grown using combined hydroponic and aeroponic methods, positioned vertically to maximize their yield.

It was easy for Orion to tell that they utilized some magical methods alongside several scientific techniques to grow their crops. Considering they were currently within a massive mechanical moving fortress, he didn't find such a revelation terrifying. Instead, it heightened his curiosity about the secrets held within the forge palace, the core of a Runaway City.

Orion knew Anara and others would be interested in this, so he kept it in mind to inform her about his discoveries later.

As they went deeper, they soon encountered a steady stream of water from what appeared to be an irrigation system flowing between the extraordinary plants. Succubi, Ogres, and Incubi -men, women, and even children-tended to the plants.

However, at this moment, they had all paused their activities and were bowing respectfully in their direction.

"This is the first terrace layer where we plant the medicinal and exotic plants before they are harvested and sold to the highest bidder or utilized by our healers," Eleanora said, leading the way forward as she stepped onto the soil.

"How many layers are there?" Orion questioned, his voice filled with curiosity. As he looked around, he could see another high-rise terraced layer.

"There are only three layers. The second is where we keep our edible crops and flowering plants. The third is where the Gardeners sleep and go about their daily lives," Eleanora responded, leading Orion through numerous fountains and streams of water.

Hearing her words, Orion raised his brows in surprise. "They live here?" he said. Fortunately, his mask hid his expression.

Eleanora nodded. "Considering the delicate nature of the Garden, it wouldn't be wise for us to hire people who could come and go as they please. Instead, the viable solution to control its confidentiality is to have people tend to it at all times, monitored by individuals trained to avoid discussing the outside world."

Chapter 1028: Three Terraced Layered Garden (2)

"Fortunately, the Migrating Deer Archipelago Runaway City understood this and designed it accordingly. Some of the gardeners grew up here, while others will grow old and die here, their corpses eventually used as manure for the soil. They have their own community and their own routines. This is their world, the only part of the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City they've ever known."

She paused and added, "In a way, they might be the only ones in this forsaken world truly living. They don't worry about food, shelter, or power. All they have to do is wake up daily and tend to the Garden."

Upon hearing Eleanora's words, a realization emerged on Orion's face as he briefly took in the Garden again. Somehow, it reminded him of the Village and the Prismerions trapped within the mountain. He had always wondered why Naka didn't just destroy the Village, at least since they were products of a failed experiment.

Could it be that he was being sentimental now? No!

Orion shook the thought out of his mind. He had seen the kind of being Naka was through the Aegis of the Arctic Deity memories, so he understood that Naka might not want to go through the effort, leaving them to decide their fate after everything his ancestors had been through. With this revelation, Orion realized how much of a task possessing a Garden was until now. He didn't find Eleanora's words incorrect; compared to the outside, these people were living the best of their lives, all for the price of their freedom.

It showcased that a Runaway City was truly a world of its own. He began to ponder if the Paradise Representatives he had brought were even enough to handle such a tremendous task. Despite this, Orion internally exhaled deeply. The deeper he delved into the world, the more vast it appeared.

"Of course, there are cases where their curiosity improves, and they try to escape or learn about the outside world. Whether through their efforts or those of the individuals placed to monitor them, we always ensure that their memories are erased or they are removed from the Garden in a less suspicious way, such as inflicting them with a deadly sickness," Eleanora added.

Orion nodded in understanding.

They walked for about forty-five minutes before arriving at a platform. It was round and stony, filled with many inscriptions and runes that shone as it hovered above the ground. It was enclosed in a dug-out slope that led upwards.

Eleanora stepped onto the stairs beside it and the hovering stony platform. "This will take us to the Second Layer," she said.

Orion nodded and stepped onto the platform as well.

Eleanora channelled her life energy into the platform, and instantly, it ascended. "It also operates automatically, moving thirty seconds after someone steps onto it. This is mostly for the gardeners, as we have ensured that they are never taught how to harness either Life or Magikal energy," she explained.

"And what if a few of them do so instinctively?" Orion asked, understanding that some races can harness the type of energy they were born to utilize. He was curious about the methods employed when such an issue arose.

"Harnessing the energies has been branded as heretical. Anyone found using it is considered a curse that will destroy the Garden, so we don't worry much about that. The gardeners handle the issue themselves, swiftly eliminating the threat. As far as they are concerned, only the respected individuals from outside the Garden can use these energies without endangering it," Eleanora explained.

Orion realized the lengths to which the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City had gone to ensure the Garden's safety. It was more of a psychological warfare as well. He couldn't help but wonder how the other Runaway Cities compared to the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City, knowing they were entirely distinct.

Orion couldn't help but feel a burning desire within him to explore each Runaway City one by one. Evidently, they possessed many secrets, and their entire structure was nothing short of mesmerizing, even for someone like him.

Although he didn't plan to abandon his duties as the Supreme Leader of Paradise and the Village Chief, he knew that he would soon need to venture out into the world to begin their exploration so that they could commence their plan. He would have to decide which Runaway City to reside in.

Within five minutes, they arrived at the Second Layer. They stepped off the round, stony platform and were met with an entirely different view. A lush, fresh, grassy land stretched out before them, and in the distance, there were numerous colourful trees with leaves in every shade of the rainbow, each bearing strange fruits that Orion had never seen before.

As Eleanora led the way forward, Orion saw that the structure was similar to the one below, with the only difference being the variety of trees, flowering plants, and the many individuals attending to them.

Soon, they reached the Third Layer via another round, stony platform and were greeted by a vast grassy plain filled with different wooden homes-ranging from small and compact to vast and immense each appearing to be hand-built. As they walked towards the homes, they were immediately met by a group of children running around, who halted and looked at them curiously and cautiously as they approached.

The men and women seemed familiar with Eleanora and immediately bowed their heads respectfully, even forcing the younger ones beside them to do the same. Many wore minimal clothing, unlike those working below. It was apparent they lived a carefree life.

When they reached the end of the community, enclosed by a wooden fence, they walked through the gates and into a dense, lush forest. They steadily made their way forward until they arrived at a much smaller settlement. Noticing the devourer bracelets on the wrists of the men and women clad in an armoured, leather-like material, Orion instantly knew they were gods' chosens. Others without the bulging bracelets were simply warriors.

Some were training with each other, while others were lazily lying on the ground or engaging in various activities. As they approached, the inhabitants immediately sensed their arrival and stepped forward to greet them.

"Your Highness!!"

The warriors and gods' chosen looked at Orion with awe and curiosity before bowing their heads in reverence, seemingly having guessed his identity.

"This is where the guards reside. They are tasked with ensuring no harm comes to the Garden," Eleanora explained, her eyes shifting from Orion to the assembled warriors and gods' chosen. She gestured for them to return to their activities.

"As magnificent as this Garden is, it alone cannot sustain the entire Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City. However, overworking our gardeners is not a viable solution. We need to trade within a few months or risk depleting our warehouse reserves. Given our current predicament, we have no choice but to turn to Paradise to prevent our Runaway City from collapsing," Eleanora said, her gaze fixed on Orion.

Eleanora knew Paradise could weaponize this opportunity against them, so she was worried about their decision. Even though she was no longer the Supreme Leader of the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City, she couldn't bear to see all her efforts in maintaining its

stability go to waste.

"Okay. Hand over the information on the necessary resources you need, and I'll ensure they are readily provided for the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City," Orion responded. He realized he couldn't use the same method he had used to win over the hearts of the denizens of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City. In terms of provision, they were far better off. He had to come up with another method.

He knew the representatives they had chosen would do their best, but to avoid overwhelming them, he needed something that would aid them.

Hearing Orion's response, Eleanora bowed deeply. "Thank you, Supreme Leader. I'll ensure the information is gathered so the resources can be distributed immediately," she said, a quiet sigh of relief escaping her lips.

Eleanora didn't mind the stares directed their way. The best rulers know when to bow or draw their weapons, and she was not foolish enough to confront an unsurmountable enemy out of

mere emotion.

Eleanora opened her lips to speak once more, hesitating.

"What is it? Speak up," Orion asked, his gaze narrowing behind his mask. "Is there anything else that the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City needs help to handle?" "No! But it's urgent. It concerns Commander Sy'ra. The attack dealt by the Commander of the Trekking Flamingo Runaway City was more powerful than her race's extraordinary regeneration could handle, leaving her in critical condition. Our healers have tried their best to stabilize her, but if we don't get help soon, she'll meet her end," Eleanora responded, bowing respectfully again. "I asked for your help in aiding her recovery."

"It appears your Commander is quite weak. Lakul hasn't requested aid for Commander Vargoth, so I presume he is steadily recovering. If Commander Sy'ra is in such a critical condition, she might not recover to the peak of her strength after healing. Which means that Paradise's resources would be wasted on her," Orion responded, shaking his head

dismissively.

Chapter 1029: An Ogre's Loyalty And Honour

Even though he needed Commander Sy'ra to put on a front on the surface to avoid paying too much attention to their existence, he wouldn't readily agree with her request. Doing so would make Paradise seem overly compassionate, which could be exploited in a world like this. Eleanora's heart sank as she spoke; her teeth clenched, "The Ogre race possesses a powerful regenerative ability that not only allows them to heal from any physical injury, even if they are near death, but also makes them stronger than they were previously. Also, the Ogre race is well known for their loyalty and honour."

"So healing her wouldn't just restore her strength and make her an asset that Paradise could control without expending much effort. Commander Sy'ra is incredibly powerful compared to other Grade One Runaway City Commanders." She bit her lip, determined not to give up.

She couldn't understand Paradise's real purpose, but their actions indicated an intention to aid the growth of the Runaway Cities for their own reasons. She hoped her words would make him reconsider.

As for Commander Vagorth of the Sleeping Fox Runaway City being strong, Eleanora couldn't refute such a claim since the two Grade Two Runaway Cities wouldn't have approached them if they weren't formidable.

"Is that true?" Orion asked.

"Yes, it's true! This information can be easily learned from anyone knowledgeable about the Ogre race. I wouldn't dare lie about such a thing," Eleanora responded, swiftly shaking her head.

The silence enveloped them, causing Eleanora to feel her body slowly drenched with sweat.

"Okay. If that's the case, then I'll need to see her condition first before coming to a conclusion," Orion responded, his tone firm.

A surge of happiness immediately penetrated Eleanora's heart. She swiftly raised her head and focused on the inky black-masked man before her. "Follow me," she said, holding back the excitement in her voice.

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After they emerged from the Three Terraced Layered Garden, they immediately descended towards the 'Bastion' situated in the upper forelimbs of the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City.

Upon reaching their destination, guarded by two gods' chosens, the guards pushed open the metallic door for them to enter and then closed it behind them.

Inside the room was only a wide king-sized bed and two succubi maids standing on either side.

Commander Sy'ra lay on the bed, her entire upper body from the shoulders down covered in white bandages soaked with dark scarlet blood. Her hair was scattered on the pillow, and she took heavy, gruff breaths with each exhale.

The maids in the room immediately bowed towards them. As though sensing their presence, Commander Sy'ra's eyes fluttered open and focused on Eleanora before freezing when she saw Orion. Almost instantly, Sy'ra attempted to push herself up from the bed, but she failed, falling heavily back with a painful hiss escaping her lips.

"Don't move," Eleanora said, her expression stern as she looked at Sy'ra. She then turned her attention to the maids. "Leave us."

The maids nodded and swiftly exited the room.

"What's going on?" Sy'ra asked, holding back the pain from her expression as she glanced at Eleanora, briefly looking at Orion but not daring to maintain eye contact.

"I've spoken with the Supreme Leader of Paradise. He has decided to assess your condition before determining whether to utilize Paradise's resources to restore you to full health," Eleanora responded thoughtfully and tone firmly.

Hearing her words, Sy'ra's expression shifted dramatically from shock to defeat. She gritted her teeth, then closed her eyes, holding back her words and frustration.

Despite her earlier refusal when they discussed this, she hadn't expected Eleanora to continue.

Orion scrutinized Sy'ra's injuries with an indifferent gaze. He could see her wounds were still open and bleeding, making it clear that it required immense effort for her to remain conscious. However, having seen much more severe injuries during Greta's treatment, he wasn't taken aback by the sight. Instead, he pondered how to approach the matter before him. "Commander Sy'ra, I have heard that the Ogre race is well known for its loyalty and honour. Suppose Paradise were to heal you, restoring you to your peak condition. Would you sever your allegiance to the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City and swear an oath to surrender yourself to Paradise?"

Eleanora was stunned. "Supreme Leader--" she attempted to speak, but Orion swiftly silenced her with a chilling glance that sent a wave of fear down her spine. "I'll advise you not to interrupt me again, Eleanora," Orion said.

Eleanora nodded, biting her lip hard enough to draw blood, which she swiftly concealed.

Ignoring her, Orion redirected his attention back to the stunned Sy'ra.

Sy'ra's eyes widened in disbelief as she stared at Orion. She hadn't expected him to make such

a statement, especially in the presence of Eleanora, the former Supreme Leader of the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City.

Her expression became complex as her gaze shifted between the chilling Supreme Leader of Paradise and Eleanora.

Noticing Sy'ra's gaze, Eleanora looked away.

This is your decision!

Even though Eleanora would feel betrayed if Sy'ra decided to sever her ties with the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City and pledge an oath to Paradise, she understood that this decision was tied to her chances of recovery.

"What is your decision, Commander Sy'ra? You have five seconds left to choose before I withdraw the offer," Orion said, his voice resonating across the room. Each word felt like a hammer striking Sy'ra's and Eleanora's hearts, making them beat faster than before. Sy'ra slowly closed her eyes, breathing deeply. "I... sever all of my ties to Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City. And on this day, I pledge my allegiance to Paradise," she said, her voice initially filled with hesitation but growing more determined as she spoke. She opened her eyes and fixed her fearful gaze on the inky black-masked man, sweat gathering on her forehead as she struggled to steady her gaze.

Upon hearing Sy'ra's response, Eleanora internally exhaled, her shoulders dropping in relief. Nonetheless, she couldn't help but feel a pang of turbulent emotion within her heart, which she immediately suppressed.

Chapter 1030: A Trade For Aid

"That's a splendid decision! Though I believe you'll uphold your words, everyone must hear them. Once you're healed, a public declaration will be held for everyone to witness," Orion said, smiling under his mask, his voice clear and serious.

"A public declaration?" Sy'ra repeated, stunned.

"Yes. Everyone needs to understand which decision is the right path to take so they can follow your example and prove themselves worthy of becoming trusted individuals for Paradise," Orion responded. "If everyone is as wise as you are, then you won't need to worry about the resources to improve yourselves, as Paradise will be willing to provide everything you need freely."

Sy'ra gulped. It was well known that the immense resources needed by gods' chosen to improve their strength were enough to tempt several of them to betray and defect from their Runaway Cities.

Given the current situation, this announcement alone would prompt countless gods' chosen to pledge their allegiance to Paradise. With her, the Commander of the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City, making such a public declaration would shatter any remaining resistance within their hearts.

This was about more than just her-it concerned the entire Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City. If Paradise truly kept its word, this could cause a ripple effect throughout the other Runaway Cities.

Sy'ra's heart sped up as she tried to identify the Supreme Leader of Paradise's plan. If she had foolishly refused this offer, it would have been extended to Commander Vorgath or Edmar of the Sleeping Fox and Trekking Flamingo Runaway Cities, who were just as injured as she was. Regardless, the outcome would have been the same.

'Did he plan this from the start?' Sy'ra thought, feeling a chill as she swiftly averted her gaze from the Supreme Of Paradise's mask.

It was as if she could sense the Vylkr vines tightening around her, imprisoning her with no escape. Her first defeat at his hands had been due to his strength; this second defeat came merely from his words. Each method was more baffling than the last.

Just like Sy'ra, Eleanora's expression paled at Orion's words. She tried to speak again, but her lips closed each time, remembering the consequences.

How pathetic. Was this how low she had fallen? Her life's work was being stripped away piece by piece right before her eyes, and all she could do was close her mouth and watch.

Eleanora wanted to laugh at her pitiful state but couldn't find the strength. Her lips remained sealed.

The room was suddenly enveloped in silence.

"I'll send one of my warriors to pick you up and take you to our Outward Stronghold for treatment by one of Paradise's best healers," Orion said. "We can begin the public declaration immediately after you're healed." He didn't find the silence unsettling; instead, he was pretty pleased with how things had turned out.

Although he knew that the former leaders of the Runaway Cities would no longer oppose Paradise's authority, capturing the people's hearts and their gods' chosen would render those leaders irrelevant. They would have no choice but to fall in line and become devout.

It was perfect!

Orion added, "Now that we're done here, I think it's time to take my leave. I have other important matters I need to attend to."

"Thank you for your benevolence, Supreme Leader," Sy'ra responded, her eyes fluttering open but not daring to meet his gaze.

Orion nodded and turned around. Unexpectedly, just as he was about to take a step forward, Eleanora collapsed to her knees and prostrated herself on the floor, her forehead pressed against the red carpet, her hands pressed together. Her actions caused Orion to halt his steps. As Sy'ra watched Eleanora's desperate movements, her veins bulged intensely as she clenched her fists. Unable to muster the strength to observe the scene directly, Sy'ra closed her eyes, but her ears remained open.

"Supreme Leader, please, I need your... Paradise's help to save one more person!" Eleanora pleaded, her voice strained but persistent.

Orion looked at the prostrated Eleanora. "Miss Eleanora, my generosity is like a shallow pond. Tread it recklessly, and you'll find yourself sinking in the depths of your own making," he replied, his tone cold and firm.

Eleanora's heart raced with fear at his words. She swallowed hard before opening her trembling lips to respond, "I would never take your generosity for granted, Supreme Leader. I will give up my most precious belongings in exchange for this aid. I am certain it will greatly benefit Paradise."

Orion's aura sharpened noticeably. Eleanora was bound to possess something of significant value as the Queen of the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City. He was keen to learn about her most precious possession and hoped it was as valuable as she claimed.

"Go ahead, I am listening. I want to know what this precious belonging of yours is and hope it is as valuable as you claim."

Eleanora raised her head, a glimmer of hope appearing in her eyes. "I not only utilize Life energy but also draconic energy, thanks to a Legendary-ranked art given to me by a mysterious traveller who once visited the Wanderlust Travelling Tortoise Runaway City. This Legendary Art enabled me to ascend the ranks and seize the position of Supreme Leader," she explained, her voice laced with desperation. "I am willing to offer this Legendary Art to Paradise in exchange for your aid."

Sy'ra's body trembled faintly slightly on the bed.

A suffocating, eerie silence enveloped the room once more.

"Is that it?" Orion asked, exhaling deeply in disappointment.

He chastised himself for raising his hopes too high. With Aerialia's presence, Paradise was not lacking in Divine techniques or arts. He was still waiting for Ilse to awaken so he could determine if she had any to share.

Orion's words were like the deafening sounds of the sky collapsing around Eleanora. A Unique ranked technique was a coveted treasure that led to the downfall of several Runaway Cities and incited conflicts among families. The existence of such a technique was enough to turn alliances into battlegrounds.