

Titan King 1081

Chapter 1081: Who was that unspeakable entity?

The monster's claws weren't human, either. They were the gnarled, wicked talons of a beast.

At the same time, the ancestor sigil on Orion's forehead blazed with searing heat. A torrent of fragmented images flooded the ancestral soul within, feeding him information in a chaotic rush.

He saw an age lost to time, an era before the first gods were even born.

He saw a tribe of giants, and within it, the birth of twin brothers. Both were prodigies, blessed with the raw power to one day ascend to the rank of deity.

He saw a brutal contest for the title of chieftain. The two brothers met in the final battle, a cataclysmic duel where neither could gain the upper hand, for they knew each other too well. Ultimately, the council of elders named the elder brother the victor.

The younger brother seethed with resentment. For a long time, he defied the new chieftain, fueled by the simple fact that his brother could not defeat him in single combat. With every dispute, the animosity between them festered, growing deeper and darker.

Finally, their hatred erupted into civil war, and the great giant tribe was torn in two.

Ages passed. The elder brother achieved his destiny and became a god. He sought to finally defeat his twin and reunite their people.

But he was too late.

Hearing of his brother's ascension, the younger twin led his followers into the deepest pits of the Abyss, seeking his own path to godhood in the darkness.

They found only damnation. The younger brother and his entire branch of the giant race were irrevocably corrupted, cursed by some unspeakable, nameless entity.

The bloodline of the giants was tainted forever, turning them into a race that preyed upon its own kind.

The elder brother, now a god, used his divine power to suppress the affliction, sealing the worst of the curse within his Divine Kingdom. He saved his people from total self-destruction, but it was not a true cure. The curse of that unknown power still lurked within their blood, waiting. Periodically, it would flare up, transforming a giant into a monstrosity.

An Abyssal Devourer.

The flood of memories subsided, leaving Orion's head throbbing. The visions had told him so much, yet the things he most wanted to know remained shrouded in mystery.

Who was that unspeakable entity? he wondered. And what happened to the younger brother? Did someone finally put him down?

...

More importantly, Orion now understood the creature before him. This was an Abyssal Devourer in a state of heightened curse. The fragmented memories were clear on one thing: the only way to deal with it in this state was to seal it away. Nothing short of a demigod could kill it.

Orion raised his trident, refusing to believe it.

He licked a drop of blood from the tines, the metallic tang sharp on his tongue as he began an incantation. "From the endless dark, I call to you, spirit of the dragon..."

The Ghost Dragon answered, its immense phantom form materializing behind the still-coalescing pool of blood.

But then, something happened that chilled Orion to the bone.

A colossal hand made of pure, liquid blood shot out from the pool and closed around the Ghost Dragon's head. With a casual squeeze, the massive spectral skull imploded.

Orion couldn't believe it. The Ghost Dragon, a summon that had never failed him, had been annihilated in an instant.

ROAR!

An echo of pure draconic fury seemed to shake his very soul. The remaining body of the Ghost Dragon dissolved, reforming into a single, massive set of draconic claws that lunged at the sanguine hand.

There was no explosion, no shockwave. The moment the claws made contact with the hand of blood, they simply disintegrated into nothing.

The sight sent a wave of cold dread down Orion's spine.

ROAR!

This time, a different roar erupted from the blood pool, a sound that shook the very foundations of the world. An impossibly mighty presence tried to force its way into reality. Countless golden runes suddenly blazed to life within the blood, swarming over the bloody hand like incandescent insects. As the runes glowed, some unseen force seemed to seize the hand from behind and drag it back into the churning depths.

"Devour it... Seal it..."

The two phrases echoed directly in Orion's mind. Before he could even process them, his body moved on its own. He felt the giant bloodline within him surge, his Titan Form activating to its absolute maximum potential. He was a puppet, walking involuntarily toward the bloody mass. His body swelled, growing to a colossal size as he opened his mouth and swallowed the Abyssal Devourer whole.

And just like that, he was back in control.

Orion stood frozen, his mind reeling with sheer terror.

I was controlled!

That was his first thought. He frantically scanned his body, his sea of consciousness, but found no trace of an intruder, no sign of anything amiss.

Before he could make sense of it, a cataclysmic torrent of power erupted from within his stomach, flooding his entire being with raw bloodline energy and faith energy.

The feedback was overwhelming. A roar of pure, untamed power was ripped from his throat as the energy surged through him. His Titan Form skyrocketed in size, reaching a height he'd never before achieved without activating both Blood Sacrifice and his Titan Emblem. He was a tower of muscle and might, soaring over ten hundred feet tall.

Simultaneously, the deluge of faith energy coalesced inside him, forging a second body of faith nearly as substantial as the one in his true body: a four-headed, eight-armed Asura Titan Form.

Yet, this incredible surge of power brought Orion no joy. A profound fear took root in his heart. This wasn't his. He hadn't earned it. This power felt... wrong. Tainted.

Get a grip, he told himself, forcing the terror down. What's done is done. Deal with what's in front of you.

His gaze fell upon the swirling barrier of the vengeful spirits. Inside, Sever and the four Bone brothers—Bone White, Bone Red, Bone Green, and Bone Blue—were still locked in a desperate struggle. The barrier was a clever trap, one that allowed entry but no escape. A detail, Orion was sure, that the Bone brothers had designed intentionally.

With a single, earth-shaking step, Orion's mountain-sized Titan Form crossed the threshold and entered the fray.

“Die!”

He immediately triggered Instant Impact.

The Firelord was his victim. The fiery humanoid had just been blasted backward, sending it flying right into the path of Orion’s charging trident.

The weapon in his hands had changed. Normally, the Flame of Will that wreathed it was a swirling combination of lightning, fire, and blood energy. Now, the lightning and fire were suppressed, leaving only a deep, visceral crimson that pulsed with terrifying power.

The Firelord’s body erupted in flame, trying to incinerate the trident.

It failed.

To the Firelord’s horror, its own intensely hot core flame couldn’t even get close to the weapon. A strange, oppressive energy radiated from the trident, actively extinguishing his fire.

“No—!”

A final, agonized howl escaped the Firelord as its body began to wither and melt, a grotesque and terrifying dissolution.

Hssssss!

That was the sound of the bonfire, the remnant of the demigod Arthas that was a native part of the Flame of Will. As the Firelord died its inexplicable death, the coalesced essence of its flame proved to be an irresistible lure for the ancient, hungry fire.

Chapter 1082: Is that supposed to scare me?

The bonfire surged, overpowering the crimson energy on the trident and pouncing on the Firelord's essence. It fed greedily, its own flames growing stronger and brighter with every passing moment. As the fire blazed, it burned away the last vestiges of the strange blood energy that had coated the trident, and the sensation snapped Orion out of his altered state.

"Now!"

Under the cover of the chaos, the Balor from the Cult of Four discreetly crushed an arcane fire orb. The vengeful spirits barrier shattered instantly in a deafening explosion.

The blast was indiscriminate, a wave of raw force that sent everyone—Orion included—flying. Orion's allies and the remaining Cult of Four arch lords were all caught in the blowback, sustaining heavy injuries.

Orion's flesh writhed as his siren regeneration kicked in, knitting his wounds back together in seconds. Across the ruined dais, the female knight, the shadow-figure(leader), the tailed demon, and the Balor scrambled together, their eyes fixed on Orion with grim intensity. Their original party of seven arch lords sent to eliminate a single target had been reduced to four, while Orion's side now numbered six.

With the barrier gone, the Balor acted fast. It produced a small, intricately carved dragon statuette and immediately crushed it.

In an instant, the four colossal god statues standing at the perimeter of The Dais of Judgment began to glow. Beams of divine light shot from their eyes, converging on the fragments of the statuette. A blinding flash erupted, forcing everyone to shield their eyes.

ROAR!

Amidst the shower of sparks, a dragon's roar echoed across the platform as a demigod phantom coalesced around a newly formed body of fire.

"By the Four Gods, all heretics who defy the majesty of the Cult of Four shall face judgment!"

The fire dragon opened its eyes. Its gaze was ancient and weary, sweeping over Sever and the Bone brothers before finally locking onto Orion.

“You actually managed to kill the Abyssal Devourer,” the demigod’s voice boomed. “No wonder Pontiff Jack(Clown) takes you so seriously.”

The dragon was an avatar of Konak, one of the twelve Pontiffs of the Cult of Four and the master of the southern Black Tower. He sounded mildly surprised by Orion’s performance, but the surprise was quickly replaced by an imperious and cold authority.

Konak’s presence was immense. His gaze was like a physical weight, sharp and piercing, carrying the full pressure of a demigod as it bore down on Orion.

“Heretics who offend the Four Gods will always be judged,” Konak declared. “Admit your sins. Accept my teachings. Only then can you be forgiven. Only then can you find salvation!”

While crushing Orion with his aura, Konak was also trying to turn him. An arch lord this powerful was a rare find, even within the Cult of Four. The thought of recruiting him had already crossed Konak’s mind.

“Hahaha... Are you trying to recruit me?” Orion laughed wildly. The intention was so obvious a fool could see it.

Before Konak could reply, Orion added with pure contempt, “You’re not worthy.”

“Sigh... Insects never comprehend their own insignificance,” the dragon avatar lamented, its voice dripping with condescension. “You cannot know the chasm that separates an arch lord from a demigod.”

The fire dragon opened its maw, and a scorching dragon flame began to gather, compressing into a brilliant sphere of pure fire that pulsed with suffocating pressure.

“You’re nothing but a dragon avatar,” Orion spat. “Is that supposed to scare me? Then die!”

He raised his trident. Lightning, fire, and blood energy swirled around the tines, a vortex of raw, conflicting powers.

“WAAAGH!”

Whether it was Orion who unleashed Instant Impact first or the demigod avatar that fired its compressed sun, no one could say. All the other arch lords knew was that The Dais of Judgment was consumed by an apocalyptic explosion.

Through the blinding light, the enraged roar of a giant and the furious bellow of a dragon echoed without end.

Titanion Realm—Aenari Island.

The sea was a murky brown, churned with blood and sediment. The school of gargantuan rays had been annihilated, yet not a single corpse floated in the water. Every casualty, ray and Ocean Hunter alike, had been devoured by the surviving hunters. The fodder had consumed the fodder.

“Everyone, that is Aenari Island ahead!” Marina’s voice cut through the air. She leapt from the ship, her feet touching down lightly on the waves. Treading across the blood-stained water, she walked step by step toward the shore.

Rendall, Beyn, Drakthul, and the others exchanged a look before steering the Sea-Devouring Warship to follow close behind her. One by one, they set foot on Aenari Island.

At the heart of the island, on the small islet in the central lake, Dadur, Eshyra, and Cyclon were gathered once more, their expressions grim.

“They really are from an arch lord faction,” the Reverse Whale Dadur said. His voice was a strange mix of resignation and grim resolve. “Not a single one of my vassals survived.”

“So, are we proceeding with the plan?” Eshyra asked. Her earlier hysteria was gone, replaced by a cold calm.

“And why not?” Dadur shot back. “It’s just one lord. Are you telling me you’re scared?”

From the moment Marina had set foot on the island, the three of them had felt her aura from afar.

“Afraid? Of course not,” the naga retorted, though it sounded like she was trying to convince herself. “Worst case, we kill them and flee back into the open ocean. We go back to being wanderers.” Despite her words, her gaze shifted to the Dreadfin, Cyclon.

Among the three of them, when it came to true power and backing, it wasn’t Dadur who held the highest authority, but Cyclon of the Dreadfin race. On the surface, the Reverse Whale was the strongest, but the Dreadfin was the one with the deepest roots.

Both Dadur and Eshyra fixed their eyes on him, waiting.

“A single Legendary level expert,” Cyclon said, finally looking up to meet their gazes, “is not enough to make us run.”

His word was final.

“Then let’s prepare,” Dadur said with a slow, grim smile. “Time to meet our new friend.”

Silverwood Realm—The Dais of Judgment.

When the searing, blinding light finally faded, only wreckage remained.

Orion stood before the massive body of the fire dragon, his trident held firm, his expression a mask of crazed determination.

The avatar of the demigod Konak, a fire dragon at the peak of the arch lord level, had been decapitated by a single blow.

"Pathetic," Orion grinned.

As Konak's demigod phantom began to rise from the dragon's corpse, Orion casually waved his hand, collecting the body and the Survivors chest that had dropped from it into his storage.

"DAMN YOU! YOU BLASPHEMOUS WORM! I'LL KILL YOU!" Konak's phantom roared, his fury absolute. Being killed was one thing, but being killed so decisively in front of his own subordinates was a humiliation he could not endure.

"Your rage is music to my ears," Orion taunted. He had just killed a peak arch lord dragon in a single strike with his Wymsbane Gyre, giving him a newfound appreciation for the skill.

It was, in every sense of the word, a true dragonslaying art.

Chapter 1083: Indomitable Will

The power of Wymsbane Gyre came from the volatile fusion of different energies, a chaotic reaction that amplified Orion's attack to a horrifying degree. But that power had a specific focus; it was only truly effective against dragon-kin.

Against the demigod phantom that now faced him, it was all but useless.

"You dared to destroy my avatar! For that, you will die!" Konak's phantom roared, the mass of raw flame pulsing with rage. "Die!"

The fire swelled, birthing a churning ocean of flame in the space behind it. The inferno then crested and broke, crashing down upon the dais as a tidal wave of pure fire, an unstoppable deluge of destruction.

"You're the one who's going to die!"

Orion didn't retreat. While Konak was busy monologuing, he had already sacrificed half of his life energy, activating Blood Sacrifice. A storm of violent energy surged into him, and his Titan Form grew taller still.

The moment his power reached its absolute peak, he vanished, activating Instant Impact.

He paid the sea of fire no mind, plunging directly through the inferno. It was a clash of raw blood and life force against all-consuming flame. He broke through the wave, emerging from the fire to appear directly before the demigod phantom.

His trident became a crimson spear of light, stabbing relentlessly at the slowly pulsing core of the fire.

"Such frightening power!" Konak's disdainful voice echoed from within the flames, even as Orion's attack was held at bay. "But you have no idea how vast the chasm is between supernatural might and true divine power."

Orion didn't speak. He just kept pouring his bloodline energy into the trident, forcing his indomitable will into the very fabric of the weapon.

Push. Push through without fear!

Schhhk!

The fiery phantom suddenly shrank, its form contracting. The tip of Orion's trident had pierced its outer layer and was now, inch by agonizing inch, pushing its way inside.

"How is this possible?" Konak's voice was laced with disbelief. "Impossible! This is my demigod phantom, a manifestation of my very essence! It is built from my divine power!"

CRACK!

The flame contracted again, and the trident plunged deeper, drawing closer to the phantom's core.

"No! Don't!"

The phantom pulsed violently, a powerful wave of force erupting outward in an attempt to throw Orion and his weapon back. The blast only managed to stall the trident's advance for a fraction of a second.

"I told you," Orion snarled through clenched teeth, "you're the one who's going to die!"

"GO TO HELL!"

With a final, guttural roar, Orion became one with his weapon. His will, his murderous intent, his very body—he poured everything into this one final, decisive strike.

Whoosh...

It was like the sound of a final exhalation of wind, the last whisper of heat as a great fire is extinguished.

Orion had annihilated the demigod's will projection. He turned, his eyes cold and brimming with murderous intent, and fixed his gaze on the female knight, the shadow, and the others.

Shit!

By the time they reacted, Orion had already vanished from sight.

Titanion Realm—Aenari Island.

"I'll give you this one chance, out of respect for our shared blood as members of the Sea Race," Marina announced, her voice echoing across the islet. She hovered in the air, facing Dadur, Eshyra, and Cyclon alone, not a hint of fear in her expression. "Pack your things. Take your vassals and your people, and leave Aenari Island."

"You have half a day."

"Are you out of your mind?!" the naga Eshyra was the first to snap back.

Eshyra was a mid-tier lord. Marina's aura marked her as a low-tier lord at best. To be given orders by someone so far beneath her was an insult she could not tolerate. As she spoke, her six arms blurred, unsheathing six gleaming blades that formed a whirlwind of steel around her.

"And you?" Marina asked, completely ignoring the naga. There was no point in wasting her breath on such a hothead. She looked past her, directly at the Reverse Whale Dadur and the Dreadfin Cyclon.

"You're from the Silvercurrent Sea?" Dadur asked, genuinely caught off guard. He had never expected the leader of the Stoneheart Horde's expedition to be a mermaid. He sidestepped her ultimatum, voicing his own question instead.

Marina gave him a wry, humorless smile. "Are there merfolk in any other sea in this world?"

The Reverse Whale was left speechless, falling into a tense silence. The Dreadfin Cyclon remained as quiet and still as ever.

"Dadur, Cyclon, stop talking to her!" Eshyra shrieked. "As if the three of us can't take her one-on-one!"

With that, she shot forward, her six blades raised to strike.

"Fool," Marina sighed, her brow furrowing in annoyance.

She took a single step forward.

In the next second, an illusory ocean flooded the area. The water was dream-like, shimmering like smoke and mist. Suddenly, a colossal, iridescent tail materialized from the phantom depths. Before Eshyra could even raise her blades to block, the tail swung with impossible speed and smashed her into a bloody pulp.

The attack was over in an instant. The tail vanished, leaving only the shimmering, ethereal seawater, which soon faded away.

Marina raised a hand, and a gleaming Lord's Stone flew from the gory remains into her palm. She tucked it away and turned her placid gaze back to the two remaining lords.

"And you?"

The sheer, terrifying strangeness of the attack had left both Dadur and Cyclon frozen in stunned terror.

"I'll leave at once," Cyclon said without a moment's hesitation. He turned and began to retreat, preparing to abandon Aenari Island for good.

"I'll leave as well," Dadur echoed, though a look of extreme, bitter reluctance was buried deep in his eyes.

Only after watching them both depart did Marina descend to the ground.

"My lady... are they really just leaving?" Rendall asked, stepping forward. His tone was one of deep, genuine respect. If his previous deference was based on her power and her connection to Orion, her actions just now had earned their true reverence. A three-on-one victory against lords of a similar level was a feat few in the entire stoneheart horde could claim. Besides Orion himself, almost no one else could have pulled it off.

"Give them half a day," Marina said calmly, not a trace of killing intent on her face. "If they're not gone by then, we attack."

But everyone there understood. This was the same quiet Warden who had just obliterated a naga lord with a single, casual gesture.

"As you command!"

"As you command!"

Silverwood Realm—Hydraea Plains.

"The two of you weren't enough." A wicked chuckle rumbled in the beast's chest. "Heh heh heh..."

The Hell-Drake Hound, Dirtclaw, bit down, crushing the head of a Ghouls lord. Blood and viscera dripped from its jaws in a gruesome display. In a two-on-one fight, he had killed one and crippled the other.

I underestimated myself, Dirtclaw thought with savage glee. Two was just a test. I should have taken on three.

BOOM!

Just as Dirtclaw swallowed the fallen lord's Lord's Stone, a tremendous crack echoed from the heavens. The sky itself seemed to fracture as an invisible barrier shattered like glass.

A flicker of alarm crossed Dirtclaw's eyes, quickly followed by a flash of vicious opportunism. He ignored the cataclysm unfolding in the sky. Instead, he lunged for the heavily wounded demonic monsters lord and, as it stared up in terror, bit its head clean off.

Chapter 1084: An Unseen Hand

After swallowing the enemy's Lord's Stone, Dirtclaw finally looked up at the storm-wracked sky.

There, he saw the figure of Orion. And behind him, their faces masks of pure reverence, were Sever and the four Bone brothers.

"Praise be to My lord!" Dirtclaw bellowed, his voice raw with devotion. "Your glory bathes the entire battlefield! You are the greatest being in Dirtclaw's heart!"

Awooo!

Overcome with emotion, he let out his customary bestial howl of excitement.

Orion's presence meant they had won the clash between the top-tier combatants. And with that advantage, every last one of these demonic monsters on the field would be converted into spoils of war.

Dirtclaw's entire body thrummed with a savage glee. He spun around and charged toward the lords of another battle zone.

Maybe... maybe... I can reach the peak of the Legendary tier in this war!

The incredible thought sparked in his mind—a mad ambition he hadn't dared to entertain before, but one that his body was already acting upon.

Kill... eat... kill... eat...

In that moment, it was the only thought left in his head.

In the south, at the Cult of Four's Black Tower.

Within the Shadow Sanctum on the fifth floor, candle flames flickered to life one by one, pushing back the oppressive darkness and breaking the profound silence. A series of sharp cracks echoed through the hall, a sound like ice splintering, like a parched earth groaning as it split apart.

At the front of the grand hall, beneath the statues of the Four Gods, eight other effigies began to crack and crumble, shedding stone until they collapsed into piles of rubble.

"Damn you to hell!" a furious voice roared from one of the piles. "You despicable giant! I will kill you!"

As the demigod Konak finished his vow, the seven statues beside his own completely disintegrated. The figures of the female knight, the shadow, the moon giants, the Tailed Demon, the Firelord, the Abyssal Devourer, and the Balor all stepped out of the debris, gathering behind Konak's draconic, humanoid form.

"My lord, we have failed you," the Balor said, his head bowed. After Konak's phantom was slain, he and the others had tried to flee, but they were intercepted by the combined might of Sever and the Bone brothers. In the end, every last one of them had been hunted down and killed by Orion.

However, the Cult of Four was built on a deep foundation. They possessed many secret techniques that could preserve the lives of their followers, which was one of the main reasons so many were willing to die for them. The statues erected in the Black Tower, worshiped by the faithful, were one such technique.

"This failure is not yours," Konak growled. "That detestable giant... he is an Over-tier expert. He could even slay my demigod phantom. He was not an enemy you could have handled." He snorted. "Rest and recover. This isn't over."

It was only now, Konak realized, that he understood why Yriel, the former Pontiff and master of the northern Black Tower, had come to him for aid. And the arrival of Pontiff Jack should have been a clear sign that their enemy was no simple matter.

"My arrogance was my downfall," Konak muttered to himself. A demigod was no fool. A single defeat was enough for him to recognize his error. He also began to understand, with dawning fury, that he'd been played. Yriel and Jack had used him as their pawn, their sacrificial lamb.

Hmph... you want to see me humiliated? It won't be that easy.

Konak strode toward the top floor of the Black Tower. Yriel and Jack were residing there. He had a feeling the two of them would have something to say to him.

Hydraea Plains—The Front Lines.

Orion himself was no longer there.

Of course, as the Alpha commanding the front, he hadn't just abandoned his post. He had left the arch lord-peak Deathly Soul-Reaper on the battlefield in his stead.

His own mirrored avatar, however, had teleported back to his Black Tower the first chance it got. Besides the bizarre aftermath of the Abyssal Devourer's death, the avatar was severely weakened from using Blood Sacrifice and was no longer fit for the battlefield.

The Black Tower, Sixth Floor.

The Deputy Commander and Alexander flanked Orion, circling him, observing and probing his avatar with intense focus. After a long while, they both shook their heads.

"I used the specialized diagnostic method contained within my sacred sword," Alexander said. "I can't find anything wrong. On the surface, your very essence seems to have been diminished, but there's also a massive, undigested reserve of life energy inside you that is constantly nourishing your body. From what I can tell, not only are you not in danger, you're actually recovering, slowly but surely."

Orion understood what he was saying. While Blood Sacrifice had consumed half of his life energy, the entire essence of the Abyssal Devourer was still churning inside him, far too much to be digested quickly. What he had lost was slowly being replenished.

But the replenishment wasn't what terrified him. It was the other force—the one that had seized control of his body without him even noticing. That was the reason Orion had rushed back, desperate for his two comrades to examine him.

Alexander having found nothing, Orion turned his anxious gaze to the Deputy Commander.

The Deputy Commander said nothing, continuing to cast a series of diagnostic spells whose effects were a mystery to Orion.

"Deputy Commander?" Orion finally asked, his voice quiet, his eyes pleading.

But the Deputy Commander just shook his head again.

"Is it hopeless?" Orion's voice cracked with desperation. "Am I a lost cause? I don't even know when it happened."

"No, that's not it," the Deputy Commander clarified. "I couldn't find anything abnormal either."

Phew... Orion let out a breath he didn't realize he'd been holding, but the relief was immediately replaced by a fresh wave of anxiety.

"While I found nothing, I do have a theory," the Deputy Commander said. At his words, both Orion and Alexander snapped to attention.

"Based on your description of events, the one who controlled you was likely a god from your own giant race. And if it was a god, then they were operating on a level of cosmic law—of fundamental rules. When it comes to such rules, Alexander and I are still in the elementary stages of understanding."

The Deputy Commander adopted the look of a scholar humbled by the infinite mysteries of the cosmos, an expression that nearly made Orion cry with frustration.

"Perhaps... you could go ask the commander," Alexander suggested, picking up where the Deputy Commander left off.

Within the Champions Alliance, the commander was the first to have achieved the rank of demigod. No one knew the true extent of his power now. But if anyone understood the rules of divine power, it would be him.

"The commander is in a deep slumber," the Deputy Commander interjected, ever the one to dash his hopes. "Even if you go to him, there's no guarantee he'll see you."

He paused. "...But you can try."

Orion rolled his eyes. He felt like the Deputy Commander was messing with him, but he had no proof.

"You might have some luck in the central region of the Valkorath Realm," the Deputy Commander finally offered, giving him a destination. He saw the instability in Orion's eyes and exchanged a look with Alexander. A decision was made.

"Go and sort this out first," Alexander said, clapping a hand on Orion's shoulder. "Then you can come back and go back to being the bait. And try not to worry. Based on what you said, if this god who controlled you really exists, it's unlikely they bear you any ill will."

He gave Orion a reassuring look. "Think about it. Not only are you unharmed, you came out of it with a massive increase in power. That's the best proof there is."

Chapter 1085: The commander's domain

Titanion Realm—Aenari Island.

Sunlight dappled across the turquoise water of the lagoon. Gentle waves lapped against a shore of golden sand, a stark and peaceful contrast to the deep, tumultuous ocean beyond. The sea breeze that drifted here was soft and delicate, as quiet and gentle as a sleeping child. It ghosted over the skin like a caress, soothing both body and mind.

“My lady, is this island... is it really ours now? Part of the Stoneheart Horde?” Rendall, leading the other elders, still looked as if he were in a daze. It all felt a bit like a dream. In their minds, they had prepared for a bloody, life-or-death battle to claim this prize. They never imagined the fiercest part of the invasion would be the slaughter of some monstrous rays.

Marina, who had been gazing out at the sea, turned back to them. “It is ours,” she confirmed, allowing a small smile. Her expression quickly turned serious, however, as she gave voice to her concerns. “But the Sea Race will not give up their territory so easily. I know my people. They won’t let this go without another fight.”

As a member of the Sea Race herself, Marina knew their nature better than anyone. This was the deep ocean, an island isolated and far from their true centers of power. The Sea Race had countless ways to make their lives difficult.

“Then we must build our city at once,” an elder urged. “As soon as the teleportation array is built and linked to the Horde, we’ll have nothing to fear, no matter how many enemies come.”

Marina nodded in agreement. The plan was sound: establish a camp, build a city around it as the core, and slowly radiate their influence across the island and into the surrounding waters.

“Alright, elders,” she said, her voice clear and decisive. “Let’s choose a site together.”

Marina knew that building a city on land was entirely different from building one beneath the waves. She was not so arrogant as to take on the task alone, instead inviting the experienced elders to join her.

“My lady, this is a small inland sea. I believe we should build our city along the coast.”

“I think we should build at the river mouth, where it meets the ocean. It would be a more defensible position.”

“ ... ”

The group talked as they walked, their voices filled with purpose and excitement. Marina led the way, a small, genuine smile touching her lips. She found that she rather liked days like this.

Valkorath Realm—Soraya City.

When Orion arrived, a sense of dislocation washed over him. This was Soraya’s city, but she was nowhere to be found. After Lorelia had been reassigned to the Silverwood Realm, Soraya had taken her place, standing guard over the cross-realm teleportation array in Lorelia’s former post. Even his adopted daughter, Elara, was now in Stoneheart City.

Orion didn’t linger. Soraya City was merely a waypoint. He entered the intra-realm teleporter at the city’s center and, in a shimmer of energy, was transported to the central region.

This was the commander’s domain. Even during the height of the slime molds invasion, when the Champions Alliance was at its weakest, this place had stood unshakable. No enemy had ever breached its borders.

There were no luxurious palaces here, no grand walls to keep enemies at bay. There was only a mountain. A mountain that was itself a blade. It wasn’t just shaped like a blade; its very presence, its aura, was that of a keen, cutting edge. Orion’s hearing was sharp. Besides the countless blade-like peaks and stone carvings, he could hear the distant, rhythmic clang of a smith’s hammer ringing through the air.

Orion gazed up at the massive peak, its primary edge pointing skyward, and started his ascent along a path of neatly laid stone slabs. Sword-wielding sentinels stood guard at regular intervals on either side of the path, but his arrival seemed to be expected. They remained perfectly still, letting him pass without challenge.

He climbed at a steady pace, and after half a day, he was nearing the summit. Three hundred yards from the top, he stopped. He could feel a change. The stone steps of this final stretch looked identical to the ones he'd already climbed, but as he took the first step, he knew they were different.

His legs suddenly felt immensely heavy. With every step he took, his very soul seemed to tremble. Yet, after each tremor, a strange, pleasant sensation washed through him, a feeling of lightness, as if some unseen burden was being stripped away.

Orion took a deep breath, steadied himself, and continued his climb, one laborious step at a time.

It was another half a day before he finally reached the summit. Those last three hundred yards had taken him as long as the entire journey before it. He had walked a celestial path, but at its end, there was no celestial gate waiting for him. There was only a small, grassy plateau, dotted with overgrown weeds.

"You're the last member of our Champions Alliance to come see me here."

The voice came from nearby. Beneath a tall pine tree sat a simple A-frame tent. A man with eyes as dark and deep as polished jet, wearing a loose-fitting, sleeveless tunic and a simple leather headband, was taking a drink from a wineskin as he curiously watched Orion crest the final step.

"Commander?" Orion asked, instinctively knowing this rugged man was the leader of the Champions Alliance.

"Yeah, something like that," the commander, Thresh, replied without much explanation. He took another swig before asking a question of his own. "So, what do you think of the view from my Blade's Edge Peak?"

"It's incredible," Orion answered truthfully, his gaze sweeping over the landscape. "A majestic range of colorful peaks. From up here, you can see everything." It was only now, standing on the summit, that he realized the other side of the mountain was a sheer, miles-deep cliff. He was standing on the very tip of the blade.

“Ha! A view like this, and a man like you... I thought it might inspire a bit of poetry,” the commander laughed. He tossed a wineskin to Orion, then paid him no more mind, simply lying back in his tent to watch the clouds drift by.

In Orion’s eyes, the legendary commander looked like a total slacker.

Orion took a few pulls from the wineskin, his gaze shifting from the clouds in the sky to the man in the tent. It felt surreal. This was the invincible commander?

“Commander, I...” Orion began, wanting to state his purpose, but the timing felt off. The situation was too bizarre, too informal.

“Spit it out,” Thresh said lazily, not taking his eyes off the sky. “Whatever it is, say it. In this place, if you’ve got the guts to say it, I’ve got the guts to listen.”

Since the commander had put it that way, Orion didn’t waste any more time. He recounted the entire series of events that had happened to him, leaving out no detail.

When he finished, Thresh gestured to the grass opposite him. “You want to lie down and watch the scenery for a bit? You’re just standing there. The wind’s pretty strong; you might get blown off.”

Orion blinked, then let out a short, quiet laugh. He ducked into the tent without another word.

“See? View’s different when you’re lying down, isn’t it?”

“It’s alright,” Orion said, not really feeling it but going along with it.

“Hahaha... your strings are wound way too tight,” the commander chuckled, shaking his head. “Looks like today’s not a good day for philosophizing about the view.” He took another sip from his wineskin and went back to his cloud-watching.

"You're fine."

As Orion was stewing in a mix of confusion and unbearable suspense, the commander finally gave him an answer.

The wineskin Orion was raising to his lips froze. He turned his head, his eyes locked on the commander. From this angle, lying on the grass, the man he had never met before seemed possessed of a profound, untroubled freedom.

"Those last three hundred steps on Blade's Edge Peak are called the Inquisition Steps," Thresh explained lazily. "They were forged from three hundred Mind-Forged Rings. The fact that you could reach the summit means your mind and soul are not corrupted." He paused, a glint in his eye. "Of course, there are some things that even they can't detect."

Before Orion could ask, the commander continued.

"But... the void within you still contains a mysterious, sealed object you know nothing about, correct?"

Orion nodded instinctively. He didn't disagree with the commander's assessment that he was "fine," but that wasn't why he'd come all this way. He wanted to understand why.

"What's inside you is a Rule," Thresh said. "Based on the memories you saw, that sealed Rule is a type of curse. But, because it's in a sealed state, it's not technically a form of active corruption."

Orion's expression was a mask of confusion; he felt like he was only half-grasping the concept.

"Commander, is this thing dangerous?" he pressed. "What should I do? Just... watch it? Ignore it?"

His eyes were filled with hope. He wasn't a demigod; he didn't understand the rules of divine power. The man lying before him was his best chance at finding a path forward.

"Heh. You got any kids?" the commander asked, changing the subject so abruptly it gave Orion whiplash.

"Several," Orion answered, his mind racing. He wasn't a fool. The enigmatic commander wouldn't ask such a question without a reason.

"After you became an arch lord, did all your children experience a bloodline resonance?"

"They did."

"And do you think," Thresh continued, his tone casual, "that you could influence your children through the power of that bloodline?"

Orion frowned. It was a question he had never considered.

"Let me put it another way. Could you, by tapping into the blood that runs through their veins, briefly take control of their bodies?"

Orion fell silent, turning his senses inward, focusing on the bloodline that was as familiar to him as his own heartbeat.

"See?" the commander chuckled softly. "You already know the answer."

When a being at the arch lord level or higher ascended, it triggered a resonance through their blood. Their descendants carried that same blood. Through certain methods, an arch lord could indeed briefly assume control of their children's bodies. Of course, successfully performing such a feat was dependent on factors like distance, the purity of the bloodline, and the power gap between them.

"It's just as you suspect," the commander confirmed. "As a descendant of the giant gods, under the right conditions, they can control your body for a short time without your consent. To be more precise, they aren't controlling you. They're controlling the blood that flowed from them. They're controlling their own power."

With that simple explanation, everything clicked into place for Orion.

The giant god was able to control him because Orion's veins were filled with his blood. And that bloodline was clearly very pure, allowing for effortless control.

So, which god was it? The question burned in his mind. Could it be my parents, who vanished so long ago? Or someone else entirely?

"Commander, is there a solution to this?" Orion asked, his gaze intense.

"It's simple," Thresh said. "Ascend to the rank of demigod and master your own Rule. In the world of Rules, only a Rule can block a Rule." He turned his head to look at Orion, a hint of playful mockery in his eyes. "Or, you could just discard your entire bloodline and use a special secret technique to transform into another race."

Orion hesitated, falling silent once more.

"It's not necessarily a bad thing, you know," the commander said, taking a sip of wine. He spoke casually, regardless of the stunned look on Orion's face. "Think about it. Would you ever use a technique like that to just randomly control your own kids?"

Orion shook his head, his conviction absolute.

"I'd wager most parents wouldn't." After saying this, Thresh drained the last of his wineskin in one long pull, and his voice turned strangely distant. "Or, you could walk the path of the demigod to its final step and forge your own divine body. Once you do that, no god, no matter who they are, will ever be able to control you again."

That was the true solution, a path to absolute and complete self-mastery.

"Thank you."

Orion stood up and gave the commander a deep, sincere bow. Thresh's words had not only explained the mystery that had been plaguing him but had also lit a fire in him, inspiring him to strive not just for the rank of demigod, but perhaps even beyond.

The commander waved off the gesture with an air of indifference. He casually tossed the empty leather wineskin, sending it sailing out over the endless sea of clouds.

"As for that ball of cursed Rules in your inner space," he said, "that's even easier to solve."

Orion said nothing, waiting for him to continue.

"For those ancient gods, completely erasing an old and malicious Rule like that would be difficult. But for us Survivors? It's child's play." The commander didn't get up. He just stretched out a hand and pointed vaguely in the direction of Soraya City. "The solution is over there."

Orion frowned in thought. After a long moment, he voiced his guess.

"The Purification Tower?"

"Bingo. With the small amount of sealed Rules inside you, a few years of quiet meditation in the Purification Tower will wipe it completely clean."

Hearing this, Orion felt as if solutions had been found for all his problems. But those solutions had only given birth to more questions.

"Commander... why is the Purification Tower so powerful?" he asked, deciding to press his luck.

"Hulk," Thresh began, using the old moniker, "if I were to use a secret technique to possess or devour you, would you accept it willingly? Or would you fight back?"

"I'd fight," Orion replied without hesitation, meeting Thresh's gaze.

"See? Even you would resist. So why wouldn't the Realm of Ash resist?"

The words hit Orion like a thunderclap, shaking him to his core.

"Our old world was devoured by this one, The New Age. Of course it would fight back. And so, the Survivor's Platform was born. We, the Survivors, were born. Our stat panels were born."

The commander's smile was as rugged and carefree as before, but his deep-set eyes now blazed with a light Orion couldn't comprehend.

"Actually, to call it 'resistance' isn't quite right anymore," he mused. "Because we've already been integrated. We are now a part of this world. And since we're a part of this world just like everyone else..."

He suddenly let out a deep, inscrutable laugh.

"Why can't we be the ones in charge? Right?"

He looked at Orion, his smile widening. "And special buildings, like the Purification Tower... you could say they are a part of our old world's will, made manifest."

Chapter 1087: Escalation

Marina's voice was cold, laced with a weary resignation. When they first landed, she had chosen to kill the naga Eshyra for two reasons: to make an example of her, and because the naga race and the mermaid race were ancient rivals. She felt no guilt for the kill.

Marina had assumed her show of force would be enough to make the Reverse Whale, Dadur, and the Dreadfin, Cyclon, back down for good. She never thought they would decide to make trouble after all. The tsunami that was now bearing down on them was their revenge—a clear message of their displeasure with the Stoneheart Horde.

"Arch Elder, take this," Marina said, pulling a large seashell from a pouch. It was an item Orion had given her.

"I don't know how powerful this tsunami will be. If it becomes unavoidable, you must lead the people into the Sea-Devouring Warship for shelter." She pressed the shell into Rendall's hand. "This is a Deepsea Razorgill Nest. If the worst happens and I can't get back to you in time, release them. They should be able to protect you."

"My lady... as you command!" Rendall started to ask something, but the icy look in Marina's eyes made him swallow his words.

"All personnel, by my command, move to higher ground! Now!"

Silverwood Realm—The Cult of Four's Black Tower.

"Pontiff Yriel. Pontiff Jack. Is there anything you'd like to say to me?"

Considering they were all fellow Pontiffs, Konak's tone was remarkably restrained.

"I imagine, Pontiff Konak, that you won't be mocking me any longer," Yriel said from the guest's seat, a smug, self-satisfied look on his face. "Abandoning my Black Tower seems rather excusable now, doesn't it?"

"The death of Yilaya the Witch and my own will projection was proof enough that the enemy was formidable," he continued. "You made the same mistake I did. We both underestimated them."

In truth, both Yriel and the clown had tacitly agreed not to warn Konak. They both wanted him to suffer a defeat. Yriel's motive was simple: he wanted Konak to understand that his own earlier loss was not without reason.

The clown's intentions were more complex. Beyond making Konak recognize the enemy's strength, he wanted to forge a deep-seated hatred between Konak and the Champions Alliance. That way, Konak would be bound more tightly to their own inner circle.

The truth was, the twelve Pontiffs of the Cult of Four were nearly all demigods with their own factions and interests. They were far from a united front. In many ways, they were rivals, because above them were only four positions: the Archbishops. Any vacancy in that upper echelon would turn them against one another in an instant.

"Pontiff Konak," the clown interjected, his voice slightly mechanical, "we have all climbed to our positions because we understand one simple truth: failure is not to be feared. What is to be feared is failing to stand united against our enemies." His words were a bridge, closing the growing distance between Konak and Yriel. He was an excellent mediator. "The enemy is strong. We need to be united, do we not?"

"Praise the Four Gods!" the clown continued, asserting his own authority. "My fellow Pontiffs, this is a world rich in resources. My arrival here is for one purpose: to help you conquer it." He was reminding Konak that he still had two other demigod allies who had yet to be deployed.

This war had only just begun.

"Bickering amongst ourselves will only diminish our own strength and fracture our unity," the clown said, his words striking a chord with both Konak and Yriel. "The Four Gods surely would not wish to see us retreat from such a fertile ground for boundless faith."

As the demigods responsible for this continental invasion, neither of them could bear to let such a prize slip through their fingers.

"Tell me," Konak said, his anger finally giving way to pragmatism. "What is your plan?" After the destruction of his fire dragon avatar, he knew Yriel and the clown must have already formulated a strategy. They wouldn't be sitting so calmly on the sidelines otherwise.

"It's simple," Yriel said. "We start taking this enemy seriously. We will deploy the Cult of Four's professional legions and commit more forces to the front. And, of course, we will need to increase the number of top-tier combatants as well."

The Front Lines—Hydraea Plains.

While the clown and the other two Pontiffs were scheming, a portion of the Champions Alliance's reinforcements had already reached the battlefield.

Demonic monsters, undead, cave spiders, and Plague-thralls armies poured onto the front lines, a tide of cannon fodder that swarmed and consumed the Cult of Four's own demonic forces. The battle line, spearheaded by the Deathly Soul-Reaper, Sever, and the Bone brothers, began a relentless push southward.

"The Cult of Four is a secretive organization. This is hardly the extent of their capabilities."

As if sensing a shift in the conflict, both the Deputy Commander and Alexander teleported to the front lines. With the arrival of the two veteran comrades, the Deathly Soul-Reaper had no choice but to cede supreme command.

"The Cult of Four is getting serious," Alexander stated, his gaze fixed on the southern horizon. "My spies in the north and south report that their standing army is on the move. The clown has also deployed his puppet legions. It seems he wants to go head-to-head with us."

"He wants to test our strength, certainly," the Deputy Commander mused, "but he also undoubtedly intends to bog us down here, to bleed us dry." A wicked smile played on his lips. "The pond is getting nicely stocked. I'm quite curious to see what other big fish we can catch."

He began to wave his staff. With each gesture, countless undead and skeletons clawed their way out of the corpse-littered ground. The Deputy Commander wasn't summoning mere fodder; he was raising legions of high-tier units.

Through the Deathly Soul-Reaper's eyes, Orion saw them: Dark Knights, Necromancers, Elite Archers, Mourning Banshees, Soul Reapers, Death Knights... there were even horrifying, bone-wrought meat wagons that churned across the battlefield.

This was a true Undead Scourge.

Orion watched the Deputy Commander, gaining a new and profound respect for the humble, scholarly 'old man'.

"The Cult of Four lost so many arch lords," Orion commented through the Reaper, voicing his question. "Can they still field more high-level combatants?" He had killed so many of them himself; he was certain he had dealt them a crippling blow.

"The Cult of Four's strength is beyond your imagination," Alexander replied, though he offered no further explanation. "You'll see soon enough."

"Have you found the clown's true form?" the Deputy Commander asked Alexander casually, his mass summoning complete.

Alexander shook his head, a flicker of disappointment crossing his face before it vanished. "Our old lead went cold. I didn't make a move, to avoid tipping our hand."

The Deputy Commander said nothing, but his silence was a grim affirmation. The traitor within the Champions Alliance had to be hunted down, no matter the cost.

Chapter 1088: The Ancient Whale

"Any word from our potential allies?" the Deputy Commander asked, finding the topic of the fruitless hunt for the clown and the Witch tiresome. He switched subjects, inquiring about the Roc-blooded race in the western Kiso Mountains and the southern Staghelm City.

Alexander simply shook his head, his silence heavy with meaning. Orion didn't know what had happened to his comrade's envoys, but it clearly wasn't good.

"We need a decisive, overwhelming victory," Alexander finally said, his voice tight. "We need to show these people our strength."

The words hit their mark. Orion understood immediately. The people they had sent to establish contact with potential allies had been met with mistrust, or perhaps something worse.

"Leaning on others is a fool's game," the Deputy Commander sighed. "The only one you can truly count on is yourself."

Alexander gave a slight nod of agreement, and Orion felt the truth of the words resonate deep within him. Allies were valuable, but not essential. More often than not, you could only truly rely on your own people. Partners and allies were just icing on the cake.

"If those people had any real intelligence, they would have made a move when they saw us fighting the Cult of Four," Orion added, voicing his own opinion, which aligned perfectly with what his two commanders had likely already discussed. "A timid, short-sighted faction like that isn't worthy of being our ally anyway."

"I have spies in every direction," Alexander said, his voice turning cold. His people had been met with a cold shoulder, and it was a personal affront to his pride. "After this war is over, there will be news. And then, it won't be them choosing whether to join us. It will be us choosing whether to accept them."

"Exactly," Orion agreed, his confidence bolstered with his two comrades backing him up. "We're here to conquer territory, not save the world!"

Alexander shot a sideways glance at Orion but said nothing. And so, the three of them continued their advance, leading the torrent of their combined armies ever southward.

Titanion Realm—Aenari Island.

Marina's sharp senses had given Rendall, Beyn, Torba, Drakthul, and the others a crucial early warning. Before the great tsunami arrived, Rendall had led the Tribe's bloodline warriors to the highest point on the island.

"It's hard to imagine," Rendall murmured to Drakthul, his eyes wide with awe and terror. "How would we ever survive something like this without an island to stand on?"

To them, a tsunami born from the deep ocean was nothing short of an apocalypse.

In the distance, the surface of the sea began to churn violently, waves cresting and crashing as if a thousand beasts were stampeding within the depths, as if countless sirens were screaming in rage. Soon, the surging, chaotic waves began to race toward them.

Then, a solid wall of water appeared on the horizon.

By the time the Stoneheart Horde's warriors could fully comprehend the sight, a deafening, thunderous roar was already upon them. The sound was a chaotic, overwhelming wall of noise.

The tsunami crashed ashore. It swallowed the beach in an instant, then the trees and vegetation, before slamming into the mountainside where the survivors clung to the peaks. Before Rendall's very eyes, the entire coastal island was completely submerged.

"Treacherous Sea Race!" he roared, his eyes blazing with fury. "Damn this cursed water!"

Facing the cataclysm, all he could do was shout helpless curses. And only Rendall knew that beneath his anger was a raw, primal fear. The terror of witnessing such a disaster firsthand was no less potent than facing an enemy on the battlefield. A spectacle of such vast, merciless power made one feel the fragility of life more than any blade.

At the edge of the sky, as the tsunami made landfall, Marina had already soared over the waves, flying toward the source of the enemy's aura. Not even she would dare to face such a cataclysm head-on.

"Your actions have angered me!"

SLAP!

The hazy, dream-like water materialized around her. The colossal, iridescent tail descended from it, slamming down upon the surface of the ocean. In that moment, the churning sea seemed to freeze, and an invisible shockwave shot through the water into the depths below.

SPLASH! SPLASH!

A moment later, two figures were blasted from the sea: the Reverse Whale, Dadur, and the Dreadfin, Cyclon. Both of them were clearly injured, their auras weakened.

"Why?!" Dadur shrieked, clutching his chest. "You're one of the Sea Race! Why are you mixed up with those land-dwellers, helping them invade our territory?"

If it had been a mermaid from the Tidefang Clan who had come to drive them out, he wouldn't have said a word. But the faction standing behind Marina was from the land. They were enemies of the Sea Race. They were insects. In Dadur's mind, they were not worthy of forcing him from his home, and that conviction was the root of his actions.

"You are a child of the ocean, a noble mermaid of the Tidefang Clan," Cyclon said, his tone far more stable than Dadur's hysteria. He was respectful, even now. "Those low-grade races are not worthy of your service. Leave now. We will pretend you were never here."

Marina shook her head. She glanced at Dadur, then focused her attention on Cyclon. "The Dreadfin have not ventured out of the Kygard Expanse in many years. I want to know why you are in the Trident Sea."

Cyclon was silent. That was his secret to keep.

"For the sake of the Dreadfin race," Marina said, her voice leaving no room for argument, "I can forgive this transgression. Leave. Now."

Both of them were from major clans of the Sea Race. Marina had no desire to kill them. A Legendary level expert was a high-tier combatant, not easily replaced.

"You tell us to leave, so we must leave?" Dadur snarled, a crazed light in his eyes. "What kind of reasoning is that?!"

He roared, his body shifting and swelling into his massive Reverse Whale form. With a great beat of his tail, he charged Marina.

Killing intent flashed in Marina's eyes. Once more, the iridescent tail emerged from the hazy water and swept down with merciless force. This time, however, Dadur was not struck. Just as the tail was about to connect, a phantom in the shape of an even larger Reverse Whale erupted from his body—the will projection of an arch lord.

"WHO DARES TO SLAUGHTER MY KIN IN MY OCEAN?!" the arch lord's aura boomed across the water. The hazy sea around Marina simply contracted slightly, ignoring the pressure completely.

"You're a dumbass," Marina breathed.

Seeing the Reverse Whale will projection turn its murderous gaze on her, she took out the urn Orion had given her and released the ancient giant-horned whale.

EEEEEEEE!

A high, piercing cry echoed from the urn, followed by an act of primeval consumption. As the charging will projection shrieked in terror, the ancient giant-horned whale lunged forward and swallowed it whole.