

Titan King 271

Chapter 271 I'm willing to bear your child

Orion lifted his trident, aiming it right at Sophia, unmoved by her seductive act.

"I get what I want, you get what you want. Citizens, subordinates, blood, slaughter...they're nothing but cannon fodder. This is a grand feast just for us, wouldn't you agree?"

Hearing those words made Orion's eye twitch.

He had a guess about what she might mean, and that guess was so brutal it practically made his skin crawl. It was a path of no return—sacrificing anything and everything for personal gain.

Sophia stepped forward and stared at Orion with gentle, liquid eyes, projecting such a soft, vulnerable facade that it was as though she'd let him do anything to her. She was completely ready; all Orion had to do was give her a single look, and she'd willingly spread her legs to let his big cock slip inside her pussy.

"Sorry," Orion replied, "I'm selfish, sure. But your values and mine just don't line up at all."

Boom!

Lightning crackled, and the trident charged with its fierce electric power impaled Sophia's body. Even so, she continued gazing at Orion with the same serene smile.

"Orion, if we don't see eye to eye, we can talk things out... find some common ground, or even—"

Zzzzt!

Before Sophia could finish, arcs of electricity erupted from the trident, wiping her out completely. Orion frowned as he stared at the stardust-like motes that once again spread through the surrounding void, looking even more grim than before.

"You've got some serious resilience—and a pretty damn tough willpower."

A hazy figure reappeared from the void passage and merged into Sophia's body. She fixed her eyes on Orion, speaking in that same tender, almost motherly voice.

"Orion, you've shattered both my dream illusion and dreamy world, which is mighty impressive!

If it's possible, Orion, I'm willing to bear your child."

Her actions, her words, her whole worldview clashed hard with everything Orion thought he knew about Legendary-level beings. And from the tone of her voice, Orion could tell she was completely serious—she genuinely longed to have his offspring.

"What sort of place is this Emerald Dream Realm?"

What kind of environment molds someone into a person who thinks power reigns over all?"

Standing guard at the other end of the passage, Orion studied Sophia. He realized that what he'd been seeing so far was still just an illusion. Sophia hadn't truly crossed over from the far side of the void passage. But that bizarre dream-trickery, which had snared him twice now, put Orion on high alert.

Without bothering to reply to Sophia, he brandished his trident again, unleashing more lightning to swirl around the passage's entrance and block the Dark Creatures attempting to invade.

During the moment Orion had been trapped in her illusion, yet another wave of Dark Creatures had slipped into his territory—among them, three Alpha-level dark creatures. Sophia's mind-bending tactics truly were tough to guard against.

"There are more than enough Dark Creatures running loose already. I can't let them keep coming. If they do, Blackstone City is in for a world of trouble."

With the last wave included, that totaled seven Alpha-level Dark Creatures. That was already enough to make the warriors of Blackstone City break a sweat. Any further invasion would only cost the Stoneheart Horde dearly, even if they eventually won.

So Orion made a decision. He slowly shut his eyes and steadied his mind, pushing his senses outward. This should make it harder for Sophia to confuse him again.

On the other side of the passage, Sophia studied Orion, her thoughts deepening.

"He's only just hit Legendary level, yet he's already this powerful?

Thank goodness the void passage is opening in my favor here. Otherwise, it'd be a pain to handle him."

Even as she mulled things over, Sophia never took her eyes off Orion. His caution was obvious.

"So, those two waves of Dark Creatures that got through are probably enough to threaten his territory.

That must be why he's so wary now.

Hmm... Looks like I need to send another wave of my people through so I can really get the upper hand."

At some point, the smile had faded from Sophia's face. The bewitchingly beautiful woman now wore a more severe expression, any hint of motherly warmth gone.

Meanwhile, at Blackstone City's outer walls:

Delilah stood at the helm, with Lilith right by her side. Earthshaker, Lysinthia, and Slagor had gathered there as well, ready for action at a moment's notice.

"Lorelia's just sent word that outside Blackstone City—about 2 miles away—countless Dark Creatures have congregated.

We don't know their exact numbers yet, but several Alpha-level auras are coming from the horde.

Strangely enough, even though they've gathered, they're not attacking right away... It's like they're waiting for something."

It was Lilith who gave the report. She often got the first intel from outside Blackstone City, even before Delilah, the Elder of Stewardship. Delilah didn't seem to mind, but she was frowning, pondering what the Dark Creatures might be waiting for.

Just then, a Broadskull Ravens returned from the darkness beyond the city walls, its body streaked with blood. A Succubus-bloodline warrior strode along the rampart and whispered a quick update into Delilah's ear. Delilah's brow furrowed, her face darkening slightly.

"The Sentinel Corps sent out a scouting squad of Broadskull Ravens, and only this one made it back.

It looks like there are flying-type Dark Creatures hidden among that army."

Delilah relayed the news to Lilith, Earthshaker, Lysinthia, and Slagor, each of whom wore a worried look.

"Elder of Stewardship, did the Broadskull Ravens manage to identify what kind of creatures they are?"

"And how many are out there?" Slagor asked.

Delilah merely shook her head, admitting she didn't know.

With the enemy situation unclear, attack timing unknown, and an army outside that declined to strike, the whole scenario seemed to favor the other side.

"Don't worry," Delilah finally said into the silence. Though her heart might be uneasy, she couldn't just stand by and let morale slip before the battle even began.

"Our lord is wise!"

She invoked Orion's name, hoping to rally the gathered elders.

"He made sure we built these outer walls in advance, plus four extremely potent arrow towers that're also fitted to defend against aerial assaults."

Delilah pointed toward the distant towers, sounding downright confident.

"With these towers standing, even if flying-type Dark Creatures launch an attack, we'll spot them before they can do much damage.

Besides, the skies above the Horde belong to Thunderhawk Rayden, who's patrolling right now.

So, as long as we hold the walls and the towers, we will win this fight!

"How much cultivation resource you can grab from this all depends on how hard we're willing to push ourselves!"

Chapter 272 Get ready for combat

As soon as the words "cultivation resources" were spoken, every elder's mind shifted to Dark Source Crystals and the Alpha-level crystal core Orion carried. Then, each of them glanced up at the shining Arrow Towers standing tall upon the city walls, and they felt their blood boil with renewed passion, their fighting spirit rising.

Delilah secretly nodded, satisfied with the little trick she had just used. Illusions don't always have to be aimed at the enemy—sometimes they can be great for motivating your own people.

However, that collective passion and fighting will can't hold up forever. For half a month straight, the Dark Creatures outside continued to gather in greater numbers, showing no sign of launching an attack.

In contrast, the Spider Queen's little spiders, sent out time and again, had mostly failed to return and died out there in the field. Even before the real battle had started, they were suffering losses—that was not a good omen.

On the city walls, Delilah and the other elders had been eating and sleeping out here the entire time, not daring to leave for even a moment.

"This can't go on," said Onyx, who sat cross-legged on the ground. He gazed into the darkness beyond the walls, voice low.

"The more time drags on, the more everyone's patience wears thin, and the more agitated our people become. On a battlefield, restlessness leads to poor decisions. Morale takes a hit, and emotions can spiral out of control."

"Delilah, we have to find a way to make this fight start sooner rather than later."

Delilah nodded in agreement. She too wished the battle would just begin already. The enemy's game plan was obvious: they wanted to stall until they held the advantage. The longer things drag out, the more likely the Dark Creatures' approach will dictate the pace of battle.

"Let's go on the offensive," Lilith suggested. Her words drew the notice of every elder present, especially since Orion had given orders to focus on defense.

"Orion told us not to leave the city because he wants the fighting to happen beneath these walls—which is a huge advantage for us. But with the enemy just hanging around, our Bloodline Warriors are burning off their motivation and morale by the day. That's bad news. We can try baiting these Dark Creatures closer, lure them right under our walls."

Lilith cast her gaze around at the group, then spoke calmly and decisively. "Even if we fail to lure them in, at least we can share some positive battle reports with our people—boost morale and keep the fighting spirit high."

Lilith's suggestion made Delilah, Onyx, and Slagor all perk up. They exchanged glances, silently swapping opinions.

"I'm in favor of Lilith's plan."

"Me too. But I'd like to point out that whomever we send outside to draw them in ought to be highly mobile."

Delilah nodded. After a brief pause, she added with firm seriousness, "I'm on board as well. But who's the best fit for this mission?"

Her question brought about a hush among the elders. As they fell into thought, Thundar stood up.

"Leave that to our cavalry corps. No one's got better mobility than we do."

Delilah studied Thundar for a moment before nodding in agreement. "Thundar, be careful out there. Fall back through the Arrow Towers' firing range when you come back. That'll make covering you a lot easier."

Thundar nodded, accepting her advice. "Then I'll head off to make final preparations. You all get ready for a real fight."

Half an hour later, three thousand cavalry-bloodline warriors rode out of the city astride their Snow Wolves, forming neat ranks and retaining solid momentum. Mixed in with the wolf pack were a few Cave Spiders, a Bone Python here and there, and even a single Deep Abyss Dragon.

"Pass on the word to the archers, crossbowmen, and spear-throwers—tell them to get ready for combat!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

Outside the city, among the cavalry, Thundar was surrounded by Dace, Otho, Beyn, and Torba. Since Orion was away from the Horde, anyone serving as a knight was naturally part of this cavalry party carrying out the task of luring the enemy. At Thundar's side loomed a Hero-level Abyss Dragon.

"Dace, Otho, Beyn, Torba, your Frost Wolves pack more power than the others', which makes them the alphas. Guide the rest of the group and keep an eye on everyone's safety.

"Fergus," Thundar continued, "you'll lead our cavalry's javelin-throwers, and you get at most three volleys. Whether we manage to bait them or not, we pull back after that—is that clear?"

Fergus nodded. He tightened his grip on his trident, bearing strong fighting intent in his eyes.

As a child, Fergus had trained with the warhammer; to him, the brute strength of warriors swinging giant warhammers or spiked clubs was true power.

But once Orion became the strongest Bloodline Warrior of the Horde, Fergus had changed course—he switched to a trident and trained with it unrelentingly.

He had once had it in mind to challenge Orion one day, to become the mightiest fighter in the Horde. That was his private ambition and driving force. But when Orion shot up to Legendary level, Fergus had to let that plan go.

He wasn't delusional; he knew Orion could squash him in a single blow.

So Fergus set a different goal—amass enough battle honors to push his way to the peak of Hero level and hopefully break into Alpha-level sooner rather than later.

Orion embodied the Horde's glory, the Giant King, lord of the Black Forest. Fergus wanted to bathe in that glory and become stronger, standing among the best of the giants. He had no choice but to push himself to the limit if he wanted more of the Horde's attention.

Fortunately, Fergus had done enough to gain the trust—and the partnership—of a small Abyss Dragon.

"Ready—!"

"Fire!"

A lethal glint flashed in Fergus's eyes alongside a surge of killing intent. At his roar, the front ranks of Bloodline Warriors launched their spears or fired bolts from their crossbows.

Thud, thud, thud!

In the darkness, the sounds of tearing flesh could be heard, and the wounded howls of Dark Creatures rang out.

"Second round—aim... fire!"

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!

Amid the whistling storm of arrows, Fergus caught sight of a tide of Dark Creatures charging from the darkness.

"Switch directions—retreat along our planned route!"

Awooo!

With low snarls, the wolves spun around. The Dark Creatures followed on their heels like a menacing tide, rolling in with unstoppable momentum.

Chapter 273 Seven dangerous presences

Void passage. Nobody knew what Sophia was scheming, but she spoke again.

"Orion, are you worried about your people?"

"After all, I've already sent two waves of my subjects over to your territory. By now, it must be drenched in blood and echoing with endless wails!"

Her tone was so gentle, yet her words were utterly cold-blooded. That was Sophia.

Orion lifted his head, eyes shut, silently focusing on Sophia without saying a word.

"Orion, closing your eyes is the dumbest way to escape a nightmare!"

"If you're willing, we can have a real conversation!"

"I can send even more of my subjects for you to slaughter as you please!"

It was blatant temptation—filthy and unmasked.

Still, Orion kept his eyes tightly shut, entirely unmoved.

Because he'd left a will projection in Blackstone City, Orion was also keeping tabs on the battle there.

Blackstone City, outer walls.

The cavalry unit led by Thundar launched a provocation, hurling two rounds of spears and bolts, drawing a huge swarm of dark creatures in pursuit.

Whoosh!

A bolt shimmering with rainbow light shot out from the arrow tower, tearing apart the first group of dark creatures that entered its range.

The cavalry made a swift retreat as dark creatures surged in like a tide, triggering instant conflict at the outer walls.

Suddenly, spears, bolts, crossbow arrows, and rolling boulders filled the sky. Icefield snow wolves retreated into the city, hugging the wall as they fell back.

"Load the catapults! Let 'em fly!"

"You worthless scum! Do you even know what's beneath those walls?"

"It's dark source crystals, it's battle glory, it's a whole lot of juicy meat for you to feast on!"

"Crush them!"

"..."

The voice of cannon fodder troops' Deputy Commander Dirtclaw rang out along the wall. The sector under his defense was far from the arrow tower, so only the cannon fodder troops had control over these heavy weapons.

As Dirtclaw roared, the Thunderstorm Bearmen among the cannon fodder troops hefted massive boulders onto wooden-framed catapults, launching wave after wave of attacks.

Huge stones drenched in burning oils soared through the air and smashed into the dark creature horde. Those unable to dodge were killed or severely wounded.

"You filthy Bearmen, that round was pretty damn good!"

"Keep pounding them! Rack up more kills, and when the dark beast tides subside, I'll get you ten slots for promotion!"

Dirtclaw, roaring with excitement and raw brutality, still remembered to toss out a tempting bone for the Thunderstorm Bearmen of the cannon fodder troops.

A moment later, when the dark creatures drew close to the walls, melee combat erupted across the entire front. The outer walls were quickly bathed in blood.

Because the outer walls were only about 100 feet high, that wasn't much of a barrier for many dark creatures.

Creatures like Tentacle Monsters, Dark Fiends, Voidcrawlers, and Night Stalkers could leap in full force, using the wall as a springboard. Two jumps were all they needed to land atop it.

On the walls themselves, only four Alpha-level Elders—Delilah, Lilith, Slagor, and Earthshaker—remained to watch; everyone else had joined the fight or gone to command their troops.

"There haven't been any Alpha-level dark creatures so far, so this wave of siege isn't very strong!"

Slagor was keeping a sharp eye on the battlefield. The fiercest onslaught had passed, and most of the dark creatures were being held at bay below the walls by bloodline warriors, unable to break through.

It turned out this happened because there were no Alpha-level individuals among the attacking dark creatures to keep them organized.

Without a leader, that wave of monsters simply didn't pack much punch.

Hiss!

Just as the battle was at its peak with horns echoing nonstop, a shrill beastly roar pierced the dark distance.

That low, grating sound was part snake's hiss, part eagle's cry.

The roar was ear-piercing, heard throughout the outer walls.

The dark creatures that heard it hesitated. Countless ones already climbing the walls were cut down right on the spot, and those below, once they realized what was happening, drew back into the far reaches of darkness.

"They're retreating!"

Lilith let out a sigh. Those dark creatures, lured in to attack, had lasted barely fifteen minutes before the recall sounded.

For the Elders eager to unleash war as soon as possible, this was not welcome news.

"That creature's roar just now was from an Alpha-level dark creature!"

"We just don't know what kind it is. It's too far away to see clearly."

Slagor stood, peering into the distant shadows, trying to spot whichever Alpha-level monster lay hidden there.

"Issue the order to clean up the battlefield and tally our spoils!"

"The dark creatures' retreat marks our temporary victory!"

"Blood, death, dark source crystals, victory—our horde's bloodline warriors have finally blown off their pent-up steam, so morale is stable now!"

"Even if the war drags on, we don't need to worry for the time being!"

Delilah rose, feeling much lighter all over.

To her, this brief skirmish was a resounding success.

Solving the horde's biggest inherent problem was more important than anything else.

"Issue another order: the Sentinel Corps will combine with the cavalry into a mixed unit. While the bloodline warriors rest, we'll beef up patrols and stay on high alert!"

Half an hour later, Onyx, Rendall, Thundar, and Lysinthia gathered once again atop the wall.

"The big battle might be on the verge of breaking out!"

It was Gorgon Lysinthia who spoke, drawing every Alpha-level fighter's attention, including Lilith's.

Under their startled gazes, Lysinthia stayed as calm as still water.

But right as everyone frowned, curious, something began to change about Lysinthia.

They watched as her hair thickened and started twisting in the air with no breeze at all.

In a few breaths, her once-lustrous hair transformed into many fine, black serpents.

Lysinthia reached out, plucked a small snake from her head, and spoke to the others.

"Ever since I turned into a Gorgon, my perception has become much sharper!"

"They tell me there are seven dangerous presences in the distance!"

She pointed at the black snake in her hand, then at the others on her head.

Then Lysinthia put the small snake back, and it reverted to her hair once again.

A few moments later, the little snakes were all gone. Her head was crowned with black hair swaying in the cold wind, giving off a chilling aura of mystery.

"Are you certain there are seven dangerous presences?"

Lysinthia nodded, confidently confirming Delilah's question.

Delilah furrowed her pretty brows and lowered her head in thought.

It was obvious the seven dangerous presences Lysinthia spoke of were Alpha-level dark creatures.

In other words, if those dark creatures launched a collective assault on the city, it would be one hell of a massive battle.

Chapter 274 Don't you want to give it a try?

"Seven Alpha-level dark creatures... Seven..."

Delilah murmured quietly, shutting her eyes as she spoke.

Aside from Lorelia and Rockwell—who were stationed at the underground fissure—and counting herself, the horde's current Alpha-level fighters included Onyx, Rendall, Thundar, Lilith, Slagor, Lysinthia, Earthshaker, Thunderhawk, and the Twilight Viper Lysinthia recently brought back.

Altogether, Delilah had nine Alpha-level powerhouses at her disposal.

"Elders, there are way too many Alpha-level dark creatures attacking this time. We've got to thin them out to minimize the danger."

"And we also can't let them breach the city. So next, we'll need to..."

Delilah favored a divide-and-conquer approach, yet dealing a swift blow to multiple Alpha-level beings at once was no small feat. With so many of them on the opposing side, if you didn't send out fighters of equal rank to pin them down, any Alpha-level dark creature that slipped into the inner city could slaughter countless ordinary citizens.

Just as Delilah had laid out her plan and was about to let the troops catch their breath, another round of beastly roars echoed outside Blackstone City.

This time, the roars didn't come just once; they sounded again and again in rapid succession.

"Damn it, the dark creatures are on the move—sound the alarm!"

Trumpets wailed. The bloodline warriors who had just stepped off the wall rushed back into position.

In the darkness beyond the city, a massive wave of dark creatures charged forth like a flood, slamming into Blackstone City.

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Void passage, where temptation lurked everywhere.

"Dear Orion, are you sure you won't reconsider?"

"As far as I know, once someone steps into the Legendary level, transcendent power starts affecting their bloodline, making it super hard to produce offspring!"

"I'm the Butterfly Mother. I have a special method that could very likely help you conceive a child. Don't you want to give it a try?"

Orion's brow twitched in response, though not because Sophia's offer had swayed him. What stirred his emotions was that mention of a bloodline starting to be influenced by transcendent power.

He'd sensed something along those lines a while back.

The second time Orion encountered Lord Ariel's will projection, Ariel fired off a sphere of lightning meant to vaporize Orion's flesh in one strike. That was when the Curse of a Hundred Blossoms kicked in, resisting the will projection's lightning and even merging it into Orion's body.

After that, Orion's bloodline purity on his data panel had dropped instead of going up.

"So transcendent power really can affect my bloodline!"

Orion sighed inwardly, solving yet another riddle that had weighed on his mind.

The notion of supernatural forces diminishing his chances of having children did bother him. But thinking of Violet and that pink seed put his mind more at ease.

"Orion, you must know that tons of arch lords and even demigods end up having no children at all. Don't you want a powerful heir of your own?"

"You may not want it, but Sophia surely does, right?"

"Orion, will you fulfill Sophia's wish?"

Rumble!

What answered Sophia was a surge of supernatural lightning. A streak of crackling electricity swept through the void passage, obliterating the dark creatures sneaking in.

Orion reached out, grabbed two Alpha-level dark source crystals from among the remains, and swallowed them on the spot.

Ever since he advanced to Legendary level, bigger, more troublesome crises had emerged. Orion couldn't raise his strength fast enough.

Sophia, who had been about to collect those dark source crystals for herself, frowned as she watched him take them.

"Only two dark source crystals, Orion. If you want more, I can give them to you."

Her voice turned gentle again, all soft and refined. Sadly, Orion paid her no heed.

...

Blackstone City. The battle had begun.

Unexpectedly, it was the sky that lit up first with the clash of blades—or in this case, talons and wings.

Even before the fight officially broke out, Thunderhawk Rayden's piercing cries rang out nonstop above Blackstone City. A flock of semi-transparent "invisible butterflies" appeared in the sky, only to be spotted by the keen-eyed Rayden.

Unfazed by a fight, Thunderhawk Rayden soared straight toward them.

This butterfly horde was led by an Alpha-level butterfly, bigger than the rest. With that one in command, the swarm flapped their wings in an attempt to surround and kill Rayden midair.

Fortunately, Rayden had brains as well as brawn. After launching several bolts of lightning, he switched course, luring the fight into range of the arrow tower.

With support from the arrow tower raining down on the butterfly swarm, Rayden's burden eased up considerably.

On the city wall, Delilah lifted her gaze, squinting at the aerial battle, then turned her attention to the arrow tower. Relief flooded her features. The arrow towers Orion had insisted on building were turning out to be the horde's protective umbrella.

They boasted formidable power and range. However, as soon as the arrow tower focused on aiding Thunderhawk in the sky, it wouldn't be able to handle the dark creatures flooding in on the ground.

After a moment of thought, Delilah gave her next order.

"Relay this to the Sentinel Corps—release every flying beast we have. Get them in the air and back Rayden up!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

Delilah had a straightforward plan: once the broadskull ravens joined the fight in the sky, they'd free up the arrow tower to concentrate on pounding the monsters below. With the tower's explosive strikes, dark creatures on the ground would be knocked around and fall into confusion, and that confusion could be a life-saving window for the horde's bloodline warriors.

"There's a giant tentacle monster out there—leave it to me!"

Rendall pointed at the first massive tentacle monster to appear among the dark creatures, brimming with confidence.

"Support squad, keep an eye out. If no other dark creatures join the fight, move in as soon as you can so we can take it down quickly!"

Having said that, Rendall vaulted off the wall, whirling his spiked club like it was a tornado and charging straight for the giant tentacle monster.

At that same moment, an enormous Dark Fiends creature came bounding out of the shadows, leaping toward Blackstone City.

"I got dibs on that Dark Fiends!"

The instant Thundar spotted it, he felt a rush of excitement. Orion had given him a taming collar a while back, but as the cavalry commander, Thundar still lacked a mount that truly matched his own strength. Seeing this beast, he figured it was finally time to try that collar out and see if he could claim it.

With that, Thundar drew the massive two-handed sword strapped to his back and charged into the fray.

Chapter 275 Butterfly assassin

The battle raged on, and within the surging wave of dark creatures, three Alpha-level creatures were now on the field.

"Don't panic. With Rendall and Thundar's strength, those two Alpha-level creatures can't do much to them for now!" Delilah spoke up, reassuring the anxious Alpha-level fighters gathered on the city wall.

Delilah knew full well that Rendall, protected by his blood shield, could kill that giant tentacle monster given enough time, even without backup. She had every confidence in him.

As for Thundar, Delilah's gaze had been glued to him, monitoring the battlefield constantly.

"Wait—that's not right!"

"Damn it!"

Delilah and Lilith both cried out at once, but they were too late.

Screeeee!

From a distant spot on the battlefield, an Alpha-level Phantom Spider suddenly emerged. One of its spidery legs sliced toward Thundar's chest.

Splurt!

Thundar had been through countless battles; at the brink of death, he managed to shift his body slightly, trying to dodge a lethal blow. Still, the spider's leg stabbed through his left shoulder.

"Support squad, move! Priority target: kill that Phantom Spider!"

"Earthshaker, go head-to-head with the Phantom Spider!"

Earthshaker nodded without a word. He vaulted off the city wall and instantly activated his racial skill, Earth Stomp. Like a runaway freight train, Earthshaker charged straight toward the Phantom Spider, a shock wave rippling behind him.

The "support squad" was really a kill team composed of Slagor, Lysinthia, and Twilight Viper. Twilight Viper would lead the frontal assault, Lysinthia would assist, and Slagor would bide his time to unleash a finishing move.

At Delilah's command, Slagor and Lysinthia also leaped from the wall, landing on Twilight Viper's back as it sped toward the Phantom Spider.

"Lilith!"

Delilah turned around. Next to her, Lilith had already begun forming hand seals, chanting a sort of melody. This was the spell to break illusions.

The reason that Alpha-level Phantom Spider had appeared so suddenly was that it had cloaked itself in illusions before ambushing Thundar. But the moment Lilith's spell spread across the battlefield, everyone's expression changed.

Once the illusions shattered, the landscape from Blackstone City all the way to the distant darkness was no longer empty ground. Everywhere was packed with swarming dark creatures. And in the low sky far away, an Alpha-level Enchanted Butterfly flitted around, scattering glowing powder wherever it flew.

That powder created large-scale illusions—an absolute nightmare if left unchecked.

"I'll handle that Enchanted Butterfly!"

Still chanting, Lilith leaped off the wall, determined to strike down the butterfly that was conjuring those massive illusions. Such a high-level enemy could wreak havoc on the battlefield if she didn't intervene.

And with an Alpha-level Phantom Spider backing it up, the illusions were extremely potent. No wonder Lilith and her succubus sister hadn't detected them earlier.

"Understood!"

No sooner had Delilah spoken than the ground beneath Blackstone City's outer district started to shake violently. A Dark Armored Beetle, another Alpha-level beast, burst through the stone slabs and climbed up from underground. Right behind it, countless Night Stalkers poured out of the tunnel it left behind.

"Got it!" Onyx's deep voice rang out. Stone axe slung across his back, he strode quickly toward the Dark Armored Beetle in heavy, measured steps.

"Mhm."

Delilah gave a low hum, her brow furrowing. "So six Alpha-level dark creatures showed up all at once. Where's the seventh?"

That was the question on Delilah's mind. Scanning the battlefield, though, she could see no trace of a seventh Alpha-level dark creature.

"Royal Guard, join me—keep chanting the spell to break illusions!"

Even though they hadn't located the missing seventh Alpha-level dark creature, Delilah saw Lilith closing in on the Enchanted Butterfly. Her cool, haunting voice rose as Delilah and her Royal Guard took over Lilith's chanting of the anti-illusion spell.

With Delilah in the chorus, Lilith no longer needed to sing. Drawing her sword in her right hand and clutching a dagger in her left, Lilith roused her bloodline power. A pair of sleek, fleshy wings appeared behind her, and she shot into the lower air.

Clang!

Lilith and the Enchanted Butterfly in midair collided, both knocking each other backward. Regaining her balance, Lilith squinted at her foe. The butterfly now wielded a pair of curved blades about the same size, and it had used them just now to deflect her blow.

"Again!"

With a low cry, Lilith's wings flashed, and she lunged once more.

Blackstone City was in total chaos and locked in combat.

High above, Thunderhawk screeches mixed with the cawing of broadskull ravens. Streaks of lightning lit the sky, while the invisible butterflies, led by their Alpha-level leader, darted back and forth, regrouping constantly with minimal casualties.

In the low air, Lilith and that Enchanted Butterfly clashed all over the place. Sparks flew with every collision, bloodline power raging in a lethal dance of blades and steel.

On the ground, from the outer areas of Blackstone City to the distant darkness, dark creatures filled every corner, every single one locked in battle.

Four Alpha-level creatures—the Dark Armored Beetle, the giant tentacle monster, the massive Dark Fiends, and the Phantom Spider—were wreaking havoc in and around Blackstone City.

Were it not for the four arrow towers on the outer walls firing at full force and suppressing the forward wave of dark creatures, those walls might have been breached already.

Chaos. Utter chaos.

Delilah oversaw the fight, chanting and watching the battlefield, hoping to direct the conflict—but it was too chaotic, with fights breaking out everywhere, each crying out for reinforcements.

Zzzap!

A long, thin sword—sharp as a needle—materialized out of thin air, lunging straight at Delilah's throat.

"Don't stop! Keep chanting the spell to break illusions!"

Delilah halted her portion of the chant and signaled the succubus bloodline warriors who instinctively sprang forward to protect her—her personal Royal Guard—to stand down. She raised her right hand, and a gleaming strand of near-invisible silk whipped out, instantly shredding the butterfly-assassin lurking behind that narrow blade.

Poof!

The assassin faded away like a phantom, and that needle-like sword vanished into the air as well.

"You can't escape me, unknown assassin!"

Delilah projected her voice, trying to rattle the assassin. At the same time, she extended the range of her web of silk, enveloping the hidden killer still skulking somewhere in the void.

With Orion absent, Delilah—acting as the horde's supreme commander—had been spinning that web from the moment she set foot on the city wall. Her goal was to protect herself from assassination.

Sure enough, this newly revealed assassin was the final Alpha-level fighter among the dark creatures. Its mission was to sneak in and murder the commander of Blackstone City's forces. If Delilah were killed, they'd be leaderless, and the city's defenses would descend into chaos.

While Delilah was attempting to break up the Alpha-level dark creatures, those creatures, in turn, were launching a decapitation strike on her.

Up on the wall, the tension was suffocating.

Delilah stood still, maintaining a calm stance, hoping to strike back with perfect timing. But after that single failed blow, the butterfly-assassin made no more moves, as if it had vanished for good.

Chapter 276 Bloody fight

Roar...

The massive Dark Fiends let out a never-ending howl. After leaping into the air, it opened its huge maw and lunged straight at Thundar.

Smack!

A giant tail lashed out overhead, striking the Dark Fiends just as it was about to pounce on Thundar. Twilight Viper released a low, rumbling hiss. Its forked tongue flickered, and those vertical pupils glowed with a cold, vicious light.

In just a short time, Twilight Viper—carrying Lysinthia and Slagor—had arrived on the scene.

"I'll go keep the Phantom Spider occupied. Team up with Twilight Viper and finish off that Dark Fiends first!"

Truth be told, Slagor was actually pretty timid, but with the high-end fighters on their side right now, he had nothing to fear.

"Got it!"

Lysinthia responded curtly, then stood on Twilight Viper's head and rushed at the giant Dark Fiends.

"Lysinthia, just immobilize that Dark Fiends—I want to tame it!"

Even with his left shoulder badly injured, Thundar refused to give up on recruiting this Dark Fiends.

Lysinthia shot Thundar and his massive sword a quick sidelong glance, saying nothing. A few seconds later, her voice echoed through the air.

"Fine, but you only get one shot."

A look of excitement crossed Thundar's face. Without another word, he hefted his greatsword and charged toward the battlefield where Twilight Viper clashed with the Dark Fiends.

Elsewhere, Slagor was having a harder time distracting the Phantom Spider. The creature had far too many long legs, which greatly extended its reach.

Fortunately, Slagor was an Alpha-level veteran with solid combat experience, plus he was protected by both a water-based shield and armor. For the moment, at least, he wasn't losing ground.

Over in the outer district of Blackstone City, if Thundar's ambition was high, Onyx's was even higher.

Onyx raised his stone axe and locked eyes with the Dark Armored Beetle. The killing intent between the two was palpable.

That was literal killing intent: while Thundar wanted his Dark Fiends alive, Onyx intended to hack the Dark Armored Beetle to pieces.

Once done, he hoped to try out the summoning ability he'd inherited at the Heroic Altar. Ever since he'd gotten that skill, Onyx had been itching to use it.

"WAAAGH!"

He let out a thunderous roar, seized the initiative, and charged in with his axe swinging. In the next moment, the clash of Onyx's furious bellows and the Dark Armored Beetle's bellowing growls reverberated nonstop through the outer district—neither side willing to back down.

Beyond Blackstone City's walls, Rendall had it easiest of all the Alpha-level fighters.

Thanks to his blood shield, Rendall could go big and bold with his attacks—wild, brutal, and direct. The tentacle monster facing him was already riddled with wounds, battered in several places by his spiked club, leaving gashes and holes pouring out blood.

"Hahaha... you wretched hunk of meat—die!"

Rendall fought like a madman. Once he realized the tentacle monster couldn't pierce his blood shield, he had absolutely nothing to restrain him.

Clang!

A metallic crash echoed. Two slim figures in the lower air clashed, parted, and then hovered apart again.

Lilith was getting more and more alarmed with each blow. She realized the Enchanted Butterfly in front of her could not only parry her physical attacks with ease but also resist her mind illusions.

Of course, Lilith had also felt the sting of the butterfly's illusions. Thankfully, she wore a butterfly hairpin that Orion had given her, which shielded her from illusions and mental assaults.

It was precisely thanks to Orion's gift that Lilith was able to keep pace with the Enchanted Butterfly. Without it, Lilith doubted she'd still be standing.

"I can't beat this thing. Guess I'll just have to keep it occupied."

Lilith accepted reality. Realizing she couldn't overpower her opponent, she dismissed any ideas of finishing it off and focused on keeping it busy instead.

Screee... Cawwww...

Up above, the battle was just as grueling. The broadskull ravens were taking the heaviest losses. Of the hundred-plus ravens sent to aid them, fewer than thirty remained.

Still, these surviving broadskull ravens had brought Thunderhawk Rayden the time and space to tear through wave after wave of invisible butterflies.

Compared to the invisible butterflies' Alpha, Rayden's lightning attacks and physical strikes packed way more bite. At least half of that airborne swarm had been wiped out.

After this bloody fight, Thunderhawk Rayden's shriek grew sharper, echoing across the skies. He was actually managing to push back the invisible butterflies' Alpha.

"I'll finish you all—I've faced down a Legendary-level fighter before!"

"Go to hell!"

Rayden's hawk cries rang out as he fought like a berserker.

Meanwhile, in the void passage, Orion still had his eyes shut.

Sophia, on the other end, fell silent, no longer trying to woo him with seductive offers.

Orion looked up, his gaze shifting toward that empty void. He knew Sophia wouldn't just throw in the towel. The woman who wanted to bear his child had no doubt set more schemes in motion.

Right then, Orion's brow furrowed.

Since reaching Legendary level, he'd placed will projections on a few key members of the horde. Now, the projection he'd left with Lorelia was sending news that the underground fissure had started acting up at this critical juncture.

Moonshadow Valley, underground fissure.

The entrance to the bottomless abyss was now plastered with spiderwebs, covering the sky and the ground alike.

"Warden Rockwell, stand ready!"

"My people discovered a swarm of subterranean creatures climbing out from below! The upside is we haven't spotted any Alpha-level ones yet."

Spider Queen Lorelia and Rockwell flanked the passage entrance on either side, posted there to prevent any sudden Alpha-level beast from bursting out into Moonshadow Valley.

Rockwell didn't answer. His keen stare fixed on the bottomless abyss. Glancing at the numberless little spiders stationed around the entrance and the spider scouts hanging upside down on webs armed with bows and crossbows, Rockwell's eyes narrowed.

"With this setup, not even a mosquito could squeeze through."

He kept that thought to himself, but in his mind, he was sure that if he were one of those subterranean monsters crawling upward, he'd never return.

"If an Alpha-level creature does show itself, no holding back. We'll work together to kill it on the spot."

"The horde's already in a major fight, so they probably can't send help here anytime soon."

Rockwell's comment made perfect sense, and Lorelia nodded.

After a brief pause, a squirming, crawling sound drifted up from the depths of the bottomless abyss. The first to poke into view were worm-like invertebrates, somewhat resembling earthworms—but each measuring roughly 23 to 26 feet in length.

Chitter, chitter, chitter!

Lorelia let out a hissing chatter, and countless cave spiders obeyed, plunging down into the bottomless abyss.

Thus began the underground creatures' invasion.

Chapter 277 Backup

Several days ago, in the underworld.

When Clymene and the five Giant Elders heard a commotion and rushed to the bottomless abyss exit, a huge swarm of subterranean creatures had already threaded their way up through the passage.

Led by Clymene, the group and the five Elders relied on the arrow tower to intercept and kill any underground monsters crawling up from below.

"Damn it! Where were all these friggin' creatures hiding before?"

"There are way too many of them. No matter how many we kill, it won't make much difference!"

"Yeah, makes you wish we'd brought some of those little spiders along!"

Clymene swung her warhammer, crushing a swath of subterranean monsters before looking up and answering the Elders.

"We can't just move the little spiders on a whim. They have to monitor and protect the teleportation portal!"

"These underground creatures are going berserk, racing topside, which probably means something's gone wrong at Blackstone City."

"Otherwise, Orion must be up to something."

"Think about it, Orion is already a Legendary-level fighter. You really think he's afraid of these crawling vermin?"

Clymene's words hit the five Elders like a cold wake-up call, snapping them out of their panic. In their minds, hordes of monsters had always meant disaster, something straight out of the apocalypse.

"That's right. Orion is our Giants' king. No way he's scared of these worms!"

"So, you're saying our king might've set some kind of bait up there?"

"In that case, do we even need to keep plugging away at these monsters?"

Vargrum, Balgor, and Grendel threw out those questions, and their remarks made Mordak and Zorn ease up a bit, too.

"Look, we were gonna kill underground creatures down here anyway. May as well thin out the herd so our people topside get a bit of relief."

With that, Clymene didn't even turn around. Instead, she swung her weapon faster. The five Giant Elders fell silent but matched her pace, redoubling their own efforts.

Boom!

Elder Grendel was slammed all the way off his feet by a subterranean creature as thick as a milling stone, shaped more or less like a massive snake. The blow caved in Grendel's chest.

By the time Clymene and the other Elders caught on, that mysterious creature had already taken the arrow tower's return fire, but still darted into the passage.

"Grendel, you okay?"

"Eh, I'm fine. Just feel like the energy in my body's draining away."

Grendel got up, touching his sunken, shattered chest as though it didn't hurt at all.

"Clymene, is the gap between Alpha-level and hero level really that big?"

"If I were still in my old form, that hit would've left me dead on the spot!"

Helping Grendel steady himself, Clymene spoke in a serious tone.

"The difference between Alpha-level and hero level is even bigger than you imagine."

"But based on your current power, you guys are on par with the peak of hero level!"

"And when you're in an area thick with death energy, you're even tougher!"

Clymene paused, propping Grendel against the arrow tower to let him recover a bit.

"You should fight around this arrow tower. You'll get early warnings here—makes things easier."

With those words, Clymene strode alone into the horde of monsters, continuing the fight. The five Giant Elders, not being a match for any Alpha-level subterranean creatures, could still depend on Alpha-level Clymene's courage.

She wasn't afraid in the slightest.

Blackstone City, atop the outer walls.

Delilah's face showed no expression, though inside her nerves were on high alert. She knew that butterfly-assassin was still lurking somewhere in her web array, hadn't run off, but she just couldn't pinpoint its location. Stalemated like this, she was growing restless.

Without Delilah overseeing the overall situation—coordinating bloodline warrior reinforcements to weaker defensive spots or areas running low on supplies—the city's defenses could collapse at any moment.

Delilah bit her fingertip, letting a drop of blood drip onto the center of her forehead. This was a method of actively activating her will projection—a "blood ignition" ritual.

Crackle!

A bolt of lightning flashed from Delilah's brow, flooding the surrounding space. With a pop, the shadowy butterfly-assassin was forced out of the void by the transcendent power, its dark form flickering into sight.

But the lightning didn't kill it, because the assassin also wielded a spark of transcendent power. An iridescent butterfly silhouette enveloped the assassin, easily breaking free from Delilah's web array and fleeing outside the city.

"It has Sophia's will projection on it. It's getting away!"

Orion's will projection left these words behind before sinking back into Delilah's forehead. As that supernatural power disappeared, the oppressive tension of their standoff vanished, too, and Delilah exhaled in relief.

"Sound the trumpets. Give our bloodline warriors some backup!"

Standing on a high platform of the wall, Delilah stretched her awareness across the battlefield, surveying the bigger picture. With that, she finally let go of the heavy weight on her heart.

"Send a message to the cavalry. They're to support the cannon fodder troops defending the eastern flank!"

Out of all the fight zones on the field, Dirtclaw's area was faring the worst because it sat outside the arrow towers' coverage.

Once certain dark creatures figured out the limits of those towers, some of the smarter ones chose to attack Dirtclaw's spot. That meant not only did Dirtclaw's group face larger numbers, but also tougher monsters.

After taking stock of the situation, Delilah wove her hands together again and began chanting softly, setting up an illusion. Her taking the initiative suggested that the Stoneheart Horde was gradually gaining the upper hand.

Outside the city walls, Slagor, Twilight Viper, and Lysinthia's support squad was making noticeable progress. Lysinthia infused her petrification ability into Twilight Viper. Strangely, the Viper itself wasn't turned into stone; instead, its defense rocketed upward.

With its boosted defenses, Twilight Viper hardly cared about the Dark Fiend's snapping jaws and claws. It simply coiled around the giant beast's body, binding it in place.

Thundar, who was busy fighting nearby, was no fool. Spotting his chance, he pulled out his taming collar and hurled it straight at the Dark Fiend. It didn't bounce off but instead sank into the creature's body.

At the sight of this, Thundar's face lit up. When he sensed a connection forming between the Dark Fiend and himself, a massive grin spread across his lips.

"Warden Lysinthia, I...I just completed a bond with that huge Dark Fiend. Thank you!"

Lysinthia stood off to the side, staring him down with her jet-black eyes. Only when he nodded repeatedly and confirmed the bond did she instruct Twilight Viper to let go of the Dark Fiend.

"Don't stand there grinning. Slagor and Earthshaker need our help, too."

Her icy voice snapped Thundar out of his joyful daze.

Chapter 278 All those blessings came from our great Lord Orion

Having an Alpha-level Dark Creature for a mount is one hell of a flashy, prestigious achievement.

Aside from Orion's Abyss Dragon, the Dark Fiend is probably the coolest mount in the Stoneheart Horde.

So it's no wonder Thundar, who suddenly got his hands on an Alpha-level mount, was overjoyed—so much so that he could barely contain himself.

Especially considering his straightforward personality!

Thundar snapped back to reality, took a running leap, and landed right on the Dark Fiend's back.

"Let's go, big fella—take a bite out of that giant spider!"

The Dark Fiend let out a low growl, spun around, and charged straight for the Phantom Spider.

Covered in jet-black skin without any visible eyes, the Dark Fiend has only four limbs and a massive mouth. Its body is astonishingly pliable, making it naturally immune to physical attacks—or more specifically, it can bounce out any foreign object or blow that tries to harm it.

With the Dark Fiend's arrival, they suddenly had the ideal fighter to go toe-to-toe with the Phantom Spider.

Once Lysinthia and Thundar jumped in to help, Slagor and Earthshaker felt their burden lighten right away. They seized the advantage, and before long, the Phantom Spider was dismembered by the group.

With the Phantom Spider dead, a strange, low roar echoed from the depths of the darkness. The moment they heard that roar, all the Dark Creatures began to retreat. Even the Dark Armored Beetle that had breached Blackstone City's outer walls tried to scramble back down the same hole it had used to get in.

"Not on my watch!"

Onyx roared, raised his stone axe, and went into a whirlwind attack against the Dark Armored Beetle.

Crunch!

The Beetle's armored shell, which had been impervious this whole time, finally cracked under Onyx's relentless strikes. Seeing a piece of its shell fall to the ground, Onyx's eyes flared with lethal intent. He used his charge skill to pursue the Dark Armored Beetle down into the tunnel, disappearing from sight.

Outside the city, Rendall was having the hardest time. Right when it looked like the tentacle monster was about to be slain, it got the signal to retreat. With its remaining tentacles pushing off the ground, it jumped out of Rendall's range of attack and slipped away into the distant darkness.

"Damn it!"

"Goddammit, my dark source crystal!"

Furious, Rendall kept his blood shield up, wielding his spiked club to rampage among the retreating Dark Creatures.

...

In the low-hanging sky, that Enchanted Butterfly pulled away from Lilith after a single clash, then fluttered off into the darkness.

Meanwhile, high above, the invisible butterflies brigade had already retreated as soon as they got the withdrawal signal.

Thunderhawk Rayden and the surviving broadskull ravens had no intention of giving chase; this aerial fight had been brutal, and aside from the occasional help from the arrow towers, they'd had zero backup. That was the main reason they didn't dare chase after the invisible butterflies.

On the city wall, Delilah had stopped her chanting; the Dark Creatures' voluntary retreat signaled that they'd won this defensive battle. Still, a deep worry gnawed at her.

The Dark Creatures' coordinated withdrawal meant there was an intelligent being commanding them from behind the scenes—by far their most dangerous and frightening opponent.

But Delilah made sure none of that concern showed on her face.

"Pass down the orders: all bloodline warriors are to stay where they are and rest right in their battle positions.

"Tell the logistics team to get moving and replenish all missing supplies.

"And bring those prepared rations and drinking water straight up onto the walls!

"... .."

As for the spoils of war, Delilah didn't need to say a word. The small spiders that had been helping on the walls were already out cleaning up the battlefield.

Bang!

Just then, a great rupture sounded in the outer part of Blackstone City. Onyx burst up from underground, leaping out of the tunnel. He straightened up and heaved with all his might, hauling the fleeing Dark Armored Beetle out of the ground.

By now, the Beetle was well and truly dead. Onyx dug out its dark source crystal, then circled its corpse, sizing it up.

"Prophet, get over here and give that power of yours a try!"

Rendall, Thundar, Earthshaker, and the others, who'd returned to Blackstone City, hurried over when they saw that Onyx had taken out the Dark Armored Beetle.

"Haha, I was hoping you'd say that. Everybody step back a bit!"

Onyx tossed the dark source crystal to Rendall, then bit his own fingertip, forming seals with his bloodstained hands. He dipped both hands in the Beetle's fresh blood and began to carve a complex summoning array around its corpse.

Half an hour later, Onyx stepped out of the blood-red magic circle, muttering a cryptic incantation under his breath.

As Onyx prayed, the circle seemed to spring to life, the runes flowing across the ground. The blood pooled around them seeped steadily into the Dark Armored Beetle's body, inscribing it with odd, arcane symbols.

At the same time, Onyx stepped closer and spat a mouthful of his own blood onto the Dark Armored Beetle. The moment his blood touched it, the symbols on the Beetle's shell began flickering one after another. As they lit up, the Beetle's previous injuries started healing, visibly rebuilding itself.

Quite a few tribespeople, drawn by curiosity, gasped in surprise when they saw it. They could hear the grinding of joints and bones as the once-dead Dark Armored Beetle rose shakily to its feet, every joint groaning as if testing a new body.

A moment later, the blood-red Beetle let out a deep bellow—a sound like a bull's call, but lower, with a metallic edge.

"It worked!"

"No way... it really worked!"

Nobody was more excited than Onyx. Because of his blood pact with this newly resurrected, crimson Dark Armored Beetle, he was keenly aware of all its capabilities.

"Heh heh, looks like I've got my own ride now!"

Grinning, Onyx scrambled up onto the Dark Armored Beetle's back. It started lumbering around the outer city with Onyx in tow. At first, its movements were clumsy, but within a few moments it picked up speed, moving with a smoother rhythm.

"Looks like Onyx and Thundar came out on top this time," Slagor said, standing side by side with Earthshaker. The two of them had formed a bond after cooperating against the Phantom Spider and were now on friendlier terms.

"All those blessings came from our great Lord Orion," Earthshaker said as he watched Onyx riding the Beetle around. He'd be lying if he said he wasn't at least a little envious, but he also knew Orion had gifted him some treasures, so he couldn't complain.

"Slagor, why don't you earn yourself some real battle accomplishments?" Earthshaker suggested. "Rack up enough of those, and the Lord will definitely have a surprise waiting for you!"

Having fought alongside Slagor and witnessed his bravery and cunning, Earthshaker felt he should steer this late-joining Alpha-level warrior in the right direction.

"Elders, the Elder of Stewardship has issued a summons! Head up to the meeting room on the city wall—urgent business!"

Delilah's message arrived, and Onyx hopped off the Dark Armored Beetle. His expression grew serious, and along with Earthshaker and the rest, he made his way back up onto the city wall.

Chapter 279 I'd truly love to bear your child

Void Passage. Sophia gazed at Orion without saying a word.

Sophia felt uneasy—she couldn't quite see through Orion.

A newly advanced Legendary-level powerhouse, who could already construct a territory...

Those four arrow towers standing along the Blackstone City outer walls were undeniable proof.

In the previous battle, those four arrow towers had fired relentlessly, dealing terrifying damage to the Dark Creatures. Anything struck from above or below by their bolts walked away severely injured.

Sophia, who'd been hiding among the Dark Creatures through a will projection, took all this in with keen eyes.

That wasn't even the biggest concern. What truly made her wary was the fact that Orion, who kept his eyes shut, very likely had enough power to kill her.

It was obvious that Orion already posed a mortal threat to Sophia.

Although this was merely her own speculation, at her level of strength, intuition was often more reliable than what one could directly observe.

"Orion," Sophia said softly, "ignoring the whole invasion issue, if you're willing, I'd truly love to bear your child."

Sophia's tone was gentle, sounding utterly sincere.

A lord who can build a territory will, if nothing goes wrong, one day ascend to become an Arch Lord.

In other words, Orion's offspring would definitely have a formidable bloodline. Having a child of powerful lineage was essential to Sophia's butterfly race. Plus, raising a descendant connected to Orion would give her people a backup plan in another world.

All of those ideas formed in Sophia's mind in the blink of an eye.

However, on the other end of the passage, Orion still had his eyes closed, utterly ignoring her offer.

"What a single-minded male," Sophia mused to herself.

Although she was thinking all this, she wasn't about to give up.

Whoosh!

In the next moment, a shimmering phantom detached itself from Sophia's body and descended through the passage.

At the same time, Orion also reacted. Thunder rumbled, and transcendent power erupted around him.

"Orion, I really mean it this time," Sophia coaxed.

"This here is my dream avatar, linked directly to my mind. All you have to do is say [yes], and I'll have sex with you right here. I'll carry your child!"

Sophia's dream avatar stepped out of the passage. During its descent, it was repeatedly struck by bolts of lightning, leaving its clothing torn to tatters in a rather sorry state.

Strangely enough, the more shredded her outfit became, the more intriguing she looked.

"Orion, welcome to the borderline between reality and illusion!"

The moment her dream avatar uttered those words, it burst like a soap bubble.

Instantly, Orion was forcibly dragged back into a dreamscape once again.

It was a pink dream, and Sophia was completely nude, steadily closing in on Orion. Orion, meanwhile, found himself lying halfway in a hot spring, unable to move at all.

"Dear Orion," Sophia purred, "I'm more than willing to be proactive... to be completely genuine for you."

With that, she spread her legs, positioned her vagina against Orion's cock, and lowered herself onto him.

That dream went on for two hours, while only three minutes elapsed in the real world.

When the dream shattered, Orion opened his eyes, looking deeply disturbed.

On Sophia's side of the passage, she was still naked, and from her expression it was obvious she'd just experienced a mind-blowing round of sex.

During those brief three minutes, Sophia had brought a new wave of Dark Creatures through the passage—among them were two Alpha-level beasts.

"My strong Orion, if your subordinates are tough enough to handle them, consider them a gift from me!"

With those words, Sophia vanished from the other end of the passage.

Emerald Dream Realm, Phoenix Butterfly Ridge.

Phoenix Butterfly Ridge was gorgeous—like a fairyland, brimming with towering ancient trees. Countless butterflies lived among the leaves, and this place was Sophia's territory.

Suddenly, Sophia appeared there. She was still riding that post-climax high from the recent session and lightly pressed one hand against her lower abdomen.

"Orion's bloodline is so incredibly potent," she murmured.

"My belly feels like it's on fire. I wonder if, once I transform into my human form, I can successfully bear my first child!"

To conceive a child with Orion, Sophia had forced herself to produce a dream avatar.

After successfully descending through the passage, she'd used her natural mastery of the dream realm to temporarily pin Orion down, then had sex with him.

To suppress Orion in a dream where he couldn't fight back had cost Sophia dearly.

First, she had poured all her transcendent power into restraining him. This meant that in the dream, she herself had zero offensive capability.

Second, summoning a dream avatar by force caused her strength to drop from peak Legendary-level down to lower Legendary-level.

Once someone makes it to Legendary, they typically go through four stages: lower, middle, upper, and peak. For Sophia to climb back up to peak Legendary-level, she'd have to invest years of effort and countless resources.

Even so, she felt it had been worth it.

Part of it was Orion's potential; more important, she needed to secure an escape route for her people.

Sophia was all too aware that a divine war was raging between the Emerald Dream Realm and Titanion Realm.

Two realms at war meant eventually one side would fall, and in that event, any living being from the losing realm would likely meet a terrible fate.

Orion from the Titanion realm was one of Sophia's backup plans. The whole ordeal might look ridiculous, even absurd. But she went through with it anyway.

"A leader who cares that deeply about his people's survival is unlikely to abandon his own offspring, right?" Sophia whispered.

She freely acknowledged that relying on Orion was a gamble, but at least it was a fallback.

Sophia had invaded Titanion Realm multiple times—she knew that, fierce as that world's competition might be, it was still preferable to the raw brutality of the Emerald Dream Realm. You could see that clearly from the fact that so many Dark Creatures in the Emerald Dream Realm were basically mindless beasts.

In truth, Sophia didn't feel demeaned at all; if anything, she was proud of herself. In her eyes, she had provided her people a lifeline.

Void Passage. Orion stood in silence, staring at the empty darkness on the far side of the passage, his thoughts swirling too deep to fathom.

That feeling of being pinned down, unable to move even an inch inside the dream, still rattled him. At least, until the dream shattered, Sophia never showed the slightest intent to harm or kill him. If anything, she'd been downright "gentle" through the whole act.

"What was she really after...?"

The dream had collapsed, and Sophia disappeared from the passage. From Orion's vantage point, he honestly couldn't piece together her motives or what she hoped to gain.

Chapter 280 A giant worm

Things were gradually getting better in Blackstone City as well.

Inside a meeting room built just behind the outer walls, the Horde's Alpha-level powerhouses were all grinning from ear to ear. Onyx had successfully summoned a blood spirit, and Thundar had captured a Dark Fiend, immediately adding two heavy hitters to the Horde's forces.

By contrast, the Dark Creatures had just lost two of their top fighters. And with the Dark Armored Beetle now dead, the Dark Creatures no longer had the option of launching an underground assault. That took a massive load off the shoulders of those defending the city.

"Everyone, we couldn't have won without you," Delilah praised the elders, then straightened her expression and began issuing orders.

"Elder Thundar, take the cavalry and head for the underground fissure to assist Lorelia and Rockwell. There's a swarm of subterranean creatures crawling up from the bottomless abyss. One of them is Alpha-level.

We need backup in case another Alpha-level beast shows up down there. Elder Thundar, you and your Dark Fiend go lend them a hand."

Delilah's words made everyone pause for a moment. Then they all frowned.

"Yes, ma'am!" Thundar answered without hesitation. He stood and walked right out of the meeting room.

Delilah watched Thundar's departing figure, noting the bandages wrapped around his shoulder. Though the shamans had tended to him, all they really did was stop the bleeding; full recovery would take time.

Luckily for him, he already possessed an Alpha-level body that healed extremely well on its own. Delilah's decision to send Thundar off to help at the underground fissure was partly meant to keep him out of the most dangerous battles near the city, lowering his risk of casualty.

There were way too many Dark Creatures out there. Even though they'd put down two Alpha-levels, nobody could say for sure more wouldn't pop up. If that happened and Thundar, still seriously wounded, forced himself to keep fighting, it could very well be fatal.

"In the last big fight, a butterfly-assassin showed up on the walls—some kind of humanoid monster with high intelligence and freaky powers. It can hide in the void," Delilah told the group. "Last time, it was gunning for me. In the fights coming up, all you elders need to keep an eye out. Don't let your guard down."

Hearing about this butterfly-assassin, the elders' foreheads knotted again, their faces turning grim.

Slagor, Earthshaker, Lilith, and Lysinthia were especially unsettled. Their personal defenses weren't exactly bulletproof, and if that assassin picked them off with a sneak attack, it could be a killing blow.

"That's why for the next battles, you elders should work in pairs. Watch each other's backs."

With that, Delilah took the dark source crystals from Lysinthia and Rendall's hands, tucking them away. Their most recent battle had scored them two Alpha-level dark source crystals—a huge haul indeed.

...

Underground fissure, bottomless abyss.

Rockwell swung his giant axe, beheading a Hero-level subterranean creature that had just busted out of the spider horde. He yanked a crystal core from its skull.

"These monsters keep getting stronger," Rockwell muttered, glancing at Lorelia in the near distance. Her usually composed face was creased with worry.

"What's up?"

Lorelia, an Alpha-level broodmother, rarely looked this tense. That meant the threat below had to be an Alpha-level underground monster.

"Something big like a worm is headed straight for us. My children can't slow it down."

"Warden Rockwell. Get ready to fight," she cautioned.

Rockwell gripped his stone axe tighter. He was well aware that underground creatures ran big. They generally sported scales or armored hides, making them even more of a hassle than surface beasts.

"A giant worm? Like a big serpent?"

"Sort of. But then again, not exactly," Lorelia answered, a trace of uncertainty in her voice.

Rockwell frowned. "Wait, so it looks like a snake, but it doesn't crawl like one?"

"It does look that way, but it's hopping—jumping—on its way up toward us!" Lorelia's eyes flashed with regret. "I can barely stand to watch. Every time that Alpha-level worm leaps, it crushes a bunch of my cave spiders."

She clearly felt bad for the spiders—they'd cost the Tribe a fortune in resources. As someone who oversaw resource consumption firsthand, Lorelia understood how precious they were.

"It's closing in fast. We've got maybe fifteen minutes before it gets here."

Speaking, she backed up to the mouth of the passage, leaving the edge of the bottomless abyss behind, effectively tossing the most dangerous part of the operation onto Rockwell's plate.

Yup, Lorelia was ready to run if things went south. She was putting Orion's lesson—if you can't win, get out—into practice.

Rockwell, no fool himself, scowled at her retreat. "Lorelia, do you really have that little faith in me? Fighting alongside me doesn't make you feel even a smidge safer?"

Lorelia stood near the passage exit, raising her longbow with a silent smile as if to say she'd at least give him some covering fire from a distance.

Four spider guards crawled forward, acting as her defensive line.

"I can't figure it out," Rockwell grumbled under his breath, stone axe in hand, stationed at the edge of the bottomless abyss. "Lord Orion's so fearless, so how did his pet end up such a scaredy-cat? Come on, it's just one underground monster. We've done this before."

Time flies in a battle. Fifteen minutes felt like an instant.

Thud! Thud! THUD!

Those were the sounds of something huge landing, squashing more little spiders in the process.

"It's here!" Rockwell tensed, eyes glued to the gaping abyss.

Suddenly, he spotted the wormlike creature contorting its body and springing upward. It appeared almost serpentine, but not quite; a single eye sat front and center on its head, topped by two jagged horns. Its massive maw gaped wide, devouring any spider unlucky enough to cling to its hide as it bounded upward.

"Rend and Spin—Whirling Slash!"

That was Rockwell's one and only long-range move. Using a weird angle and burst of power, he hurled his stone axe, aiming to cut down his target from a distance.

With the bloodline power coursing through it, the spinning stone axe became a whirlwind. It whooshed straight at the weird worm.

Slash!

The blow caught the worm mid-jump. Caught off guard, it took a vicious cut, leaving a huge gash. Rockwell felt sure that if he scored one more hit like that, he'd slice the thing clean in two.

The wounded worm screeched and channeled strength into its next leap, widening its jaws as it sprang toward Rockwell.

Wooo—woo—woo!

Now that it was up close, Rockwell could hear a peculiar whooshing rising from the thing's lower half. Its tail end twisted in a spiral pattern, giving the monster extra momentum on each jump.

Two heartbeats later, the worm vaulted out of the bottomless abyss entirely. At the same moment, Rockwell's stone axe, having boomeranged back through the air, whirled into his waiting grip once again.