

Titan King 341

Chapter 341 If you're into her, I'll bet she'd jump into your arms in no time

Crack!

"You damn fat pigs! Quit squirming!"

"Remember, there's only one rule in the cannon-fodder troops: absolute obedience! Anyone who tries to disobey—well, I'll have you sliced up and fed to the cave spiders!"

As Dirtclaw whipped the newly conscripted boarfolk slaves, he rattled off the code of conduct for the cannon-fodder units. These boarfolk, having just been herded in, weren't quite broken in yet. Their proud heads needed to learn to bow down to the northern creatures they once despised.

"Y'know, I think Dirtclaw's a natural-born leader in the cannon-fodder troops," Earthshaker remarked, speaking in Onyx's presence.

Onyx was officially the one in charge of these troops, so Earthshaker wasn't trying to offend him; he was simply praising Dirtclaw.

"As long as he doesn't get himself killed, sure, he's got a real shot," Onyx agreed, eyeing Dirtclaw in the distance "educating" the boarfolk slaves. Having Dirtclaw around made Onyx's job a lot easier. Recently, Delilah had hinted she wanted to take Dirtclaw under her command, but Onyx had flatly refused.

"Dirtclaw's just one step away," Onyx added. "Any day now, he might break through to Alpha-level."

But Dirtclaw's path toward advancement hadn't been smooth. After the last dark beast tide, he'd burned all his gains on some Alpha-level upgrade materials from the Horde's storage.

Yet even after gulping them down, he'd failed to cross that threshold. In other words, Dirtclaw was the only Stoneheart Horde member who'd tried twice and still failed both times.

That setback hadn't crushed him, though. If anything, after consuming those resources, Dirtclaw was convinced he was nearly Alpha-level and doubled down on his ferocity, especially when it came to "disciplining" boarfolk slaves. He planned to wring every possible victory point out of them and eventually earn his promotion.

"Honestly, for someone who's messed up twice, Dirtclaw's the most relentless gnoll I've ever seen," said Rockwell. He was sitting next to the prophet, polishing the stone axe he'd received as a gift.

Before they set out, Orion had given Onyx a hero-grade battle axe. Onyx's old stone axe, then, got passed along to Rockwell. Among the obsidian golems, that axe held special significance.

"I think next time, he'll finally make it," Slagor chimed in. In truth, he'd worked hard to become part of the Horde's core circle. After multiple brushes with death alongside them, Slagor had finally earned everyone's trust. Though he held little direct authority now, it was obvious Orion placed a premium on him.

During the last dark beast tide, Slagor had repeatedly taken on pivotal roles, effectively controlling the Horde in Orion's stead—revealing just how valued he was in Orion's eyes. And after the current split of the cannon-fodder forces into five groups, Slagor still carried considerable weight.

"So, how do you guys think these southern races stack up against Godforsaken Land?" Earthshaker suddenly posed a question that left Onyx and Slagor momentarily silent.

After a pause, Onyx shook his head. "Can't even compare. Setting aside high-level combatants, just think about those walking dead armies. None of these southern folk can handle something like that."

Slagor nodded. He thought the same. The ancient Legendary-level fighters over in Godforsaken Land were on an entirely different tier. Not to mention, that war was a lot more intense than this conflict between north and south.

Plus, back in Godforsaken Land, everyone in their faction had banded together. There wasn't this constant infighting over who got which spoils.

"How about the Elder of Stewardship?" asked Rockwell, looking up once he finished sharpening his stone axe.

"She went to Lord Orion's tent. Figured he should know the latest about our cannon-fodder troops," Earthshaker answered.

Inside that makeshift tent, skimpy lingerie lay discarded on the ground. Sensual moans filled the air.

Delilah was exhausted but deliriously happy—Orion's cock once again proved irresistible, taking her to wave after wave of climax.

Collapsing naked against Orion's chest, Delilah murmured, "Five cannon-fodder groups, plus the 100K we had originally. Each group snared 50K more boarfolk, so that's about 250K boarfolk in total."

She planted kisses across Orion's chest, detailing the state of their troops. "It's a shame so many boar-knights got gobbled up by those insectoids and centaurs. Otherwise, we'd have way more boarfolk cavalry."

"We'll keep growing," Orion rumbled, "we have plenty of food back in the Horde. We won't have any trouble feeding them. Once we get these boarfolk back to Blackstone City and train them, both our cavalry regiments and cannon-fodder units will expand nicely."

Wrapping his arms under Delilah's thighs, Orion stood in one fluid motion. She instantly knew what he wanted. Clamping her legs around his waist, she let his cock lift her body as if it were a lever.

Delilah bounced on it over and over, sending jolts of pleasure up her spine. Such a position took serious stamina for most men, but Orion handled it without breaking a sweat.

Soon, Delilah was moaning through another explosive orgasm.

An hour later, she wasn't sure how many climaxes she'd had. Her vagina felt utterly filled by Orion's cock, and her juices kept running down her thighs and dripping to the floor, coating his still-exposed length. Chest rising and falling with each ragged breath, she looked at him with mischievous eyes.

"Daddy," she purred, "Soraya's a horny woman too. She'd totally love this. If you're into her, I'll bet she'd jump into your arms in no time."

Lost in pleasure once, Orion had let slip that "Daddy" got him hot. Delilah, quick to catch on, used it whenever they made love.

"What makes you say that?"

"I've barely met her a handful of times."

Delilah licked his lips, giving a playful little nip. "I know how her mind works. She's willing to offer her body—probably hoping it'll help her break through to Legendary-level. And that Lumi—if you felt like it, she might also wind up in your bed."

Delilah was bold. Behind closed doors, she had no fear of voicing such taboo topics. Orion squeezed her butt and chuckled.

"You don't have to pry. If it's a charming woman, of course I'm interested. As for you and Lilith, the moment either of you hits that threshold, I'll give you the chance to advance. The two of you rank higher in my heart than the others."

Delilah flashed him a foxy grin and slid onto him again. This time, she took the dominant position. Straddling Orion's cock, she started grinding. She felt an overwhelming gratitude and worship toward him, and the best way she knew to repay him was with her body—giving him the most unforgettable pleasure she could.

Utessar Kingdom, northern gate of the royal capital.

At last, Princess Ava of the Rose Knight Regiment came face to face with Arthur's friend—the so-called "coal knight" Galahad.

"I'm delighted to meet you, Sir Coal Knight," she said, slipping off one of her gauntlets and tossing it to Galahad.

"It's an honor to join the Rose Knight Regiment, Your Highness," he replied, picking up the glove and bowing in a knightly salute.

"Sir Galahad, tell me—how does a knight survive on the battlefield?" Ava asked.

Galahad bowed once more, answering in a resolute voice, "A knight needs a heart that accepts his comrades, a clear head for strategy, and the willpower to stay grounded. Of course, none of that matters unless you've got faith in your heart... and a sword in your hand."

Princess Ava chuckled. Pulling out her own blade, she lightly pressed it to Galahad's shoulder.

Chapter 342 Knight's honor

"Galahad, I now officially bestow upon you the title of Coal Knight."

"This isn't meant as an insult but rather an honor—a knight's honor!"

Galahad bowed his head, dropping to one knee.

"Young man, welcome to the Rose Knight Regiment! In the Rose Knight Regiment, our credo is love for one another, unwavering faith, and unbreaking honor."

And so, Coal Knight Galahad joined the Rose Knight Regiment and marched off to the front lines.

Meanwhile, at the royal palace, a secret meeting was underway.

Present were the three most powerful figures in the kingdom: His Majesty the King and the two Grand Dukes.

"Your Majesty, the Holy Sword Mercenary Corps has found something unusual in some ruins," said Grand Duke William as he handed a copy of a parchment over to the king.

Accepting it, the king's eyes flickered with surprise, which quickly turned to shock.

"A blueprint for a teleportation array? Grand Duke, if all this is legitimate, can we really repair the intercontinental teleportation circle they used to talk about?"

After that initial reaction, the king forced himself to calm down.

"Your Majesty, based on our current understanding, it can be repaired," Grand Duke William replied gravely. "But we'll need to burn through a ton of magical materials, and it'll take at least half a year. Also, we'll need a whole crowd of mages to gather at that large magical formation and inscribe all the arcane runes on it."

"Half a year... half a year..." King Harold muttered, looking troubled. He seemed to be weighing scenarios and turning them down one by one in his mind.

"Grand Duke, we can't pause the repairs," he decided at last. "I'll have the Royal Mage Society assist you."

Grand Duke William inclined his head in acknowledgment. "Understood, Your Majesty."

"Your Majesty," said the other figure in the room, Grand Duke Richard, "assuming we manage to fix the teleportation circle, how do we approach those people on the other continent for negotiations or help?"

He was forward-thinking enough to figure the kingdom should prepare early.

"Grand Duke Richard, at that point, you'll go as our representative. As long as they don't demand anything outrageous that cuts off our interests, we can accept their terms."

The king's voice carried a weary note. He had no idea what happened six thousand years ago to cause the humans of this continent to quarrel with humans on another continent—and then destroy the only intercontinental portal in existence.

After a long silence, someone spoke in a low voice.

"Your Majesty, we should get to the front lines," Grand Duke William reminded him quietly.

The moment he said that, the meeting room fell silent. This ongoing war involved humanity, the dwarves, and the Blood Elves. Already, the dwarves and Blood Elves had dispatched their top forces to the front, whereas the key figures of the human kingdom were still holed up here.

If the king didn't show his face at the front lines, the other two races—and all their vassal tribes—would definitely harbor suspicions and complaints.

"Very well," King Harold finally said. "Tomorrow, Grand Duke William and I will head out. I'll send word to the Saint, requesting his protection."

The Saint—humanity's arch lord—was the one and only arch lord among dwarves, Blood Elves, and humans combined. Technically, the entire kingdom's territory was his domain.

But due to external forces like theocratic factions, much of the territory had been parceled out. Some lucky few, leveraging their resources, had actually reached Legendary-level in their own right.

Of course, many human warriors lacking a Lord's Stone never advanced beyond peak Alpha-level. The famed Eight Great Knights of old were such examples.

"Has there been any word from the dwarves or the Blood Elves?" King Harold asked, as if seeking some form of comfort. Normally, battle information from the front lines would find its way to him almost immediately.

Clasping his hands behind his back, Grand Duke William spoke in a calm, measured tone. "Rest assured, Your Majesty. Even though the dwarves and Blood Elves might not have a top-tier Legendary beings, they have no shortage of Legendary-level fighters. If the situation on the front lines isn't too dire, they'll honor their promises and deploy reinforcements to the central region."

King Harold said nothing. Instead, he stared at the teleportation circle diagrams spread across the table, lost in thought.

In the western region, at Giant City.

Orion, Lokiviria, Jorik, Gareth, Ironhoof, and Bluehide were all standing on the city walls, gazing down over the battlefield.

"Hahahaha! That Blood Elf was clever enough to take all the top soldiers out of this dump!"

The speaker was none other than the smaller head of Bluehide—his tone just a touch smug.

"That's not exactly great news," Lokiviria muttered, frowning as he looked toward the south. Concern clouded his eyes.

"If every place we hit is this empty, all we end up with is enough to feed our forces and maybe grab some resources. We won't be getting any real, lasting benefit. We can't even hold onto the territory we seize, and we'll be on guard nonstop for a potential counterattack. By the time we reach the Blood Elves' land, you can bet there'll be a ton of them. And they'll be strong."

With that, Jorik, Gareth, and Ironhoof also furrowed their brows. Far from boosting morale, taking Giant City had only ramped up everyone's worries and doubts.

"Friends," Orion began, "sometimes things just don't go how we want."

"We're not on the main battlefield here. This isn't where the White Dragon is making his big move. All we're meant to do is pin down the Blood Elves, keep them tied up—then we'll have done what White Dragon entrusted us to do."

"We hold the Blood Elves in place, hold the line, and wait for good news from the central arena. Once word of victory arrives, that's the day of reckoning for the Blood Elves."

He had to boost their morale somehow—and he was right: as long as they stalled the Blood Elves, the final result would hinge on White Dragon Frostsire.

If Frostsire couldn't beat the highest-level powers of humans, dwarves, and Blood Elves, then no matter how hard Orion and his group fought, it wouldn't matter.

"Isn't that right, Lord Jorik?" Orion then turned, directing everyone's attention to Jorik.

Of all of them, Jorik was clearly the closest to White Dragon Frostsire. If the dragon had any special orders or if something went wrong, Jorik would be the first to know.

Chapter 343 War has always been like this

"My lord, these gnomes have no real fight in 'em. Why should we waste our resources feeding them?"

That blunt complaint came from Earthshaker. His cannon-fodder armies had recently absorbed a large number of gnome slaves, which, to him, felt like a direct hit to their combat effectiveness.

Orion glanced back at the smoldering ruins of Giant City behind them, then pointed at the scorched remains.

"Look over there. If they were really worthless nobodies, how could they have built such a big city in the first place? Think about it—if gnomes were good for nothing, would the Blood Elves have kept them around all this time? Plus, if these gnomes were truly useless, how come they get to live on these rich southern lands while we're stuck in the north?"

Earthshaker looked puzzled, unable to come up with a quick answer. It was true the gnomes weren't physically imposing or known for battle prowess—yet they inhabited this abundant southern region, which baffled the buffalofolk.

Orion tapped Earthshaker lightly on the forehead, hoping to enlighten him.

"Sometimes raw power doesn't come from brute strength but from up here."

Realization dawned on Earthshaker.

"Lord, you're saying these gnomes... they've got brains?"

"Exactly."

"So if they're so smart, why did they give up on their city and run?"

"Because we're dangerous, and they're clever enough to back away from that danger."

"Lord, any gnome that chickens out from a fight is no good to us!"

"..."

Orion stifled a sigh. He knew buffalofolk tended to see things in black and white—they revered anyone stronger than they were and had little respect for those who seemed weaker.

From a distance, Orion could see other officers in the cannon-fodder troops whipping gnome slaves. He just shook his head silently. Whether the gnomes would end up worthwhile remained to be seen; he'd have to ship them back to Blackstone City before making that call.

"My lord, I hear the territory ahead belongs to Beastmen," Onyx remarked, stepping up beside Orion. "Word is, they're a pretty brawny bunch."

"Beastmen, huh? Never met them myself," Orion replied. "From the name, it sounds like they're half-human, half-beast. According to the latest scouting intel, Beastmen are one of four big vassal races under the Blood Elves. They keep watch with the Blood Elves and trade steadily with the human kingdom.

"They say the Kitsunes are real smart and darn seductive. Of course," he added, "there are also some big-deal bloodline warriors among them—like the Gronthar clan or certain werewolves."

Hearing Orion's quick rundown sparked the curiosity of nearby troops.

"Lord, are these Kitsunes any prettier than us succubi?" Delilah asked with a playful glint in her eyes.

Orion shook his head. "Anyway, Beastmen are no gnomes. Their combat prowess won't be small potatoes. Once we invade, watch your step. Don't go off on your own."

He'd just spoken these words when an Alpha-level icefield snow wolf came bounding toward him. It was Jorik's messenger—if it had come looking for Orion, that meant Jorik had something important to discuss.

Roar!

Suddenly, a draconic bellow resonated through the forest. The horses in the Rose Knight Regiment began collapsing to their knees in terror. Only a handful remained upright.

"On guard—on guard! We've got enemies!"

Rustling noises flitted through the trees. The royal guardian knight, Arthur, rushed to Princess Ava's side, his sharp gaze fixed on the forest where the sound had come from.

"Half-dragons!"

"They've got us surrounded!"

It wasn't Arthur or Ava who spoke but the coal knight, Galahad.

"Knights, dismount and form a shield wall! Regular horses are useless against half-dragons—they're too spooked!"

Princess Ava heard Galahad's words. Glancing over at Arthur, she got a nod of agreement.

"Knight Regiment, dismount! Group into hundreds, form a circular shield block!"

Her voice rang with both urgency and steel. They hadn't even reached the edge of human territory when the enemy was already upon them.

Without warning, a half-dragon burst out of the woods—then another, then a third—until a whole horde of half-dragons came swarming in. Their reptilian scales glinted dully, their hands twisted into draconic claws as they lashed out at nearby targets.

"Where I stand, I shall not fear my foe,"

"I'll banish every evil with my will..."

Murmuring a battle prayer, Coal Knight Galahad drew his two-handed sword in a smooth arc.

The drawn blade shone brilliantly, a silvery gleam like fresh snow.

"I once pledged to stand against all wrong..."

Shwissh!

Steel cut through the air as swiftly as a sliver of running water. A half-dragon fell at Galahad's feet, splattering his dark armor with blood. Little by little, his black plate turned crimson-red. Meanwhile, Galahad's aura flared brighter and brighter, nudging him ever closer to Alpha-level status.

"For the glory of knighthood!"

The guardian knight Arthur whispered his own prayer and drew his longsword, stepping up to fight alongside Galahad.

It was Princess Ava's first time witnessing the coal knight in battle. She saw no hesitation, only bold, lethal strikes. She was struck by his skill, his gleaming sword, and the way he carried himself in combat.

"Knights... what kind of people are they, really?" Ava mused quietly, even as she tugged out her own blade. Mounted on horseback, she joined the fray.

"Shield up, hold them, then counter with lances! Keep steady!"

Though chaos reigned, Ava's vantage point on her horse gave her a decent overview of the skirmish. It let her issue commands calmly and effectively.

Two knights in front of her fought especially fiercely, taking down countless foes. The battle dragged on from midday straight into dusk before the last of the half-dragons harassing the Rose Knight Regiment were finally killed off. The regiment itself, however, had lost more than half of its total force.

"And we're not even on the front lines yet..." Ava muttered, stacking the bodies of her fallen knights and personally lighting the funeral pyre. "If this is the kind of punishment we're taking already, how terrifying is this southern invasion going to be?"

"War has always been like this," Arthur said in a low, somber tone. "Your Highness, we shouldn't linger here. We have to fall back and join the main royal army."

"Agreed," Princess Ava said. She wasn't a fool or some glory-hungry commander who'd throw her soldiers' lives away.

Chapter 344 Who's the real Giant King?

"Given the way things are going, we have no choice but to pull back and meet up with the main army. That's the only way to avoid an ambush like the one we just survived."

Princess Ava glanced over at the coal knight Galahad, who was off to one side with his hands clasped in fervent prayer. His armor, which had flashed so brilliantly in battle, had gone back to being coal-black. His longsword now lay silent at his hip, its earlier gleam faded entirely.

Compared to his fearless display against the half-dragons, Galahad looked like a different person altogether.

"Arthur, you're incredible—both of you are way stronger than any knights I've seen before," Princess Ava said, her gaze drifting back to Arthur. "It's our honor that you brought him into the Rose Knight Regiment."

Arthur simply nodded, remaining quiet. Truth be told, he himself had never witnessed another knight in real combat until now.

From the moment he'd become a knight, he assumed anyone in that same role would share his ideals. But after seeing Galahad fight, Arthur realized there might be knights out there who were even more exceptional.

"I saw his armor change color right in the middle of the fight. Does the same thing happen to you?" Princess Ava asked.

Arthur shook his head. Though he also owned a personal set of armor and a sword, they worked nothing like Galahad's.

"In my heart, I'm certain there are others sticking to ancient knightly vows just like us," Arthur mused silently. "Maybe they're just hidden away, out of the world's eye."

He thought about the legendary "Eight Great Knights." As far as he knew, he was the only one carrying on that tradition—until he met Galahad. If all eight still existed and fought side by side again, maybe they really could turn the tide.

Orc Territory. A tribal camp.

Unlike humans or Beastmen, the Orcs hadn't built any real cities—they preferred tents and moved their encampment from time to time. Besides, the Orc had no true lord of their own (nobody at or above Legendary level). The chieftain, Grommash, was a blademaster stuck at peak Alpha-level.

So when Blood Elf Elanor arrived, she already had something in mind.

"Grommash, bring some of your people and come with us. If you stay alive, you've got a real shot at becoming a proper lord one day."

Blademaster Grommash shook his head, turning her offer down flat.

"Ms. Elanor, you and your crew head out. I'll hold them off right here," he replied.

Elanor didn't push the subject further. She just nodded and led Boarion the boarfolk, Brimli the gnome, and Faelar the Blood Elf away from Orcs lands.

On the way out, Faelar seemed puzzled. "Ms. Elanor, why didn't you keep encouraging Grommash to come with us? He's pretty strong, and wouldn't he be more valuable in the City of Blessings?"

Elanor gazed back toward the Orc's camp, looking thoughtful. "We need time to prepare. Someone has to slow down the southern invaders—even if it means standing in their path. Grommash volunteered for that. I've already offered him our Blood Elf support. Plus, Grommash is at Alpha-level peak. He wants to put himself in a life-and-death scenario and try to break through on his own."

Self-driven breakthroughs were exactly why Grommash refused to retreat. Orcs might be vassals to the Blood Elves, but they still had a fair amount of autonomy—especially because their lords had historically achieved Legendary breakthroughs on their own. Grommash hoped to form his own Lord's Stone through battle, stepping into the ranks of Legendary.

It was a tough road, yet it was the path he'd chosen.

"Grommash has strong resolve. No point telling him otherwise," Elanor added. "He already sent away a bunch of younger Orcs, ensuring his tribe won't go extinct. Whenever a Orc becomes a lord, even the Blood Elves have no authority to order them around."

She also knew full well that forging a Lord's Stone alone stood next to impossible. Throughout history, those who'd done it could be counted on one hand.

"Let's go. Next, we'll head to the giants' territory. The southern invaders apparently have a giant lord among them, which might work to our advantage."

Elanor looked south again. That was where a clan of powerful giants dwelled. Legend said the ancestors of the giants were a powerful Titan. Elanor had no idea if that was true.

"Ms. Elanor, are you hoping Giant Balor will somehow... persuade that southern giant lord to switch sides and shift the balance?" asked Brimli the gnome, showing a flash of clever insight.

"If this plan works, we might snatch victory at minimal cost," Elanor murmured in reply, not denying his guess.

"Two giant lords facing off... so who's the real Giant King?" Brimli chortled, apparently picturing something amusing.

Boarion, clutching his still-injured arm, glanced toward the south with a serious expression. Elanor and Faelar, on the other hand, stayed calm, confident the war had yet to see its biggest turn.

Back in the Orc camp, Grommash waited until Elanor's group was out of sight, then addressed the tribe elders.

"Orcs do not bow. We do not run! Our young ones have already been sent away, so no more worries there. Now, for our tribe's sake—and for our freedom—we must embrace this do-or-die moment. In our darkest hour, we'll be reborn."

Blademaster Grommash harbored a burning ambition. As war loomed, he aimed to spark his own ascension in the heat of battle, maybe even dragging his tribe out from under Blood Elf authority for good. Win or lose, the Orcs would find themselves on the other side of the line from the Blood Elves—leaving the elves nothing to say.

"Get ready, my people!" he roared. "Let our blood wash away the shame, and let the fury of battle cleanse our souls!"

On the march, riding on the back of the Abyssal Dragon.

Orion had Delilah in his arms, his eyes half-closed as he immersed his consciousness into the Survivor's Platform.

"Big boss, the weapon you gave me was awesome!"

"Big boss, lately there's been nothin' worthwhile. Such a shame!"

Once on the Survivor's Platform, Orion's first move wasn't to trade with Aerin but to check on Julius Caesar, to see if he'd put up anything new for sale. Unfortunately, Caesar seemed out of luck lately—no fresh loot had turned up.

Ignoring Julius Caesar, Orion wrapped up his trade with Aerin.

Finally, Orion turned his attention to Arthas.

"Hey bro, how's life been?"

Arthas didn't say anything right away. Instead, he initiated a trade, sending Orion a tiny, cherry-sized translucent bead.

"This piece of world essence is yours. Leonidas asked me to pass it on."

Startled, Orion looked closely, though at first he saw nothing within the bead. But in a flicker of the eye, it seemed like countless stars were twinkling inside.

"It's precious," Arthas added. "If you refine it, you should gain a minor upgrade."

Seeing that message, Orion felt downright ecstatic. Since reaching Legendary level, he'd consumed plenty of dark source crystals, but gains at that tier were just too hard to come by.

Orion squeezed Delilah's left breast, then withdrew the arm around her to pretend he was yawning. In the same motion, he slipped the world essence into his mouth.

As soon as it entered his body, Orion's transcendent power surged. For a moment, lightning and a faint red glow seemed to flicker in his eyes.

"What's going on, sweetheart?" Delilah asked. She was pressed close enough to Orion to feel the wave in his aura.

"No worries. I had a small breakthrough, so my aura got a bit unstable."

Orion pulled her closer again, nuzzling the scent in her hair.

Meanwhile, on the Survivor's Platform, Arthas hesitated for a while before sending Orion a message:

"Hulk, when long-established Legendary-level heavy hitters start warring, don't dig yourself in too deep. Know when to pull out. Also, that world of yours is in the midst of a divine war—this isn't a good time to open any teleportation portals. Even if you did, the most I could manage is sending one Legendary-level subordinate to help. Be careful! Even a demigod is not someone we can afford to provoke."

Reading the warning filled Orion with concern. Arthas wasn't trying to frighten him—he genuinely cared about him.

After a long pause, Orion replied:

"Thank you. I know my limits. When the time comes, I'll step back. As for the teleportation array, I'm not opening it anytime soon."

He was telling the truth. Right now, he had no plans to throw open a gateway and invite Arthas's undead army into his world.

"It's definitely wise to plan ahead," he thought. "Trouble's already brewing in the coalition, with tensions and infighting on the rise. I'd best keep my guard up at all times."

Still, this wasn't the moment for Orion to withdraw. Not yet.

First, he wanted to meet that giant lord the scouts had been talking about. Orion had no intention of letting any unknown clan of giants slip through his fingers. Consuming or subjugating that tribe would bolster his own giants and cement their standing in the Stoneheart Horde. That was his real objective.

He also wanted to see how strong those Starveil Giants truly were...

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Utessar Kingdom, at the northern city gate.

Baron Torin had finally made it here, though he had neither a single retainer nor knight in tow—no militiamen either. Everything he'd done, yet he'd ended up with nothing.

On his way to the royal capital, Torin Ashvale ran into the king leading his regular army in person. Even before Torin had a chance to meet the king himself, his militia and knights were "requisitioned" in the king's name. Hearing it was a royal command, every last one of his men ditched Torin without hesitation.

"Shit... Your Majesty, I hope you die on the battlefield," Torin muttered bitterly. "And if you manage to survive, I swear I'll crush this kingdom of yours someday."

Fury and spite burned in his chest. At least he was a "survivor." Without that advantage, after everything that had happened, it would be impossible for a mere baron to rise up once again.

"Looks like I'll have to sell that thing after all, if I want to fund another comeback. Based on my experience, that little mini-building is definitely something special."

Over in the western region, Orion's allied forces didn't bother passing through Beastmen territory; they headed straight into the orcs' domain, where war was about to explode. Orion, however, was still half-absorbed in the Survivor's Platform.

Suddenly, he noticed a new item on the listings—a miniature building—and he bought it on the spot for five thousand C-grade crystal cores. Didn't take him more than a few seconds.

In the Utessar kingdom's royal capital, Torin Ashvale just stood there in a daze when he saw five thousand C-grade crystal cores drop into his account.

The mini-building he'd listed had been snapped up in seconds. Even an idiot would realize that meant it was worth far more than five thousand C-grade crystal cores.

"Ah well... bigger treasures mean nothing if I can't use them to rebuild. Good riddance."

Having settled that, Torin turned and walked toward the Mercenaries' Guild. With no knights or retinue left, if he wanted to build his status up again, he'd have to rely on the Mercenaries' Guild to form a mercenary corps and carve out a new faction and power base. There was an air of desolation in his shuffling footsteps, but also a certain steely resolve.

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Seven days later, in orc territory, war broke out.

The orcs—under Blademaster Grommash's leadership—showed no sign of sitting around and waiting to be attacked. Instead, they launched the first blow.

From the back lines, Orion watched orc wolf-mounted cavalry collide with the cave spiders' formation, and he felt a wave of nostalgia. If Thundar were here, he'd probably charge right out with his cavalry regiment to test their mettle against those wolf riders.

"That orc chieftain is no pushover," Orion commented. He was perched behind the Abyssal Dragon, observing Delilah, Onyx, Rockwell, Earthshaker, Slagor, and the others as they converged on Blademaster Grommash.

Grommash's swordsmanship was razor-sharp, and each slash shone with lethal brilliance.

Crack!

Onyx swung his enormous axe in a thunderous blow, shattering Grommash's greatsword in his hands.

Narrowing his eyes at Onyx, Grommash's expression grew grim. Though his overall might exceeded that of his attackers, their teamwork was overwhelming. On top of that, a succubus was adding illusions from the sidelines, making it even harder for Grommash to keep up.

Yet this was exactly the crucible he desired. If Grommash hoped to ascend, this life-or-death struggle against Alpha-level foes was precisely the push he needed.

Chapter 345 I want a challenge

The battle raged on. It wasn't that Grommash didn't want his people's help, or that they refused to lend a hand—it was Grommash himself who turned them away.

In fact, as long as he kept these Alpha-level fighters occupied, the surrounding orcs would remain much safer.

"Kill them all!"

Blademaster Grommash roared. His greatsword had been snapped in two, but clutching its broken half only seemed to fire up his battle spirit even more.

From the rear of the battlefield, a figure approached Orion and spoke—it was Bluehide. Rather, the smaller of Bluehide's two heads was talking, and he eyed Orion with evident warmth and interest.

"That orc chieftain seems... off," he remarked. "Looks like he's forcing himself to break through. He keeps pushing his own limits."

Orion glanced at Bluehide. His response carried a double meaning.

"You've noticed?"

First, he was asking if Bluehide had figured out what Grommash was attempting. Second, he was subtly inquiring whether Bluehide had picked up on Orion's advancement to mid-Legendary level.

"I certainly have," Bluehide said, giving a little shrug. "Makes me feel pretty good—almost wanna blow a big bubble right now."

He fell silent for a moment, turning his gaze to the battlefield. Orion smirked but didn't take offense.

"In that case, Lord Bluehide... care to tell me if that orc's plan will work?"

Bluehide pretended he was blowing a bubble, then shook his head.

"Nope. I've studied this world's history, and the number of folks who ever forged their own Lord's Stone isn't more than three."

Orion was about to ask who those three were, when Bluehide lowered his voice:

"By the way, I'll let you in on a little secret: my two heads have different names. Call me Aldous. I've got a feeling we could be friends. As for my big dozy head here, that's Bluehide. Of course, whether you call me Bluehide or Aldous, I really don't mind. We're essentially the same person."

As Aldous chuckled, he pointed to the larger, sleepier head. Orion paused, intrigued; he now saw this ogre for who he truly was.

Boom!

Suddenly, an explosive roar burst from the front lines, sending swordlight whipping in all directions.

Onyx, Rockwell, Earthshaker, and Slagor all got knocked around to some extent; they looked visibly shaken, with Onyx sporting a host of fresh cuts in his petrified skin.

Blademaster Grommash, meanwhile, lay on the ground, out of strength.

"Hurry, let's save our chieftain!"

"Come on—rush in!"

Orc elders who'd been watching from the sidelines finally jumped into action to rescue Grommash—only to be surrounded by countless cave spiders and boarfolk.

"Lord Orion, your people are pretty impressive," commented Aldous. "Especially that minotaur—he has a unique ability."

Orion nodded silently. Indeed, Earthshaker's Blood Sharing skill was a nasty tool; Orion wouldn't have brought him along otherwise.

"That orc out there—he's called Blademaster Grommash—he's famous even outside his own lands," Aldous went on. "Truth is, killing Alpha-level foes wouldn't be too hard for him, but your people managed to capture him alive. That's a hell of an achievement. Grommash's exploits are well-known in my territory, too."

Orion kept his eyes fixed on the battlefield. Now that all the Alpha-level orcs were tied up, Delilah, Onyx, Rockwell, Earthshaker, and Slagor had slipped free of danger. Only then did he relax and look away.

"Lord Aldous, the orc chieftain is being held prisoner—that's a wrap for his tribe," Orion said calmly. "Still, can you help me bag more orc captives? I plan to use them as slave labor. I need a ton of workers to build walls."

Aldous nodded, answering earnestly, "Lord Orion, that's an easy ask. I'll have my people round up as many orcs or beastmen as you need. Their meat is pretty damn unappetizing anyway!"

The truth was, Orion had asked him this favor on purpose. He found Aldous intriguing and wanted to get closer to him.

Besides Gareth, Orion could use more allies during this venture. Relationships sometimes formed through "help me out" moments like these, and Orion understood that well.

Half a day later, Onyx, Rockwell, Earthshaker, and Slagor dragged Blademaster Grommash—bound and wounded—over to Orion.

"Blademaster Grommash," Orion remarked, "I hear you reign supreme among Alpha-level beings. A certain ogre lord just sang your praises."

He smiled. "I'm sorry though. If I were still Alpha-level, I'd give you a fair shot at challenging me."

Grommash's wounds were severe, yet the instant he saw Orion, his eyes lit with unquenchable thirst for a fight.

"Noble giant lord, I can challenge you right now," he growled.

Orion shook his head with a chilling grin. "Blademaster Grommash, that sentence you just spoke had nine words in it." At that, Orion slid his thumb across his own throat in a silent gesture.

An instant later, Earthshaker beheaded nine captured orcs right in front of Grommash. The heads were piled before him.

"Please consider your words more carefully when you speak to me," Orion said in a mild tone, though the glint in his eyes carried a distinct warning.

"I want a challenge!" Grommash roared.

Slash, slash, slash, slash!

"I want a challenge!" he shouted again.

Slash, slash, slash, slash!

...

What came next even surprised Orion. No matter how many orcs were beheaded, Grommash just kept glaring at Orion, repeating his demand. He didn't even spare a glance for his dying clansmen.

After a while, Orion's blood turned cold. Expressionless, he murmured, "Fine. I'll give you one."

He waved Earthshaker and Slagor away, signaling them to let Grommash go.

The orc rose unsteadily, then snapped his fractured right arm like it was nothing. Piece by piece he bit off the remaining flesh, exposing the arm bone beneath—the blade he intended to use.

With his hand as a sword, Grommash pointed that makeshift blade straight at Orion, a raw wave of fighting spirit rolling off him.

Orion let out a mocking laugh, drawing his own trident and facing off from a short distance away.

"Raaaaagh!"

Grommash unleashed every ounce of bloodline power he had and charged.

Crash!

Orion swung the trident, hammering Grommash aside without killing him outright.

From the moment Orion learned Grommash was trying to forge his own Lord's Stone, he'd been tempted to humor the orc—let him see if he could pull it off.

Orion was curious to know if forging a Lord's Stone from scratch was even possible. And if Grommash did succeed, Orion would seize it, fulfilling his own ambitions.

That, in truth, was why Orion had given him this chance.

Chapter 346 We're friends

"Sword Skill: Invincible Sword Dancer!"

Blademaster Grommash spat out blood, gritting his teeth as he roared in a hoarse rasp. Every drop of his blood seemed to surge throughout his body and pour into the bones of his left hand. Little by little, those bones were stained a deep crimson, shifting into the shape of a sword.

At the same time, Blademaster Grommash's face turned unnaturally pale from blood loss, his features contorting into something ferocious.

"Ever since I was a kid, my father told me I was born to be unbeatable!"

"Invincible Sword Dance..."

With a clang, a blood-red sword flash shimmered, and a wave of transcendent power pulsed out. The sword light swallowed Blademaster Grommash whole, merging with his very body as he lunged toward Orion in a single mighty slash.

Orion lifted his trident, sensing a genuine threat. A colossal sword attack—nearly 300 feet long—crashed down with a force worthy of a Legendary-level strike. Within it, Orion could feel a faint but unmistakable rush of transcendent power.

Blademaster Grommash had succeeded, rising to Legendary level. Yet he had also failed, because he died in the process.

Splurch!

Orion's trident pierced Grommash's throat, leaving the blademaster with but a single ragged breath.

"I've seen a new light... so bright... so dazzling..."

"I... I can't... die like this!"

Those final words trailed off as Blademaster Grommash breathed his last. With no change in his expression, Orion smoothly swept his trident from the blademaster's throat down to his heart.

Accompanied by a sickening tear of flesh, Orion fished out a faintly glowing Lord's Stone from within Grommash's body.

"Earthshaker, collect his corpse. I'll need it."

After giving Earthshaker this command, Orion pocketed the Lord's Stone. Moments later, Jorik, Gareth, Ironhoof, Bluehide, and Lokiviria all arrived before him.

"I sensed a strange burst of transcendent power," Lokiviria remarked, eyeing Orion with suspicion.

Orion glanced at him but offered no explanation.

"Orion, what just happened?" Jorik finally asked. The others wore expressions of curiosity as well. Orion let out a small sigh and answered calmly.

"Just a moment ago, Blademaster Grommash sacrificed his own life, trying to form his Lord's Stone in a last-ditch effort to challenge me."

"But he failed."

Orion only half told the truth, and after listening, Jorik, Gareth, and the others looked as though it all suddenly made sense.

"If it was Blademaster Grommash, he definitely had the ability to pull something like that off," Aldous said. As he spoke, he gave Orion a quick wink, his expression cryptic. It was clear Aldous knew more than he let on, but he had chosen to keep Orion's secret.

"The orcs can't threaten us now. Tell our people to feast well, and then we'll keep pushing south."

Without further explanation, Lokiviria threw down that order before turning on his heel and leaving Orion's temporary camp. "Feasting well" had another meaning: distributing the spoils of war.

Jorik, Gareth, and Ironhoof said their farewells and took off as well. Only Aldous lingered by Orion's side without any sign of leaving.

"Orion, do you still need slaves?" Aldous asked. "I can have my people save some strong orcs or beastmen for you."

They say when someone's too eager to do you a favor, you should watch your back. Orion studied Aldous, who simply pretended to blow imaginary bubbles, acting clueless.

"So, you saw it," Orion suddenly said in a steady, casual tone.

Mid-bubble, Aldous froze. A few seconds passed before he turned slowly to face Orion.

"You're not scared I'll spill the truth?" Aldous asked, sounding genuinely surprised, as if witnessing something uncanny.

"Not at all," Orion replied. "After all, we're friends, aren't we, Aldous?"

He gave Aldous a warm, radiant grin.

"That's right, we're friends. And friends would never hurt each other, right?" Aldous responded—though it was unclear if he was posing the question to Orion or to himself.

Orion laughed—loudly and with genuine delight. "Aldous, you're adorable. I like you. I'm glad to have you as a friend."

With that, he clapped Aldous on the shoulder and headed off toward the orc camp.

"I've got myself a friend now!" Aldous muttered under his breath, then took giant strides after Orion.

Meanwhile, in the beastmen camp, everyone was on edge.

"Arch Elder, we need to leave. The orc chieftain next door is already dead. It's dangerous to remain here," advised an elderly fox-woman who had just approached Sylvana.

Sylvana was the arch elder of the fox tribe. Gazing at a freshly broken beast fang in her hand, she sighed and turned around, revealing her breathtaking features—especially her mesmerizing eyes, brimming with natural allure.

She wore a partly sheer white robe and spoke not a word as she led her people out of the tent.

"Fate has altered. Our destiny has become obscure, and I can no longer see what lies ahead," she said softly once they left the beastmen's camp.

Sylvana had a rare occupation: she was a seer, serving as the beastmen's oracle.

"Elder Sylvana, the beastmen race has had its share of ups and downs. Sometimes, a reading can be wrong. It happens," the elderly fox-woman replied, bringing forth a white exotic beast for Sylvana to ride.

Seated on the creature's back, Sylvana looked down at the aged fox and spoke with firm conviction.

"In my original divination, Blademaster Grommash was supposed to rise meteorically in this very battle, becoming one of the most formidable warriors on this continent."

"But Blademaster Grommash is dead. I was wrong about him. I have no idea where my reading failed."

She sounded puzzled, upset, and even a little unwilling to accept it. None of it mattered now, though; the white beast bounded off, carrying Sylvana away from this place of chaos.

Half a day later, the allied forces from the north completely took over the beastmen camp. Pillaging and massacring had become merciful by comparison—wherever the insectoids, ogres, or cave spiders swarmed, not even a single corpse was left behind.

"Lord, we discovered a mysterious totem. It looks like some kind of special structure," a succubus whispered to Orion, approaching him quietly.

"Lead the way," Orion told her, narrowing his eyes. He followed her deeper into the beastmen camp.

The beastmen's training grounds featured a towering totem that exuded a strange aura. But now, two groups had formed at the base of that totem, confronting each other in tense standoff.

Chapter 347 True Giant King

Eight Alpha-level insectoids hemmed in Delilah, Onyx, Rockwell, Earthshaker, and Slagor.

"Damn fools—this loot belongs to the insectoids!"

Those were the words of one particular insectoid among the eight Alpha-level insectoids, the only one capable of speech.

"This was our find first. You came after—the spoils should be ours," Rockwell spat out bitterly. If not for Delilah and Earthshaker's quick intervention, he'd likely have been devoured moments ago by these eight insectoids.

"We've got the numbers, and our fists pack more punch. The treasure should belong to whoever's strongest."

The talking insectoid sounded full of itself, tearing into the group with smug confidence. Eight against five—by its calculations, the insectoids clearly had the upper hand.

"Since we're allies, you can still get out now. Otherwise, we'll eat you."

Noticing Delilah, Onyx, and the others weren't budging, the insectoid tried threatening them outright, its voice turning ominous.

"If you dare lay a single tooth on them, I'll kill every last one of you!" From afar, Orion's cool, level voice drifted across to the group.

"It's Orion!"

"Our lord is here!"

Delilah and Onyx both exhaled in relief, while Rockwell, Earthshaker, and Slagor shouted with delight.

Although Orion's voice had reached them—striking a chord of fear in the insectoids—he himself didn't appear immediately. Part of why he'd spoken up was to rattle the insectoids, and part of it was to send a message to their leader.

Sure enough, less than half a minute later, a fierce gust of wind swept past, and Lokiviria, the insectoid lord, arrived on the scene.

"You plan on slaughtering my people?" Lokiviria demanded, glaring straight at Orion without an ounce of intimidation.

"By the rules, we found this place first. So everything here is ours," Orion countered. "Lord Lokiviria, your underlings stepped out of line."

Without bothering to turn for confirmation, Lokiviria's antennae swayed rapidly. Orion could plainly see the shifting antennae of the insectoids behind Lokiviria as well—their silent way of trading information.

"My swarm insists they found these spoils first," Lokiviria stated, deliberate and false, turning black into white.

"Lord, we were here first," Rockwell sputtered, rushing to warn Orion so he wouldn't be misled. "They showed up after us and tried driving us away to snatch everything!"

"Shut up! Since when do you get a say during a discussion between Legendary-level fighters?"

Whoosh!

A blast of wind suddenly ripped forward, barreling straight at Rockwell. If that gust struck him, he'd be done for. Terror distorted Rockwell's face; death was only a moment away.

Boom!

A flash of lightning shattered that oncoming wind, and Orion saved Rockwell from certain doom.

"Lokiviria, he's my subordinate. Even if he doesn't know his place, it's my right to discipline him—not yours. Or are you telling me that we should all just bow to whoever has the biggest fist?"

The Flame of Will materialized in Orion's grasp, and his cold stare fell on Lokiviria as he leveled the trident at him.

"So you really think you're tougher than me?" Lokiviria snapped. "Perfect. I've been itching to knock you down a peg—let's see what you've got."

"I hear you used to serve Gareth. Any idea that when she headed south last year, I nearly bashed her to death?" Lokiviria added with a harsh laugh.

On the distant sidelines, Gareth—visibly humiliated—had her face turn dark as night. In truth, Lokiviria wasn't lying. He had beaten Gareth before, leaving her badly injured.

Orion sighed. He knew after this, their alliance would be anything but stable—if it could be called an alliance at all.

"Lokiviria, didn't anyone ever tell you that your mouth is downright obnoxious? Now die!"

No sooner had those words left his lips than Orion hurtled toward Lokiviria.

"Bring it on!"

Rather than retreat, Lokiviria charged straight at him. Pressing both fists together like a cannon, he concentrated a blade of wind on them to clash head-on with Orion's trident.

Wham!

A deafening reverberation ensued, and both Orion and Lokiviria flew backward under the force of the collision.

"Impressive... so you're middle Legendary level."

Orion's eyes widened. He kept them trained on Lokiviria, dead serious.

"Middle level? That's impossible!"

Even with just that single impact, Lokiviria had figured out Orion's power stood in the middle Legendary tier.

"Watch this!"

At a distance, Orion raised his trident. An Eightfold Spear Barrage took shape, enveloping Lokiviria with nowhere to run.

Locked inside the Eightfold Spear Barrage, Lokiviria immediately felt a surge of danger. He wasn't clueless; transcendent power flared wildly around him. A moment later, countless gusts of wind circled him, spinning faster by the second.

Within only a few heartbeats, those winds solidified into a protective shield around him. Outside the Eightfold Spear Barrage, Orion manipulated his spider spear, launching a relentless assault.

The clangs and crashes rang out nonstop. Orion had no intention of holding back. If he could stomp out Lokiviria here and now, he could claim another Lord's Stone.

That idea hit Orion hard—after all, fuck it, once he got his hands on a new Lord's Stone, he could simply withdraw rather than plunge any deeper into this mess.

A thunderous din shook the air as Lokiviria, shielded by his swirling winds, darted left and right inside that Eightfold Spear Barrage, unable to break free.

Just as Orion was about to shift the spears into tridents for a finishing blow, Jorik, Gareth, and Ironhoof suddenly stepped in front of him, blocking his view.

"Orion, stop—this is no time for us to tear each other apart!"

Jorik's expression was grim, though he was speaking politely.

Everyone could see Orion outmatched Lokiviria. Jorik felt an odd mix of relief at Orion's strength and a swell of unease at the threat it implied.

Orion was his ally and, outwardly at least, had always treated him with respect. Lokiviria, on the other hand, had never gotten along with Jorik. In theory, Jorik shouldn't be intervening now at all.

But Jorik knew exactly why he came: to rally these northern lords and hold off the Blood Elves. And since Lokiviria was one of his strongest allies, Jorik didn't want him dying here.

So, Jorik had to intervene and even invited Gareth and Ironhoof for added support.

"Lord Orion, it's not time for us to be tearing each other apart!"

"Dear Orion, this really isn't a good moment!"

The first line was Ironhoof's, while the second came from Gareth. She was very familiar with Orion, and this time she used an especially intimate way of addressing him.

Orion withdrew his trident, responding to them all with silence.

Off in the distance, the Eightfold Spear Barrage—once controlled by Orion—vanished. Freed from it, Lokiviria charged out.

He strode over to the group, expression grim as a block of ice.

"The spoils here belong to me!"

Orion's voice was cold, with no room for refusal—he wasn't about to negotiate.

"Orion, since your people arrived first, it's only natural the loot here goes to you," Jorik said, trying to smooth things over. After Orion nodded, he said nothing more.

As for Lokiviria, he snorted and then turned to leave.

Shortly after, Jorik, Gareth, and Ironhoof hung around to talk for a bit before they also left.

Aldous alone stayed behind, making no move to go away. When Orion glanced at him, Aldous immediately offered an explanation.

"Don't get me wrong. Beastmen treasures aren't enough to make me lift a finger and fight over them. My friend, I'm just curious what your people found."

Orion nodded, then turned to look at Delilah and Onyx.

Delilah stepped forward and came to Orion's side. She nodded at Aldous before reporting to Orion, "Lord, here it is!"

"Earthshaker found it," she added.

Orion gave Earthshaker a quick glance, then walked over to the cylindrical object Delilah was pointing at. He reached out, touching its cold surface.

But nothing unusual happened.

"Lord, this is a totem pole. It's useful for us buffalofolk," Earthshaker said in a low voice as he moved closer.

Orion nodded. He didn't have any more questions and didn't say much else.

"Dig it up and take it. You've got plenty of slaves — no sense feeding them if they're not gonna work."

Orion turned, shooting Aldous a look. Aldous let out two awkward chuckles and followed him away.

"Man, that was close!"

The moment those Legendary-level powerhouses were gone, Rockwell practically deflated onto the ground like a balloon with the air let out.

Even with Orion present, Lokiviria's pressure had been overwhelming.

"Don't be so reckless next time. If the lord's around, try to keep your mouth shut," Onyx said, placing a reassuring hand on Rockwell's shoulder.

In a life-or-death situation with Legendary-level beings, guys like them wouldn't even stand a chance. Staying quiet was the safest bet.

Rockwell nodded, having learned his lesson.

"Once we're done here, the few of us will work together to pull this stone pillar out, rig up a basic wooden frame, and have the slaves haul it," Onyx said, circling the totem pole a few times. It gave off a strange aura, one he could feel too.

"Leave it to me!" Earthshaker, ever enthusiastic, had already called over some of his tribe to start building the support.

...

Down south lay Starveil City.

Named after the Starveil Giants, the city was part of the Blood Elves' territory, but the Starveil Giants enjoyed significant autonomy.

The main reason was that the Starveil Giants were led by a Legendary-level lord, Balor Starveil.

Right now, in one of the palaces, Balor was entertaining Blood Elf Elanor, Boarfolk Boarion, Blood Elf Faelar, and Gnome Brimli.

"Honorable Elanor, we're right here in Starveil City, within the domain of my giant clan(tribe). I think we should strike back at those invaders from the north," Balor said.

Huge and powerfully built, Balor slouched on his throne, his hulking frame radiating a savage energy. Setting down his specially made goblet, he stroked his long beard with a self-satisfied flair.

"Lord Balor, adding you into the mix really helps us crush the enemy's morale," Elanor replied. "But we still need more, so I'm calling in some additional gnomes and Blood Elves. With their crossbows mounted on the walls, we'll be much safer."

She didn't seem particularly concerned about Balor's attitude. In this world, a true powerhouse was respected wherever they went, and Balor was undoubtedly strong. Even she wasn't certain she could beat him if it came down to a fight.

"Honorable Elanor, do as you please. Giants will neither fear battle nor turn away from lending a hand."

Balor downed another massive bowl of liquor, then wiped the dribbles from his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Lord Balor," Elanor continued, "I'm sure you've heard there's a giant among the southern invaders, right?"

She was only asking for confirmation; the war between north and south had already begun, so every side's scouts had spread out long ago.

"I've heard. Apparently, those giants come from a different branch — not Starveil or Shadowabyss. Probably Stoneheart or Ironbone. Maybe even both.

Ha! Giants from the north attacking the south... interesting, very interesting! Goes to show how powerful our giant race really is!"

Balor's hearty voice boomed across the hall. Boarion the Boarfolk, Faelar the Blood Elf, and Brimli the Gnome exchanged looks before finally turning their gazes toward Elanor.

"Lord Balor, we hope you can bring those giants—and that giant lord—under your banner. With them on our side, this counterattack has a much higher chance of success," Elanor said.

Balor swept his huge hand dismissively in the air. "Elanor, you don't need to remind me of that. If they're true giants, they should already be subject to me, their king. Of course, that includes their giant lord."

His deep, raspy voice carried a heavy, intimidating edge. Balor's aura was wild and ferocious, and when he spoke, there was no lack of confidence or threat in his tone.

He lowered his hand and grabbed a barrel of wine off the table, tilting it back as he guzzled it down. As a tipsy haze crept over him, Balor muttered softly, "I never would've guessed there'd be another giant tribe hidden up north. Looks like I'm getting closer and closer to becoming the one true Giant King."

Chapter 348 Dragon-slaying knight

Elanor gazed at Balor the Giant for a moment before pulling her eyes away.

"Faelar, hurry back to our clan and report everything here to our king. Then bring a contingent of troops to help out. Remember, you've only got two weeks. Make sure you're back by then. Our enemies from the north will also arrive in about two weeks."

She said this in front of all the Legendary-level powerhouses, giving orders to another Legendary-level Blood Elf on purpose.

Elanor was trying to calm everyone's nerves. A smart woman, she knew that if a lot of the northern invaders' forces could be whittled down right here in the giants' city, it would be a real bonus for the Blood Elves. By the time those northern outsiders reached the Blood Elves' City of Blessings, their numbers would be cut back. The Blood Elves would not only keep their territory safe but protect their honor as well.

"With five Legendary-level fighters against six northern lords, we'll have a pretty decent shot at winning."

Elanor was stunningly beautiful, especially when she was lost in thought and the soft white bangs on her forehead fell naturally around her face. She looked breathtaking.

Of course, Balor the Giant, Boarion the Boarfolk, and Brimli the Gnome didn't share the human sense of beauty, so they weren't really moved by her looks.

...

In the human kingdom, Princess Ava had led her Rose Knight Regiment on a perilous route but finally managed to rendezvous with the empire's regular army.

Inside a tent at the temporary camp, Princess Ava and King Harold stood facing each other.

"My dear sister, it's such a relief to see you before heading to the battlefield!"

King Harold produced a pink rose from who knows where, gently tucking it into Princess Ava's hair.

"Our Kingdom's longtime crown princess—still as lovely as ever. You're our kingdom's pride and joy!"

Hearing her beloved older brother praise her like that, all the gloom that had followed Princess Ava these past days—from bounties on her head to multiple assassination attempts—seemed to vanish instantly.

"Brother, you're the true pride of the empire! You brought together the dwarves, the Blood Elves, the half-dragons, and the merfolk. Without your efforts, we humans wouldn't be able to hold off those southern invaders on our own."

King Harold shook his head. Sure, it was a good thing they had formed a united front, but it came at the cost of all kinds of promises and concessions from the human kingdom. At the core, it all came down to tangled interests.

"I heard you were attacked by the half-dragons several times. Were you hurt?"

Princess Ava gently shook her head at her brother's concern.

"My guardian knights have shown their bravery and absolute devotion in protecting me. But, wait—did the half-dragons defect? Didn't you strike an alliance with them? Weren't they supposed to be our friends?"

King Harold heaved a sigh and shook his head once more. He walked over to the small window flap of the tent and lifted it, watching his royal guards patrol outside and the imperial soldiers cooking by the campfire. After a long pause, he spoke in a hushed tone.

"Ten thousand years ago, the lands of our current human kingdom belonged to the white dragon Frostsire. Back then, legions of half-dragons already lived here. After our ancestors sealed Frostsire away, the half-dragons withdrew north with him and went into hiding.

"The half-dragons we've allied with are basically mixed-blood half-dragons. They're nowhere near as powerful as the ones sired by Arch Lord White Dragon Frostsire himself. That's also one reason half-dragons haven't taken over this fertile southern land."

Before heading out to face this invasion, King Harold had pored over many ancient histories and secret records. If you trace it far enough back, humans were the outsiders here.

Ten thousand years ago, the humans had legions of mages and griffin riders. But about six thousand years ago, for unknown reasons, this continent's humans got cut off from their homeland on another continent.

That allowed dwarves and the Blood Elves to rise, forcing humankind to shrink its territory. Over time, they turned into the three major races sharing the south.

After reading a ton of old documents, King Harold concluded that the changes starting six thousand years ago might not have been such a bad thing after all. At least when the northern invaders marched down now, the dwarves and Blood Elves had no choice but to do their part in resisting. They understood the concept of "sharing each other's fate." They were all plenty smart.

"Brother, have you been studying a lot of old history and digging up all sorts of secret records lately?" Princess Ava asked, eyes bright with curiosity, clearly excited.

"I have. Why, is there something you're dying to know?"

Knowing his sister's personality well, King Harold turned around and smiled as he spoke.

"Yes, absolutely!" In front of King Harold, Princess Ava dropped her formalities. The two siblings felt like they'd time-traveled back to their childhood days.

Princess Ava pulled up a stool for him, her eyes full of anticipation, practically begging for a good story. "Brother, what can you tell me about knights? What's the big deal? Dish!"

King Harold nodded and took the tea she offered, letting out a small, wry chuckle.

"Oh, if you mean the eight knights who dreamed of slaying dragons, yeah, I've been reading about them. Every knight upholds eight virtues: humility, honor, sacrifice, valor, compassion, spirit, honesty, and justice.

Each dragon-slaying knight has their own way of passing down traditions. They're not in it for fame or fortune. They chase freedom, true love, and self-fulfillment. Whatever they choose to protect, they do so with their own lives. According to legend, the Eight Great Knights shared some special connections among themselves..."

...

Elsewhere in the same camp, in a stable:

"This is a beast-blood mount, and it's yours now!"

Arthur held the reins of a strange-looking steed, passing them to Galahad.

"Beast-blood mount" was a human term referring to horses crossbred with swift beasts.

After generations of selective breeding, humans finally produced a breed of particularly strong horses carrying beast blood. That was how these so-called beast-blood mounts came to be.

Chapter 349 He's my quarry

"This is a gift from Commander Ava. It's a belated welcome present for joining our Rose Knight Regiment."

"Thank you!"

"No need to thank me. You should be thanking our commander!"

Coal Knight Galahad gripped the reins, feeling a surge of excitement that made his hands tremble slightly. In his knightly heritage, there were certain sword techniques that required coordination with a mount. Now that he finally had one, Galahad was undeniably thrilled.

"Galahad, you're even more outstanding, more powerful, than I imagined," Arthur remarked. Staring at the still-youthful face of Galahad, he suddenly felt a touch of regret.

"He's so young... Maybe I shouldn't have dragged him into this war."

But then Arthur remembered the one he had to protect—Princess Ava—and his resolve hardened once again.

"For Ava's safety, I need reliable allies—strong knights. We'll definitely make it back in one piece!"

—————

Beastmen territory, along the route of the allied invaders.

Orion was half-reclined on the back of his abyssal dragon, his thoughts fixed on the newly formed Lord's Stone that Blademaster Grommash had just handed over.

This Lord's Stone was smaller than any he'd received before, but something about it tugged powerfully at Orion's senses. That strange aura felt important to him on an instinctual level. Yet every time he tried to focus on it, he found nothing at all.

"What am I missing? Why is this Lord's Stone calling to me like this?"

He took it out again, studying it carefully. It gleamed with dazzling light, and when he stared at it, it was as if stars and sword light flickered within. After a dizzying moment, the vision disappeared.

"Is it some kind of transcendent power related to swords?" he murmured, brow creasing with thought.

"Lord, what's on your mind?" Delilah was curled up against Orion like a cat. Hearing him mutter, she looked up, noticing the tension in his face.

"It's nothing. I just can't figure some things out."

Orion tucked away the Lord's Stone and tilted his head down to kiss Delilah. Five minutes later, Delilah—her cheeks flushed—slumped bonelessly into his arms. Propped against his chest, she felt a tremor of excitement surge through her.

"I can't resist Orion's kisses anymore..." Some unspoken secret lingered inside her. She found herself more and more fascinated by Orion, less and less able to resist him. If Orion ordered her to die right now, Delilah suspected she might not refuse.

"Any time we kiss, I just catch fire and can't help myself," she thought. "What should I do? I want him all to myself!"

She raised her head, a trace of longing in her eyes. "Is this the man I'm doomed to love forever?" Seeing him up close, she couldn't help but feel a little dazed.

"Lord, an Alpha-level icefield snow wolf showed up outside. He says he's Lord Jorik's messenger." The speaker was Dace, one of Orion's sentries. He kept his voice low as he relayed the information. "The wolf asked me to deliver a message. The united armies plan to pitch camp on that open ground up ahead, and their lord wants you to join them to discuss how to deal with the giants."

Hearing the word "giants," Orion and Delilah instantly snapped out of their playful mood.

"Tell him I got the message," Orion said.

Dace bowed and withdrew, going off to deliver Orion's reply.

"My dear, will you be facing another giant king in person?" Delilah asked softly, standing up to straighten Orion's clothing.

As a member of the Stoneheart Horde, she knew better than anyone how powerful Orion—her own giant king—truly was. Now that he faced a rival giant king from the south, Delilah's heart churned with anxiety. Not just for Orion's safety, but for the horde's future.

Win or lose, the Stoneheart Horde was about to change. If Orion won, the transformation would be on their own terms. If Orion lost—or even fell in battle—Delilah could already imagine this unknown giant king seizing the chance to annex them.

At that point, every major race of the Stoneheart Horde—succubi, obsidian golems, buffalofolk, cave spiders—would see their fate rewritten.

"Don't worry. Even if I lose, I won't die here. That so-called giant king isn't strong enough to finish me off." Orion could sense Delilah's thoughts. They were lovers, and her emotions were more or less laid bare to him.

"If I do fall, I'll drag you down with me. No point wandering the endless shadows by myself," Orion added, his unsettling promise enough to rattle most people.

But Delilah merely smiled and gave him a devoted kiss. There was a kind of love that wasn't sweet, yet gave her a sense of absolute certainty.

"Keep an eye on the others. Let me know if anything happens." Orion patted Delilah's backside, then vanished in a bolt of lightning toward the center of the allied camp.

Once he was gone, Onyx, Rockwell, Earthshaker, and Slagor gathered around.

"Elder of Stewardship, did our lord leave us any instructions?" Onyx asked. Among them, he was the strongest and held the most authority. He posed his question delicately, avoiding any direct mention of final requests.

All four of them had long since grown comfortable with Delilah's intimate relationship with Orion—only by staying close to her could they glean answers to questions they dared not ask Orion outright.

Seated on the back of the abyssal dragon, Delilah was already fully dressed in her bone armor, exuding a calm and serious air. You'd never guess she'd just been melting into Orion's arms minutes earlier.

"The lord says don't worry—there's no chance he'll lose. He also says there's no way that southern giant king is strong enough to kill him."

Delilah's voice was full of confidence and fervor as she relayed Orion's words.

"We must have faith in our lord! Even if Lord Orion should lose, I'll stay by his side. We made that commitment the moment we set foot outside Blackstone City!"

Delilah's words brought silence from Onyx, who lowered his head and stared at the now-miniaturized battle axe in his hands.

Rockwell's face took on a feverish glow, as though he was already picturing himself dying in a blaze of glory. Earthshaker, meanwhile, said nothing, merely gazing at the slaves hauling the totem pole in the distance—he looked as if it had nothing to do with him.

Only Slagor spoke up, letting out a sigh before voicing his sincere thoughts.

"If I die in this war between north and south, at least it won't be a regret."

—————

When Orion reached the allied camp, Jorik was already seated in the place of honor. Gareth, Ironhoof, Lokiviria, and Bluehide sat on either side inside the makeshift tent.

Orion glanced around. Seeing Bluehide's smaller head taking charge of his body, Orion walked over.

"My friend, how's the little treat I gave you taste?"

"Tasty—better than coffee beans!"

Orion and Bluehide had become good friends. Orion had offered him a few bottles of Pet Pills to see how interested he was.

If Bluehide really liked them... well, Orion had been half-jokingly pondering whether an ogre could be turned into a pet. It was an intriguing question.

Without another word, Orion pulled out a bottle of high-tier Pet Pills and handed it to Aldous. Seeing how easily Orion and Bluehide got along made both Lokiviria and Jorik grow more serious. Especially Lokiviria—neither Orion nor Bluehide was someone he could ever hope to beat.

Jorik's hint of unease flashed and was gone. After taking a quick look at everyone, his gaze settled on Orion.

"Orion, the giants' territory is just ahead, and there's a giant king there. How do you want us to help?"

The implication was crystal clear: they wanted Orion to face, and potentially subdue, that giant king. If the southern giants pledged loyalty to Orion, never mind stalling the Blood Elves—the City of Blessings wouldn't stand a chance.

"Heh... if there really is a giant king, he's my quarry. Anyone who tries to steal him from me shouldn't be surprised if I'm less than polite."

Though Orion's voice was lazy, his tone was undeniably forceful. Hearing him, Jorik looked pleased. Everyone knew the farther south you went, the stronger the lords became. A giant king who lived beside the Blood Elves without being totally subjugated spoke volumes about his power. Now Orion was volunteering to take him on—a development they all welcomed.

Just as they were exchanging satisfied looks among themselves, Orion interrupted with a new remark, his tone still casual but carrying a cautionary edge.

"Don't start celebrating too soon. Think about Blood Elf Elanor, Boarfolk Boarion, Gnome Brimli, plus another Blood Elf lord. Even if you have five Legendary-levels against four, you're not gonna have an easy time. You haven't forgotten just how strong Blood Elf Elanor is, have you?"

Blood Elf Elanor was upper Legendary level, requiring both Lokiviria and Bluehide together to restrain her. And that still left Gareth and Ironhoof each to handle Boarfolk Boarion and Gnome Brimli on their own. Basically, every single person in this tent was risking their neck.

A hush settled over the temporary pavilion. Nobody spoke for a while until at last, Jorik slowly opened his mouth to ask, "Orion, how long will it take you to defeat that giant king?"

It wasn't an easy question. Orion couldn't really provide an answer without risking some of his secrets. He turned a puzzled stare at Jorik.

"Lord Orion," Jorik went on, "if you can kill that giant king—or make him submit to you—sooner rather than later, I believe we can start turning the tide right there. We'll do our utmost to keep everyone else occupied so they can't interfere with you."

As Jorik spoke, he glanced at the others, wordlessly urging them to declare their own positions.

"My friend, I'll handle that Blood Elf." Aldous twisted his head around, speaking in an almost cloyingly friendly tone. "If she slips up, I'll grab her and hand her over to you, let her bear your children."

He was half-joking, half-boasting, but it showed his stance.

"I'll do my best," Gareth chimed in next.

"Count me in," Ironhoof added without hesitation.

Finally, every gaze landed on Lokiviria.

"What are you all staring at me for?" he scoffed. "I'm not an idiot. If Orion kills the giant king, that's our victory. If we fail to keep the others at bay, he'll be the one who ends up collapsing."

With that grumble, Lokiviria made his own viewpoint clear.

"In that case, Orion, the turning point of this invasion now rests on you," Jorik said.

Orion just nodded, silent. In the coming conflict, the major shift would indeed revolve around Orion and that other giant. Both the northern alliance and the southern alliance led by the Blood Elves believed so. In many tribes, after all, when kings clash, either you die or you surrender. Of course, there was the possibility of submission, but then the loser could kiss all power goodbye.

"At any rate, there's something I need to say before we're done."

As everyone nodded, mulling things over, Orion spoke up again. This time his voice was cold and forceful, each word ringing with finality.

"From the moment this war ends, you are forbidden from touching any giants—except those who actively resist us. You get what I'm saying? If I win, they're my people. They belong to the giant race. Anybody who raises a hand against my giants, I'll kill them and wipe out their entire clan(tribe)."

Then and there, Orion unleashed his middle Legendary-level pressure upon everyone without restraint.

Lokiviria and Bluehide, both middle Legendary themselves, could hold their own. But Jorik, Gareth, and Ironhoof clearly had a rougher time under Orion's aura, feeling both physical discomfort and a sting of insult.

Chapter 350 Blood-Eclipse Flare

A few moments later, Orion's aura vanished, and the atmosphere in the makeshift tent grew tense and heavy again.

Jorik looked grim. As the leader of the allied forces, he'd realized there was now someone in the ranks he couldn't truly control.

"I have no objection. I'll give the order," he said, face still cold as he agreed to Orion's demands for the sake of completing his ancestor's instructions.

"My friend, I'll promise not to let my people eat those giants," Aldous added, turning to Orion with a serious expression. "But you can't stop my people from snacking on everyone else. My folks are starving."

"No problem," Orion answered with a shrug, effectively addressing everyone in the tent. "If they're from another race, it's none of my business. Go ahead and eat whoever you like."

Having heard Aldous and Orion strike this agreement, Gareth, Ironhoof, and Lokiviria all nodded in turn, signaling they would abide by Orion's condition.

In the central region, with a big battle looming, skirmishes erupted one after another. The Rose Knight Regiment flung itself onto the field, striking first and wiping out a group of half-dragons.

Coal Knight Galahad moved with lightning speed and showed off some truly extraordinary swordsmanship.

Pow!

He beheaded a half-dragon with one strike, then rushed to Arthur's side.

"We have to pull back—reinforcements for the half-dragons will show up any minute now."

Standing shoulder to shoulder, Galahad and Arthur kept Commander of the Rose Knight Regiment, Princess Ava, safe behind them.

"I'll cover you. You get the commander out of here."

Szzz-rah!

Arthur hefted his massive greatsword. He didn't argue with Galahad's plan.

"Take care of yourself! We'll regroup in Greenleaf Territory once we break through."

Cleaving aside another half-dragon, Arthur shielded Princess Ava's retreat from the front lines.

"Your Highness, we need to get you out of here right now. Once you're safe, we can fall back with an easy mind."

Putting Princess Ava on his beast-blood mount, Arthur urged her on.

"Coal Knight, make sure you come back!" Ava called out before tightening her legs and galloping southward.

Arthur followed close behind on his own beast-blood mount.

"Shed your fear, seek an honorable death; face your enemies head-on, find your glory in life.

I will lend my hand to those in need. I will back my comrades..."

And so, in order to protect the rest of his allies, Galahad went on a rampage. His armor was soon painted crimson, and his sword dripped with the blood of countless foes. Galahad's eyes were bloodshot, and the arcs of his blade carried a sense of murderous red fury.

What was strange was that his sword seemed to be absorbing the half-dragons' blood.

"Better to die than submit. Even in darkness, my heart stays true to the light."

"Sword Skill: Blood-Eclipse Flare!"

His sword's radiance flashed like sunlight, cutting down enemies left, right, and center.

Suddenly, there was a cracking sound, like an eggshell breaking inside Galahad's body, and he abruptly leaped to Alpha-level power.

All of it seemed tied to the sword he held—or more precisely, to the gemstone embedded in its hilt.

As he felt his strength surge, Galahad's mind gradually cleared.

"Hold fast to your essence, better to die than yield—though the world is dark, let your heart shine its light."

Murmuring these words, he raised his longsword, poised for a charge.

Sluurp!

The slick sound of flowing blood echoed around him. Moments later, Galahad had burst through the surrounding half-dragons. Jumping onto a beast-blood mount, he hacked his way southward through every last obstacle.

—————

Three days later, at Greenleaf Territory.

Although this was human land, it had already been declared a war zone. Over the course of those three days, the members of the Rose Knight Regiment had trickled back one by one, battered and depleted.

"It's the Coal Knight—he's back!"

Atop the city wall, a soldier in the watchtower shouted, catching the attention of Princess Ava and Arthur.

"Galahad is back!"

"Let's go meet him!"

They hurried to the city gates, where they glimpsed Galahad riding up the distant road. His armor was once again pitch-black, and his sword was sheathed at his waist. At a glance, Galahad appeared as ordinary as ever, but Princess Ava and Arthur's faces betrayed growing astonishment.

"Coal Knight, you've leveled up!" Princess Ava exclaimed. She herself was only at the peak of Hero-level with the help of countless alchemical potions, and Arthur had only recently advanced into Alpha-level. Yet here was Coal Knight Galahad, not even eighteen years old, already surpassing her to become an Alpha-level fighter.

"My friend, you've gotten stronger," Arthur said. He was every bit as stunned as Ava. He knew Galahad had been able to hold his own against Alpha-level foes even back at Hero-level peak. Now, having truly advanced to Alpha-level, he was doubtless more formidable than Arthur himself.

"Fear no death, never give up, and keep your faith in the light while wandering in darkness," Galahad murmured. "I was born anew in the midst of bloodshed. Battle has been my crucible and my curse—both the sorrow of the battlefield and of humankind itself."

There was something deep and cryptic in his words that Princess Ava and Arthur couldn't fully grasp, but it didn't matter now.

"Coal Knight, welcome back!" Princess Ava said happily. In her eyes, knighting Galahad as the Coal Knight had been her best and most gratifying decision of late.

"Your Highness, forgive me—I couldn't bring back more of our fellow knights," Galahad said, sliding off his beast-blood mount and bowing like a true knight.

Princess Ava could have sworn she felt a hint of pressure rippling from him. If it wasn't just her imagination, then Galahad was exuding a presence that definitely belonged to an Alpha-level warrior.

So, with Princess Ava at his side, Galahad entered the castle at Greenleaf Territory.

Two days later, a messenger arrived from the front lines, relaying a royal decree.

"By order of His Majesty the King, the Rose Knight Regiment shall represent the Empire and lead twenty thousand imperial troops west to support the Blood Elves."

Princess Ava took the envelope from the messenger. What he recited was only the official summary, while the real details were written inside.

Ava opened and read carefully before passing it along to Arthur. Once he finished, he handed the letter to Coal Knight Galahad in turn. Having reached Alpha-level, Galahad now shared some of the Rose Knight Regiment's privileges and was allowed in on these bigger decisions.