

Titan King 471

Chapter 471: I killed it

The massive skeletal apparition was Arthas's *Body of Faith*, a manifestation forged from countless strands of faith energy and transcendent power.

"You've come, so don't think about leaving!"

"Stars Rain!"

In an instant, the sky blazed with light as countless stars plummeted, trailing luminous tails as they crashed into the slime mold layer.

The meteors turned into fireballs.

The fireballs radiated intense heat before detonating.

Flames, shockwaves, and beams of death energy swept through the air, igniting the sprawling slime mold layer like cotton meeting fire. In moments, it burned to ashes.

When the haze of the explosions and the shockwaves finally cleared, a strange green flower bloomed at the blast's epicenter. Emerging from its center was the slime mold broodmother—naked from the waist up, her lower half entwined with countless roots.

The flower pulsed with vibrant green, having evidently survived Arthas's devastating death technique.

The brood mother looked up at the giant skeletal apparition as its massive sword descended. She turned, merging back into the slime mold layer, abandoning her plan to kill Orion.

Rumble!

The skeletal apparition's strike didn't falter despite her retreat.

The giant sword cleaved downward, carving a bottomless ravine into the earth.

The once-connected slime mold layer was split in two.

This meant the slime mold mutants fighting at the frontlines were temporarily cut off from their supply.

Meanwhile, within the vine-encased space, Orion keenly noticed that the spiked tendrils coiling toward him froze for a moment.

Some of the tendrils even retracted back into the slime mold layer.

As Orion puzzled over this, Lich Vexis's voice reached him from outside.

"Lord Orion, my master has made his move!"

"The slime mold layer has been severed in two, and the Vine Splitters have lost their supply for now. Hurry and escape this vine prison!"

It clicked for Orion instantly.

But escape?

No!

Orion wasn't about to let these fungal creatures who'd ambushed him off so easily. He didn't just want to leave—he wanted to leave with a victory.

Raising his trident, Orion unleashed the full force of his transcendent power without holding back.

With a swipe of his trident, a flame sparked to life on its tip.

As it flared, the transcendent power he'd released ignited entirely.

The flames spread, consuming the entire vine prison.

This wasn't a technique Orion had learned—it was one he'd devised himself, born from his own transcendent power.

But it was still rough around the edges. Orion couldn't control it precisely; the flames attacked indiscriminately, risking harm to himself and draining his energy immensely.

"There you are!"

Through the burning transcendent power, Orion tracked the movement of the vines within the flames and pinpointed the Vine Splitter's true form.

Crackle!

His body crackling with lightning, Orion launched [Instant Impact] again, diving straight into the slime mold layer.

Moments later, agonized howls and the rumble of thunder echoed from within.

When Orion emerged once more, he burst out of the slime mold layer, clutching two orbs of Legendary-level life essence in his hands.

In this clash, Orion hadn't just slain the Vine Splitter—on his way out, he'd encountered a parasitic creature and taken it down as well.

Without lingering, Orion returned to the skies above his allies' frontline.

From this position, the fungal creatures would have to leave the slime mold layer—and its support—to attack him.

If they dared come this far, Orion would cut them down with ease.

"Lord Orion, thank goodness you're out!"

Lich Vexis approached him, her tone lighter with relief but laced with newfound awe.

Orion was the first being Vexis had ever seen survive a Vine Splitter ambush in all her time on the battlefield.

"Lord Orion, Vine Splitters have a long attack range. We should fall back a bit more to avoid being dragged into the slime mold layer again."

Orion shook his head and raised his left hand, revealing two orbs of pure life essence.

"The Vine Splitter is dead. There's no need to worry."

Silence.

Vexis didn't respond. Orion glanced at her.

She stared at the life essence in his hand, her expression frozen in shock.

After a long pause, as if she hadn't heard him clearly, Vexis asked in disbelief, "Lord Orion, what did you just say? Could you repeat that?"

Orion took a deep breath, releasing his Titan Form and shrinking back to his normal size.

"That peak Legendary-level Vine Splitter—I killed it."

"If there's no second one nearby, we're safe for now."

Silence again.

Lich Vexis fell quiet once more.

Only now did she truly understand why Orion was Arthas's friend, not his subordinate. Orion was undeniably powerful.

On the other side, Arthas had summoned his skeletal apparition but hadn't managed to kill the slime mold brood mother, who'd already begun her descent. Instead, he drove her back and severed the supply lines for the frontline slime mold mutants.

This act indirectly aided Orion.

Of course, this extra strike also cost the skeletal apparition its chance to pursue the brood mother further.

But Arthas didn't sheath his blade. Instead, the skeletal apparition followed the brood mother's trail, chasing her down.

At the slime mold Nest, the brood mother finally let out a quiet sigh of relief as she neared her domain.

A being like her wasn't built for solo combat—she wasn't a fighter.

Hiding in the main nest, serving as a command center, gathering intel, and dispatching slime mold mutants and supplies where needed—that was her strength.

Just as she prepared to close her eyes and rest, a sudden sense of danger gripped her.

The broodmother tried to react, but it was too late.

A black dagger materialized before her.

It appeared out of nowhere, shadowless and traceless, slicing toward her head.

This wasn't a physical cut—it was a strike at her soul, her faith, her very existence in the void.

The dagger was Alexander's weapon, his assassination technique.

In a life-or-death moment, two broodmother guardians stationed near the main nest roared and charged at the dagger.

But no matter how they attacked, the black dagger remained unaffected, slicing straight toward the slime mold brood mother.

Crack!

The protective shield around her shattered. As death loomed, one of the guardians unleashed an unthinkable substitution skill.

Splatter!

The guardian's head burst apart, killed by the dagger's cut.

Thanks to the guardian's sacrifice and repositioning, the broodmother edged closer to the main nest.

Once inside, she'd be safe—the main nest was a gift from the slime molds' demigod, impervious to any Arch Lord's attack.

But then, the black dagger vanished after cutting down the guardian.

In the next instant, it reappeared at the back of the broodmother's head, slashing down with lethal precision.

Chapter 472: Your baby is growing inside me

With a sharp whoosh!

The black dagger sliced into the slime mold brood mother, but at that very moment, the brood mother burrowed into the main nest.

Blood sprayed everywhere, only to vanish in the blink of an eye.

A loud clang rang out as the black dagger struck the main nest—its surface like a massive eggshell—producing a piercing, metallic screech.

The dagger ricocheted, transforming into a streak of dark light that cut down one of the brood mother's nearby guards in an instant.

Finally, the black dagger faded into the void, disappearing without a trace.

Atop the walls of Bone City,

Alexander's figure was shrouded in a veil of shadow, his form indistinct.

It was an odd sensation—though it was daytime with two suns blazing in the sky, the spot where Alexander stood remained cloaked in darkness, a gloom that even sunlight couldn't pierce.

"What a pity. She didn't die—just took a heavy blow from me!"

"Kind of a shame, really."

Arthas let out a sigh. After finally seizing a rare opportunity, the slime mold brood mother had slipped away yet again.

"But you can rest easier now. My attack carried a potent poison and curse—toxins even a demigod might struggle to purge."

"She's badly wounded. The situation here should turn in your favor soon."

"After this, she'll likely stay holed up in the main nest, too afraid to come out."

"There's no chance to kill her now!"

Alexander was right. Shaken by this encounter, the slime mold brood mother would surely hunker down in the main nest to recover, refusing to emerge no matter what.

"I'm heading back. Word of my departure and this brood mother's injury has probably already reached the other main nest regions."

"Alright, let me know if anything comes up!"

With a ripple of spatial energy, Alexander teleported back to the area he was tasked with defending.

In Blackstone City, inside the Horde Hall,

Lilith, Rendall, and Lorelia gathered together, their expressions grim as they faced a sky darkening far too early.

"We've barely had two years of peace, and now the dark beast tides are looming again!"

Rendall let out a wistful sigh. Since the North-South War began, the Black Forest had enjoyed nearly three years free of dark creature disturbances.

In that time, Blackstone City's influence had spread north and south, with roads and wilderness fortresses built to bolster its reach.

The Stoneheart Horde's northern foothold had been developing steadily, step by step.

But the arrival of the dark beast tides would disrupt that rhythm, halting many well-laid plans.

"The supplies and troops sent to Lysinthia City should arrive within the next few days."

"With Clawpincher and Twilight Viper assisting, holding Lysinthia shouldn't be an issue."

"What worries me is Thunderwood Forest. Slagor's there alone—he might not be able to handle it all."

Lilith's right hand rested on her belly as her gaze drifted southward.

"How about I send Rockwell to Thunderwood Forest?"

"With Thunderhawk Rayden's help, he'd make it in time."

Lilith nodded, approving Rendall's suggestion.

"But if Rockwell leaves, who'll help me guard the underground fissure?"

Lorelia spoke up, her tone serious. She held the task Orion had given her in high regard.

In battle, Lorelia might hesitate or retreat, but if fleeing meant failing Orion's orders, she'd carry them out without a second thought.

"I'll take over!"

"Until the dark beast tides recede, I'll handle both the Underground Fissure and Blackstone City. I'll just have to move fast." Rendall said.

Rendall and Lorelia laid out their ideas, but in the end, they deferred to Lilith's judgment.

"Let's follow Arch Elder's advice. Have Thunderhawk patrol more frequently to keep things running smoothly."

"Slagor in Thunderwood Forest is great at strategy and command, but he needs a partner for frontline combat."

"Rockwell heading to Thunderwood Forest to help him hold Thunderpeak Mountain is the perfect fit."

Rendall nodded in agreement.

"No time to waste—I'll go inform Rockwell now!"

Lilith gave her approval, and Rendall hurried off toward the underground fissure.

"Mistress, I'll head back to the fissure too!"

"Go ahead!"

Watching Lorelia depart, Lilith's gaze drifted to the increasingly bustling Blackstone City, her thoughts wandering.

In truth, with Blackstone City's current defenses, no Alpha-level dark creatures could breach it unless a Legendary-tier powerhouse attacked directly.

Orion had turned Blackstone City into a military stronghold in the north, its walls bristling with ever-denser arrow towers as proof.

Beyond Lilith, Rendall, and Lorelia—three Alpha-level figures—a statue of the Slaughter Tyrant stood in the inner city square.

Empowered by faith energy, the Slaughter Tyrant statue was among the strongest Alpha-level entities.

This was why Lilith had chosen to return to Blackstone City to nurture her pregnancy—its defenses far outstripped those of Stoneheart City.

"Dear Orion, when will you come back?"

"Did you know? Your baby is growing inside me."

"..."

At the frontline of Valkorath Realm,

After escaping an ambush, Orion faced no further Legendary-tier threats in the subsequent defensive battles.

He smoothly handed over duties to Arthas's subordinates and led his own forces back to Cryptopolis City.

Compared to last time, this post-battle debriefing and loot distribution were quicker and more straightforward.

Gustalon and Onyx, under the envious gazes of many, gleefully accepted their spoils and temporary authority, their faces beaming with delight.

Once they absorbed these gains, Gustalon and Onyx would undoubtedly grow stronger, maintaining their edge over the others.

After the group left the palace, Orion lingered, mulling over the horde's next steps before immersing his mind in the Survivor's Platform, joining the Champions Alliance public channel.

Leonidas: "Alexander, I just heard your presence vanished from the western region. Did something happen?"

Edward: "He and Arthas were gearing up to assassinate a broodmother."

Leonidas: "Assassinate a broodmother? Now? Did you find an opening?"

Leonidas: "What's the outcome? Did it work? Someone fill me in!"

No one answered Leonidas except Deputy Commander Edward.

It wasn't until the assassination concluded that Leonidas got his update.

Alexander: "Close, but no dice!"

Leonidas: "What do you mean 'close'?!"

Leonidas: "Wounded? Failed? Or just a waste of time?"

Arthas: "The broodmother on my end took a serious hit. For now, I'll assess things and support your three regions as needed."

Edward: "Not bad. That eases the pressure a bit!"

Leonidas: "Impressive—actually wounding a brood mother! Arthas, how'd you pull it off?"

Arthas: "The slime mold brood mother sent out a Vine Splitter and three parasitic creatures to take down Hulk, planning to swoop in and convert him quietly. Her scheme flopped, and we seized the moment."

Leonidas: "Holy crap, a Vine Splitter and three parasitic creatures? Is Hulk dead?"

Arthas: "Nope. He took out the Vine Splitter!"

Chapter 473 473: Brood mother counterpart

A heavy silence fell over the public channel.

The online members of the Champions Alliance were stunned by the combat prowess Orion had just displayed.

It wasn't until Orion himself appeared in the channel that the quiet was broken.

Hulk: "I only escaped the Vine Splitter's trap thanks to Arthas. His attack cut off the slime mold layer's supply line."

Hulk: "That's the real story—Arthas is giving me too much credit!"

Leonidas: "Hahaha... Bro, don't be so modest! Taking down a Vine Splitter isn't as simple as cutting off a supply line!"

Kraken: "I feel like the gap between us is getting wider!"

Leonidas: "What's there to fear? Don't you know who wins in the tortoise-and-hare race?"

Leonidas: "Once I'm free, I'll figure out a way to boost your strength too!"

Kraken: "Please, I'm not a tortoise—I'm a massive octopus!"

Leonidas: "Same difference—both from the sea, both slow crawlers!"

Edward: "..."

Alexander: "..."

Arthas: "..."

Leonidas's last remark left everyone dumbfounded.

After the joking died down, the serious discussion began.

Alexander: "The slime mold brood mother in the northern sector took a heavy hit from me. Two of her guards are dead too—one of them was pretty tough, likely her counterpart."

Alexander: "Without her close guards, if she dares step out of the main nest, I'll finish her off."

Leonidas: "Arthas, come reinforce me first! If you don't, all my beasts are going to get wiped out!"

Alexander: "No, reinforce me first. Most of my subordinates aren't suited for frontal combat. Free them up, and the situation will improve."

Arthas: "What about the Deputy Commander's side?"

Edward: "You go help them first. My crew can hold the east without any issues."

Say what you will, but a demigod-level powerhouse speaks with unshakable confidence.

Arthas: "Alright, once I stabilize things here, I'll start providing support."

Seeing the big shots wrap up their business, Orion finally voiced the question nagging at him.

Hulk: "Hey bros, what exactly are a brood mother counterpart and a brood mother guard?"

It wasn't the blunt Leonidas or the aloof Arthas who answered, but Alexander.

Alexander: "Think of the brood mother counterpart as a candidate brood mother. If the slime mold brood mother is a she-wolf, the counterpart is the he-wolf. But in slime mold society, it's matriarchal—females hold the highest authority."

Alexander: "If the slime mold brood mother is killed, the counterpart transitions from male to female, becoming the new brood mother to keep the slime mold hierarchy stable."

Alexander: "This assassination didn't kill the brood mother, but with her counterpart dead, she's got no fallback now."

Alexander: "As for the brood mother guards, they're just what the name implies—mutated slime molds tasked with protecting her."

Alexander: "One thing to note: the counterpart is stronger than regular guards."

It was precisely because of the counterpart's existence that Arthas, Leonidas, and Alexander didn't dare launch an all-out assault on the main nest region.

In other words, setting aside the power differences among arch lords, this fungal creature invasion of Valkorath Realm involved eight arch lords.

A lineup like that was unprecedented—at least for Orion, it was a first.

From his throne, Orion's throat bobbed as he swallowed, though there was no saliva to gulp down.

"Four peak arch lord-level slime mold brood mothers already felt out of my league."

"I didn't realize I'd still underestimated the slime molds' overall strength."

Hulk: "Bro, thanks for clearing that up!"

Alexander: "No problem!"

Orion and Alexander weren't close—this "bro" felt like a bid to build rapport—but Alexander didn't show any displeasure.

With his questions answered, Orion initiated a trade with Leonidas, handing over the unpaid lump of life essence.

Leonidas: "Man, you've been killing it lately. The northern sector's battles should ease up soon. Why don't you swing by my southern territory for a visit?"

Leonidas: "I'll show you what a stampede of ten thousand beasts looks like—what the end of days feels like, with undead crawling everywhere."

Leonidas's mix of teasing and self-deprecation made Orion shake his head slightly.

Clearly, Leonidas's beast subordinates were at a disadvantage in combat, with many fallen ones being turned into undead to keep fighting.

After a moment's thought, Orion agreed.

"Alright, once I've settled things here, I'll come find you!"

"Hahaha... It's a deal then!"

After wrapping up with Leonidas, Arthas—almost as if he'd timed it—sent Orion a message.

Arthas: "The situation in our warzone should lighten up for a bit. Use this chance to take Moonveil Plains in the northeast. Ideally, set up a city there too."

After Orion read the message, Arthas initiated a trade, sending over a storage ring.

Arthas: "The storage ring's got city-building materials. If you need more, ask the Deputy Commander."

Honestly, Orion was taken aback. Using something as valuable as a storage ring to hold basic construction stuff like stone, wood, and sand? He hadn't seen that coming.

Arthas: "Don't be shocked. In certain times and places, building materials are worth more than soldiers."

Arthas: "Sometimes, a city is the foundation. With a city, you can build defense towers, set up teleportation arrays, and construct all sorts of specialized buildings."

Arthas: "A war fortress gives you a foothold, whether you're invading or defending."

Orion tucked the storage ring away, nodding at Arthas's logic.

"Thanks for the heads-up!"

Building materials could indeed be as critical as strategic resources in the right circumstances.

"I'll probably stick around Cryptopolis City for now. Once I'm ready, I'll let you know."

"Good!"

Arthas's reply was short and to the point—classic him.

Exiting the Survivor's Platform, Orion extended his senses downward, probing the scorpion main nest deep underground.

There, Soraya had advanced to Alpha-level peak.

But going from Alpha peak to Legendary required comprehending transcendent power—a process that, even with life essence easing the way, wouldn't happen overnight.

For now, everything was in place; all that was missing was the final push.

Orion was waiting—waiting for Soraya to break through to Legendary. That's when he'd head to Moonveil Plains and stake his claim with a city.

Once Soraya became a Legendary-level brood mother, backed by Lich Vexis, Orion would finally have a solid footing in Valkorath Realm.

"Just a little more patience. Things are about to turn around!"

Chapter 474 474: Planning for the future

In the Emerald Dream Realm, Red Moon Valley.

Red Moon Valley was once the territory of the Red Thread Clan. It earned its name because the valley's terrain curved into a crescent moon shape.

The valley's geography was peculiar, featuring two parallel exits separated by a mountain, each exit forming one of the crescent's tips.

Beyond the entrances lay an arc-shaped interior—a natural haven, a geomantic treasure.

At this moment, Legendary-level powerhouse Loska stood before a stone monument, heart pounding with a mix of tension and exhilaration.

This was one of the ancestral lands of the Red Thread Clan—Loska's own heritage.

He had traded territory twice the size of Red Moon Valley to reclaim it.

The reason? Hidden within Red Moon Valley was a cross-realm teleportation array.

This array was so well-concealed that only those with pure Red Thread Clan blood could sense and activate it.

"Perfect! The cross-realm teleportation array is intact. The Red Thread Clan has a shot at rising again!"

Loska's excitement was palpable. Within a 10K foot radius of the teleportation array, all forms of perception were blocked.

This meant that as long as Loska stayed near it, he could evade the senses of demigod-level beings and avoid the void passage entirely.

"When the dark beast tides hit Titanion Realm, and all the Legendary-level warriors head to guard the void passage, that'll be my chance to slip into Titanion Realm and seize resources."

"The Red Thread Clan will rise again—destined to reclaim its place as a top faction in the Emerald Dream Realm!"

Loska kept hyping himself up while steadily channeling transcendent power into the teleportation array.

Once it was fully charged, he'd teleport to Titanion Realm.

In Blackstone City, at the Bottomless Abyss.

After multiple sweeps, the vast majority of subterranean creatures dwelling in the Bottomless Abyss had been wiped out.

Only a handful of timid ones remained, cowering deep underground, too afraid to show themselves.

By now, those creatures posed no threat to Clymene and her crew—instead, they'd become the hunted.

Through this period of trials, Vargrum, Mordak, Zorn, Balgor, Grendel, and Desdemona had all advanced to Alpha-level.

Together with Clymene, they guarded the underworld, which had essentially become the Stoneheart Horde's backyard.

The cost? The layer of deathly aura that once shrouded the underworld had grown noticeably thin.

"Clymene, when Orion comes back and sees these defensive structures and arrow towers we've built, he's going to be blown away."

Vargrum smashed a rock with his hammer, gathered the pieces, and hauled them toward a nearby defensive building.

Ever since they'd learned that the teleportation array might connect to an enemy from another realm, Clymene had led Vargrum, Mordak, Zorn, and the others in a dual effort: clearing out the subterranean creatures while constructing defenses around the array.

As Clymene put it, it was all about being prepared.

After all, the surface above housed the Stoneheart Horde and a large population of giants.

With confirmation from the succubus Desdemona, they'd taken the tens of thousands of skeleton warriors Orion had left them and, while building defense towers, planned out the underworld—adding living quarters and fortified zones.

What was once a desolate, shadowy underworld now had the rustic charm of a classical-era village.

"The deathly aura here keeps thinning, Clymene. We need to start planning for the future."

It was the succubus Desdemona who spoke.

She hadn't reached Alpha-level in life, but after being reborn as a Skeletal Being, she'd finally achieved it.

Her words silenced the gathered Skeletal Knights around her.

"Planning for the future" meant one thing to them: leaving.

Once the deathly aura here ran dry, they'd have to move on.

They'd grown accustomed to the underworld, and above ground, they had friends and family they couldn't bear to leave behind.

If they left, where would they go?

The world beyond the teleportation array?

And if they went there, could they ever come back?

These questions hung over them, the mood growing heavy with reluctance and worry.

"I've been waiting for this day for a long time!"

"According to Orion, beyond that teleportation array lies a new world."

"I'm going to carve out a new territory for Orion—for the horde!"

Grendel's voice brimmed with ambition and hope.

Aside from Clymene, he'd been the first among them to hit Alpha-level.

His words sparked a fire in everyone's hearts, pushing aside their lingering attachments.

"From the day we were reborn, we knew this moment would come eventually, didn't we?"

"There's a difference between the dead and the living."

"We've been given a chance to persist in this unique way, to keep contributing to the horde. That should be enough."

"When Orion returns, I'll talk to him about where we go next."

"My brother Orion—he's worth our trust!"

Clymene's words filled their eyes with hope, faith, and a touch of fervor.

"He's the King of Giants!"

"The lord of the Stoneheart Horde!"

"Orion hasn't forgotten us—why else would he have sent us here?"

"Yeah, if Orion could bring us back, he's got a plan for us!"

"..."

But just as they chattered excitedly about their future, the massive stone monument in the center of the underworld suddenly emitted a soft, radiant glow.

Everyone present saw it.

"Clymene, the monument's glowing—am I seeing things?"

"I saw it too!"

"..."

Yet what followed was Clymene's sharp, wary voice.

"Something's up! Everyone, get into combat mode!"

"Center defenses around the arrow towers—stay alert!"

In an instant, the air crackled with deathly energy. The skeleton warriors, mid-construction, dropped their tools, grabbed their weapons, and surrounded the teleportation array in a tight, impenetrable ring.

Meanwhile, Clymene, Vargrum, Mordak, Zorn, Balgor, Grendel, and Desdemona donned their bone armor, fully geared up.

But after half a day of waiting, no enemy emerged from the array.

Clymene stood behind an arrow tower, frowning as she stared at the teleportation array, her guard firmly up.

"You all keep watch. I'll be right back."

After a moment's thought, she stepped into a nearby building and activated the will projection Orion had left within her.

Chapter 475 475: Strongest Lord in the north

"Sister, is something happening in the underworld?"

Orion knew full well that Clymene wouldn't awaken him unless it was something critical or a matter of life and death.

"Orion, there's movement with the teleportation array. It started glowing, but no enemies have come through."

"It's been half a day since the anomaly began."

Orion's will projection fell silent for a long moment before responding in a low, deliberate tone.

"This situation means someone on the other side has activated the array."

"No enemies coming through suggests they're either hesitating or waiting for something."

"Sister, my guess is that the other side of this array is likely the Emerald Dream Realm."

"Because the Emerald Dream Realm and Titanion Realm are locked in a divine war, this teleportation array is probably a relic left by some arch lord."

Clymene didn't ask about the divine war or arch lords—she knew those were matters beyond her current reach.

"Orion, what should we do now?"

Clymene cut straight to her most pressing concern. What they needed was direction, not to remain passively in the dark.

Her question silenced Orion once again.

"Hold the line for now. I'll send word to Lorelia to dispatch a batch of small spiders to assist you."

"The dark beast tides are coming soon, and it's unlikely an arch lord would show up in the underworld. If it's just a Legendary-level figure, there's no need to panic."

Orion was confident. If it was merely an ordinary Legendary-level enemy, the strength of his will projection could still hold them in check.

As for an arch lord, they'd surely be tied up in the divine war—sneaking into Titanion Realm personally was out of the question.

Besides, if an arch lord appeared in Titanion Realm out of nowhere, the demigods would notice immediately.

Long ago, Arthas, an arch lord at his peak, had told Orion he couldn't descend to Titanion Realm without being detected by demigods.

So, the enemy this time was most likely a Legendary-level lord—possibly one tied to the cross-realm teleportation array.

Of course, there was a slim chance an arch lord was pulling strings from afar, but that was highly improbable.

If an arch lord did show up in person, even if Orion rushed back now, he'd struggle to face such a formidable foe.

"Orion, should we evacuate the clansmen from Blackstone City first?"

Clymene's worry was palpable—an unknown enemy left her uneasy.

"It's too late. With the dark beast tides approaching, the people of Blackstone City have nowhere to retreat."

As he spoke, Orion's mind drifted to the teleportation array beneath Moonshadow Valley.

But that array could only transport a hundred people at a time and required transcendent power and crystal cores to operate.

Evacuating all of Blackstone City's inhabitants was impractical—the cost would be astronomical, far beyond what the Stoneheart Horde could bear.

Besides, the enemy hadn't even appeared yet; things hadn't reached that point.

What Orion feared now was that during the dark beast tides, Blackstone City might face a pincer attack from both the surface and the underworld.

That pressure would fall squarely on Blackstone City—and on Spider Queen Lorelia.

"Don't worry, Sister. If the enemy turns out to be overwhelmingly strong, I'll return to Blackstone City ahead of schedule."

Hearing this, Clymene gave Orion a relieved smile. She opened her arms and embraced his form.

Soon after, she stepped out of the stone house, shared a rough outline of Orion's plan with the group, and reignited their morale and confidence.

If Orion was paying attention to this, it meant they had the strength to resist.

That belief took root among them, their momentum and enthusiasm steadily rising.

"Vargrum, Mordak, Zorn, Balgor, Grendel, Desdemona—split into two teams and take turns guarding the teleportation array."

"Remember: anything that steps out of that array, friend or foe, kill it on sight."

The six Alpha-level warriors—Vargrum, Mordak, and the rest—acknowledged the order and began organizing the Skeletal Knights and death spiders into position.

In Blackstone City, Horde Hall.

Lilith and Rendall wore grim expressions as they gathered in the meeting hall, their faces clouded with tension.

Moments ago, the message from Orion's will projection had left them restless and on edge.

"Lilith, should we summon Lysinthia, Twilight Viper, Rockwell, and Slagor back?"

Rendall's voice betrayed his nerves as he grappled with the looming threat from below.

Lilith shook her head firmly.

"No. If we do that, Thunderwood Forest and Lysinthia City will be left defenseless. Everything the Stoneheart Horde has built over these years will crumble in the dark beast tides."

"Besides, Orion didn't suggest that. He just told us to hold Blackstone City and fend off the surface invasion."

"Arch Elder, we can't lose our nerve. We just need to follow Orion's plan."

"We have to trust him—he's the King of Giants, the lord of the Stoneheart Horde, the strongest lord in the entire north."

The keywords—"Orion", "King of Giants", "Strongest Lord in the north"—gradually steadied Rendall's frayed nerves.

"Alright, I'll follow your lead!"

"You take command here. I'll personally lead a patrol around Blackstone City!"

In times like this, only walking the city and seeing the arrow towers lining the walls gave Rendall a sliver of reassurance.

Lilith nodded. Though she appeared calm on the surface, her heart was racing with unease.

The backbone of the Stoneheart Horde and most of its top fighters weren't in Blackstone City. To say Lilith wasn't rattled would be a lie.

"Lilith, you've got this. You can hold the fort for your husband—for the Stoneheart Horde!"

"..."

In Valkorath Realm, Cryptopolis City.

Orion opened his eyes atop his throne, a cold glint and killing intent flashing in his gaze.

After receiving Clymene's report, he'd pieced it together: someone in the Emerald Dream Realm was planning to sneak into Titanion Realm during the dark beast tides to plunder resources.

This move suggested the enemy's strength wasn't at the arch lord level—maybe not even mid-tier Legendary.

A foe like that didn't warrant Orion's return. It'd just waste two precious teleportation scrolls.

After all, Deputy Commander Edward carving those scrolls while holding off demigods was no small feat.

If the fungal creatures' demigods seized an opening, the fragile stability in Valkorath Realm could collapse entirely.

Chapter 476 476: Giants never back down

"The underworld has Clymene holding the fort, along with Vargrum, Mordak, Zorn, Balgor, Grendel, and Desdemona—six Alpha-level Skeletal Knights assisting her. High-end combat power is sufficient for now."

"As for low-end forces, those tens of thousands of skeleton warriors can hold the line, and Lorelia's small spiders are already on their way to reinforce them. That shouldn't be an issue."

"What's worth worrying about is whether the person on the other side of the teleportation array will show up in person."

"If it's just a will projection arriving, it's not a crisis—it's an opportunity."

"..."

Orion muttered to himself atop his throne, analyzing the situation in Blackstone City and the underworld.

After reaching his conclusions, his eyes slowly closed again.

On the Survivor's Platform, Orion reached out to Deputy Commander Edward, giving him a rough rundown of the situation.

Just to be safe, Orion requested teleportation scrolls from Edward.

But he made a point to stress that he didn't want his request to disrupt the current stability in Valkorath Realm.

"Don't worry, this is an easy fix for you."

"As long as it's not a large-scale teleportation scroll, it won't cause much trouble."

"When the time comes, I can send just you back. Teleporting one person is a breeze for me."

Orion was pleasantly surprised by Edward's response.

If it was only him returning, he could relieve Blackstone City without throwing Valkorath Realm's situation into chaos.

On his throne, Orion opened his eyes, a weight lifting from his shoulders.

A relaxed expression spread across his face.

"There are so many resources waiting for me to claim in Valkorath Realm. I'd rather not go back unless I have to."

"This time, let Clymene, Lilith, Rendall, and Lorelia feel the heat. They can't always live under my protection."

"Especially Lorelia—compared to Soraya, she's got a long way to go!"

With his mind made up, Orion felt a sense of clarity wash over him.

In Titanion Realm, the Blood Elf's City of Blessings.

Compared to Stoneheart City's frantic preparations and Blackstone City's precarious state, the City of Blessings seemed downright composed.

At that moment, Fergus and Tarn stood atop the city walls, gazing out with deep reverence for Orion.

No matter how hard they tried, Fergus and Tarn couldn't fathom just how powerful Orion must be—to lead his people from the north all the way to this majestic city, carving out a massive chunk of territory from the behemoth that was the Blood Elves, claiming Stoneheart City, and securing such a vast foothold in the south.

"The walls of this city are incredibly sturdy. No wonder the Blood Elves aren't afraid of the dark beast tides."

Fergus let out a sigh, gaining a new appreciation for the southern powerhouse.

"No need to envy the blood elves. It won't be long before our Stoneheart Horde is on their level."

Tarn spoke up, still young, still brash.

Fergus shook his head, at a loss for how to rein in his impulsive younger brother.

"The Blood Elves may be strong, but our Stoneheart Horde isn't weak either."

The gruff, booming voice came from Brakthul, Gronthar's equally hotheaded younger brother—a troll.

Gronthar had broken through in the Dragon Nest among the dragon clan and passed the Alpha-level resources he'd earned to Brakthul.

Brakthul hadn't let him down, ascending to Alpha-level in one go.

This time, Brakthul had accompanied Fergus and Tarn to Blood Elf territory as the strongest member of the envoy sent to the City of Blessings.

As for Fergus and Tarn, they were here representing Orion to attend the elven king's inauguration ceremony.

Orion didn't have time to visit the City of Blessings himself, so the task of representing the Stoneheart Horde at the ceremony naturally fell to Fergus and Tarn.

With their elders tied to Orion's parents by blood, sending them to the City of Blessings was a show of respect and goodwill from the Stoneheart Horde to the Blood Elves.

Of course, Fergus and Tarn had another mission, assigned by Elder of Stewardship Delilah: to establish a Stoneheart Horde diplomatic office in the City of Blessings.

After the elven king's inauguration, they didn't rush back to Blackstone City. Instead, they stayed on as diplomats for the Stoneheart Horde.

It seemed Delilah had intended this as a chance to toughen them up.

Per the agreement between the Stoneheart Horde and the Blood Elves, Fergus and Tarn were obligated to assist in fending off dark creatures.

That's why the two brothers now stood atop the City of Blessings' walls.

"The Stoneheart Horde really isn't weak!"

A sultry, captivating voice sounded behind Fergus, Tarn, and Brakthul. The trio turned to see Blood Elf Lycanor striding toward them.

"Especially your lord—his strength is top-tier on this continent."

"Back then, he fought me right outside the City of Blessings. I know how formidable he is."

For some reason, whenever someone praised Orion's might, Fergus, Tarn, and Brakthul felt a surge of pride.

"Greetings, Lady Lycanor!"

Fergus reacted quickest, hurriedly bowing to her.

Lycanor was a Legendary-level powerhouse. Even without projecting her aura, her presence alone was enough to make Fergus and Tarn feel small.

"Greetings, Lady Lycanor!"

"Greetings, Lady Lycanor!"

Thankfully, Tarn and Brakthul weren't slow on the uptake, quickly following Fergus's lead with their own bows.

"You're guests of our Blood Elves—there's no need to risk yourselves on the walls."

Seeing their salutes, Lycanor softened the subtle pressure of her aura.

"Per our races' treaty and alliance, this is our duty."

"Giants never back down, and we never shy from a fight!"

Lycanor studied Fergus for a moment. She knew the temperament of giants—most were brash and fierce.

Yet Fergus's steadiness reminded her of Orion's own demeanor.

"If that's the case, I won't stop you."

"If you need help, feel free to come to me anytime."

With that, Lycanor brushed past them, continuing her patrol along the wall.

Fergus, Tarn, and Brakthul exchanged glances, each seeing the wariness in the others' eyes.

A Legendary-level powerhouse speaking to them so calmly had put them under immense pressure.

"It's hard to imagine Orion actually fought someone that powerful!"

Brakthul let out a sigh. As an Alpha-level being, he understood the gap between them and a Legendary-level figure better than Fergus or Tarn.

Fergus gazed at Lycanor's retreating figure, frowning in thought as he pondered the meaning behind her words.

"One day, I'll be that strong too!"

Tarn drew the massive sword slung across his back, pointing it skyward. The young giant's boldness shone through, brimming with vigor and ambition.

Chapter 477 477: Money turns people greedy

Valkorath Realm, Battlefield Frontline.

This marked the Stoneheart Horde's third deployment to the front, and Orion's third descent into battle. This time, accompanying him were two Alpha-level subordinates, Earthshaker and Gronthar.

Orion hovered in the air, overseeing the frontline.

Lich Vexis held the rear, directing the overall strategy.

On the front, bolstered by Blood Sharing, Earthshaker and Gronthar led the charge, tearing through the slime mold mutants with ruthless efficiency.

Gronthar, in particular, thrived in this chaos—his wide, sweeping attacks perfectly suited for such a sprawling battlefield.

Wherever his war axe swung, slime mold mutants fell in droves.

With no Legendary-level foes lurking in the slime mold layer, Earthshaker and Gronthar unleashed their full strength, racking up kills and reaping battle merits.

"Hahaha... After this, I'll be able to take another step forward!"

Gronthar's morale soared higher with every clash, alternating between roars of fury and booming laughter.

Earthshaker let out a couple of deep bellows, equally ferocious in cutting down enemies.

Orion took it all in, keeping a protective eye on his subordinates while scanning the surrounding slime mold layer.

Though the slime mold brood mother had been gravely wounded, there were still plenty of Legendary-level slime mold mutants out there. It wasn't out of the question that the brood mother might send them into the fray.

So, Orion didn't dare let his guard down for a moment.

The battle raged on for three days.

As their rotation drew near, both Vexis and Orion breathed a sigh of relief, exchanging thoughts via telepathy.

"Lord Orion, it seems the slime mold mutants have given up on targeting you for now!"

Vexis's voice carried a hint of awe—Orion's strength made her feel far more at ease.

"Given up? I wouldn't bet on it!"

"The slime mold brood mother's been crippled. I suspect those Legendary-level mutants have been summoned back to guard the main nest."

"Once she recovers, there's no way she'll just sit back and watch us slaughter her mutants."

Orion trusted his instincts on this.

His exchanges with the Champions Alliance had taught him that the slime mold brood mother was an arch lord at her peak.

A being like that would be wary of true powerhouses like Arthas, Leonidas, and Alexander.

As for someone like Orion? She'd likely want to kill him and claim his body for her own use.

"My master has ramped up resistance, and the slime mold layer is starting to pull back."

"Lord Orion, if you want to build your city in Valkorath Realm, now's the perfect window."

Vexis offered this as a friendly heads-up. Orion nodded but didn't elaborate.

He did want to establish a city in this realm, but he needed to bide his time.

Soraya hadn't yet reached Legendary level, so for now, Orion had to stay put in Cryptopolis City.

"Let's head back and regroup. We'll return to the front in three days."

Orion sidestepped Vexis's suggestion, shifting the topic.

Vexis took the hint. As a dedicated support, she'd given her advice— the decision was Orion's to make.

When Orion led his forces back to Cryptopolis City, the troops under Earthshaker and Gronthar erupted into celebration.

From his throne, after settling all matters, Orion's mind sank once more into the Survivor's Platform.

This time, he was flooded with messages.

Most came from grain merchants under the [Horn of Harvest] banner, while some traders had directly initiated delayed transactions with him.

Orion casually opened a message from one grain merchant, his brow furrowing slightly.

"Dear friend, what kind of grain are you looking to buy? How much? What species is it for?"

At first glance, it seemed innocuous, but on closer inspection, this merchant smelled like they were fishing for intel.

Orion didn't reply, skipping to the next message.

"Dear Hulk, I've got authentic alpine wheat—fake it and I'll pay you tenfold. My wheat's the cheapest on the entire Survivor's Platform."

"I've already sent you a delayed transaction. Don't forget to confirm it."

This came from a grain merchant named Seven of Swords. Orion skimmed it—alpine wheat, tenfold guarantee, delayed transaction—and after a moment's thought, checked his pending trades.

Sure enough, Seven of Swords had sent him ten delayed transactions.

Each deal was for 100,000 tons of grain, priced roughly at market rate, slightly higher than Scarecrow's rates.

Orion didn't hesitate, confirming the trades. His crystal cores dwindled quickly.

But by the seventh transaction, the grain price suddenly spiked tenfold. Orion, about to confirm, froze and pulled back.

Thinking he'd misread, he double-checked several times before confirming it wasn't his eyes playing tricks.

Frowning, he reviewed the remaining delayed trades. The eighth was also ten times the price, while the ninth and tenth returned to normal.

A scam. A blatant trap. Orion saw through it in an instant.

Seven of Swords was preying on the careless and desperate—those too rushed to double-check their grain deals.

Orion didn't get mad. Calmly, he confirmed the ninth and tenth trades, leaving the seventh and eighth hanging.

Thanks to Seven of Swords' little stunt, Orion grew warier. He outright rejected all other grain merchant messages.

Next, he meticulously cleared out his delayed transactions, one by one.

Any hint of fraud? Declined.

Slightly pricier but within his budget? Purchased.

By the end of it, Orion had secured another hefty batch of grain.

"Seven of Swords... In tarot, that card means deception. Is this guy openly admitting he's a con artist?"

"Merchants, huh. Money turns people greedy—makes them chase profit above all else."

"These types are probably thinking, 'Scam one, and it's a win.' Greed's got them blind."

Orion added a few honest grain merchants to his friends list, then let the matter drop.

The merchants' antics reminded him once again: not every survivor was a saint.

Meeting Arthas and the Champions Alliance? That was dumb luck—divine favor, even.

Shifting his focus to the Champions Alliance public channel, Orion scrolled through his allies' latest chatter.

Kraken: "Hey, big shots, I don't know why, but fungal creatures are pouring into the deep sea lately. The slime mold layer's spread from shallow waters all the way down."

Kraken: "I ran into a Legendary Peak level parasitic creature this time. Good thing I'm fast, or it'd have been curtains for me."

Edward: "Kraken, you'd better relocate your operations. That area you're in? It's spillover from Leonidas's zone."

Arthas: "Where's Leonidas?"

Arthas: "Are you helping out—or just making things worse?"

Chapter 478 478: Battle Will Surge

Leonidas: "Arthas, quit with the snarky comments. You think I want it this way?"

Leonidas: "This slime mold tide—aside from your northern front, which of the other three directions isn't a struggle?"

Leonidas: "Instead of wasting time yapping here, hurry up and send reinforcements!"

Alexander: "Leonidas is right. We need backup!"

Arthas: "Hold on, reinforcements are already on the way!"

Edward: "That snake Velora is always pulling dirty tricks. Stay sharp—she just unleashed a batch of powerful slime mold mutants."

Deputy Commander Edward's words silenced the public channel for a moment, followed by a chorus of groans.

Leonidas: "Good grief, no wonder this slime mold tide is so brutal!"

Leonidas: "Deputy Commander, are you up to this or not? If you're struggling, I've got some super Viagra here—guaranteed to restore your manly confidence and make you unstoppable."

Alexander: "This is brutal!"

Arthas: "Phew... good thing I took out the slime mold broodmother early over here!"

Kraken: "..."

After reading his allies' exchange, Orion realized the fungal creatures had gotten another boost in strength—definitely bad news.

This revelation lit a fire under Orion, making him eager to leave Cryptopolis and build his own city.

Orion messaged Kraken with concern, pushing his thoughts aside.

"You hurt?"

"Need any healing potions?"

Though Kraken and Orion were rivals, both vying for the legendary gear promised by the Deputy Commander, they were friends behind the scenes. Kraken had helped Orion out more than once.

Neither Orion nor Kraken saw the other as an enemy—they had that kind of mutual respect. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been recruited into the Champions Alliance in the first place.

"Yeah, I'll probably need a month to recover."

"Thanks, I've got healing potions already, and my regeneration is pretty strong."

"Hulk, watch yourself. These fungal creatures that just showed up—some of them are at Legendary-level peak."

"Even with my upper Legendary level strength, I couldn't take them down a rank above me. That should tell you how tough they are."

Kraken was warning Orion while dropping some valuable intel.

From Orion's perspective, survivors like Kraken could usually punch at least one level above their weight. Kraken getting injured meant these new fungal creatures were no joke.

"What kind of slime mold mutant did you face?" Orion asked.

"Probably a parasitic type—a whale-like deep-sea monster!"

It clicked for Orion. No wonder Kraken got hurt—fighting a whale monster in the deep sea stripped him of any home-field advantage.

Orion didn't press further. Instead, he initiated a trade, sending Kraken some top-tier healing potions.

"Take a look at these. See if any work for you."

"If not, just hold onto them. Better safe than sorry."

Kraken didn't turn down Orion's kindness and accepted the potions.

Chatting with Kraken gave Orion a clearer picture of the situation.

Logging off the Survivor's Platform, Orion found himself holding two survivor chests—loot from enemies he'd taken down.

He'd originally planned to save up a few more before opening them together.

Now, though, Orion had no choice but to crack them early, hoping to bolster his resources and options.

[Battle Will Surge]

Type: Skill (Rare)

Description: Ignite your fighting spirit to create a spherical wave field around you. The field can attack enemies or serve as a defense.

Staring at the scroll from the first chest, Orion didn't look particularly thrilled.

In his current combat setup, he wasn't short on skills like this.

Especially after mastering Instant Impact, Orion's fighting style leaned toward seizing openings for a one-shot kill, not dragging out battles.

Still, Battle Will Surge could attack and defend—a nice perk.

Defensive skills were something Orion lacked entirely right now.

He tore up the scroll, learned the skill, and turned his attention to the second chest.

A puff of ash scattered, and a miniature building appeared in Orion's hand—a tower-like structure.

"Is this a Purification Tower?"

A spark of excitement lit up Orion's eyes. Purification Towers were versatile—they could purify Lord's Stones and cleanse most negative effects and impurities, like curses, plagues, and witchcraft.

Orion had wanted one of his own for ages, but he never expected it to come so suddenly.

"Not bad luck at all. Looks like the city I'll build in the Valkorath Realm won't be too shabby!"

"No more begging Arthasbro for favors either!"

Orion stashed the Purification Tower, extending his senses to check on Soraya in the Scorpion Nest.

Soraya had entered a state of grasping transcendent power—she wasn't far from Legendary level now.

...

Emerald Dream Realm, Phoenix Butterfly Ridge

Phoenix Butterfly Ridge was a place of eternal spring, blooming month after month, its hills alive with graceful, dancing butterflies.

In a flower house atop the ridge, Sophia, dressed in black, gazed wide-eyed at a group of butterfly sprites flitting among the flowers—paired off, their ribbon-like tails and silken wings catching the light. Her expression softened.

"The void passage is about to open. Will I run into that giant again?"

Sophia touched her abdomen gently.

Inside her womb, a faint pulse of life stirred.

Sophia was fortunate—she'd successfully conceived a child with Orion.

But using a secret technique, she'd sealed the child within her.

The reason was simple: she could sense that her offspring's bloodline wasn't noble enough yet.

Not long ago, Sophia had clearly felt the child's bloodline power grow stronger, a sign that Orion had leveled up again.

In other words, her bold move to sleep with Orion had paid off.

"Wait a little longer. When your father reaches Arch Lord, that's when you'll come into this world, my child."

Sophia murmured, soothing herself and the child within.

To birth an offspring with Arch Lord potential, Sophia had cast aside pride and dignity, forcing herself on Orion. She'd sacrificed a lot and wouldn't give up halfway.

For her child, for the phoenix butterfly race dwelling in the ridge, no humiliation or cost was too great for Sophia to bear.

"I really want to know just how strong you are now," she whispered.

...

Meanwhile, in the Emerald Dream Realm, while Sophia was lost in her longing for Orion, the Red Thread Clan, gearing up to invade the Titanion Realm, was buzzing with far more excitement.

Three months ago, Loska had stationed himself near the teleportation array, refusing to step away even for a moment.

He'd waited years for this chance to revive the Red Thread Clan's glory.

Right now, nearly a million Dark Worms were gathered in Red Moon Valley.

Loska had a clear plan: seize this opportunity to massively boost his forces.

He knew that once the teleportation array was used, it'd likely be detected, and enemies on the other side might destroy the cross-realm teleportation array outright.

"Lord, all the clan members have been assembled!"

Before the teleportation array, massive Dark Worms loomed, coiled and ready for action.

"Good. Issue the order: seal Red Moon Valley's two main gates. No one leaves."

"As you wish!"

"Hmm... now, we wait!"

...

Titanion Realm, Desert.

Ever since the desert fell under the Stoneheart Horde's control, this territory had become one of Soraya's domains. No outsiders dared trespass here anymore.

Jarex, a giant scorpion warrior, was fiercely loyal to the scorpion tribe.

Following Soraya's orders, he guarded their ancestral homeland.

One day, while slumbering underground, Jarex sensed a familiar presence.

But it flickered past, vanishing as quickly as it came.

Something felt off. Jarex opened his eyes, scanning his surroundings with his senses, but found nothing.

"When you feel like something's up, don't second-guess it—something's definitely happening."

"At times like this, stay on guard!"

Soraya's past teachings echoed in his mind. Though he'd planned to keep sleeping, Jarex summoned a black scorpion, mounted it, and burrowed out of the desert.

Feeling the air above the yellow sands grow colder, Jarex still detected nothing unusual.

"Per Her Majesty's instructions, I should patrol the territory now."

Muttering to himself, Jarex rode his black scorpion into the desert's shallow layers, following his usual patrol route.

In the south, within Stoneheart Horde territory, Golden Pearl.

Ever since Soraya, Orion, and the others teleported away from here, High Priestess Selenis had held the fort.

Though winters in the south were milder, dark beast tides were still unavoidable, so the scorpion tribe burrowed underground to steer clear of danger and conflict.

At that moment, High Priestess Selenis, deep in slumber, snapped her eyes open, confusion flickering in her gaze.

"Odd... did I just sense queen's presence?"

She extended her senses, probing the environment around her.

A moment later, she sighed.

"Ugh... it hasn't been that long since Her Majesty left. Am I already mixing up reality and illusion?"

"..."

Valkorath Realm, Cryptopolis.

Sensing a ripple in Soraya's aura, Orion flashed to her nest in an instant.

He gazed at the stunningly beautiful Soraya, his eyes brimming with pride.

Orion hadn't expected that, among all his subordinates, Soraya would be the first to break through to Legendary level.

Soon after, Soraya opened her eyes. Her pupils split into eight uneven segments, giving them a striking, unique look.

At the same time, an uncontrollable Legendary-level pressure swept through Cryptopolis, rousing Lich Vexis from his slumber in the undead tower.

Naturally, many Stoneheart Horde bloodline warriors training in the city were flattened to the ground by the force.

"A Legendary-level broodmother—finally a success!"

"This is great news. I need to tell my master right away. We won't have to fear those fungal creatures up north anymore!"

A glint sparked in Lich Vexis's eyes before he shut them again.

On the city walls, Onyx and Dirtclaw, on guard duty, dropped to their knees, struggling under the pressure.

"An unfamiliar Legendary-level aura—who's invading Cryptopolis?"

"No, wait—this feels familiar... it's... Soraya!"

"Could it be... she... she's reached Legendary level?"

Onyx and Dirtclaw propped each other up, slowly rising as the Legendary pressure began to fade.

"Prophet, you were right—Soraya's broken through!"

They exchanged a glance, a flicker of bitterness in their eyes, quickly replaced by overwhelming excitement.

Soraya hitting Legendary level was massive news for the Stoneheart Horde.

For Alpha-level elders like them, it was downright thrilling.

Her breakthrough meant Orion's promises were coming true—they too might one day reach Legendary status.

It also proved Orion was a leader big-hearted enough to embrace their potential.

"Someone's actually hit Legendary level!"

Atop an arrow tower on the wall, Gustalon materialized from the wind, staring dumbfounded at the central palace of Cryptopolis.

"One of Orion's crew really made it to Legendary level!"

"He wasn't kidding..."

"Legendary level... a lord's status... I've got to hit Legendary too..."

Soraya's ascent to Legendary level that day was unthinkable to many.

But it was also inspiring.

The Stoneheart Horde's top brass were buzzing with excitement. From now on, Legendary level wasn't some distant dream—it was a tangible goal they could reach for.

Underground, in the scorpion tribe's main nest, every sand scorpion wagged its tail, the rustling sound a tribute to their queen, their lord.

"How's it feel?"

Noticing Soraya's eight fragmented pupils slowly merging back together, Orion knew she'd fully awakened.

"Amazing!"

"It's like I went back to the desert, back to Golden Pearl."

Soraya tilted her head up at Orion, her eyes briefly glazing over as she recalled that sensation.

"Hahaha... that's the boundary mark. It happens when you hit Legendary level."

Orion laughed heartily, reaching out with a big hand to pull Soraya into his arms.

He leaned down, kissing her passionately.

After a long moment, Soraya looked up, locking eyes with Orion.

"I always knew you were strong, but now I realize just how huge the gap between us really is."

Orion said nothing, just grinned mischievously at her.

Fresh into Legendary level, Soraya's strength was still miles behind Orion's peak Legendary prowess.

Chapter 479: High Warden

If Soraya didn't know Orion was her man, she might've struggled to keep her composure—because she could feel the primal fear this giant instilled in her.

As a broodmother, her senses were razor-sharp, and Orion's presence beside her constantly radiated a danger that felt like standing on the edge of an abyss.

"You've successfully broken through. Looks like it's time to redefine the Stoneheart Horde's Warden!"

Orion pulled Soraya into his embrace, letting her rest against his broad arm.

"Redefine?"

Soraya's face lit up with a smile. Reaching Legendary level thrilled her more than anyone—it was something she'd never even dared to dream of before.

"Yeah. Don't you think an Alpha-level Warden lacks any real intimidation?"

Orion had noticed this issue long ago and had been itching to shake things up.

When he first created the Warden role, it was meant to position the horde's strongest subordinates.

But ever since Orion hit Legendary level himself, the Warden title had become more name than substance—its holders' strength and status barely distinguished them from the council elders.

The title had essentially lost its weight.

Now, with Soraya's breakthrough to Legendary level, Orion was ready to revive the Warden position and elevate it above the four senior elders.

"Starting with you, the minimum strength requirement for a Stoneheart Horde Warden is now Legendary level."

"Congrats—you're officially our High Warden!"

The High Warden ranked above the four senior elders, and Soraya loved the title.

In truth, as the second Legendary-level powerhouse in the Stoneheart Horde, everyone knew her status was unique from here on out.

Not only was Soraya Orion's woman, but she was also a Legendary-level warrior with a lord's title. Aside from Lilith, no one could keep her in check.

"Orion, I love the sound of High Warden."

Soraya flipped over, straddling Orion as she spoke, shedding her clothes piece by piece.

She decided to use her body to thank Orion for all his help.

...

The next morning, Orion stepped out of the palace and issued the order to relocate the troops to Moonveil Plains.

His subordinates received the command and instantly understood: the Stoneheart Horde was about to build a city in the Valkorath Realm.

The bloodline warriors erupted in cheers, bustling about as they packed their gear and supplies.

Naturally, Orion also sent a message to Lich Vexis, who emerged from the undead tower.

"Lord Orion, when do we set out?"

"Tomorrow at dawn!"

"Please let my master know so he can adjust the defense lines in time."

Orion nodded. Even without Vexis's reminder, he'd planned to contact Arthas.

"Lord Orion, I'll go prepare as well. The trip to Moonveil Plains might be a long one—we'll need some supplies."

Orion waved Vexis off to handle it freely, then returned to the palace and settled onto his throne.

Sinking his mind into the Survivor's Platform, Orion reached out to Arthas directly.

"It's time. I'm moving to Moonveil Plains tomorrow."

"Should I hold Cryptopolis against an attack first?"

Arthas replied quickly, his tone tinged with excitement.

"No need—I've already sent my people to take over the defense."

"While things are stable in our region, get started on building those city walls."

"When you start construction, mention it to the Deputy Commander. Ask him for a magical formation blueprint. Regular walls won't hold off slime mold mutants or slime mold layers."

Orion's curiosity piqued, and he asked outright.

"A magical formation blueprint?"

Arthas patiently explained.

"It's a blueprint that adds a magical defensive barrier to your city. Its main job is to fend off enemies from underground."

"It can also handle aerial and surface attacks, but that'll drain its energy fast."

With Arthas's explanation, it clicked for Orion.

Some slime mold layers burrowed underground. If his city couldn't defend against subsurface attacks, it'd be little more than a decoration.

"Thanks for the heads-up!"

"No problem. When you're building, don't forget to have your broodmother keep hatching those small scorpions. We'll need her help with what's coming."

"Don't worry, it won't slow us down!"

Soraya's next task was a heavy one. Both the Stoneheart Horde and Arthas had been banking on her breakthrough.

"I'll have my people send you some life essence soon. We need to speed up those small scorpions' growth."

"This..."

"Don't turn it down. The more scorpions, the better. I'll need you to send a ton of them to the front lines as cannon fodder later."

"Alright, got it!"

"Oh, and take Cryptopolis's skeleton warriors and other undead with you. Use them as labor to speed up construction."

Orion had no complaints about Arthas's arrangements—they were spot-on.

"If you're short on building materials, don't sit on it. Just ask me."

Orion was touched. Sure, this kind of care partly stemmed from their alliance and came with expectations, but Arthas had gone above and beyond.

If Orion were in his shoes, he doubted he could've done more.

"Bro, I've got a question I'd like your take on."

Orion shifted gears, quietly tucking Arthas's kindness into his heart.

"Shoot!"

Orion paused, then laid out what he'd noticed.

"Yesterday, when Soraya hit Legendary level, I felt our contract loosen up. What's that about?"

"What kind of contract did you sign?"

"An equal contract!"

Arthas went quiet for a while before responding.

"If you get the chance, switch that equal contract to a slave contract."

Orion fell silent, unsure how to reply.

Just then, Arthas sent another message.

"Let me put it this way: in this world, no contract is set in stone or unchangeable."

"A contract's like a rope, with both parties holding an end."

"It's a tug-of-war—whoever's stronger pulls the contract their way."

Arthas's take on contracts was a revelation to Orion.

This perspective sparked a burning curiosity in him to hear more.

"Take a slave contract, for example. If you're the master, you're holding the long end of the rope, while the slave's stuck with the short stub."

"In a contract, it's damn near impossible for the short end to overpower the long one."

"Of course, it's not like slaves have zero shot at turning the tables on their master—it's just a long shot."

Orion frowned, deep in thought. His understanding of contracts sharpened.

And Arthas wasn't done yet.

Chapter 480: Soraya City

"With an equal contract, both sides hold half the rope. Now that your subordinate has reached Legendary level, she's gained the power to tug at the contract you signed with her."

"But since your strength outclasses hers—or maybe she doesn't want to challenge you—she's let go of the tug-of-war over the contract."

"Hulk, think about it. Have you ever seen me, Leonidas, or Alexander enslave an Arch Lord?"

Reading this, Orion's expression darkened slightly.

"Under normal circumstances, enslaving someone a rank below you is almost foolproof."

"Even if you're injured or something unexpected happens, it's rare for a slave to rebel and turn on their master."

"But enslaving someone of the same rank? That's a huge risk."

"So, Hulk, until you hit Arch Lord yourself, keep the number of Legendary-level fighters under you to five or fewer."

"And that's assuming they're all lower-tier Legendary."

Orion took a deep breath. In front of Arthas, his grasp of contracts felt like a rookie's.

"Imagine if all your Legendary-level subordinates teamed up and pulled on the contract at once. Could you handle that?"

Arthas's final question left Orion speechless.

"That said, there's a flip side. Legendary-level fighters provide a hefty amount of faith energy."

"Haven't you noticed a change in your faith energy stats?"

Orion quickly checked his data panel.

Sure enough, besides the new [Battle Will Surge], his faith energy had spiked from the mid-500,000s to over a million.

Orion surged his transcendent power, shifting into Titan form. The power drained fast, but with faith energy converting into it, his recovery rate was more than double what it used to be.

"This..."

The change meant Orion's combat endurance had gotten a serious boost.

"Maybe this is one of the gaps between a regular Legendary and an Arch Lord!"

Orion mused, his understanding of Arch Lords growing clearer.

"Thanks for the heads-up—I wouldn't have noticed otherwise!"

Dropping his Titan form, Orion returned to normal size and thanked Arthas.

"Hahaha... no big deal. You'd figure it out the moment you fought or burned through a ton of transcendent power."

"Oh, one more tip: don't try condensing a body of faith until your faith energy breaks ten million."

"If you fail, all that faith energy goes down the drain."

Arthas went on, sharing more insights that left Orion richer for it.

The night flew by. The next day, Orion led his crew northeast toward Moonveil Plains.

...

Blackstone City.

A month passed in the blink of an eye.

In the Horde Hall, the air was crisp and cool. Lilith sat in the main seat of the meeting room, flanked by Rendall, surrounded by Stoneheart Horde's hero-level elder candidates.

Lilith gazed toward the hall's entrance, echoing Orion's past words to the group.

"Everyone, can you feel it?"

"The air's turning cold—breathing it makes you shiver."

"Maybe today, maybe tomorrow, once night falls, the sun won't rise again."

She paused, her eyes sweeping over the horde's elders.

"The dark beast tides are coming. Are you ready?"

Lilith's voice tightened, her tone brimming with authority and an icy edge, like a gust of wind slicing through the room.

"We're ready!"

"Yeah, we're always prepared!"

"May the glory of the Titan God bathe the Stoneheart Horde, and may Lord Orion's light pierce the darkness..."

Lilith nodded. Orders rolled out one after another.

Once the commands were given, bloodline warriors and small spiders emerged from Moonshadow Valley and underground fissures.

From that moment, the Stoneheart Horde shifted into round-the-clock battle readiness.

Bottomless Abyss, Underworld.

Clymene had been swamped lately, and no one else was getting a break either.

Aside from Clymene, the others were undead creatures, so physical exhaustion wasn't usually an issue. If they felt tired, it was soul-deep or from the wear of death energy.

Ever since the cross-realm teleportation array started acting up, Clymene had been stationed there.

Most of her time was spent staring at it.

"Clymene, with 500,000 little spiders crawling down from the passage to back us up, even if a Legendary-level lord steps through that array, we can wear them down to nothing."

That was Grendel, second only to Clymene in strength but the brashest of the bunch.

"Grendel, shut it!"

"You think we can just grind down a Legendary-level fighter because we say so?"

"Any being or race capable of using a cross-realm teleportation array isn't something we can trash-talk lightly."

"Stay sharp. If a fight breaks out, we go all in."

Clymene's tone was dead serious. She rarely scolded her guards—or rather, her guardian knights.

Reprimanded, Grendel clamped his mouth shut, swallowing his reckless bravado.

Lorelia had thrown major support their way, sending 500,000 small spiders to the underworld. Add in the tens of thousands of skeleton warriors and death spiders already there, and the underworld's total forces swelled to a staggering 600,000.

That sheer number left Vargrum, Mordak, Zorn, Balgor, and Grendel—folks who'd died young, never seen the world, or fought in a real war—awestruck, then cocky.

"Clymene's right!"

"Grendel, get real. A Legendary-level fighter's terror isn't something we can just overwhelm with numbers."

"Facing an unknown enemy, the smart move is to take it seriously and give it everything we've got."

Desdemona chimed in, backing Clymene up.

Unlike Clymene, Vargrum, Mordak, Zorn, Balgor, and Grendel, the succubus Desdemona hadn't died during the southern invasion.

She'd fallen when Orion stormed the Godforsaken Land.

Compared to Clymene, Desdemona had seen real action—undead armies numbering over a million, Legendary-level powerhouses clashing in the sky. She'd witnessed it all.

"Killing us would be a breeze for a Legendary-level fighter."

"If they wanted to slip past our blockade, it'd be even easier."

Desdemona directed her words at Clymene, hoping she'd approach this invasion with the utmost respect and battle-ready resolve.

Sometimes, Desdemona wondered if Orion weren't backing them, whether she'd hesitate even a second before climbing out of the underworld and fleeing this territory at the mere hint of a Legendary-level invader.

"Desdemona, don't worry—I know what you're getting at."

"I'm well aware of why I died out there, far from home."

"I won't underestimate any enemy we face!"

Clymene's words seemed aimed at the succubus Desdemona, but her gaze was fixed on the guards who'd died alongside her.

"You haven't forgotten how we fell, have you?"

"Back then, we underestimated Reynard—and paid for it with our lives."

"Do you want our living kin to laugh at us all over again?"

Vargrum, Mordak, Zorn, Balgor, and Grendel fell silent, heads bowed.

Dying far from home, their heads lopped off and hung on city walls—even as Skeletal Knights now, that shame clung to them like a stain they couldn't scrub off.

"Clymene, we're with you. You call the shots, we follow."

Clymene nodded wordlessly, turning back to stare at the cross-realm teleportation array.

...

Valkorath Realm, Moonveil Plains

Despite its lovely name, this place was a wasteland. The only upside? Flat terrain.

Wherever Orion looked, there was no grass, no trees.

What stretched before him was a dull, lifeless expanse of gray.

"This land was first overrun by slime mold layers, sucking the soil dry of nutrients."

"Then my master tainted it with death energy, turning it into a total dead zone."

"Restoring life here after the war's done? That'll be a challenge."

Lich Vexis stood beside Orion, her eyes tracing his gaze. She could guess what he was thinking.

Orion pulled his attention back, glancing at the hundreds of thousands of skeleton warriors building the city walls, a few things clicking into place.

"I was wondering why your master insisted I bring extra building materials."

"Turns out, there's nothing here—not even the stones, which are corroded and fragile as butter."

Lich Vexis didn't dare comment much, staying quiet.

Suddenly, the ground beneath Orion's feet shifted, then shook violently.

Moments later, a massive black scorpion burst through the soil, emerging from below.

And it didn't stop there—one, two... ten giant black scorpions broke through, standing before Orion. After a chorus of rustling sounds, they froze in place.

"These are the black scorpions I just hatched. All Alpha-level. With them helping out, construction's bound to speed up."

Soraya stepped forward, draped in thin red gauze that fluttered in the wind, lending her a sensual, mysterious air.

Then, like grains of sand, she vanished from atop the lead scorpion, reappearing beside Orion.

The power of sand—transcendent power!

Soraya hooked her arm around Orion's, smiling as she pressed her chest against him.

"Not bad, huh? With them pitching in, moving those big stones just got a lot easier—no need for cranes."

Orion eyed the ten giant black scorpions, their hooked tails raised high, a glint in his eyes.

"What do you think of these black scorpions?"

Soraya beamed, her smile playful like a kid fishing for praise.

Orion turned to Lich Vexis.

"These big guys are great for building—and they'll be weapons on the battlefield."

"Lord Orion, with them around, the Stoneheart Horde's bloodline warriors will take fewer losses."

"But, a heads-up, Lady Soraya—we need cannon fodder. Tons of it, endlessly."

Soraya nodded. She'd already gotten the gist of the situation from Orion.

Luckily, the scorpion tribe's breeding ability was solid. Soraya didn't need to reproduce herself—each female scorpion under her could churn out 40 to 80 small scorpions per batch.

With the tens of thousands of small scorpions they already had, plus ample supplies and life essence, the scorpion tribe would multiply fast.

"Lady Vexis, don't worry. My main nest is set up, and the first batch of small scorpions is already in the works."

"It won't be long before the battlefield's crawling with them."

That was Soraya's confidence—and her tribe's strength.

Other things aside, if bloodline potential wasn't a factor and it was just about churning out cannon-fodder-grade small scorpions, Soraya could produce as many as resources allowed—practically an endless supply.

"I'm planning to name this city Soraya City. Any thoughts?"

With Soraya's lordship secured and the scorpion tribe on track, Orion was in high spirits.

Orion had built cities named after Lilith, Delilah, and Lysinthia—a fact that had long since reached Soraya's ears.

Having followed Orion to this foreign land, she couldn't be left out.

"Soraya City?"

"Yep!"

Soraya's face lit up, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"I want a building of my own here. Can I?"

She tilted her head, squinting playfully at Orion.

"Of course! Soraya City's named after you—this'll be your domain someday."

Mwah!

Soraya planted a kiss on him, pressing herself even closer.

In the distance, atop the city walls, Onyx took up his old role as overseer once again.

"It's hard to believe our first city in this strange world is one we're building ourselves."

Watching the bustling construction site, Onyx felt a wave of emotion.

"No kidding. This takes me back to when we built Blackstone City."

"Back then, I was still in the cannon fodder troops, working under you as an overseer!"

Earthshaker hopped over from the nearby wall, slotting a massive stone into the inner layer.

"And Dirtclaw was hauling rocks in the cannon fodder troops too!"

Standing beside Onyx, Dirtclaw's eyes glazed over for a moment at Earthshaker's words, lost in memory.

He remembered it clear as day: captured at first, then following Orion to invade Thunderhawk City, Half-Moon Lake, and Stormrage City.

Later, he returned with Orion to the black forest, hauling stones to build walls, rising through the ranks to manage the cannon fodder troops.

Eventually, his gnoll tribe(clan) got special care and privileges.

Through it all, Dirtclaw fought tooth and nail, clawing his way up from piles of bodies, awakening his bloodline to become one of the Stoneheart Horde's most inspiring figures.

And, of course, the greatest gnoll in his tribe's history—an idol to countless others.

"Oh... praise Orion!"

"Praise my master!"

"Everything I am today is thanks to the Stoneheart Horde looking out for me, guiding me forward!"

Dirtclaw's fervent, prayer-like devotion sent Onyx, Earthshaker, Gronthar, Drakthul, and the others nearby into fits of laughter.