

Titan King 851

Chapter 851: Them or You

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The lightning-infused spears hammered against the pagoda formation. The once-impenetrable ward flickered under the assault, and with a series of sizzling cracks, it shattered completely.

In that instant, all the spears condensed by the Eightfold Spear Barrage rained down. For a moment, it looked as if Marquis Chix was caught in an inescapable storm of divine punishment.

Unfortunately, it was only an illusion.

When the electrical energy dissipated, Chix was standing in the same spot, completely unscathed. There wasn't even a single tear in his leather armor.

"You are clever," he said. "To have found the elemental powers that counter our Death-Soul race so quickly. But it is not enough."

Orion didn't speak. He reached into the void and seized one of the spears. In his perception, the spear had pierced Chix's body, yet there was not a single drop of blood on it.

Seeing this, a grim look flashed in Orion's eyes. His plan to summon the Ghost Dragon had failed. No blood meant no medium for the sacrifice. Blood was both the greatest strength and the greatest weakness of the Ghost Dragon summoning skill.

"Were you hoping to see if we Death-Souls bleed?" Chix taunted, his voice dripping with amusement. "Sorry, but I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint you. Or perhaps you wanted our blood to fuel some forbidden art? That, I'm afraid, is impossible. Hehehe..."

This time, Chix's laughter was unrestrained. He had guessed Orion's intention. The Death-Soul race had survived in a multitude of worlds for a reason; they had long ago evolved past such fatal weaknesses.

As it stood, Orion's only counters were fire and lightning, but neither of those powers could be formed into a single, decisive finishing blow.

For a moment, Orion felt a pang of disappointment. For this duel, he had transferred his true body's most powerful gear—the trident Flame of Will, the Titan Emblem, and the Abyssal Devil Shield—to this mirrored avatar. He hadn't expected that his conventional methods would feel so powerless against a peak-tier Archlord.

"ROAR!"

Orion bellowed and unleashed his Titan Form. To hold back any longer against such a powerful opponent would be to underestimate him—an act of digging one's own grave. Rampant power surged through his body. He activated his awakened skill, Battle Craving, and his combat senses sharpened, his will to fight soaring. Only in this state did he feel he stood a chance against Chix.

"My turn," Chix's voice turned sinister. He was also annoyed that his repeated ambushes had failed to eliminate Orion.

He raised his scythe, and a beam of black light shot from its blade into the dark tooth floating high above. The spinning tooth stopped, and the golden runes upon it began to flash. In an instant, the single black tooth divided into four identical, massive fangs.

"I can use formations too, you know. Hehehe!" Chix swung his scythe, and the four black teeth descended. They swelled to the size of small mountains, lunging at Orion from four different directions.

The battle had once again reached a fever pitch.

Meanwhile, if Orion was on the fifth underground level of the six-tiered dueling grounds, then Leonidas was on the sixth and lowest floor.

At this moment, Leonidas's Void Dragon avatar was flickering violently amidst a continuous spatial collapse. He looked even more wretched than when his previous dragon avatar had self-destructed.

This was a soul bombardment.

Leonidas's opponent was a Soul-Devouring Reaper. Its belly was a repository for countless souls, which it was now releasing in a constant stream. The souls exploded, one after another, in a horrifying feast of spiritual energy, attempting to directly annihilate the Void Dragon's own soul.

The power of countless souls detonating at once was terrifying. Space itself was beginning to fracture under the strain. It was a good thing Leonidas's avatar was a Void Dragon; for any other, the outcome would have been grim.

"Apologies, but our duel requires no crude violence," the opponent cackled, its voice a mad shriek. "Let us swim in the ocean of souls together, find oblivion in the explosions, and decide the victor amidst the collapse of space! Kehehehe..."

Leonidas's opponent was a madman. The Soul-Devouring Reaper's entire power lay in the souls it had collected. To detonate them was an extreme, self-harming tactic.

If Leonidas could endure until all the souls were gone, he would undoubtedly be the victor. If he couldn't last until that final moment, victory would belong to the Reaper.

"Damn it... damn it... damn it..." Leonidas cursed from the epicenter of the soul explosions, his dragon eyes wide with fury. He swung his claws and wings, constantly trying to mend the collapsing space around him.

The Void Dragon's abilities were potent. Beyond devouring, locking, and displacing space, it could also find stable nodes within the chaotic void to anchor itself. But the process was difficult, especially when space was collapsing continuously. Any node he found was unstable and could be annihilated in an instant. To survive this soul storm, he had to find new anchor points faster than space could fall apart around him.

Otherwise, he would either be annihilated in the void's collapse, or worse, be eternally banished. Neither outcome was one Leonidas could accept.

On the fourth underground level, Alexander's avatar faced a Steel-Soul Spirit of the Death-Soul race.

The Steel-Soul Spirit was a bizarre existence, a fusion of an undead and a rare metal. It possessed both an incredibly hard body and an unyielding soul. It was, in a word, an unsolvable enigma of a creature.

However, the avatar it faced was an enigma in its own right. It was a sword, and nothing more. A sword of unparalleled sharpness.

The battle was a strange chase, a single iron ball pursuing a spirit sword, constantly colliding, constantly grinding each other down.

"Not bad," a strange voice echoed through the arena. "To be able to move so freely under the suppression of my gravity field. It is a shame such a rare spirit sword must be broken here today."

"This sword is indestructible. Sooner or later, it will cut you down," Alexander's cold voice rang out. The spirit sword was being suppressed by the iron ball, but in another sense, wasn't the iron ball merely a whetstone for the sword?

"Then let us see if you cut me down first, or if I melt you down."

With a roar of heat, the flying iron ball suddenly glowed fiery red. Licks of flame erupted from its surface, clinging to the spirit sword. Alexander's sword sizzled under the intense heat, as if it itself had been set ablaze.

Chapter 852: The Same Path as Him

Teeth? Small mountains? Blades?

These weren't teeth at all. They were four massive, rotating blades. Orion stood in the center of the Four-Gate Blade Formation, the opening gambit Chix had laid from the very beginning. It had been this very artifact that had yanked Orion out of his Ghostly Steps.

Kch-Kch-Kch!

The sound of the four giant blades grinding and cutting at Orion was terrifying. In front of him, the Abyssal Devil Shield manifested, releasing a defensive barrier that forcibly held the blades at bay. Even so, the sound of steel grinding against the shield was enough to make Orion's heart pound.

"Such impressive resources you have," Chix commented, his voice tinged with envy at the shield's power.

"Is that so?" Orion retorted. "Then by all means, enjoy it."

Letting the giant blades continue to grind against the shield, Orion focused his will. The pair of devil eyes on the face of the Abyssal Devil Shield snapped open. An invisible ripple spread out—the Devil's Gaze.

An opportunity.

Orion's figure flashed. When he reappeared, he was behind Chix. His trident blazed with fire and crackled with electricity, and because of his Instant Impact, it carried a powerful sonic shockwave.

Against another opponent, this sonic attack might have been negligible, something neither of them would have paid much mind. But against this Death-Soul, stunned by the Devil's Gaze and with its defenses down, the sonic damage was immense.

"Aaaaiiiiiieeeee!"

A sharp, ear-piercing wail of agony echoed through the arena, a sound not of a soul nor of a beast, but a roar filled with utter fear and despair.

Orion felt it clearly. When his trident, Flame of Will, had pierced Chix's body, there had been no feeling of substance, like stabbing at empty air. But under the impact of the sonic wave, Chix's body was beginning to solidify. Orion knew he had found a breakthrough, but his attack power still seemed insufficient. Chix's body was flickering rapidly between its incorporeal and corporeal states.

"ROAR!"

Orion's Titan Form let out a deafening roar, unleashing a second sonic attack at point-blank range. Under the double assault, Chix's body finally became fully solid.

With its form now tangible, the fire and lightning on the trident found their target and instantly detonated.

BOOM!

Chix's body exploded, turning to ash.

But Orion did not celebrate. Instead, his brow furrowed. A peak-tier Archlord could not possibly be killed so easily. They would certainly have more trump cards. This was a judgment born from his understanding of his brothers-in-arms, like Alexander and Leonidas.

Sure enough, in the distance, the four blades of the formation vanished, reforming into the black tooth pendant. A plume of black mist seeped from it, and within the mist, Chix's figure slowly coalesced. Once he had fully stepped out of the mist, the tooth pendant shattered, turning to dust.

"Friend, you are even stronger than I estimated," Chix said, his tone no longer relaxed. The fact that Orion could destroy his first form meant he possessed the power to win this duel.

"Victory is not decided, and death is not yet certain. Let us continue."

As Chix spoke, writhing masses of black tentacles began to pour out from under his robes. They fused and intertwined, filling out his withered, dry frame.

In a matter of seconds, the being that stood before Orion was an invincible 'god', its body a mass of dragon-like muscles that looked as if they were forged from steel, radiating an aura that could challenge the heavens and the earth. This new form exerted an immense pressure on Orion.

"Friend," Chix said with an evil grin, "I have suddenly taken an interest in your body. I think I will collect it."

He raised his scythe and teleported behind Orion.

Clang!

Orion was prepared, countering with a back-thrust of his trident. Crimson fire and crackling lightning leaped from the weapon, attempting to harm Chix once more. It had no effect. The black tentacles that formed Chix's new muscles were made of some unknown material that was highly resistant to both fire and lightning.

In other words, Chix's second form was a monster with both terrifying offense and defense.

With no time to think, Orion focused all his energy on the fight. The scythe swung, the trident thrust. Two masters of movement, one using Instant Impact, the other teleportation, clashed at an incredible frequency. The close-quarters battle had begun, a frenzy of insane collisions.

Their figures flickered across the dueling ground, moving so fast they were little more than blurs. The only way to track their positions was to watch the Flesh Golem in the center of the arena, its head constantly swiveling to follow the fight.

In the colosseum, on the third level.

Compared to the frantic battles of the Archlords Orion, Leonidas, and Alexander, the duel between the demigod phantoms was far calmer.

"Hehe, I never expected my opponent would be you," a cloaked old man said, standing before Arthas. "When did you advance to demigod?" Unlike the other Death-Souls, he carried no weapon, no artifact.

"Just recently promoted," Arthas replied, his voice cold. "Perfect timing to get some practice with you." As he spoke, a white, bone-forged sword condensed from pure divine power appeared in his hand. He pointed it at the old man in a clear invitation to battle.

"Your Champions Alliance grows stronger and stronger," the old man mused. "I thought for sure your great commander would be the one fighting this time."

From their conversation, it was clear that this Death-Soul demigod knew Arthas, and was also acquainted with the senior members of the Champions Alliance.

"If our commander took the field, would there even be a game for us to play?" Arthas scoffed, his tone a mixture of disdain for his enemy and pride in his leader. "It's good for a man to know his own limitations."

The pride was for his commander, Thresh.

"True enough. If he took the field, it wouldn't even be a fight," the old man agreed. As he spoke of the Champions Alliance's commander, an image coalesced in his mind's eye: a powerful body, a sharp blade aura, and a pair of eyes that could look down upon the gods themselves—eyes that were always confident, always resolute.

"A sword?" The old man's reverie broke. He looked at the sword in Arthas's hand, a new trace of apprehension in his eyes, but also a flicker of eagerness.

"It seems you wish to walk the same path as him."

The next moment, sword light flashed, and a Death-Soul began to chant. The battle, a clash of divine power and will, had already begun.

Chapter 853: Mutual Destruction

In the Dueling Space, on the second level.

"Perhaps defeating you will allow my power to be recognized," the opponent, a being of pure madness, cackled. "I am a madman, and you are a mage. Let this madman feel the power of magic! Let me scream freely in a world of your making! Hahaha..."

Faced with this frenzied foe, Deputy Commander Edward remained preternaturally calm. A frenzied opponent is always difficult to handle. To face one, maintaining one's own inner peace, refusing to let them disrupt one's heart and rhythm, is the best possible response.

"Wind rises. Clouds surge. Space collapses," the Deputy Commander intoned, his voice steady, each word clear and precise.

As he spoke, the very environment of the demigod-level dueling ground began to shift and warp under the influence of divine power and fundamental rules.

"Soul-suck, and the wind stops!" his opponent shrieked. "Soul-burst, and the clouds scatter! With the guard of my soul, the heavens may fall, but I am not extinguished! Hahaha... continue... this is not enough!"

The Deputy Commander's expression remained serene. He slowly raised his hands and began to weave the seals for a powerful formation.

The battles of demigods are a contest of divine power, a collision of cosmic rules. Between equals, such a battle is a continuous, unending clash.

In the Dueling Space, on the fifth level.

After a full-force collision, Orion and Chix separated. In the clash between Orion's Titan Form and Chix's second form, the latter had the upper hand. Chix's teleportation consumed less energy and was faster than Orion's Instant Impact. If not for his own prodigious regenerative ability, Orion might already have been exhausted.

"You are very strong," Chix said, shouldering his scythe as he stared at Orion from a distance. "You're the first enemy at the Archlord level I've met who can trade blows with me for this long. To be honest, outside of the Abyss, I've never seen a giant as powerful as you."

This guy is tough, Orion thought. A peak-tier Archlord. In aura, resources, and combat experience, Orion held no advantage. This was the second supremely difficult opponent he had ever faced, every bit the equal of the Silver-Eyed Grand General Dorian and his ability to slow time. If Dorian was unbeatable because of a single, overpowered ability, then Chix was superior to Orion in his overall, comprehensive stats.

"You are not unbeatable!" Orion retorted, raising his trident.

"The Death-Soul race is not unbeatable, it's true. But it seems I'm guaranteed to win this duel! Hehe..."

The weaknesses of the Death-Soul race were well-hidden. Physical attacks and ordinary spells were useless against them. Only targeted sonic attacks and psychic assaults were truly effective.

But when Chix entered his second form, his resistance to those very things increased. It was as if his original form was immune to physical attacks but weak to vibration, while his second form was no longer immune to physical damage, but his soul's weakness to vibration had been reinforced, its resistance heightened. And his combat power in that second form was tremendously enhanced. With his overwhelming strength now covering for it, his one minor weakness was no longer a weakness at all.

Orion flipped his hand, and five Lord's Stones appeared in his palm. The Titan Emblem on his chest began to glow, absorbing all five stones. In his current state, Orion was certain he had no way to defeat his opponent. So, he had no choice but to play another trump card, sacrificing the five Lord's Stones to the Titan Emblem.

A mysterious power flowed from the emblem, strengthening Orion's body. He began to grow even larger, his strength and speed increasing wildly. The aura he now radiated was intensely oppressive.

"Guaranteed to win?" Orion taunted. "That's not for you to decide!"

He raised his trident, and his figure flashed, leaving only a fading afterimage. In the distance, Orion and Chix collided once more. The trident danced, the scythe whirled. The contest of strength and speed had become a blur, impossible to distinguish.

In the Dueling Space, on the sixth level.

Amidst the endless self-destruction of souls, space itself was collapsing. No matter how focused the Void Dragon was, Leonidas found that his speed at finding stable spatial nodes could no longer keep up with the rate of collapse.

"Hehe, I can feel it. Your speed at finding nodes is slowing down," his opponent's voice echoed. "In the end, I will win this duel! It's just a pity about my little darlings. It took me hundreds of years to collect them."

In truth, Leonidas couldn't even see his opponent anymore. His vision was a chaotic swirl of colorful and gray void. His dragon eyes flashed with rage and unwillingness.

"Damn it... you piece of trash... bastard..." Filthy curses poured from the Void Dragon's mouth, though it was unclear if Leonidas was cursing himself or his opponent.

It's no good. I'm still not fast enough. Am I going to lose this duel? No! I refuse to fucking lose!*

Having apparently made a decision, a mad glint appeared in Leonidas's eyes.

"Hehehe, this is a feast of souls, a Requiem of Souls. In the soul's..." Just then, the Soul-Devouring Reaper's voice came again, now tinged with a sacred, fanatical quality, as if it were lamenting something, singing something.

"Will you shut the fuck up!?" Leonidas roared. "You sound terrible! Are you chanting a sutra to send yourself off? We're both Archlords, stop putting on airs in front of me, you goddamn charlatan! Playing at being some kind of artist with this crap?"

"ROAR!"

The Void Dragon let out a final, defiant roar as dense spatial energy gathered around its body. A silver mark on its forehead began to flash violently.

"You like explosions so much? Fine! I'll play with you! Let's have a big fucking explosion together!"

BOOM!

Knowing he could not win by finding nodes, Leonidas had made the desperate choice to self-destruct. This was the self-destruction of an Archlord's Void Dragon avatar, an explosion that resonated with countless spatial nodes. The resulting spatial collapse was on a level that the soul explosions could not even begin to compare to. Their fundamental principles were entirely different.

The blast was so immense that it not only caught the Soul-Devouring Reaper, but also the Flesh Golem in the center of the arena, killing it instantly.

"This is fine too," the Soul-Devouring Reaper's faint voice echoed through the blast. He could accept this outcome. "Mutual destruction. No winner, no loser. At least I can answer for this to my people."

At the very least, he had not fueled his enemy's power.

Chapter 854: Never Broken by It

"If we're going for mutual destruction, then let's make it absolute!"

After speaking these words, the Soul-Devouring Reaper also chose to self-destruct. It wasn't that he didn't want to escape, but in this dueling ground, faced with such a total spatial collapse, his death was certain. Before he died, however, he feared that the Void Dragon might possess some hidden means of resurrection.

And so, the Reaper also detonated his own being. In doing so, he would ensure the continuous destruction of this pocket dimension, giving the Void Dragon no opportunity to revive. Even if it did, it would only be reborn into an ongoing explosion. This way, the Soul-Devouring Reaper believed, his allies in the final arena would have a better chance at ultimate victory. He had done his part to help his tribe secure that great prize.

By the same token, Leonidas's self-destruction, while costing him his Void Dragon avatar, had successfully eliminated an opponent for the Champions Alliance.

Thus, the sixth level of the dueling grounds was instantly consumed by a terrifying scene of explosions and collapsing space. This duel had no loser, and no winner.

In the dueling grounds, on the fourth level.

The chase between the spirit sword and the Steel-Soul Spirit had finally come to a stop.

The Steel-Soul Spirit had transformed from its iron ball state into a towering giant of steel. In its hands, a sphere of crimson, all-consuming flame now engulfed the spirit sword, attempting to smelt it, to reforge it into a personal weapon.

Within the ultimate fire, the spirit sword glowed red-hot, showing signs of melting.

"Unfortunate for you that you met me, your nemesis," the Steel-Soul Spirit's voice boomed. "If you had faced the other two Archlords, you might have been the victor. But now... this spirit sword will be mine."

"Hahaha..."

In truth, the Steel-Soul Spirit was not just a powerful warrior; he was also a master Artificer. Many of the Death-Soul race's weapons were his creations. Chix's scythe, for instance, had been forged by his hand.

In the Artificer's eyes, Alexander's spirit sword avatar was the perfect raw material. With the addition of enough rare components, he believed, it might even have the potential to be elevated into a Relic.

Therefore, the Steel-Soul Spirit was determined to claim it.

Faced with this overwhelming pressure, Alexander remained silent. But the spirit sword, trembling and struggling within the consuming flame, made it clear that he had not yet given up.

In the dueling grounds, on the fifth level.

Having transformed into his titan state, Orion finally had the upper hand in raw power and presence. Even when Chix teleported, Orion could now track his movements, even predict them, setting traps where he anticipated Chix would appear.

Sccchhh!

The trident sliced down from Chix's chest, cleaving his body in two. But once again, to Orion's disappointment, not a single drop of blood flowed out.

Chix teleported away in a rapid series of flashes, creating distance between them. When he reappeared, countless black tentacles were writhing inside his sundered form, repairing his body.

They were his Tentacles of Death, the very foundation of his existence. Unless Orion could deal with these tentacles, he would never be able to kill Chix.

"The number of trump cards you possess is truly unexpected," Chix said. He raised his scythe and sliced off his own empty hand. In their previous clashes, the scythe had been stained with Orion's blood. Chix fused his severed hand with that blood, and a black, writhing copy of Orion appeared.

Seeing this, Orion seemed to realize what was happening and launched himself forward with Instant Impact.

"Hehe, Orion, you noticed a little too late!" Chix taunted, teleporting with the copy to the far side of the arena.

Orion did not give up, continuing his pursuit. But as he crossed the center of the arena, the Flesh Golem roared and hurled its chained warhammer, aiming directly for Orion's face. Frowning, Orion stopped his advance and retreated out of the Golem's attack range.

But in that single moment, as Orion steadied himself, Chix unleashed his secret technique.

"Your Excellency, please endure the tearing of your soul!" he shrieked. He swung his scythe, wildly hacking at the Orion-copy made of death tentacles.

Every time the copy was struck, Orion's own soul was rent apart. He had never encountered such a terrifying soul-based attack.

"Argh..."

"ROAR!"

With his soul under assault, Orion fell to the ground, rolling in agony. He let out horrifying screams and mad roars of pain. The feeling of his soul being shredded made his entire body seize up, curling into a tight ball.

"Hahaha... the victor of this battle will be me! It will be me!" On the other side of the arena, Chix roared as he continued to slash madly at the copy. He fought with a frenzy, as if killing the copy would kill Orion himself.

And because the copy was made of death tentacles, it healed itself almost instantly after each blow, meaning the soul damage inflicted upon Orion was continuous. Under an attack of this intensity, even the most resilient soul would eventually shatter.

Face it.

The best way to eliminate fear and pain is to not be afraid.

Smile.

Smile in the face of fear and pain.

"..."

A murmuring voice whispered at the edge of Orion's hearing. He tried to focus on it, but when he listened closely, it seemed to recede. But when he was drowning in the agony of his soul being torn, the voice would draw near again.

"They are immense, their bodies strong, their nature savage and fierce."

"Their intelligence is low, and they fear the sun."

"They fear, so they are petrified, corroded, transformed."

"They prostrate themselves on the ground, praying to commune with their ancestors!"

"They seek wisdom, seeking to inherit their ancestors' understanding of the world, their exploration of the soul."

"They wield great stone tools... they huddle in wind-swept ice caves... they sing ancient war songs..."

"..."

All pain comes from the soul, from the fear of the unknown.

Every giant who possessed the Titan Form held within them an endless, dormant power. In this state of his soul being constantly torn asunder, Orion, through his bloodline, through his Titan Form, returned to the ancient past.

He saw the hardships of his ancestors.

He saw them, in a dark and chaotic era before the coming of the gods, walking into the future, forever accompanied by pain, but never broken by it.

Chapter 855: The Titan's Sigil

"I heard it!"

"When night fell, someone gently called my name."

"In that age of suffering and hardship, they forged an invincible soul with resilience and faith."

"Spirit and soul... they shine brightest in the crucible of pain and suffering."

"Chix, I thank you for your gift."

The screaming Orion slowly rose from the ground. On his forehead, the mark of an ancestral soul had appeared—the sigil of a Titan. It was the image of two giant, crossed tusks, a symbol of life's tenacity and of hope for the future. At the same time, it was an emblem of an indomitable, unyielding will.

Orion was different now. He was different from an ordinary giant. From within his own bloodline, he had awakened the Titan's Sigil, received the will of an ancestral soul, and inherited a legacy of spirit. As Orion understood it, he had inherited a legacy of pain.

"How do you want to die?" Orion's gaze fixed on Chix, his eyes now filled with a fortitude that seemed to transcend time. In the face of such resilience, pain was merely a daily routine.

"Impossible!" Chix shrieked. "How can you be standing there, perfectly fine? I don't believe it!"

He redoubled the speed of his attacks, putting his full strength into every swing of the scythe against the copy.

But no matter how mercilessly the copy was cut, Orion stood motionless, his face devoid of pain, not a single cry escaping his lips.

"This feeling is rather complex," Orion said with a strange smile. He suddenly raised his hand and made a choking gesture in the empty air.

On the other side of the arena, Chix, in the middle of swinging his scythe, suddenly found that the Orion-copy's hand had shot out and seized him by the throat. A terror he had never before experienced washed over him—a trembling that began in his very soul.

Then, the copy released him. Chix gasped for air, but before he could react, he froze. A powerful suction force was emanating from the copy's hand. He realized with horror that something inside him was being pulled out, piece by piece.

By the time he understood what it was, it was too late. It was his soul being extracted—a translucent, struggling, wailing soul.

On the other side of the arena, Orion's figure flashed, bypassing the Flesh Golem in the center and appearing at Chix's side.

"Why don't you have a taste of your soul being torn apart?" Orion asked. He lifted his trident, fire and lightning crackling at its tip. Without hesitation, he thrust it forward.

BOOM!

Zzzzzzt!

"AAIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!!!"

The sound was a mixture of a soul screaming in fire and electricity—a sound both wretched and beautiful. Chix's soul lasted only a moment in the storm before it was burned away to nothing.

Is he really dead?

Orion lowered his trident, gazing at the unmoving soul-form in the distance. That was Chix's body, the physical shell that the Death-Soul race used to house their souls and their will.

After a long moment of thought, Orion commanded the copy at his side to approach the soul-form. Step by step, the copy moved forward and, to Orion's surprise and delight, began to merge into the empty vessel. And then, a flood of information about the soul-form poured through the spiritual connection and into Orion's mind.

"Hahaha... Good! Excellent!" he laughed. "Very good indeed! From now on, your name is Death-Soul's Touch."

How could it not be good? The copy had merged with Chix's soul-form. This vessel, with its explosive melee capabilities, had just become Orion's newest avatar. As for why this had happened, Orion couldn't be entirely sure, but he understood the chain of cause and effect.

The cause: Chix had used a soul-based secret technique, combining Orion's blood with his Tentacles of Death to create a copy linked to Orion's soul, intending to destroy the copy to annihilate Orion's spirit and win the duel.

The effect: While his soul was being torn apart, Orion's Titan Form had allowed him to connect with the will of his ancient ancestors. From them, he had inherited the will of an ancestral soul.

In short, he had awakened a new giant racial ability. This ability was called the Titan's Sigil, and its aspect was Pain. Through this ancestral will, he had unexpectedly gained control of the copy and learned some rudimentary applications of soul power.

"A pity there was no victor's cache," Orion sighed, though there was no real disappointment on his face. Gaining a peak-tier Archlord avatar was the best possible prize. To be precise, it was the shell of a peak-Archlord. Its actual combat effectiveness would depend on the strength of the soul Orion placed within it, as the soul-form's power was directly linked to the soul's intensity.

"Chix is dead. You're next," Orion said. He had his new Death-Soul's Touch avatar stand before him, and man and avatar turned to face the Flesh Golem in the center of the arena. With its movements restricted to its domain, the peak-Archlord guardian would actually be quite easy to deal with.

"Kill!" Orion roared, and he and his new avatar charged forward.

In the Titanion Realm, on the Silvercurrent Sea, at the Serpent Isle.

Orion's mirrored avatar looked at the newly constructed, tower-like castle with great interest.

"We will call it the Serathar Spire," he had declared. Lysinthia had begged him to name the castle, and as for the city still being built around it, she had named it Jynx Beacon. Jynx was the name of the Serpent Isle, and "Beacon" represented a starting point, a symbol of her hope for the Gorgon people. This was their new beginning.

"The Serathar Spire... the name the Master chose is so beautiful. It feels like it has a kind of supreme presence," Lysinthia had said.

With the castle established, the territory core set in place, and the intra-realm teleportation array activated, the city of Jynx Beacon was finally on the right track.

"My Lord!"

With a shimmer of spatial energy, Gustalon's figure appeared before Orion.

"Until Lysinthia herself advances to the Lord tier, you will stand guard here for her," Orion commanded. "This is the Serpent Isle, in the Silvercurrent Sea region southwest of the Black Forest. Your only duty is to ensure the safety of this city. You need not concern yourself with anything else."

He pointed to the beacon-like castle, then to Lysinthia, explaining the situation to Gustalon.

"As you command! I guarantee the mission's completion!"

Orion nodded, then turned his head to look at Lysinthia. "Well then, I will await your good news back in the Horde's lands."

Before Lysinthia could reply, Orion's avatar activated the targeted teleportation function of his Boots of the War-Tyrant and returned to the Emerald Dream Realm.

With his brothers in the Champions Alliance focused on the duel, the Dusk Continent needed his Archlord avatar to stand guard and patrol.

Chapter 856: Return to the Void

In the Dueling Space, on the third level.

The sword light gradually receded into the darkness, but within that darkness, a brilliant radiance began to shine.

"How ironic," Arthas said, sheathing his sword as he calmly regarded the old man before him. "The Death-Soul race are a people of darkness, yet you have comprehended the laws of light."

"Light can illuminate the darkness. When there is nowhere to hide, light can make the darkness seem even deeper," the old man said, his demeanor serene, as if their fierce battle had not caused him the slightest surprise or exertion. "You must understand, darkness and light are not in conflict. They promote and supplement each other. Just like you and your sword."

The old man studied Arthas. "Rather than mocking me, I sense that you are afraid of me."

He paused, reconsidering. "Or perhaps not fear. A kind of regret. To reveal such a negative emotion in a duel like this can only mean one thing: you are not confident that you can defeat me. Am I right?"

He was self-assured, his eyes shining with a light that symbolized victory.

"Perhaps you're right," Arthas admitted. "A newcomer to the demigod realm like me is still far too lacking compared to an old fellow like you."

He was far too lacking. It was an inevitability. The power gap between the six realms of demigods was as vast as the heavens and the earth. Even within the same realm, the power one could exhibit varied immensely based on personal accumulation.

"So, you are ready to surrender?" the old man asked. "If so, it would be to both our benefits. A will-projection, once expended, is difficult to re-condense. It is not a true life form, after all, merely an expression of will and power."

"Surrender?" Arthas scoffed. "Are you joking with me? Have you ever seen a member of the Champions Alliance surrender without a fight?" He shook his head, his will firm, his gaze turning sharp once more.

"True enough. Your group only has those who die fighting, never those who surrender," the old man acknowledged. "Unless..."

He did not finish the sentence. He was referring to the two traitors, a taboo topic for the Champions Alliance, two beings hunted by the entire faction.

"Let's continue," Arthas said, raising his sword and cutting off the old man's reminiscence. He focused his divine power, and a soul-searing flame ignited upon his white bone-forged sword, crackling ominously.

"It seems this will be a battle of attrition," the old man sighed. "Unless I destroy you, this duel will not have a result."

He took a step forward, ignoring the immensely powerful sword in Arthas's hand. Behind him, a burning phantom of pure light began to manifest, illuminating the entire dueling space.

"Light is everywhere!" a majestic, authoritative voice boomed. "It is in every corner, at every moment. It is in your heart, and in your eyes."

The entire dueling space was bathed in a brilliant radiance. For an undead being like Arthas, such light was his natural enemy, the foe he hated most.

"White Bone—Fatal Strike!" Arthas's resolute voice rang out. Man and sword became one, the sword an extension of his will.

The next instant, the dueling ground flashed, an alternating interplay of sword light and holy light.

In the Dueling Space, on the first level.

When Orion, having defeated his opponent and the Flesh Golem, arrived, he found the place empty. Taking down the Flesh Golem had been simple enough; he and his Death-Soul's Touch avatar had merely taken turns entering the guardian's territory and inflicting damage. Before long, the Golem had been destroyed.

To the point, unlike the fifth level where Orion had fought, this first level was a wide, circular arena, with no restrictions or guardians. The air was thick with all types of elemental energy. In other words, any combatant here could unleash their full power. If the lower levels were the hands of a clock, this first level was its face.

Sensing no other presence, Orion immediately entered his Ghostly Steps state. He began to regulate his condition, waiting for either enemy or ally to arrive.

In the Dueling Space, on the second level.

The magical duel between the Death-Soul madman and the mage, Deputy Commander Edward, was also reaching its end. But it was an endgame that left the Deputy Commander feeling helpless. His opponent was an obstinate, paranoid, and reckless lunatic. Encountering such a foe in the dueling grounds was the height of bad luck.

"I know that you people from the Champions Alliance are insane and persistent," the madman cackled. "To be honest, I quite like people like you. But more than liking you, I prefer to fight you. A zealot and a madman—a perfect match, wouldn't you say? Hahaha..."

The Death-Soul madman was trapped within the Deputy Commander's magical formation. But the immensely powerful formation had not killed him. Instead, the fiend was using the formation itself to pin the Deputy Commander in place.

"Edward, you probably didn't expect this, did you? My will-projection is actually hosted within a twisted soul. And I've equipped this phantom with a series of terrifying abilities. Don't be impatient, the real show is just beginning!"

The madman's words were many, his actions unpredictable. The Deputy Commander stared at the lunatic in his formation, his expression extremely grave.

"Soul Adsorption!"

"Death-Soul Storm!"

"Death-Soul Bulwark!"

"Soul Siphon!"

From within the magical formation, the madman's soul split into four seeds, which spread out to form a Death-Soul Devouring Formation. The Soul Adsorption acted as a vortex, absorbing and converting the magic of the Deputy Commander's formation.

The Death-Soul Storm was a counter-measure, a tempest that constantly cut away at the formation. The Death-Soul Bulwark was even more outrageous; it grew along the boundary of the original magical formation, creating a soul-barrier that now trapped the Deputy Commander inside as well. And the Soul Siphon was the most terrifying of all; it was silently draining the Deputy Commander's mental will.

In other words, the madman was borrowing the Deputy Commander's own faith energy, intending to use his enemy's power to defeat him. Such an outrageous demigod technique was beyond what even a demigod's true body could likely accomplish.

"You are demigods of the Champions Alliance! If you don't prepare some real killing moves, how can you expect to win the Relics?" the madman shrieked. "Right? Hahaha... The Relics... the Relics... the Relics will belong to the Death-Soul race in the end... they will be MINE!"

The madman grew more and more hysterical, the twisted soul that housed him becoming increasingly unstable.

"Truly a madman," Deputy Commander Edward sighed, having already made his decision.

"Since you call yourself a madman, have you ever seen something—or someone—even more insane than you? If not, you're about to!"

"Return to the Void—Annihilate!"

Chapter 857: One Decisive Blow

In the Dueling Space, on the fourth level.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

It was the sound of sword light. Heard up close, it was like the clash of metal on stone; from a distance, it was like the ringing of a great gong.

"An excellent, all-consuming flame!" Alexander's cold voice rang out from within the spirit sword. The sword itself was now lighter and thinner than before. "Thank you. You have given this spirit sword the chance to advance further."

Lighter meant no impurities. Thinner meant its edge was sharper.

"They say one should see a task through to the end. Since you wished to forge a sword, then use your life to christen this future sacred blade!"

Zing!

The spirit sword hummed, and the ultimate fire that had been trying to smelt it was, as if it were oxygen, inhaled into the body of the blade.

"Be sundered!"

The spirit sword flew, striking at the Steel-Soul Spirit with the speed of a thunderclap. Though the sword was fast, the Steel-Soul Spirit was a special being. As a creature of pure steel-soul, it possessed a passive defense. A shield of raw steel manifested, blocking the searingly hot blade.

"It's not so simple to kill me!"

Alexander did not deign to reply to the Spirit's roar. The power of the spirit sword was swelling once more.

"Alexander's Edge!"

When the spirit sword's power reached its absolute peak, Alexander's voice, cold as the grave, echoed. He had sealed three killing moves within this sword avatar. Alexander's Edge was the first. As the technique was unleashed, the incomparably sharp spirit sword sliced through the steel-soul shield and, with an unstoppable momentum, cleaved its target in two.

In the Dueling Space, on the first level.

The moment the teleportation array lit up, Orion could hear his own heart pounding in his chest. A beam of light shone forth, and within it stood a will-projection so faint it looked as though a strong gust of wind could blow it away.

It was the aura of an unfamiliar demigod.

Orion's heart sank, a bitter taste filling his mouth. Which of my brothers was annihilated? The Deputy Commander, or Arthas?

As his mind raced, the old man's voice echoed in his ears.

"A lower Archlord? Are you a new monster from the Champions Alliance?"

Orion was in his Ghostly Steps state. He suppressed his aura and stilled his movements, not daring to make the slightest motion.

"Under the illumination of light, never mind a ghost, not even a demigod can hide." The will-projection standing in the light stared at Orion, its eyes filled with a smiling expression. But to Orion, that smile was filled with mockery and condescension.

He saw through my skill? That was Orion's first reaction, and he quickly confirmed it. Faced with the demigod phantom's gaze, Orion exited Ghostly Steps, his own eyes filled with grim caution.

"My apologies. Perhaps I startled you," the old man said. "May I know your name? I wish to know who it was that could slay one of our Death-Soul race's three most outstanding Archlords."

Orion didn't speak. His Death-Soul's Touch avatar stepped out from his body and stood beside him, silently staring at the demigod phantom.

"So it was Chix," the old man murmured. "To think even his soul-form was seized!"

Orion sensed it—the moment the demigod phantom saw the avatar, its blurry form had fluctuated minutely. It meant that Orion's victory over Chix had dealt the demigod a significant shock. The appearance of the captured soul-form seemed to have overturned his entire understanding of the situation.

"In that case, I have no choice but to slay you and reclaim what belongs to our Death-Soul race." The old man's voice turned to ice. His attitude toward Orion was the polar opposite of how he had treated Arthas.

Arthas was a demigod, a peer deserving of mutual respect. But Orion was a lower Archlord. Even as a member of the Champions Alliance, in the old man's eyes, he was nothing.

Unless one entered the demigod realm, one was ultimately an ant. This was the consensus among all demigods regarding those beneath them.

The old man took a step forward, and boundless light began to spread out from him like the sun's rays, shining down on Orion.

Zing!

At that moment, the hum of a sword sounded from the teleportation array. A spirit sword flew out, landing before Orion.

Just as Alexander's spirit sword avatar came to a stop, five massive rumbles echoed from below. The dueling spaces from the second level down to the sixth all collapsed, turning to utter nothingness. This anomaly was, of course, sensed by the old demigod, Orion, and Alexander.

"It seems the plan went exceptionally well," the demigod phantom sighed, a hint of relief in his voice. "That old fellow Edward and the madman took each other out."

The collapse of the dueling spaces meant the duelists within no longer existed. They were dead. According to the rules, two more combatants should have arrived in this top-level arena. Since they had not, the only possible outcome was mutual destruction. It was an easy conclusion to draw.

"As for you two," the old man said, turning his attention back to them. "To have made it this far, your strength is impressive. You have the potential to reach the demigod realm."

This was not empty praise. That none of the Death-Soul race's three most powerful and talented Archlords had made it out of their duels was an astounding outcome. If these two Archlords before him joined forces, they might actually be able to defeat his will-projection.

"Now, it is our turn," the old man's voice became solemn, his focus absolute.

On the other side, Alexander was communicating with Orion via telepathy.

"Listen to me. This old man is an even more terrifying existence than the Deputy Commander. Our usual methods and trump cards against Archlords will have little effect on him. Rather than a drawn-out battle, let's risk everything on a single, decisive blow."

Orion agreed with this tactic. There was a fundamental difference between an Archlord and a demigod. A demigod controlled divine power and the very rules of existence; they could not be harmed by the killing moves of an ordinary Archlord.

"Bro, whatever your plan is, just say the word. I'll follow your lead," Orion replied directly. When facing a demigod phantom, Alexander had more experience and was better equipped to deal with it.

"In a moment, grasp the spirit sword. Pour all of your peak power into it," Alexander's voice was cold, the rhythm of his words fast but steady. "Aim for the demigod phantom and unleash a single, all-out strike."

"I have sealed two killing moves within this sword. One is 'Alexander's Flaw-Seeker,' specifically for finding an enemy's weakness. The other is 'Alexander's Bane,' which specializes in destroying will-projections. Hurry..."

In the distance, after the successive collapses of the lower dueling spaces, the old demigod began to walk toward Orion and Alexander. With every step he took, the light radiating from behind him grew one degree brighter. By the time he was almost upon them, he had become a miniature sun.

Orion sacrificed the last five Lord's Stones he had brought, activated all of his enhancement skills, seized the spirit sword, and with a great roar, swung.

Sword. Light. From blinding radiance to utter extinction.

Chapter 858: You've Lost Your Fangs

In Stoneheart City, upon the great throne of the castle.

Orion slowly opened his eyes. A sharp light flashed within them before he slowly closed them again. He immediately immersed his consciousness in the Survivor's Platform, entering the Champions Alliance public channel.

Edward: Alexander, Hulk, well done.

Besides the participants themselves, the first to know the results of the duel were always the Commander and Deputy Commander. The Commander was still in his slumber and would almost never make an appearance for anything but the most critical matters. For Deputy Commander Edward to say this, it was clear he already knew the final outcome and had the winnings from the wager in hand.

Arthas: My apologies. I was unable to drag my opponent down with me.

His opponent had been strong, and Arthas was still a newly ascended demigod. He would not run from his failure, especially not in a matter like this. The loss of face, the admission of defeat—Arthas would confront them head-on. Facing one's own failures and shortcomings was a required lesson for a cunning old veteran.

Leonidas: My Void Dragon is gone.

Leonidas: That was a Void Dragon! It cost me countless years of effort and resources to cultivate!

Leonidas was genuinely heartbroken, so much so that he didn't even have the heart to tease his defeated friend Arthas.

Hulk: I'm fine. It was mainly Alexander's two killing moves. They were just too damn incredible.

Orion did not dare take the credit. Though he had given it his all, the one who had truly landed the finishing blow on the demigod's will-projection was Alexander's spirit sword. Alexander's final two techniques were truly powerful, in no way inferior to Orion's own Ghost Dragon Summoning or Blood Sacrifice.

Alexander: It wasn't that I am so powerful. That will-projection was already crippled. The demigod was running on fumes after defeating the skeleton.

Even if Alexander hadn't said it, everyone could have guessed. In a battle between demigod phantoms, a decisive victory usually came only after a long war of attrition. After the old man from the Death-Soul race had defeated Arthas, he couldn't have been in good condition. His confidence had come from his conviction, and from underestimating the combined strike of Alexander and Orion. If he had faced either one of them alone, his chances of winning would have been much higher.

Kraken: What did you big shots get up to? Why all the humble-bragging?

Isabella: I smell treasure, or at least a good story!

Kraken and Isabella were not privy to the details of the duel in the Crucible of the Gods. The Commander had organized it not just to secure some benefits for the team, but for his own purposes.

First, both Deputy Commander Edward and Arthas had become demigods within the last century. They lacked experience in demigod-level combat. The duel in the Crucible had been arranged, in part, for them, with Relics as the prize.

Second, Alexander and Leonidas had been at the peak of the Archlord tier for too long. They needed a catalyst to break through. Such a catalyst was most easily found in battle against peers of the same level.

Whether Leonidas and Alexander had found their spark for ascension, no one knew. But Alexander had gained a massive benefit: his spirit sword avatar now had the potential to become a Relic.

In the future, a Relic avatar could very well become a demigod-level avatar with strength no less than his true body. This benefit was in no way inferior to finding the key to becoming a demigod.

And of course, there was Orion. In this duel, he too had unexpectedly acquired a new Archlord avatar. It was something he himself had never anticipated.

Leonidas: Little kids shouldn't ask about adult matters.

Leonidas: Once you're Archlords, your big bro will take you out to raise some hell.

Seeing Leonidas's message, Orion's lips curled into a smirk. His brother's words were definitely dripping with ill intent. Knowing Leonidas, when Kraken and Isabella finally reached the Archlord tier, he would probably lead them into some horrible mess.

Alexander: Are you planning to lead them to a reckless death? A total party wipe?

As expected, Orion wasn't the only one who thought so.

Leonidas: Is that a veiled jab?

Leonidas: Hmph... If I hadn't self-destructed my Void Dragon avatar, you would have had to face that disgusting freak who only knows how to blow up souls.

It was obvious that Leonidas, having fought his opponent to a draw, was feeling sensitive. To him, Alexander's comment about a "reckless death" sounded like a slight against his strength, an accusation that he had failed to defeat his enemy.

Alexander: Let's not talk about the skeleton and the Deputy Commander. We're not qualified to judge demigod battles.

Alexander: But among the Archlords on the team, you were the only one who didn't make it to the final round.

Alexander: Leonidas, you've gotten old. So old you've lost your fangs.

It was a sharp blow, a deliberate taunt from Alexander. Of course, to Orion, it looked like a form of boasting. Alexander was flaunting his own success at Leonidas, perhaps even goading him.

Leonidas: ARGH... THAT PISSES ME OFF! COME ON, ALEXANDER, I'LL FIGHT YOU FOR THREE HUNDRED ROUNDS!

Alexander: For real? You're not chickening out?

Leonidas: Chicken out my ass! We're both peak Archlords, you think I'm afraid of you?

Seeing this, Orion finally understood Alexander's intent. As a good brother, he quickly tried to intervene.

Hulk: Leonidas, think before you act!

Leonidas: Think my ass! Bro, are you saying I'm old too?

Hulk: Bro, Alexander's spirit sword avatar is genuinely brutal. I has personally felt its power.

It was true. The memory of the spirit sword's power still gave Orion a slight shudder.

Leonidas: It's just a peak Archlord. How brutal can it be?

Leonidas was skeptical. He, Alexander, and Arthas had all been peak Archlords together in the past. It wasn't as if they hadn't sparred before, or as if he hadn't seen Alexander in action.

Alexander: Brutal might not be the right word. But I am confident I can turn my spirit sword avatar into a Relic within a hundred years.

Leonidas: Really? No way!

Alexander: It's fake. Let's have a duel. Only then can I be sure if I'm hallucinating.

Leonidas: ...

Leonidas wasn't stupid. And knowing Alexander's sullenly cool personality, he knew his friend wouldn't make empty boasts. So, Leonidas didn't reply.

Alexander: Three hundred rounds. You in or not? I can come to you.

Leonidas: Later, when you have time, come with me to the Dragon's Boneyard again. My Void Dragon can't have been sacrificed for nothing.

Leonidas continued to dodge the challenge. Losing his avatar and failing to defeat his enemy was one thing. Getting thrashed by his friend right after would put his already foul mood beyond saving.

Alexander: Just call me 'dear big brother.'

Leonidas: Get lost!

Chapter 859: Fated to be Yours

This was the usual bickering between friends of the same level; even Orion couldn't get a word in, let alone Kraken and Isabella. The two of them could only let their imaginations run wild, trying to guess what their Archlord big shots had been up to.

After a short while, the Deputy Commander spoke up, putting an end to Leonidas and Alexander's squabbling.

Edward: I have sent the items to you all. Check for them yourselves.

Edward: Arthas and I will be entering a period of slumber. It won't be for too long.

Edward: My storm avatar will carry a will-projection to stand guard over the Emerald Dream Realm. Alexander and Leonidas, you two keep an eye on things there.

Edward and Arthas had gained a great deal from this duel. Besides each receiving a Relic, they had also acquired a wealth of combat experience that they needed time to digest. Furthermore, both had lost a powerful will-projection in the battle; they were injured and needed time to re-condense them.

Leonidas: Don't worry, Deputy Commander. I'll watch over it.

Alexander: Leave it to us.

Exiting the public channel, Orion saw he had received a private message from Arthas.

"Well done. If you hadn't won, the momentum would have shifted. Alexander might not have been able to handle the enemy on his own."

When it came to Orion, Arthas was pleasantly surprised. In the beginning, he hadn't had particularly high expectations for him. When he first introduced Orion to the Champions Alliance, his only real hope was that Orion wouldn't fall behind Kraken. He had assumed that as long as Orion survived, he would one day reach the Archlord tier and become a true partner.

However, after seeing Orion in the Godforsaken Land, Arthas had changed his mind. But no matter how quickly his opinion changed, it couldn't keep up with the speed of Orion's own growth.

From the moment the Champions Alliance had begun its defense against the fungal creatures, Orion's rise had been like a rocket. While Arthas himself was slumbering, Orion had ascended to Archlord.

"Hehe, it was everyone's effort," Orion replied. "Leonidas suffered a big loss this time. His Void Dragon's abilities were very special; it's a shame to lose it."

Orion was well aware of his own strengths and weaknesses. In this duel, everyone had contributed. No matter how much Leonidas and Alexander taunted each other, everyone knew the truth: unless it was the absolute last resort, who would willingly self-destruct an avatar like the Void Dragon? The Deputy Commander and Arthas had even had their demigod will-projections annihilated, a testament to the intensity of their battles.

"I need to enter a slumber to digest what I've gained and re-condense my will-projection," Arthas continued. "If you need to find me, you can go to Bone City in the northern part of the Valkorath Realm."

This was the benefit of having true comrades. Arthas did not hide his resting place, a clear sign of his trust in Orion. If Orion ever truly found himself in trouble and needed help, he wouldn't be left without a door to knock on.

"Take this with you. It will be useful at some point."

To Orion's surprise, Arthas initiated a trade, sending him a white jade skull.

Orion took the skull in his hand and, with a slight probe of his senses, understood what it was. It contained one of Arthas's demigod phantoms.

It was a trump card, a gift from his mentor. With this in hand, Orion wouldn't have to be overly nervous even if he encountered an ordinary demigod phantom.

He had never possessed a trump card like this. It was something Arthas would never have given him if he didn't trust him completely.

To put it in perspective, Orion had been a member of the Champions Alliance for some time now. Both the Commander and the Deputy Commander were demigods, but neither had ever bestowed upon him a trump card like a will-projection. Trust was one thing, but the depth of the relationship was another.

Of course, the blade flashes the Commander had gifted him were also very useful, but blade flashes and a will-projection were two entirely different concepts. A demigod phantom like this contained a great deal of Arthas's own faith energy; the Commander's blade flashes did not.

"Thank you, my brother. I won't be polite then!" Orion said, his heart filled with joy. Arthas was the one who had guided him onto this path. Compared to Leonidas and Alexander, their bond had an extra layer of intimacy.

"Mm. You should also take some time to consolidate your gains. When I awaken, you will come with me to invade a large Godforsaken Land. I've had my eye on that world for a long time!"

Hearing this, another smile spread across Orion's face. Arthas truly understood him. He knew that as a new Archlord, Orion needed vast territories to gather faith. By leading an invasion, Arthas was helping his protégé(disciple) build his foundation.

"Sounds good!"

After finishing his private chat with Arthas, Orion finally had time to check the items the Deputy Commander had sent him. There were two chests.

Orion noticed that ever since the appearance of survivor treasure chests, both the Commander and the Deputy Commander had developed a fondness for giving out rewards in boxes.

He opened the first chest. Inside were twenty fist-sized spheres of world essence. This was good stuff. Not only could Orion use it himself, but he could also distribute it to his subordinates in the Horde who needed it. Additionally, it could serve as nourishment for Violet and her children. However, compared to a World Fragment, this world essence was inferior in both quality and quantity.

Putting the world essence away, Orion opened the other chest.

According to what Leonidas had told him, a victory in the duel guaranteed at least one piece of legendary equipment. Orion was filled with anticipation.

But when he opened the chest and saw the purple lightning pearl inside, a pearl the size of a great boulder, he was momentarily stunned.

"A... a Relic?"

He rubbed his eyes, and after confirming he wasn't hallucinating, his heart began to pound in his chest.

Three Relics were wagered. The Deputy Commander got one, Arthas got one... and the last one fell into my hands?

It was hard to believe. In his mind, the Relic should have gone to Alexander or Leonidas. In the duel, they had played a much larger role. And those two brothers, with their deep resources, could make far better use of a Relic than he could.

Orion stared at the Relic in the chest, lost in thought for a moment before sending a message to the Deputy Commander.

"Deputy Commander, I'd like to ask about something."

Before Orion could even type his question, the Deputy Commander seemed to guess what it was about.

"The last Relic ended up with you?"

Seeing the reply, it seemed as if the old man himself didn't know the Relic would fall into Orion's hands.

"Deputy Commander, you didn't know?" Orion could only ask directly at this point.

"The final Relic... according to the rules, I randomly placed it into one of the three chests. Since neither Alexander nor Leonidas have contacted me, it must have fallen into your hands.

Besides myself and the skeleton, the final Relic was distributed randomly. That you received it means it was fated to be yours. Besides, you contributed to the victory, Orion. Just accept it."

Chapter 860: Pillars of Power

After reading the Deputy Commander's explanation, Orion finally understood. He felt a wave of relief, followed by a slight pang of disappointment.

It wasn't that the Commander and Deputy Commander favored him; he had simply been luckier than his two brothers, Alexander and Leonidas.

"Understood. I have no more questions," Orion replied to the Deputy Commander, the surprise and vague worry in his heart vanishing.

"Good. While I am in slumber, make sure to supervise little Elara. See that she meditates and learns more magical knowledge," the Deputy Commander added. "That girl is clever, but she also loves to play. You must be strict with her."

"..."

After listening to a bit more of the mentor's nagging about his disciple, Orion exited the Survivor's Platform.

Hah.

He took a deep breath, a sense of unreality washing over him. The rewards for winning this duel had been immense. The Relic, especially, was a tremendous asset for both him and the Stoneheart Horde.

"You're awake."

Hearing his deep breath from outside the hall, Lilith slowly walked in.

Orion looked up and patted his thigh. With a shy expression, a mixture of reluctance and willingness, Lilith sat down on his lap.

"When did you get here?"

"I've been here for a while. I saw you were in meditation, so I waited outside."

Orion lowered his head, burying his face in Lilith's hair and inhaling the familiar fragrance of his wife.

"The familiar scent of Mita grass. This is your scent."

Lilith didn't speak, a blissful smile on her face. She leaned back against Orion's chest, finding a comfortable position and relaxing against her husband.

"Are you here because of Pallas? Because of the dragon egg?" As her husband, Orion quickly guessed the reason for her visit.

"Mm. Are you really going to give that dragon egg to Pallas?"

Dragon eggs were a rarity across the entire continent of Utessar. Ostensibly, only the dragons themselves possessed them, and they were never traded externally.

For Orion to bestow a dragon egg upon Pallas was, of course, a gesture of profound kindness and love.

But if the outside world found out that Pallas had hatched a dragon, what kind of uproar would it cause?

And how would the dragons themselves react?

Hatching the egg would be simple for Lilith, a master Beast Tamer, but the act could destabilize the entire continent.

The Stoneheart Horde had finally entered a period of peace, and Lilith didn't want this matter to bring trouble to their clan.

"Hatching the egg... will it...?"

Orion bent his head and kissed her earlobe.

"It's of no concern," he murmured. "You just focus on hatching it. As for what the other races think, let them think what they will. And as for the dragons, they know better than anyone whether they've lost an egg, and what their own status is in other worlds."

He spoke with an air of complete indifference, his voice filled with a confidence Lilith found irresistible.

She turned her head and took the initiative to kiss him.

A long time later, they separated.

"It's just one dragon egg," Orion said dismissively. "Never mind Frostsire, not even a visiting demigod can do anything about it."

He now possessed a Relic, and the demigod phantom Arthas had given him.

As long as a demigod's true form did not personally appear, all enemies were paper tigers.

And even if one did, once Orion revealed his trump cards, they would be forced to reconsider their options.

In a word, Orion and the Stoneheart Horde were now firmly established in this world.

As he spoke, his hands expertly unfastened Lilith's clothing, and he pulled her into his embrace.

...(omitted)

An unknown amount of time passed. Orion held the spent and languid Lilith, letting her rest against him.

"Erect a statue of me in Stoneheart City. Put it in the center of the main square. I have a use for it," he said. "The statue should be open for the people to worship freely. Whenever the Horde has a large event, it can be held near the statue."

Having advanced to Archlord, Orion's need for faith was immense.

This was not something he had hidden from the high-ranking elders of the horde. Everyone understood that faith was crucial for both Orion and the Horde.

The Wardens, in particular, being at the Legendary tier, could already sense faith energy.

Furthermore, the Relic he had just obtained needed to be baptized and nurtured with faith, and the statue would serve as its vessel.

"Should it be even bigger than the one in Blackstone City?"

"Mm, two or three times bigger will be fine."

"Should we have one built in the other cities of the horde as well? That way, the citizens in the remote territories will know who it is that gave them their current good lives."

Orion did not object to Lilith's suggestion.

By bringing this matter to her, he was effectively delegating the task to the succubus race.

In the end, it would be Delilah who would allocate the resources and complete the construction. After spending so long with the succubus twin sisters, Orion had come to understand the special connection between them.

"Do you have the confidence to break through to the Lord tier(Legendary Level)?" he asked softly.

Both Lilith and Delilah had reached the peak of the Alpha tier, but whether they could make the final leap to Lord, even Orion couldn't be sure.

Among the original core members of the Stoneheart Horde, the succubus sisters, Onyx, Dirtclaw, and Lorelia had all reached the Alpha peak and possessed the qualifications to attempt the breakthrough.

Others, like Rendall, Earthshaker, Thundar, Dace, and Rockwell, were unfortunately still in the late-Alpha stage.

However, the more recently joined giants, Drakthul and Grulbane, had also reached the peak.

Lilith's body stiffened slightly. She didn't speak.

To be honest, the most practical problem facing the succubus sisters right now was that their power had fallen behind.

The core alliance of races—the succubi, buffalofolk, obsidian golems, and even the gnolls—desperately needed a Legendary-tier expert to stand on the grand stage and protect their interests.

The current five Wardens—Lumi, Gustalon, Soraya, Clymene, and Lycanor—had no direct ties to this core bloc.

"Let go of all your burdens," Orion said gently. "Go for it with all your heart, without any hesitation. I have your back. I hope that you can walk with me, further and further."

He genuinely hoped Lilith could advance.

The wife of the lord of the Stoneheart Horde rightfully should be a high-level existence.

The political situation demanded it, and Lilith herself needed it.

"Orion..."

Moved, Lilith lowered her head and began to kiss his body.

The next morning, Orion rose unusually early. He was holding Prince Pallas in his hand like a little chick.

He hadn't called for Elara, but the little girl's senses were sharp.

She teleported sleepily onto Orion's neck, her eyes still half-closed as she looked around.

"Daddy, where are you and little brother going?"

Orion reached up and stroked her head.

"To the youth camp. It's time for Pallas to join the collective training for the Horde's younglings."