

Titan King 911

Chapter 911: Little M

"Instead of worrying about problems that are far outside your reach, you should focus on the here and now," Orion said. "We're about to reach the front lines. You'll be leading the vanguard into battle. The smart play is to have a few aces up your sleeve and an exit strategy."

Isabella rolled her eyes. She was starting to realize that Orion sounded more and more like her father and Alexander—a total nag.

"You three as well. Prepare for battle," Orion said, turning to the figures standing in a line behind him.

Vexis, Clymene, and Gustalon stood at attention, guarding him.

All the other Wardens of the Stoneheart Horde were tied up with other missions and couldn't be mobilized. Soraya and Lorelia were defending Red Moon Valley and its teleportation array. Lumi had returned to the northern ice fields to also keep watch over Thunderwood Forest. The blood elf Lycanor was guarding the lighthouse on Serpent Isle, assisting Lysinthia with her own campaign. Even his abyssal dragon had been dispatched to the port of City of the Guardian.

These three—Vexis, Clymene, and Gustalon—were the only Legendary-level powerhouses Orion currently had available for this campaign. And Vexis was only here as a reinforcement sent by Arthas.

The three Wardens bowed, their faces alight with anticipation for the coming war.

"Don't worry," Isabella huffed, her pride stung. "I have my colossal dragon. As long as no arch lord enters the field, I guarantee I'll sweep the dragon forces and bring us back the most battle achievements and spoils."

Orion ignored her boasting. He looked up at his own aerial units trailing behind the magnificent colossal dragon. The motley collection of various bird species looked not just disorganized, but frankly, a little pathetic.

Our air force has always been our weak point, he thought with a sigh. The thought of the Flying Fish Mayflies that Lilith was still cultivating back home brought him a sliver of both comfort and impatience.

Seven days later, on a palace floating in the middle of the sea, Orion and Isabella found Leonidas lounging under a sunshade, gnawing on a roasted fish.

"Haha! Bro! Good to see you! We're fighting side-by-side again!" Leonidas gestured with the fish to a deck chair next to him, inviting Orion to join him and relax.

"Boss, where's my seat?" Isabella demanded, suddenly flustered. With Orion about to lounge next to Leonidas, she was left standing between them like one of the maidservants waiting to serve them.

"You're the vanguard," Orion said before Leonidas could reply. "Shouldn't you be leading your troops on the front line instead of slacking off back here?"

He beckoned, and Vexis and Clymene stepped forward. Orion gestured toward Isabella, and the two Wardens nodded in understanding. They would accompany her. Gustalon had already been sent out on a separate mission three days prior.

"You haven't forgotten what Alexander told you, have you?" Orion added, playing his trump card just as the hothead looked ready to blow a gasket.

As expected, the mention of Alexander's name made Isabella's face twist into an ugly scowl. She turned on her heel and stormed away.

"So, bro, what's the situation?" Orion asked, finally turning to Leonidas after Isabella had mounted her colossal dragon and departed.

"What do you think? It's all skirmishes and wars of attrition," Leonidas said with a shrug.

Orion looked puzzled. That didn't sound like the dragons' aggressive style.

"Heh heh... relax, bro," Leonidas chuckled. "When you have two factions like ours, both with multiple demigods and deep reserves, this is the norm. Constant, low-level contact."

To be honest, Orion didn't have much experience in these kinds of massive campaigns. It was precisely why the Deputy Commander and Arthas had put Leonidas in charge of directing the war.

Orion grabbed a roasted fish for himself and took a bite, giving Leonidas a look that said, I'm all ears.

"In a war like this, the ones who see the most action are the lord-tier powerhouses," Leonidas explained. "Guys like us, the arch lords? We don't get involved right off the bat unless things get desperate or one of our kids gets killed by the enemy."

"If both sides went all-in from the start, it would just be mutually assured destruction. The only ones who'd profit are the vultures hiding in the shadows, fanning the flames."

As he said this, Leonidas pointed a finger toward the sky, as if to say something was hiding in the clouds.

"Bro, these demigods are all wily old bastards," he continued. "Especially a long-lived race like the dragons. They're sharp as hell. Until the situation becomes clear or the war reaches a turning point, you and I are probably going to be stuck out here on the open sea."

Just as Leonidas finished speaking, Orion sensed a swarm of flying monsters approaching in the distance—creatures that looked like a cross between bats and pterodactyls.

"Gargoyles," Leonidas said, noticing them too. "Makareth's combat troops from the Abyss. You gotta admit, that kid's got some decent stuff. At least he's more reliable than that hothead Isabella."

Orion nodded in complete agreement. Seriously, for this massive war, Isabella had shown up with just her colossal dragon and the clothes on her back. And the worst part was, she still acted like she was hot stuff, ready to dominate the entire battlefield by herself.

The pride of some people, he mused, is etched into their very bones, unchanging no matter the circumstances.

"Hahaha, Big Boss! I knew you'd be here in a day or two! Look what I brought back for you!"

In the distance, Makareth came speeding toward them, riding a devil fish that kicked up waves and spray, cutting a majestic figure. With a final flash of movement, he appeared before them on the palace deck and placed three Dragon Crystals on the round table next to Orion.

Dragon Crystals were the equivalent of a Lord's Stone. In some realms, dragons condensed their power into these instead.

"A gift for me?" Orion asked, looking up at Makareth with genuine curiosity.

"Heh heh, everyone gave me gifts when I joined the group, right? Consider this my return gift to the team."

The gesture was significant. The value of these crystals far exceeded the gift Orion had given him. Orion knew that much. He nodded, picked up one of the crystals, and held it up for Makareth to see.

"Hahaha! Come on, Little M, let's get you some sun!" Leonidas said, producing another sunshade and deck chair. "Once you're rested up, the big bros will take you out to catch a big dragon for a barbecue."

Little M? Orion thought, trying to suppress a twitch. It was one of Leonidas's little quirks—giving everyone diminutive nicknames. Squiddy, Little M, and Little Bro—the last one being Leonidas's name for Orion himself.

"Did you see Isabella on your way back?" Orion asked, passing a roasted fish to Makareth.

"Ran right into her," Makareth grumbled. "That woman... she's terrifyingly reckless! Didn't even ask a single question. Just roared and charged her colossal dragon straight into my gargoyle formation. Her dragon-tongue magic almost wiped out my whole squad."

Chapter 912: The Giant-Spore Blight

Makareth had been about to complain about Isabella, but he caught himself. Thinking better of it, he corrected his tone and called her "sister."

Orion couldn't tell if Isabella had promised him something or if the demon was just a shameless flatterer when he chose to be.

Orion and Leonidas exchanged a look, shaking their heads with resigned amusement. They all treated Isabella like a younger sister—and a formidable one at that—so they tended to cut her a lot of slack.

"Makareth, tell us what you saw out there. What's the situation at the front?" Orion asked. He just couldn't bring himself to call the brawny demon "Little M."

"Right now, it's simple," Makareth said, his demeanor turning serious. "A few dragon lords are leading some Sea Race and dragon beasts, constantly probing our lines, testing our defenses."

"What they didn't count on," he added with a wicked grin, "was just how sharp the scimitar of Demon Makareth truly is." He tossed the two remaining Dragon Crystals in his hand, the spoils of his victories a testament to his power.

"Easy there, kid," Leonidas cautioned. "Don't go provoking one of the ancient ones. If you get cornered, you'll bite off more than you can chew."

Since the Deputy Commander had assigned Makareth to his command, Leonidas had a duty to advise and look after him. It was an unspoken custom within the Champions Alliance.

"Don't worry, Big Boss, I know my limits," Makareth chuckled. "I stick to hit-and-run tactics."

"Besides," he added with a sly look at them both, "if I really did get cornered, aren't you two here to back me up?"

Leonidas laughed, shaking his head. He liked the kid's style; his personality meshed well with his own.

In fact, Orion found he was getting along with Makareth too. The demon acted like one of the team, not putting on any airs or pulling any of the usual Abyss-born schemes. His straightforwardness was refreshing, and beneath it, there was a clear intelligence.

And so, the three of them sat there under the sun, talking shop about the war at the front.

Titanion Realm, the Dwarven Tribe.

Thunderhold City —a name given to it by outsiders. To the dwarves, it was the royal capital of Storm-Hammer.

But other races preferred Thunderhold, because the waves of heat from the countless forges that defined the city were as oppressive as a physical storm. Few non-dwarves could stand to live there. Of course, the major factions of the continent still maintained their own embassies within the city.

The dwarves did not build palaces. Their capital was a network of countless tunnels and caverns dug deep into the bedrock and the heart of the mountain itself.

A hollowed-out mountain should have been a vulnerable target, but the dwarves had reinforced the entire range with veins of smelted iron, turning their home into a steel fortress, impervious to conventional attacks.

At the very peak of the highest mountain, in a forge that radiated heat and belched sparks, the dwarven king, Brokk Silverbeard, sat at a round table with Harbek Bronzebeard and Dain.

King Brokk pushed a letter from the human kingdom across the table to his two advisors.

"Intel from the human kingdom," the king said, his voice a low rumble. "The entire population of Soaring Bird City has vanished. Based on the clues, it's believed they were sacrificed."

He took a heavy breath. "By the forge-father's beard, our own people stationed there did not escape this terrible fate."

It was grim news, and King Brokk's heart was heavy with grief.

"Your Majesty, the disappearances aren't the point," the dwarf prophet, Dain, said, immediately cutting to the heart of the matter. "The point is, who is the culprit? Have the humans caught him?"

The king shook his head. "There is no word on the killer. Our ambassadors have already had an audience with King Harold, and he has no news for them yet."

The dwarves and the human kingdom had been allies for generations, their relationship built on trade and mutual respect. After millennia, they had open lines of communication.

"Your Majesty, there is something strange about this incident," Dain murmured.

King Brokk and Harbek both stared at the prophet. Among all their people, Dain was the wisest. He was the prophet of the dwarves; his words were their guide.

"Speak, prophet. Quickly now," King Brokk urged, picking up a flagon and pouring a drink for Dain himself. The brew within was a rare tribute from the blood elf royal family.

Dain downed the drink in a single gulp, smacking his lips in appreciation. "Your Majesty, first, the location is wrong," he began. "Soaring Bird City is far from the heart of the human kingdom, and also far from the stoneheart horde and the blood elf race."

"If the mastermind behind this was targeting the human kingdom, the attack should have taken place in a more prosperous city further south, not Soaring Bird."

"So?" Harbek grunted. He was an elder of the dwarves, a key figure in the tribe. "Out with it, old man! You drank the king's fine ale, now you should be enlightening His Majesty and the rest of us!"

In front of old friends, Harbek's temper was as fiery as any forge.

Dain just shook his head and let out a small burp. King Brokk and Harbek didn't understand what he meant.

"Specifically, I do not know," the prophet admitted. "However, I suggest we send envoys to visit the blood elf race and the stoneheart horde. Under the guise of trade, we can inquire about this from the side. Now that the blood elves and stoneheart are joined by marriage, and our relations with the elves are good, we should be able to learn something."

It was a sound suggestion.

"Good relations, my axe!" Harbek spat. "They'd ignore us completely if it weren't for our fine weapons and armor! The whole continent knows the blood elves are obsessed with cleanliness and nature. You see any of their High Elves stationed here in our royal capital of Storm-Hammer?"

King Brokk sighed, unsure if Harbek was mocking the blood elves or their own people.

"It's decided, then. We'll listen to the prophet," the king declared, his patience wearing thin. "Tomorrow. Tomorrow, Elder Harbek, you will lead a delegation to the Stoneheart Horde. Prophet, you will lead one to the blood elf race. It just so happens the Tribe has a new batch of weapons that need to be delivered."

The king looked at the two pillars of his Tribe, both already half-drunk, and made his decision with a weary shake of his head.

Thunderhold, a remote corner.

Torin hid in a sweltering basement. He handed a bag of mysterious seeds to Mike and Wyatt, ordering them to scatter the contents in every corner of Thunderhold City, without a soul noticing.

After they departed, Torin took out the scroll and repeated the question that had been haunting him.

"Are you sure that thing will work?"

After a moment, Ogu's calm voice drifted from the parchment.

"Rest assured, my friend. That is the Giant-Spore Blight."

"In three days, at most, it will begin to grow in every corner of Thunderhold. And no one of dwarven blood can resist it."

Chapter 913: The Purer Bloodline

This was the umpteenth time Torin had asked the question, but Ogu remained patient, answering without a trace of annoyance.

"Once they inhale the blight, it will take no more than half a month for the dwarves of the city to transform into Dark Dwarves—our own powerful enforcers."

"Yi, just imagine it," the clown's voice dripped with a sinister pride. "When the dwarves' bodies mutate, when they become giants, their strength will double yet again. Shouldn't you be pleased to have such mighty warriors at your command? With their help, you will soon establish a firm foothold on this continent."

Ogu's voice was a mesmerizing cocktail of pride, malice, and seduction.

"All we have to do now is wait. Wait for the moment the dwarves are collectively infected and transformed."

"Heheheh..."

Emerald Dream Realm, Over the Sea.

The clouds churned, roiled by gale-force winds and violent collisions. Two dragons burst through the mists, one chasing the other, both unleashing furious, defiant roars.

It was a dragon war, with the crucial difference that one of the combatants, a colossal dragon, had a rider wielding a dragonlance standing proudly between its horns.

"ROAR... DAMNABLE TRAITOR!" the red dragon, Drakokrates, bellowed. "To allow a human insect to stand upon the noble horns of a dragon! You are a disgrace to our kind!"

Even in the Uynting Realm, the colossal dragon's bloodline was not a lowly one, and Drakokrates simply could not accept seeing one of its kind fighting for the enemy, slaughtering its own people.

"Betraying dragonkind?" the colossal dragon retorted, its voice dripping with contempt. "A mongrel like you, with your impure blood, dares to call yourself a true dragon? As the Dragon God is my witness, I will devour you today!"

It was said you become like those you keep company with. The colossal dragon had learned nothing else from Isabella, but it had perfectly mastered her boundless pride.

"ROAR... I WILL SWALLOW YOU WHOLE!"

Wars between dragons were rare, but when they happened, they were almost always battles to the death. More often than not, the loser was devoured by the victor as food. It was clear both the red dragon and the colossal dragon were enraged, each fully intending to extinguish the other.

With thunderous roars, the two titans chased and tore at each other across the sky, a whirlwind of claws and fury. All other flying beasts gave their battlefield a wide berth.

"Hmm... not bad," Leonidas commented from the palace square floating on the water below. "An Isabella like this is finally starting to look like a member of the Champions Alliance."

He, Orion, and Makareth stood together, watching the duel of the two dragons. Having once possessed a dragon avatar himself, Leonidas was intimately familiar with their strengths and the finer points of their combat styles. He was more than qualified to comment.

"That red dragon is at the peak of the legendary tier, too," Makareth added. "I've clashed with it before. It's tough. I couldn't take it down in a short time."

Its defenses were so strong that it had managed to escape Makareth's assault completely unscathed.

"Isabella's situation is different," Leonidas explained. "Her colossal dragon's bloodline suppresses the red dragon's. She has the advantage in this fight."

"And you think that red dragon is angry because a human is riding its opponent? Impossible. The real reason for its fury is that the colossal dragon's bloodline is purer than its own, and it can feel the suppression."

Among dragons, when a bloodline suppression was in effect, the one with the nobler blood could more easily break through the defenses of the inferior one. Leonidas shot a smug, I-know-all-the-secrets look at Orion and Makareth.

"Bro, if the red dragon is being suppressed, why would it still pick a fight with a colossal dragon?" Orion asked, immediately spotting the inconsistency.

"Heh heh, big fish eat small fish. Survival of the fittest applies to dragons, too," Leonidas said. "But there's another factor: the weak challenging the strong. Devouring a more powerful being to evolve your own bloodline. That red dragon must have an ace up its sleeve to be attempting such a risky gamble."

He clapped Orion on the shoulder. "Bro, keep an eye on that little firecracker Isabella. She might be in for a nasty surprise."

Orion nodded, shifting most of an eye to Isabella, but his attention as a commander also split, taking in the wider battlefield. This skirmish was far more than just a duel between two dragons.

In the lower sky and just above the waves, the Sea Race and flying units of both sides had smashed into each other. The battle was a chaotic, brutal meat grinder.

In the air, Rayden and his flock were clashing with a swarm of four-winged apes. These monsters could not only fly but were also formidable melee fighters. The combination was devastating, and Rayden's forces were taking heavy losses. If not for the support of Makareth's Gargoyles, the Champions Alliance would have no advantage in the air at all.

Just then, Orion's eyes followed Thunderhawk Rayden as he shot past a four-winged ape. Talons met fists with a deafening, metallic clang. A clap of thunder and an enraged roar followed as Rayden banked sharply, spun, and dove back in for another attack.

The ape flapped its four wings, clawing for the thunderhawk's wings, trying to throw it off balance. As they closed, Rayden twisted sideways, his talons once again deflecting the ape's iron-hard fists in a shower of sparks.

A crackling sound filled the air as a bolt of Chain Lightning erupted from Rayden, slamming into the back of the ape's head. Its shriek of agony was cut short.

Similar duels were playing out across the lower sky. Flying units fell from the air like stones, plunging into the sea below.

And in the sea, it was a complete bloodbath.

Swarms of Ocean Hunters crashed into the dragons' vassal race, the blue-backed sea serpents. The two cannon-fodder forces collided, instantly staining the surface of the ocean red. Below the bloody waves, a frenzy of death raged between countless fish and serpents.

Slightly back from the main battle, Vexis and Clymene stood together, chanting in unison. "Darkness envelops, death guides the way, servants of undeath, hear my call, rise from bleached bone and be reborn..."

In the water, the mangled bodies of the fallen—both Ocean Hunters and sea serpents—began to stir. They rose from the depths, their eyes glowing with cold light, and threw themselves back into the fight. Even many of the flying units that had been shot down burst from the waves, joining the battle once more in their broken forms.

The battlefield was a vision of bloody, glorious carnage. Dragons roared in the heavens, thunderhawks streaked through the air, and giant apes tore at the clouds and the sea with their bare hands, all while devil fish and sea serpents waged a war of mutual annihilation in the crimson world below.

Chapter 914: The King's Nightmare

"Mmm... the rich smell of blood. It's always so intoxicating!" Makareth closed his eyes, taking a deep breath of the carnage-scented air drifting from the battlefield. "I can feel the Demon blood in my veins starting to boil, starting to rage!"

It was a hell of a rush.

"It's about to be over," Leonidas murmured, glancing at Makareth before looking to Orion.

Orion's gaze was fixed on the sky, focused entirely on Isabella and her colossal dragon. Just moments before, the colossal dragon had used a cloudbank to mask its presence, then seized the opportunity to drop vertically onto the red dragon's back.

A triumphant roar of a predator that had caught its prey echoed across the heavens.

The colossal dragon opened its terrifying maw, sparks flying from its teeth as it lunged for the red dragon's neck. At the same time, Isabella bravely leaped from her mount, plunging with her dragonlance aimed straight for the red dragon's eye—one of a dragon's most obvious weaknesses.

But just then, a terrifying will projection erupted from the red dragon's mind, coalescing into the phantom of a much larger dragon. One of its spectral claws shot toward the colossal dragon, the other toward Isabella.

"And you think I don't exist?"

A cold, imperious voice echoed across the sky. As it spoke, a trident of crackling lightning materialized from nowhere and lanced through the phantom, annihilating it in a blinding flash.

“You have slain my child,” an ancient, furious voice reverberated through the void long after the lightning had faded. “I will not forgive this!”

With the threat eliminated, Isabella was decisive. She gave the kill order.

Her mind linked with her colossal dragon, which clamped down with its full bite force. In a gruesome display, the colossal dragon, still in the air, tore into the red dragon and devoured it completely.

On the palace floating on the sea below, Leonidas shrugged. “That’s how it always is. You kill the whelp, and the mother shows up. You kill the mother, and then the grandmother comes knocking.”

He seemed completely unfazed that Orion had just snuffed out a demigod’s will projection with a single trident throw.

Gulp.

It was the sound of someone swallowing hard. While Leonidas was unconcerned, Makareth, who had witnessed Orion’s casual display of power, was experiencing a visceral, gut-wrenching fear.

It was too fast. Too terrifying. The aura that had radiated from the trident had been suffocating. He knew, with absolute certainty, that if that trident had been aimed at him, he would not have survived the blow.

Orion could kill him effortlessly.

As that reality sank in, a tremor ran through Makareth’s body.

“See that? You should learn from him, kid,” Leonidas said, clapping Makareth on the shoulder. He and Orion had both noticed the demon’s reaction. Leonidas’s tone was cajoling, trying to ease the pressure. “When Little Bro goes to the Abyss, he might be able to hook you up with some serious loot.”

“Big Boss... you’re planning to go to the Abyss?” Makareth, as an awakened, quickly snapped out of his state of shock. Hearing that Orion was heading to the Abyss, his eyes suddenly lit up with a greedy, opportunistic gleam.

“When the time is right, I’ll have to make a trip,” Orion confirmed.

“Big Boss, you have to look me up when you go! I know the second layer of the Abyss like the back of my hand!”

Orion nodded, agreeing. As a senior member of the team, it was his duty to help clear some obstacles for a junior member like Makareth when the time came.

“There’s nothing interesting left here,” Leonidas declared. “Let’s head back. A skirmish like this isn’t enough to draw out the real big bosses.”

With the red dragon devoured, the tide of the battle had turned completely. Aside from a few Sea Race that had fled when they saw how things were going, most of the enemy forces ended up as either food or raw materials for summoning.

Titanion Realm, Thunderhold City.

It was the third day since the dwarven envoys, Harbek and Dain, had departed. The afternoon was bright and sunny. A gentle breeze swept through the city, dispersing much of the oppressive forge-heat.

In those three days, the Giant-Spore Blight seeds spread by Mike and Wyatt had taken root. They grew into a strange, flowering fungus that resembled thick-stemmed mushrooms.

Then, all at once, in every corner of Thunderhold, they bloomed.

The breeze stirred the bluish-green fungi in the grass and at the base of the walls, and a countless, invisible cloud of spores was released into the air.

The cataclysm began.

Achoo!

In the afternoon haze, King Brokk sneezed, stirring from a light doze on his iron throne. On days when he wasn't forging, the dwarven king had a habit of enjoying a flagon or two at noon. He'd loved that pleasant, hazy state between drunk and sober ever since he was a child.

But today, something felt different.

What's wrong? he wondered. Is the air too cold? No, it's more than that. It's... quiet. Thunderhold is much quieter than it should be.

Brokk heaved himself off the throne and walked to the royal palace's balcony to look out over his dwarven kingdom.

In that single glance, the boozy haze vanished from the king's mind, replaced by ice-cold shock.

The view of Thunderhold, normally choked with smoke, fire, and the constant clang of hammers, was gone. A bluish-green mist, which had appeared from nowhere, now blanketed the entire city and was slowly spreading outward.

And in the streets below, dwarves were fighting each other.

To be precise, they were giants—dwarves that had grown taller than humans—savagely brawling. They were frenzied, roaring, attacking each other with hammers and blades, with no regard for the lives of their kin.

"What... what is this?" King Brokk whispered, still not fully processing the nightmare. Was this a dream? An invasion? A rebellion?

"Not a rebellion," a flat, emotionless voice said from behind him. "A mutation."

The voice shocked Brokk, an upper-legendary tier powerhouse, back to full awareness. This was an attack.

He spun around, a strange warhammer appearing in his hand as if by magic.

Sitting on his iron throne, as if he owned it, was a puppet.

“I am quite curious,” the puppet said, its voice belonging to the clown, Ogu. “You are a dwarf, the dwarven king no less. Why were you able to resist the Giant-Spore Blight?”

He had possessed the blight for a long time, and it had never once failed him. For it to be ineffective against King Brokk was a genuine puzzle. Out of sheer curiosity, he hadn’t killed the king immediately.

“Who are you?” Brokk roared, his voice thick with fury. “What have you done to Thunderhold City, to the dwarven Tribe?”

The warhammer in his hand began to glow, turning a cherry-red as an aura of peerless power radiated from it. In an instant, King Brook’s presence surged to the level of an arch lord.

“That aura...” the puppet mused, its head cocked. “Could it be... one of the tribal relics? Ah. So that’s how it is.”

Chapter 915: The King of the Dark Dwarves

Seeing King Brokk’s transformation, the clown Ogu shifted his gaze to the warhammer, instantly understanding why the dwarven king had been able to resist the Giant-Spore Blight.

A tribal relic, in essence, was simply an artifact that concentrated faith energy. Such items could be powerful or weak.

A weak one, like the banner on Lord Orion's old war tent, was practically useless. King Brokk's warhammer, however, was in the powerful category.

Barring any special forces that could neutralize faith energy, the weapon was like a self-contained body of faith—not unlike the forbidden art Orion had once acquired to help him ascend to arch lord.

"Who are you? What have you done to my people?" King Brokk roared, his own power surging with his anger.

The only response was a stiff, cold smile from the puppet on the iron throne, and the condescending gaze of a higher being looking down on a lower one.

"Insolent wretch!" To King Brokk, who now possessed the power of a half-arch lord, such an attitude was an insult to him and to all dwarves.

He moved, raising his warhammer, and brought it down on the puppet as if he were striking an anvil, a wave of searing flame trailing in its wake.

"Honestly," the puppet sighed, "trash of your level is truly unworthy of my attention."

It raised a hand. Ignoring the blistering heat and flames, it snatched the warhammer from the king's grasp, leaving King Brokk staring in utter disbelief.

"I imagine," the puppet said, its voice filled with a mocking, playful tone that was somehow even more repulsive, "that without this little trinket, you can finally complete your transformation into the King of the Dark Dwarves and become my capable subordinate."

King Brokk didn't care about the taunting tone. "What? Dark Dwarves? You... how did you...?"

It was clear from his horrified expression that he knew of the Dark Dwarves. They were a taboo subject, a forbidden part of dwarven history—a mutated, treacherous, and evil existence.

The Dark Dwarves were to the dwarves what Lysinthia's Gorgons were to the serpentfolk: an irredeemable enemy that must be destroyed on sight. The only difference was that Dark Dwarves were even more violent and bloodthirsty.

"Heheheh... you should be less concerned about them, and more concerned about yourself," the clown's voice echoed softly.

Without the protection of the tribal relic, the Giant-Spore Blight that had already taken root in King Brokk's body began to take effect.

Visibly, the king's skin began to shift, from yellow to green, then to blue, and finally to a deep, necrotic black. His height shot up rapidly, and the muscles all over his body bulged and hardened under the influence of the parasite.

"Yi, do you see?" the puppet asked, turning its head to look at Torin, who was now walking slowly into the throne room. Its voice was dripping with pride.

As for Torin, his eyes were wide with excitement and ecstasy as he watched the dwarven king's horrific transformation. At last, he would stand at the top of the continent's pyramid, ready to speak to those high-and-mighty figures as an equal.

Stoneheart Horde, Stoneheart City.

Delilah once again entered Orion's great hall. This time, there were no outsiders present.

She sashayed toward him, winding herself into his arms as he sat on the throne. Her eyes smoldered with a familiar invitation, her whole body seeming to blush a faint pink as she began her seduction—a game of conquest and surrender that she never tired of.

"Is there news?" Orion asked, his voice calm. He wrapped an arm around her waist, holding her still.

Delilah's body went rigid for a fraction of a second. The gesture was a clear signal: business first. She leaned against his chest, hesitating, unsure how to begin.

"Is it about Kronos?" Orion asked softly.

Delilah looked up, her eyes wide with shock. Although the assassination attempt on Kronos had happened in the human kingdom, any clever analyst who studied the event would eventually point the finger at the Stoneheart Horde, and specifically, at her succubus race. The existence of Pallas was motive enough.

This was why she had hesitated, unsure how to explain.

"You know?" Her voice was laced with panic. She hadn't ordered the attack, nor had Lilith. But could one of their subordinates have acted on their own? She couldn't be sure.

"Your eyes are full of panic," Orion said, his voice gentle. He reached out and tilted her chin up, forcing her rose-colored eyes to meet his.

"I know you didn't do it. I put you in charge of the Sentinel Corps because I trust you completely. So why," he asked, a playful glint in his eyes, though his tone was serious, "don't you trust me?"

"No... it's not that..."

Before Delilah could finish, Orion leaned down and captured her lips with his. He trusted the succubus sisters. If he couldn't even trust them, the entire Stoneheart Horde would be nothing more than a burden to him.

A long while later, when her lips were swollen and red, he finally let her go.

"The incident happened in the human kingdom. I don't have any leads to investigate it myself right now," Orion said, holding her close. "Let this matter drop. The Sentinel Corps is not to get involved."

"The one pulling the strings is that human, Baron Torin. He's behind the attack on Kronos and the incident at Soaring Bird City."

He told her the truth calmly. She looked up at him, her eyes wide with disbelief.

“Torin? How is that possible? He absolutely does not have that kind of power!” She was certain of this, her conclusion based on all the intelligence and data they had on him.

“Torin doesn’t,” Orion agreed. “But the entity standing behind him does. That’s why I will have someone else handle this. The Sentinel Corps is to stay out of it.”

Delilah frowned, trying to puzzle out who could possibly be backing Torin.

“Don’t worry about it,” Orion said. “You’ll understand when things become clearer.”

His hands slid down her back, and his now-unruly touch made Delilah understand what was coming next.

In the last moment before she lost her train of thought, she managed to report one last piece of intel.

“The evil mist over Soaring Bird City was dispersed by priests from the human kingdom. The city is now under reconstruction, and the territory has been granted to Princess Ava.”

She tried to continue, “Don’t you want to know why the human kingdom would do...”

But her words were cut off by a soft cry as Orion’s hands tore through the fabric of her dress.

Chapter 916: The Dragon’s Pact

“A toast!” Leonidas bellowed from his floating palace, raising his goblet. “To Isabella for slaying a dragon lord, and to our enemies for their temporary retreat!”

Orion, Makareth, and Isabella were gathered around him. Isabella just rolled her eyes. Her opponent had only been at the upper-legendary tier, and Orion had been forced to step in at the last second to clean up the mess. It wasn't exactly a victory she could brag about.

But Leonidas didn't care; the bro just wanted an excuse to drink.

"Big Boss, I don't think these dragons are as tough as they're made out to be," Makareth boasted, already several drinks in. "They're pretty easy to kill!"

After several successful skirmishes, he was starting to look down on the dragons' low-to-mid-tier forces.

"Kid, you haven't seen anything yet," Leonidas chided. "The dragons' regular armies haven't even been deployed. What you're facing now are just their second-rate vassal races. Even that dragon Isabella killed was probably some outcast they didn't care about."

"Never underestimate a weak enemy, and never fear a strong one. You need to be careful, Little M."

With two hotheads of the legendary level under his command, Leonidas felt obligated to lecture them, hoping they wouldn't get complacent.

"Bro."

Orion, who had been quietly tearing into a roasted fish, suddenly looked up and got Leonidas's attention, pulling him away from his drinking contest with Makareth.

"Heh heh. I was just getting ready to stretch my legs, and these reptiles are finally making a move," Leonidas said, putting down his goblet. He stood and stared into the distance.

From the direction of Dragonflame Island, both he and Orion could sense three powerful arch lord signatures, moving slowly toward them. After a series of minor defeats and heavy losses to their vassals, the dragons were finally responding.

“So, my bros, is it time for some action?” Makareth chimed in. The kid had a silver tongue. After just a few days, he had started calling Leonidas “bro” just like Orion did, and had extended the honor to Orion as well—a level of familiarity that not even Kraken had achieved.

“Weren’t you just complaining that the enemy was too weak?” Leonidas shot back. “You and Isabella can take the lead on this next one. Go test the waters.”

“Don’t worry, bro! Leave it to me and Sister Isabella!”

Orion and Leonidas exchanged a look. Makareth was a true Demon, always setting traps for others while finding himself a convenient shield. With that one sentence, he had just dragged the ever-eager, clueless Isabella to the edge of the abyss with him.

Now, if anything went wrong, Leonidas and Orion wouldn’t be able to scold him without also scolding her.

The clever devil, Orion thought.

Poor, clueless girl, Leonidas thought at the same time.

Titanion Realm, Stoneheart City.

On the throne of his castle, Orion opened the survivor’s chest he’d acquired during the Dragonflame Island raid. It was the reward he had been most looking forward to lately.

The box dissolved into a shower of light, but what appeared in Orion’s hand was not a piece of equipment, a skill scroll, or even a miniature building.

It was a palm-sized rune, pulsing with a mysterious aura.

[Dragon’s Pact]

Type: Rune (Special)

Quality: Legendary

Attached Effect: Draconic Dread

Description: The wielder of this rune is witnessed by the ancient Dragon God and exerts a suppressive effect over all dragonkind. The probability of successfully subjugating draconic creatures is greatly increased.

Note: This rune can be fused into a weapon or piece of equipment, where it will automatically generate a special effect or skill that suppresses dragons.

Item Evaluation: Runes and dragons have an ancient, intertwined history.

Orion stared at the rune in his open palm, lost in thought. He'd never acquired a special item like this before and had little experience with them. But he knew it was incredibly valuable—essentially a permanent, high-tier taming skill for dragons.

The option to fuse it into a weapon was something he had no use for at the moment.

He closed his hand into a fist. The Dragon's Pact dissolved into a phantom dragon of light that coiled around his right arm. When the glow faded, a faint, shimmering dragon tattoo was left on his forearm.

Just as Orion lifted his arm to inspect it, a wave of cheers and excited shouts drifted up from the castle's main square.

"Look! The prince really has a dragon!"

"Whoa... it really is a dragon! And it's black!"

“What a cute baby dragon!”

“And the princess is really pretty, too!”

In the square below, nearly two hundred Tribe younglings were gathered—all of Pallas’s friends from the youth camp. He had used his dragon’s hatching as an excuse to invite them all over for a party.

Of course, the idea had most likely come from the true boss of the Stoneheart Horde’s next generation, his older sister Elara.

At that moment, Pallas was the center of attention. Hovering over his head was a tiny, completely black dragon whelp. It was so young it hadn’t even grown scales yet, and it flapped its fleshy wings, snapping and snarling playfully at the surrounding younglings.

“My wolf pup won’t move!” a young boy named Degar cried out. The wolf pup he had brought to show off to his friends was now huddled between his legs, trembling uncontrollably. Degar was the youngest son of Thundar, and considered the one with the most potential.

Several other children were in the same situation. Their own young pets—a Raptor, cave spiders, a Flame-Tiger, a thunderhawk, a vulture—had all retreated to their small masters’ sides, cowering.

“Brother,” Elara said, walking up to Pallas and pinching his cheek, which was puffed up with pride from all the compliments. “Tell your Akediel to retract his dragon aura. He’s scaring everyone’s pets.”

Pallas pouted, annoyed at having his face pinched. But one look at Elara’s deceptively sweet smile sent a shiver down his spine. He quickly communicated with the black dragon, Akediel, who immediately suppressed his aura and landed gently on Pallas’s shoulder.

The whelp’s arrival was met with a new wave of oohs and ahhs from the children, who crowded around Pallas once more.

Not far away, on a long veranda at the edge of the square, a group of off-duty Stoneheart Horde elders had gathered to watch the younglings' celebration. It was a chance for the children to play, show off their pets and weapons, and, most importantly, enjoy a special feast.

The elders had all come voluntarily to help with the food, since a pack of younglings would be hungry after playing all day.

As they saw Orion observing from above, they bowed.

"My lord!"

Chapter 917: Ghostbone Armor

With a flicker of movement, Orion appeared before the elders.

Tarn, Rendall, and Rockwell were the first to react, bowing deeply in respect. Then Erythros, Grulbane, Torvald, and Taran turned, all moving to perform the grand salute.

"The younglings are the main characters today, not me," Orion said with a wave of his hand. "I'm just here to crash the party and grab some food."

A surge of his supernatural power formed a field around him, gently preventing those who were about to kneel from doing so.

To show their support for their younglings, the elders had all brought treasures from their personal stores. The bonfires roaring in the square, the massive cauldrons bubbling with stew, and the sizzling barbecue racks were proof enough.

"My Lord," Tarn said respectfully.

"You've matured," Orion said, looking at Tarn — who had become an elder himself after returning from the human kingdom and starting a family of his own.

"Are you also here to see the dragon?"

"Yes. I'm here with Doke." Doke was Fergus's son and Tarn's own nephew. As he spoke, Tarn pointed to a small giant youngling standing next to Pallas. He was a head shorter than the prince, staring up at the black dragon with drool trickling from the corner of his mouth.

"He's a sturdy little fellow," Orion commented. Looking out at all the younglings in the square, he felt a sense of purpose solidify within him. He needed to find a way to secure more benefits for this new generation.

They were the future of the Tribe, the foundation of the Stoneheart Horde's expansion, and the source of his faith energy.

"None of you are to leave tonight," Orion said, turning to the elders, all of whom had distinguished battle achievements. "It's been too long since we've all had a drink together. We're not leaving until we can't stand!"

His order was met with a chorus of cheers and laughter—a sound of pure, heartfelt joy.

"Daddy!" a bright, clear voice cried out. Before the elders could react, Elara had scrambled up onto Orion's neck, hugging his head and planting a kiss on his cheek.

"Why aren't you playing with Pallas and the others?" Orion asked, reaching up to affectionately mess up his daughter's hair.

"This is Pallas's moment," Elara said, resting her chin on the top of Orion's head. She stared with wide, curious eyes at the assembled elders, who in turn were all staring intently at her.

Orion saw the complex mix of admiration and reservation in their eyes. On one hand, Elara was undeniably brilliant; the magical talent she displayed at such a young age had won over the entire horde. On the other hand, the fact that she was not of his blood still sat uneasily with some of them. It was something the sharp-witted Elara had surely sensed herself.

"This is Elder Tarn. This is Elder Rendall, you should call him Arch-Elder..." Ignoring the complicated looks from his subordinates, Orion began introducing them to Elara one by one.

Elara, clever and charming, greeted each one with a sweet honorific. In return, she was showered with a collection of interesting little trinkets and gifts.

"Daddy," she whispered in his ear after the introductions were done. "Elara needs to go back to the Grey Mountains. My little dragon is about to hatch, too!"

"In a couple of days, I'll go with you," Orion promised.

Her face lit up with a brilliant smile, and she gave him another kiss. Her fire dragon egg, having absorbed a phoenix egg and a tremendous amount of energy from the volcano, was finally ready. Seeing Pallas bond with his black dragon had perhaps lit a fire under little Elara as well. It was a development Orion was very happy to see.

That night, the younglings ran wild in the castle square. Their celebration evolved from dragon-watching to pitting their pets against each other, and finally to wrestling matches among themselves. They were a gifted generation, and none of them would back down from a challenge unless they were knocked flat.

Pallas, in the end, was the happiest of all, for he was the ultimate victor. The blood of an arch lord running through his veins made him stand head and shoulders above the rest.

And of course, the adults—Orion and his subordinates—drank themselves into a happy stupor.

Emerald Dream Realm, the Kasenna Sea.

With the presence of dragon arch lords detected on the front lines, Leonidas and Orion had personally led their forces to the heart of the battlefield. Makareth, Isabella, Vexis, Clymene, Gustalon, and several of Leonidas's own Legendary-level beasts had all joined the fray.

The battlefield was pure chaos. Dragons tumbled through the air while all manner of flying beasts beat their massive wings, whipping the sky into a frenzy. The mist that had previously shrouded the heavens had been completely torn apart by the war.

"They're getting closer," Orion said. He and Leonidas stood on the square of Leonidas's floating palace, hands clasped behind their backs as they surveyed the battle.

Across the entire field, Isabella, backed by her colossal dragon, had the strongest frontal assault capability, followed closely by the Demon, Makareth. But in terms of sheer kill count, no one could match Gustalon.

As an elemental being, he had become the wind itself, a deadly gale that swept through the battlefield. Aside from the Ocean Hunters, Whale Riders, and Great-Fin Croc-Whales fighting in the deep sea, every enemy was a target for him to reap.

"Makareth! Isabella!" Leonidas's voice boomed across the battlefield, devoid of his usual laid-back, joking manner. It was cold and sharp as steel. "Weren't you just complaining that the enemy was too weak? Now the big ones are here. Do you have the courage to challenge a higher tier?"

"HRAAAGH!" was Makareth's only reply. He swung his moonstones scimitar, unleashing a flurry of powerful energy arcs that eviscerated the enemies swarming him.

Then, he flared his Demon Wings, and a dark, sinister Abyssal energy poured from them, covering his body in a dense web of black, glowing runes. He knew instinctively that to fight above his weight class, he had to go all out.

On the other side of the field, Isabella and her colossal dragon tore apart the dragon that had been harassing them. As it fell, a layer of bone armor erupted from her body, spreading down from her feet to encase her colossal dragon as well.

It was a sight Orion knew all too well.

That was the work of Arthas. That was Ghostbone Armor.

I wonder if Arthas gave it to her himself, or if Alexander asked for it on her behalf, Orion mused, finding the thought interesting.

The Ghostbone Armor Isabella now wore wasn't as high-tier as his own, but it was a complete set, and its defensive capabilities were immense.

Chapter 918: All beings are guilty

"Ooh-ho! And there's a female in the mix!"

As the enemy arch lords arrived, Leonidas's tone became extremely excited, especially when he sensed that one of them was a female dragon.

"Bro, that one's mine. Don't you dare try to take her from me!" he declared, his voice taking on a lecherous, sleazy quality. "When it comes to female dragons, big bro here has the most experience!"

"Heheheh..." He was practically howling with glee, like a male dragon that had been locked away for ten thousand years and had just laid eyes on his dream mate.

"As you wish," Orion said, holding up his hands. A shrewd glint appeared in his eyes as he discovered another one of Leonidas's little quirks. He mentally filed it away, perfect ammunition for some future trash-talking.

While he made his mental note, he carefully analyzed the approaching enemies.

Just then, the arch lord auras in the distance accelerated. A radiant figure strode through the air toward them. She wore a coat of crystalline blue, cut in a knightly fashion, over a pair of tall boots. Her lustrous, blue hair was naturally curled, framing a mature, bewitching face.

She was a dragon-woman of stunning beauty.

But to Demon Makareth, such beauty was worthless.

"The enemy before me is like a poppy, like a thorn apple... an intoxicating drug that I drown in, an acid that corrodes the will, a vexation that stays my hand from its purpose!"

"A painted skull... a perfect dance... a serenade of death..."

"All of it must be... severed..."

The moment he saw the enemy, Demon Makareth fell into a strange state. It was as if he'd lost his mind, caught in a state of self-hypnosis. And yet, his aura was skyrocketing. The attacks he launched at the approaching woman grew more and more tyrannical with each swing.

"I have to say," Leonidas commented, his gaze fixed on the distant battle, "those who can forge their own Lord's Stone are truly on another level. It's impressive."

It was high praise, a sign of his deep respect for Demon Makareth's power.

"That state he's in seems even more high-tier than your Behemoth rage, bro," Orion observed.

It was the first time Orion had ever seen Makareth truly unleash his full power. In this state, he seemed to be walking a razor's edge between enlightenment and madness, like a saint and a true demon all at once.

"Every being has a past. All beings are guilty," Makareth chanted, his voice distant. "And the guilty must be judged! They must be subjected to torture!"

He was so unpredictable. One moment he was in a state of enlightened madness, and the next he had become some kind of religious fanatic, casting himself as the judge of the dragon-woman before him.

Faced with this opponent, who was a full tier beneath her, the woman in the blue coat simply raised a hand, summoning three phantom thunder dragons that shot straight for Makareth.

"Interesting! A blue dragon with both water and lightning affinities," Leonidas purred, his voice starting out normal before becoming distinctly improper. "That is exactly my type."

"There are two big ones underwater," Orion noted, keeping his eyes on Isabella's position in the distance. Since Leonidas had claimed the dragon-woman, Orion's concern shifted away from Makareth. "Should we give Isabella a heads-up?"

"That little hothead is too proud and smug, and she has no real combat experience," Leonidas scoffed. "Alexander sent her to the front lines specifically so she could get knocked around a bit. Leave her be. Let her learn the hard way."

Orion had no objection to that. Isabella truly needed to be tempered by battle. The fact that she and her colossal dragon had fought Makareth to a near standstill meant that most of her battles had been fought with a crushing advantage. She had no experience with her back against the wall.

In the sky, as Makareth engaged his foe, Isabella also sensed the enemies in the deep sea.

"Down!" she commanded, standing majestically atop her colossal dragon's head, lance at the ready.

On her command, the colossal dragon tucked its head and plunged into the sea like a falling mountain. The water erupted, churning with massive bubbles. A powerful vortex formed where the dragon had entered the water. The Sea Race units from both sides sensed the immense power and fled the area.

In the sky and in the deep, the challenges for Makareth and Isabella had begun.

Stoneheart City, the Silent Goblet.

Orion lay on his stomach on a massive bed covered in fur blankets, his eyes half-closed. Delilah, clad in a transparent silk robe, sat astride his waist, her hands slick with a mysterious, aromatic oil traded from the human kingdom.

As Orion understood it, it was a type of soothing muscle balm, meant to enhance a massage and increase comfort.

"The civilization of the human kingdom is so much more prosperous than our stoneheart horde," Delilah said, her voice a low, sultry tone. "They have no shortage of wonderful things for enjoying life."

She was using the massage as an excuse to take liberties, her hands tracing the lines of his powerful back—a sight that made her heart race.

"The humans are inherently intelligent, and they've accumulated knowledge over countless years," Orion said, his eyes still closed. He was using his own perspective to slowly broaden Delilah's worldview. "They are far ahead of us in life experience and technology."

"Fortunately, this isn't a world where technology is the only path forward. We have many other roads we can take to eventually surpass them."

"I heard the transformative weapons from the Bureau of Weapons have entered the final stage. Can they be mass-produced yet?"

Transformative weapons—a manufacturing technology the Stoneheart Horde had acquired from the Godforsaken Land long ago. The Horde had invested immense resources and manpower into mastering this knowledge. Only recently could they finally claim to have fully digested the technology and the principles behind it.

Orion's requirement wasn't just to follow the blueprints, but for his people to truly understand the forging techniques. Only then could the Stoneheart Horde forge its own unique line of technology, an advantage no other race on the continent possessed. It was their foundation, and their edge.

"Mass production will begin soon," Delilah reported. "According to the plan laid out by the council, the transformative weapons will first be supplied to the Alpha-level powerhouses in the horde's various armies."

"The surplus will then be added to the horde's treasury, allowing our bloodline warriors a chance to exchange for them."

"A small portion will also be made available to our allies. As for the continent of Utessar, for now, they will not be for sale."

Chapter 919: Tell me what happened

By laying out the plan for the transformative weapons, Delilah was indirectly asking Orion if he had any additions.

"A little harder," he murmured, then added, "And set aside a batch of those transformative weapons for my private vault. I have a use for them."

He was intrigued by the new technology. He planned to put some of the weapons, which were for now exclusive to the Stoneheart Horde, on the Survivor's Platform. He wanted to see if he could bait some high-potential awakened individuals, trading the advanced tech for other rare goods or resources.

Delilah understood. In her mind, Orion having allies in other worlds meant the Stoneheart Horde had allies in other worlds. And allies often needed to exchange gifts. A transformative weapon was a very fine gift indeed.

"Orion, turn around and look," she whispered, her voice full of seduction.

Orion opened his eyes and turned his head. Floating in the air was a crimson exotic beast, like a cross between a serpent and a dragon, roaring silently at him. It was a familiar sight. Long ago, during the invasion of the Godforsaken Land led by Leonidas and Arthas, scenes of warriors transforming into weapons and exotic beasts had been common.

"It suits you," Orion said. He knew that hidden in the space around the crimson beast were countless, razor-thin filaments—Delilah's other weapon.

"It's custom-tailored," she explained. "Everyone's form is different after they transform, but it's always the one that best suits their fighting style."

The crimson beast vanished, and her naked form fell into Orion's arms. He caught her, and meeting her eager, expectant gaze, the two of them became one.

The sun set, and the moon rose and fell through its cycles.

The next morning, Orion awoke to Delilah's kisses, as passionate and intense as a rainstorm.

"Feeling eager this morning?" he teased, his voice thick with sleep. "Did something happen?"

He knew her personality well. She must have received some intelligence and was about to go into work mode, which meant she first had to drain him dry with a frantic burst of passion.

She didn't answer, instead climbing onto his chest and sealing his lips with her own, silencing him. The world outside faded away.

A long while later, Delilah lay nestled in his arms, finally content. Only then did she speak of the intelligence she'd just received.

"A report came from the human kingdom. There's been a mutation in the dwarven Tribe. The entire race has been corrupted."

"A personal letter from King Harold is already on its way and should reach you soon. Fortunately, just before the mutation occurred, the dwarven elder Harbek and the prophet Dain had already left with their envoys, heading for the human kingdom and the Stoneheart Horde, respectively."

Delilah rolled over, her beautiful eyes fixing on Orion with an expression of pure, fervent adoration. "My lord, it is just as you predicted. A major event has occurred on the continent of Utessar. The dwarves have suffered some unknown fate and mutated into Dark Dwarves."

"And that Baron Torin is with them. He has become the leader of the Dark Dwarves."

During their intimacy, Orion had already shared his conclusions about Torin, which was the source of Delilah's current worshipful gaze.

"He calls himself the Avenger," she continued. "He has already marshaled the Dark Dwarves and invaded the northern Tribes. A number of ambitious lords, who were already looking for trouble, have surrendered and joined him. My lord... war is coming. A war between the dwarves and the human kingdom!"

Delilah was visibly excited by this, a flicker of schadenfreude in her eyes. From the perspective of the Stoneheart Horde, anything that weakened the human kingdom was a welcome development for the other factions on the continent.

"Shouldn't you be pleased, my lord?" she asked, noticing his pensive silence.

Orion was lost in thought. With Torin and the clown Ogu working together, not even an arch lord, let alone a mere lord, would be able to defeat them. The human kingdom was about to suffer a catastrophic blow.

"What are you thinking about, my lord?" Delilah whispered, winding her body around his and blowing softly in his ear, trying to get his attention.

"This isn't as simple as you think," Orion said quietly. He leaned in and kissed her again, holding her until she was about to lose herself completely. Only then did he pull back and continue.

"If Torin dares to corrupt the entire dwarven race, to invade the north, and to make a move against the hidden factions of the dragons and humans, it means that the entity standing behind him does not fear the human Saint."

"That," he said, his voice low and serious, "is the real reason Torin dared to declare his independence and his hostility toward the human kingdom."

The haze of passion in Delilah's eyes slowly cleared, replaced by astonishment. "My lord, are you saying there's another arch lord backing Torin? It couldn't be one of the Sea Race, could it?"

It was the only logical guess. On the entire continent, besides the white dragon Frostsire and the human Saint, the only other arch lord she knew of was the man she was lying on top of. If there was another, they had to have come from the sea.

"I don't know," Orion said, shaking his head, neither confirming nor denying her guess. It was better that she didn't know about the clown Ogu.

"Then what do we do now, my lord?" Delilah asked, an opportunistic gleam in her eyes.

"We wait," Orion said, settling back onto the bed. "The human kingdom will eventually ask the stoneheart horde, the dragons, and the blood elves for aid. That will be the time for us to negotiate our price for a piece of the dwarven cake."

He closed his eyes, looking utterly relaxed. "Now," he murmured, "how about you massage my shoulders and back?"

"Hee hee... my lord is brilliant!" Delilah giggled. "This is the dwarves' own problem, an internal affair of the human kingdom. It's better for us if they fight it out. It has nothing to do with the Stoneheart Horde."

As she began to knead his shoulders, her eyes narrowed thoughtfully. In that moment, she looked even more like a cunning fox than Sylvana.

Human Kingdom, Gobido City.

This was the primary trading hub between humans and dwarves. In the city's eastern district, a large smithy had been closed for three days. The abnormality drew little attention; everyone knew something had happened to the dwarven race.

On the third floor of the smithy, Elder Harbek and the prophet Dain sat together, surrounded by empty wine bottles and barrels. But neither of them was drunk. They were sober with grief.

"Damn it all!" Harbek roared, his voice cracking with anguish.

"What in the blazes happened?"

"Why would our king, our people, suddenly turn into those filthy mongrels, the Dark Dwarves?"

He grabbed the silent prophet by the shoulders. "Prophet... tell me what happened!"

Chapter 920: Promise me

Harbek's eyes were completely shot with blood. As a Legendary-level powerhouse, he was utterly helpless. He wanted to do something, anything, but there was nothing he could do.

The frustration was so intense he felt he could have screamed. He was not reconciled to this fate.

The prophet Dain simply stared down at the small warhammer charm hanging from his belt—the symbol of his station. But the charm was now shattered. All that remained was half of a cracked handle, a heartbreaking sight.

It meant that the Dwarven Tribe of Utessar was gone. Their territory had a new master.

"Prophet... Prophet, tell me, what do we do now?" Elder Harbek's anguished, furious voice rang out again, startling Dain from his stupor.

"Prophet, I'm scared. I feel weak, I have no strength left. I can no longer sense the direction of the dwarven Tribe. I can no longer hear the clang of hammers from Thunderhold City, no longer feel that invigorating heat from the forges... I..."

The dwarven Tribe was gone. They had all lost their way. The faith of their people had vanished in an instant, and they had all become homeless.

What can I do now? Dain asked himself, his head bowed. Find the enemy, kill the enemy, and avenge our people? Or rebuild the dwarven Tribe? The dwarven Tribe... our people...

He interrogated his own soul, searching for a path forward, trying to steady his faith against the storm of despair. He was the prophet. In the dwarves' most desperate hour, he had to provide guidance. Even if that guidance was wrong, even if it was fruitless, it was better than doing nothing.

Slowly, a light began to kindle in Dain's eyes, growing brighter and brighter until it blazed.

"Harbek Bronzebeard, Elder of the dwarven Tribe," the prophet said, his head rising. His voice was sonorous and majestic, filled with a power that could stir the hearts of the hopeless. "Open your eyes. Look at me."

Harbek looked at Dain, at those eyes that were now preternaturally calm. Slowly, Harbek's wails subsided. He buried his anger deep within himself, and a quiet stillness fell over him.

"Our lord(king) and our people have been transformed. They are no longer themselves," Dain stated, his voice clear and hard. "The dwarven Tribe has fallen. In the cruel competition between races, the dwarves have failed. We have lost our territory."

It was a fact Dain knew all too well. With the majority of dwarves turned into Dark Dwarves, their race was already in ruin. Even if the human kingdom or another faction helped them retake their home, the few of them who remained could never manage such a vast domain. The dwarven Tribe had truly fallen. It had, for all intents and purposes, vanished.

"The dwarven Tribe is gone," Dain continued, "but the dwarven race remains. In the kingdom of Utessar, in the blood elves' City of Blessings, in the Stoneheart Horde's Stoneheart City, many of our people still live. They are still there."

As he spoke these words, his voice filled with emotion. In the murky fog of the future he had foreseen, he thought he had found a path.

"Harbek, you are no longer an elder of the dwarven Tribe. You are now a lord of the dwarven race. And the duty of a lord is to lead our people, to continue living on this continent. Like dandelions, we must scatter everywhere and bloom wherever we land."

Dain looked at Harbek, his eyes filled with a grim and unshakeable resolve. That certainty infected Harbek, steadying him.

"Prophet," Harbek said, his voice now firm. "Tell me what to do, and I will do it."

Dain nodded, his gaze never leaving Harbek's. "Go. Go west. Go to Stoneheart City, or to the City of Blessings. Gather the dwarves there. Pledge your loyalty to them. Use your fealty and your forging skills to earn a place to survive."

It was a clear path forward. To submit was to receive sanctuary. In doing so, the dwarven race would gain the space it needed to survive, to avoid being enslaved and utterly crushed beneath the wheels of history.

"Prophet..." Harbek was no fool. He understood what Dain was asking of him. But the words were hard to speak. For his people to bend the knee to another race... it was something he could not easily accept.

"Harbek, do not cling to false hope!" Dain's voice was sharp. "For thousands of years, our race has relied on the human kingdom. And while we grew strong, we also made countless enemies among the northern tribes. Hatred is not so easily forgotten. If you try to carve out a new territory in the north to settle our people, the dwarven race will never know peace. We would likely be exterminated."

His voice was cold, his eyes filled with warning.

"Prophet..."

Dain just stared at him, his gaze so calm it seemed to pierce through time itself.

"Promise me."

"Promise me!"

His voice was quiet, but also cold and imperious. It was both a demand and a plea.

"Prophet... I promise," Harbek finally choked out, tears streaming down his face. "I promise!"

"Then I can rest easy," Dain said, a smile of peace and release spreading across his face.

Through a blur of tears, Harbek watched in horror as Dain's white hair began to fall out in clumps, his skin shriveling and wrinkling before his very eyes. A prophecy, a path to the future... it did not come without a price.

"Go," Dain whispered, his voice now weak and hoarse, like a candle in the wind. "Go west."

"Prophet, what about you?" Harbek cried, deeply concerned for the elder's safety.

"As for me," Dain rasped, "I will go to the human kingdom. The northern tribes will not forget their hatred. And we dwarves... we will not forget ours either. I will use the last of the dwarven Tribe's resources to make the enemy responsible for all of this pay the price they are owed."

His hoarse voice turned calm again—deceptively calm, masking a hatred that burned like wildfire.

"Go now. Go west. The sooner, the better."

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Emerald Dream Realm, the Kasenna Sea.

Demon Makareth had become completely unhinged. He brandished his scimitar, his body wreathed in Abyssal energy, dodging and weaving between the attacks of the three phantom thunder dragons like a bat using echolocation.

With a hiss, he slashed out with an immense arc of black energy, forcing the three phantoms back and giving himself a precious moment to breathe.

He held his battle-hardened scimitar before him, supporting the blade with his left hand. The cold light glinting off its edge reflected the unwavering, ruthless look in his eyes.

But such determination was meaningless in the face of overwhelming power.

The three thunder dragon phantoms lit up with electricity. With a terrifying peal of thunder, they trailed blinding lightning as they lunged forward for the kill.

They opened their mouths, and crackling arcs of lightning shot out from the vortex-like maws.

If Makareth were caught in that storm, he would be lucky to escape with his life.