

Titan King 931

Chapter 931: I'm a Lord Now, Too!

Slaughter. Death. Weaving. Lorelia repeated the cycle, driven to exterminate every last enemy who had harmed her master and Mistress. In the relentless carnage, the darkness-shrouded Blackstone City was transformed, becoming a world made entirely of silk.

She had no idea how many enemies she killed. By the time her consciousness returned to normal, there was not a single living dark creature left in Blackstone City.

Lorelia crawled to the top of the city wall, to the bodies of Orion and Lilith. She lay down beside them, just as she had when she was a small child. She felt so tired. A wave of exhaustion washed over her, and her eyes fluttered shut as she fell into a deep, deathlike sleep.

Red Moon Valley, Lorelia city.

Orion's true form materialized, startling Soraya from her watch.

"Lorelia has advanced. I'm going to check on her."

Orion gave Soraya a quick embrace and, before she could reply, stepped into the underground caves, heading for Lorelia's Nest.

Soraya stood stunned for a moment, but a joyful smile quickly spread across her face. "So the little one finally advanced! I knew something strange was going on with her lately!"

She didn't follow Orion inside. As a broodmother herself, she knew their particular quirks.

The moment she set foot in the Nest, she would likely be attacked by the cave spiders.

Orion was different. His bond with Lorelia extended to her children; the young spiders would not reject him.

Entering the Nest, Orion saw that Lorelia had evolved into the form of a young woman, perhaps sixteen or seventeen years old.

Tear tracks still stained her cheeks, as if she had cried herself into a profound slumber.

After sensing her aura for a moment, Orion let out a slow sigh of relief. The violent fluctuations in her energy had calmed and stabilized. Lorelia's advancement had been a success.

He moved closer, intending to cover the girl with a blanket. But the moment he approached, Lorelia's eyes snapped open.

Crimson. Slaughter. Ice. Despair and darkness. That was the storm of emotions Orion saw and felt in that first instant. But it was all swept away in the next, replaced by sheer, unadulterated joy.

"Master?"

Perhaps because she had just woken up, her mind was still foggy, unable to distinguish reality from the Dreamscape. Seeing a living, breathing Orion before her was both a shock and a wonderful surprise.

"Did you have a nightmare?" Orion's voice was placid as he reached out and ruffled her hair. It was a habit of his, a gesture that had always worked on Lorelia since she was little.

Feeling the familiar warmth of his hand and smelling the strong, familiar scent of her master, Lorelia's mind finally cleared.

"Master... Master... Master, I missed you so, so much!" she wailed, throwing her arms around him.

"Master, I had a long, long nightmare. It was so scary, so scary. Master, I'm homesick! I want to go back and see Blackstone City!"

Orion said nothing, simply letting her cling to him like a Squiddy. Her emotions were once again in turmoil; she needed patience and comfort.

"Do you not know what happened?" he asked after a long while, when he felt her begin to calm down. He gently peeled her off his body and gave her a playful flick on the forehead. "Sense your own aura. Your own body. See what's changed."

Lorelia nodded, instinctively obeying. A moment later, a shriek of delighted, triumphant surprise echoed through the entire underground cave system.

"Aaaaah! I advanced! I'm a Lord now, too!"

"Master... Master... I really advanced!"

"Master, am I amazing or what?"

"Master, I'll conquer the world for you..."

She was so full of herself she was practically floating.

But I know the truth, Orion thought. To forge her own Lord's Stone like that... there is a terrifyingly ferocious will to kill hidden deep inside her.

"Come on. Soraya has been waiting outside for a long time."

Orion started to walk out, ignoring Lorelia as she scampered gleefully around the Nest. Seeing him leave, Lorelia followed, scampering on her newly formed legs, wobbling this way and that with a huge grin on her face.

"Sister Soraya, look! Look at me! I'm just like you now!"

"Sister Soraya, I can wear dresses, too!"

Soraya just shook her head, smiling as she took out a dress she had prepared and helped Lorelia put it on, which sent the girl into a fit of giggles.

Half an hour later, Soraya and Lorelia appeared on the city walls of Red Moon Valley. They came to stand behind Orion, gazing together toward the west. In the seas to the west, the allied forces and the Dragon Faction were still at war.

"Master, are we going to join the battle now?" Lorelia knew Orion's moods well. If he was staring west, it meant the situation there was likely not optimistic.

"It's ninety-nine percent naval and air combat over there. I don't need you for that." Orion pulled his gaze back and turned to face them.

"Lorelia, prepare yourself. A war is likely to break out in the southern part of the Titanion Realm. The enemy will be the dwarven Tribe and the Northern Coalition."

He then proceeded to explain the entire situation between Torin, the human kingdom, and the dwarves in detail.

Lorelia's advancement was perfectly timed. Orion planned to let her rest for a while, then hand the southern war over to her. It would be the perfect opportunity for her to familiarize herself with battles between Lords.

"Master, I will defeat the enemy for you and claim more territory for the Tribe!" Lorelia declared, puffed up with confidence. "I am the most powerful Lord, the weaver of the Dreamscape, the greatest Lorelia Queen!"

Her newfound transcendent power had her feeling invincible. Orion didn't say much. It was a common phase for newly minted Legendary-level Lords. The feeling would pass soon enough.

He turned to Soraya. "You continue to guard this place. I'll notify you if anything changes."

Soraya nodded. Feeling Orion's intense gaze on her, she knew what he was thinking, and a blush crept up her cheeks.

Seven days later, the teleportation array activated. Orion, Lorelia, and a contingent of high-level cave spiders were transported back to Blackstone City. From there, Orion and Lorelia crawled out from the underworld and into the underground fissure.

Sensing Lorelia's arrival, the small spiders hidden in the rock crevices swarmed out of their holes, hissing a welcome to their returned queen.

"I am finally home!" The familiar bottomless abyss, the familiar underground fissure—this was the place she had guarded for so long. She knew every inch of it.

"Prepare yourself," Orion said, and with that, his form vanished from the fissure.

Lorelia didn't mind. She led her children on a tour, revisiting every familiar place, every beloved corner where she used to love to sleep.

Chapter 932: Loot Delivery Service

In the northern frozen plains, at the Ice Phoenix Palace.

Barbaric and serene, fervent and impulsive, Orion and Lumi were lying tangled together, sating the longing and warmth they felt for one another.

"The frozen plains are beautiful, but they're too cold, too lonely. I was afraid you'd forget about me," Orion murmured after a long while, holding Lumi close. Her skin, cool and smooth like polished marble, was uniquely comforting. "Lorelia has advanced to Lord-rank and is guarding Blackstone City now. Come south with me for a while."

"Mm," Lumi hummed softly, not even opening her eyes. From their first embrace to their passionate kiss, to the complete baring of their hearts, she was utterly spent.

Orion stroked her back and slowly closed his eyes as well.

Emerald Dream Realm, over the Kasenna Sea.

The mirror avatar and Leonidas stood together at the highest point of their beast-wrought palace, gazing toward Dragonflame Island.

"Two more arch lord auras moving this way," Leonidas said with a frown. "It seems our last lesson didn't teach them any fear."

The dragons' actions showed no intention of backing down. In other words, the combined might of the Deputy Commander, Arthas, and the other demigod hadn't been enough to deter them. The Dragon Faction's resolve to invade the Dusk Continent and secure a foothold in the Emerald Dream Realm was absolute.

"I might have been worried before," Orion's avatar said, his voice perfectly calm. "But now, I'm starting to think of them as our personal loot delivery service, bringing us materials and treasure chests."

The enemy arch lords joining the fray didn't cause the slightest ripple in his heart.

Ever since he had resolved to challenge a demigod phantom, his mind had achieved a state of profound tranquility. The threat of another arch lord couldn't stir him in the slightest.

"Hahaha... bro, you're starting to sound like Arthas now!" Leonidas turned his head to look at Orion, a comical expression on his face. "That prickly bastard used to have that same look, never even flinched no matter who he was facing."

"Our bro Arthas is still the same," Orion replied, meeting Leonidas's gaze, his own perfectly placid. "He's facing down actual demigods and still not flinching."

"Ah, maybe Arthas was right," Leonidas sighed dramatically. "I'm just a washed-up has-been. Even my little bro has caught up to me." He seemed genuinely dejected.

Orion thought to himself. It was an act. I know perfectly well that the gap between myself and bros like Leonidas and Alexander is still immense.

For one thing, Leonidas had self-destructed two of his avatars in a row, and I couldn't detect the slightest hint of damage to the man's deep reserves of power.

If it had been me, I would have been screaming bloody murder after losing just one.

"Little M and Isabella are back," Orion noted as Makareth and Isabella returned in triumph from the front lines. Without any enemy arch lords on the field, few Legendary-level opponents could stand against them.

"Hahaha, bros, we're back!" Demon Makareth landed beside Leonidas and immediately grabbed a flagon of ale from a nearby table, chugging it down. "I personally finished off two Lords today!"

Isabella landed beside Orion, her head held high with pride, like a peacock showing off its magnificent tail.

She had earned her kills without her colossal dragon, a feat that filled her with a sense of accomplishment. She was hoping for a little praise from Orion and Leonidas.

Unfortunately, both Orion and Leonidas completely missed the social cue.

"My lord." Gustalon's form materialized respectfully behind Orion.

"Well done. Go and rest."

In truth, both Makareth and Isabella had been assisted by Gustalon, whom Orion had sent to support the team's two newcomers.

It was the same way Arthas used to send Rumbold or Vexis to help him, no matter the situation. How Orion used that support was his own business.

Now, Orion was doing the same for them.

Gustalon gave a slight bow to Orion and Leonidas, nodded to Makareth and Isabella, and then vanished into the wind.

Watching the breeze blow away, Makareth lowered his flagon.

"Big boss," he said, his voice full of admiration and envy, "that subordinate of yours is an absolute reaper on the battlefield. He's like a ghost, comes and goes without a trace. In a chaotic fight, he's the enemy's worst nightmare."

It was no exaggeration. With Gustalon's support, slaughtering Legendary-level enemies had become almost easy for Makareth. He didn't have to worry about them escaping, nor did he fear being surrounded.

"Gustalon is an elemental being, which makes him special. But he's not invincible. You two need to watch his back as well."

As an elemental, Gustalon's potential was enormous. He was unique among Orion's forces. Orion's hopes for him and Lumi extended far beyond the Legendary level. They were his future aces, and they needed to be treasured.

"Don't worry, Big boss. I get it," Makareth said, his tactical instincts sharp. "Protecting Gustalon is just another way of protecting our own escape route."

Orion nodded and glanced at Isabella.

"What are you looking at? I'm not an idiot!" she snapped, rolling her eyes. She felt like Orion was underestimating her, and it annoyed her to no end.

"You two get some rest," Leonidas interjected. "In the next engagement, my bro and I will be going with you. And when we do, no one will be watching your backs."

He was making it clear: the next battle would likely involve enemy arch lords. He and Orion would be busy dealing with high-tier opponents and wouldn't have the attention to spare.

"You know, for all that, you have to admit these dragons are tough," Makareth said, still amazed. "And they've got deep reserves. They've lost so many Lords, but their front line hasn't budged an inch."

Even in the Abyss, most major factions would turtle up to lick their wounds after taking such heavy losses.

"These dragons are all backed by at least one world of their own," Leonidas explained. He had the most authority on this subject, having discovered Uynting Realm himself. "They have plenty of mid and high-tier fighters to spare. You two should be careful. Every world has a few geniuses with monstrous talent and strength."

He clapped his hands together.

"Alright, enough shop talk! The dragon meat is roasted and ready. You won the battle, so I am going to throw you a proper welcome-home feast!"

Chapter 933: Luring Them In

Titanion Realm, on the border between the human kingdom and the former dwarven Tribe.

Grand Duke William and Prince Theodore met, flanked by two other nobles of earldom rank, both of whom were William's trusted men.

"Your Grace," Prince Theodore said with a perfect bow. "I am here at the King's command, to serve the realm and help purge this traitor."

William had no complaints about Prince Theodore. In terms of strength and character, the prince was flawless. He was politically astute but operated with his own firm principles. As heir to the kingdom, he was beyond reproach.

"Your Highness," Grand Duke William said, gesturing first to himself, then to the two earls behind him, and finally to the knights standing guard in the distance. "We all need you here. And you need the glory this campaign will bring."

Though William was a Grand Duke of the kingdom, there was always competition between the duchies, and between the duchies and the royal family. With his house's full strength committed to this campaign, he needed a guarantee from the kingdom—a guarantee that no one would raid his lands while his back was turned.

Prince Theodore was that guarantee.

This wasn't a matter of pettiness on William's part; it was a necessary act to maintain the kingdom's fragile balance of power. Without it, the human kingdom would inevitably fall into internal conflict, and perhaps even collapse.

"It is my sworn duty to serve the kingdom, Your Grace," the prince replied, his face showing not a hint of resentment.

The response left William and the two earls deeply satisfied. Only a prince with such magnanimity could earn their trust and support when he one day ascended the throne.

"Let us head to the command tent," William said. "We have maps of the entire region north of the dwarven Tribe. We can plan where to capture that traitor, Torin."

"Of course."

To the north, on the Azurevein Plains.

The plains were the territory of the Blacksteel gnomes, and a countless number of tents, large and small, now dotted the vast grasslands. In the very center stood the largest tent of all.

Inside, Torin sat at the head of a long table. Flanking him were Brokk, King of the Dark Dwarves; Gotte-Steel, King of the gnomes; Orwar, a werewolf lord; and the satyr lord, Jin.

In truth, most of the lords of the far north had been tempted by Torin's call to arms.

But when they learned their enemy was the human kingdom, many had second thoughts and retreated.

The primary reason was not just the kingdom's long-standing reputation for power, but also the fact that in all of Torin's forces, there was no publicly acknowledged arch lord to act as their champion.

Many lords simply lacked the confidence to ignite another Great War between North and South.

Unless Ogu, the clown hiding in Torin's shadow, chose to reveal himself, the smarter lords would not be staking their lives on this venture.

"Lord Commander," Gotte-Steel began, "the armies of the human kingdom have entered the old dwarven Tribe's territory. Shall we go and wipe them out now?"

Lord Commander was, of course, Torin's new title at the head of the Avenger armies. The one speaking, Gotte-Steel, was a timid, sycophantic gnome lord.

"We wait," Torin said, the picture of confidence. "Let them push deeper into the territory. Let them get to a point where reinforcements will take too long to arrive. That will be our moment to devour this army and deal a heavy blow to the human kingdom."

He had every reason to be confident. He was backed by a Big boss from the Survivor's Platform, who had promised to send a will projection to aid him in the critical moment.

If the human kingdom's Saint were to descend, his patron might even consider sending a full-fledged avatar. With an arch lord as his backer, Torin had little to fear from the kingdom's expedition.

His real concern was that the Avenger armies were not yet strong enough to steamroll the human kingdom entirely.

"My lords," Torin announced, his voice echoing in the tent. "The lands we currently hold are not enough. They are not rich enough. To the south, in the human kingdom, there are more fertile fields, more vast forests and mountains. If we defeat them, we can claim those lands, piece by piece. Then, your tribes, your people, will have the resources they need to flourish. Opportunity is right before us!"

This was a pep talk aimed at the werewolf lord Orwar and the satyr Jin. They were the newest additions to his coalition, and Torin needed to shore up their confidence. As for the Dark Dwarf Brokk and the gnome Gotte-Steel, their races had already been brought to heel with Ogu's help; their loyalty was assured.

"Lord Commander," the werewolf Orwar spoke up, "I believe we still lack sufficient air units. The kingdom's griffin armies are not to be taken lightly."

Orwar had fought in the last North-South war and had been lucky to survive. He knew better than anyone that the forces of the human kingdom were formidable, especially in a defensive battle, where their well-equipped soldiers were incredibly difficult to kill.

However, he also knew the kingdom had been severely weakened by that last conflict. There was a real chance they could lose again.

Orwar's confidence stemmed from something else: in Torin's camp, he had sensed the unmistakable aura of an arch lord.

It was a presence he had felt once before, long ago, during the last war—the combined might of the human Saint and the white dragon Frostsire.

He knew Torin had a powerful champion in his corner. It was the entire reason he and the satyr Jin had joined the Avenger armies.

"Rest assured, Lord Orwar," Torin said smoothly. "I have my own ways of dealing with those griffin riders. Our task is to crush the kingdom's ground forces in a decisive battle. We will shatter them, boost the morale of our Avenger armies, and inspire more of the northern tribes to join our cause."

Torin and his new army needed a great victory to prove his capability. Only then could he truly rally the northern tribes and lead them in a war of his own making. Whenever he thought of such a grand undertaking, his blood sang with excitement and ambition.

"The human kingdom's army is not large this time," the satyr lord Jin hissed, his small eyes narrowed. His rectangular pupils, set beneath a pair of curved goat horns, gave him a look of pure malevolence. "Only four Legendary-level champions. Lord Commander, we should plan this carefully, deal them a blow from which they won't recover. It will lay the foundation for our future invasion of their territory."

Faint black-gold markings on his forehead betrayed a trace of Demonic blood.

"Lord Jin speaks wisely," Torin said with a smile. "And that is precisely why I have summoned you all to the command tent."

Torin unrolled a strange sheet of parchment. On it was not just a map of the terrain, but also the live movements of the human kingdom's army, advancing like ants across the parchment.

Seeing this magical map, the lords all rose and gathered around it, leaning in to watch the army's progress as they began to murmur their various strategies to Torin.

Chapter 934: This Time Is Different

Stoneheart Citadel, seat of the Stoneheart Horde.

Orion sat high on his throne once more. Below him stood Delilah and a single, black-clad shadow.

"Princess Ava of the human kingdom has left Rose Manor," Delilah reported, her voice a suggestive murmur. "By my calculations, she should be arriving in Soaring Bird City any day now."

"She's the one presiding over this little three-way summit they've cooked up."

She let the silence hang for a moment before leaning forward slightly. "So, my lord... Are we going to grace them with our presence?"

Orion didn't answer. His focus was elsewhere.

"What about Kronos?"

Ava's movements didn't seem to concern him nearly as much as Kronos's.

"Still at Rose Manor. From all reports, he does nothing but train, day in and day out."

Orion said nothing, closing his eyes to think. Sending Ava to Soaring Bird City was an obvious move by the human kingdom—a calculated effort to placate both the stoneheart horde and the blood elf race.

An emotional play, Orion thought. A blatant attempt to use my history with Ava and Kronos to stall us from holding the traitor Torin accountable.

He opened his eyes, his decision made. "Since King Harold is extending such a personal invitation, you will attend the summit. See what they have to say."

He had already chosen his envoy.

"But before you go to Soaring Bird City," he added, a sharp glint in his eye, "make a detour to the City of the Guardian. And ride Xalathar."

A flicker of genuine delight crossed Delilah's face. She accepted the command with a pleased bow.

Arriving on the back of Xalathar, the Legendary-level abyssal dragon, meant she wasn't just a representative. She was Orion's voice. She was his will made manifest.

That distinction was critical, not just within the Stoneheart Horde, but to every other major faction watching.

"And the northern lords? What's the situation?"

Now that the Horde had solidified its foothold in the south, Delilah's Sentinel Corps had cast a wide net of scouts across the territories of the other races. Torin's rise was bound to cause ripples in the north.

"Most are watching and waiting," Delilah said. "Only two have actively joined the human Baron's rebellion: a werewolf lord and a satyr lord."

"Their encampment is a fortress. It's crawling with specialists, an unnerving number of them. We've lost every scout we sent to penetrate their perimeter."

Orion's brow furrowed at that. "Pull the Sentinel Corps off any intel gathering related to the Avenger Armies for now."

"As you command," Delilah replied. She cast a sidelong glance at the silent shadow on the other side of the throne before taking her leave, her steps silent as she exited the great hall.

Only when she was gone did Orion turn his attention to the remaining figure. "Report."

"My lord," the shadow began, his voice a dry rasp, "the human, Torin, has successfully reached Legendary level."

The air in the hall grew heavy.

"But his aura is unstable. It fluctuates wildly. Our strategists believe he used some forbidden technique to ascend. There will be consequences."

It was a bombshell. Torin hit Legendary level faster than I did.

But then, considering he was now tethered to a patron like Ogu the Clown, it wasn't entirely surprising. With that kind of backing, anything was possible.

"Continue," Orion commanded, his voice flat. He wanted to know just how powerful Torin had become.

"Latest intel confirms five primary leaders in the Avenger Armies: Torin himself, Brokk of the Dark Dwarves, Gotte-Steel of the Blacksteel gnomes, the werewolf Orwar, and the satyr Jin."

"However, we believe there are two additional Legendary-level powerhouses hidden within their camp."

"We don't have an ID on them yet," the shadow admitted. "They're ghosts."

Seven Legendary-level combatants.

To the man Orion was now, it was a trivial threat. But if he were still just a lord, that lineup would have been more formidable than an entire theater command during the last North-South War.

"What about the other northern clans? Have you made any inroads?" Orion asked, his tone almost casual.

Torin was a nuisance, but the real threat was the entity pulling his strings—Ogu, the traitor to the Champions Alliance.

Fortunately, the human kingdom was taking point on this one, allowing him the luxury of observing from the shadows.

"Our intelligence largely corroborates what the succubus reported," the shadow said. "However, our strategists predict that if the Avenger Armies win their first major engagement against the kingdom, a flood of northern clans will join their cause."

"In their eyes, the human kingdom has already lost one continental war. They believe it can lose another. The victory of the white dragon Frostsire convinced them all that humanity is in terminal decline."

So that's it. They wanted a repeat of history. The northern lords were greedy, ambitious. They craved the resources and fertile lands of the south.

"Makes sense," Orion murmured to himself, putting himself in their position. "If I were a northern lord, I'd probably join the invasion too. If things go south, you just retreat back to your territory. Nothing wagered, nothing lost."

He sat in the silence of the throne room, turning the thought over.

"A pity for them," he whispered, a faint, cold smile touching his lips. "This time is different."

His own prior conclusion was wrong. The last war was a coalition of dwarves, humans, and blood elves against the dragons and the northern hordes. But this time, the board had changed.

The dwarves had been corrupted and had switched sides, true. But the southern coalition now included the Stoneheart Horde.

Even if Ogu the Clown manifested a powerful archlord avatar, it wouldn't be enough. The north was going to lose this war, and in the process, their lands would be squeezed even further.

"Any word on him?"

The "him" was obvious. Ogu.

"Apologies, my lord. The Hall Master is handling that file personally. I am not privy to its contents."

Orion nodded. The shadow bowed low and simply dissolved back into the darkness he came from, leaving no trace he was ever there.

Orion closed his eyes again, his mind slipping away to the Survivor's Platform, ready to go shopping.

Emerald Dream Realm, the Kasenna Sea.

The invasion by the dragon flights was a relentless meat grinder. The mid-to-low tier combat units on both sides were locked in a brutal, attritional struggle.

After weeks of sustained combat, Orion's thunderhawk army and Demon Makareth's gargoyle army were both shattered remnants.

Having lost all unit cohesion, they had been rotated to the rear to lick their wounds and reform. The raw aerial combat prowess of the dragons' lesser dragon beasts and drakes was simply overwhelming.

Now, holding the front line was a new force Leonidas had deployed: a flying beast called the green-scaled fireraven.

Though its name suggested a raven, the creature looked more like a grotesque, featherless vulture, its screech echoing over the churning waves of the Kasenna Sea.

Chapter 935: Prison of Light

Their bodies were covered head-to-toe in green scales, and they could sling a surprising amount of mid-tier fire magic.

While these green-scaled fireravens were still no match for true dragon beasts or the dragons themselves, their strength was in their sheer, unending numbers.

When a wave of them was incinerated, necromancers like Vexis and Clymene would simply raise their corpses, and the newly undead beasts would rejoin the fray.

"So, bro. What do you think of my little pets?" Leonidas's voice boomed with pride through their private channel.

"They're brutally effective," Orion admitted without hesitation. The praise was genuine. "If they weren't up against dragons with their insane magic Resistance, your fireravens would scorch the earth clean of any enemy."

"Heh, I'm not just hyping them up. On a land-based battlefield, they're a certified apocalypse," Leonidas said, though a hint of pain crept into his voice. "It's just... the attrition rate is staggering."

Even with his deep reserves, watching his forces get systematically annihilated was a bitter pill to swallow. His resources weren't infinite.

The good news was that while the Champions Alliance coalition was taking heavy losses, their battle line remained stable, thanks in large part to the relentless pressure from the undead armies. The bad news was that the dragons had support units of their own—specifically, dragons that wielded light magic, capable of purging undead and dispelling enchantments.

These light-wielders were priority number one for Demon Makareth, Isabella, and Gustalon. And right now, they were making a play.

"Isabella, cover me!" Demon Makareth roared, beating his wings as he hefted his blade, preparing to charge deep into the dragon army's formation to execute the white dragon casting the radiant spells.

Isabella, already mounted on her colossal dragon, was one step ahead of him, diving into the fray. But her path was immediately intercepted by two Legendary-level dragons, one green and one red, who pinned her down in a brutal dogfight.

Demon Makareth's form flickered, phasing through space in a series of short, sharp jumps. But just as he was about to reach his target, a defensive ward flared into existence, taking the shape of a massive, shimmering brass dragon.

Makareth's scimitar struck it twice in quick succession, the impacts sending violent shudders through the construct, but the barrier held.

"I'll control the field! Wait for my opening!" Gustalon's voice echoed across the wind.

A moment later, a massive vortex erupted with Makareth at its epicenter. The storm expanded rapidly, its tearing, pulling forces intensifying with every passing second. As the maelstrom reached its critical point, the Bronze Dragon Ward began to groan and buckle until it was finally ripped apart by the gale.

"Hahaha! Perfect! Watch this—Abyssal Rend!" Makareth roared.

Transcendent power flared around him as Abyssal energy engulfed his body. He became a streak of pure black blade aura, hurtling toward the now-exposed white dragon.

"Insolence!"

From the rear of the dragon formation, a mountain-sized black dragon opened its maw and spat a beam of pure darkness, aimed directly at Makareth.

"You dare interfere in a children's squabble?" a new voice thundered. "Have you dragons devoured your own honor? You shameless lizards!"

Leonidas appeared in a flash of teleportation high above the battlefield, slamming a closed fist into the beam of dark energy and shattering it into nothing.

"Finally decided to show yourselves?"

Orion, trident in hand, walked on the air itself, each step solid as he came to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Leonidas.

In the distance, two immense forms materialized—the black dragon and a massive white dragon, their true forms blotting out the sky as they surged forward.

"Old rules," Leonidas grinned, his body already beginning to swell. "You take one, I take one!"

He shot forward, activating his Behemoth rage as he rocketed toward the black dragon like a cannonball.

Orion didn't waste a second. He took a single step, and his Titan Form erupted into being, his power surging exponentially. He triggered Instant Impact, and the space around him seemed to crack and buckle under the force of his charge.

He appeared directly above the white dragon, plunging his trident downward for the kill.

The arch lord white dragon barely moved. It simply tilted its head up.

"Light illuminates all. There is nowhere for you to run."

A soft halo of light pulsed outward from the dragon's scales. A spike of pure danger shot through Orion, and he tried to pull back, but it was too late. The halo flashed, unleashing a barrage of brilliant lances of light.

Orion's reaction was instantaneous. The Icy Bone Armor from his trident's Flame of Will materialized around him. It shattered a microsecond later.

His Ghostbone Armor flared up next. It, too, was instantly destroyed.

Even the dragonscale leather armor gifted to him by his commander offered no resistance. The lances of light punched through his defenses as if they were paper.

In the space of a single heartbeat, his body was perforated by dozens of searing wounds.

Hahh!

The devastating blow sent him reeling, but he used the momentum to create distance. Not far away, he hovered in the air as his flesh began to writhe. Under the healing effect of his Titan bloodline, the gaping holes in his body sealed over at a visible rate. Within a few breaths, he was whole again.

"Interesting," Orion said, his voice steady despite the lingering pain. "You're stronger than I expected."

He had never faced an enemy this terrifying. This white dragon exuded an overwhelming sense of crisis, but also... a strange familiarity. And its tone—it spoke as if it knew him.

"Who are you?"

"Who I am," the white dragon rumbled, a chilling grin spreading across its reptilian face, "is something you will learn soon enough."

Without any further movement, the light around it flared once more, growing impossibly bright.

"Without light, the world is darkness. And darkness is a prison."

Orion's pupils contracted. An impossible sensation washed over him—the distance between himself and the white dragon was stretching to infinity.

It was as if the dragon was a lone star in the void, and Orion was being cast out from its light, banished into the absolute dark. Yet he knew, with chilling certainty, that he hadn't moved an inch.

The light around him was simply gone, sucked away, absorbed by the dragon. The stark contrast created a powerful hallucination, a feeling of being exiled by light itself. He was trapped in a pocket of absolute blackness, unable to do anything, because his enemy was now an infinite distance away, far outside his attack range.

He was, in a very real sense, imprisoned.

"Let me guess," the dragon's voice echoed in his ear, calm, superior, and impossibly condescending. "Your aura... it is very similar to that of the tomb raider. Is this your avatar? Or perhaps your puppet?"

The voice paused.

"I will give you one chance. Return what you stole from me, and I shall spare your life."

At those words, the blood drained from Orion's face. He knew. He finally knew who this was.

The Great Dragon King of Light, Mondusath!

No, that couldn't be right. This had to be an avatar. A puppet.

"It seems you recognize me now," the white dragon said, its voice resonating with satisfaction. "Return my property, or tell me where it is."

It began to walk forward through the void, raising one massive claw. At its tip, a sphere of incandescent light began to coalesce.

Orion tried to use Instant Impact to escape the banishment of light, but while he felt the skill activate successfully each time, his body remained stubbornly locked in place, a prisoner in the suffocating dark.

Chapter 936: The Dignity of a Survivor

A light-based power this perverse was beyond belief.

The white dragon drew closer, the sphere of radiant fire on its claw growing brighter, hotter.

A new mark blazed to life on Orion's forehead: the emblem of two massive, crossed tusks. The Ancestor's Soul.

Orion threw his head back and let out a guttural roar of pure agony. As he did, a shockwave of soul power erupted from him, violently expelling every trace of elemental energy from his immediate vicinity. For a split second, he existed in a perfect vacuum, devoid of both light and darkness.

The anomaly did not go unnoticed. The Great Dragon King of Light, Mondusath, thrust its claw forward without hesitation, aiming to impale him.

But in that same instant, Orion vanished.

He reappeared a safe distance away, panting, a wave of relief washing over him. Thank the gods for the Ancestor's Soul. That was my last trump card. Without it, that last attack would have crippled me.

Mondusath's calm voice drifted across the void once more. "No wonder you were able to infiltrate my sanctum and steal my treasures. You are as slippery as an eel."

The dragon's form shimmered. "A pity. You cannot escape."

Another halo of light pulsed from its body. Where the light touched, the dragon could manifest. It appeared instantly at Orion's side, swiping a claw to ensnare him.

The Ancestor's Soul roared again, and Orion blinked away just in time.

"Bro, end your fight, now!" Orion sent a desperate, mind-to-mind message to Leonidas. "This white dragon is an avatar of Mondusath himself! It's on a whole other level!"

This arch lord's power couldn't be measured by conventional standards. Its abilities weren't just bizarre; its grasp of combat tempo was flawless. A warrior as powerful as Orion had been suppressed from the very first exchange, struggling just to find an opening to counterattack.

"Only shadows flee from the light," the white dragon intoned, its voice devoid of anger or surprise as Orion dodged again. The halos around its body began to flash in a complex rhythm as its free claw wove a series of intricate signs.

Miles away, Orion's body suddenly wavered, then seemed to melt like wax, dissolving completely into the shadow he cast upon the ground.

Meanwhile, Leonidas, who had been thoroughly enjoying his brawl with the black dragon, nearly choked when Orion's message came through.

Holy shit.

He didn't waste a word. He sacrificed his battle-axe in a flash of light, simultaneously whipping out a scroll. He tore it in half and slapped the pieces against his chest.

The next moment, his Behemoth form began to shift.

His fingertips elongated, hardening into razor-sharp talons that crackled with raw lightning. Runes of thunder blazed to life across his massive body, coalescing in a matter of seconds into a gleaming suit of electric armor.

It was a Forbidden Art, a rare support-class incantation—the Aegis of Thunderlight.

"Go to hell!" the armored Behemoth roared, charging the black dragon with reckless, unstoppable force.

The news from Orion was so dire that Leonidas had no choice but to burn one of his own trump cards to end this fight immediately.

Titanion Realm, deep within the dwarven Tribe territory.

While Orion's mirrored avatar fought a desperate battle against the Great Dragon King of Light, the survivor Torin was leading his Avenger Armies in a surprise assault on Grand Duke William and Prince Theodore.

The chaos of the rank-and-file soldiers, everything below Alpha-level, was a roaring tide of steel and screams, a single, massive melee that swallowed individuals whole.

But high in the sky above, the real battle was taking shape.

Torin, flanked by Brokk of the Dark Dwarves, Gotte-Steel of the gnomes, the werewolf Orwar, and the satyr Jin, had surrounded the four lords of the human kingdom.

Grand Duke William, a peak Legendary-level warrior, anchored their defense. Though outnumbered five to four, on paper, his side still possessed the greater raw power.

"Legendary level?" Grand Duke William's face was a mask of fury, his voice shaking with rage as he felt the aura pouring from Torin. "So it's true. You are a traitor. You've betrayed the human race, you've betrayed the nobles, and you've betrayed our faith!"

In this world, if a common human ascended to Legendary level without being part of the nobility, there were only two possibilities. The first was that they had forsaken their people and their faith. The second was that they had condensed a Lord's Stone through their own power—a possibility so remote, the Grand Duke dismissed it out of hand.

"Betrayal?" Torin threw his head back and laughed, a ragged, broken sound that was more of a sob than a chuckle. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

His voice rose to a scream. "If it weren't for you parasites hollowing out my Soaring Bird City, would I have ever ended up like this?!"

He gestured wildly, his eyes manic. "You nobles! What do you do besides squat on the heads of the common folk, sucking up the wealth they create, hoarding their faith for yourselves?"

"Soaring Bird City is my territory! Have you ever heard of a lord who has to pay entry tolls and protection fees just to enter his own city? Have you ever seen a lord so terrified that he daren't even step outside his own gates?"

"That is what you gave me! Humiliation! You trampled on my dignity!"

To an outsider, Torin's speech might have sounded pitiable. But the kingdom had extensive intelligence on him. The list of his own atrocities, committed in the shadows, was long.

"Lord Torin, it's not too late to stop," Prince Theodore said, his voice calm and measured. "I give you my word. If you surrender and confess, you will be given everything you desire."

Torin was Legendary level now, with a coalition of other lords at his back. Such a faction was worth turning. If they could be brought into the fold, the human kingdom's power would swell, cementing its place as the continent's number one power. Recognizing this, even Grand Duke William held his tongue, his face a dark scowl.

Torin just stared at the prince. "Stop? Are you out of your mind?"

"Everything I want, I will take with my own two hands! Why would I need you to grant it to me like a scrap from your table?"

A chilling, high-pitched cackle escaped his lips. "Heh heh heh... I have you four surrounded. I will not let this opportunity pass. Your lives will be the offering that consecrates the banner of the Avenger Armies!"

His gaze fixed on the prince, dripping with venom. "Don't think I don't know, Theodore. You've always looked down on me."

"Do you remember? The first time you came to Soaring Bird City, it was I who broke my back playing host, who personally escorted you to the Stoneheart Horde to retrieve your bitch of an aunt."

A flash of memory, raw and painful, crossed Torin's eyes—images of himself begging, scraping, and bowing for the sake of his city.

"And what was the result? When we returned, you didn't even spare me a glance. I offered you my loyalty, and you didn't even give me the chance to prove it!"

The memory shattered, replaced by a murderous rage. "And now you dare to offer me surrender? You're the first one I'm going to kill!"

He would use slaughter to reclaim the dignity that was stolen from him—the dignity of an awakened survivor.

"Kill them!"

Chapter 937: By This Blood

It was an indescribable sensation.

His body, his mind, his very soul were trapped in an amorphous prison of shadow. Everything around him was an absolute darkness that seemed to dissolve reality itself.

The feeling was worse than being devoured; it was a slow, terrifying erasure.

For the first time, a sliver of genuine despair and fear pierced Orion's composure. It coiled around him, heavy and exhausting, a shackle on his will.

"You see," the voice of the Great Dragon King of Light, Mondusath, echoed from everywhere at once. "I told you. You cannot escape."

Above him, in the dark firmament of his prison, a face emerged—the partial visage of Mondusath, so colossal it blotted out everything else.

The effect was nauseating. It was as if Orion was trapped at the bottom of a deep well, and the only sky he could see was the impossibly vast, leering face of the Great Dragon King.

Every subtle shift in the dragon's expression was amplified a thousandfold. What Orion saw was pure mockery. Utter contempt.

In the world outside the shadow, Mondusath loomed over the dark mass Orion had melted into, its physical form peering down at its trapped prey.

"Tell me," the dragon commanded, its claw igniting once more with radiant fire, the very laws of physics seeming to bend around it. "Where is it? Who has it?"

Zing!

At that moment, a spectral spirit sword tore through the fabric of space, appearing directly above the pool of shadow.

"Alexander's Flaw-Seeker!"

Alexander's cold, sharp voice cut through the air. The spirit sword hissed as it descended, aimed directly at Mondusath's head.

Mondusath gave a dismissive snort, and a halo of light pulsed from its body to intercept the attack. But this time, the light failed. Alexander's Flaw-Seeker was an attack that bypassed all defenses to strike at a target's fundamental weakness.

With a sickening schlick, the avatar of the Great Dragon King of Light was cleaved cleanly in two.

The instant Mondusath was struck, the shadow prison dissolved. Light and darkness rushed back into equilibrium, and Orion stumbled out, the terror of his confinement still clinging to him.

"Bro! Just in time!" Orion gasped, appearing beside the hovering spirit sword. "That thing is the Great Dragon King, Mondusath!"

He had to warn him, afraid Alexander would underestimate the foe and pay the price.

"I gathered it wasn't normal," Alexander's voice replied from the sword. "A peak arch lord shouldn't be this terrifying."

And it was terrifying. Across from them, the two halves of Mondusath's body slid back together as if nothing had happened, leaving not so much as a seam. It fixed its cold gaze on Orion and the spirit sword.

"So, it seems you also had a hand in the desecration of my tomb," Mondusath accused the newcomer.

Alexander didn't deign to reply. The spirit sword merely trembled, gathering power.

"This is just an arch lord's shell," his voice transmitted to Orion. "No matter how powerful, it can't surpass a demigod. With the right approach, it can be killed."

It was both an observation and a statement of supreme confidence.

"Right," Orion grunted, subtly collecting a few droplets of blood that had been flung from the dragon by the spirit sword's attack.

Alexander's avatar hadn't just saved him; it had secured the medium he needed. Alexander had known from the start that a single blow wouldn't be enough. For a man who preferred to end fights in a single, perfect strike, that fact alone spoke volumes about how dangerous he considered Mondusath.

"Again!"

The spirit sword wasted no more time on conversation, transforming into a streak of light as it shot toward Mondusath once more. Alexander was buying him time.

"Hmph. May the light in your eyes be your undoing, and your slaughter illuminate your own demise!" Mondusath chanted. Another halo coalesced around it, the law of light itself manifesting as a perfectly circular, shimmering mirror.

The spirit sword slammed into the mirror's surface, its energy rippling against the reflective barrier, threatening to be refracted and turned aside. But a furious roar emanated from the sword avatar, and the repulsive force ceased.

A horrific, grating screech filled the air, like two tectonic plates grinding against each other. The mirror shattered, and Alexander's spirit sword was thrown back.

"A Regulus Blade?" Mondusath's voice was laced with genuine shock. "A holy relic?"

It couldn't believe that a mere arch lord would possess a sacred sword capable of ignoring the laws of light and meeting it in a direct clash of power.

Its answer was not a reply from Alexander, but the final words of Orion's incantation.

"Dragon-ghost, slumbering in the endless dark, hear my call! By this blood, I offer a tribute you covet! Descend and feast! Arise, Ghost Dragon!"

The forbidden summoning skill, Ghost Dragon, activated. An aura that made Mondusath's scales crawl—an energy fundamentally opposed to its own—descended, enveloping it completely.

Body, mind, and soul—all were sealed in an instant. Mondusath couldn't even command the law of light to defend itself.

Now!

Orion and Alexander shot forward from opposite directions, their target the paralyzed dragon.

Aura Lock! Berserk Aura! Instant Impact!

Bolstered by his Titan Form and the Ancestor's Soul, Orion became a living thunderbolt, slamming into Mondusath's white dragon form.

Just as its physical body was about to be obliterated, a furious shriek erupted from within. A faint sphere of light burst forth from the corpse—the white dragon's body of faith. Mondusath's own will projection.

But what met the escaping will was not Orion's charge. It was another ultimate attack, one Alexander had been preparing all along.

"Kill!"

"Kill!"

In that single moment, the wills of Alexander and Orion burned as one, their focus absolute: destroy Mondusath's avatar, here and now.

BOOM!

BOOM!

Two massive impacts echoed in rapid succession. Mondusath's physical form was annihilated by Orion's charge, its dissipating body consumed as a sacrifice by the rising Ghost Dragon. At the same time, Alexander's spirit sword collided with the sphere of light, a high-pitched, resonant hum ringing from the blade as the two forces locked in a desperate stalemate.

Orion gripped his trident, preparing to join the tug-of-war between fundamental forces. But just then, a titanic roar echoed from the distance.

It was Leonidas.

"BEHEMOTH OBLIVION BEAM!"

The lightning armor around Leonidas surged violently, countless arcs of electricity leaping from his body until he resembled a miniature sun. In the next instant, that sphere of energy compressed into a perfectly straight beam of incandescent power, a bolt of divine punishment that lanced across the sky and struck the white dragon's body of faith.

The truth was, Leonidas could have finished the black dragon arch lord long ago. He had been dragging out the fight, waiting for precisely this kind of opening. Compared to the black dragon, the cards up his sleeve were almost limitless.

"DAMNABLE WRETCHES! FILTHY TOMB-ROBBERS! YOU INFERIOR INSECTS! I WILL ANNIHILATE YOU! I WILL—"

Amid the grinding shriek of sword light and the crackling roar of thunder, the voice of the Great Dragon King of Light, Mondusath, grew fainter and fainter, until it vanished completely.

Chapter 938: As Long as I Am Here

The clouds of battle parted. The explosive collisions ceased, and the churning waves of energy fell still.

Orion, Leonidas, and the spirit sword avatar gathered in the quiet emptiness of the sky. For a long moment, none of them spoke.

The fight had shaken them all. It had taken the combined might of three of the Champions Alliance's top-tier arch lords just to bring down a single avatar of the Great Dragon King of Light, Mondusath.

That white dragon, they all knew, represented the absolute pinnacle of power at the arch lord stage. It was the ceiling.

"Son of a bitch," Leonidas finally grumbled, his tone laced with cynical resentment. "Talk about an OP boss. If you didn't have so many tricks up your sleeve, bro, our corpses would be decorating this battlefield right now."

"There's always another level," Orion said, his gaze distant. "Did you ever imagine that a single arch lord could be that terrifying? I think that white dragon could have faced a demigod phantom without flinching."

He turned to the others. "Let's go back. The Deputy Commander and the others were surely watching. The fact that the dragon demigods didn't intervene means there's something else going on here, something we don't know."

To avoid provoking an all-out war between demigods, Orion, Leonidas, and Alexander turned and left the field, leaving their mid- and low-tier forces to continue the grinding war of attrition on the front lines.

Titanion Realm, deep within the dwarven Tribe territory.

War between lords was a brutal affair.

Initially, under Grand Duke William's leadership, the four lords of the human kingdom had held their own against Torin's five. But the tide turned in an instant when Torin tore two scrolls in half, summoning a pair of Legendary-level puppets out of thin air.

In the ensuing chaos, the two human earls were cut down.

The sudden reversal happened so fast that even the human kingdom's Saint Noel, who was observing the battle, couldn't react in time.

"Insolence!"

A wave of pure fury washed over Saint Noel. For two lords of the kingdom to be slain right under his nose was an unforgivable failure. But as his will projection descended upon the battlefield, he was met with an even greater shock.

A mysterious and unfamiliar will, one of immense domain power, rose from within the Avenger Armies to intercept him.

Saint Noel made several attempts to probe and question the entity, but received no response. The lines were drawn. This was a blood feud, with no room for negotiation.

"I will hold him! William, Theodore, fall back now!"

With that telepathic command, Saint Noel engaged the unknown will projection.

Down below, the moment they felt the presence of the enemy arch lord, any will to fight drained from William and Theodore. Without a shred of hesitation, they turned and fled.

"After them! Don't let a single one escape!" Torin shrieked with manic laughter, black, demonic sigils writhing across his skin, twisting his features into a terrifying mask.

He had slain two lords with his own power. The intoxicating sensation of holding the power of life and death in his hands was a dizzying, addictive rush.

At the same time, with their own esteemed patron's will now present on the field, Brokk of the Dark Dwarves, Gotte-Steel of the Gnomes, and the lords Orwar and Jin cast off all restraint, roaring as they gave chase to the fleeing Grand Duke and Prince.

News of the turning tide spread like wildfire through the armies clashing on the ground. The scouts from the various northern clans embedded within the Avenger Armies immediately disengaged from the fighting and raced back to deliver the report.

Stoneheart Citadel, the Stoneheart Horde.

Orion, of course, felt the ripples from the arch lord battle.

He opened his eyes, left the throne room, and walked out onto the eastern ramparts of the citadel. A few moments later, Lilith, having gotten the news, appeared at his side. She linked her arm through his, her face etched with worry.

"Is something wrong?"

Orion nodded, seeing no reason to hide it. "There are aftershocks of an arch lord battle coming from the dwarven Tribe's territory to the east. I imagine the kingdom's Saint has finally clashed with the power behind Torin."

Lilith didn't need to be a strategist to understand what that meant.

War had come. And it was likely to be a full-scale war between the north and the south.

"Do we need to prepare?"

Orion shook his head, pulling her close with his free arm. "I am here," he said, his voice ringing with absolute confidence. "As long as the northern lords aren't complete fools, they won't drag the Stoneheart Horde into this."

"My guess is the Northern Coalition will flood into the dwarven lands to link up with Torin's Avenger Armies. It's always smart to stand in the shadow of a giant. Even they understand that."

His confidence was its own form of power.

"Of course," he added with a thin smile, "if some shortsighted lord wants to deliver their Lord's Stone to my doorstep, I certainly won't object."

"Send word to Aldous. Tell him to put our forces on alert, just in case. Have our standing armies mobilize and begin patrols along our northern borders."

With Delilah away in Soaring Bird City, the logistics and administration of the horde fell to Lilith. She absorbed Orion's intel and strategic analysis, knowing it was now up to her to set his commands in motion.

"Daddy! Mama!"

Just as they finished speaking, Elara sensed Orion's presence and, in a flash of teleportation, appeared on his shoulders, clinging to his neck.

"Is it time?" Orion asked, reaching up to habitually ruffle her hair.

"Uh-huh! I can't wait anymore!" Elara chirped.

Lately, Pallas had become the talk of Stoneheart Citadel after bonding with his black dragon, his status among the other Tribe younglings skyrocketing. As far as Elara was concerned, once she had her dragon, she was going to throw a party that would put Pallas's to shame and cement her rightful place as the coolest kid in the Tribe.

“I need to take Elara to the Valkorath Realm,” Orion said, turning to Lilith. “Her dragon egg is about to hatch. We’ll be back in three days, max.”

Lilith nodded, a warm smile on her face as she watched the strange and loving pair.

Human Kingdom, Soaring Bird City.

The city was still mostly a ruin, but since the evil Abyssal energy had been cleansed, reconstruction had begun with the full support of the kingdom. The basic layout of the city remained, making the work proceed smoothly.

On the grounds of the former palace, a new, heavily armed fortress was being erected. Its style seemed to borrow heavily from Stoneheart Citadel’s design. It was clear Ava intended to turn this place into a bastion.

Delilah could understand the sentiment. No one wanted a repeat of what had happened to the old Soaring Bird City. Ava didn’t want to be caught helpless ever again.

“Your Excellency,” a voice called out, pulling Delilah from her thoughts. It was Ava. “Has there been word from the Stoneheart Horde?”

Chapter 939: The Admiral and the Octopus

On the third-floor balcony of the palace, Ava and the blood elf race’s Grand Elder Lireesa watched as Delilah received a report from a tiny raven that had landed on her arm.

Delilah offered a devastatingly charming smile, her allure undeniable. Both Ava and Lireesa had to admit, the grand steward of the Stoneheart Horde possessed a magnetism that could easily captivate the King of Giants.

“War is coming.”

Delilah didn't offer any specifics. Instead, she adopted a look of grave, statesmanlike concern, her gaze shifting between Ava and Lireesa. It lingered on Ava.

The human kingdom's defeat in the dwarven lands had caused all of Ava's previous assurances to evaporate like mist.

Hearing Delilah's words, both Ava and Lireesa frowned.

"Your Excellency," Lireesa began, her age affording her the right to speak first, her tone polite but firm. "Has there been some trouble in the dwarven lands?"

Delilah nodded slowly, her eyes fixed on Ava. "Torin's Avenger Armies," she said, her voice laced with a strange theatricality, "have attacked the forces of the human kingdom deep within dwarven territory."

"The details of the battle are still unknown, but the power behind Torin has officially engaged with your Saint."

She watched them process the bombshell, a ghost of a smile touching her lips before she added, "The outcome is, as of yet, undecided."

Even without a clear result, Ava and Lireesa knew exactly what this meant. The appearance of a new, unknown arch lord, combined with such an aggressive move, was a clear play for territory. A declaration of intent.

"Your Excellency, are you saying the North-South War is about to begin again?" Grand Elder Lireesa's voice trembled slightly.

Delilah could hear the note of desperate hope in her tone.

The war had broken out in the dwarven lands. For the blood elf race, this was a stroke of luck. To their north sat the impassable Stoneheart Horde, and to their east, their traditional allies, the human kingdom. They were, for all intents and purposes, completely shielded from the front lines of this new conflict.

Grand Elder Lireesa couldn't help but offer a silent prayer of thanks. The decision to forge an alliance with the Stoneheart Horde through Lycanor's marriage now seemed like a stroke of pure genius.

"Princess Ava," Delilah said, her smile returning as she looked at the human royal. "This situation is now far beyond your ability to delay or decide. I suggest we all wait a few days. I'm sure new intelligence will be arriving from your kingdom shortly."

Delilah savored the moment. She had held power over Ava when she was a captive, and she still held it now.

Ava nodded. While she was far from calm, she showed no outward signs of agitation. "Perhaps you're right."

With a slight bow, she turned and left the balcony. She hadn't come to Soaring Bird City alone, and she had her own means of contacting King Harold. She had to confirm this intelligence, to find out exactly what had happened.

"Lady Lireesa," Delilah said casually, noticing the Grand Elder hadn't left, a thoughtful expression on her face. "You, of all people, should be pleased."

"You jest, Your Excellency," Lireesa replied cautiously. "If it is truly a continental war, the blood elf race cannot possibly stand aside."

Delilah's smile widened, but she said nothing. The Grand Elder was correct. If a full-scale war broke out, neither the stoneheart horde nor the human kingdom would allow the blood elves to remain neutral. As part of the southern alliance, they would be expected to contribute resources and troops. The silver lining, of course, was that the war itself wouldn't burn its way to their doorstep.

"You speak the truth," Delilah mused. "And it won't just be the blood elves. The dragons won't be able to sit this one out, either. I imagine this three-way summit will soon become a four-way one."

She leaned against the railing, letting the cool breeze play with her elaborate hairstyle and her light silk robes. From where Lireesa stood, Delilah radiated an effortless grace, the poise of a woman who felt the great currents of the world turning at her command.

The times are changing, Lireesa murmured to herself, bowing her head. The great tide is turning.

She could almost see a fragment of the prophecy once given by the Divine Tree.

Emerald Dream Realm, the Kasenna Sea.

The war on the front lines raged on. Isabella and Makareth had not yet returned.

Orion and Leonidas were lounging under a parasol, back to drinking and eating as usual. As for Alexander, he had vanished the moment he returned.

“Heh, so bro,” Leonidas started, a greedy glint in his eye. “Get any good drops?”

“A skill book,” Orion replied flatly.

“Hah! My RNG was better! Scored a piece of legendary equipment.”

Leonidas had slain the black dragon, while Orion had dealt the killing blow to the white dragon’s physical form. Of course, the dragon’s body of faith had been destroyed by the combined efforts of Leonidas and Alexander, but will projections didn’t drop survivor chests. Only Orion, who had shattered its corporeal body, was rewarded with loot.

An unspoken understanding passed between them. Neither asked for specifics about what the other had received. Items like these were trump cards, lifelines. The less people knew about them, the better.

Just as Leonidas was about to launch into another boastful tirade, the space beside them rippled. The figures of Arthas and Kraken appeared.

Arthas was merely a will projection, but Kraken... Kraken was different.

He had taken on the appearance of a human naval captain. He wore a tattered admiral's uniform, a high-collared black cape, and a neatly trimmed Twilight Viper beard. His eyes were steady and resolute, giving him an air of class.

The most jarring detail, of course, was that instead of hair or a captain's hat, a massive octopus with a dense thicket of tentacles was perched atop his head.

"Kraken, you broke through?" Orion exclaimed, sensing the change in his aura.

"Hahaha! That's my boy, Squiddy! Your timing couldn't be better!" Leonidas leaped from his lounge chair and threw an arm around Kraken's shoulders, looking him over with intense curiosity. "Whoa, Squiddy, your aura feels... weird."

Up close, Leonidas could clearly feel the anomaly in Kraken's energy.

"This body is a lord avatar I acquired long ago," Kraken explained. "By chance, I came upon a special potion. After the avatar drank it, it allowed my true form to merge with it. Essentially, my true form can now inhabit this avatar."

When Kraken spoke, it was unnerving. The voice emerged from both the admiral's mouth and the beak of the massive octopus simultaneously, creating a layered, stereophonic duet.

"The primary benefit is that I can not only use my own racial abilities, but I can also use skills through the avatar that were impossible for me in my massive octopus form," he continued. "And this avatar has excellent potential for future growth."

Chapter 940: Inferno Dragon

Orion and Leonidas understood immediately. In his previous beast form, skills like swordsmanship or complex martial arts were impossible for Kraken to use effectively. Now, with the captain avatar, his capabilities had expanded, and his combat power had taken a significant leap.

“That last battle was strange,” Arthas’s will projection spoke, his voice cutting through their chatter.

“The dragon demigods were watching you fight, but they made no move to intervene. That suggests the Great Dragon King of Light, Mondusath, does not hold the esteemed position within their hierarchy that we once believed. The entire situation stinks of intrigue. Be careful.”

Arthas’s gaze swept over Leonidas and Orion. “Kraken has just reached arch lord. He lacks combat experience at this level. Watch over him.”

“If the dragons send more arch lords, the Deputy Commander will dispatch a storm avatar, and I will send my own bone dragon to support you.”

“The situation is volatile. Multiple other demigod-level powers are observing us from the shadows. It’s impossible to tell friend from foe. Be vigilant.”

With those final words, Arthas’s will projection slowly faded, his departure as swift and clean as his arrival.

Orion, Leonidas, and Kraken looked at each other, momentarily at a loss for words.

Titanion Realm, Dwarven Lands.

Torin stared at the scroll in his hand, hesitating.

It was a binding-type skill scroll. If he tore it, he could capture either the fleeing Grand Duke William or Prince Theodore. His gut screamed at him to trap the prince. He had sworn he would kill Theodore. And besides, holding the prince hostage would give him immense leverage over King Harold.

But what if the kingdom simply abandoned the prince? Then the scroll would have been wasted.

Capturing the peak Legendary-level Grand Duke William, on the other hand, would instantly cripple one of the kingdom's top combatants. The death of the Grand Duke, on top of the two earls, would almost certainly throw the kingdom's internal factions into chaos. A fractured kingdom would be much easier to conquer.

Think with your head, not your gut, he told himself, the phrase a frantic mantra. Logic over emotion. Logic over emotion.

After a long, agonizing moment, his decision was made.

He ripped the scroll in half, his eyes locking onto Grand Duke William with a venomous glare. "You'll do."

To make the path ahead easier, he chose to eliminate the Grand Duke.

As the scroll disintegrated, an artifact appeared: a simple, garish bowl, the kind a street jester might use for a shell game. It locked onto Grand Duke William and shot toward him like a lid slamming onto a pot.

"No!" William roared in terror, unleashing a torrent of supernatural power, desperately blasting at the giant bowl descending upon him.

Nearby, Prince Theodore watched, his blood running cold. He made a split-second decision. Sacrificing his own sacred armor in a blinding flash of energy, he triggered a recall protocol linked to a Godly Artifact deep within the kingdom. He vanished, teleported back to safety.

A moment later, Torin stood with the artifact bowl in his right hand, Grand Duke William trapped within. He threw his head back and let out a triumphant, world-shaking roar.

He had done it. He had won.

After this victory, the ambitious lords of the north would flock to his banner. They would sweep through the human kingdom, through the entire south. Torin could see it now: a future where he, like the white dragon Frostsire and the giant-king Orion before him, would establish his rule over the southern continent, becoming one of the most powerful men in the world.

“Crush all our enemies!”

“The humans are broken!”

“Did we... did we actually win?”

“We won!”

Aside from the near-mindless Brokk of the Dark Dwarves, the other three lords—Gotte-Steel, Orwar, and Jin—stared in disbelief. The five of them had actually defeated the armies of the human kingdom. Two lords killed, one captured, one forced to flee. It felt like a dream.

“Warriors!” Torin bellowed, holding the artifact bowl high, his voice deep and commanding, carrying for miles. “This day, victory is ours! We have earned the right to stand on this soil, to carve out a rich new homeland for ourselves and for our tribes!”

He would show the world that the human kingdom was not invincible. He wanted everyone to remember his voice, to believe that under his leadership, they could defeat any enemy and find a new home in the south.

“No power can stand in our way! So long as we are united, no matter who the enemy is, no matter the hardship, we will be victorious!”

Stoneheart Citadel.

When Orion and Elara returned, two tender dragon cries echoed through the fortress. A tiny, crimson dragon was perched on Elara’s shoulder, curiously taking in its new surroundings.

“Daddy! Sister! You’re finally back!”

For Pallas, the days without Elara were a strange relief, a life without pressure. But every night, after he had tired himself out playing, he would invariably find himself looking for his sister. The first day had been fine; he played hard and slept soundly. But from the second day on, he kept wandering over to her bedroom to see if she had returned.

Hearing Pallas's voice, Elara giggled and teleported away. A moment later, from deep within the castle, Pallas's cries of "No, no, stop!" could be heard, along with the sounds of two young dragons wrestling and roaring playfully.

Lilith came to Orion's side and began to unfasten his cloak.

"That little dragon with Elara," she said softly. "Her aura is... unusual."

Lilith was acutely sensitive to such things.

"She was originally a fire dragon," Orion explained. "But she absorbed a phoenix egg. Her bloodline evolved. She's a Inferno Dragon now."

"In the dragon race, that's considered a top-tier bloodline. When she reaches maturity, ascending to arch lord won't be a problem."

Lilith's hands trembled slightly. The shock of his words was immense. She was suddenly beginning to understand why Orion doted on Elara so much. From this day forward, she would too.

"She is the other half of our Horde's future," Orion said, pulling Lilith into an embrace. He leaned down and whispered his plans for the future into her ear. "The one who will secure the throne with him."

Lilith's eyes went wide with disbelief, which was quickly replaced by a wave of ecstatic joy.

Orion read the look in her eyes and simply shook his head, a faint smile on his lips. With his blood running through Pallas's veins, the boy's future was already guaranteed. At a minimum, he, too, would one day become an arch lord.