

Titan King 961

Chapter 961: Counter-Attack!

Alexander said nothing, quietly waiting for Orion to continue.

He watched him, a flicker of recognition in his eyes. He saw a shadow of Arthas in Orion.

Birds of a feather, Alexander thought. Both are the quiet, intense type, full of cunning schemes. And deep down, a cold, crazy lethality is etched into their very bones.

As Alexander was lost in his analysis, Orion's voice boomed again.

"A counter-attack!" he declared, slamming his fist on the table. "We invade Dragonflame Island. We hit the dragons back, and we kill those goddamn lizards!"

Getting it all out seemed to sober him up instantly. The drunken haze was gone.

"Bro, you know the Dragon Crucible is built, but it needs a sea of dragon corpses and blood to run. Arthas's undead forces don't need it, but everyone else's troops are chomping at the bit for it. How are we supposed to fire it up if we're not hunting dragons? Am I right, bro?"

Orion's energy was infectious as he raised his cup.

Alexander stared at him for a long moment before finally lifting his own goblet to meet Orion's. After they both drained their cups, Alexander fell silent for a moment before speaking, his voice calm and even.

"I've already given you command of the battlefield. Do what you think is right. You're calling the shots this time."

He paused. "As for the dragon demigods, the rest of us will handle them. I guarantee they won't interfere with you."

The words were spoken so plainly, yet it was that very flatness that let Orion feel the unshakable confidence and resolve behind them.

"Bro... you're not kidding, are you?"

Orion was completely sober now. At the mention of such a massive undertaking, a surge of his transcendent power had burned away the last vestiges of alcohol.

Alexander didn't speak, just shot him a look of mild disdain.

"That mirror avatar you have stationed in the Emerald Dream Realm isn't in great shape. You're not planning on having him lead the counter-attack on Dragonflame Island, are you?"

With that, Alexander's form vanished from the Silent Goblet.

"He's got a point. That avatar really needs to be swapped out," Orion muttered to himself. He decided he would dispatch another one of his mirror images from Blackstone City to replace the damaged one in the Emerald Dream Realm. If they were going to do this, they were going all in.

Emerald Dream Realm, the Kasenna Sea.

The truce with the dragons' high-tier forces had left Orion, Kraken, Makareth, and Isabella in a state of post-battle chill. The three of them were sprawled in a row on their beach chairs, the picture of lazy indolence.

"Ugh, I miss Big Boss Leonidas," Demon Makareth groaned, rolling over. "If he were here, he could at least tell us stories about the third layer of the Abyss, or cool shit from other worlds."

Without a fight, he wasn't just bored; his whole body felt twitchy and uncomfortable.

Just then, Orion, who had been resting with his eyes closed, suddenly stood up. He walked over to the large glass tank where Kraken was recuperating.

"Kraken. Are you more or less recovered?"

The massive octopus, who had seemed to be sleeping, opened its eyes before Orion even reached the tank. It shifted, propping itself up on the edge of the glass.

Kraken's tentacles had all grown back. The healing factor of a deep-sea race like his was on another level, perhaps even more monstrous than other races. On top of that, the Deputy Commander had sent over a supply of restorative magical plants, speeding his recovery even further.

"I'm about eighty percent," Kraken's voice echoed in their minds. "But my confidence took a bigger hit than my body. That was my first real fight after ascending to arch lord."

The ambush had left a mark. Kraken had already decided that after this war, he was going to find a way to create an avatar. He would never again fight with his true form on the line. Fighting was necessary, but survival was paramount.

"Why do you ask? You don't show up unless you want something."

"Get ready," Orion said, his voice low and serious. "We're launching a counter-attack on Dragonflame Island."

The atmosphere on the beach went dead silent.

"What? Bro, what did you just say?" Demon Makareth was the first to react, leaping in front of Orion with his scimitar already in hand. To him, the word "counter-attack" was the sweetest music. He cupped a hand to his ear, making a show of having misheard, begging Orion to say it again.

"You heard him right. I heard it too," Isabella said, walking up to Orion's side. She stared at him with her beautiful eyes, a look on her face she had never shown him before.

"Get ready," Orion repeated, letting out a breath. "I've made my decision. We are counter-attacking the dragons. We are invading Dragonflame Island."

Alexander had given him command, and with it came a sense of effortless control, the feeling that the power to decide the fate of thousands was his.

"Uh... what about the demigods?" That was Kraken's first reaction. With that level of threat hanging over them, he wasn't about to get reckless. He was here in his true form; he had to play it safe.

Makareth and Isabella, on the other hand, hadn't even considered such a thing. They were already fantasizing about how many Legendary level dragons they could capture to bleed out for materials.

"Alexander has already spoken with me. They will tie up the dragon demigods," Orion explained. "This time, I am in command of the war below the demigod tier. I will lead the charge, and with you, the storm avatar, the bone dragon, and the ancient giant-horned whale, we will sweep over Dragonflame Island."

He spoke with the calm, unshakable confidence of a mountain.

"For real?" Kraken asked, his mind racing.

The dragons had come with eight arch lords. The newly ascended Alexander had killed three with a single sword stroke. By that math, they still had five arch lord dragons left. On the Champions Alliance side, including Orion, they also had five arch lords. If it's one-on-one...

A spark of hope ignited within him. His confidence had been shattered on the battlefield; the only way to get it back was to return to that same battlefield.

"Relax," Orion said, his voice ringing with power. "With me here, even if a few more arch lord dragons show up, I'll slaughter them all."

This was the confidence he'd gained from his battle with the demigod phantom. As long as he wasn't facing one of those peak-level monsters, with his fighting style, no one could stop him from slaying dragons.

"When do we move?" Kraken asked, his excitement growing.

"Three days." Orion looked at each of them in turn—Kraken, Makareth, Isabella—his expression deadly serious. The three-day delay was because Arthas's bone dragon had its wings broken and needed that long to fully repair itself in its graveyard.

Just then, the air in Leonidas's keep shimmered with void energy. A handsome man with long, flowing white hair, dressed in white robes and carrying a long-bladed executioner's sword at his hip, stepped out of the portal.

"Elder," he said, bowing his head to Orion. "My name is Sever. I have been sent by the Hall Master to lend you my strength."

Chapter 962: Let's fucking go

Sever approached Orion and presented a token, the symbol of his station in the Blade Hall.

Orion took the token, examined it briefly, and handed it back.

"Rest and prepare. In three days, you march with me," Orion said, looking Sever over. He was pleased with this new assistant, an arch lord in his own right. "Do you require anything? I'll do my best to provide it."

"Sever is ready, my lord. Awaiting your command."

Orion knew Sever's arrival was a clear sign of Alexander's support. He must have been delayed by other matters before, but now that the grand counter-attack was on, Alexander was dispatching his heavy hitters to help.

"Let's fucking go!" Kraken bellowed, completely losing his shit with excitement. "This time, I'm going to devour a dragon whole! I'll suck every last drop of blood from its body!"

Half his tentacles writhed wildly in the air while the other half thrashed the water in his tank, sending splashes everywhere.

He had been so damn cornered in that last battle. Trapped in the hurricane with no escape, nearly surrounded and killed. He had to unleash the pent-up rage, the hatred, the sheer terror of that moment.

"Get ready," Orion announced to all of them. "This war isn't over just because the Champions Alliance says so."

Titanion Realm, the Rakala Plains.

On the vast plains, the disciplined square formations of the human army marched relentlessly toward the front. In the sky, knights in silver armor mounted on massive griffins rained javelins down upon the earth.

Their rhythm was only broken when a swarm of bat-like flying puppets rose from the ranks of the Northern Coalition.

"Enemy air power!"

"Form up! Engage!"

The well-trained griffin knights immediately adjusted their formations, charging in an orderly fashion toward the flying puppets. Higher still, dragons burst from the cloud cover, diving toward the ever-growing swarm of constructs.

The flying puppet armies were a gift from the clown Ogu to Torin. The Northern Coalition had plenty of ground troops but lacked an air force. The arrival of the puppet armies filled that gap, and it was one of the main reasons Torin and the others dared to meet the southern Five-Race Alliance head-on.

Draconic roars and bestial howls echoed across the land. Dragons soared through the sky, their wings blotting out the sun as if to devour the entire battlefield. The draconic pressure was immense; a portion of the beast-kin in the Northern Coalition's army lost their will to fight, collapsing to the ground in terror.

The earth itself began to tremble. Fissures split open across the battlefield, and from these newly formed tunnels, a tide of countless cave spiders surged from the depths. With their greenish-black carapaces and glowing scarlet eyes, the spiders threw themselves into the fight, immediately relieving the pressure on the human kingdom's armies.

"My children!" Lorelia's high-pitched shriek cut through the din. "Bare your fangs! Unsheathe your claws! For our territory, for our master, for ME! Fear nothing! Tear apart every enemy before you!"

Then, turning her attention to her allies, she cried out, "Warriors of the Alliance! For freedom and glory! For the cities and families behind you! Even if you die, you will drag your enemies down with you here!"

Lorelia brandished the rapier she'd wheedled out of Delilah. Giving a grand, morale-boosting speech was something she'd wanted to try for ages. When she was very, very small, she had watched from the city walls as Orion rallied the people against the dark creatures. That electrifying moment had been burned into her memory. Now, she was finally having her own go at it. She didn't have any wide-area buffing skills, but she felt pretty badass doing it.

Delilah let out a weary sigh and physically pulled Lorelia back before she could start another round of screeching.

"Be careful. We're in the center of the battlefield now. An enemy lord could attack at any moment."

"Oh. Okay." Lorelia always listened to Delilah.

"Just focus on commanding your spiders. We'll protect you."

Lorelia nodded and submerged her consciousness in the Dreamscape, unleashing a slaughter upon the Northern Coalition.

In the distance, behind the human kingdom's main force, a line of elven archers appeared. They drew their bows in unison, and waves of bolts rained down on the northern armies. The battlefield was a merciless meat grinder, harvesting the lives of any who dared enter.

High above the bloody chaos, the lords of the opposing factions faced each other in two distinct groups.

Leading the Five-Race Alliance was King Harold of the human kingdom. Behind him stood several great nobles from his kingdom, as well as lord-level powerhouses from the dragons, the blood elves, and the stoneheart horde.

"You fiends!" one of the human nobles roared. "Your vile desecration of the bodies of our nobles must be punished!"

"We are merely recycling resources," a voice replied coolly. It came from the puppet of Grand Duke William. "You should be in awe of such a miraculous technique. This form, you see, is a representation of eternity. If you beg me, perhaps I will allow you to be preserved in this state forever... Hehehe..."

Torin stood beside the puppet Grand Duke. "Enough talk," he snarled. "Let's just kill them all. Once they're dead, not just the human kingdom, but the blood elf territories will be ours as well."

His eyes were locked on King Harold, burning with a fervent, murderous desire.

That's the man, Torin thought, a flood of bitter memories rushing back. He's the one who confiscated my entire fortune when I fled my earldom. The first man in this world to ruin me, to leave me with nothing.

His contempt for Harold's rule was absolute. Under him, the nobles of the kingdom had become vampires, sucking the life from the common people. The entire system was rotten from the inside out.

"You, the traitor to humanity!" an earl shouted, pointing a finger at Torin. It was one of the esteemed patrons he had once tried to bribe. "What right do you have to speak to His Majesty the King?"

"No right?" Torin spat back, his voice thick with venom. "If he hadn't stolen everything I owned, would I have been subjected to your ridicule in the capital?"

"If it weren't for you insatiable, greedy, useless parasites, would I have been sidelined in Soaring Bird City?"

"Everything I have become is because of you! You forced my hand! All of you!"

Chapter 963: A Fucking Joke

Torin was furious. And he was hurt.

He wanted to scream out every humiliation he had suffered in the human kingdom over the years, but all he got in return was not pity, not sympathy.

It was ridicule.

Contempt.

Disgust.

The truly great nobles of the human kingdom—which one of them wasn't of noble lineage, their titles passed down for generations? For Torin to climb to the peak of power was an impossibility; it would threaten the interests of too many people. And so, he was never accepted. He was always an outsider.

That's the look, he thought, his head bowed. The same look as always.

"You all think I'm weak," he muttered, his voice a ghostly rasp, terrifying and lonely. "You all think I'm an easy target, so you ignore me, you exploit me, you crush me."

His voice began to rise. "Isn't it pathetic? As a human, as a lord, I have to pay tolls and protection money in my own goddamn territory! I'm treated with more respect doing trade with the stoneheart horde than I ever was in the human kingdom!"

He lifted his head, no longer caring if the other lords of the coalition heard his past. He roared the question at King Harold and the gallery of great nobles.

"Tell me, isn't that a joke?"

"ISN'T IT?!"

"HUH?!"

"ISN'T IT A FUCKING JOKE?!"

King Harold's eyes held a flicker of pity, but the rest of them looked at him with the same old disdain, now mixed with a healthy dose of revulsion.

"You look down on me..." Torin's voice dropped to a seething whisper. "All of you... all of you... will die."

"KILL THEM!" he bellowed.

A vile, supernatural power erupted from within him, coalescing into a spectral, crocodilian beast that lunged at the lords of the Five-Race Alliance.

With Torin's charge, the Legendary-level battle exploded into chaos. With so many lords joining the fray, the sky erupted into a kaleidoscope of destructive energy, a storm of power that was every bit as intense as the clash of the two arch lords moments before.

The lords' battle was the signal for a true, all-out war. From Alpha-level to hero level down to the rank-and-file elites, a new war between north and south was being waged across the land.

Hordes of satyrs wielding massive stone hammers charged bravely into the tide of cave spiders, hoping to slow their slaughter with sheer numbers. From another flank, mixed armies of giants and ogres rushed forth, their massive clubs and iron hammers joining the fray against half-dragons and satyrs.

Elsewhere, puppets flew from the crowds, their swords and scythes reaping a bloody harvest on the battlefield. They were cold and emotionless, their eyes seeing only targets. Every time they broke through to the human army's rear, they brought nothing but chaos and death.

The draconic roars from the sky, the bestial howls from the ground, the clash of weapons, the snapping of bone, the shattering of claws... the cacophony of sounds rose and fell, a symphony of life and death. And a dirge. For with every note, countless lives were extinguished, their bodies and souls erased.

"Go, if you want to."

Delilah's voice was calm. She and her companions had reached the heart of the battlefield. The abyssal dragon remained hidden within its own magical mist, and any creature below Legendary level that blundered in simply became its food.

"But..." Saelen hesitated. Her mission was to protect Delilah. If she left now, she would be failing her duty.

"Go. The worry is practically falling off your face," Delilah said gently. "I'll be safe with Lorelia and the dragon."

Saelen didn't reply. Now that they were closer to the fighting, she could sense the battle between the Legendary-level powerhouses. She could feel that her Grand Elder, Lireesa, had already had several close calls. She was deeply worried. Grand Elder Lireesa was too important to the blood elf race. They couldn't afford to lose her.

"Go. They need the support."

"Your Excellency, please do not leave this spot. I will return as quickly as I can," Saelen finally said. After entrusting Delilah with that last plea, she drew her longbow and shot into the sky, streaking toward the lords' battlefield.

"Ah, to be young," Delilah sighed, shaking her head as she watched Saelen's receding back. Worry clouds your judgment. Grand Elder Lireesa has forgotten more about surviving than Saelen will ever know. Do you really think she wouldn't know how to retreat from danger?

"That blood elf was sent to us to gain our protection, wasn't she, Sister Delilah?" Lorelia asked. She was still effortlessly commanding the spiders across the battlefield, yet still had enough attention to spare for a chat.

"Oh? You figured that out?" Delilah's eyes widened in genuine surprise as she looked at Lorelia. The girl's mind had clearly sharpened since her ascension.

"Of course! Who am I? I am the smartest, prettiest, and greatest Warden of our stoneheart horde!" Lorelia declared with unshakable confidence. Besides Mistress Lilith, she was the greatest spider queen of them all. Elara and Pallas didn't count, of course. She didn't compete with kids.

"I'm the treasured jewel of the stoneheart horde. To protect me, my master even assigned this big guy to be my bodyguard," she said, stomping a foot on Xalathar, which earned her an annoyed rumble. "Hehe. In their eyes, my location is the safest place on the battlefield. Because they know that either on me, or on this big guy, there is sure to be one of my master's will projections standing guard. I have to admit, that blood elf elder has a good eye."

Delilah narrowed her eyes, watching Lorelia with a strange light dancing in their depths.

Honestly, she felt a sense of crisis.

She had felt it once before, the first time she met the Horde's first daughter, Elara. From Elara, she got a sense of overwhelming, almost omniscient intellect, as if nothing could ever be hidden from those eyes.

And now, Lorelia was giving her a similar feeling. It was easier to accept from Lorelia, because her Intelligence was something that had been built up over time, an unconscious growth from learning at her and Lilith's side. But because of her status as a broodmother, she also possessed a strategic perspective and a capacity for learning that surpassed normal beings.

Is it possible, Delilah thought with a jolt, that the stoneheart horde's future will have two geniuses I can't outwit?

Legendary level. Delilah felt the craving for that power once more. Sometimes, when intellect was not enough to dominate, overwhelming power was the only way to crush all obstacles.

Chapter 964: The rest are mine

"Do you know the cruelty of war?"

A voice, cold and authoritative, boomed across Dragonflame Island. "Have you ever truly hated the enemies who brought ruin to your kind? This war... is not over."

Deputy Commander Edward's challenge immediately drew four demigod phantoms from the deepest sanctums of the Dragon Nest.

"Who is it?"

"Who dares trespass on the territory of the dragons!"

"Enemy attack!"

"Aooo..."

A piercing, draconic roar echoed, serving as both a warning to their kin and a weapon in itself, as a terrifying wave of draconic pressure surged skyward toward the intruders hidden in the clouds.

BOOM!

The wave of pressure slammed into an invisible barrier high above and dissipated. A colossal six-pointed star materialized in the sky, its lines etched with glowing, densely packed runes.

It was a forbidden magical formation.

At its center stood Deputy Commander Edward, holding a shimmering golden gemstone. At each of the formation's six points stood a figure of immense power: Arthas, Alexander, Pollard, and two of the commander's own Aegis Guard, his elite sword-sworn sentinels.

Six demigods had descended upon them. The four dragon demigods, who had just charged from their nest, stopped dead in their tracks.

"It's that faction from the Dusk Continent!"

"Six demigods? They had reinforcements?!"

"Damn that Great Dragon King of Light! He set us up!"

"This is no time for accusations! Send word back! Get the other two elders here now!"

But as the dragon demigods scrambled to form a plan, the magical formation above began to descend like a collapsing sky. If they didn't resist, Dragonflame Island would be shattered and sunk in moments.

"We can't wait! We have to go up and hold them back!"

"Damn that old lizard, I knew he was up to no good!"

"We face a great enemy! We go together! Do not separate!"

"Elder Mikalus, the formation's aura is terrifying! We need the relics!"

With a unified roar of grim resolve, the four demigod phantoms rallied behind a lance carved from a single dragon's fang and charged into the descending hexagram. The relic, combined with their own demigod power, visibly slowed the formation's descent.

Just then, two more demigod phantoms shot out of the Dragon Nest, joining the desperate defense without hesitation. The dragons' reaction time was incredible; they clearly had a way to transmit information back to the Uynting Realm and receive reinforcements almost instantly.

"Now that everyone has arrived," Deputy Commander Edward said coolly, watching the six dragon demigods enter his trap, "seal the formation."

At his command, Arthas, Alexander, and the others at the five outer points activated the runes at their positions. The Hexagram stopped its descent and pulsed with a torrent of void energy.

The six dragon demigods who had charged inside were violently torn apart from one another, each sealed within one of the six pocket dimensions of the forbidden formation. It was a trap designed not only to contain, but to divide and conquer.

"I will remind you all one more time," Edward's voice echoed through the formation. "If you cannot kill your opponent, use any means necessary to simply hold them here."

His warning was for all of them, but it was aimed squarely at the demigod Pollard. Of everyone in the formation, only Pollard was not one of their own. And given his half-assed performance on the battlefield before, Edward was making the stakes clear.

"Rest assured, Your Excellency," Pollard replied, his voice smooth. "I won't let you down."

As a demigod, he understood the unspoken threat perfectly. This faction, which had just summoned two more unknown demigods out of thin air, was beyond merely powerful. Pollard was now certain they were backed by a massive, inter-dimensional power.

As the demigod battle began within the misty confines of the formation, the war between the dragons and the Champions Alliance erupted once more across the Kasenna Sea.

It was a sudden, targeted assault. Even with the dragons' impressive intelligence network, the Champions Alliance had thrown their entire weight into the attack so quickly that the dragons couldn't get reinforcements in place in time.

Orion, mounted on the ancient giant-horned whale, Kori, led the charge. Flanked by Kraken and Sever, he commanded all the Sea Race units, ready to steamroll the enemy forces.

High above, the Deputy Commander's storm avatar rode Arthas's bone dragon, a looming threat to the dragons who held dominion over the skies.

"Kraken, there's an arch lord sea beast up ahead. It's yours. Any problems?" Orion called out.

The dragons' reaction speed and sheer depth of forces were impressive. The moment their army had entered the battlefield, the enemy arch lords had moved to intercept them. And now, he could sense two more arch lord dragons approaching at high speed from Dragonflame Island.

Worst of all, his initial estimate of five enemy arch lords was wrong. There were seven. The dragons had held two in reserve.

"It's just a big shark. I can handle it," Kraken replied, his voice booming with newfound confidence. "But what about the other dragons?"

As he spoke, he transformed into his massive octopus true form, his mountain-sized body creating an oppressive aura as it spread across the ocean's surface.

"Don't worry. The rest are mine."

After a moment's hesitation, Kraken nodded and submerged, swimming toward the colossal shark in the distance.

"You, go up," Orion said, turning to Sever. In the sky, three arch lord dragons were ganging up on the bone dragon and the storm avatar.

Sever drew the executioner's sword from his hip, locked onto his targets, and shot upwards like a blade of light.

"Kori," Orion commanded his mount, "lock onto that dragon beast. Devour it."

He had spotted his own target, a massive creature with the body of a dragon but no wings. Such a powerful dragon beast had to be a rare asset.

The ancient giant-horned whale whipped its massive tail, charging forward with immense force as it activated its Gigantic Form. Even before it reached its target, Kori let out a piercing cry, unleashing two powerful control skills: Sonar Prison and Sonic Shockwave Chain.

Full power from the very start. That was Orion's order. He had to eliminate an enemy before those two dragon reinforcements arrived.

"Kill!"

Orion activated Instant Impact. Standing on the whale's back, he was now moving with a secondary burst of acceleration, his speed so great it was indistinguishable from teleportation.

Chapter 965: My Feast

Orion appeared before the arch lord dragon beast, his trident striking out with his full power.

But the creature was still an arch lord. Even ambushed, it had passive defenses that triggered instantly. Its massive dragon scales flipped open, revealing countless tiny pores that sprayed a high-velocity shower of venom.

The poison splattered against Orion's armor of chilled bone, which sizzled and smoked under the corrosive assault. Orion ignored it, his focus absolute as he drove his trident home.

The weapon tore through the beast's chest, punching a massive hole clean through its torso. The organs near the wound were shredded, coated in a layer of clinging frostfire.

ROAR!

The dragon beast, critically injured, let out a hysterical roar of agony. The sound carried the full weight of its draconic pressure, a powerful sonic attack. But by the time it unleashed its cry, Orion was already gone, having moved the instant his strike landed.

The giant-horned whale's attack was already arriving. Kori opened its massive mouth, a swirling, abyss-like vortex forming in its throat, and swallowed the dragon beast whole.

For a brief moment, the beast's sonic roar had actually allowed it to break free from the dual prison of Kori's sonar and shockwave abilities. But Orion's attack had come first, followed immediately by the whale's. The one-two punch was perfectly timed. The dragon beast never had a chance to escape.

WWOOOOOSH...

Having swallowed its prey, the ancient giant-horned whale slapped its enormous tail against the sea, kicking up colossal waves.

By now, the two arch lord dragons sent as reinforcements had arrived.

Orion landed on the whale's head. A layer of bone-fire flared across his body, instantly repairing the damage caused by the dragon beast's venom.

"One standard dragon, one fire dragon," Orion murmured, a slight smile playing on his lips. "Excellent materials."

"Meet them head-on, Kori!"

The ancient giant-horned whale once again lowered its horn and charged, taking the offensive against the approaching enemy.

From another part of the battlefield, a dragon roared in defiance.

“For our territory! For the Alliance! For the Dusk Continent! Let your fires burn!”

Isabella, carrying her lance, soared and wheeled through the sky on the back of her colossal dragon. Her feet seemed rooted to its scales; no matter how the great beast twisted and turned, she remained perfectly balanced.

A high-speed dive, a graceful glide, a full three-hundred-and-sixty-degree barrel roll—Isabella smoothly threaded her lance through the neck of a green dragon.

Dragon’s blood is thicker than a beast’s, she noted dispassionately. And it stinks more.

She shook the gore from her lance, not even glancing at the dying dragon as it plummeted toward the sea. Alexander’s shadow army would collect the prize. Her job was to kill.

“What a rich bouquet of slaughter... with a hint of death!” a voice cackled. “I will turn this place into a living Hell! There will be no rebirth for you, no entry into any Divine Kingdom!”

A deeply malevolent aura radiated from Demon Makareth, stirred by the scent of carnage. It began to corrupt the combatants around him. Those touched by his power were warped in some mysterious way, their life force siphoning into Makareth, granting him endless vitality and surging strength. It was the same ability that had allowed him to nearly fight Isabella to a standstill.

“The battle has just begun, you worms!”

Makareth became a manic reaper, blinking across the battlefield to hunt down Legendary-level dragons.

If Makareth was a powerful duelist, then far in the distance, Gustalon was a true battlefield meat grinder. The storm avatar had transformed into a colossal hurricane, tearing deep into the enemy lines. Countless Sea Race and dragons were swept up into its vortex. Low-level creatures were either knocked unconscious or simply torn to shreds. Where the hurricane passed, it left only a wake of maimed bodies.

Further still, massive tsunamis rolled across the ocean, one after another. That was the terrifying result of Kraken's battle with a shark-like arch lord.

He had wrapped the massive shark in his tentacles, his toothed suckers working like ravenous maws, relentlessly tearing and draining the shark arch lord's flesh and blood. Kraken was fighting and feeding at the same time.

"After I eat you, I'm going to take on a dragon one-on-one!" Kraken's voice echoed in the shark's mind, his eyes burning with a mix of madness and joyous revelation.

Without anyone else to interfere, fighting the shark arch lord at his full strength, Kraken was realizing he wasn't nearly as weak as he'd thought. This massive shark, for instance, was a middle arch lord, and Kraken was easily crushing it. Given a little more time, he would devour it completely.

The shark arch lord sensed the danger. It thrashed and leaped from the water, slamming its body against the waves, but nothing it did could break Kraken's grip. Finally, out of options, it let out a piercing shriek. A shimmering blue phantom swam out of its body—its body of faith.

The moment it appeared, the surrounding water seemed to freeze as countless, razor-sharp Water spears materialized from the sea. The spears and the shark phantom shot toward Kraken from every conceivable angle.

But even seeing this, Kraken refused to release his prey.

"You think you're the only one with a body of faith?" he roared. He opened his mouth and his own body of faith shot out—a phantom that looked even more ancient and primordial than his massive octopus form.

The instant his phantom appeared, the sea froze again, its motion arrested by the conflicting faith energy of the two behemoths.

“You’re not getting away!” Kraken bellowed. “Today, you are my feast!”

The two bodies of faith entangled, just as their physical forms had, each trying to consume the other. To Kraken, his enemy’s phantom was just a massive source of faith energy, ripe for the taking.

The battle had reached a fever pitch.

From the Hexagram on Dragonflame Island to the vast Kasenna Sea beyond, the war raged.

From the deep sea to the ocean surface, from the low skies to the heavens above, every inch of space was a chaotic tangle of fighting.

The conflict was so total, so brutally intense, that any hidden onlookers dared not approach, knowing that to get any closer would be to be dragged into the maelstrom themselves.

Chapter 966: A Dragon and a Slime

In the heart of the former dwarven territory in the Titanion Realm, the battle between the clown Ogu and the human Saint, though lacking demigods, was no less fierce.

“I truly did not expect you to break free from my Shadow Bind,” Ogu’s voice was a low growl. The power Saint Noel had displayed before should have been completely insufficient to escape a restraint of that level. “I’m curious. What method did you use?”

“Your is powerful, but the human kingdom is not a faction you can afford to provoke,” Noel’s expression was solemn and divine. A phantom of a crown appeared above his head. “Begone!”

It was the kingdom’s relic, the Crown of Kings.

It unleashed a cascade of radiant light that shone down upon the clown. The light pulsed with a power of rules that was both familiar and alien to Ogu, and he instantly realized what was happening.

“A relic!” he cried out.

He tried to flee, but it was too late. The holy light enveloped his will projection, binding him in place. A golden flame ignited upon his form.

“Swap!”

At the very last second, the clown played another of his trump cards. His will projection vanished, and in its place stood the figure of Grand Duke William. The golden flames continued to burn, and in the space of a single breath, the Grand Duke’s body was incinerated into nothingness.

The clown had used his puppet substitution technique to escape a mortal blow.

When Ogu reappeared high in the sky, he kept a healthy distance from Saint Noel.

“If you retreat now,” Noel’s voice boomed with authority, “I can still act as if this never happened.”

It wasn’t that he wanted to spare the clown, but he knew he was only fighting a will projection. Though Noel was also only a phantom, this was his home turf, and with the aid of the Crown of Kings, it was highly unlikely he would lose.

Ogu said nothing, staring at Noel, a flicker of hesitation in his eyes.

“Fine,” he finally conceded. “But I’m taking the Northern Coalition forces below with me.”

It was his one condition. As long as the Northern Coalition survived, he retained the leverage to continue confronting the human kingdom. It would give him a temporary base of operations on the continent, a vital foothold for his future plans in the Titanion Realm.

“That, Your Excellency, is impossible.” Saint Noel did not agree.

The Northern Coalition was the fundamental threat to the kingdom’s stability. All threats had to be eradicated. Furthermore, this was an alliance of four races. If the stoneheart horde, the dragons, and the blood elves did not gain sufficient spoils from this war, the human kingdom would be forced to reward them from its own coffers. Noel would never agree to a plan that undermined his own foundation.

Besides, Noel knew this arch lord was not from the continent of Utessar. He had no roots here. As long as the Northern Coalition was wiped out, the human kingdom would, on the surface, have no enemies left on this land.

“In that case,” Ogu sighed, “let’s continue.”

Although Saint Noel had a relic, the clown’s primary objective was to test if this continent had any demigods watching over it. A relic was troublesome, but it wasn’t something he hadn’t encountered before. He had no guarantee his own ultimate attack could kill the Saint, but that wasn’t reason enough to abandon his mission.

Ogu produced a badge. Instantly, eight more of his will projections shimmered into existence in the void. It was an Insignia of Illusions, a precious, one-time-use item.

Only one of the eight projections was real. But to Saint Noel, they all appeared genuine.

The battle between them erupted once more.

In the lower altitudes, the battle between the lords was far less chaotic. Aside from the furious duel raging between Torin and King Harold at the center, most of the other lords were just going through the motions.

This was war, but it wasn’t a war with no retreat, no other options. They were here for the loot, not to die. So, after an initial show of force, both sides had become more restrained, waiting for the duel between Torin and King Harold to decide the victor.

If the fight between Ogu and Noel was the key to the war's outcome, the fight between Torin and Harold would determine the future course of the battle.

"Treason is unforgivable!" King Harold grew more enraged as the fight dragged on. Torin had been his subject, a lesser being. Now, relying on some vile power, he was fighting him to a standstill. For the king, being his equal was the ultimate humiliation.

"Treason? You were the ones who forced my hand!" Torin snarled back. "Besides, with the power I now command, why should I kneel before you? Why should a man's station at birth decide his destiny? Power answers to strength, not blood!"

"Hahaha... Kill! KILL!"

Torin's transcendent power surged, and the phantom of the spectral dread crocodile behind him grew more solid. King Harold snorted in contempt and surged forward, sword raised.

Not far away, the ogre lord Aldous slammed his club against the warhammer of Brokk, the King of the Dark Dwarves, sending the annoying enemy staggering back into the arms of another human Grand Duke.

Aldous's attention was fixed on the fight between Torin and the king. The giant lord Orion had given him a secret mission: find the right moment and crush that powerful-looking human lord, Torin.

The fight had reached this stage, and Aldous still hadn't found his opening. He was growing impatient.

Pathetic, he thought, watching the king fight. This is the king of the human kingdom? Compared to Orion, My lord, this is the difference between a dragon and a slime.

Orion, My lord, was Aldous's special term of respect for his friend.

Honestly, for the leader of what was once the largest faction in the south, King Harold's performance did not impress the ogre lord. It fell far short of the power he had expected.

Chapter 967: Fear and Excitement

“Humans are so damn cunning,” Aldous muttered to himself, watching the distant duel. “They’re always scheming over what the other one has. Too smart for their own good. Being smart is the root of all trouble. Ogres have it right. Eat ‘til you’re full, take a nap. Simple.”

He kept grumbling. The fact that Torin and King Harold couldn’t manage to seriously injure each other was delaying him from completing his own mission.

Go on, hit each other, he thought. Beat each other half to death. That’ll make my job a hell of a lot easier.

The battle between the Legendary-level lords was a strange affair. With the non-essential members on both sides holding back and going through the motions, the front line was a stalemate.

But for the war below the Legendary level, it was a total rout for the Northern Coalition. The root cause was the intervention of Lorelia and the abyssal dragon.

The dragon, Xalathar, was playing a defensive role, remaining hidden in its mist and not actively seeking out Legendary-level opponents. Its mission was to protect Lorelia, so it had no intention of joining that tier of combat. Because of this, with no major threats to distract her, the cave spider armies under Lorelia’s command were an absolute catastrophe for the enemy.

In the past, the spiders were mindless cannon fodder, a zerg rush that died in droves. But this time, they were not only using swarming tactics to gang up on targets, but they also knew when to make tactical retreats, avoiding head-on confrontations they couldn’t win.

They were using advanced strategies: overwhelming encirclements, flanking maneuvers, cutting off support lines. For their enemies, the disciplined nightmare that the cave spider armies had become was something ripped from a fever dream.

“She’s a monster,” Delilah whispered, her eyes wide as she watched Lorelia bounce up and down on the abyssal dragon’s head, letting out gleeful shouts of “Got ‘em!”, “Oh yeah!”, and “They’re surrounded!”

Each cheer marked another victory for the spiders on the battlefield. Delilah had no idea what Orion had taught her privately, but the intelligence and strategic acumen Lorelia now displayed was beyond anything she could have imagined.

Looks like the victory in this war will definitely go to our Five-Race Alliance, she concluded, her assessment of the battle's trajectory now firm.

"Kill the enemy! I will fight to the last!" On the front lines, Rolan swung his trident relentlessly, cutting down the satyrs and werewolves that charged their lines.

He steered clear of the Alpha-level threats. Whenever one appeared, Ursa, Tarn, Gort, or one of the other veterans would intercept it.

Ursa was especially deadly. Her dark fiend mount was not only incredibly agile, but also ignored a certain degree of physical damage. Relying on the fiend, Ursa had already personally brought down three of the Northern Coalition's Alphas.

"Steelblade! Rolan! Watch and learn! This is war!" Ursa roared, smashing an enemy's head to pulp with her spiked club. "No hesitation! You give death to any enemy that appears before you, and you do it as fast as you can!"

She was teaching the two younglings with the cruelest, most effective facts on the ground.

ROAR!

Spurred on by her presence, Steelblade roared and swung his trident, his face flushing crimson with a surge of blood and life force.

But Ursa shook his head. A surge like that was a sign of bravery, and it brought a temporary burst of strength. But after it faded, it left only profound weakness and exhaustion. In a battle like this, losing control of your stamina had only one outcome. Death.

Ursa quietly waited for the moment her son's strength would give out. She wanted Steelblade to feel that powerlessness, that terror, for himself. Only then would he learn how to survive.

"Another big one's coming. I've got this one," Gort bellowed nearby. He swung his greataxe, cleaving a half-dragon in two. Kicking the corpse aside, he lumbered toward an approaching Alpha-level dire wolf. Ursa and Tarn had already gotten their kills. By their rules, it was his turn to claim some battle achievements.

Emerald Dream Realm, the Kasenna Sea.

Facing two arch lord dragons, Orion had separated from the giant-horned whale. Letting the whale tie one of them up wouldn't be a problem. As long as Orion could quickly kill his own target, Kori wouldn't have to worry about being double-teamed.

After all, the whale was still digesting the arch lord dragon beast he'd swallowed earlier. Though its body was mangled, its body of faith was still thrashing around inside.

Orion activated Instant Impact, appearing beside the red dragon and thrusting with his trident. But the dragon was prepared. It vanished in a flicker of movement, teleporting behind him.

Searing heat flared at his back as the red dragon, Adras, unleashed a torrent of dragonfire. As a red dragon, it was a master of fire magic, and its flames burned hotter than any other. Adras was confident that a direct hit would leave its enemy dead or dying.

But it was disappointed. The enemy's form wavered and vanished again. A moment later, Adras itself teleported away.

Orion reappeared, retracting his trident. His attack had missed, but he wasn't surprised. He stared at the red dragon in the distance with a flicker of excitement.

Not bad. This dragon was not only a master of fire, but also proficient in teleportation. An enemy like this could even go a few rounds with an arch lord like Leonidas.

To end the fight quickly, Orion raised his trident high and unleashed Eightfold Spear Barrage. A dense web of spider spears materialized in the space around them, designed to restrict Adras's movement.

"You are the giant," the dragon's voice boomed, startling Orion. He was certain this was their first meeting.

"You know me?"

Adras shook its massive head, its eyes grave. "An elder spoke of you. A giant who killed his demigod phantom in another realm."

Understanding dawned on Orion. The elder Adras spoke of had to be the brass dragon, Latychrenber.

"I see fear in your eyes," Orion said, a slow grin spreading across his face. "And something else... excitement."

"So, you want to test your strength against me?"

Chapter 968: You are not quite as weak as I imagined

"A challenge? Hardly."

"I doubt you truly possess the strength to slay a demigod's phantom," Adras rumbled, his voice thick with disdain. "You must have devised some sort of trap, an illusion to deceive the elders."

"But there are no demigods watching now. Let me see what you are truly made of."

As a dragon at the peak of an arch lord's power, Adras was both mighty and proud. He did not underestimate Orion, precisely; he simply believed the tale of three arch lords besting a demigod's phantom concealed some trickery. Adras knew better than most how vast the chasm was between an arch lord and a demigod.

“It seems you hold little respect for your own elders,” Orion observed.

He could see it clearly now. The fire dragon before him simply didn’t believe the word of the brass dragon, Latychrenber. The idea that three arch lords could handle three demigod phantoms was unthinkable to most of dragonkind—a fairy tale. It was far easier for them to believe their elders had been ensnared by some grand deception.

Orion studied Adras. The dragon’s attitude suggested that the unity of the dragons was not as absolute as it appeared. There were fractures, rivalries between the different flights, hidden beneath the surface by the pressure of external threats.

“Giant,” Adras snarled, “you must understand. We dragons are the masters of the sky and the earth. You, your kind, the entire Dusk Continent—you are nothing more than our prey!”

Orion rolled his eyes. The dragon had to be a fool. How could a creature with such a temperament survive long enough to become an arch lord?

“Has this beast ever even left the Uynting Realm?” Orion muttered.

He couldn’t have known how right he was. Adras was the scion of a demigod elder and had indeed never ventured beyond his home. He had ascended to his power through bloodline alone, sleeping his way to the rank of arch lord without a single trial. The dragon clans knew of his sheltered existence; he had been kept from the front lines in all previous invasions.

But with the Deputy Commander and Arthas leading a full assault on Dragonflame Island, and the demigods unable to control the field, even Adras had been forced to join the fray.

“Not even a demigod can save you today!” Orion raised his trident, its points leveled at Adras.

“You dare provoke the great Adras? You dare defy the mightiest of dragons?” Adras roared, his voice like an avalanche. “I will incinerate you with my flame! Filthy insect, you are dead!”

As the roar echoed, a blinding light flared from Adras's body. Crimson runes ignited across his scales, and the very air grew thick and heavy with raw, fiery power. Orion heard a sound like a world-spanning wildfire catching all at once. The very surface of the sea around them erupted into flame.

Orion's brow furrowed, his expression hardening. This was no simple fire magic. Adras was demonstrating a masterful command of two opposing elements. The flames were not merely burning on the water's surface; they were feeding on it, drawing the essence of the sea into a volatile reaction that amplified the inferno tenfold.

In the moments Orion took to analyze the phenomenon, Adras had already summoned two towering fire elementals. They stood upon the burning waves, flanking their master like sentinels—one wielding a spectral greatbow of fire, the other a massive greatsword of living flame.

"Heh heh heh... In the domain of fire, I am without equal!" Adras hissed and began chanting again, preparing to summon another elemental.

Orion would not let that happen. He activated Ghostly Steps and used Instant Impact, appearing directly before Adras in a flash and thrusting with his trident. The sequence was brutally simple, but it was a strike delivered with his full might, empowering himself with Titan Form and Aura Lock in the same instant. Short of revealing his deepest trump cards, this was the most powerful assault he could muster.

BOOM!

The trident slammed into a shimmering barrier of pure fire, the impact unleashing a deafening shriek of tortured energy.

"Hahaha! My fire giants are not merely for attack!" Adras gloated. With a vicious sneer, he revealed that the greatbow-wielding elemental had vanished, its essence reformed into the very shield that now held Orion's trident at bay.

"Insolent gnat, daring to challenge the majesty of a dragon! Die!" As Orion was locked against the fire shield, the second elemental swung its massive greatsword in a devastating arc.

CLANG!

The blade was stopped cold by a sphere of rippling force that erupted around Orion—his Battle Will Surge.

“Don’t you know?” Adras’s voice was a mocking purr. “A dragon’s scales are unbreakable, its claws without peer.” As he spoke, his own massive claws shot forward, scissoring through the air to shred the shimmering sphere to nothing.

The situation was a stalemate. Faced with the ferocious assault, Orion did not retreat. He would meet the dragon’s attack head-on. But he was not merely defending.

The web of spider spears hovering in the air—many of which had already been consumed by the inferno—swiftly merged, coalescing into four colossal spears that shot toward Adras from four different directions.

SCREEE! GRIIIND!

The horrifying sound of claws tearing at the energy shield mingled with the high-pitched shriek of the spider spears grinding against dragon scales—a maddening cacophony of destruction.

“You are finished!” Adras bellowed, ignoring the agony of the spears beginning to bore into his flesh. With a single, immense effort, he drew all the fire from the surrounding space into himself. The elemental energy converged on his claws, which began to crackle and pop, every scale glowing with white-hot power.

“Infernal Rupture!”

A terrifying wave of force erupted from the dragon. With a series of sharp cracks, Orion’s Battle Will Surge shattered into a million pieces. The blast caught him square in the chest, tearing his body in two and sending the halves flying in opposite directions.

In the distance, Orion’s upper torso used Instant Impact to appear beside his lower half. The flesh of both pieces came alive, writhing like a nest of worms as the severed parts rapidly crawled toward each other to knit back together.

It was the regenerative power of a siren, capable of mending even the most grievous wounds in moments.

"Well." Adras sneered, his eyes glowing with murderous intent as he watched Orion reform. "It seems you are not quite as weak as I imagined."

Orion stared back coldly. The dragon's power was a stark contrast to its foolish words. This one had real strength.

Chapter 969: The Favor of the Woman in White

"The fight's just begun. Don't get ahead of yourself!" Orion reached out and snatched one of the blood-soaked spider spears from the air—one that had just torn through Adras's scales. The blood that stained it was that of a dragon.

"Dragon-ghost, slumbering in the endless dark, hear my call..."

Titanion Realm, the city of Stoneheart.

Orion sat upon his throne, his gaze lost in the space before him, a flicker of doubt in his eyes.

"So the human kingdom's Divine Artifact(Godly Artifact) is a true relic," he mused. "With that kind of power in reserve, it's no wonder they've dominated the southern continent for so long. But... why didn't Noel use it when that old dragon Icekra started the war? Is there some secret I'm missing? One that concerns the dragons, or one that belongs to the human kingdom alone?"

The higher one stood, the farther one could see. Now, as one of the apex predators in the continent's food chain, Orion saw things he never could have before. Prior to becoming an arch lord, he would never have imagined the complex, hidden relationships that existed between the dragons and the human kingdom.

Through the Deathly Soul-Reaper he had hidden with Lorelia, Orion had a clear picture of the current war. He had truly not expected the humans to be hiding such a trump card. He also now knew its true form: a crown.

"The Utessar Continent..." he whispered to himself. "I remember this land once had another name, but it seems the creatures living here have long forgotten it. When can I finally rename it the Titan Continent?"

He had never abandoned his ambition to unite the continent. Before, he had held back because his strength was insufficient. Now, he held back because neither his strength nor the time was right. The unification would have to wait.

To the east, in the lands of the Dwarven Tribes.

The fires of war raged. Bodies littered the ground. The battle was far from over.

Is this how Mentor dominated the battlefield in his early days? Rolan thought, awestruck. It's so powerful!

He wrenched his trident from the chest of a Dark Dwarf warrior, and a surge of vitality flowed from the weapon into his own body, replenishing his strength and stamina.

He was finally understanding the true power of the Bloodthirsty Trident. It was this vampiric quality that allowed him to remain on the front lines, honing his skills, earning his first bloody battle honors.

"Well done, Rolan! To think you can still swing that trident!" Gort's voice boomed nearby.

"He's the lord's disciple, through and through."

Ursa, Tarn, and Gort were all surprised by the boy's combat prowess. Steelblade, who was two years Rolan's senior, had collapsed from exhaustion hours ago and been carried to the rear. Yet the younger Rolan was still fighting, his energy seeming to grow with every kill. His spirit and willpower were a match for some of their Alpha-level warriors.

"I will keep fighting! I won't bring shame to my mentor's name!" Rolan declared. "After him, I will be the strongest warrior of the giant's bloodline!"

He hefted his trident once more and charged toward a dire wolf in the distance.

The three veterans watched his every move—every thrust, every dodge, every leap. Ursa, Tarn, and Gort exchanged a look of shared admiration. They had all possessed that same fire when they were young; they wouldn't have reached the Alpha-level otherwise. Ursa, in particular, remembered the serpentfolk and cave spider assault on Moonshadow Valley.

Driven by sheer grit, she had run on her own two feet all the way to the succubus territory to call for aid. It was that same ferocious spirit her father, Rendall, had always been so proud of.

"Orion's disciple is on the field. Keep an eye on him," Delilah said quietly from behind Lorelia. While managing the larger battle, she made a point to watch over the Horde's key figures.

"Don't worry," Lorelia chirped. "Rolan is the master's disciple, which makes him my little apprentice too! Of course I'm watching him. I've already sent two of my big spiders to stick close by. They'll make sure no Alpha-level threats get near him. Heh heh..." She turned and gave Delilah a quick, tongue-out smile.

Suddenly, Lorelia's expression changed. "Xalathar, we've got company!" She sensed a Legendary-level power approaching them fast.

It was the werewolf lord, Orwar. His pack was being torn to shreds by the cave spider armies, and he was suffering heavy losses. To stanch the bleeding, Orwar had broken away from the human earl he'd been fighting and was now making a beeline for Lorelia.

ROAR!

The abyss dragon, Xalathar, had sensed the threat as well. It raised its head and unleashed a terrifying Abyssal Flame Bomb from its maw. The projectile struck Orwar mid-air, blasting him out of the sky.

The werewolf lord was wounded but not seriously. He landed, transformed into a colossal wolf, and charged again.

"Xalathar, this big brute is looking down on us!" Lorelia called out. Orwar was a mid-tier lord, while she and Xalathar were both lower-tier. That was the only reason he would dare to engage them both.

From within the roiling mist that surrounded him, Xalathar let out a low, furious growl, but he did not lose his composure and charge out of his domain.

From the distant field, the human earl who had been crossing blades with Orwar felt the stirring of Lorelia and the abyssal dragon. Without hesitation, he broke away and turned back toward the storm where the Legendary combatants clashed. There, the struggle between Torin and King Harold had risen to a fever pitch, driving the other human lords to press their assaults with ruthless force.

The probing skirmishes were no more—steel rang in earnest, and every stroke was meant to kill.

"Die, you old dog!" Torin snarled, tearing a scroll in half.

A figure emerged before him—a woman in flowing white robes. Her beauty was striking but utterly lifeless. Her face was as stiff as a doll's, frozen in a faint, serene smile.

Torin had acquired from Ogu the clown a one-use cursed puppet—The Favor of the Woman in White.

Whomever her gaze fell upon would inherit her so-called "favor." In the eyes of a vengeful spirit, that favor was nothing less than a death curse.

The woman in white fixed her hollow stare upon King Harold and, with a stiff, puppet-like motion, stretched out her arms as if to embrace him from across the battlefield.

In the same heartbeat, a colossal wraith-phantom unfurled behind the king, gathering him into its icy hold. Malevolent power seeped from the specter, and a tide of cryptic runes writhed over Harold's body, vermin swarming a corpse.

"The majesty of a king," Harold snarled, straining against the spectral bonds, "cannot be defied!"

Chapter 970: Your treason ends now

Unfazed by the vengeful spirits swarming him, King Harold stood ramrod straight, his hands resting on the pommel of an invisible sword.

The unremarkable crown on his head suddenly pulsed, unleashing waves of incandescent light that pierced through the spectral forms. The spirits and the curse they carried dissolved into nothingness.

"No fucking way!"

From a distance, Torin's face went pale, a mask of pure disbelief. He remembered the Clown, Ogu, being crystal clear when he sold him the cursed item. It was supposed to cripple even a full-fledged arch lord, let alone a mere lord. But the damn thing had fizzled out like a cheap party trick.

This was his ace in the hole for killing King Harold. With his trump card now useless, his mind was already screaming at him to bail.

What Torin didn't know—what he couldn't possibly have known—was that the simple crown on Harold's head was the kingdom's Relics, the very heart of the Human Kingdom's power. With the Relics in his possession, Harold, as the supreme ruler, was a target that most arch lords couldn't even dream of assassinating.

"Is that the best you've got?" Harold's voice boomed, his body wreathed in the Relics' golden light. He raised his sword and began advancing on Torin, one heavy step at a time. "Your treason ends now, traitor."

High above, the clash between the Clown and the human Saint, Noel, was also drawing to a close.

The Clown had lost.

Ogu's will projection had shrunk drastically. It flickered erratically, weakened and translucent.

"I'll be damned. You can actually handle the Relics," the Clown's voice rasped, devoid of its earlier mirth. "You earned this one. No complaints here."

He was genuinely blindsided. He had never imagined an arch lord could wield the Relics with such devastating power. All eight of his illusions had been obliterated by the prismatic light, and even his own projection had been critically damaged.

"You must be a peak arch lord," Noel stated, a cold knot tightening in his stomach. "I've never seen anyone withstand a direct hit from the Relics and live to tell the tale." He could confirm it now. An enemy of this caliber targeting the Human Kingdom... he wasn't sure if this was a trial or a death sentence.

"Heh. My strength is nothing special," Ogu deflected. "But your praise is wasted on me. I'm far more interested in him."

In a blink, the Clown's will projection vanished and reappeared directly behind King Harold. The move was obvious; Ogu had spotted the connection between Harold and Noel. He reached out, his ghostly hands aiming for the crown on Harold's head. This was one of the Relics, a true superweapon that even some demigods lacked.

But something felt wrong.

Noel hadn't moved to intercept him. There was only one explanation.

He's certain I can't take it.

Sure enough, the crown on Harold's head flared to life again. Brilliant beams of light, sharp as swords and dense as rain, lanced through the Clown's will projection, shredding the phantom to pieces.

"I'll remember this," a voice hissed from the dissipating energy.

The Clown wasn't gone yet. An arcane scroll suddenly flew from Torin's robes, igniting without a flame. A new phantom, far weaker than the last, materialized from the ashes, grabbed Torin, and vanished into thin air.

"Don't pursue," a voice commanded.

Saint Noel appeared at King Harold's side, placing a hand on the shoulder of the king, who had already started to give chase.

"Ancestor, why?" Harold demanded, his eyes still fixed on the horizon.

A look of weary resignation crossed Noel's face. "That was an arch lord. What we fought was just his will projection. Even if you caught up and destroyed that last phantom, all it would cost him is a bit of faith. Compared to that, your safety—and the security of the Relics—is what matters most to the Human Kingdom."

Harold was no tyrant, deaf to counsel. He respected the strategic reality of the situation. "Ancestor, so... do we proceed?"

Saint Noel nodded, his expression turning to ice. If it weren't for this war, he never would have realized how little respect the northern tribes now had for the Human Kingdom's authority. That being the case, a culling was long overdue.

"We proceed. We've shown too much of our hand today. We need more territory and resources to build up our strength. Besides," he added, "the only way to maintain this new alliance is to make sure the Stoneheart Horde, the Dragons, and the Blood Elves all get a big enough piece of the pie from this war."

That's right, a new alliance. With the Dwarven Tribe in decline, the name "Five-Race Alliance" was already obsolete.

"Then let's start with these goddamn accomplices," King Harold snarled, turning to face the remaining lords of the northern tribes. His eyes burned with murderous intent. The Human Kingdom had lost several lords in this war. He would get their Lord's Stone back, and then some.

"Kill them all!"

With that single command from the king, the battle between the Legendary-level combatants erupted into a final, brutal deathmatch.

Shit, shit, shit, he got away! The target got away! What the hell am I gonna do? It was my first mission from my lord Orion, and I totally blew it! Goddammit... that Human King... that damn Human Saint... Why didn't you just chase him down? This is so fucked. How am I gonna explain this when I get back?

"Alright, you bastards! Wreck his shit! I want his Lord's Stone!"

The battle raged, and Aldous's other ogre head had taken over, roaring encouragement. As Aldous hyped him up, the ogre lord fought with increasing ferocity, growing stronger with every blow.

Aldous's logic was simple. Since he'd failed the main objective, he'd make up for the screw-up with some serious loot. Yeah, making up for it with a pile of Lord's Stone seemed like a pretty solid backup plan.

Stoneheart City, Fifth Floor of the Silent Goblet.

Alexander's avatar materialized in the room again. Orion was there waiting for him.

"Relax," Alexander said, his tone casual as they both observed the distant battlefield through their own means. "That piece of trash doesn't have the balls to invade your continent, much less this entire world."

"How can you be so sure?" Orion asked. He had no real gauge of Ogu's true power or depth, but one thing still unnerved him: how the hell did the Clown and that Witch survive being hunted by the commander and Deputy Commander? The thought alone was terrifying.

"This was just a probe. He hasn't even figured out the meta for the arch lord tier yet. He's not stupid enough to launch a full-scale cross-world war," Alexander explained. "Besides, this world has plenty of

its own demigod-level players. This is their territory. They're not just going to sit back and watch some outside evil faction move in on their turf. This is a battle of faith. They have to get involved."

Alexander paused, glancing at Orion with a knowing look. "And the one you've got backing you wouldn't allow it, either."