

Titan King 921

Chapter 921: Just an Avatar

Makareth was completely unhinged, delirious with battle-lust. With a roar, he charged forward, scimitar in hand.

Arcs of light from his blade flashes took out one of the thunder dragons, but the other two were already on him, their reactions lightning-fast, their movements savage.

A dragon's tail lashed out like a whip.

CRACK!

The blow slammed into the Demon's body with the sickening sound of crunching bone and tearing flesh. Before he could recover, crackling thunder exploded around him as one of the dragons caught him in its massive jaws.

The shadow of death enveloped him. Pressure like a collapsing mountain squeezed him from all sides, and Demon Makareth let out a scream of pure agony.

Just as he was about to be crushed into paste, a magical light flared around his body. He vanished, reappearing on the floor of the floating palace in a heap.

"Finally! It's my time to shine!" Leonidas glanced at Makareth, who was lying on the deck like a sack of broken bones, before launching himself into the air like a rocket.

"Hey there, little beauty! Prepare to surrender to my handsome and charming self! Ha ha!"

As he shot forward, Leonidas had already sacrificed his battle-axe, activating his domain. He strode through the air, and the thunder dragons that had so thoroughly beaten Makareth came to intercept him. He annihilated them with a single punch each.

They couldn't even withstand one blow.

Not far away, the female dragon rider, Daize, frowned. This new enemy was clearly on a completely different level. Her nephew had been killed, and she had come seeking revenge. She just hadn't expected the enemy to be this powerful.

Daize chanted a magical spell. A suit of blue ice armor, crackling with arcs of lightning, covered her body. With a cold snort, she charged toward Leonidas.

In the next instant, Leonidas and Daize were grappling. That's right—literally wrestling in mid-air. It was a deliberate, boorish tactic on his part.

"Looks like this side is about wrapped up, too," Orion murmured, glancing at the brawling pair before dismissing them from his mind.

He hefted his trident and flew to the patch of sea where Isabella had plunged into battle. Like a cannonball, he shot into the water.

The surface of the ocean cratered inwards, forming a massive vortex that expanded outwards in all directions.

Less than a minute later, the colossal dragon burst from the waves. It wasn't flying. It was running across the water's surface, stumbling toward the palace. Both of its wings were broken. It clutched its mangled limbs with its foreclaws, while its mouth held the bloody, unconscious form of Isabella.

The moment it reached the palace deck, it could hold on no longer. With a pained howl, it collapsed.

Fortunately, Leonidas's subordinates had the presence of mind to act. They quickly summoned beasts and shaman who knew healing magic, and a constant stream of restorative spells began to wash over the two casualties and their dragon.

BOOM!

In the distance, a massive explosion erupted from the seafloor. A mushroom cloud of water burst into the air, and from its center flew a gigantic turtle carrying a mountain on its back.

Standing on the turtle's back was an old man with downcast eyes and a tortoise shell strapped to his own back. He was the one who had crippled Isabella and her colossal dragon.

But now, the old man was staring down into the depths, his expression grim.

A mournful whale song echoed from below. The next moment, the sea began to tremble as if it were boiling. A black shadow rose from the depths, and a supersized ancient giant-horned whale breached the surface, hovering as it stared at the old man and his turtle.

"You're pretty fast," Orion's voice echoed across the water. "That turtle of yours having something like a teleportation ability... interesting."

He brandished his trident, sizing up the giant turtle. It wasn't just its defense that was astonishing; it was also incredibly fast. If it hadn't run into him and his ancient giant-horned whale, the old man would have caused a massacre.

So that's why Leonidas chose the female dragon, Orion realized with a flash of insight, suddenly understanding the cunning merchant's brand of insidious thinking.

The old man looked at the three severed turtle tails dangling from the ancient giant-horned whale's mouth, his heart aching. His mount was a Tritail Dreadturtle, and those tails were the essence of its power, the primary conduits for condensing water magic. With them severed, the turtle had lost its elemental advantage and was forced to surface.

"Your Excellency," the old man pleaded, "the war has not yet fully broken out. I am just here to beat the drums for the opening act. There is no need for us to fight to the death."

In truth, he and his turtle were merely vassals of the dragons. He owed the dragon rider, Daize, a favor, and at her request, he had reluctantly left his own world and teleported to Dragonflame Island to participate in a war that had absolutely nothing to do with him.

"You should understand," Orion said, raising his trident and smiling coldly. "The moment you set foot on Dragonflame Island, you were already a player on the board. Since you're already in the game, why cling to your excuses? Why hide and obscure your intentions?"

He took a step forward on the whale's back. "If you do not wish to fight, that is fine. Death is a release."

Orion was utterly dismissive of his words. Just moments before, deep underwater, this old man had been laughing uproariously as he tortured Isabella.

"Then die."

The word had barely left his lips when the old man discovered with a jolt of terror that Orion had vanished. The figure still standing on the whale's back was just a phantom.

To his mounting horror, the real ancient giant-horned whale had lowered its horn and was charging his Tritail Dreadturtle.

"Perhaps," a voice whispered directly behind him, "you should be more concerned about yourself."

The old man instinctively tried to flee, but he found he couldn't move. At the same time, a tingling, itching numbness spread from his heart, agonizingly intense.

He looked down. A trident had pierced through his body from behind. His entire chest cavity, he now realized, had been vaporized by an unseen fire. It was the effect of the trident's Flame of Will.

After being reforged by the demigod Arthas in Whitebone Coldflame, the weapon now inflicted a paralyzing, freezing effect on flesh and blood. It was why the old man hadn't felt the pain at first.

"No... no... impossible!" he stammered, his mind reeling with disbelief. He simply could not accept that he had been killed so easily.

FWOOSH!

The Whitebone Coldflame flared to life, erupting from his chest and incinerating his body in an instant.

Orion stood where the old man had been, his face impassive. A flicker of disappointment crossed his eyes.

The old man's death had not dropped a survivor's chest, nor had his body of faith appeared.

It meant that this had only been an avatar. The real old man, in his own world, still lived.

Chapter 922: Gertria's Gift

With the old man dead, his Tritail Dreadturtle was now the sole target. Its shell, however, was incredibly tough; even the ancient giant-horned whale was having trouble breaking through the mountain on its back. Orion raised his trident and joined the fight.

High in the sky, the battle between Leonidas and the female dragon, Daize, was reaching its climax.

Leonidas had absolutely no shame. His attacks were relentlessly and deliberately aimed at Daize's chest. Even for a dragon with astonishing defenses, she instinctively moved to protect herself—a feminine reflex.

For a master combatant like Leonidas, that defensive motion created the perfect opening, allowing him to press his attack without pause.

"You lecherous vermin! You despicable beastman! You are foul! You deserve to die!" Daize shrieked, truly on the verge of a breakdown from Leonidas's sleazy fighting style.

To escape his groping attacks, she transformed, revealing her dragon true form.

ROAR!

With an enraged bellow, Daize's sky-blue dragon body materialized, spanning the sky. She lunged, her massive jaws snapping at Leonidas, swearing to tear the crawling insect to shreds.

"Oh yeah, my darling! You finally revealed your true form!" Seeing her as a full dragon, a strange light flashed in Leonidas's eyes, visible to all. He was getting more and more excited, his body and even his voice trembling slightly.

"My sweet, I am going to cherish you so, so much!"

With a flicker of teleportation, Leonidas appeared on top of the blue dragon's head. He grabbed her horns with both hands, stroking them as if caressing the body of a pure maiden. His expression was a bizarre mix of sincerity, adoration, fanaticism... and pure sleaze.

ROAR! ROAR! ROAR!

The female dragon, Daize, went insane. Aside from a bonded dragon rider, for anyone to touch a dragon's horns was the ultimate violation—the equivalent of rape. The horns were a taboo among dragonkind, never to be touched by anyone but a beloved mate.

"Perfect curvature... a beautiful color... what an exquisite feel..." Leonidas murmured, critiquing her horns as he stroked them. "Go on, my darling, scream for me! The more you scream, the more excited I get!"

Her roars were interrupting his... appreciation. He ducked his head, pressing himself flat against her skull to dodge a swipe from her massive claws.

AWOOOO!

The man was truly shameless. After dodging the attack, he stood up again and resumed stroking her horns, all while letting out his own ridiculous wolf howls.

Daize beat her wings, carrying him higher and higher into the sky. After reaching her maximum altitude, she tucked her wings and began to plummet. It was a desperate attempt to shake him off.

Unfortunately for her, Leonidas refused to let go. In his world, female dragons were meant to be conquered. To let go now would be an insult to his very manhood.

"Come, my darling!" he roared over the wind. "Let the sea witness our fall into the abyss of love! Let everyone see our vow! We shall be together in life and death! Let the world feel my passion for you...!"

Under the watchful eyes of nearly everyone on the battlefield, Leonidas clung to the horns of the female dragon Daize as they plunged together into the deep sea. Even Orion, in the middle of his fight with the Tritail Dreadturtle, had to spare a glance at the colossal tidal wave Leonidas kicked up in the distance.

"Honored powerhouse, perhaps we can talk."

As Orion's attack rhythm slowed for a moment, the giant turtle floating on the surface of the sea extended its massive head, met his gaze, and spoke.

Orion reined in the ancient giant-horned whale, halting its assault. He was curious to hear what it had to say.

"I am Gertria, of the Tritail Dreadturtles. I greet you, honored powerhouse."

Orion remained silent, his eyes fixed on the ancient turtle.

"Thank you for killing that turtle-slaver, for allowing me to break free from the seal on my consciousness," Gertria's voice was rough, like a constant wheeze. "It was not my intention to be your enemy. I was being controlled by him. I thank you, truly. You have broken my bonds and given me a choice, a hope for continuation."

The creature was clearly exhausted and heavily injured. Still, Orion said nothing, forcing down his curiosity. Sometimes, asking questions just gave the enemy an opening.

"Honored powerhouse, the mountain on my back is a formation. To break my defense, you must first destroy it. This formation," it added, "is also the method of my enslavement."

As it spoke, Gertria began to shudder violently. The mountain on its back started to crumble as if hit by a magnitude-12 earthquake. After a quarter of an hour, the mountain had completely collapsed, sliding into the sea as rubble.

Freed from its burden, Gertria seemed to regain some of its spirit, its voice growing stronger.

"Please, do not misunderstand, honored powerhouse. My life is fading. I have no wish to be your enemy. On the contrary, I wish to offer you a gift."

Sensing it was still being targeted, feeling Orion's undisguised killing intent, the ancient turtle quickly tried to explain.

Orion remained silent, his gaze cold and unwavering.

"Honored powerhouse, please wait but a moment."

With that, Gertria opened its mouth and inhaled. A limitless volume of seawater rushed into its body, filling out its previously shriveled form. The three tails that the ancient giant-horned whale had bitten off began to regrow.

They swayed with a strange, mystical rhythm, gathering the water magic from the surrounding area. The speed of the condensation left Orion stunned.

A vortex of pure water magic began to form behind Gertria. It grew larger and larger, swallowing more and more elemental energy. The terrifying fluctuation of magical power made even Orion frown.

"Honored powerhouse," Gertria said, its voice now soft, "I hope you will be kind to them."

It gave one last look at the surrounding sea. This was a foreign ocean, not its home. A hint of regret was in its gaze.

Then, Gertria closed its eyes and began the final rite of dissolution and release.

Just as Orion was debating whether to intervene, to kill Gertria and prevent the volatile water magic from spiraling out of control, the turtle's massive body began to visibly shrink and wither.

As it did, the vortex of water magic behind it grew even more powerful, its pull becoming immense, the fluctuations more and more violent. Fortunately, this was an arch lord's battlefield. There was no one else nearby to be caught in the blast.

Chapter 923: The Avenger armies

After a moment of consideration, Orion decided against destroying the elemental whirlpool.

Half an hour later, its pull began to weaken before dissipating completely.

The body of the Tritail Dreadturtle was long gone.

In its place, bobbing on the surface not far from Orion, was a vessel the size of a washbasin, shaped like a turtle's shell.

Inside rested three shimmering, aquamarine turtle eggs.

Seeing them, Orion understood immediately what had happened. The Tritail Dreadturtle had sacrificed every last drop of its life force to incubate these three eggs. It had chosen its offspring over its own survival.

Then again, Orion thought, it wouldn't have survived anyway. Once you were dragged into this war, willingly or not, defeat meant your fate was sealed.

"Smart old turtle," Orion murmured, carefully collecting the three eggs before turning back toward the Leonidas palace.

In a way, the Tritail Dreadturtle had secured a powerful master for its descendants, a strong protector.

Back in the main plaza, Orion checked on Makareth and Isabella.

A swarm of shamans and priests were attending to them, and the worst of their injuries had been seen to. Both, however, remained unconscious, their minds having clearly suffered significant trauma.

His gaze swept over the slumbering colossal dragon, then drifted out toward the distant sea. It seemed Leonidas and the female dragon, Daize, had gotten a little carried away in their chase.

Meanwhile, in the Titanion Realm, north of the former dwarven Tribe's lands.

This was the edge of the Blacksteel gnomes' territory.

Perhaps due to their similarly short stature, the gnomes race had always been a vassal to the dwarven race. It was a relationship that had guaranteed their security and allowed their civilization to flourish.

But the good days for the Blacksteel gnomes had ended the moment the dwarven race was corrupt.

They were assaulted by a joint force of Dark Dwarves and their puppets. Their own My lord had been blasted into a bloody paste by Brokk, the Dark Dwarf king.

Faced with death and terror, the Blacksteel gnomes bent the knee, choosing servitude under a new master.

The Avenger armies.

That was the name of this new faction, led by a man named Torin.

Inside a large tent within a grim, imposing military encampment, Torin's eyes snapped open, gleaming with a sharp intensity.

"Well, Torin? Isn't supernatural power a beautiful thing?" a voice purred. "Welcome to the world beyond. You are a lord now. Heh heh heh..."

Across from Torin, a puppet was perched on a round table, leaning casually against one of Orion's stolen wine gourds. It was Ogu, the clown.

His voice pulled Torin from the intoxicating trance of his newfound transcendent power. He still couldn't quite believe it. He was now a Legendary level powerhouse.

A man of his strength held significant standing anywhere on the continent.

"So this is supernatural power?" Torin murmured, holding up his hands. A sphere of raw Abyssal energy coalesced between his palms. Feeling the terrifying force contained within, he felt that while he couldn't move mountains or part seas, splitting a cliff face or diverting a river seemed entirely possible.

"Are you sure there are no side effects to gaining power this way?"

Supernatural strength was incredible, but a seed of doubt remained. This ascension to the Legendary level wasn't like the others.

He had achieved it through a dark ritual, sacrificing countless lives to some unknown entity to force a connection with his Lord's Stone. It was an extreme, forbidden path.

"Don't you feel the power that is now your own?" the puppet Ogu countered, sidestepping the question. "Why waste time with pointless second-guessing?"

Of course, Ogu wouldn't tell him the truth. Ascending this way was indeed possible.

But the clown had no intention of revealing that the moment Torin outlived his usefulness, everything would be stripped away.

Power gained from a pact with an evil being was flawed, a loan that could be recalled at any time. Right now, Torin was little more than a vessel, a host for the entity he'd sacrificed to.

"You have to understand, Torin," Ogu's voice dropped, low and conspiratorial. "Beyond the rank of lord, every single step forward is a monumental struggle. Any method that helps you advance is a method worth trying."

He sounded like he was trying to convince Torin, but also, perhaps, himself.

"If you succeed, the method works. Why should you care if the path is cruel or wicked? Am I right, Torin?"

Feeling Ogu's gaze on him, Torin looked up and met the puppet's eyes.

"You're right," he said, his voice firm. "I'll accept any method, as long as it gives me power."

His gaze was resolute. In that moment, he finally felt he had the strength to truly contend for dominion over the continent.

"I'll hold up my end of the bargain," Torin declared. "Soon, you and I will both have a territory of our own."

Torin was dead serious, but Ogu's response was less than optimistic.

"You and I are not enough, Torin. Not even close," the puppet said, his tone all business. "We have to push north, sweep up more lords into our ranks. Only then will we have a force that can truly stand against the human kingdom."

Ogu's analysis of the continent's political landscape was chillingly clear.

"And have you considered this? The human kingdom will likely rally other factions to deal with us. The stoneheart horde, the dragons, the blood elves... they are all our potential enemies."

On this point, Torin had his own ideas. He didn't share Ogu's bleak outlook.

"The Stoneheart Horde will likely be our enemy, thanks to the assassination you orchestrated to sow chaos," Torin conceded. "But I believe we can negotiate with the dragons and the blood elves. We can send an envoy."

Making an enemy of every major faction on the continent was suicidal. Torin was clear-headed enough to understand that. He believed in complex diplomacy, in offering strategic benefits to carve out a space for them to survive and thrive.

"It's not that simple, Torin!" Ogu's voice was sharp, leaving no room for argument. "The fall of the dwarven Tribe is a feast, and the Stoneheart Horde, the dragons, and the blood elf race will not pass up a slice of the cake. It is the nature of great factions. The fundamental law of this cruel world."

He leaned forward slightly.

"Think about it. To them, our Avenger armies are just another piece of that cake, and not a small one. Tell me, does a diner negotiate with the meal on his plate?"

The words hit their mark. Torin listened, processing the cold logic. But he held fast to his own convictions.

"Fine," Torin said, his decision made. "We'll prepare for both outcomes. We'll try your way, and we'll try mine. Maybe one of them will create an opening for us. No?"

He wouldn't abandon his own strategy without trying it first, without seeing it fail with his own eyes.

Whenever his opinion clashed with Ogu's, his own would take precedence.

Torin was acutely aware that he couldn't let himself be manipulated, couldn't let anyone else pull his strings.

Chapter 924: Sister-in-law

Sunlight pierced the clouds, falling upon the dark grey city walls.

Delilah moved with a familiar grace through the sweet-scented air of the city, heading deep into the fortress of Stoneheart.

Several herbs in the magical plants garden had matured, releasing a fine, white fluff that drifted through the entire city, blanketing everything like a delicate layer of summer snow.

As she stepped into the garden, Delilah heard the cheerful shouts of Elara and Pallas.

Egged on by three chittering elemental sprites, they were chasing a shimmering faerie insect around the grounds.

Nearby, Orion and Lilith sat together, watching their two children play with blissful smiles.

As Delilah approached, Lilith gestured for the maidservants to bring her a chair before dismissing them.

"The dwarven elder, Harbek, has crossed the border of Soaring Bird City and entered our Stoneheart Horde's ogre territory," Delilah said, sitting down and casually helping herself to a pastry from the round table. She nibbled on it as she delivered her report.

"My lord, what do you think he wants? The elder of the dwarven tribe, coming all the way out here."

Her tone was tinged with a smug satisfaction.

"Is he here to ask for aid, or to pledge his allegiance?"

When the Stoneheart Horde had first arrived from the north, the dwarven Tribe couldn't be bothered with them. Now, the tables had turned. With the dwarves facing disaster, they were the ones coming to their door.

"Roll out the welcome mat, but keep him at arm's length," Orion said, leaning back and lacing his fingers behind his neck.

He tilted his chair until it found that perfect, precarious balance point between sitting and falling, and let it rock back and forth with a gentle creak.

"The dwarves won't get serious until the human kingdom turns down their plea for help."

"Aren't you afraid Harbek will just take all the dwarves to the human kingdom instead?"

Honestly, a Legendary level dwarf like Harbek—a master of both combat and craft—was exactly the kind of talent the Stoneheart Horde desperately needed.

If Harbek could be brought into the fold, the question of who would truly lead the Stoneheart Horde Bureau of Weapons would finally be settled. In a short time, the Horde's armament and weapons technology would leap forward by several tiers.

Considering all this, Delilah had to press him. "Orion?"

"If Harbek goes to the human kingdom, it just proves he's not a smart man," Orion said, not bothering to meet Delilah's gaze. He slowly closed his eyes, letting the warm sun soothe his eyelids. "And if that's the case, the dwarven race would never flourish under his leadership anyway."

He paused, a lazy smile on his face.

"Besides, from what I know of that dwarven prophet, he wouldn't have left things to chance. I bet they have a contingency plan. The prophet goes to the human kingdom, while Harbek comes here to us. Even I know not to put all my eggs in one basket."

His voice trailed off lazily. The succubus sisters exchanged a look but said nothing, content to simply share this rare moment of peace with the man beside them.

In the Emerald Dream Realm, over the Kasenna Sea.

Orion stared at Leonidas, who had his arm wrapped around the waist of the female dragon, Daize. His eyes were wide with pure admiration.

This bro is on another level. He actually conquered an arch lord-tier female dragon through a combination of fighting, roaring, flirting, and just generally being a menace. If he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, Orion would have never believed it was possible.

"Heh heh heh. Bro. You know what to do. Call her 'sis'," Leonidas grinned, puffing out his chest.

A faint blush colored Daize's cheeks and she tapped his chest with a playful fist.

"A pleasure to meet you, sis," Orion said, giving Leonidas the respect he'd demanded. He shot his friend a quick, conspiratorial wink.

"Bro, I'm leaving things to you for a bit," Leonidas announced. "I've got to, uh, get your sister-in-law settled in."

Just as Orion's mind started racing with questions, Leonidas had already provided an answer.

Orion nodded. No matter how curious he was, he couldn't exactly start interrogating him in front of Daize.

But before Orion could say another word, Leonidas unfurled a cross-planar teleportation scroll. With a ripple of void energy, he and Daize vanished from the Leonidas palace.

Orion shook his head. The Dragon Faction was going to be absolutely livid.

In this one conflict, they hadn't just lost an arch lord and the powerful Tritail Dreadturtle he commanded, but one of their top-tier mistress dragons had also been poached.

In any tribe, every single arch lord was a pillar of their power. The defection of one wasn't just a loss of combat strength; it was a devastating blow to morale and faith.

The sheer depth of this bro's resources is just jaw-dropping.

From the moment he'd met Leonidas, seeing him sacrifice two of his own avatars, deploy a seemingly endless variety of land, sea, and air units, and now this feat of taming the dragon Daize... Orion was thoroughly impressed. He knew that an arch lord like Daize wouldn't submit so easily just from a single fight. Leonidas had to have some skill or item that made her willing to follow him, to submit to him.

But then again, that was Leonidas's secret. If he didn't offer it up, Orion couldn't ask.

Three days passed. Demon Makareth, who had been unconscious in the plaza, finally awoke.

He shot up from his prone position, shaking his head violently as if trying to dislodge something from his brain.

"Mak. We saved you some barbecue. You'd better get over here and refuel," Orion's voice called out.

Makareth looked up and saw Orion lounging under a large sun umbrella. The world slowly came back into focus.

"Big boss. Give me a sec. Still rebooting."

Orion nodded and said no more. He'd settled on calling him Mak. Little M felt too much like he was talking down to him, and his full name felt too formal. Mak was a good middle ground.

A moment later, Makareth stood, ripped off his tattered and blood-soaked clothes, and collapsed onto a lounge next to Orion, wearing nothing but a pair of massive shorts.

"Big boss. Is the fight over?"

"Nah. The grunts are still grinding it out on the front lines."

"Say no more."

Makareth sat bolt upright, grabbed a massive haunch of roasted meat, and began to wolf it down.

"Let me get a full stomach, then I'm going back in to carve my way through them again."

True to his word, the moment he was full, the guy grabbed his giant moonstones scimitar and sprinted back toward the front lines.

"Interesting. Very interesting," Orion mused to himself.

He was fascinated by Makareth. Beyond his earnest intensity, the Demon lord had an extreme, almost fanatical, streak of obsession and madness etched into his personality.

Maybe only someone that goddamn stubborn could forge his own Lord's Stone and ascend on his own terms.

Just as Orion was lost in thought, the air shimmered with void energy. Leonidas appeared a short distance away.

"Yo, bro," Orion called out, giving him a wave. "Back already? Did you feed your new girlfriend?"

Chapter 925: The Demigods Arrive

"Hahaha... bro, when you say stuff like that, I can tell you've got no experience with dragon girls," Leonidas boomed. "They're insatiable by nature. It's impossible to 'feed' them enough."

As he spoke, Leonidas plopped down into his chair and started chugging from a keg of ale.

"So..." Orion began, letting the question hang in the air. He knew Leonidas would get it.

"Your sis, Daize, has been settled in on a territory in another realm," Leonidas confirmed. "Don't worry. For both our sakes, I'm not letting her show her face on the Emerald Dream Realm battlefield again."

Orion lifted his own keg, clinking it against Leonidas's.

"Holy shit, bro. You're a legend." The praise was genuine.

"Heh heh, all in a day's work, my friend. A small matter!"

A shit-eating grin spread across Leonidas's face. It was clear his three-day "adventure" with Daize had left him thoroughly satisfied.

"So, is this Isabella chick still out?"

The fun and games were over. The first thing Leonidas did upon his return was scan the battlefield. He noted Makareth, who was once again going absolutely berserk on the front lines, but his gaze lingered with surprise on Isabella, who was still curled up within the protective embrace of her colossal dragon.

"Yeah, still out," Orion said with a shake of his head. He was almost jealous of Isabella; even while falling unconscious, her colossal dragon had instinctively shielded its master.

"I'll go take a look."

Leonidas set down his keg, got up, and walked toward the dragon. After a moment's thought, Orion followed.

"Her consciousness took a major jolt. No wonder she hasn't woken up." Leonidas pulled a vial from his pouch, shook out two small pills, and handed one to Orion.

"Get this into the little chick."

With that, Leonidas took the other pill over to the colossal dragon's massive head, pried its jaw open, and tossed the medicine inside.

Orion didn't overthink it. He walked over to Isabella, lifted her gently so her head was tilted back, and pressed on her jaw. Her lips parted, and Orion placed the pill inside.

But as he went to lay her back down, he realized she wasn't swallowing. The pill was just sitting in her mouth, not going down.

Orion paused for a second, then took out a waterskin. He fished the pill out of Isabella's mouth and popped it into his own. He took a swig of water, let the pill dissolve, and then leaned down and fed the mixture to her.

"Heh heh, bro. How'd she taste?"

Orion had barely straightened up when Leonidas's voice slithered over his shoulder. Before Orion could even process the question, Leonidas switched topics.

"Wow, I didn't realize you were so into this Isabella chick!" he said, his voice dripping with insinuation. "Bro, you're not worried... you know? That she gets around?"

Orion shot him a confused look.

"I've known a lot of female survivors, bro," Leonidas said with an air of worldly experience. "And let me tell you, a lot of them have a thing for keeping... boy toys. For all you know, the girl in your arms has a stable of a few thousand of them."

A wave of revulsion washed over Orion.

"Bro," he said slowly. "Is that why you made me do this? That's a dick move, man."

His only response was Leonidas's cackling laughter as he was already walking away.

"You're the disgusting one!" Orion yelled after him. "Your whole family is disgusting!"

At that exact moment, Isabella's eyes fluttered open. She fixed Orion with a venomous glare from her eyes.

Orion just shrugged, gently propped her up against her colossal dragon, and teleported back under the shade of his umbrella.

"Bro, a little heads-up next time you're gonna screw me over?"

Leonidas didn't say a word, simply handing Orion a roasted beast leg. Orion grunted a couple of times, then started tearing into the meat.

Suddenly, the sky itself seemed to recoil. The atmosphere shifted as three mighty, overwhelming presences swept across the land.

The dragon demigods had arrived.

The color drained from Leonidas and Orion's faces. They both dropped their food and flashed into the sky above the Leonidas palace.

But someone was faster.

The will projections of Deputy Commander Edward and Arthas materialized in the sky, blocking the path of the dragon demigods.

"Hand over Daize and that beastman, and we can forget this incident ever happened," the leading draconic phantom declared, its gaze fixed on Deputy Commander Edward. It had stated the reason for their arrival and the terms for peace.

"Cut the bullshit," Arthas's voice boomed. "You want a fight, you've got one."

How could Arthas, who had been monitoring the entire war, not know about Leonidas poaching a dragon arch lord? It was a total baller move that had boosted morale while simultaneously crippling the enemy.

Hand over Leonidas and Daize? What a joke.

That wasn't how the Champions Alliance operated. Besides, only a complete moron would agree to a move that weakened their own side.

"So be it. We will have war!"

Just as the three-on-two battle was about to erupt, another mighty voice echoed from the distance.

"If there's a war, how could you possibly start without me!"

It was Pollard, the progenitor of the Blood-Eyed Black Serpent, former ruler of Dragonflame Island—the very demigod who had once sought an alliance with the Champions Alliance.

"Your Excellencies," Pollard purred, addressing Edward and Arthas. "How about we each take one? The cries of my slaughtered children echo in my ears day and night. They tell me their deaths were so, so tragic!"

Deputy Commander Edward and Arthas were unmoved by Pollard's dramatic entrance. With perfect, unspoken understanding, they simply launched themselves at two of the draconic phantoms.

Pollard didn't get a verbal reply, but by leaving the third dragon demigod phantom for him, they had given him his answer.

Three-on-three. The sky turned dark as the battle between demigods began.

Far away, on the Dawn Continent, several shadowy figures materialized high in the atmosphere, their attention fixed on the western sky, toward the Dusk Continent.

A chorus of voices rose.

"A battle has started in the west. Is it a dispute over territory?"

"But isn't there a supreme entity in the west?"

"Those terrifying blade flashes not long ago... why would war break out there now?"

"Could it be that another supreme power has descended?"

They chattered amongst themselves, reaching no conclusion.

"Let them be," a final, authoritative voice cut through the noise.

If Orion had been there, he would have recognized it as the voice of the shadow serpent, Tusha.

"As long as it doesn't involve the Dawn Continent, the fiercer their battle, the better. Ideally, they'll annihilate each other. We continue to gather our strength. If we cannot devour this world, then we will simply claim it as our own."

Chapter 926: Get ready

On the Chaos Continent, outside the great ward guarding their skies, several shimmering forms of light and shadow coalesced.

"Intelligence reports the otherworldly dragons are fighting the two demigods from the Dusk Continent."

"I knew it. Those dragons were up to no good. Should we get involved?"

"The Emerald Dream Realm is a chaotic mess of different factions right now. Besides the Sea Race, the three continents are locked in a three-way stalemate."

"It's a delicate balance. Someone is trying to break it. But to what end?"

"Do you think... could that evil being be pulling the strings from behind the scenes?"

Whoever uttered that last question plunged the rest of the demigods into a heavy silence.

In the end, they failed to reach a decision.

Ever since the demigod Valthor had merged with the world itself, the Chaos Continent had been like a rudderless ship. Everyone had their own agenda, and every race acted with extreme caution, purely focused on self-preservation.

Dusk Continent, over the Kasenna Sea.

Leonidas and Orion landed back in the plaza of the Leonidas palace. With the Deputy Commander and Arthas having stepped in, there was no need for two arch lords like them to handle things.

"Bros, what in the hell is going on up there?"

Makareth was sharp. The moment the disturbance began, he had disengaged from his enemy and teleported back to the palace. Seeing Leonidas and Orion return, he and a recovering Isabella immediately walked over.

"While you two were out cold, one of your 'bros' here killed an arch lord, and the other one ran off with one," a new voice interjected.

Alexander's form shimmered into view. A spirit sword was strapped to his back, and his eyes were fixed on the sky as he cleared things up for Makareth.

Orion glanced at Alexander.

He's fully kitted out for battle. Don't tell me he's actually planning to challenge a demigod if things go south?

The insane idea flashed through Orion's mind. He cleared his throat and shot a look at Leonidas.

Leonidas, however, paid it no mind. He walked over to Alexander and slung an arm around his shoulders.

"Yo, Alex, come on. Could you let me tell the story? It sounds so much cooler when I get to do the bragging myself. Don't steal my thunder."

Alexander just rolled his eyes at Leonidas's shamelessness.

"Killed one, and... ran off with one?" Demon Makareth's eyes went wide.

He could understand killing an arch lord; after all, the Big bosses of the Champions Alliance were all on another level. But poaching an enemy arch lord? That was the kind of slick, unbelievable move he'd never even heard of.

"Easy there, Little M," Leonidas said smoothly. "When you see your new sis, you need to be respectful. And you'd better forget all about how she used to kick your ass."

Makareth slowly turned his head, staring at Leonidas, who now had an arm slung around his shoulders too. He blinked.

Thump.

A few seconds later, Makareth dropped to his knees on the ground and began to bow deeply to Leonidas.

"Big boss, please accept this disciple's bow!" he proclaimed. "Big boss, you must teach me this technique! I swear I will make it famous throughout the lands!"

Orion, Alexander, and Isabella all simultaneously took a step away from the pair of clowns.

Leonidas, however, placed his hands on Makareth's shoulders and helped him up. He wore an expression of profound sincerity, like a king knighting his most loyal champion.

"Bro, it's all good. We can talk about it, we can talk," he said grandly. "Hahaha..."

Meanwhile, Alexander turned to the still-pale Isabella.

"How are you holding up?"

"I'm okay, Alexander. Mostly," Isabella said, a look of shame on her face. "But my colossal dragon needs time to recover. Its wings just healed; it can't handle any intense fighting."

Before the arch lord, before that ancient turtle, her pride and the colossal dragon she relied on had been shattered so easily. If Orion hadn't intervened, she'd have been saying goodbye to... well, everything.

"Keep at it," Alexander said, his tone even. "I was satisfied with your performance in the last battle. At least you showed no fear."

Hearing praise from Alexander, a new light ignited in the dejected Isabella's eyes.

Some people don't grow from criticism; they thrive on encouragement and praise, using it as fuel. Isabella was clearly one of those people. Basking in approval was the fastest way to rebuild her confidence.

"That unfamiliar demigod's presence has appeared again," Alexander said, looking up at the sky, which churned with brilliant light and coalescing clouds, looking as if it might collapse.

He was, of course, asking Orion. Or perhaps, testing him.

"He's helping us fight the dragons," Orion answered. "It's a gesture of goodwill. He's showing his sincerity because he wants to ally with us."

That was his take, and he figured he was more or less on the money.

"Yes, but that's not the whole story." Alexander nodded, then shook his head.

While Orion and Isabella waited for him to elaborate, Leonidas's voice cut in from behind them.

"Helping us to show his sincerity, that's a given. That's his primary objective," Leonidas said, walking over with Makareth in tow. The two now stood beside Alexander and Orion. Their shared interest in the art of 'persuading' women seemed to have deepened their bond.

"But by showing up now, he also gets a front-row seat to see the Deputy Commander and Arthas in action. If you wanted to ally with someone, wouldn't you want to size up their strength? Maybe even feel it out for yourself?"

Leonidas continued, "And as an enemy of the dragons, he also wants to gauge their power. He wants to see what gives them the right to devour the race he once protected."

"Beyond all that," Leonidas clapped Orion on the shoulder, giving him a sly, knowing look. "This guy probably wants to get friendly with us so he can try to dig into who was behind those world-shaking blade flashes from a while back. Take notes, little bro."

"Get ready," Alexander said, his voice cold and sharp, completely ignoring Leonidas's antics as he stared at the sky. "If the situation turns against us, the three of us are up."

Hearing that, Leonidas and Orion's casual expressions vanished. They fell silent, their gazes joining Alexander's, fixed on the heavens.

Titanion Realm, the human kingdom.

In a secret chamber deep within the royal palace, King Harold stood before a spotless magic mirror. His face was a stone mask, betraying no emotion.

A traitor like Torin emerging from the human kingdom... it was a profound embarrassment for them. A joke. The other factions on the continent would surely laugh at them, waiting eagerly to watch their little drama unfold.

King Harold waited for about five minutes.

At last, watery ripples began to spread across the surface of the magic mirror, a sign that someone on the other end was activating their own.

An instant later, the ripples subsided, and the surface became perfectly clear again.

Within the mirror, the images of the empire's two Grand Dukes appeared: William and Richard.

Chapter 927: The King's Gambit

"The utter destruction of Soaring Bird City is a catastrophic loss for the kingdom. It is a stain on our honor that will be hard to wash away." Grand Duke Richard had one hand on his chest in a posture of prayerful solemnity.

"He is a traitor!" Grand Duke William's reflection in the mirror was visibly shaking with rage. "A viper we nurtured in our own house! This treachery must be punished with the utmost severity. We must do it to restore the kingdom's dignity, to protect the interests of our noble class, and to send a clear warning to the fence-sitters hiding in the shadows."

Compared to Richard, William's anger was far more personal.

He had the most to lose from the fall of Soaring Bird City; it was his faction that held the largest stake there. In fact, it was William who had directed his subordinate nobles to systematically sideline Torin in the first place.

King Harold watched the two Grand Dukes. They all knew the truth.

A large part of why Torin did what he did was because they had conspired to turn Baron Torin into a powerless figurehead.

Now, they were placing all the blame on him, shamelessly shirking their own responsibility and leveraging the full might of the kingdom to protect their personal interests.

He saw right through them, but his hands were tied. The Grand Dukes hadn't kept all the spoils for themselves; they had been careful to give the royal family a slice of the cake.

"There is no point in assigning blame now," King Harold said, his voice cutting through their posturing. He had no desire to bicker with his ministers. "Let us decide how to deal with this Torin."

Uniting their strength to eliminate the traitor and repel the outside enemy was his only priority.

"Torin is a traitor. We must clean our own house," Grand Duke William insisted.

Torin's sacrifice of the city had cost him dearly. His hatred for the man was bone-deep. Why Torin would choose rebellion over his comfortable position as a city lord was something William, blind to his own role in the affair, truly could not comprehend.

"The traitor must be dealt with swiftly," Grand Duke Richard agreed. "We cannot allow our neighbors to laugh at our expense."

Whatever the reason for the treason, elimination was the only answer.

"Very well." The King brought the hammer down, deciding against a pointless investigation into Torin's motives. "After this meeting, I will issue a royal decree declaring Torin a traitor to the kingdom. We will publicize his crimes and make him an object of scorn for all."

He paused, letting the decision settle.

"Second question: who will lead the punitive expedition?"

As king, Harold had to remain in the capital; he could not lead the armies himself.

"The eastern coast is still unstable," Grand Duke Richard said immediately. "The naga race launches small-scale incursions almost weekly. I cannot be spared."

Harold and William both knew the situation on the east coast was precarious. It had to be garrisoned. There was nothing more to say.

"I will go."

King Harold looked at Grand Duke William, who had volunteered before the king could even ask.

"His Highness Prince Theodore's territory lies in the north, very close to the lands of the dwarven Tribe," William continued smoothly. "I implore Your Majesty to allow the Prince to coordinate with me in this action to purge the traitor."

The old fox.

William was roping in the heir to the kingdom, ensuring the other two couldn't plot against him behind his back. It gave his mission an extra layer of security.

"You have my permission," King Harold said after a brief moment of thought. "I will order Theodore to cooperate with you, Grand Duke."

Letting the prince take a small risk was a worthwhile price to pay if it meant William would be fully committed to the task. Besides, the campaign would allow Theodore to accumulate more prestige and honor. It was a win-win.

"Thirdly," the king continued, taking charge of the diplomacy, "I believe we must inform the stoneheart horde, the blood elves, and the dragons. Their personnel stationed in Soaring Bird City were all sacrificed. It is our duty to offer condolences. Furthermore, before Grand Duke William concludes his mission, we must proactively engage the other three factions on this matter. We need to manage them and ensure they do not interfere in our internal affairs."

As king, Harold not only had to push for the traitor's elimination but also manage their powerful neighbors, creating the time and space William needed to succeed.

"The dwarven Tribe is a cake ready to be carved, and with the dwarven prophet Dain having come to our Royal capital, we already have the first slice. We know the dragons have a shadowy presence among the northern barbarian factions. This operation must be swift."

King Harold's gaze fell on William again, his expression deadly serious.

"Rest assured, Your Majesty. I will give it my all," William promised.

Only then did the King nod slowly. "Containing our neighbors is also a contingency. We currently have no intelligence on the faction backing Baron Torin, but for him to have the gall to rebel, his support must be significant. If the Kingdom army suffers a setback, we can use the opportunity to invite our neighbors to the table. Let them have a piece of the cake as well."

It was the safest play. If you knew you couldn't eat the whole meal, it was better to share the leftovers. You'd gain allies and put them in your debt.

"Grand Duke William," the King said, his tone heavy, "the speed with which you eliminate this traitor will dictate the kingdom's entire approach to this crisis."

The pressure was immense.

"Your Majesty," William replied, "I understand the gravity of the situation."

Silence descended upon the three men, each one calculating what they stood to gain from the chaos.

"I will inform the Saint of this matter," King Harold said at last, his voice cool and distant. "The Saint will be watching over you."

Hearing this, a look of relief, even joy, flashed across William's face. He bowed deeply. With the Saint's attention, at least no major disaster could befall him.

They spent the better part of the day discussing the logistics of the armies to be deployed.

Finally, the magic mirror went blank. King Harold turned and left the secret chamber.

When he reappeared, he was in the south, at the sun-drenched Rose Manor.

"Harold? What brings you here?"

At the highest point of the manor, Ava stood leaning against a stone railing. She was watching her son, Kronos, in the distance, riding atop a Raptor and training with a giant bloodline warrior.

Ever since he'd learned that Pallas had hatched a black dragon, Kronos had been training with a desperate fervor.

As the older one, his young heart refused to accept being second best. He was determined not to fall behind, to never let Pallas surpass him.

King Harold said nothing at first, simply watching his nephew train for a long moment before turning to his sister.

"I've come about Soaring Bird City."

His voice was gentle, a stark contrast to the political maneuvering from moments before.

"That territory borders the blood elves and the ogres, and the ogres are a vassal race of the Stoneheart Horde. If I grant that land to you as your fief, no one in the Kingdom will dare to voice any opposition. It will be a place for you and Kronos, in the future."

It was a territory Harold had carved out for his sister amidst the Kingdom's complex and dangerous political landscape. Fortunately for them, Ava and Kronos had a truly powerful entity watching their backs. Otherwise, a move like this would have been impossible.

Chapter 928: A Horny Little Mutt

"Thank you!" Ava turned, looking at King Harold with an expression of pure adoration, the same innocent gaze she'd had when they were children.

"It doesn't come without a price." Harold shook his head, a hint of weariness creeping into his stern features. He turned away, unable to meet her eyes. In his mind, her simple, earnest gratitude was something he didn't deserve.

"What do you need us to do?"

In the past, Ava would never have responded with such calm acceptance. As the High Princess of the kingdom, she was proud, the most beautiful rose of the court.

But she was no longer just herself. She had a child now. A child caught between the human kingdom and the Stoneheart Horde, whose future fate was destined to be anything but peaceful.

If we can't avoid it, then I have to prepare Kronos, one step at a time. This was Ava's new reality. If that day ever comes, I can't let him go to the table with no cards in his hand.

It was for this reason that she had allowed Torin to use her name to run his scams and build his influence, even though she knew the man was morally bankrupt, involved in vile acts and the slave trade behind the scenes. It was simple: Torin and Soaring Bird City provided wealth, resources, and intelligence.

"Two things," King Harold's voice grew low and serious. When it came to matters of state, he had to set aside their bond as brother and sister and speak plainly. "One for the future, and one for the present."

Ava nodded silently, motioning for her brother to continue.

"For the future, Soaring Bird City will become a vital hub for communication and trade between our human kingdom, the stoneheart horde, and the blood elves. Given your status, and Kronos's, neither side will give you trouble. In other words, you and Kronos, and the city itself, will be key to whether the relationship between our three factions is harmonious, whether our alliance remains stable."

Hearing this, Ava slowly shook her head. She wasn't a fool. She didn't believe for a second that the relationship between great factions could be fundamentally changed, let alone decided, by a mother and son who were, in the grand scheme of things, irrelevant.

"You've matured," Harold said, turning back to look at her seriously. "But that only makes me worry more."

He should have been happy with her realistic response. But he wasn't, because growth only comes through pain. And as her brother, allowing his family to suffer was his failure.

He stared at Ava for a long moment, then reached out and ruffled her hair, just as he had when they were children.

"You're right to think that way. If a true war were to break out, you and Kronos couldn't do much to stop it. That iron-willed, enigmatic King of Giants of the Stoneheart Horde... a man who could carve a path from the north to the south has a will strong enough that you could never hope to sway it."

This was the truth, and it was also Harold's frank assessment of Orion. Of course, King Harold himself enjoyed a sterling reputation among the other major factions.

"But Kronos is his son. No matter how strained our relations become, they will never harm you. And in the future... if the future is hopeful, there's no reason the stoneheart horde and the human kingdom can't have a relationship like the one we share with the blood elves."

Harold's gaze drifted to Kronos, charging across the training grounds. His voice was heavy with meaning, his eyes fixed on a distant horizon.

"Ava, every great faction has two faces: one is sharp and aggressive, the other is gentle and kind. You and Kronos are fortunate. Judging by the King of Giants' attitude, you fall under his gentle and kind face. That makes your position between the Human Kingdom and the Stoneheart Horde unique."

He turned back to her then, his face bathed in sunlight, a gentle smile gracing his lips.

"And as long as Theodore and I are here, you will never be lesser than anyone."

Harold conveyed his absolute resolve to her with his eyes alone.

A soft breeze rustled through the Rose Manor, sending a flurry of petals into the air. A few drifted down between them, and for a fleeting moment, Ava felt as if she were twelve years old again. Back then, Prince Harold had made her the same promise: that he would make sure her life was happier than that of any other noble girl.

"As for the present," King Harold said after a long pause, "your task is to host a trilateral summit in Soaring Bird City. You will convey our stance on the traitor Torin to the blood elves and the stoneheart horde, express our deepest condolences for the loss of their people, and buy the kingdom time to clean its own house."

There were two reasons he was giving this task to Ava.

First, by succeeding, she would earn the merit needed to make her enfeoffment of Soaring Bird City legitimate in the eyes of all.

Second, it would demonstrate to the kingdom's noble class the vital importance of Ava and Kronos in inter-factional relations. That way, none of the other nobles would ever dare to undermine her and her son the way they had done to Torin.

"The kingdom will dispatch the necessary officials to assist you."

"I understand."

Stoneheart Horde, Stoneheart City.

Ever since Pallas's celebration for bonding his black dragon, the castle had grown much quieter.

Perhaps because Orion himself was now in residence, the fortress felt increasingly solemn and august, the air thick with the aura of immense power.

And in truth, it was. Orion often sat alone on his throne, sometimes lost in thought, other times immersing his consciousness in the Survivor's Platform. His silent presence made the entire castle feel more imposing, more monolithic.

Just as he was now. Though Orion's mind was deep within the Champions Alliance public channel, no one in the castle dared to break the profound silence.

Leonidas: @Deputy Commander @Arthas What's the status up there?

At this point, with Alexander staying silent, Leonidas had become the group's de facto mouthpiece. His impatience wasn't just his own; he was speaking for Orion, Kraken, Isabella, and Makareth, all of whom were desperate for information.

Arthas: If you had a little more ambition and got yourself to demigod sooner, maybe we wouldn't have people kicking down our door in the first place!

Leonidas didn't get an answer. He got a classic burn from his old friend.

Leonidas: What, you lost? No way. @Arthas how'd you get so useless after promoting to demigod?

Leonidas wasn't one to take a hit without firing back.

Arthas: I can swat an army of horny little mutts.

Leonidas: ...

A horny little mutt. There was no doubt who that was aimed at.

Chapter 929: Shoulder the Sky

The poaching of Daize meant that the Dragon Faction's deployments, their strategies, their entire playbook in the Emerald Dream Realm, were now half-exposed. That was the real reason for their fury, the real reason they had sent three demigod phantoms to attack.

To put it bluntly, Leonidas had really stepped in it this time.

But then again, as sworn enemies, this was exactly the kind of trouble Deputy Commander Edward and Arthas wanted to see more of. Outwardly, the Alliance had to be united. Inwardly, however, the burn was specifically targeted.

Edward: One enemy destroyed, two fled. They have retreated.

Just as the tense silence was about to set in, the Deputy Commander, who had been quiet for a long time, delivered the result. Of course, the one "destroyed" was not a true demigod, but a demigod phantom.

Edward: This time, an otherworldly demigod, Pollard, intervened. He helped us pin down one of the demigod phantoms, which allowed us to secure the kill.

Edward: This Pollard, who claims to be from the Blood-Eyed Black Serpent, has formed a temporary alliance with us.

Edward: His forces will watch Dragonflame Island from another direction. This may relieve some of the pressure on us going forward.

The news from the Deputy Commander left Leonidas, Orion, Kraken, Isabella, and Makareth in deep thought.

Under normal circumstances, the fact that the two Big bosses of the Champions Alliance were willing to ally with another faction meant one thing: they were feeling the pressure.

Or rather, the combat strength displayed by the Dragon Faction was a cause for concern.

For the members of the team, the inability to help in such matters left a heavy feeling in their chests. At least, that's how it felt for Orion.

Arthas: It's not as bad as you're thinking. The Champions Alliance is not a faction you can just push around.

Arthas: The reason we accepted Pollard's offer is because our conflict has already drawn the eyes of other demigods in the Emerald Dream Realm.

Arthas: When a potential ally comes to you willingly, you don't push them away and into the arms of the enemy. That would be against our interests and would not be a wise choice.

Arthas: We also agreed to the alliance to see what these entities are really after.

Arthas's explanation eased some of the tension in the channel.

Alexander: Leonidas and I have both hit a bottleneck. The next time a demigod phantom attacks, don't hold us back.

Alexander: With our resources, it's a loss we can afford.

To slay a god as an arch lord—Alexander had that kind of courage and daring.

Leonidas: I'm with Alex on this one. What consequence could possibly be worse than blowing up one of my own avatars?

Leonidas was more than happy to try his hand at challenging a demigod. Besides, he was desperate to break through to the next level.

Hanging out with a bunch of his "disciples" all the time was fine, but after a while, you started to lose that profound, enigmatic aura that a Big boss was supposed to have. It was completely at odds with his carefully crafted persona as the king of swagger.

Hulk: If it's just a demigod phantom, I can try to fight it.

After Leonidas's posturing, Orion, as a core member of the team, felt he had a responsibility to step up.

If he were completely powerless against a demigod phantom, he wouldn't have said a word.

But the fact was, he had the power. And right now, Orion himself didn't know the true limits of his own strength. He hadn't had a single, all-out fight since ascending to arch lord.

Edward: As long as Arthas and I are here, it's not yet your turn to shoulder the sky.

But the resolve of Alexander, Leonidas, and Hulk was immediately shot down by the Deputy Commander.

While he usually seemed like an affable peacemaker, the kind of man who believed harmony brings wealth, deep in his bones flowed a pride that towered over all of theirs. The authority of a demigod-level mage was not to be questioned.

Arthas: This conflict with the Dragon Faction won't be over any time soon. Make your arrangements. This is going to be a war of attrition.

Arthas: Isabella, Makareth. You two don't need to stay in the Emerald Dream Realm indefinitely. Developing your base of operations should be your priority now.

This was both a warning and a gesture of care. Arthas knew this feud wouldn't be settled easily.

The Great Dragon King of Light, Mondusath, would never give up on retrieving the six World Dragons eggs. And if the dragons from the Uynting Realm ever found out about the eggs, they would likely be even more frenzied.

It was clear from the Dragon Faction's current attitude on the Dusk Continent that they were still unaware of the World Dragons' existence.

To put it plainly, the war was likely to escalate.

When it did, Isabella and Makareth, as Legendary level lords without sufficient backing or resources, could easily fall if the others were spread too thin to protect them.

In contrast, arch lords like Alexander, Leonidas, and Orion, with their powerful avatars, could afford to go all-in. As for Kraken, he wasn't mentioned because he was already on the verge of his own ascension. This war was his final baptism by fire.

Edward: One more thing. I have finished setting up a defensive formation across the Dusk Continent. It will be activated in seven days.

Edward: When it goes live, the less-hidden otherworldly races and heretics on the continent will be exposed. Hulk, Isabella, Kraken, you need to deal with them as quickly as possible.

Kraken: Roger that.

Isabella: I'll coordinate.

Hulk: Don't worry, Deputy Commander. I'll pass down the orders.

Kasenna Sea, in a bay bordering the Dusk Continent.

A colossal steel warship was moored there, its front half beached on the sand while the rear half was submerged in the water, forming a massive, natural swimming pool.

At that moment, Kraken was lying at the pool's edge, gazing out at the vast ocean. The last rays of the setting sun stained the water red, reflecting in his large, round, black eyes with a unique beauty.

Kraken saw no sense of an ending in the crimson sunset, but rather a pressing urgency and a profound sense of anticipation.

Soon... it's coming soon...

He prayed and hoped, his heart racing. With the Champions Alliance pouring resources his way, he had spent all his recent time and energy breeding more Sea Race units.

While these cannon fodder troops weren't highly intelligent, their sheer numbers were overwhelming. As they were born, Kraken harvested ever-increasing amounts of faith energy.

At this rate, it wouldn't be long before he could attempt his own ascension to arch lord.

Hulk has the guts to challenge a demigod. I have to pick up the pace. I can't fall behind.

Once I reach arch lord, I'll be able to fight alongside the Big bosses!

Then, my world will become so much bigger!

Gazing at the sun dipping below the horizon, Kraken felt that his own brilliance was just beginning its ascent.

Chapter 930: Lorelia's Nightmare

Dusk Continent, Red Moon Valley, in the city of Lorelia.

The city was Lorelia's fiefdom. The fact that Orion had entrusted her to guard a location with a cross-realm teleportation array spoke volumes of his trust in her.

Of course, the current Lorelia wasn't quite ready for such a heavy responsibility. That was why Soraya, not Lumi, was stationed here to watch over her.

"Soraya, why don't the master and the others bring the war to the continent?" Lorelia asked. "If they did, you and I could fight side-by-side again, leading massive armies, charging across the battlefield, and just... kicking ass everywhere!"

As she spoke, she made a tiny fist and pumped it in the air.

Soraya smiled, tying a butterfly-shaped ribbon in Lorelia's hair. The little girl giggled with delight.

"If the flames of war spread to the land, wouldn't it be the people of our Stoneheart Horde who suffer?" Soraya said gently. "The Alliance's thinking is correct. Meeting the enemy at the gates is the right choice."

She adjusted the bow, but Lorelia, laughing and shaking her head, kept knocking it askew.

"But I want to go fight with the master!" Lorelia pouted. "Don't you, Sister Soraya?"

Soraya nodded, then shook her head. Of course she wanted to participate in the war.

But the moment she imagined all the sand scorpions she had painstakingly hatched being killed on the battlefield, her heart ached.

As a race broodmother, she cherished her children. And yet, in moments of crisis, she knew she would sacrifice them without hesitation. It was a tangled feeling of love and loss.

As a broodmother herself, Lorelia could sense this emotion.

"Okay, okay, Sister Soraya, I pray the master doesn't bring the war to the Dusk Continent!" she said quickly. "Is that better? Hehehe... Sister Soraya, do I look pretty?"

She wrapped her arms around Soraya's slender waist, snuggling against her and being as cute as possible.

"Sister Soraya, I have to tell you, our Mistress has a butterfly hairpin, and it's so, so beautiful," she chattered on. "The master gave it to her, and when she wears it, the butterfly's wings actually flutter and sparkle. It's the prettiest thing ever!"

Hearing this, Soraya finally understood why Lorelia loved butterfly-shaped accessories so much. In the little one's heart, Lilith's hairpin was the most wonderful ornament in the world.

"Aaaawn... Sister Soraya, I'm sleepy. I'll come find you again tomorrow!" Lorelia let out a huge yawn. She felt an overwhelming wave of drowsiness.

Soraya reached out to stop her, intending to ask what was wrong. For a being at the Alpha peak, especially a broodmother, such sudden fatigue was unnatural.

But Lorelia was already gone, darting away before Soraya could catch her.

That little one... she hasn't been in any battles recently. Why does she seem so drained?

Though Soraya was surprised, she didn't pursue it. This was the Dusk Continent, guarded by demigods and arch lords. It was perfectly safe.

In the deepest of the underground caves beneath Lorelia city.

Lorelia dragged her exhausted body into her main nest, her eyes already closed.

Her Nest was interesting; inside it, she had built a tent, an exact replica of the one she had lived in as a child. It was a perfect copy of Orion's tent from Moonshadow Valley.

She crawled inside, collapsing onto the soft animal hides. Her entire body went limp as she instantly fell into a heavy, deep sleep.

She was in an abyss. It was dark, so very dark, like the black forest during the dark beast tides of old.

Where is this? Why is it so dark? An underground cave?

It's so deep and black... what's down there?

Lorelia opened her eyes. She was in that familiar, yet strange, place again.

Should I go down and see? But if I go down, what if the master can't find me? I still have a mission from him!

She stared into the inky blackness before her, wanting to descend but held back by worry. The mission from Orion was just an excuse she told herself. The real reason she hesitated was fear.

Should I go down or not?

In the end, she couldn't suppress the impulse welling up from within. She slowly began to crawl down into the dark abyss.

It was deep, and it was dark. Lorelia crawled for a long, long time. She rested countless times, and countless times she thought about turning back, but she couldn't stop herself from continuing her descent.

After what felt like an eternity, she finally saw the flicker of firelight and heard the faint, distant sounds of roaring. She crawled toward the light, and before she knew it, she had crawled out of the abyss.

Lorelia looked back, confused. She remembered clearly that she had been crawling down, so why had she just come up from below? She couldn't figure it out, couldn't make sense of it.

But the roars of beasts outside drew her attention. She decided to stop thinking about it and crawl out to see what was happening. Yet, the further she crawled, the more familiar everything felt.

"Hey... this place... this place..."

"This looks like the underground fissure!"

"Here... and here... and over there... I've slept in all these spots!"

"Hehe... yay! I'm home!"

Lorelia was ecstatic. She hadn't been back in so, so long. The underground fissure was the first home Orion had ever found for her, and she had always loved it.

Wait. There are beast roars coming from outside. Could the dark beast tides have come? Are dark creatures invading?

Where are my children? And where is the master?

Her mind racing, she scrambled toward the exit. Soon, she emerged from the underground fissure.

But the sight that met her eyes was not the familiar Blackstone City she knew. It was the smoldering, burned-out husk of Blackstone City.

Outside the walls, countless dark creatures were still swarming the city.

And there, hanging from the highest point on the wall, were the lifeless bodies of her master, Orion, and her Mistress, Lilith.

"Ma... Master..."

"Mistress!"

Lorelia froze. A long moment passed. Then, a heart-wrenching, soul-tearing scream ripped from her throat.

At the same time, a swirling, ethereal mist enveloped her entire body. She scrambled frantically up the wall, crawling desperately toward Orion and Lilith.

"Master... Master... Mistress..." she cried, gathering their bodies in her arms, calling their names over and over. But Orion's body was cold, drained of blood, covered in wounds.

"No... no... NOOO!"

Lorelia wept, a hysterical, desolate wail of pure grief.

She didn't know how long she cried. But when she finally looked up, her eyes were blazing crimson.

"Revenge... REVENGE!"

"YOU WILL ALL DIE!"

She lunged, tearing into the enemy with her claws and fangs.

At the same time, strands of silk began to pour from her body, anchoring to the city walls, to the burned tents, to the stone gates of Moonshadow Valley... soon, everything was covered in her silk.

As the webs grew thicker, her movements became faster, more fluid. Wherever her silk touched, that was her world. Her domain.

KILL!

KILL!

KILL!

KILL!

Lorelia descended into a frenzied slaughter. The silk she produced enveloped the entirety of Blackstone City, creating a defensive ward of her own making. Within this ward, she was invincible.

"DIE! ALL OF YOU WILL DIE!"

"FOR MY MASTER... REVENGE!"

She was lost to the slaughter, an endless, merciless storm of vengeance.

Titanion Realm, in the castle of Stoneheart City.

Orion's eyes snapped open. He shot up from his throne, an expression of sheer disbelief on his face.

"That little girl, Lorelia... she's advanced to Lord-rank!"

"And... she did it by forging her own Lord's Stone?!"