

Titan King 951

Chapter 951: To Slay a God

Just as Latychrenber had guessed, Orion was stalling for time.

Activating his trump card, Blood Sacrifice, took time. Absorbing the terrifying power it unleashed also took time.

Fortunately, he was done.

“I’ve wanted to challenge a demigod for a long time,” Orion’s voice boomed, “even if it’s just a phantom.”

As he spoke, his body began to swell, the sheer force of his expansion pushing back the heavy mist. His Titan Form materialized, larger and more imposing than ever before, the soul of his ancestor pulsing with furious energy on his forehead.

“DIE!”

Orion knew this was different from fighting an arch lord. Against a demigod, there were no second chances. His first move had to be his last. It had to decide everything.

In another Slaughter Space, Alexander, a being with even more combat experience than Orion, understood this principle perfectly.

The moment he entered the space, he had initiated his true killing move.

In the lore of his home world, the name Alexander belonged to one of the Ten Gods, a deity known for his fierce extremism, his love of competition, and his penchant for taking impossible risks.

What the dragon demigod didn't know was that the man who had entered the Slaughter Space carrying the spirit sword avatar was Alexander's true form.

And this true form, wielding this sword, was about to attempt to slay a god. He was hungry for apotheosis.

"Alexander's Radiance!"

As the demigod phantom watched, Alexander performed an act of absolute insanity. The spirit sword rose to hover above him, then descended without hesitation.

The blade entered at the crown of his head, sinking inch by agonizing inch into his body.

This act of self-mutilation stunned the dragon demigod into silence.

"Today," Alexander vowed, his voice colder than the void around them, "I will slaughter you."

When the spirit sword had fully merged with his body, Alexander gazed at the phantom. Then, his entire form erupted in light, his flesh and blood dissolving point by point.

When the light faded, Alexander was gone. In his place stood a single, terrifying blade: the Sword of Alexander.

With a hum that vibrated through reality itself, the sword shot forward like a beam of light, aimed directly at the demigod phantom.

In yet another Slaughter Space, Leonidas was having a much worse time.

Compared to Alexander's madness, his state was simply miserable. His Lightning Armor was shattered, with only a cracked gorget still clinging to his chest. He was bleeding, on the run, relentlessly pursued by the demigod phantom.

“What was that you said when you first got here?” the black dragon demigod taunted him as it gave chase. “That you were going to ‘slay a god’? Hahaha! Don’t make me laugh to death!”

This dragon was a master of both close-quarters combat and ranged attacks. In front of it, Leonidas’s Behemoth true form was nothing more than a punching bag.

“Did you really think a Behemoth could truly compare to us dragons? You must be dreaming!”

WHOOSH!

A claw swiped through the air, severing one of Leonidas’s arms. He screamed in agony, dragging his broken body onward.

“For all your big talk, I thought you’d be tougher than this! Run, little beast, run! I’m going to enjoy bleeding you dry, bit by bit!”

The phantom closed the distance and unleashed another vicious flurry of attacks.

If Orion had been there, he would have found it strange. Leonidas was a being of pure pride; taking a beating like this was completely out of character. By all rights, he should have self-destructed his avatar by now rather than endure such humiliation.

And yet, for some reason, he didn’t.

On the main battlefield, high in the sky, the three-on-three demigod battle raged, blotting out the sun.

“Are they going to be okay?”

Even while engaged with his own opponent, Arthas found a moment to send a psychic message to the Deputy Commander, asking about the trio in the Slaughter Spaces.

“I don’t know,” the Deputy Commander sent back. “But the commander messaged them directly and ordered them to face their opponents alone. He must have a reason. Besides, even if they lose, it’s only an avatar. They can afford the loss. The commander has already dispatched two of his Blade-Sworn to Dusk Continent. If there are other enemies hiding in the shadows, they will intervene.”

Hearing this, Arthas finally felt a sense of relief.

The dragon’s six-demigod assault was a terrifying show of force. Against that, plus whatever other powers were watching from the wings, the Champions Alliance stood no chance on their own. Without a powerhouse like their commander to rely on, they would have lost Dusk Continent already.

The team was in a team fight, and even in his slumber, commander Thresh was their ultimate trump card. In his own way, he had already joined the battle.

“It’s Kraken and the others who are in for a tougher fight...”

If the battle between demigods was a world-breaking clash of attrition, the fight between arch lords was a maelstrom of raw power that could move mountains and boil seas.

Kraken, the storm avatar, the bone dragon, and the ancient giant-horned whale—four arch lords—were besieged by eight dragon arch lords. It was the most difficult battle of Kraken’s life.

Thankfully, the storm avatar was immensely powerful. It had single-handedly unleashed a storm domain, locking down several enemies and giving Kraken and the others just enough room to kite and reposition.

Even so, Kraken was being hounded by three dragons within the raging tempest.

A severed tentacle, chopped into several pieces, was flung out of the storm by a cyclone, tumbling like trash into the deep sea below.

It belonged to a massive octopus.

Titanion Realm, Human Kingdom Border

Griffin riders patrolled the skies for a hundred miles in every direction. The news of the arrival of Delilah, Lorelia, Aldous, and the Abyssal Dragon was relayed to King Harold long before they reached the border.

In response, the king himself rode out to greet the allied force from the stoneheart horde. It was a matter of etiquette and protocol. Delilah was representing Orion; it was necessary for the king to welcome her personally.

“Welcome!” King Harold, clad in magnificent hero’s armor, projected an aura of regal power. Flanked by a cavalry honor guard, he slowly approached Delilah and Lorelia, who had already landed. “On behalf of the human kingdom, I, Harold, offer our most sincere welcome and greetings to our allies who have traveled so far!”

“Delilah, envoy of the stoneheart horde, brings greetings from my lord, the King of Giants, to Your Majesty,” Delilah said with a slight bow, returning the formal greeting.

The one standing behind her was not Lorelia, but the ogre Aldous.

Lorelia herself had already scurried onto the back of the Abyssal Dragon, Xalathar, as Delilah had moved forward. She would never let any outsider, save for a trusted few from the stoneheart horde, get near her.

Master taught me, she thought, her eyes fixed on Delilah as she spoke with King Harold. As a broodmother, Lorelia must stay hidden. My safety is the number one priority.

If anything happened to Delilah, if they tried anything funny, she would have her spiders devour every last one of them in an instant.

Chapter 952: Burning Skies and a Boiling Sea

Seven days later, the cry of dragons echoed through the sky.

Glacial Dragon Jorik arrived at the border of the human kingdom, accompanied by the dragon lords Zephyros and Bloodscale and a massive host of dragon beasts.

Three days after that, Lireesa arrived with the newly ascended blood elf race lord, Saelen, and an army of elven archers.

With that, all the forces of the Five-Race Alliance, save for the dwarves, were in position.

“Warriors!” King Harold’s voice boomed from the highest watchtower in the military camp, flanked by Delilah, Jorik, and Lireesa. “This war is not merely to resist the invasion of the northern tribes! It is to defend the very faith of our Five-Race Alliance!”

“Our families and our people live on this fertile southern land! For their sake, we must become its guardians!”

“Soldiers! Every charge you make, every enemy you strike down, will be another line in the epic legend of our glory!”

His voice was deep, commanding, and filled with a power that inspired the roaring cheers of the assembled armies.

After the mobilization, the war began.

The southern allied forces launched a preemptive strike. Their goal was not just to kill the enemy, but to conquer the territories further north. This was for the collective benefit of the alliance—what was now the Four-Race Alliance.

Emerald Dream Realm, Kasenna Sea

There was only one way to describe the scene: burning skies and a boiling sea.

In the depths, Merfolk warriors and sea beasts tore each other apart, the water flashing with the constant detonation of countless low-level magic spells.

The surface was a floating graveyard of dismembered bodies: maimed Merfolk, Ocean Hunters missing their lower halves, massive octopuses stripped of all their tentacles, Whale-Riders floating belly-up... and headless Giant-Fin Crocs. The field of corpses stretched to the horizon.

Below the waves, the slaughter continued unabated as schools of fish-like warriors weaved spells. From the abyssal depths, enormous bubbles and the titanic corpses of even larger sea beasts constantly rose to the surface.

The entire Kasenna Sea, with the battlefield as its epicenter, had been stained the color of a spreading plague.

In the sky, dragon beasts and flying exotic beasts collided in a chaotic swarm. Every clash sent bodies raining down into the bloody sea.

But the most intense part of the battlefield was the firefight between the Legendary level powerhouses.

“Dammit, we have to pull back! The bastards are switching targets!” Demon Makareth roared, decapitating a wounded green dragon with a final slash of his scimitar before quickly stashing the corpse.

“Fall back,” Gustalon’s voice whispered on the wind. “We need to protect the undead lords at the rear. Their summoning is the key to winning this war.”

He had fought alongside the undead armies many times and knew the importance of necromancers like Vexis and Rumbold.

“Withdraw!” Isabella seethed with frustration.

The three of them had been an unstoppable kill squad, slaughtering every dragon that came their way. But the dragons weren't stupid. After losing several of their own, they'd changed tactics, bypassing the trio to attack the undead lords maintaining the summoning formations at the back line.

"I wonder how Barnacle and the others are doing," Demon Makareth muttered on the way back, his gaze turning to the horizon. A hurricane that occupied half the sky was raging there, its vortex sucking up the sea itself.

"A storm of that magnitude would tear any Legendary level being to shreds," Gustalon said, materializing to look at the distant storm. No one there understood its terrible power better than he did.

"Hurry!" Isabella's voice, sharp with anxiety, came from up ahead. "Vexis's position is being overrun!"

Makareth and Gustalon stopped staring and immediately gave chase.

Inside the terrifying hurricane, the battle between arch lords was brutally visceral.

The bone dragon mount had its wings torn off and was now tumbling through the cyclone, using the wind to try and escape. But the dragon pursuing it was a master of the storm, easily keeping pace.

Higher up, Kraken's Admiral was also fleeing, desperately trying to draw aggro. The massive octopus on its back now had only two tentacles left.

"Dammit, there are too many of them! I can't hold them off!" Kraken screamed into the gale. "Deputy Commander, is your ultimate ready yet?! Shit!"

A blast of dragon fire erupted behind him. He didn't dare get distracted again, continuing to lead his pursuers on a deadly chase through the hurricane.

At the eye of the storm, the Deputy Commander's storm avatar was doing two things at once: maintaining the crowd-controlling hurricane while simultaneously inscribing an offensive magical formation. This was their ace in the hole.

Thankfully, he had prepared a base array ahead of time; he just needed to finish the supporting formations to stabilize the situation.

Just outside the storm's eye, the ancient giant-horned whale was guarding the avatar, locked in a wrestling match with another dragon. In fact, the whale had already been the MVP of this fight; a second dragon was still struggling inside its digestive dimensional space.

Normally, being attacked from both inside and out would have torn it to pieces, but the storm avatar had cast several support spells on it. The whale was now larger, encased in a suit of bestial armor woven from wind and water. It was even tougher than when it had first fought Orion.

ROAR!

The storm avatar glanced at the whale, which was now gaining the upper hand, before returning to its inscriptions.

This team fight raged from the sky to the sea, a top-to-bottom war of annihilation. No one knew where, or when, it would end. Transcendent power ran rampant, elements churned, and the roars of beasts and the dying never ceased. The slaughter continued.

Slaughter Space

The heavy fog was layered, thick and oppressive.

"You are defeated," a voice whispered through the mist.

"You are tired. You are exhausted. You feel your strength leaving you."

"You want to give up. You close your eyes."

For an arch lord to kill a demigod—even a mere phantom—was an incredibly difficult task.

How difficult? Orion was learning firsthand. Even with the immense power granted by Blood Sacrifice, he couldn't just one-shot the phantom. He had to painstakingly chip away at the power of Law that protected it. The power of Law and supernatural power were two completely different things.

And that process gave the brass dragon, Latychrenber, an opportunity to fight back.

The heavy fog in the Slaughter Space began to transform, shifting into a soporific mist.

While weaving hypnotic verbal suggestions, Latychrenber breathed the Sleep-Fog towards Orion, trying to lull him into unconsciousness.

Chapter 953: Where the Behemoth Falls

But just as Latychrenber's spell was about to take hold, a translucent barrier of light erupted from Orion's body, impossibly sacred.

The moment the Aegis of Light appeared, the surrounding Sleep-Fog vanished as if darkness had met the dawn.

"An Aegis of Light?" Latychrenber shrieked. "Impossible! How do you know our dragonkin's secret technique?"

The Aegis of Light was the skill Orion had gained from killing the white dragon avatar of the Great Dragon King of Light, Mondusath. It was incredibly versatile; besides acting as a defensive barrier, it could also dispel negative status effects. Furthermore, when facing forces of corruption, it could infuse his attacks with holy power, dealing bonus damage to evil and dark enemies.

"WAAAGH!"

A raw, unconscious roar was Orion's only reply. Now a being of pure light, he continued his relentless assault, chipping away, piece by piece, at the power of Law protecting Latychrenber.

"You think killing me will be that easy?" the phantom roared, the sheer terror in Orion's aura sending a jolt of fear through him. It was time to go all-in. "Divine Anathema: The Brass Furnace!"

The demigod phantom dissolved, transforming into a torrent of molten brass that instantly enveloped the area where it and Orion were clashing. The molten metal then cooled with impossible speed, solidifying into a colossal, seamless brass sphere.

The auras of both Orion and Latychrenber were sealed off from the world, their fates unknown.

In another Slaughter Space, the very ground was stained, its blood a dark, earthen color.

“Hehehe... can’t run anymore?” the black dragon phantom purred, hovering a short distance from Leonidas. It stared strangely at the shriveled figure, who looked like a starved husk of his former self, his skin withered, his body shrunken. He had bled himself dry.

With his last ounce of strength, Leonidas knelt, his eyes fixed on the dragon.

“Honestly,” the phantom mused, “your persistence was almost touching. You delayed me for a long time. You did right by those low-level insects on Dusk Continent who are about to be annihilated.”

Leonidas didn’t reply. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to, but he no longer had the strength to speak.

“Where... the behemoth... falls... his... blood... seeds... the earth...”

His voice was a ragged whisper, each word a monumental effort.

“From... barren... fields... a... crimson... harvest...”

“RISE!”

With the final word forced from his lungs, Leonidas took his last breath.

The Beastfolk avatar of Leonidas... was dead.

But in the Slaughter Space, everywhere his blood had touched the ground, the earth began to tremble. A moment later, a serpentine dragon formed from pure killing energy erupted from the ground, coiling around the black dragon phantom.

An infinite, overwhelming power of slaughter surged from it. The blood-dragon opened its maw and swallowed the phantom whole, trapping it within the great array in its belly.

“No... IMPOSSIBLE!”

A final, disbelieving shriek echoed from within the array as the demigod phantom was ground down into nothingness, then silenced forever. It was as if Leonidas and the black dragon had never been there at all.

A moment later, the blood-dragon dissolved, its power melting back into the environment, making the Slaughter Space’s aura even thicker.

Unknown Realm, Giant Beast Mountain

A miniature teddy bear dog, standing on the edge of a cliff, slowly opened its eyes. The death of his Beastfolk avatar had registered instantly with Leonidas’s true form.

There was no anger or sadness on his face. Instead, a strange mist seemed to rise in his eyes.

“Where the behemoth falls, his blood seeds the earth...” he whispered, the words a low, repetitive chant. “Where the behemoth falls, his blood seeds the earth... where the behemoth falls...”

He was on the verge of something, a profound truth just beyond his grasp, and he was desperately trying to seize it.

“Where the behemoth falls...”

After a long silence, a flash of inspiration struck his mind. Everything clicked into place.

“So that’s it!” he roared, the sound a mix of joy and revelation. “I SEE NOW!”

ROAR!

The teddy bear dog let out a roar that shook the entire territory, causing his powerful neighbors to cast their gaze towards Giant Beast Mountain.

But after that one explosive sound, the mountain fell completely silent.

Leonidas, in his teddy bear dog form, lay down on the cliff’s edge and fell into a deep slumber.

Slaughter Space

The air rang with the sound of a singing blade.

If Orion and Leonidas had struggled against their opponents, Alexander’s battle was looking almost effortless.

“I understand now,” the dragon phantom gasped, reeling from Alexander’s assault. It had finally figured it out. “You madman! To ascend to the demigod level in this form... it’s reckless! It’s suicide!”

The standard path to becoming a demigod, aside from amassing faith energy, required one to condense a personal Lord’s Stone. Only with a Lord’s Stone could one comprehend and incubate the power of Law. It was the template, difficult but established.

But Alexander was different. After acquiring his spirit sword avatar, he took an unorthodox path. He had fused himself with the sword, becoming the blade, the blade becoming him.

Put simply, the spirit sword was Alexander. And since the spirit sword avatar had already incubated its own power of Law, by fusing with it, Alexander had bypassed the comprehension step entirely. He had become a demigod without ever needing to hibernate and evolve.

“You know too much, too late,” Alexander’s voice echoed from the blade.

ZING!

A sword-song like a dragon’s cry filled the space. The phantom facing him was instantly shredded into nothingness by the Sword of Alexander.

After annihilating the demigod, Alexander’s human form materialized. He cautiously observed the spot where the phantom had been for a long moment before allowing the space to teleport him out.

Dusk Continent, High in the Sky

Alexander appeared, his senses sweeping the area. He couldn’t feel Leonidas’s or Orion’s auras.

“To have held out this long... that’s a victory in itself,” he murmured, glancing down at the continent. It was scarred with the smoke of battle, with heretic factions causing trouble everywhere. But these Alpha-level mobs were nothing more than petty skirmishes compared to the war raging in the Kasenna Sea.

Ignoring them, Alexander transformed back into his spirit sword form and shot through the void, appearing instantly at the front line of the arch lord battle.

“All invaders will be slain.”

The sword hovered outside the massive hurricane. It swung gently three times. Three blades of sword-light, radiating an unstoppable power, pierced the storm.

Terrified roars erupted from within.

Then, like a comet, the Sword of Alexander shot straight up into the clouds, trailing an aura of impossibly sharp energy.

"Such a dense power of Law... so sharp!" a hidden observer gasped.

"That aura... it's not a phantom. Could that be a true form, descended to the battlefield?"

Chapter 954: Madness is the price of greatness

"This is bad! Dusk Continent has another hidden demigod!"

High in the sky, the remaining three dragon phantoms reeled in shock as they felt the aura of this unknown powerhouse.

In contrast, the deputy commander and the spectral Arthas looked relieved, letting out a collective sigh.

Alexander ascending to the demigod level meant the crisis on Dusk Continent could be resolved without having to deploy the commander's Blade-Sworn. Those were the Champions Alliance's ultimate trump cards; the less they had to play their hand, the better.

Plus, this was Alexander's true form, radiating a dense power of Law. His strength was on a completely different level than their own demigod phantoms.

"Kill the phantom fighting Pollard first!"

"Pollard is sandbagging, just messing around. Kill his opponent and force him to make a choice!"

The Deputy Commander and Arthas sent the same psychic message to Alexander simultaneously. To be honest, they were seething, and the source of their frustration was Pollard.

When Pollard first sensed that the dragons had deployed six demigod phantoms, his commitment to his alliance with the Champions Alliance had immediately wavered. As a demigod, he was naturally cautious. He didn't flee, nor did he immediately turn traitor. Instead, he chose to drag out his fight with his dragon opponent, waiting for a situation where the winner was clear.

Because of this, every time the Deputy Commander or Arthas were about to finish off their own opponents, Pollard would pull his punches, allowing his phantom counterpart to intervene and rescue them. His behavior was infuriating, but given the delicate 3v3 balance, they couldn't afford to call him out. Doing so would likely turn the fight into a 2v4.

Tsssss!

It was the sound of the spirit sword tearing through the void at a velocity that defied physics.

"Alexander's Edge!"

The Sword of Alexander chose its target and, with unstoppable killing intent, plunged into the battle between Pollard and the dragon demigod. The two, who had been in a tacit agreement to sandbag, were both stunned by his sudden arrival.

That momentary hesitation was all Alexander needed.

"KILL!"

By the time the dragon phantom reacted, it was already locked down. With no hope of escape, it could only channel all of its power of Law in a desperate attempt to block Alexander's fatal strike.

The attack was beautiful. It was swift.

The sword energy flared, a river of starlight, a rainbow of destruction. The blade-light sliced through the void, illuminating the entire sky, its sheer power a testament to its wielder's will.

It was a killing blow, a strike of pure intent that was both terrifying and awe-inspiring.

When the light faded, the dragon demigod phantom was gone.

ZING!

With another resonant hum, the Sword of Alexander shot towards its next target: the phantom currently entangled with Arthas.

Faced with such a decisive and murderous weapon, the two remaining dragon phantoms lost all will to fight. Using a special technique, they ripped open a portal in the void and fled the battlefield.

"Gentlemen, the enemy has retreated! We shall continue this another day!" Seeing the dragons flee, the allied Pollard felt a pang of guilt and fear. To avoid being held accountable by the Deputy Commander and Arthas, he also turned and vanished.

"Cowardly fence-sitter," Alexander muttered disdainfully, his human form reappearing beside the Deputy Commander and Arthas.

"Is something wrong?" he asked, noticing both of them were staring at him.

"I thought that you and Leonidas, at best, might find the catalyst for your ascension and fall into a slumber," the Deputy Commander said, his mage's curiosity getting the better of him. "I never imagined you would ascend directly to the demigod level, and in such an unorthodox fashion. It's unthinkable."

"I can feel it," Arthas added, his eyes wide with inspiration. "You and I both walk the path of the Sword's Law. But you... you are somehow vastly different. Can you explain?"

"Let's put it this way," Alexander began. "You are on the path to mastering the Sword's Law. I am the Sword's Law. My path is the sword's path."

Arthas understood. Though they were both men of the sword, their paths had diverged. Like branches on a tree, they were now heading in different directions, destined to see different futures.

"Honestly, the inspiration came to me after I saw Hulk's mirror avatar," Alexander admitted. "His avatar is special, almost indistinguishable from the real him. It got me thinking... if my spirit sword avatar already possesses its own Law, why can't I make it like his mirror avatar?"

He gazed in the direction of Dusk Continent, where Leonidas's and Orion's auras were still absent. "I kept thinking about it, and eventually, I found my own path to becoming a demigod."

"You're insane," Arthas said, his voice full of concern for his old friend. "To risk your true form on the battlefield like that... it's too reckless. If you had failed to ascend, I would have lost a friend, and the Champions Alliance would have lost a core member."

"Sometimes, when you've lived a long time, you lose the clarity that the young ones have," Alexander replied, turning to look Arthas in the eye, his gaze firm and resolute. He quoted a phrase Demon Makareth was fond of saying. "Madness is the price of greatness, isn't it?"

The Deputy Commander interrupted their intense stare-down. "What's their status?"

The war had reached a lull. After that clash, it was unlikely either side's top-tier fighters would make a move for a while. He looked towards Dusk Continent, concerned about Leonidas and Orion.

"Leonidas has fallen into a slumber," Arthas reported. "It happened very suddenly. He must have found his catalyst."

Leonidas hadn't sent any messages, but Arthas had agents stationed at his base of operations. They had used a secret art to inform him of what happened at Giant Beast Mountain.

"Then that just leaves Hulk," the Deputy Commander said grimly. "He's not at arch lord peak yet. It's no surprise he's struggling against a demigod phantom. Let's head back. We need to be there in case the enemy escapes the Slaughter Space."

The Deputy Commander and Arthas nodded, and the three of them returned to Dusk Continent.

Truthfully, Arthas had a different feeling about Orion. He trusted him. But with Orion still missing, he couldn't be sure what was happening.

Chapter 955: It Means They Are Afraid

Hsssss!

The sound came from a cave spider. It had caught a satyr warrior, its silk wrapping tightly around the struggling creature. The more the satyr fought, the tighter the strands became.

A moment later, the cave spider injected its venom into the satyr's body, paralyzing it.

In truth, the venom did more than paralyze; it began to dissolve the victim's flesh and blood. After a moment, the spider plunged its sharp mouthparts into the satyr's head and began to suck the liquified insides dry, one mouthful at a time.

Within fifteen minutes, the satyr was nothing but an empty husk.

After its meal, the cave spider circled the husk twice, then abandoned the useless shell and moved on, searching for its next prey.

"Does this disgust you, Lady Saelen?"

Delilah and Saelen had watched the entire feeding from the rear. Delilah smiled, tilting her head as she studied the blood elf who had been assigned to protect her.

For this war, King Harold of the human kingdom was leading the charge personally. With his power, popularity, and status, he was the natural supreme commander, controlling the overall strategy.

Delilah had been assigned back to the stoneheart horde's cave spider armies to manage their section of the front. The archer Saelen had been posted with them as well, filling their need for a Legendary-level

ranged DPS turret. In exchange, the stoneheart horde's ogre lord, Aldous, had been transferred to the front lines. With the Abyssal Dragon protecting Lorelia, Aldous's role had become somewhat redundant. King Harold's troop arrangements were, in fact, quite logical.

"No," the archer Saelen said, shaking her head. This wasn't her first time seeing the cave spiders. She had been on the battlefield during the last North-South war and had witnessed the stoneheart horde's spider armies in action.

Back then, they had suffered heavy casualties. Their numbers were smaller then, their bodies not so large. Of course, the sight of them feeding was still undeniably chilling.

"We blood elves respect the natural habits of every race," she explained calmly. "We do not shy away from the reality of slaughter. We believe that if something exists, it has a reason and a right to exist."

It was a philosophy the blood elves had learned from millennia of living in harmony with nature.

"I'm glad to hear that," Delilah said, her smile genuine now. "These little ones are actually quite cute, you know. Their courage is every bit as fierce as an ordinary bloodline warrior's. On the battlefield, they are the most trustworthy companions you could ask for."

Delilah spoke from the heart. From the very first dark beast tides, Lorelia's cave spiders had fought alongside the stoneheart horde, protecting the bloodline warriors of every race. It was no exaggeration to say that without them, the horde's warriors would have been wiped out long ago.

Back home, people might whisper behind their hands that Lorelia was wasteful or timid. But it wasn't true dislike. It was the tough love of a family, frustrated with a child who wouldn't live up to their immense potential. Even with that frustration, they would all willingly give up their share of the spoils after every victory to support Lorelia and her spiders.

Only the warriors who had been on the battlefield knew just how dependable the spiders were, and how many had died protecting them. To the soldiers of the stoneheart horde, the cave spiders were, unironically, their "little sweethearts."

"On that, I have no doubt," Saelen said. Though she had reached the Legendary level, she was humble, completely lacking the arrogance or coldness often associated with her rank.

"Lady Saelen, I think I know why you were chosen by King Rommath," Delilah said warmly.

Saelen had spent time in Stoneheart City and had been one of the blood elf race's liaisons there, so Delilah knew her well. It was why they could speak so freely. Ever since Lycanor had married outside the race, Saelen's promotion to lord made her the most likely candidate to be the new blood elf queen.

At the mention of the blood elf king, the esteemed Rommath, a faint blush colored Saelen's cheeks.

"Hee hee..." Delilah giggled. "It seems the feeling is mutual."

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Far away, deep within the former territory of the Dwarven Tribe.

"The human kingdom is shameless!"

"They've allied with the stoneheart horde, the dragons, and the blood elves! The Five-Race Alliance army is already pushing north! What do we do?"

"We can't just let them beat us back! They have an alliance, but so do we! We won't surrender easily!"

"Commander, please, tell us what to do!"

"Yes, Commander! Do we fight or do we negotiate?"

"We'll follow your lead, Commander! Everyone will follow your command!"

Torin scanned the faces of the assembled lords in his command tent. Including him, there were twelve of them.

Twelve lords. If every single one of them was truly and sincerely loyal to him, he'd have the confidence not just to fight back the Five-Race Alliance, but to conquer the entire continent and even invade other worlds.

Unfortunately, every lord in this tent was a two-faced bastard. They said one thing and did another, showing him no real respect. Even the smoother operators who tried to curry favor with him were the kind of opportunists who wouldn't lift a finger unless they saw a clear profit.

For this pack of vultures, Torin had only one word in his heart.

Tools.

"Ahem. Gentlemen!" Torin cleared his throat. His deep voice cut through the clamor, silencing the tent.

"Gentlemen, if we want to claim the south, the dwarven Tribe's territory alone is not nearly enough to divide among us," he began. "Therefore, we must invade the human kingdom. They are smart. They sense our ambition, and they feel threatened. The fact that the human kingdom brought in the stoneheart horde, the dragons, and the blood elves means one thing."

Torin paused, looking each lord in the eye before delivering his point.

"It means they are afraid of us."

"Gentlemen, they are afraid. Do you know what that means?" His voice rose, filled with a charismatic fire. "It means we are strong! It means we have the power to shatter the stalemate in the south! It means we have a chance to take it all!"

At that moment, he looked every bit the supreme commander, directing the fate of nations.

"Look around you! Together, we are twelve lords! I ask you, which of the great factions in the south can boast such a lineup? We are this powerful, so why shouldn't we fight for a piece of this continent?"

He had learned a valuable lesson since rising to power: after analyzing the situation, you had to rally, and if necessary, delude your allies.

"We are both alliances, but our armies are more numerous than theirs. And our high-level power is not lacking either! They have an arch lord Saint, but we... we have the supreme commander of the Avenger armies."

This was the biggest card Torin had to play. As long as their commander—the clown, Ogu—was in the game, these lords wouldn't lose hope entirely.

Chapter 956: It's a slight

"But don't you all feel like we're just a disorganized mob?" Torin continued, pressing his advantage. "To defeat the Five-Race Alliance, we must be united. Someone has to step up and take command. All of you must obey orders and follow the chain of command."

Using the army's supreme commander as a threat to consolidate his power over these greedy lords was a move born of desperation. He knew that doing so would only increase the clown Ogu's prestige and influence.

"Gentlemen," Torin said, his tone softening slightly. The threat of an arch lord was clearly effective. "The Five-Race Alliance is coming for us. This is, without a doubt, a slight against us. I want to hear your ideas for a better strategy to deal with this enemy."

"Commander, just tell us what to do."

"Yes, we'll listen to your command, and the command of the one who backs you!"

"Please, Commander, tell us plainly. How do we unite?"

The lords in the tent, for all their greed, knew what was at stake. If they didn't band together, they truly were just a disorganized mob. They'd end up doing nothing more than feeding the enemy kills, loot, and Lord's Stones.

"It's simple," Torin said as their pleas grew more urgent. He produced a contract scroll and placed it gently on the table. "They are the Five-Race Alliance. We will be the Hundred-Race Alliance. This is our charter. Take a look."

The tent fell silent once more as the scroll representing the alliance contract was passed quickly from hand to hand.

"I agree. I'll sign."

"I'll sign, too."

These lords were smart. With a great enemy at their doorstep, as long as the terms of the charter weren't too punishing, they would agree. One by one, the twelve lords signed the contract, a fragile bond of trust finally forming between them.

Under Torin's direction, they spent some time discussing strategy before finally rising and leaving his tent.

Only after everyone was gone did the puppet of William, controlled by Ogu, walk in.

"Well done, Yi."

"Once this group hits the battlefield, they'll tie up the majority of the enemy's forces for us. Once I severely wound or kill that human Saint, the Five-Race Alliance's morale will collapse. They might even dissolve entirely. After all," Ogu chuckled, "who would be willing to offend an arch lord?"

"Hehehe... and then, Yi, you'll have the perfect justification to claim a vast swathe of the south for yourself."

Torin stared at Ogu, his face an emotionless mask.

"Ogu, do you take me for a three-year-old?" he said coldly. "Do you think the human Saint is someone you can just kill whenever you feel like it? And even if you do kill him, the stoneheart horde still has their King of Giants, who is also an arch lord. The Five-Race Alliance won't just collapse."

A clever man who had calmed down was not so easily fooled.

"Hehe... Yi, you've grown again," Ogu said, the puppet's laughter stiff and unnatural. He didn't think he was exaggerating. For him, killing an arch lord was an easy task. What he truly feared were the demigods that might be watching this continent.

The plan to kill the human Saint is just a test, Ogu thought. A probe to gauge this world's defenses. If the Saint falls and no demigod intervenes, then I can escalate the invasion of the Titanion Realm. If possible, I could even call upon the Witch to corrupt this entire continent. But I must move slowly, testing the waters bit by bit, until I understand the true depths of this world.

"My growth is irrelevant," Torin said, cutting through Ogu's thoughts. "What I want to know now is, can you really take down the human Saint?"

For Torin, the other eleven lords, and the entire Avenger armies, this was the only thing that mattered. If Ogu failed, it was all over. Once the human Saint was free, they and their factions would all be purged.

"Hahaha... Yi, what you've just said is a great disrespect to a survivor of my station!" Ogu's voice was full of mock indignation. "It's a slight! Yi, think about yourself. Can an ordinary lord stand against you?"

Ogu's puppet stood up. He was finding Torin more and more interesting. He was beginning to regret selling him out. He should have guided him, molded him into one of their kind.

But it was too late for that.

"Prepare yourself, Yi," Ogu said as he walked out of the tent. "Everything you've dreamed of is right in front of you."

The Slaughter Space

The brass sphere still stood.

An unknown amount of time passed before a thin crack appeared on its surface. The crack grew larger, deeper. Finally, unable to bear the strain, the sphere shattered into a thousand palm-sized fragments that fell to the ground with a clang.

When the last of the brass pieces had fallen, Orion's figure was revealed.

"In the end... I still won," he panted.

Killing a demigod as an arch lord was incredibly difficult. It wasn't a matter of just firing off an ultimate ability for a one-shot kill. Without being a demigod himself, the only way was to use brute force to shatter the power of Law, creating an opening to land a fatal blow. With all his resources, this was the only method available to Orion.

His aura was faint, and the toll on his mirror avatar was immense. Restoring it would require an unknown amount of resources and top-tier magical plants.

"Is demigod the limit?"

By killing the demigod phantom of the brass dragon Latychrenber, Orion had also tested the absolute limit of his hidden trump card, Blood Sacrifice.

Demigod. That was the skill's ceiling. In other words, once Orion himself ascended to the demigod level, this trump card would become obsolete.

There was a deeper, more serious problem. The skill was a reflection of the giant's bloodline within him. This meant his own bloodline could only support him up to the demigod-level. He still had many questions about demigods and the gods beyond them, but that was a problem for another day.

Orion glanced at the brass fragments scattered on the ground, then extended his trident. The Flame of Will spat out a tongue of fire, melting the pieces one by one and absorbing them into itself. The trident felt heavier, sturdier.

It was almost depressing. He had exhausted himself, revealed his trump card, and unleashed his ultimate ability to kill a demigod phantom, and all he had to show for it were some rare brass fragments. There was no other loot.

"I wonder how Leonidas and Alexander are doing," Orion murmured as his form slowly faded from the Slaughter Space.

Chapter 957: Ascension and Absence

When Orion returned to the Dusk Continent, the war on the Kasenna Sea was more or less over.

That wasn't entirely accurate. A truce had been called between the top-tier powerhouses—the demigods, arch lords, and lords—but below that level, the grunts were still fighting and dying all across the sea.

The low-tier skirmishes continued because while the dragons' leadership had withdrawn, the dragon flights had not surrendered.

They couldn't. None of their six demigods had truly died; the beings that were shattered in the fighting had only been their phantoms. The reality was that four of the six had been critically wounded, making another full-scale war impossible for the foreseeable future.

Sensing the state of the continent, Orion teleported directly to the location of Leonidas's coastal keep.

"Where are my bros, Leonidas and Alexander?"

Orion appeared beside Isabella. She had shed her knight's armor for a flowing dress of violet and gold and was lounging lazily on a beach chair, soaking in the sun.

He looked down at her, his vantage point offering a clear view of the curves of her body and her exquisitely sculpted face.

"You're asking me? Who am I supposed to ask?" Isabella opened one eye, peering up at him. "And have you had your fill of staring?"

She deliberately arched her back slightly, a move that was equal parts seduction and mockery.

"Or were you hoping for a hands-on tour?"

Orion glanced away from the view without comment and walked over to where Makareth was sitting. Makareth had already gotten up and dragged Orion's usual lounge chair next to his own.

Orion didn't hesitate, offering a quick "Thanks" before sinking into it.

"The bros aren't back yet?" he asked.

"Don't know. Isabella and I haven't seen them since we got back."

"And Kraken?"

"Over there." Makareth pointed to a large glass tank nearby. Inside, a mass of what looked like spongy tissue pulsed faintly.

Orion blinked. He'd completely missed it. He hadn't even registered that the lump of flesh was, in fact, Kraken.

"Barnacle is in a deep slumber," Makareth said, his voice grim. "The Deputy Commander's storm avatar brought him back. Bro, what the hell did you guys go through? They beat an arch lord like Barnacle into... that."

Orion shook his head. He had no idea what had happened to Kraken. He, Leonidas, and Alexander hadn't been part of the arch lord battles.

"He was jumped by three arch lords," a new voice said. "They almost trapped and killed him."

Alexander's form materialized next to the beach chairs. Orion and Makareth shot upright. Even Isabella sauntered over from her spot, her movements possessing a feline grace.

"I'm surprised you made it out in one piece," Orion said, staring at Alexander, his shock plain on his face. "Bro... did you ascend to demigod? How long was I in the Slaughter Space?"

Alexander rolled his eyes. "You say that like going into a coma is a requirement. My situation is... different. I don't need the slumber. You were only in the Slaughter Space for three days longer than we were."

The mention of the Slaughter Space made Orion realize with a jolt that someone was missing.

"Where's Leonidas? He's not out yet?"

Orion refused to believe that Leonidas didn't have the power to kill a demigod phantom. In the entire Champions Alliance, besides Arthas, he knew Leonidas best. The man was a total goofball most of the time, always laughing and joking around, but when it mattered, he was solid.

"Leonidas lost his avatar in the Slaughter Space," Alexander said quietly. "But his enemy didn't walk out, either. He's in a deep slumber now. He'll be out of commission for a long, long time."

At first, Orion felt a surge of pride. But a moment later, the joy on his face was replaced by a bitter cocktail of loneliness and envy.

From now on, in the arch lord tier of the Champions Alliance, it was just him and the comatose Kraken. Arch lords and demigods... they just didn't run in the same circles.

Orion finally understood how Leonidas must have felt when Arthas went into his own slumber. It was a sour, complicated feeling. Envy, jealousy, and a burning frustration—not at anyone else, but at himself for not being strong enough, for not pushing harder.

"Since you're back, you're in charge of the battlefield," Alexander stated. "The Deputy Commander and the skeleton are in seclusion to recover. I'll be doing the same for a while."

With that, Alexander's form vanished.

"Sir Alexander, wait, I still..." Isabella started, but he was gone before she could finish her question.

Orion just shrugged. He walked over to the glass tank where Kraken was regenerating and spoke softly.

"Well, Kraken, looks like it's just you and me now, buddy. Can't count on these other bros. They leveled up without us."

His monologue went unnoticed. Isabella was staring, stunned, at the spot where Alexander had disappeared.

The same Alexander I used to idolize as a kid... he's a demigod now? That was a level of power infinitely greater than even her own father. It felt unreal, like her world had been turned upside down. She had never, ever imagined that one day she would have the backing of a demigod.

Makareth, meanwhile, was rummaging through his things. He seemed the most normal of them all as he pulled out a storage pouch and shoved it into Orion's hands.

"Big boss, I've got some good stuff for you!" he said, too excited to even call him 'bro.' "It's full of dragon corpses. The Deputy Commander sent over some of the big ones, too."

Orion peeked into the pouch. The "big ones" were several arch lord-level dragons. Three of them had been bisected by a single, clean sword stroke.

"The Dragon Crucible is still under construction," Orion said, looking up. "I'll let you know when it's ready."

"Awesome! We'll be waiting for the good news, Big boss!"

After stowing the pouch, Orion lay back down on the beach chair and closed his eyes, his mind racing.

In Stoneheart City, within the Titanion Realm, Orion opened his eyes on the throne. A flicker of raw hunger flashed within them.

His bros, Alexander and Leonidas, had both ascended to demigod, one right after the other. Having it happen to those closest to him hit Orion hard. It was more than just envy or jealousy. It was like a shot of pure, uncut motivation, a jolt that was both exhilarating and agonizingly urgent.

Never before had Orion felt such a desperate need to reach for the demigod realm. He had to evolve.

I will become a demigod, he vowed to himself. I will...

As he was psyching himself up, the sound of his adopted daughter Elara's happy giggles echoed from the square outside the palace, punctuated by the playful roars of two young dragons.

Shit, I almost forgot. Today is the day of Elara's celebration.

Orion rose from the throne and strode out of the palace.

In a gazebo on the east side of the palace grounds, he appeared beside Sylvana and wrapped his arms around her as she gazed out at the festivities in the square.

"What are you thinking about?" he murmured.

Recognizing his familiar scent, Sylvana didn't resist, leaning back against his shoulder.

Chapter 958: The Next Generation

"You like children, don't you?"

Sylvana nodded slightly, a faint blush coloring her cheeks.

His hand wasn't idle, slipping beneath the fabric of her dress to trace the soft, delicate skin at her waist.

"Then we should work on it. Have one of our own."

The warmth that had been spreading through Sylvana vanished. She shook her head sharply, a look of loss and regret eclipsing her budding desire.

"You don't want to?" He caught the flicker of her micro-expression instantly.

"My eyes... it could be passed down."

It was her deepest fear, the reason she had never allowed herself to carry his child.

"I tried to see past the veil of fate, and I was broken by the rules of reality for it. Any child of mine... they would most likely be burdened by my curse."

Orion's roaming hand stilled and withdrew. The tension in Sylvana's body eased as she regained her composure.

He gently turned her to face him, his gaze fixed on those impossibly beautiful, fox-like eyes. It was a tragedy that they were blind.

"When I ascend to demigod, when I can touch the rules of power myself, I will try to fix your eyes."

It was a promise, and Sylvana believed he meant it. But for an arch lord to ascend to demigod was such a far-fetched, monumental task. She took his words for what they were: a comfort meant to soothe a wound that might never heal.

"What's so interesting about these younglings anyway?" Orion murmured, a playful growl in his voice. "Let's go back to our room and talk."

He swept her up into his arms. The blush returned to her cheeks, deeper this time. She knew exactly what he had in mind.

That day, the castle was full of life. It was Elara's celebration, and the invited younglings were having the time of their lives. Bonfires, roasted meats, pastries... nothing was missing. It was a perfect picture of peace and prosperity.

...

Far to the northeast, in the dwarven tribe territory.

A great river, the Rakala, flowed through the center of the Rakala Plains. And it was along this river that war had erupted.

ROOOAR!

A trident punched through the skull of a half-dragon. The beast let out a pathetic, gurgling cry and collapsed.

Cold sweat streamed down Steelblade's face. It was his first time on a real battlefield. He stared at the dead half-dragon, then at Rolan, who now stood behind the corpse. Just a second ago, that thing's claws had been inches from tearing his heart out.

"Thanks, Rolan!"

"Don't space out! This is a warzone!" Rolan snapped. "The little ones have already charged. We follow them, we stay alive. We have to keep up or we'll fall behind!"

Compared to Steelblade, Rolan was far more composed, his focus sharpened by bloodlust. He wielded the Bloodthirsty Trident, a gift from Orion. A single drop of blood fell from its tip, casting Rolan in the image of a fledgling god of battle.

He kicked the lifeless half-dragon aside and pulled the sprawled Steelblade to his feet.

"Come on, man. This is our first deployment. We can't bring shame to your daddy and your grandfather."

Steelblade staggered upright, taking the trident Rolan offered him with a flush of shame on his face. He had been completely stunned by the half-dragon's ferocity, his training forgotten.

"Hah... Thanks. I won't let them down," he breathed, taking a deep breath. The shame on his face slowly hardened into resolve.

"That's the spirit. When we get back from this, we're taking a trip to the Abyss together. I hear the abyssal dragons are still waiting for us!"

Rolan clapped Steelblade on the shoulder, then turned and charged back into the fray.

Steelblade took one more deep breath, then lunged forward, following close behind.

Further back, the Alpha-level powerhouses Ursa, Tarn, and Gort watched from their mounts—a dark fiend and a Bone Python, with Gort standing firm on the ground.

"He's the lord's disciple, all right," Gort commented, his voice a low rumble. "Adapted to the battlefield that fast. Kills without the slightest hesitation."

"Steelblade's not bad either," said Ursa, who was Steelblade's mother. The horde would never have let their sons go to war without veterans watching their backs. "He's still green, but at least he didn't freeze up or run."

"Give him time," Tarn added. "Let him get used to the chaos. He'll be another powerful giant bloodline warrior."

As fellow giant Alpha-levels, Ursa and Tarn had been green recruits once, too. They knew exactly what Steelblade was going through. They felt understanding, not disappointment.

"The first batch of the Tribe's younglings have finally grown up," Gort rumbled. He was the third Alpha-level of the obsidian golem race, after Onyx and Rockwell, but he certainly wouldn't be the last. "Does that mean we're getting old?"

"I don't know about old," Ursa laughed, a booming, confident sound. "But I know the stoneheart horde is getting stronger every day. I've got at least another hundred years of fighting in me."

It was pure confidence. She was in her prime, and this era of the stoneheart horde was her stage. Once, her goal had been to reach Alpha-level like her daddy. But now, her sights were set on becoming a lord herself. If she could make that leap, she could live for ages longer and see the horde flourish even more.

"I visited the youth camp," Tarn said, a thoughtful look on his face. "There's an obsidian golem there named Magmus. His talent is off the charts."

The mention of the next generation brought Pallas to his mind as well. The younglings in the youth camp had both talent and potential. Most of them had already bonded with contract beasts, led by Elara and Pallas with their dragons. No matter how you looked at it, the future of the stoneheart horde was bright with countless new powerhouses.

"That's Lord Rockwell's youngling," Gort said with pride. "A great favorite of the lord and the prophet. Before the prophet went into seclusion, he made a special trip just to see that boy, Magmus."

The influx of talent in his own obsidian golem race was a source of great excitement for him. Ever since Orion had become a lord, the giants, succubi, buffalofolk, and obsidian golems had all received a

massive share of resources. All four races were now producing offspring with incredible potential—a generation destined for far greater things than their own.

"I heard the Heroic Altar is about to be opened for the next rite of succession," Ursa said, a grin spreading across her face. "A big chunk of the slots are going to the youth camp. When we finish this campaign, we might get back in time to watch the tournament for the slots."

She already knew more than she was letting on. Orion had allocated ten slots from the Heroic Altar to the four main races, and word had already reached him that one of those slots had his name on it.

"A tournament?" Tarn's eyes lit up. The giants were a naturally competitive people. "I'd love to see that. I wonder who'll take first place this time. Who'll be the next Rolan, unbeatable among their peers."

Chapter 959: A Miscalculated Compromise

"Come on, let's move. Those two are back in the fight!"

Just as Ursa and Tarn were getting lost in their discussion of the Tribe's future, Gort's sharp reminder cut through.

Rolan and Steelblade were already getting distant. The three veterans spurred their mounts, chasing after them.

At the center of the battlefield, Lorelia and Delilah sat enthroned on the back of the massive abyssal dragon, Xalathar. Beside them, Saelen rode on a hulking spider sentry.

Saelen was not of the stoneheart horde, and Xalathar would never allow an outsider to ride on its back as it did its mistresses. The arrangement, while practical, created a scene that felt subtly exclusionary.

"Hehe, aren't I amazing, Sister Delilah?" Lorelia chirped, perched on the dragon's head. She was humming a tuneless little song, periodically turning to show off to Delilah, who sat further back.

For Lorelia, who had seen much larger and more chaotic battles, this was child's play. And now that she had advanced to the Legendary level, her control over her little spiders was flawless.

"You're much stronger than before, Lorelia," Delilah said with a smile.

It was placating praise, delivered because she knew the little girl thrived on it. In truth, Delilah had no idea what specific feat Lorelia was so proud of, but that didn't stop Lorelia from basking in the compliment.

The reality was, some of her accomplishments were things only Lorelia herself could perceive. Her boast was justified. Across the entire battlefield, the cave spiders moved with perfect coordination. In the sector Lorelia was responsible for, the situation was completely under her control. Wherever the cave spiders passed, the enemy was either devoured or captured.

Before, Lorelia had commanded her spiders using her raw mental power, a method that was incredibly draining. During the war against the Silver-Eyed, for example, directing her forces that way had left her totally gassed, causing her to collapse unconscious on the battlefield.

But things were different now. She had awakened a Dreamscape series transcendent power.

Commanding her spiders was now effortless. She simply had to pull all of them into her Dreamscape collectively. With the enhancement of her Legendary level mental fortitude and her Dreamscape abilities, the thousands of spiders scattered across the battlefield were, in her eyes, as simple to command as watching two colonies of ants fight.

Any change in the battle, any gap in the defenses, any flank that needed support—a single glance told her everything she needed to know. As a result, wherever her cave spiders swarmed, they left nothing standing. And most importantly, the casualty rate for her spiders was lower than it had ever been.

Delilah and Saelen remained oblivious to this nuance. From their perspective, with a lord-tier broodmother, an abyssal dragon, and a blood elf archer working in concert, this level of dominance was to be expected. They assumed the enemy was simply being crushed by a show of overwhelming force.

They couldn't see the true genius of Lorelia's invisible hand at work. Delilah's own mental power wasn't strong enough to cover the entire battlefield, and Saelen was a warrior, not a strategist.

"Hehehe... I'm the strongest! Next, I'm going to lead my little spiders and conquer a huge stretch of land for my master!" Lorelia declared. "Wherever I go, the flag of our stoneheart horde will..."

BOOM!

Before she could finish, a thunderous crack echoed from the heavens.

It was the sound of arch lords clashing.

Just from the aftershock, Lorelia knew that power signature. An arch lord had entered the battle. She ducked instinctively, teleporting from Xalathar's head to its back and hiding behind Delilah.

"Lorelia, you are the mighty Warden of our stoneheart horde!" Delilah said, surprised.

Lorelia's sudden movement gave her a strange sense of déjà vu, as if the powerful young woman the horde had raised was still the timid little broodmother from years ago.

Hearing Delilah's teasing, yet reminding, tone, Lorelia remembered herself. She was a Warden, a being more powerful than Delilah. She was supposed to be Delilah's shield! How could the great Warden Lorelia hide behind the person she was protecting?

"Hehe... Sister Delilah, I just came back here to protect you," she giggled, recovering quickly. She wrapped her arms around Delilah's waist. "Hold on to me. I'm the strongest shield you'll ever need!"

In truth, she'd snapped out of it. Her master's arch lord avatar was hidden with her; even if an enemy arch lord came for her, she had nothing to fear. It was just an instinctive reaction. A primal response to sensing a high-tier threat.

"The war is about to go wide," Saelen said, her voice tense.

She and Delilah looked up, trying to see the clash in the sky, but all they could make out were roiling clouds and blinding flashes of light.

“They’re starting to fight over there, too!” Lorelia pointed towards the heart of the battlefield, where the chaotic energy of a dozen Legendary level combatants was flaring up.

At her warning, Xalathar and Saelen also sensed the distant commotion.

“Big guy, forward! Let’s go check out the front lines!” Lorelia commanded. She teleported back to her spot on the abyssal dragon’s head and raised a small hand like a true battlefield commander.

ROAR!

Xalathar responded with a deep bellow. A thick fog of Abyssal energy began to pour from its body, its Mist Domain. Within this fog, the abyssal dragon was in its element. It could hold off several enemies of the same level without breaking a sweat.

“Let’s go, let’s go! Time to slaughter the enemy!” Lorelia’s excited shrieks echoed from within the swirling dark mist.

CRUNCH. CRUNCH.

Xalathar’s massive footsteps shook the earth as it lumbered towards the area where the lord-level battles had erupted.

High in the sky above, two colossal domain will phantoms stood in opposition after a cataclysmic clash.

“Your Excellency, where are you truly from?” a voice boomed. “If you withdraw your forces to the north now, I can let what has happened be forgotten.”

The speaker was the human Saint Noel. After realizing he couldn't defeat his opponent without revealing his own trump cards, Noel had decided to seek a compromise.

This wasn't a true surrender on behalf of the human kingdom, but a strategic concession. By pushing the invaders further north, it would give both sides space to coexist peacefully. It was a de facto admission of the Avengerarmies' existence and status, which should, in theory, resolve the conflict.

As for the slain Grand Duke William and the two earldoms, they were an acceptable loss in the face of the human kingdom's overall security. Their deaths could be treated as water under the bridge.

Unfortunately for Saint Noel, he had gravely miscalculated.

Chapter 960: Reputation is Everything

The clown Ogu had come not only to cripple the human kingdom's army but to wound Saint Noel himself. It was a test, a provocation to see if it would draw the attention of a demigod.

So, when Noel offered him an olive branch, Ogu simply ignored it.

"You want a ceasefire? Fine," the clown's voice echoed, wooden and with a strange metallic quality that made its origin impossible to place. "Surrender half the human kingdom's territory and sign a thousand-year non-aggression pact with the Avengerarmies. Otherwise, even if I agree, the countless northern tribes at my back will not."

"Outrageous!" Noel's voice was a low growl, now laced with fury. "Don't you think you're going too far? Isn't the vast expanse of the north enough to satisfy your ambition?"

The last war against the north had been a loss for the human kingdom, a blow to their prestige among the other races. Noel would not allow it to happen again.

The kingdom had lost to the arch lord peak white dragon Frostsire not because the dragon was invincible, but because a demigod had intervened on its behalf. That was the secret reason for the truce, a truth known only to the highest echelons of the humans and dragons. Noel couldn't believe some random, unknown arch lord now had the audacity to try the same thing.

"The north?" Ogu's voice dripped with theatrical scorn. "Heh heh heh... that barren wasteland? Do you take me for a beggar you can shoo away with scraps?"

Through their brief earlier contact and this new clash, Ogu had already seen through his opponent. This Saint was merely a middle arch lord. The clown felt that with just a little effort, he could snuff him out for good.

"It seems you are determined to make an enemy of the human kingdom," Noel said, his voice cold and heavy. The killing intent in his eyes intensified. "In that case, I cannot allow you to leave here alive."

"Hahahaha... such big words!" Ogu mocked. "You want to take me out? Get real, will you?"

In response to the clown's taunts, Noel said nothing more. He simply surged forward, a tidal wave of transcendent power.

"Hahahaha... an excellent welcome!" Ogu shrieked with glee, dissolving into a black shadow that shot out to meet the charge.

BOOM!

With a deafening explosion, the battle erupted across all fronts, from the heavens to the earth.

In Stoneheart City, within the stoneheart horde's territory, Orion opened his eyes. He leaned over and gently kissed the sleeping Sylvana.

After hearing his promise to one day heal her eyes, she had given it her all, using every trick she knew in a playful attempt to conquer him in bed. But her mortal body was no match for the stamina of an arch lord.

Orion rose and slipped on a regal cloak. With a flicker of movement, he appeared in the Silent Goblet tavern in the outer city.

He went directly to the fifth floor, a place that, besides Orion, not even Delilah had ever set foot. It was a floor accessible only to those at the demigod level. And sitting by the window, already out of his brief seclusion, was Alexander.

"This is a nice establishment," Alexander commented without turning. "A shame its proprietor isn't strong enough. Otherwise, you'd attract even more mysterious powerhouses to this city."

He was referring, of course, to Delilah.

"It's fine," Orion replied, walking over. "It's better to accumulate strength and foundation step by step. If you move too fast, you leave people behind, and you can't keep control."

Alexander turned his head to look at Orion. He didn't argue the point, nor did he continue the topic. He knew that the path to power was a complex and contradictory one.

Many abandoned their earthly attachments—emotions, desires, even personal mementos—believing them to be burdens. But he admired Orion. He felt that as Orion grew stronger, he hadn't discarded the very things that most power-seekers deemed a handicap.

"He's being cautious," Alexander said, his gaze shifting to the northeast. "He only sent a will projection. Not even an avatar. It seems we won't get a chance to make a move."

Orion knew exactly who he was talking about: the traitor to the Champions Alliance, the clown Ogu. The battle erupting in the northeast was his doing.

"However," Alexander continued, a slight smile on his lips, "he revealed his presence. And that gave me an opening."

Before his ascension, Alexander would have had no way to track a creature like Ogu. But as a demigod, with a grasp on new and profound rules of power, he now had the means.

"I'll let it go this time. Once I've pinpointed his base of operations, we'll gather the grand army and wipe him out. Traitors don't deserve to exist."

Orion nodded in agreement. Attacking Ogu's will projection now, before they knew the location of his lair, would be foolish. It would only spook him.

"So," Alexander said, pulling his gaze back from the distant horizon and fixing Orion with a disdainful look. "I've been here all this time, and you haven't offered me so much as a drink. Is this any way to treat a guest?"

"Hahaha... my apologies, bro. One moment," Orion laughed, slightly embarrassed. It wasn't that the succubus waitresses of the Silent Goblet hadn't wanted to serve Alexander; they were simply incapable of reaching the fifth floor.

Orion went downstairs and returned a few minutes later with a full feast and several bottles of the finest wine from the human kingdom and the blood elf territories.

"Bro," Orion said as they sat opposite each other, after they had downed the first three cups. "Is this your avatar or your true form? Won't you attract unwanted attention?"

"Just an avatar," Alexander said. "My true form is holding down the fort in the Emerald Dream Realm. I don't have time to waste on this garbage."

Orion shrugged, understanding completely. He despised traitors just as much.

"My avatar uses a secret technique," Alexander explained, sensing Orion's concern. "Even crossing realms with a demigod phantom in tow, it won't alert the other demigods of this world."

Orion was relieved. He wasn't worried for himself, but he feared that Alexander's arrival would trigger a siege by this world's native demigods. If that happened, he and the stoneheart horde would be caught between a rock and a hard place.

The two continued to drink and talk. After several more rounds, Orion, feeling a pleasant buzz, finally voiced an idea that had been brewing.

"Bro," he began, "this war with the dragons... the guys are feeling pretty pissed off about how it went down. Are you telling me none of the other bros have any... second thoughts about it?"

Alexander looked up, a playful, knowing glint in his eyes. "What are you trying to do? Just spit it out."

Orion grinned and drained his cup in one go. "The dragons dared to invade our Champions Alliance. They dared to come to the Dusk Continent and stir up shit. We can't just let that slide."

He leaned forward.

"Otherwise, it's bad for our rep."