

## Legion lich 101

### Chapter 101 Negotiation

Sevenus led Athos to the hole in the center of the forest, where the willow was still in the same position as before. Between its roots, a one-meter-wide hole was dug. Sevenus jumped into the hole without hesitation and Athos followed.

"Incredible." Athos muttered, looking around. Just as Sevenus had said, dozens of enchanted wood weapons were strewn across the floor, as if Treevor saw no value in them. There was no furniture except for a desk, so it's likely that Treevor used this place only as a workshop rather than a home.

Broadswords, shortswords, scimitars, spears, axes, halberds, bows and arrows, etc. There were a few weapons taped to the wall, as if Treevor had separated his best work from the rest.

Athos took a white wooden sword from the wall to admire it, but his hands burned when he touched it and white smoke began to rise. Athos dropped his sword to the ground and frowned, realizing the weapons here would be useless.

"All of this is made with glowing willow wood and has light enchantments. It's useless to us." Athos said disappointed at having to leave so many weapons behind.

"Should we destroy them then? It's better than leaving them here for someone else to find." Sevenus suggested, but Athos shook his head, having a sudden idea.

"No, those things can still be useful. If I've managed to turn someone with a high affinity for light like Emilia into an undead, it should be possible to do the same with these weapons. These weapons aren't made from plants like the arm from Treevor, after all. Bring skeletons to collect the weapons, but make sure they cover the weapons before touching them." Athos ordered.

Athos used a wind spell to lightly float some swords and left Treevor's workshop.

'Hmm.. how do I corrupt these weapons? By the way, is it even possible to turn a tree into undead?' Athos thought after he emerged from the hole.

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He walked to one of the surviving trees and tried to turn it into an undead just like he would a human or monster, but it was useless. The tree withered and shrank, all its vitality being drained away. Even if Athos tried to inject the vitality back along with a spark of his life force, the energy was just wasted.

Athos repeated the process on another tree, but the result was the same.

'I tried using the center of the tree as a replacement for the skeleton in the first and the bark of the tree in the second, but it was useless. I knew that using the same spell I use on humans on trees had little chance of success, but I had to try.' Athos thought.

'Treevor's right arm wasn't made entirely of plant, so I shouldn't take it into account. Also, Treevor had a core while trees didn't, so-wait. The world energy is spread evenly throughout the tree instead of being concentrated in a core, while my spell affects cores. And unlike magical plants, trees and common plants do not have an energy signature of their own.'

I need to corrupt the world energy flowing through the tree without killing it.’ Athos immediately began testing his hypothesis.

Athos touched a tree, using his ability to draw energy from the world beyond light, and flowed into the tree without absorbing it. The world’s corrupted energy slowly replaced the tree’s energy, Athos being careful not to overdo it and kill the tree by accident. The tree began to creak as it shrunk and twisted.

Its trunk twisted into a spiral and darkened, its leaves turned black.

“Success! I just hope the same trick works with enchanted weapons. I’m not sure how enchantments work, so I’d better wait for Treevor to make up his mind before trying weapons.” Athos spoke as he looked anxiously at the swords, but held back. He also burned the tree to ashes to leave no evidence of what he did.

“I should put conditions on teaching me about enchantments when he tries to trade. It can be very useful to create custom weapons instead of relying on others.” Athos spoke as he rejoined the other skeletons.

“My lord, I... gathered all the... hive hawk corpses... and turned them into... skeletons. We have a... total of 314 new... skeletons.” The skeleton mage reported as soon as he saw Athos approaching.

As if on cue, the queen flew above him and landed on his shoulders. She had grown 20 centimeters in the last 5 years, reaching 80 centimeters in length. She rubbed her beak affectionately over his face, causing Athos to bow his head as to why she was suddenly so docile.

The truth is, the queen instantly felt that she was being controlled, already accustomed to mental links. She instinctively felt that it would be impossible to resist and surrendered to her new master, acting docilely to ensure Athos’ goodwill.

The males also began to fly around him, but for a different reason than the intelligent queen. Their minds were broken and the queen’s residual will disappeared at the time of their deaths, so the black currents corrupted their minds without resistance and made them instantly loyal to Athos.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. Let’s get back to town, folks.” Athos spoke to the hawks in the hive, but ordered the other skeletons to remain trapped. It wasn’t until Sevenus climbed out of the hole after accounting for the weapons and explaining that he needed hands, that they finally understood why they couldn’t move.

Athos tried to walk towards the city, but the hive hawks grabbed him after a few steps and carried him all the way. They left him in the town square, before Athos ordered them to disperse throughout the city. Having the hive hawks following him around all the time would have been irritating, to say the least.

“Apparently all went well, master.” Emilia spoke. Athos had left her behind, mainly because he felt it would be unnecessary to take someone as strong as she.

“It’s been an hour or so since Treevor was left alone. Do you think it’s been enough for him to surrender or is he still desperately looking for a way to escape?” Athos asked. All their preparations were ready and all that was left was for Sevenus to return with weapons and Treevor to make a decision.

"If he's not ready, we can force him to the negotiating table. He's in no position to refuse anyway." Emilia shrugged.

"Okay, let's go then." Athos agreed with her and broke into the house where Treevor was. He left the wooden swords outside. Treevor might get annoyed to see his workshop violated and have another tantrum, so it was best avoided.

Treevor's avatar rose the moment Athos entered, his gaze determined and slightly nervous.

"Ready to chat?" Athos sat down on the same sofa as before and leaned back arrogantly.

"I have some conditions to work for you." Treevor spoke bluntly.

"Speak up, but know that you will work for me whether I accept your terms or not." Athos spoke coldly and the chains weighed down on Treevor, forcing him to sit.

"First, no child deaths. Second, I want a fair share of the resources I earn. Third, I don't accept being treated like your slave like you do with those other skeletons." Treevor tried to look strong, but Athos only snorted at him.

"I refuse the first, I will kill whoever I want and you will have no say in it. As for the second, the resources obtained are mine and I distribute them among the soldiers, so you will receive a share anyway. And lastly, I don't care what you want to be called as long as you follow my orders." Athos spoke, making Treevor grit his teeth in anger.

"That's not a deal, it's just a sentence!" Treevor yelled.

"Watch your tone, or I-." Emilia said angrily, but she immediately fell to the ground while holding her head. Athos had given command of the entire army to Treevor and he was Emilia's direct superior. Offending him caused Emilia agonizing pain.

"The first condition is non-negotiable and on top of the second, allowing you to accumulate resources is not only useless, it also hinders the performance of the entire army. If you're really competent, I'll give you the resources you need anyway. And as for the third condition, you are currently above the entire army, second only to me in authority. What I expect from you is your combat power and your knowledge of enchantments.

"As long as you fight when I tell you to and are willing to teach me about incantations, what you do in your spare time is up to you." Athos subtly added his condition and trapped Treevor without the latter noticing.

'This guy has spent most of his life alone and from what I saw in that workshop, he has no hobbies other than creating things and practicing magic. He is feeling his freedom in dangerous and is on alert, but in the end he will still need the resources I will get to enchant weapons and I will be able to obtain the final product and strengthen my army. I'm the one who wins in the end.' Athos thought.

"You also don't have to worry about getting your hands dirty with innocent blood. When I fight, I usually send the strongest like you against the strongest on the enemy side, while letting the weaker skeletons kill the fry." Athos spoke and Treevor's expression softened for a second before he forced himself to be serious again.

Treevor looked down at his ghostly hands and sighed in defeat. Seeing that Athos had slaughtered the entire city without mercy, he didn't have much hope of convincing him to spare the innocent, but he had to try.

"I accept working for you boss, but I won't call you master." Treevor offered his hand to Athos, who promptly shook it.

## Chapter 102 Corruption

"Now that you've agreed to work for me, I have a job for you. Hi, bring the swords here." Athos ordered Emilia, who quickly withdrew from the room and went to get her weapons.

"Hey, that's mine!" Treevor screamed as Emilia returned, seeing the white wooden swords in her arms. Emilia quickly placed her swords on the table between them and returned to her position as Athos' guard.

"No, that was yours. Now that it belongs to us, I need you to help me make them usable. The sword wood is from glowing willow and has light enchantments, I want to know if it's possible to alter these weapons in any way." Athos explained his idea, causing Treevor to sigh.

"That's impossible. The glowing willow wood is full of the light element, but it still has the other elements and maintains a balance. The mana of "you" undead on the other hand, is completely unbalanced. Even if I made weapons with enchantments of darkness, which I don't know, your mana would still corrupt it. Corrupted mana and pure mana are different things." Treevor spoke, refusing to call himself undead.

"I've already managed to corrupt a tree, so I think it's possible to corrupt the willow glow, but I need your help to deal with the enchantments." Acts have spoken.

"How does your magic work?" Treevor asked, his scientific curiosity piqued. Athos explained how his raising undead spell worked, as well as the differences to transforming a tree.

"That won't work. The runesmith technique requires a mage to use his own mana to manipulate the material's energy to form a sequence of runes. Depending on the pattern of runes used, different enchantments are created. Feeding those runes anything other than pure mana or world energy would damage the runes, rendering the weapons useless." Treevor said and Emilia nodded, the only one in the room with any runesmith knowledge besides Treevor.

"Are runes made of pure energy? I thought you carved the weapon." Athos spoke in shock, but Emilia corrected him.

"Master, if the runes were carved on the surface, a single scratch on the surface would destroy the enchantment and make the weapon explode." Emilia explained politely.

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"My grandmother used to tell me stories that in the old days weapons were made by carving the runes on the surface, but not only is it dangerous, it also didn't utilize the material's full potential."

"I think we got off topic a bit. The important thing is that it's impossible to turn sword wood into corrupted wood without destroying the enchantment. If I corrupted it anyway, how long would it take

you to enchant it again?" Athos asked after confirming that it would be impossible to use the weapons immediately.

"I have no idea. The only way to find out is to try, but it takes me about 30 minutes to form a single set of runes and these weapons have three patterns each, so it should take at least an hour and a half to make a weapon." Treevor explained, making Athos frown at the unexpected delay.

"Why so long?"

"Runesmith required both fine control, a lot of mana and a high quality material. The more mana I put into the process the stronger the weapon will be, but it will also take longer to make." Treevor spoke.

Athos asked no more questions and just concentrated on corrupting the wooden sword. It was a much more difficult process than transforming an ordinary tree, despite the difference in size. The excess light on the wood strongly rejected the corrupted mana, but all it took was a single rune to corrode for an entire pattern to crumble.

The sudden burst of light element stunned Athos and nearly caused the weapon to explode, forcing Athos to inject his own mana in a panic to suppress the light. It only partially worked. The corrupted mana prevented the explosion, but because it possesses Athos' signature it cannot replace the lost energy.

Before Athos could think of a way to deal with it, the second rune pattern broke and the weapon began to glow, threatening to explode.

"Shit!" Athos immediately conjured a corrupted barrier around the sword. The barrier shook for a few seconds and cracked into several pieces, releasing a beam of light that nearly severed Treevor's skeleton arm, but the avatar pulled him out of the way in time.

"Fuck! What did I do wrong?" Athos swore and removed the barrier, looking regretfully at the pieces of wood on the table.

"I can see at least some mistakes in what you've done." Treevor spoke softly, making Athos almost growl at him.

"Say."

"First, the sword has a total of three enchantments, two light and one without elements. You should have started with the non-elemental standard, it would corrupt without too much trouble and the corrupted energy would spread evenly throughout the weapon, hitting all light runes all at once, rather than focusing on just one and causing an explosion while the others were still at full strength." Treevor spoke dryly, but Athos tried to refute him.

"I can't control where the corrupted world energy moves. All I can do is flow the corrupted energy to the sword. If I try to blend my mana to control it, the energy will be rejected rather than replaced." Athos explained the obvious and Treevor just nodded.

"It's true that you can't control corrupted energy once it flows into the sword, but the entry point is a different story. You held the sword by the hilt and flowed mana from there. The closest set of runes was of the light element, with an enchantment that created a layer of light over the blade, increasing its size

to that of a zweih?nder.” Treevor couldn’t see the runes without mana vision, but he remembered the runes patterns you usually use.

“You should have started at the middle of the blade, where the non-elemental runes are.” Treevor explained, before remembering. “By the way, the last set of light runes is just above the non-elemental set and extends to the tip of the sword.”

“You could have explained that to me before I wasted a valuable sword!” Athos shouted indignantly.

“I didn’t know how the enchantments would react until you tried it.” Treevor shrugged in response.

Athos grunted in response, but picked up another weapon and proceeded to corrupt it without complaint. It didn’t consume a drop of mana to do this, the only thing Athos needed was focus to channel the world’s energy and separate light to make it corrupt. It had only been 6 days since Athos turned undead, but he practiced extracting corrupted world energy whenever he spent mana, so he was already getting familiar with the process.

Athos fed the sword lightly with pure world energy, causing the runes to light up for a moment and memorized the position of all of them. Afterwards, he placed his fingers under the non-elemental runes, spreading the entry point as far as possible while injecting corrupted world energy.

Normally, a mage’s brain would fry when trying to split a single energy stream into ten different ones, but Athos just let the energy he could naturally absorb flow through his body, using his fingers as conduits.

Corruption was much simpler this time. The non-elemental runes didn’t last long and quickly dispersed. As all the runes were corrupted at the same time, there was no energy explosion this time. The white wood began to darken starting from the middle of the blade and quickly spread to the hilt and tip of the blade.

The runes of light gleamed visibly in rejection of the corruption that surrounded her, their glow even more accentuated by the dark wood. Athos continued to flow corrupted world energy, so the runes of light would wear out and explode, but the corruption that surrounded it stifled the explosion.

Light runes were made of pure mana and light element, so the mana turned to corruption as soon as the light disappeared. As soon as Athos felt that the sword was full and was no longer accepting extra energy, he sighed in relief and leaned back on the sofa.

“You know, I never understood why people are so envious of the mana body feature, at least until today.” Treevor muttered suddenly, reminding Athos that he was not alone.

“What are you talking about? A wizard with a wand could do the same, only with greater difficulty.” Athos did not understand the reason for the sudden envy, but he had too much headache to think. He began circulating mana through his body to clear the headache, Treevor’s voice flowing in one ear and out the other in the process.

“You may not know this, boss, but controlling mana using a wand is much harder than it looks. A normal mage would be unable to replicate what you did. The wand would just draw the world’s energy, the mage would need a magic item that split the energy into several parts and another that flows into the

sword. It's an incredibly complicated process..." Treevor continued to explain passionately, but Athos only gave generic answers so that Treevor would think he was listening.

'He seems to be saying something important, so write it down for me without him noticing.' Athos ordered Emilia mentally.

"In front of you, master. I grabbed paper, ink, and a pen just as he started to explain what you'd gone wrong with. Emilia sends back. It was only then that Athos realized that she was actually writing down every word Treevor said. The latter mistook Emilia for a novice runesmith taking notes, so he made sure to explain the differences in detail.

## Chapter 103 Enchantment

'Good job.' Athos praised Emilia and sat down properly, interrupting Treevor's endless rant.

"Yes, I agree with you, but our time is limited and I need these usable and enchanted weapons ASAP, so get to work." Athos spoke.

"I will, but I need access to my mana for that. Would you be so kind?" Treevor pointed to his own body which was still standing in the same position as before.

"You can get back into your body with no problem. The currents are no longer forcing you back into your body, so it should be possible for you to leave and come back whenever you want." Athos spoke disinterestedly, massaging his temples.

Treevor didn't much like the lack of confidence in Athos's voice, but it didn't do any good to keep stalling. He returned to his own body, his empty eye sockets glowing for a second as he straightened up.

"Damn, this body feels like shit. How do you deal with it?" Treevor asked uncomfortably, touching his own body here and there, not enjoying the sensation at all. The darkness in his body replicated every physical or mystical sense that Treevor was capable of feeling, but the sensation that passed through was something artificial.

"It's normal for me, as it was for Emilia back here. You're just feeling weird because your mind is still intact. With time, you'll get used to it." Athos said trying to comfort Treevor, but those words only scared him. Treevor just sighed and focused on the work in front of him, trying not to think about the future.

"So what kind of enchantment do you want? The weapon obviously has a high affinity for darkness, but I know very few darkness runes, so I can't guarantee the effectiveness of the final product." Treevor took the sword and used death vision to assess it.

"Can you only create enchantments of darkness? Or can you create enchantments from other elements?" Athos asked as he perked up.

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"If I had the right materials, I could even add enchantments from other elements, but with what I have on hand, only darkness and corruption would be possible." Treevor could see that Athos was a little disappointed by this, but there was nothing he could do.

"How about just strengthening the raw power of the sword? Corrupt enchantments that improve weapon effectiveness in general rather than special abilities. My cast speed is high thanks to my mana body and what I need is a weapon to that I can fight at close quarters." Athos suggested, surprising Treevor.

People usually wanted weapons with flashy effects or enchantments that covered their weaknesses, so Athos' request sounded strange to him. Treevor knew that weapons made of magic wood were a little softer than weapons made of metal, but they had better magic conductivity and could be better powered by the wielder's mana, so there wasn't much difference in the end.

"Are you sure about that? As a runesmith, I must say this is a waste." Treevor tried to change his mind.

"Hmm...so how about an energy drain enchantment? One of the biggest weaknesses I've noticed in skeletons is that we can't heal without making our bones brittle. Draining the enemy's vitality would solve the problem." The skeletons didn't have any fat that the cure could consume, so it was natural for them to get weaker as they took damage.

Athos was a little better off than the others, thanks to his skin that would heal any wound he suffered, but even that would have limits. Draining the enemies' health would partially solve this problem.

"That can be done easily." Treevor nodded and got to work immediately.

'It's best to let him work for now, my runesmith classes can wait until I settle down somewhere.' Athos thought, not wanting to get in the way. He took a new weapon and started corrupting it.

They continued to work silently, while Emilia just watched. Athos took approximately an hour to corrupt, while Treevor took an hour and a half to enchant each weapon. Athos used that half-hour gap to regenerate Treevor's mana while he worked, so neither of them had a second of rest. They took until dawn to corrupt and enchant all the swords that Athos brought to try out.

Athos and Treevor looked at each other satisfied with the feeling of accomplishment, as Emilia finally let Sevenus and the other skeletons in and they left all the weapons they had collected from Treevor's arsenal before turning and leaving.

"..." They didn't say anything for a few seconds, just looked at each other in despair. A certain feeling of companionship formed between them.

"Let's take a break, okay? Even though my mana is full, I'm dying of a headache." Treevor practically begged.

"I was about to suggest that." Athos readily agreed. He circulated mana to lessen the headache, but he still felt exhausted.

"Emilia, how much time do we have?" Athos asked, too tired to think.

"It's been 6 days since the master attacked the city and was killed in the process. The messenger should be halfway to the nearest town by now. It should take approximately 8 days for him to reach the nearest town, 7 if he force the horse to exhaustion. After that, the noble of the city will inform the country and send aid to the city, mainly supplies and soldiers to normalize the city." Emilia informed.

"I must have about 3 weeks then, I think." Athos did the math, but Emilia refuted him.



“Master, I believe things are not that easy. All wealthy nobles have magic items for long-distance communication and nearby cities and strongholds must have been informed. If that happens, our chances of conquering the Platinum Fist fortress are null.” Emilia expressed her concern.

Athos thought for a while, but decided that Emilia’s worries were unnecessary. “Even if they are informed, the fortress soldiers will be on guard against a mage trying to escape and infiltrate the fortress, but not in their wildest dreams would they expect an undead army.”

“But I agree that if possible, it’s best that they not be on guard against anything. We’ll try to advance our plans and be ready in less than a week.” Athos said and Emilia nodded happily.

“In that case master, I believe it’s best to get back to work as soon as possible.” Emilia said sweetly, making Athos and Treevor groan in frustration.

“Speaking of which, what are we supposed to do about that glowing willow? It’s going to take almost a full day to corrupt something that size and even longer to enchant it again.” Athos suddenly remembered and spoke to Treevor, trying to procrastinate.

“If possible, I also want to recover it. Half of my amber eye was left in the glowing willow in the form of an amber gem and I want to recover it. When you turned me into an undead, the crack in the amber eye closed and I hope to do the same with the other half.” Treevor said hopefully.

“How exactly do you manage to split your amber eye?” Athos asked something that had been bothering him for some time.

“My amber eye is just condensed energy. When I create my avatar, amber energy flows into it and allows it to physically interact in the same way as pure mana.” Treevor explained.

“I see. But wasn’t the other half of your eye cracked? After a day all the energy must have dissipated.” Athos spoke.

“No need to worry about that. One of the willow enchantments connects the gem and absorbs its energy to power the enchantments, but it also fed the gem with energy from the environment while I wasn’t fighting. The energy leakage and recovery should be canceling.”

“We were supposed to camp outside the city. We’ve been going out of town and back so many times I’ve lost count.” Athos complained, but got up anyway.

“Oh.” Athos exclaimed, but it was too late. The hive hawks surrounded him and tried to get his attention.

“I hadn’t seen all these birds when I arrived. Did you hunt them when you left, boss?” Treevor asked confused.

“Yes, they are hive hawks. They have more than enough numbers, so they’ll give us a ride there.” Athos said and immediately half the birds surrounded Treevor. They started to fly up and Treevor started screaming in panic.

“Hi, put me down now! Get me down!” He started waving his arms in panic, only to freeze like a statue in fear of falling.

"Are you afraid of heights?" Athos asked in disbelief.

"I am half plant and half elf. Humanoid beings are incapable of flight while plants are rooted in one place for their entire lives. Therefore, flying is something that is not in my nature." Treevor tried to explain logically, but Athos just laughed at him.

"Of course, of course." Athos spent the rest of his short trip mocking Treevor, the latter too preoccupied with not dying.

"We're finally here." Treevor muttered gratefully, fending off the hawks from the hive as if they were his sworn enemies.

"You were right, Treevor. The amber gem is the same." Athos woke him from his stupor, looking curiously at the still half-transformed willow. No matter how many times he looked at it, it was always impressive.

The only difference Athos could make out was a thin thread of amber energy running down the willow's trunk, but the gem was as strong as it had been the moment Treevor parted from him.

"Now that I think about it, I'm going to have to corrupt this whole willow tree, aren't I?" Athos muttered as he finally realized his mistake, his eye sockets looking emptier than ever.

#### Chapter 104 World pillage

"Maybe so, maybe not. I engraved dozens of enchantments all over the willow, so if you try to corrupt it like you did with the swords, the willow is more likely to be destroyed. But there might be another way." Treevor spoke and lay down on the ground a few inches from the tree, his avatar leaving his body.

His amber eye was low on energy, because he spent most of it fighting Athos, but Treevor purposely avoided smearing his avatar with corrupted energy, remaining as pure as possible. As his mind was not yet tainted with corruption, he had no trouble possessing it and the overflowing light element did not affect him.

The glowing willow reverted to its tree form, before the amber gem separated and flowed back into the amber eye. She was quickly corrupted, before being returned to the willow.

"Now comes the hard part." The wooden face appeared in the trunk tree and spoke. The enchantment that spread amber energy through the body was made of pure mana and was the first to be corrupted. Treevor could sense where each rune pattern was and focused primarily on the feats of pure mana, corrupting them one by one.

Treevor couldn't allow the corrupted energy to spread and cause a light enchantment to explode by accident, so he focused the corrupted energy on one point until there were no more pure mana enchantments.

When he was finally finished, Treevor slowly began to release the tainted corrupted energy, being careful not to overdo it. The glowing willow began to darken and twist in a spiral, the runes of light glowing across its surface.

"Wow." Athos exclaimed without realizing it, watching the glowing willow transform. It was similar to the tree he corrupted, but on a much larger scale. Using death vision, he saw that as the leaves and

roots darkened, they began to attract darkness instead of light, while the roots absorbed corrupted environment energy.

Treevor was extremely careful, increasing the amount of corruption around the runes, slowly undoing them. It took nearly an hour to corrupt everything, but Treevor did it. Most of the corrupted energy was consumed, but the corrupted willow was already recovering. In a matter of minutes he would be back at his peak.

As for the corrupted amber energy, he had spent most of what he had just received, but at least he had regained the willow.

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"Phew. I'm done boss. I still have to enchant everything again, but it's good to be back." The wooden mask laughed, absorbing his body again and leaving him safely in the center of the tree.

"Do you really need that many enchantments? That body looks incredibly powerful all by itself." Athos asked curiously, looking him up and down.

"Do you remember that light cannon, the holy field, the shockwaves I used when we fought? They were all willow enchantments. Enchantments don't have a cast time, so it's much more convenient to use them to fight while storing your spells for the right moment." Treevor spoke.

"Well, if I had a titan like that to fight, I would also find it more convenient to use it. But changing the subject, how are your racial abilities? You can still expand your senses through the forest, absorb energy from the environment, or transform world energy. in nutrients?" Athos showered questions about Treevor, the latter immediately began to investigate.

"I can't spread my senses even though I feel the trees. It's like the trees are rejecting me. I could probably use force to spread myself out, but the trees would die in the process." Treevor spoke dejectedly, a racial skill becoming unusable was a great loss to him.

"Maybe you haven't lost the skill, it's just not compatible with the trees around you. Let me try something." Athos jumped out of the hole and corrupted a random tree, before sending Treevor to try again.

"It worked! I can feel the surroundings of the tree as well as I can in life. How did you know this was going to work?" Treevor asked excitedly.

"You seem to have forgotten about it, or you purposely ignore it, but you are now an undead. Your racial abilities have changed, some good, some bad, but you will have to adapt. Continuing to think like a living being is a mistake that can come to cost dearly in the future." Athos scolded him seriously.

"And what did you expect? You killed me less than a day ago and expect me to become a murderous psychopath like you overnight? You've been an undead for less than a week, but you seem totally used to it the condition itself. How is this possible?" Treevor asked irritably.

"I was already dead inside, long before they killed me." Athos replied with a shrug, before deciding to return to the subject. "Anyway, how are your other skills?"

Treevor wasn't pleased with the sudden change of subject, but he agreed that investigating his abilities took priority. "As I've already proved, absorbing energy from the environment is possible, but it requires me to be in contact with the ground."

"What about the ability to transform the world's energy into nutrients?" Athos asked. That was the skill he couldn't even imagine changes.

"Hum...this is weird. I can't extract energy and turn it into nutrients, but I feel like I'm doing something wrong." Treevor felt strange with the abilities he was used to using suddenly changing. He did some tests on his own body and finally understood what was wrong.

"That's it!" Treevor exclaimed and its roots began to spread and sink into the earth. The moist, nutrient-rich land began to dry out, all its nutrients draining away, something Athos had never seen in this forest.

This region didn't usually snow even during winter, the only indication of the change of season was the days getting shorter and the weather getting colder. Thanks to Treevor, the forest bloomed year-round ignoring the seasons, so seeing the land dry up was something new.

"What are you doing?" Athos asked curiously, using death vision to get some idea of what was going on. He didn't understand how, but the roots were draining the soil and turning it into corrupt amber energy.

"My ability seems to have reversed. Instead of turning world energy into nutrients, I now turn nutrients into corrupted energy." Treevor spoke, feeling both happy and sad for his new skill, world pillage.

The idea that he could gather vast amounts of amber energy quickly, overcoming one of the spirits' greatest limitations was a source of endless joy. The idea that to do that he would have to destroy the forest he had spent years tending with his bare hands not so much.

"This is amazing. Is there any limit to how much amber energy you can muster? Or how concentrated the energy is?" Athos asked in amazement. He shuddered with emotion just to imagine how much power Treevor could muster if he drained all the nutrients from the forest, the villages, and the outskirts of the city.

"There is no discovered limit to how much energy a spirit can accumulate. And the energy concentration is at the same level as the nucleus. In my case, amber energy has the same concentration as a nucleus in the 5th layer."

"How fast can you steal nutrients?" Athos asked, noticing that the wooden mask's amber eye glowing even brighter.

"I'm just testing and getting used to my ability. I can do a lot better than that." Treevor spoke confidently and the roots dug even deeper into the earth.

Athos could feel a slight vibration in the ground and the earth around him immediately dried up, causing him to take a shocked step back. A bolt of dead earth quickly began to spread around the corrupted willow.

Athos took a handful of earth in his hands, realizing that the earth was dry, almost like sand. The dead earth radius continued to increase, until it reached the roots that Treevor used to spread energy through the forest. It was the moment when death fell on the forest of Faltra.

Like a hungry beast, the willow dried up its roots, before using the root net to drain all the trees in the forest. The leaves of the trees withered, as their trunks shrank and their branches fell.

The destruction was not limited to the trees. The earth around the trees also dried up and died, spreading small circles of dead earth that only increased in size until it killed the entire forest.

"..." Athos could not believe what he was seeing. He had scattered the hive hawks through the air and followed the death of the entire forest in real time. It was an unbelievable sight.

"It's a terrifying skill." Treevor spoke in horror. He just tried to activate the skill to its fullest for a second, but was unable to stop once activated. Treevor struggled to stop it, but the world pillage stole all life within its reach, until only a wasteland remained.

The trees were drained to dust. Small monsters like horned rabbits and whip-tailed rats, the only monsters left in the forest began to desperately flee, but the hive hawks hunted them all down.

'Extra life force is always welcome.' Athos thought for a moment, but his mind was elsewhere. 'This skill is good for gathering energy and making farmland infertile, but it has no effect on living beings,'

Athos began to analyze Treevor's new ability as well as its possible uses, as the latter was too shocked to do so. The conclusion he came to was that the skill would be incredibly useful in the long run, but would be of little use in the near future.

From what Treevor explained, the demihuman empire was already a barren place, made up entirely of savannas and deserts. In addition, most breeds relied on hunting for food rather than agriculture.

...But it would be a different story when he returned.

#### Chapter 105 Assault mode

Humans depended on agriculture and livestock for sustenance and it was no exaggeration to say that their countries would crumble without them. What if Athos had the power to take that away from them? If the soil were incapable of supporting agriculture, wouldn't entire countries fall without it having to take a single step forward?

Athos could easily imagine what would happen. Rising food prices, commoners starving, nobles accumulating resources, crime rate rising, public order deteriorating, the despair of the starving population, chaos spreading, a revolt starting, wars for increasingly scarce resources, countries crumbling from within...

"Haha..." A laugh escaped him without him noticing. Athos touched his surprised face and realized he was smiling. It seemed the mere thought of causing so much disgrace made him smile without realizing it. He quickly hid his smile and turned to Treevor, trying to look as impassive as possible.

"How do you feel, Treevor? How much energy did you manage to muster?" Athos asked.

"I feel amazing." Treevor muttered, finally snapping out of his stupor. He had regained all the energy he had spent, returning to the same level as before facing Emilia and the other mage-killers. No, he was even stronger than before.

The energy leak forced him to expend 4 times more energy than necessary, in addition to the constant leak even if he didn't do anything. Without it, he could fight much more smoothly and avoid making fools of mistakes out of impatience, as he did in the fight against Athos.

"Treevor, I want you to steal all the land around the city, as well as the villages. You should get even more powerful that way." Athos suggested, but Treevor's reaction wasn't the best.

"And destroy the land of innocent people? I wouldn't be able to live knowing that I destroyed the lives of hundreds of villagers." Treevor spoke resolutely. Killing soldiers and mages was one thing, innocent villagers was a different story.

"If that's the problem, don't worry. I already killed all those people myself, the farmland is vacant now. Even if you don't drain it until it turns into dead land, I would still destroy all the buildings and poison the land." Athos lied through his teeth. He would never waste his time on something so useless, but Treevor didn't know that.

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"You bony bastard..." Treevor swore angrily at him, but complied anyway. The willow changed shape, assuming its combat form and leaving Athos gaping. "What is the problem?"

"You should look at yourself in the mirror. Your assault mode has changed a lot." Athos spoke in admiration.

Treevor conjured a mirror of ice in front of him, shocked by what he saw. His entire body was ebony in color just as expected, but now he was slender and tall, rather than robust as before.

It had grown to nearly 5 meters in height, with long limbs. His arms lengthened and thinned, small black spikes protruding from his forearms. Long, hollow claws protruded from his fingers, dripping sickly green liquid. There were several small black flower buds on both shoulders, instead of a gigantic one.

The corrupted amber gem was in the middle of his chest, spreading amber energy throughout his body. The enchantment that absorbs the energy of the amber gem was only responsible for powering the enchantments with a single thought from Treevor so that he could fully focus on fighting. That way, all he had to do was wish for an enchantment to activate, saving you the trouble of manually guiding mana.

Its legs were roots intertwined in a spiral, ending in four long claws, three in front and one where the heel should have been. From the back of its head, black vines and thin branches hung down to its waist like long hair, spikes growing at regular intervals until it ended in a hollow thorn dripping with poison.

His helmet was shaped like a skull, his jaw tightly closed. Two curved branches protruded from the sides of his head, running down the sides of his face to his jaw as if they were face protectors, covering the parts his helmet left exposed.

Treevor turned from side to side, noting all the changes the willow had undergone. The acacia tree he used in the past had minimal differences with the willow, so this big change came as a surprise to him.

'How do you feel?' Athos asked mentally, as Treevor was ignoring him as he checked his body.

"Let's find out now." Treevor spoke with a smile. A section of the vines on the back of his head came off and slipped down his arm like snakes, before curling around his hand and forming a long, thorny whip. It

seemed that now, instead of turning his limbs into weapons, he would create weapons with parts of his body.

It was certainly less destructive than the ancient glowing willow whip, but it seemed to have a longer range. Treevor climbed out of the hole and looked around the vacant lot, before conjuring three clay dolls in a row.

As he was testing his power, he decided to go all in at once and swung his whip with all his might. The whip elongated and made a slashing sound, almost immediately hitting the first puppet.

The clay doll was ripped in half, the whip leaving a deep cut mark on the floor. In addition, black smoke began to rise, indicating that the attack was toxic on some level.

“Destructive power decreased, but slashing went deeper, so slashing power increased. Range and attack speed also improved.” Treevor spoke aloud so Athos could hear.

Treevor struck again, but this time he wrapped the whip around his wrist before he unleashed it with all his might, the same move he used to impale his spear. The vine moved in a straight line and hit the clay doll’s chest, impaling him without resistance and digging into the ground behind him.

“Looks like the spear and whip are a set now. Well, that makes it easier for me not to have to change it all the time. Now is the best part.” Treevor spoke with a smile on his face, before the black flower buds on his shoulders bloomed and absorbed the surrounding darkness, making Treevor shine like a second sun for a second or two.

He expected one or maybe both of his arms to turn into cannons, but the vines and branches behind his head formed small cannons each and pointed at the last clay doll, the one he was unconsciously aiming at. before shooting multiple beams of darkness.

The clay doll was pierced with dozens of beams and was immediately destroyed, along with everything behind it. Before the beam’s energy ran out, Treevor tried to hit different targets, but it was an almost impossible task.

The “mini-cannons” as he decided to call them, moved at will and didn’t have a convenient target lock, so he’d have to split his focus on controlling each of them.

“Having multiple cannons instead of a single cannon is more versatile, but it has greatly increased the difficulty of using them. I think I’m going to need an enchantment to solve this problem. I can’t imagine controlling dozens of beams at the same time and still fight.” Treevor sighed, but he was really happy inside.

He realized he could activate the flowers individually so he wouldn’t overwhelm himself, a huge improvement compared to the all-in before.

“Well, attack speed increased, range increased, destructive power decreased, versatility increased. Also, how did you do it? Darkness is intangible, but you managed to form reeds in the earth anyway.” Athos asked as he counted on his fingers, remembering with interest everything Treevor had said.

"I mixed some corruption to deal physical damage. Now, i need to test my defensive ability and movement speed. After that, I'm going to enchant the willow. I already have some ideas on what to do, as well as new weapons that I believe will match this body." Treevor spoke happily.

"I see. But how are you going to test your defense? Physical attacks would just scratch you and our energy signature is similar, so we can't harm each other." Athos asked.

"Like this." Treevor muttered before conjuring a seven-foot stone sphere. He removed all his mana from the stone and grabbed it by the sides, throwing it as high as he could.

He walked until he was right under the rock, before turning the vines and branches into a shield. It was a kite shield, but it was much thinner than the glowing willow shield. The stone hit the shield hard and broke, leaving a small dent that quickly healed.

"The glowing willow shield withstood that same test without suffering a single scratch. As expected, my defense dropped a little." Treevor said. "Time for the last test."

Treevor ran around the hole before stopping and bending his knees, jumping as high as he could. Surprisingly, the wood twisted into a spiral in his legs acted like a spring and propelled him whenever he ran or jumped.

"That's amazing. I think out of all the changes, attack speed and movement speed have increased the most." Treevor didn't test his regeneration, because he already knew his answer.

Darkness healed the undead as well as light healed the living, after all.

"Made you more deadly, didn't it?" Athos spoke as he approached him, realizing that the tests were over.

"That, exactly." Treevor agreed with him. If glowing willow was a healing tank, corrupted willow was a fast attacker that also healed.

## Chapter 106 Leaving the city

Things went pretty fast from there. Treevor drained all the land around the city and villages, as well as some of the land leading to the big cities. Treevor spent a day and a half enchanting the corrupt willow, using corrupt and darkness runes.

When he was finally finished, Athos delivered all the corrupted swords into his hands, causing him to fall into deep despair. Athos had not stood still in the meantime and successfully corrupted all weapons.

After another day of pure torture – I mean, runesmith – they were finally ready to go.

All the undead gathered in front of the gates, all the carriages and wagons lined up. The skeletons were armed with all the best items the city had to offer, the magic weapons that Treevor enchanted distributed among the army's mana users, but the best was left with the leaders of course.

Athos was sitting on top of one of the carriages in the middle of the army, just waiting for something. The entire army was waiting for his cue to march, but he was patiently waiting for something. As if he couldn't wait any longer, Sevenus approached him on horseback and asked respectfully.



“My lord, is there something preventing us from leaving? Is there something we still need to do?” Sevenus asked.

“The dawn.” Athos replied as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

“Dawn? But why?” Sevenus remained confused.

“Well, since it’s an army leaving, I thought having the right weather was important. An hour or two won’t make a big difference since we’re marching without a break. So why not wait a while and leave with the sun rising. Doesn’t it create an epic mood?” Athos was serious.

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Sevenus and all the leaders started laughing in exasperation, realizing it was just a whim of Athos. As soon as the sun began to appear on the horizon, Athos got up and ordered the march to begin.

The skeleton horses and cattle neighed and pulled the carts, at the same time the skeletons began to walk neatly. The leaders were scattered throughout the army, with Treevor in the rear, as he would be seen from a distance because of his size.

The hive hawks, like the other skeleton birds, were flying ahead of the army, looking for monsters or other humans. The Platinum Fist Fortress was close to a mountain range and there were metal mines close to the fortress.

There were numerous traders who visited the fortress and the caravans carrying metals moved regardless of the seasons. It would be a big problem if they ran into a caravan returning from the fortress and they were discovered.

Before the gang blockade the city of Faltra served as a resting point between the fortress and the big city of Shiima, but it had been 5 years since that changed and it is unlikely that a caravan would move towards the city, but better be prepared.

The army marched day and night without stopping, killing the monsters and animals that the skeleton birds encountered. It was mostly gray wolves and wild boar, but there was a single aurora frog. The animals were just common deer.

Treevor still took short breaks every few minutes to use the world pillage, but with his movement speed it was easy for him to catch up to the army.

Athos stopped the army after 5 days of march, 12 hours’ journey from the fortress, to make sure that they would not be seen by lookouts or merchant caravans. He decided to do an investigation with a small group of elites to form a plan of attack.

Athos, Treevor, Emilia and Caio advanced as soon as it got dark, taking care not to be discovered. Treevor was in his real body instead of the corrupted willow, as a 5 meter titan would not be very stealthy. A small group of hive hawks followed them on the orders of Athos.

They approached the fortress before Treevor stopped them.

“There’s a large-scale spell ahead. If we go any further than that, it’s possible we’ll be discovered.” Treevor spoke. Large cities or strongholds had large-scale spells that could be activated in emergencies, such as protective barriers, or others that were always active, such as surveillance spells.

These spells were enchanted on objects in the same way as runesmith, only on a much larger scale. Tens or even hundreds of mages would enchant one or several items at the same time, creating effects that would be impossible to recreate alone, no matter how strong a mage is.

It required a lot of energy, so hundreds of magic stones were needed to maintain them. Stronghold mages also used items that naturally drew world energy like magic tree branches to power large-scale spells, but they were simply insufficient.

It was nearly impossible to detect a large-scale spell while they were deactivated, and even those that were active permanently active would be impossible to detect with common abilities like mana vision or sensory field.

Treevor was only able to detect it because of his plant side’s mystical senses.

“Let’s stop here and use the hive hawks to investigate.” Athos spoke, ceding command of one of the hive hawks to each of them, before ordering them to fly as high as they could. His black bones would be nearly invisible in the darkness of the night and mana vision wouldn’t go that far.

“Isn’t that bigger than Faltra already?” Athos asked shocked. The fortress in front of her was such an incredible sight. The fortress was surrounded by two walls, one internal and one external, made of stone over 15 meters high. ballistae and catapults were just behind the walls, soldiers watching and ready to use them in case of threat.

There was a camp of tents and stone buildings being built between the inner and outer walls.

Night had fallen, but the fortress was still active. Athos could see what appeared to be an open-air market, warehouses, training areas and garrisons where soldiers could rest. The inner wall was directly connected with the fortress wall, which occupied the center of the “city”.

“Does anyone have any ideas on how to break into this place?” Athos asked after watching for some time, trying to find gaps in the defense that he could exploit, but finding none.

“Invading from the front is impossible. The catapults and ballistae would kill thousands of skeletons before we reached the wall and the barrier would block us long enough for archers and mages to kill a few thousand more. Even if the boss and I fired our spells early on until we ran out of mana, it would still give them more than enough time to get organized.” Treevor spoke as he crossed his arms, considering the attack to be madness.

“I have to agree. I think it’s best to just ignore them and move on.” Emilia suggested again.

“Hey Treevor, I have a question. Do you know how the detection spell works?” Athos asked, ignoring Emilia’s suggestion. He got an idea when he saw through the hive hawks, a sparrow flying up to the keep and nothing happening. It was likely that the spell would ignore small animals or an alarm would sound whenever a bird flew over the keep.

"I can only feel it approximately, but the spell seems to expand around the wall in a spherical shape." Treevor explained without understanding Athos' idea.

"Can this surveillance spell detect teleportation?" Athos asked, placing his hand on his chest and feeling the lower teleportation crystal, the one that belonged to Emilia. He had brought it with him in case he needed to flee in an emergency.

"That's unlikely, master. The teleportation crystals cannot be detected by anything except items purposely made to detect the energy coming from the crystals. It's a huge and unnecessary investment in a fortress designed to resist demihumans, a race underdeveloped." Emilia spoke.

"In that case, i don't have to wait any longer. We're going to invade today." Athos said before calling all the hive hawks back. "Treevor, I want you to go back to where the army is and lead the attack. I will use teleportation crystals to invade with the team that is already here. We will hide and cause chaos at the moment of the attack."

"This is crazy. It's going to take at least a day to get there and back, how are you going to hide for so long?" Treevor asked worriedly. If Athos were discovered and killed, he had no way of knowing whether he would be freed or whether he would die for good.

"It will be difficult, but in a fortress this size it's not impossible. We can hide in warehouses and move between buildings to avoid being seen." Athos shrugged.

"Haah... do what you want. But if I start the attack and you don't show up, I'll order the retreat and run away without looking back, understand?" Treevor spoke and waited for Athos to nod his head before starting to run.

"Well, shall we invade then?" Athos spoke and one of the hive hawks immediately began to fly. He flew high, beyond what the patrol on the walls could see and entered the detection radius without any problems, before flying towards the training area which was empty in the middle of the night.

The hive hawk flew low until it found an empty building and entered. He informed Athos that he was alone and the latter immediately looked through his eyes.

"You two, approach me." Athos ordered. He transferred mana to the teleport crystal until it was full, before a black sphere surrounded its surroundings.

With a strong wind, the black sphere appeared inside the building.

Chapter 107 Information collection

"Check your surroundings." Athos ordered as soon as they arrived. Emilia and Caio checked the windows for any enemies, but there was no one nearby.

"There is no one in sight, master." Emilia informed.

"Fine. Caio, get rid of the dirt that came with us when we teleported." Athos spoke as he looked around the building to try to identify what it was used for. There were straw dolls and spears with the ends covered, so it must be a room with training equipment.

Gaius took a black wand from the pocket of his cloak and made the earth slip through the wooden planks on the floor. The wand was made of glowing willow wood and replaced the spellcasting ring that Caio lost in the battle with Treevor

The spells the skeleton mages cast were even stronger now, as the wand drew corrupt world energy.

“You two are the infiltration experts here. What should we do now?” Athos asked bluntly.

“The priority is to keep a low profile while we try to look for a little-visited location. We can also take advantage of being here to find strategic locations to destroy when the attack starts, but that would be risky.” Emilia began to explain.

“Unlike ordinary spies, we cannot disguise ourselves among the crowd to gather information and we only have one day before the attack, so I suggest killing a soldier without anyone noticing and questioning him. The disappearance of a single soldier will not be realized until it’s too late.” Caio suggested, his almost perfect diction.

Athos had slightly reorganized the army’s chain of command. Caio now held the position of Sevenus.

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“Sounds like a good idea to me, but we can’t move much without being discovered and most soldiers move in groups to patrol.” Athos spoke.

“It won’t be a problem. We can look for a soldier who isn’t on duty. The only reasons traders come to this distant stronghold are the metal mines or selling their wares to soldiers who have no form of entertainment. The only people buying in the markets were men remember?” Emilia spoke, making Athos scratch his head in shame.

He hadn’t noticed these small details and only saw the general structure of the fortress and defensive weapons.

“I saw what looked like a makeshift brothel from above. It was far from the market for obvious reasons, so ambushing one of them without being seen should be simple.” Emilia spoke, remembering some tents erected far from the market with women in front. A few men who were clearly drunk from the way they walked called out to one of the women and entered the tents.

‘It seems that regardless of where I am, the answer is always in brothels.’ Athos thought, but kept the thought to himself.

“I’ll leave the capture of a soldier to you, bring me results.” Athos ordered and Emilia nodded.

“You can count on me, master.” Emilia said.

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Emilia and Caio left as Athos ordered, blending their presence with their surroundings as they moved along dimly lit paths, avoiding the crowd. They approached the makeshift brothel slowly and waited for someone to come out.

‘I find this mission very reckless.’ Caio spoke suddenly through the mental link between them.

'What are you talking about?' Emilia asked confused.

'We just invaded without planning or preparation. Our master just came up with a plan on the spot and invaded. Even now we are just improvising.' Caio complained about his master's imprudence. He wasn't worried about himself, but about his master putting himself in these dangers.

This feeling of concern was conveyed in its entirety to Emilia and she nodded happily. 'I understand how you feel, but there's not much we can do. Our master is reckless and doesn't care about his own safety. It's up to us, your servants, to make sure your crazy plans work.'

'I think you're right.' Caio replied and the conversation ended there. They waited in silence for approximately 10 minutes before a couple of drunk men emerged from the tents with a goofy grin on their faces.

'Here they come.' Emilia spoke. The two men went into an empty alley and started pissing as they talked.

"Dude, do you know how long the traveling brothel is going to be at the keep? It's been months since I had this fun and I still have a lot accumulated. Serving in the keep pays well, but it's useless because I don't have anything to spend." One of the men spoke with a vulgar smile on his face.

"They will stay in the keep for a while longer. I don't know all the details, but the general has given an order and all merchants are prohibited from leaving until an inspection is made." The second man replied.

"Better for me then. I-" The first man was about to make another dirty joke, but bony hands grabbed his head from behind and twisted his neck. So did his friend a second later and they fell to the ground.

'You could have let him talk a little longer. He gave some very useful information." Caio spoke as he transformed the corpse into a skeleton.

'He was just going to tell another stupid joke. We can get all the information we want later. Now let's go back.' Emilia replied while doing the same.

'Did you take two? Great, get back to my position. Athos spoke in their minds, feeling the life force of the new skeletons. Emilia, Caio and two new skeletons were reunited with Athos.

"It's a pleasure to meet you. I need you to tell me everything you know about the inner workings of the fortress." Athos spoke as soon as the skeleton soldiers entered the building and Caio made sure no one followed them.

The skeletons nodded, but their bodies trembled slightly as their minds tried to resist.

"I'll get you something so you can communicate, wait a minute." Athos spoke and left the building for a few minutes. When he returned, Athos was carrying sheets of paper and a quill.

"Caio, I need some dirt here." Athos asked and Caio obeyed, conjuring a small ball of dirt on the floor.

Athos soiled the tip of the quill in the dirt and handed it to one of the skeletons. "Here, use this to answer my questions."

The skeleton nodded and picked up the quill and papers.

"Where do court mages live? I doubt they stay at the garrisons with the rest of the soldiers." Athos asked.

"In the fortress, along with the army officers and the general." That's what the skeleton wrote.

"Where do they keep their weapons and equipment?"

"In the armory, near the fortress." The skeleton pointed to a large building outside the inner walls. It was a simple building that didn't stand out, so Athos had ignored it as he looked through the hawk eyes.

"What about alchemical items? Where do they keep them?" Athos asked.

"Inside the fortress. It's dangerous to leave them in very exposed places, so the general keeps them under surveillance, but I don't know where exactly." The skeleton replied.

"Tch, couldn't it be a little more difficult? Maybe a dragon to guard the place?" Athos asked sarcastically. Emilia and Caio sighed, knowing that Athos would decide to invade the fortress next.

"Is there an underground sewer here?" Athos asked.

"Yes, but all entrances are inside the fortress." The skeleton wrote.

"That won't be a problem. There is an enchanted item generating a great spell in this fortress. Do you know where it is?" Athos asked, but he already imagined the answer.

"I don't know. I only know that a mana barrier activates when the fortress is under attack." The skeleton replied.

"I see. One last thing, where is the nearest bathroom?" Athos asked and the skeleton pointed to a small solitary room among the small buildings in the training area.

The small group approached the bathroom and Athos opened the door.

"Hey, it's busy- what the fuck!" A man was shitting inside and yelled annoyed at the intrusion, before realizing the intruder's identity.

Athos said nothing and just strangled the man to make sure he didn't scream for help. The man struggled with his pants down, but Athos broke his neck and spared him further embarrassment. Athos turned him into a skeleton and touched his shoulder in solidarity, feeling pity for the first time since becoming an undead.

"I promise I won't tell anyone how humiliating your death was." Athos spoke, but he didn't have much confidence in keeping his promise. The skeleton moved out of the way and Caio took a step forward.

The bathroom was just a dirt hole in the floor, so it was simple for Caio to dig a hole big enough for a skeleton to get through. The sewers were a little different from the sewers in Faltra. There was 5 meters of earth between the surface and the sewer, with what looked like cement forming the walls and roof of the sewer.

Caio used earth magic to close the path after they descended, erasing their tracks. The land corrupted by his magic would return to normal after half an hour, so there would be no problems.

"Emilia, Caio, I want you two to find the way to the keep. I'll stick around and prepare the distraction for when Treevor arrives. Let me know when you find the entrance." Athos smiled at them. The sewer had the same musty smell as the city of Faltra, so there would also be slimes here.

## Chapter 108 Invading

Slime acid would be an awesome weapon. "I want to cause as much death and chaos as I can before the army arrives."

'Let's see if there's anyone around here.' Athos improved his hearing and focused on the tunnels, but apart from Emilia and Caio's footsteps, there was nothing else. Obviously, Athos couldn't cover the entire sewer with his hearing alone, but at least there was no one around.

"Skeletons stamp their feet or do anything that generates vibrations on the floor. I want as many slimes as possible." Athos ordered and the skeletons obeyed. The slimes slowly crept towards them, but Athos released a pulse of darkness that dissolved them in a puddle of acid.

"Fine. Let's keep moving and gathering more slimes here. Be careful where you step, or you might lose your feet." Athos spoke as he moved.

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'Haah... our master's recklessness knows no bounds.' Caio complained through the mind link as he ran through the sewers without making a sound thanks to his ability of silent footsteps, while sharpening his hearing. The fortress's sewers looked like a labyrinth, so he ran the risk of encountering enemies at every turn.

'Look on the bright side, we are doing what we were trained to do. Invading strongholds with magical defenses to assassinate someone is our specialty after all.' Emilia replied, scratching the wall to her left with a dagger to mark that they've already passed this way.

They kept moving like this for about 20 minutes when they finally found the right spot. Emilia hid in a corner and peeked in, seeing a group of 15 soldiers guarding a ladder attached to the wall that led to a hatch.

The soldiers were at the end of a corridor, so it would be impossible to approach them without being seen. The eyes of some of the soldiers sometimes glowed with mana, so even using abilities to blend their presence with their surroundings would be pointless.

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'I take the ones on the right and you take the ones on the left?' Caio asked, but Emilia shook her head.

'Only three of them use mana, the others just stare into the dark without seeing anything. If we kill the mana users, everyone else will drop in seconds. But for that, I need you to seal the trapdoor with earth magic so that the sound doesn't leak and they don't call for help.' Emilia spoke.

'Understood.' Caio nodded and used earth magic to sink to the ground. He dropped low enough for the natural energy of the ground to cover him, and swam across the land until he was behind the soldiers. Caio conjured a thin layer of stone that sealed the openings in the hatch and stopped the sound from leaking out.

"Hmm?" One of the soldiers heard the sound of earth moving and looked up, only for a ball of mud to land on his face and solidify again. He fell backwards as he tried to remove the stone in his face, but she held on tightly.

"What happened??" The soldiers turned in panic and tried to help the thrashing soldier on the floor, turning away from the dark hallway.

Emilia took advantage of the gap and ran at maximum speed, reaching the soldiers in less than 3 seconds. She stabbed the mana users in the back of the head first, eliminating the only threat in her eyes.

One of them managed to react in time and blocked his dagger, but a second blow hit his unprotected armpit and a third pierced his right eye all the way to the brain, killing him instantly.

The surrounding soldiers panicked and tried to attack the black skeleton, but black stone spikes pierced its legs and immobilized it in place. A second volley of spikes pierced the soldiers' abdomen or chest.

"I could have killed them all and saved their mana, you know?" Emilia exclaimed aloud, now that she didn't have to worry about being discovered.

"It doesn't cost much mana anyway, so don't worry about it. But won't it be a problem to kill them all? One or two soldiers disappearing won't be a problem, an entire unit is another story." Caio asked as he climbed out of the walls and conjured up the stone thorns.

The soldiers fell to the ground abruptly and groaned in pain. Emilia stabbed them in the heart and killed them all, before turning them into the undead.

"Do you really think our master is waiting for the army to arrive? If he only wanted to sabotage the fortress's defenses, he would have stayed in hiding until tomorrow night, when the army was approaching. Besides, he said it himself, didn't he? cause as many deaths as possible before the army arrives."

"But we will be killed if that happens." Caio complained.

"Our master still has the teleportation crystal. We can buy him time to flee at the cost of our own lives, so let's just worry about fulfilling our mission." Emilia said, ending the discussion.

'Master, we have found the entrance to the fortress, should we invade immediately or wait for you?' Emilia asked through the mental link.

'It will take a while for me to finish here, so I want you to invade the fortress without me. You have two goals: to find the place where the alchemical items are kept and where the large-scale spells are imbued.'

'As soon as you find them let me know, but don't attack. I will ignite the acid and create an acid cloud that will move to the surface, causing chaos and drawing their attention to me. Use the opportunity to



explode alchemical items and destroy the large-scale spells.' He spoke and Emilia nodded in confirmation. Athos and the other skeletons had already collected 1/3 of the slimes from the sewer and turned them into puddles of acid.

The floor was completely covered in acid to the point that Athos had to conjure corrupt platforms to move without losing his feet. Luckily, the slime acid didn't spread like a liquid and looked more like a jelly, so Athos had no problem attracting slimes into puddles and destroying them one on top of the other.

'Understood, master.' Emilia answered and Caio opened the trapdoor slightly and looked around, making sure they were alone. The trapdoor was at the back of the fortress and the place was empty.

Emilia and Caio emerged from the hatch, before Emilia turned to one of the skeleton soldiers behind him. "Guide me to where the officers' quarters are. Not the high-ranking soldiers or wizards, but those civilian officers who handle the paperwork." Emilia asked.

Skeletons could not speak, so one of them would guide him while all the others would gather with Athos. Emilia, Caio and the soldier skeleton invaded the fortress, walking through the corridors glued to the wall, hiding from the soldiers' patrol.

The fortress had several floors, but luckily, the officers' quarters were on the third floor, along with the employees who took care of the maintenance of the fortress, while the first was used for important meetings. Court mages and high-ranking officials sat at the top of the fortress.

Soldiers were patrolling the corridors on the third floor, so they were forced to wait patiently for the patrol to turn the corner before continuing. Rooms were divided by gender, with women closer to the stairs and men at the end of the hallway.

Emilia broke the lock of one of the random rooms and found two bunks on the left and right. There was a large closet in the bedroom and a desk with an unlit candle on top.

"Who's there?" a woman in pajamas asked in a sleepy voice, hearing the door open. She glanced at the door as she tried to get her glasses.

Emilia and Caio advanced as soon as they heard the voice, conjuring a fog of darkness that quickly flooded the room. There was no light in the room, so the nearsighted woman didn't see the fog of darkness until she reached the edge of the bed, when it was too late.

Darkness rotted the woman's skin and she tried to scream, but a dagger hand hit her forehead and killed her. The other women in the room woke up from the sudden pain, but Caio and the other skeleton killed them.

The black mist was actually the spell to raise undead en masse and it immediately seeped into their bodies, turning them into skeletons.

"The alchemical items and location where the large-scale spells are engraved, do you know where it is?" Caio asked, while Emilia watched the door. The woman nodded in agreement.

"Where it is?"

The woman opened one of the desk drawers and took out paper before writing something on it and handing it to Caio.

“The alchemical items are in a storage ring that the general uses, while the full-scale spell is imbued on the outer walls, but there is a control room at the top of the keep, just below the general’s office.” It was what was written on the paper.

Caio was surprised by the details, but understood why when he noticed that the skeleton wasn’t shaking. It is likely that the woman was not resisting out of sheer fear or confusion. Whatever the reason, Caio could only sigh at the information.

‘You heard. What should we do now?’ Caio asked Emilia.

‘We will inform our master, just as he ordered us.’ Emilia responded before contacting Athos and explaining what they discovered.

Athos was silent for some time as he thought about what to do. ‘Which layer is the general in?’ he asked after some time.

Emilia turned to the woman, but the one who answered was the skeleton they had killed in the sewer. He raised 7 fingers to him, making Emilia and Caio sigh. ‘7th layer, sir.’

‘What are the chances of you and Caio killing someone of that level?’ Athos asked another question.

‘Low, sir. Our layers may be close, but the difference in equipment will be colossal.’ Emilia replied, looking at her own daggers. They were magic daggers made of corrupted willow, but they were the only decent equipment she had.

## Chapter 109 Acid cloud

The general on the other hand must be wearing magic items from head to toe. Also, the noise of the fight would attract several soldiers and the mages that would be nearby.

‘I understand. Let’s give up the alchemical items and focus on the control room. Can you turn it off?’ Athos asked and this time Emilia nodded in agreement.

‘Yes, that won’t be a problem.’ Emilia replied.

‘Excellent. I’m more than halfway through here, so in less than an hour we’ll have a distraction. Stay hidden until then.’ Athos said.

‘Master, I believe the acid cloud will only alert them. It’s better to use the confusion generated by the acid cloud to escape, instead.’ Emilia suggested.

‘You are sure?’ Athos asked disappointed, but Emilia was firm in her decision.

‘Yes Master. I have confidence in infiltrating the control room and destroying it, but escaping after that is a different story. If I’m surrounded by soldiers and the mages interfere, it’s going to be hard to get away. The chaos generated by the acid cloud is what I need in.’ Emilia spoke sincerely.

She already had an idea of how to break into the control room, but the escape was a different story.

‘OK. Wait a little longer and I’ll be ready.’ Athos spoke before ending the communication.

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Approximately an hour passed and Athos got in touch again saying he was ready. In front of him, there was a mountain of slime that covered almost the entire passage. The skeleton soldiers were right behind him, awaiting his orders.

Emília and Caio didn’t stay still during that last hour. They invaded every room within the floor and killed every employee while they slept, before turning them into the undead.

The entire floor was full of undead inside the rooms just waiting for Emilia’s orders.

The two moved while hiding their presence, moving slowly thanks to the guards going up and down the stairs. When they finally reached the control room floor, they could only sigh in anger.

The general’s office was at the end of the hall, and two robed men stood on either side of the door. Emilia had no way of knowing what layer they were on, but two mages wouldn’t be easy to deal with without making any noise.

The distance between them was also long and the torches on the wall at regular intervals did not allow them to move in the darkness.

‘Any idea what to do?’ Caio asked.

‘...’ Emilia didn’t respond immediately, looking at the mages and around. The wizards were inattentive and bored, leaning against the wall as they spoke, but she was too far away to understand what they were saying. The most important part was that their wands were in their belts, so they wouldn’t have any spells ready.

The problem would be magic items with no casting time. Emilia had no way of confirming whether there were magic items or not, but it was likely that at least her cloak was.

After some thought, Emilia came to a simple conclusion. ‘Caio, we have no choice but to invade hard. We’re going to run at full speed and while I throw a smokescreen to make it difficult for them to see, then I kill the one on the left and you kill the one on the right. Any question?’

‘I could use earth magic to block the entire passage, but I would need to use the floor or walls.’ Caio spoke, but Emilia had a different idea.

‘Earth magic will cause tremors throughout the fortress and alert the soldiers. Use only corrupt magic and darkness.’ Emilia warned as she took out her wand and began to cast her spells. Caio did the same and as soon as they were both ready, they left the corner and ran at full speed, using the acceleration skill.

“WHAA-” The mages were taken by surprise and only saw two shadows moving through the dark, their eyes unable to follow the skeletons’ fast movements. Their army-trained bodies swung into action at that moment and drew their wands by instinct, at the same time activating the army cloak enchantment and forming a barrier of mana around them.

Caio was the first to attack, conjuring three condensed corrupted mana spears, firing one at each enemy and a last at the door behind them. Emilia was faster and conjured a smokescreen made of darkness in front of her, obscuring her and Caio.

The mages didn't have much time to think and one of them just launched magic missiles while the other launched fire arrows, but both attacks missed their targets as Emilia and Caio could still see in the black smoke, easily dodging the attacks.

Corrupted mana spears pierced the barriers and flew precisely to the mages' foreheads, but they activated abilities to boost their reflexes and dodged at the last second. Caio detonated the spears of darkness, spreading darkness within the barrier and suffocating the mages. The last spear hit the door, but the door enchanted resisted, leaving only a deep dent.

They tried to move out of the darkness, but the barrier surrounded the cloak perfectly. With no other choice, the mages deactivated the barrier and tried to get away, but Caio and Emilia caught up with them at that moment.

Gaius impaled one of them in the stomach with his sword while Emilia stabbed the other in the heart.

"Argh!" The mage with the punctured stomach screamed in pain, but Caio twisted his sword and slashed to the right, ripping half of the mage's abdomen. The man fell to the ground and agonized for a few more seconds, but Caio focus was already on something else.

"Shit!" He cursed angrily. From the floor below him, Caio could hear the sound of metal boots hitting the ground quickly, running hurriedly after hearing the scream of pain.

"Let's speed." Emilia said. 'Leave the rooms as I ordered earlier.'

The skeletons of the civilian officers came out of their rooms at the same time, almost causing a heart attack in the soldiers hovering around the place. The skeletons ignored the soldiers and ran into the hallways, quickly taking over.

Soldiers trying to go up or down were surprised by the skeletons and stopped halfway.

"Undead! It's an undead attack!" One of the soldiers screamed at the top of his lungs, but it was the last thing he did.

All the skeletons did Emilia's orders and detonated their cores at the same time, flooding the stairs in a thick fog of darkness. The soldiers nearby were immediately suffocated by the darkness as those farther away tried to flee, but mist of darkness spread and seeped through the floors.

'That should buy us some time.' Emilia thought before communicating with Athos. 'Master, you can release the acid cloud now.'

'Finally.' Athos smiled inside the sewers, taking only seconds to conjure up a small tornado of hot air. The heat warmed the slime and turned it into a gas, which the tornado guided through the small passage that led to the training area bathroom.

"Hive hawks, you too. Athos ordered and the hawks at different points in the sewer nodded in agreement. Athos felt that gathering all the remaining acid in one place would be inefficient, so he left

the rest in strategic locations, such as in the market bathrooms, in the garrison where the soldiers slept, or in the armory.

Athos didn't know where these points were by the sewers, but the skeleton soldiers that Gaius and Emilia killed did.

Athos conjured another tornado of hot air and split it between the four hive hawks that came with them when they teleported, letting the hawks feed the spell with their own mana.

Acid gas surged up through the restrooms, killing one hapless man who was using the restroom at the time, before corroding the wooden cabin and starting to spread across the market. The restrooms were a little far from the busy area due to bad smell and hygiene, but the hissing noise when the acid began to corrode one of the stalls caught people's attention.

The ruckus began as merchants tried to back away in fear and off-duty soldiers went into alert mode, trying to steer the merchants in an orderly fashion away from the acid cloud.

A second acid cloud appeared in the opposite direction, forcing the fleeing soldiers and traders to split left and right to avoid being hit.

The same thing was happening in the garrison where the soldiers were, but the result here was far worse. The soldiers were sleeping at the time and the acid was only noticed when the door to the first room was corroded. The rooms for soldiers in the garrisons were large dormitories, so several soldiers were trapped at once.

The soldiers were scared, but their military training spoke louder and they tried to block or delay the acid with the lockers and bunks while yelling to alert others, but the gaseous acid ignored the furniture and spread across the room. Similar scenes took place throughout the garrison.

The situation in the arsenal was also bad, but in a different way. With the exception of the few soldiers guarding outside, there was no one here. The acid spread unhindered, destroying all weapons and armor stored here. It took a few minutes for the soldiers outside to notice the acid, but more than 1/3 of the weapons were already unusable.

The acid cloud in the training area was the most harmless, but it spread in a random direction and there was no way to predict where it would go. An alarm began to sound throughout the fortress, but with the exception of the soldiers guarding the wall, everyone was already busy trying to save their own lives.

'That should buy us some time.' Emilia thought and started to destroy the magic door. The door appeared to have a sensor that identified the mana signature of an individual, most likely the general himself, so she would have to force her way in here.

She injected corrupted mana and tried to contaminate the door. The door runes tried to reject the strange energy, but Emilia kept injecting corrupted mana until the runes exploded, destroying the door.

With a kick, the enchanted door fell back and Emilia finally entered the control room.

Chapter 110 Escape

The control room was much smaller than Emilia had expected. It was just a 10 square meter room, with a stone plinth in the center. There was a mana sensor just like the one on the door, but Emilia ignored it and tried to corrupt the pedestal, but it was an arduous task.

The runes on the pedestal were connected to the runes around the wall, so there was simply too much energy to corrupt. Emilia tried to move the entry point to the top of the pedestal, just as she heard Treevor explain to Athos, but it was in vain.

The pedestal was not only used to control large-scale spells, but also to deposit magic stones to feed the runes. The enchantment on the pedestal absorbed Emilia's corrupted mana and spread it across the walls evenly, rendering the process useless. It was like pouring a bucket of black paint into the ocean.

"Well, if it's not going to be the easy way, let's try to be a little rougher!" Emilia screamed before pointing her wand at the top of the pedestal and conjuring a corrupted mana spear. The spear hit the top of the pedestal and turned like a drill, sending spark through the air.

As expected, the runesmiths who made the enchanted pedestal improved its overall toughness, but Emilia's constant attack caused cracks across its surface and caused the runes to flicker erratically.

Stone splinters began to fly as the pedestal runes crumbled. The pedestal was finally broken and the runes controlling the barrier were lost forever.

'The barriers and detection spells are still standing, but without the control room to power it and activate the barrier, it's just very sturdy stone walls. Our mission here is accomplished.' Emilia thought, before running out of the control room.

"Finished?" Caio asked outside, peering intently at the dark fog in the hallway, along with his new skeleton mages.

"Yes, we can go now-" The ceiling collapsed under their heads, interrupting Emilia. The four of them jumped back in reflex, the ceiling stones falling right where they were.

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A man in silver armor and carrying a spear of the same color descended, before immediately attacking Caio. The spear's blade was forked and aimed precisely at Caio neck, but he blocked with wooden sword precisely between the forked blades, stopping the attack inches from his neck.

Even successfully blocking the attack, the enemy's sheer brute force pushed Caio until he hit his back against the wall. Caio was already using skills to improve his physique, but the enemy was doing the same and he was clearly superior.

Emilia jumped up and tried to stab the unknown enemy at the base of the neck, but the enemy's armor flashed and a shield of light appeared on its back. The dagger opened a crack in the shield of light, but it failed to penetrate.

Still, Emilia smiled inwardly and inserted her wand into the crack, conjuring up a smokescreen of darkness. Caio took advantage of the moment when the enemy's vision was impaired to kick his knee and throw him off balance. The kick was imbued with the heavy strike skill and forced him to kneel despite his silver armor.

“Your pests!” The enemy screamed angrily, swinging his spear and flinging Caio away. His spear flashed and he swung it over his head, scattering the smokescreen. He glared at Emilia and Caio, but the attack came from the opposite direction.

One of the mage skeletons conjured a ten-foot fireball while the other fed it with pure mana, increasing both the intensity of the flames and its explosive power.

The fireball flew towards the enemy’s back, but the latter just reversed the spear and pierced the fireball without turning around. The fireball exploded in his back, but the enemy didn’t even blink.

“General!” Mages descended from the hole in the ceiling and began to cast spells against Emilia and Caio.

‘Remember what I said about earth magic? It’s time to use.’ Emilia spoke through the mental link. His mana was already below half after so many spells, so the only choice left was to flee.

‘Working on it.’ Caio had taken his wand the moment the general sent him flying, certain that it would be impossible to kill him with his current power. The stone turned black and rose like a wall, blocking the general and his mages.

“They won’t run away!” General Astrus Mifar yelled, hurling his spear like a javelin and shattering the earthen wall, before continuing to fly and slashing into the wall. With a flick of his hand, the spear flew back and the general grabbed it again. “Split up and go after them!”

The general was the first to run, but he headed towards the mist of darkness on the stairs instead of down the hole. In his head, the hole in the ground was just a feint and the skeletons fled into the dark fog where humans couldn’t chase them. The general even sent some mages downstairs, just in case.

The mage skeletons left behind did not try to fight like the mages, but entered the control room and detonated the cores themselves. They were only on the first layer and Caio considered them expendable, so he preferred to further damage the control room to make sure it would be unusable.

The general turned the corner, but black fog had spread from the stairs and invaded the corridors. Court mages with an affinity for light were on the upper floor and managed to contain the advance of the black fog, but it spread unchecked through the lower floors of the fortress. The energy released by over 100 cores was by no means small, after all.

“Shit, don’t get in the way!” The general shouted and hurled his spear into the mist. The spear glowed white, dispelling the darkness as it passed and clearing the way for the general.

The spear quickly returned to his hand and the general ran until he reached the stairs and descended, using the armor’s enchantment to protect himself.

The general was furious at the moment, but it was with himself. The day before, he had received a call from the country, informing him of a mage attack on the small town of Faltra. The reason was still unknown, but apparently a mage drove part of the city mad and killed the noble who ruled it, causing immense damage in the process.

The wizard’s whereabouts were still unknown and it took the messenger about two weeks to reach the nearest large city, so it was possible that the wizard had infiltrated the fortress disguised as a merchant.

The general thought it unlikely that the mage would come to the fortress, but nodded and ordered the merchants to be kept in the fortress until they were verified. In his mind, it was inconceivable that someone would infiltrate the fortress without him knowing.

Large-scale spells used the element of air to detect anything around the wall within a radius of up to 1 kilometer and the element of earth to detect underground. Anything passing through would be detected, even small birds were detected, just ignored.

Even breaking in with a teleport crystal was useless. The teleportation crystals created dimensional corridors where the mage was and where he thought, but one of the control room enchantments would detect the dimensional corridor and forcibly change its coordinates to the outside of the walls, where the soldiers would be ready to deal with the intruder.

The only reason Athos was able to successfully infiltrate was that teleportation using the corrupted mana tore through space instead of creating a stable corridor, so the full-scale spell didn't detect it.

The general berated himself for being careless and swore to capture the mage who was probably on the run now. The information didn't say anything about him being a necromancer, but he would have been able to get all the answers he needed after capturing him.

As he descended, Emilia and Caio climbed the stairs to the upper floors of the fortress. They knew that the general would pursue them, so the priority now was to lose him.

'Master, did you successfully escape?' Emilia asked for the mental link, hoping inwardly not to hear an answer. If Athos had already fled he would already be out of reach.

'I'm working on it. The slime acid has run out and I cast a drill made of corruption to dig a way out, but the soldiers on the wall noticed me and tried to shoot arrows from the ballista installed on the wall.' Athos replied calmly, despite his precarious situation.

He was currently in mid-air, jumping onto air platforms to avoid the countless arrows flying towards him. That would have been impossible while he was alive because of his weight, but his magic had improved and his weight had dropped considerably, so it was a simple task now. The other skeletons in the sewers were destroyed in the first volley of arrows, so Athos had only the hawks hive around him now.

'I'll need the teleportation crystal to be able to escape, can you send one of the hive hawks to take you to the top of the fortress?' Emilia asked.

"No problem, he's on his way. Athos spoke as he handed the teleport crystal to one of the hawks and watched him fly towards the fortress.