

Legion lich 131

Chapter 131 Intrigues

'Yeah. The earth mages are a little weak in mana, but the rest is ready.' Athos replied. With the exception of the skeletons on the two walls guarding the enemies, everything else had funneled into or around the fortress.

The flower buds on her shoulders began to bloom as they absorbed the surrounding darkness so fast that her surroundings glowed for a second. Next, Treevor mixed a large amount of corrupted world energy that his yggdrasil arm attracted and mixed with the darkness, before touching the pedestal and injecting it all at once.

The entire room began to glow with a dark light as the runes absorbed its energy like a bottomless bucket. Treevor kept pouring out all of his mana until his core was empty, before stepping out and telling the next one to come in.

Athos entered shortly thereafter and poured all the mana from his core and body before leaving. All the skeletons kept doing this for hours, as it was the only way to feed the large-scale spells. Comfort mana was injected, energy flowed between the death mithril plates and the air between the plates was sucked out and the vacuum held them together.

A dark barrier began to slowly rise, blocking most of the sunlight and making the interior of the fortress darken like night. The barrier closed in a perfect dome before disappearing and the light returning to normal, but all the skeletons knew it could be activated at any moment.

"It's done?" Athos asked looking out of one of the fortress windows. He was constantly drawing corrupt world energy to recover and had already injected energy three more times into the pedestal.

"We've barely started. The only active enchantment at the moment is the barrier, the other three are missing so we'll need a few more rounds to fill the enchantments completely." Treevor said with a tired smile. Its wooden body looked withered and its leaves droughts.

"Haah... work never ends." Athos thought in defeat, his core had recharged so he went to power the spells once more.

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"What the hell was that?" A soldier on horseback asked in a daze, looking at the fortress in the distance. He was using a spyglass to observe the fortress in the distance and noticed the barrier rising. The soldier was one of the scouts sent to confirm the situation in the fortress and there were five other soldiers on horseback around him.

"I don't know, but we should report this as soon as possible." Another soldier on horseback said before turning to leave, but a sharp object hit him in the chest, piercing through the leather armor he wore. His horse whinnied as it too was hit and knocked to the ground.

"Enemy attack! Disperse!" the soldiers split up to increase their chances of survival, as they looked for where the attack came from. One of the soldiers screamed as he pointed towards the sky and saw three

skeleton birds flying, shooting black feathers at the backs of his companions and knocking them down along with their horses.

The soldier reached for a flare, a small stick that fired a tiny sphere that exploded in a red light, signaling danger to the other scouts scattered around here, but his horse was hit by something and fell, knocking him to the ground.

The soldier tried to roll over to cushion the impact and get up, but a skeleton suddenly appeared and pierced his heart from behind and killed him. Emilia looked around and breathed a sigh of relief after confirming that everyone was dead.

‘They are increasing in number. Our time is tight, but it looks like the master will be able to complete the large-scale spells in time.’ Emilia thought, not knowing whether to be sad or happy about it.

She still had hopes of convincing him to go to the demihuman empire, but the large-scale spells thwarted her plans. Emilia began raising the corpses into the undead and interrogating them in the same way that Athos did when he stormed the fortress, discovering that the army had already been dispatched and was on its way to the fortress.

They were expected to arrive in a week, but the scouts had no information on the size of the army. It appeared that the kingdom had guarded against leaking information and dispatched the scouts without important information.

Emilia heard the sound of approaching footsteps and turned slightly, looking at Caio and five skeleton soldiers on horseback approaching. “How was it on your side?”

“No problems. One of them almost set off a flare, but I stopped him in time.” Caio spoke as he approached. “What do you want to do now?”

“We’re going to kill a few more groups. The master seems to have managed to complete the large-scale spells and the scouts have definitely seen that. We need to kill as many as possible before-” A yellow flare went off in the sky, interrupting Emilia. “Before that happens.”

“That was the signal for the scouts to retreat. It’s going to be nearly impossible to hunt them all down silently now, so let’s hunt as much as possible before retreating to the keep.” Emilia spoke up, determined to prevent the information from the large-scale spells from leaking out.

The birds with blades reported the position of the scouts on horseback. There were a total of five five-man units, all on horseback and fleeing in different directions. Emilia and Caio had already killed most of them and these were the only ones left. Some had retreated before Emilia started hunting them, but they wouldn’t have any relevant information other than that the undead hadn’t fled.

“Skeletons on horseback, split up and hunt one unit each. You originally had the same position, so the difference in strength shouldn’t be that big. Blast yourself with the enemy if necessary. Birds with blades take care of the farthest group while Caio and I take care of one each. Go.” Emilia ordered and the skeletons split.

Half an hour later, on a distant hill.

A group of seven light-armored adventurers lay on the ground, using magic spyglasses to observe something in the distance. Their bodies were smeared with mud and dry leaves, camouflaging with their surroundings.

They were watching as a single scout on horseback tried desperately to evade two skeleton knights. The scout was covered in wounds and tried to outwit the pursuers, but the skeleton horses' speed was superior and they were slowly closing the distance.

He was the last surviving scout and it didn't look like he would last long. The adventurers had been watching over these scouts since the group of skeletons caught up with them and engaged in combat. Three of the skeletons died during the combat, but so did most of the scouts and only one of them managed to escape, sacrificing the rest of the group in order to escape.

"Should we help him? He's going to die at this rate." One of the adventurers commented, but no one moved.

"And risk our lives for an army dog?" One of them asked scornfully and the rest chuckled softly.

"Besides, that particular skeleton looks very dangerous. I don't like our odds against him." The leader of the group spoke as he watched a different direction, where Emilia was lifting the scouts' corpses like undead.

He couldn't use mana vision at this distance, but her movements were a blur to the leader and that was more than enough for him to decide the skeleton was something they couldn't handle.

His group of adventurers were known as the sewer rats and they specialized in espionage and tracking. They were a C rank group, but their real power was only around D rank.

They were even further away and couldn't see the fortress, but it wasn't a problem. The orders they were given were to investigate the army and not the undead. They didn't know why, but guildmaster Florence ordered several teams of adventurers to investigate every move within the army.

The group faintly imagined that there was a political war behind it, but they were given enough not to ask questions. Originally, they planned to capture a unit of scouts and interrogate them, but Emilia thwarted their plans.

"What do we do now, boss? We can't go back empty-handed like this." One of his companions grumbled.

"No, we already have enough information. We know that the army scouts were all killed without exception and that the undead are already aware of our presence, so they will be prepared when we arrive. We also discovered that there are assassins among the enemy forces and although it's not part of our mission, it can earn us a nice bonus." Small smiles of greed appeared among the adventurers as they thought about the money.

They were loyal only to themselves and whoever paid the most, after all.

"Boss, the movement in the sky. Skeleton birds flying over our area in 10 seconds." One adventurer watching the sky reports and all the others take camouflage cloaks and cover themselves from head to toe, hiding themselves well from view.

The bladed bird passes over them, its less-than-sharp eyesight unable to discern the adventurers' disguise. After a few minutes, one of them pokes his head slightly out of his cloak and looks up at the sky, before sighing in relief and warning the others that the danger has passed.

"Let's back off now. With all the scouts dead, we're just taking our chances here." The party leader speaks and everyone else nods, packing up all their gear and quietly retreating, rather than rushing hastily like the scouts.

Chapter 132 Formation of the army

The kingdom's army was already much closer than Emilia had expected. They were currently 6 days away from the fortress. His formation was a bit scattered for anyone with the slightest bit of military tactics, but there was nothing that could be done.

Colonel Orus Mifar was the officer in charge of this mission. He was Astrus' younger brother and was determined to avenge his fallen brother. The fall of the Platinum Fist Stronghold shook House Mifar's position in the realm and Orus intended to use this quest as a form of redemption.

Orus was not in the throne room while the battle was broadcast, but he received the news of his brother's shameful death a few minutes later. He ran to the capital as fast as he could and bowed before the king, going so far as to touch his forehead to the ground and begged to be put in charge of the attack force he was sure was being formed.

Orus went so far as to evoke an ancient tradition of the Mirkor realm, the bloodline vow, shocking the king and all the nobles present. The bloodline vow was like a request for atonement for a noble, which would wash away any transgression a family member had caused if they succeeded in a mission given directly by the king, but would extinguish a noble house if they failed.

It was something rarely used, as it put the whole family at risk. It is far better to use just one family member as a scapegoat than to risk everything. The king had no choice but to agree to the colonel's request after such a declaration and he was named the commander of this mission, but the other organizations did not take this well.

Frictions and small arguments ensued as they gathered at the golden arch fortress, so the organizations tacitly decided to ignore each other during the march to avoid conflict.

The church took the forefront of the army, while the kingdom army occupied the center and the left and right wings of the army. The adventurers followed close behind them, covering the rear of the army.

The church sent a total of 5000 crusaders, 250 paladins and 250 priests, with a bishop as the leader for the operation. The church seemed determined to purge the undead from the face of Elbon and they marched hastily, more than once pulling away from the rest of the expedition and the bishop needing to order them to slow down.

Unlike the kingdom's army, where the vast majority of soldiers were just normal people and only elites were mana users, all crusaders were able to use mana so their marching speed was naturally higher.

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His morals were at their peak, as it was the first crusade against evil in years. Avenging his fallen comrades only increased his fury.

The kingdom's army was the most numerous, numbering 20,000 soldiers in total. They were divided into 4000 light infantry, 3000 heavy infantry, 3000 spearmen, 3000 archers, 2000 knights, 1000 elite infantry, 1000 elite knights, 500 siege weapons, 300 tamers, 200 court mages and 2000 mercenaries, in addition to the commander of the mission and leaders of each unit.

Light infantry were fast-attacking units, focused on hit and run and used only swords or scimitars with leather-reinforced armor. Heavy infantry were armed with plate armor and heavy shields, using maces or axes as weapons.

The elite infantry were the mana users in the army and their equipment was naturally superior, their high quality weapons setting them apart from the rest of the army.

The elite cavalry were the same, but they were mounted on horse-type monsters called horse of fear. They were completely black horses and red eyes, their eyes released a glow that caused fear and panic in the enemy's minds. It wasn't effective on undead, but they were durable as monsters and wouldn't cower in mid-combat.

Siege weapons were divided into 200 catapults, 200 fire trebuchets, 50 explosive ballistae and 50 enchanted battering rams. Trebuchets were just regular trebuchets, but they had alchemical ammunition that ignited on impact.

Explosive ballistae were the same, while battering rams were enchanted items that lessened their own weight for easier transport and released high-frequency vibrations that hit, causing internal and external damage at the same time.

Tamers were a new unit in the army, specializing in fighting alongside familiars. Their strength was the most varied, as their prowess in battle depended more on the type of familiar they possessed than their own power. They only knew simple spells and their skills were focused on supporting their familiars.

The mercenaries were an independent unit made up mostly of front-line fighters and a few archers.

The adventurers were the most misshapen unit and looked more like a rich armed militia than a royal army. Their numbers amounted to nearly 600, mostly D or C rank, with a few B rank adventurers. The adventurers split into their respective groups or those who already knew each other, so mages, fighters, and rogues were scattered randomly.

A few groups had split up and advanced ahead to act as scouts, but most were present.

The order had not sent any support and only transported the fighters to the golden arch fortress. Many criticized the order for not sending any reinforcements to the army, but little did they know that the dark elder had sent 5 teams of mage assassins surreptitiously after the army.

Their mission was solely to assassinate the hidden leader of the undead and retrieve his corpse. It was okay to be discovered after the corpse was secured, but they couldn't be discovered until then.

The elder intended to justify his actions as emergency reinforcements or prevention against information leakage since the undead could turn anyone into other undead and get all the information they wanted.

The army stopped to make camp just before dark, much to the chagrin of the church which had more than enough strength to continue the march. Communication between soldiers, adventurers and crusaders was minimal, as any interaction resulted in conflict.

The fervent belief of the crusaders who wanted to keep advancing without caring about anything else, the soldiers who were unable to keep up with them and were too worried about whether they would be able to survive the next fight, and the greedy adventurers who came only for the cash reward generated fights and forced their leaders to camp separately.

The fights only got worse the moment they started preparing meals. The soldiers just made a communal soup, but the adventurers had a big barbecue while drinking beer, as if they were just having fun. They had packed large amounts of food for the trip, as it was the adventurers' motto to enjoy each day as if it were their last, no matter where they were.

They would have been a little more reserved with their food reserves if it had been a long expedition, but at a distance of just 10 days between the strongholds there was no reason to hold back. Most adventurers had brought at least one pack animal with enough food for a month, in addition to the provisions they carried themselves.

The leaders of each group met whenever they stopped to camp in the colonel's military tent, mainly to familiarize themselves with each other's thinking. These troops were hastily gathered from several different places, so it was necessary to gather.

The colonel was inside the military tent, scowling at the representatives of the adventurers and the church. The bishop had barely said a word since he arrived, only responding when the colonel asks the state of the crusaders and ignoring any attempt at conversation.

The adventurers' representative was even worse. He was holding a chicken leg in one hand and a bottle of beer in the other, ignoring the disapproving looks of the bishop and colonel. He was the leader of the B rank shark blue adventurer team and the strongest adventurer in this mission, his strength was on par with an A rank. Only his arrogant and unpretentious attitude kept him from increasing in rank.

Colonel Orus surreptitiously used mana vision to assess his guests, discovering that the strongest in the room was the adventurer, being in the sixth tier while the other two were in the fifth. That explained his arrogant attitude, he considered himself superior to the other two men.

The colonel felt he couldn't let things go on as they were and gave a fake cough before saying in a confident tone. "Blue fang, behave properly and share with us the current state of adventurers."

"Blurp...Okay." The blue fang, as he was better known, swallowed the chicken and drank all the beer, belching loudly before wiping his hands on his shirt and answering in the affirmative. "The adventurers' morale is high and their forces excellent. As you can hear from here, everyone is having a good time and calming their nerves, ensuring they are at their peak for the day of battle."

The colonel wanted to ask how burning his food stores without worrying about possible eventualities was excellent, but arguing would be pointless. The blue fang had already stopped paying attention to him and picked up another chicken leg from God only knows where and went back to eating, as if all his work was done.

“What about the church forces?” The colonel turned to the bishop and asked, tired of the blue fang idiocy.

“Our brave soldiers are in perfect condition, everyone is committed to making this crusade a success.” The bishop spoke with a fanaticism that made the colonel sick, but at least he was willing to cooperate.

Chapter 133 Attack plan

“I know it’s still a few days until we reach the stronghold, but I want to discuss your role in the upcoming battle. I want to know your thoughts on the monster we’re going to face and opinions on how to fight it.” The colonel spoke solemnly.

“We clergy intend to take the vanguard during the battle. Our priests intend to conjure a gigantic sacred field that will protect our crusaders from the filthy attacks of the undead while weakening them. Even if they try to use siege weapons against us, our paladins will conjure shields of light to protect us as we take the gate.” The bishop declared proudly.

“And how do you plan to deal with enemy magic? We’re sure there won’t be at least 50 undead mages besides the plant monster. How do you plan to deal with them?”

“Well, we’re not on this crusade alone. The army has several court mages that can deal with enemy mages, and enchanted siege weapons can break down the sturdy gate. We already have the advantage in numbers and firepower, the only worry is how to deal with the plant monster.” The bishop spoke with a frown on his face.

“The mages of the order suggested that the plant monster was in possession of a teleportation crystal and used its miasma to activate it. As the church may know, undead created from necromancy and undead that arise spontaneously are completely many different.” Colonel Orus spoke and the bishop nodded. Miasma was what corrupt magic was called among mages.

“Undead created by necromancers are made with dark magic, but still maintain a certain balance with the other elements thanks to the pure mana of the mage who created them. Natural undead are abominations of nature, unable to accept their own death and completely rejecting the light in their own bodies.” The bishop explained in disgust, causing the blue fang to raise an eyebrow in surprise, as this kind of information was not available to the general public.

“Miasma teleportation is different and rips space instead of connecting it, so it would explain how the plant monster ignored the forced teleportation spell and invaded the fortress. Unfortunately, that doesn’t help us to face it. Even the order currently has no means to stop the teleportation.” Orus spoke in frustration.

“So we don’t have the means to stop this monster from attacking our rear, is that it?” The blue fang asked rhetorically. He knew how important it was to keep a monster’s attention on itself and prevent it from attacking the weakest mages and archers. It was then that he had an idea.

“Why don’t we use that to our advantage? If we know they can teleport and attack where we’re most exposed, we can give them that.” The blue fang smiled as he spoke, holding the two men’s attention.

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“What do you suggest?” the bishop asked.

“If I were an undead that could move anywhere on the battlefield, I would first attack the priests who are most dangerous or the mages who have the most firepower. If we gather the priests in place and scatter the mages across the army, we can reduce enemy targets and predict where they will appear.” The colonel was surprised at the adventurer’s thought, mainly because he was right.

The blue fang was right and the undead really did target the priests first when they invaded the keep, but it was too risky to gather all the priests in one place.

The blue fang continued talking as if reading the colonel’s thoughts. “We don’t need to risk the real priests, Colonel. We can disguise some adventurers in place of the priests and ambush the monster when it appears. How many priests does it take to maintain a sacred field?”

“50 is the minimum and covers a little over 100 meters. We need all 250 to effectively cover all crusaders and paladins during battle. It’s not certain your plan will work, so I can’t move any priests without jeopardizing the crusaders.” The bishop spoke after thinking about the blue tusk proposal.

The crusaders who came with him on this crusade were willing to give their lives willingly for justice, but the bishop would not sacrifice their lives in vain. He planned to lead the priests personally to protect as much as he could.

“You don’t need to move any priests, just change your gear with the adventurers. Let’s put the adventurers disguised as priests in the middle of the formation with the priests disguised as adventurers around them as if to protect them, and ambush the plant monster. ”

“Along with the paladins, we have enough strength to kill the plant monster or at least hold it in place while the army annihilates the undead. It must cost a lot in mana to teleport so he shouldn’t be able to do it repeatedly. ” The blue fang spoke with a toothy smile, satisfied with his plan.

‘Adventurers are really cunning. Even without the information we have, he formed a plan to hunt the monster with the scant information he had. He ignored the undead army, focusing only on the undead spirit that was his target. It’s not the kind of vision suited for someone in charge of thousands, but it’s perfect for leading small, elite groups.’ The colonel thought, positively evaluating the skills of the blue fang.

“Really, if the paladins and adventurers get together, the plant monster can be stopped and the rest of the undead army would be much easier to deal with. But that would put the adventurers at great risk and there would surely be heavy casualties on your side. Are you sure about that?” The colonel asked a little suspicious of how cooperative the blue prey was being.

“We have a better chance of surviving than your soldiers, Colonel. Unlike soldiers who are trained to obey orders and paladins who would attack without caring about their lives, we adventurers are trained to react on our own in an emergency.”

“Also, we’re not going to put all of our own in that group, just enough to replace all the priests, we still need to decide where the others will be placed.” What the blue fang said was true. Many soldiers were trained to instinctively react to incoming orders, but this slowed their reaction to unforeseen situations.

"I want a piece of that thing as a souvenir too. A body part of a plant monster capable of creating undead would be worth good money on the black market." The blue fang thinks to itself, managing to keep a poker face.

"It would be really helpful if you could lend me some of your mages when the fight starts. A little bit of magic to be able to kill the plant monster would help a lot." The blue prey asked the colonel, who promptly agreed to her request.

"It won't be a problem. Now, we need to discuss the distribution of soldiers and how we're going to attack them." The colonel spoke and the three spent a few hours discussing the plan of attack.

In the end, they decided that the best way to ensure the undead would be wiped out was to lay siege to the entire fortress. The front gate where Athos' army invaded would be attacked by the church and its crusaders, focusing most of the enemy's attention on them.

Meanwhile, the archers and siege weapons unit would rain arrows and explosives on the enemy army, the light infantry and mercenaries would use ladders to scale the walls and take the gates.

Heavy infantry, spearmen and cavalry would circle around and storm the other gate, cutting off the undead army's escape route. Both elite units would be kept on hold and deployed where needed, acting as emergency backup. The fortress had its own elite soldiers and the colonel was on guard against them.

Court mages would form a large-scale spell of their own and provide cover for crusaders or adventurers and paladins if the plant monster was more powerful than expected. The adventurers would act freely and attack undead that stood out in the army undead.

The difficulty was where to place the tamers. Their strengths were so different from each other that they didn't know where to put them. In the end, it was decided that they would stay as reserve troops and along with the elite soldiers.

The discussion ended, the bishop and the blue prey said goodbye to the colonel and joined their respective forces. The colonel was left alone and his expression changed from serious to hate and he gripped tightly the pendant hidden in his breast pocket. It was something given to him by Astrus on his coming of age birthday.

"I'll release you soon brother, just wait a little longer." Orus muttered, before going to get up and get something to eat.

"Did you hear everything?" The blue fang spoke as soon as he left the colonel's tent and made sure no one was following him. Its shadow stretched and a man wearing black leather armor stepped out of it with a black snake coiled around his arm.

The serpent was a shadow serpent, capable of hiding in shadows and carrying objects or people together. It was an incredibly rare and hard-to-find monster, but one of your group members was lucky enough to have one as a familiar.

"I heard. You did well in there, but they knew more than they said." The unknown man spoke.

“I know, but that’s normal. An undead spirit would cause unnecessary panic and be troublesome for them if I accidentally leaked the information. I didn’t seem very trustworthy after all.” The blue fang laughed, proud of his arrogant adventurer performance.

Chapter 134 War preparations

“That aside, what did you think of Guild Master Florence’s quest?” The black fang asked, ignoring their leader’s idiot grin.

“Murder or let Colonel Orus Mifar die. I don’t feel very comfortable killing someone for no reason.” The blue fang spoke as it clicked its tongue in disgust. Being a hired assassin didn’t suit him, but breaking a direct order from the guildmaster would have consequences he didn’t know he was willing to carry out.

“You did this on purpose, didn’t you? Place yourself away from the colonel on the battlefield to have a plausible excuse to decline the mission. You really don’t change, brother.” The black fang spoke smiling, easily reading the blue fang’s plan. The assassin removed the black hood, revealing his face.

His face was identical to the blue fang. The same short black hair, the same slightly droopy blue eyes, slightly disproportionate cheekbones and thick eyebrows. They were identical twin brothers, even their height and voice tones were similar.

They were in the habit of switching places whenever necessary, as they possessed the characteristic of duality. It was an incredibly rare trait, as was the mana body, where twins were born with the same energy signature and opposing elements.

Where the blue fang had an affinity for water and earth, the black fang had an affinity for air and fire. It wasn’t as powerful a trait as the mana body, but it was incredibly versatile as the twins didn’t need to hold back when fighting together.

“You found me, little brother. Now let’s get some more food and meet up with the rest of the group, we still have a few days of marching to go.” The blue fang pulled its brother into a hug and dragged him to where the rest of the group was.

“Don’t be smug, you’re only 5 minutes older.” The black fang spoke with false anger, but could not resist and followed.

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In the fortress of the platinum fist, a few hours before.

“What happened here?” Emilia asked after returning to the fortress only to find Athos and Treevor lying on the ground.

‘We spent the last few hours in constant cycles of feeding the large-scale spells and stopping to recover energy. We’re exhausted to a degree I thought the undead were incapable of staying.’ Treevor responded without moving an inch, grateful that the mental link allowed him to communicate without having to move.

Treevor was not able to recover energy at the same speed as Athos, although the yggdrasil arm able to absorb corrupted world energy puts it ahead of any average mage in terms of mana regeneration.

'How long before the large-scale spells are fully charged?' Gaius asked, heading straight for the control room to feed the large-scale spells.

"The barrier and the spell that forces teleport outside the wall are already in full working order, the two detection spells and the undead field are missing. But I'm not sure that will be enough for a victory guaranteed." Athos spoke, recovered enough to move without his head throbbing in pain.

"Any idea what we're up against? You went out hunting the scouts, did you find anything useful?" Athos asked as he and Emilia headed for the control room. The line of undead that was here has visibly dwindled, most returning to their jobs, such as forging weapons, building barricades in the inner area of the fortress, and keeping the prisoners Athos took alive.

Athos knew it would be impossible to keep an invading army outside the city, so the skeletons were building barricades and roadblocks between the few buildings outside in preparation for urban warfare.

The prisoners were being kept alive in cells as Athos was too busy to deal with them, but before long he could finally experiment with them. Seeing the court mages working in sync as if they were a single being inspired him greatly and he couldn't wait to begin testing.

"All the scouts knew was that the army might take a little over a week to reach the stronghold, but the size of the army and the different troops are still a mystery. The kingdom doesn't allow low-ranking troops access to this type of information, to avoid information leakage." Emilia spoke, pulling Athos out of his reverie.

"Then we only have one more week to prepare, as it will still take a day to finish feeding the large-scale spells." Athos began to think about countermeasures as Emilia entered the control room.

"Master, I have an idea that might help, but I'm going to need almost every hive hawk for that." Emilia spoke from inside the control room and Athos signaled for her to continue. The hive hawks were an invaluable tool to him, so it would take a great plan to make Athos yield them.

Emilia's idea was simple. She wanted hive hawks to fly high in the sky and attract storm clouds. This region didn't snow because they were very close to the center of the continent and the clouds hardly passed through the mountains, but the queen could use wind magic to attract the clouds to the fortress.

It would take less than 12 hours for the hive hawks to reach the nearest mountain and a few days to lure the clouds to the fortress. Hawks could carry the cloud during this time, turning it into a storm cloud.

The idea seemed incredible, especially since there were few ways to defend against it. The clouds would be too high for the mages to do anything about and the few air-affinity mages wouldn't be able to cover the entire army. Spells and magic items that allowed flight were expensive in mana, so they wouldn't do either. But there was a problem.

"How can we guarantee that the lightning won't hit our own soldiers?" Athos asked. The idea sounded a little suicidal and unpredictable to him. Although it was exactly the kind of plan he would suggest.

“That would be true if we attracted an already charged cloud. What we’re going to do instead is use magic to charge a cloud from the start with our mana so the lightning charges our energy signature. It’s like mixing your mana with an element pre-existing to control it.” Emilia explained, convincing Athos.

“This is amazing! How did you think of that?” Athos asked after trying and finding no major flaws in Emilia’s plan. Mages could still cast a large-scale spell to defend themselves, but it would still serve to keep most enemy mages busy and for a long time, as the lightning would not disperse after a single shot.

“I would love to take credit for the idea, but I didn’t think of it. It was a strategy used by the wind elder. He is very active in the kingdom of Tivan, in the far north of the continent. He besieged and destroyed a city of beast people. using this tactic.” Emilia explained where the idea came from.

“I see. It’s going to be a really awesome weapon when the battle starts.” Athos gave the go-ahead for her plan and asked through the link, ‘Does anyone else have any idea how to face the enemy army?’

A new weapon would be awesome, but two would be even better.

‘I have, boss. Could you give me some of those corpses you brought with you? I could create massive amounts of parasitic venom out of it and bathe weapons in poison. Most of the human army are ordinary soldiers and a single splash of my poison would be a very painful death sentence.’ Treevor spoke, still lying on the ground despite having recovered enough to move.

He feared that approaching Athos, the latter would find another task for him to do.

The corpses had been heaped in a corner of the fortress and a coffin of death spell was cast on them. A gigantic cover of black ice froze the accumulated corpses, preventing them from decomposing.

The darkness also preserved the corpses, so an ice mage only needed to renew the layer of ice and the corpses would remain fresh.

‘I still haven’t been able to practice necromancy, so corpses are useless for now. Take as many as you need. How long is your poison able to last before it loses its effectiveness?’ Athos agreed with his idea.

‘I haven’t had time to test all the changes on the willow yet, but I assume it’s a day before it loses effectiveness. I will prepare the poison when the army starts to approach, as it is enough to pile all the corpses in one place and pour a drop of the poison and it would devour everything. Try to separate at least 100 corpses by then, boss.’

‘I will send some of the skeletons to separate their corpses.’ Athos spoke. ‘Now stop pretending you’re still in pain and join us.’

‘How do you know?’ Treevor asked in horror, but his body rose anyway.

‘We spent the last few hours working ourselves to exhaustion together, only to recover and start all over again. I’ve already calculated how fast your mana regenerates.’ Athos replied.

“You already know everything that needs to be done and you don’t need me here anymore. Even if I keep regenerating my mana and feeding the control room, it won’t make much difference in the end.” Athos spoke up after Treevor joined them.

“What do you plan on doing then?” Emilia asked confused. There wasn’t much to do in the fortress, after all.

“I’m going to do some experiments on the live prisoners and the corpses that Treevor won’t use. I have some macabre ideas I want to put into practice.” Athos grinned evilly, his black teeth looking like black pearls and causing the undead they saw to shiver, though they should have been incapable of shivering.

Chapter 135 Human experiments

“Do you think they will kill us soon?” A man inside a prison cell asked, his eyes lifeless. He was one of the servants of merchants that Athos captured, currently in the keep’s prison. His body was thin and his cheeks sunk against his face, clearly suffering from malnutrition.

Athos had ordered the skeletons to keep the prisoners alive, but did not specify how well they were to be treated. The skeletons did not take care of any of the prisoners’ basic needs, only following the ambiguous orders they were given.

All of them were put in just four cells, despite having almost thirty of them. Each received only a single meal a day and never left the cell, being forced to shit or piss on the floor and live with the smell for the last few days.

The prison did not have a toilet, as it was only intended to be a temporary punishment for soldiers who got out of line. In a fortress where all customers were soldiers who had the authority to arrest him, no merchant dared to step out of line.

The prisoners were cold, hungry, dirty with their own waste, desperate for how long they would stay in this situation and what the undead would do to them in the end. Some of them had already started to show signs of infection and illness, such as fever and festering sores.

Some of them were injured when they were brought in and with no healing applied, the best they could do was cover the wounds with the dirty clothes they were wearing.

“BOO!” Athos suddenly appeared outside the cell, hitting the iron grating with a loud bang, almost causing the prisoners to have a heart attack. He had mixed his presence with his surroundings just to scare them away.

“Pfftt, hahaha! You should have seen your reactions, I would kill to see it again.” Athos said with a laugh, but none of the prisoners were in the mood to laugh. They huddled in the corner of the cell, their eyes wide as they stared at Athos in terror.

Athos soon got bored of their fearful expressions and stopped playing. “I have good news and bad news for you. The good news is that I’ve finally finished everything I had to do and have time to do my experiments with you, so it’s likely that many of you will soon die and be released from your torment.”

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“The bad news is that you are about to turn lab rats into a very creative lich, so their deaths will be very painful and testing is likely to continue even after you die. Any volunteers?” Athos asked with a smile and only crying and sobbing could be heard.

One of the prisoners tried to bite his own tongue to commit suicide, but Athos shocked the man and made him pass out. "Great, we have the first volunteer. Since no one else has volunteered and I don't have the patience to wait, I'll choose randomly."

Athos opened the cell door and entered. The cell was cramped, but enough for all the prisoners to fit together and everyone immediately tried to run towards Athos, trying to run him over to escape. A general shock was enough to knock out most of them, and a punch to the jaw did the rest of the work.

"Skeletons, carry them all for me. I lied just to scare you when I said I was going to pick a few, I'll take them all at once." Athos spoke and electrocuted the other cells, laughing at the expressions of fear and confusion on the prisoners' faces.

The surrounding skeleton guards obeyed his orders, opening the cells and carrying all the prisoners before following close behind Athos. They walked to a building made of white stone in the outer area, where mages with an affinity for light would heal the wounded soldiers, if Emilia and Gaius hadn't killed them all during the first invasion.

The building had only two floors, the first being a large hospital area divided by curtains, as there were only 5 mages capable of healing in the entire fortress. The skeletons threw the prisoners onto stretchers before handcuffing them with handcuffs that Athos had prepared in advance.

Athos walked up to his first victim-that is, his first guinea pig, a male who appeared to have a fever. Among all the tests Athos wanted to do, the one he was most curious about was what would happen if he turned a living person into an undead. He wanted to know if the process would just be incredibly painful, or if it would be any different from a normal corpse.

Athos touched the prisoner's body with his hand, conjuring up the undead. The prisoner woke up startled by the darkness ravaging his body and began to scream, but Athos didn't care. The darkness finally reached its core and ravaged it, before the spark of corrupted life force restores it to a black core.

The prisoner's body withered into a black skeleton and Athos received the extra life force, but it was just an ordinary black skeleton.

"Well, I didn't have high hopes for this one, it was just scientific curiosity. Let's start the real experiments." Athos spoke without feeling disappointed and went on to the next.

"Hey, what the fuck was that? What are you doing?" The man strapped to a nearby stretcher screamed, having woken up to the screams of pain from the first experiment. Others began to wake up from, still in pain from the blows they received.

"Save your screams for when the real pain starts." Athos spoke and gagged the man, before moving on to the next experiment. He wanted to know if it would be possible to only partially turn a person into a skeleton. Athos got this idea from seeing Treevor and how his body was able to function despite being half-plant.

He only had half a brain and several organs half or completely missing, but his body functioned normally. Athos should be able to do the same, as his darkness perfectly replicated organs.

Athos grabbed the man and forced him to stand still, before using the vampiric touch to slowly drain the nutrients from the man's left leg.

“URRRKKK!!” The man gasped, feeling the flesh of his leg atrophy in a matter of seconds. He tried to move his leg, but Athos gripped his knee and waist tightly, trapping the member.

Athos controlled the ability so that it didn't drain beyond the leg, to prevent it from hitting a vital organ and killing his experiment by accident. The process was slow and the prisoner nearly passed out from the pain a few times, forcing Athos to deliver a shock to keep him awake.

The experiment was a failure. The prisoner resisted until the moment the leg was mummified, but blood began to spurt from his waist and Athos was forced to burn the wound to stop the bleeding and the prisoner died of shock.

‘Um...I think I need to change my methods. Without a light mage, any wound can be fatal. I'm going to put the hybrid experiments on hold until the army attacks and I manage to capture some priests alive. Now let's go to the next one.’ Athos thought as he transformed the corpse into a skeleton.

Athos continued testing whatever ideas came to his mind, most being deadly to the prisoners and some being put on hold for lack of a light mage. The screams echoed inside the hospital throughout the day as Athos put all his creativity into play.

General Astrus had some healing potions of varying degrees in his storage ring, but the ring imploded the moment Athos tried to access it when he was checking the battle loot.

“This will be the last experiment before we call it a day. I want to know how the others are doing and you need a few hours of rest and food to get through another day of work.” Athos spoke with the last 10 survivors. The prisoners raised as undead were around the room, some of them with one or two limbs trapped in strange places.

One of the experiments that Athos did was to find out if he could transplant limbs into random places on the body, finding that they could be reattached anywhere in the body without serious consequences. Skeletons had trouble balancing and getting used to limbs in strange locations, but it was just a lack of custom and limbs were just as sensitive as they were in lifetimes.

“Please just kill me soon.” One of the men pleaded hoarsely, his throat aching from screaming in fear and crying during the day. Athos followed no obvious order when choosing prisoners, moving between rooms at random and terrorizing all the prisoners.

Whenever a prisoner's screams stopped, they knew he had died and that any one of them could be next, so they swallowed back tears and made as little sound as possible, fearing the slightest movement would draw Athos' attention.

“Hmm? Don't worry, I've done everything I wanted to with the living, at least for now. I need a light mage to continue since you humans are too fragile or at least healing potions to proceed with my experiments.” Athos spoke and saw a glimmer of hope shining in the man's eyes.

“So you can go back to your cell until my next burst of creativity.” Athos continued to speak gently, turning hope into despair.

“NO! I beg you, let me die! KILL ME!” The man screamed at the top of his lungs, but the skeleton guards at the hospital still dragged him to prison along with all the other prisoners still alive. Athos had used the vision of death to separate the healthy from the sick and experimented primarily on the sickest.

Chapter 136 Undead experiments

Athos stayed behind, along with the prisoners' skeletons. "Well, I'm done with the human experiments, so let's start with the skeletons?"

Athos could have sworn that the skeletons' empty eye sockets were wide with amazement at the moment, but he didn't mind that. Athos was more excited to experiment with the dead than the living, really.

Now that he was sure he could remove any of the bones from the skeletons and relocate them freely, he wouldn't need to hold anything as long as the skull was kept intact.

The experiment he was most eager to do was to test whether it was possible to add limbs to skeletons or fuse skeletons together, creating chimeras of bone. Having similar energy signatures there shouldn't be a strong rejection and Athos had tested that it was indeed possible to modify skeletons.

"You two, come closer." Athos spoke and two skeletons took a step forward, though they shivered like leaves in the wind.

"You, dismount." The skeleton that Athos pointed out obeyed and fell to the ground in a pile of bones. The cartilages that hold the skeletons' bones together were made purely of darkness and could be undone with a single thought, however the skeletons would be unable to move until they were restored again.

Athos picked up one of the humeri from the floor and fitted it to the skeleton's shoulder, before ordering the skeleton to try to flow mana through it. According to their tests, darkness would connect the humerus and that would be enough, but it didn't work here. The bones still belonged to a different skeleton and just flowing mana was useless.

The skeleton disassembled on the ground also failed to fuse the humerus into the shoulder, so Athos ordered both of them to flow mana at the same time and it finally worked. The skeletons' mana flowed from the humerus to the skeleton's shoulder and bone fused seamlessly.

"It worked!" Athos squealed excitedly and picked up all the bones in the arm and reassembled the arm. When he finished, a third arm was protruding from the top of his shoulder, but there was a problem. Despite being merged with a different body, control of the arm was still from the skeleton dismounted on the ground.

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Even when Athos ordered the skeleton on the ground to relinquish control, it still didn't work. The bone was still part of the skeleton dismantled on the ground and was impossible for anyone else to control.

"Perhaps you can coordinate your movements?" Athos asked, still not giving up on the bone chimera idea. The skeletons tried to coordinate with each other, finding it harder than it looked. Despite the black chain forcing his movements into near-perfect sync, the skeleton's balance had shifted and the extra limb hindered his movements.

It would take a long time for the skeleton to get used to the extra limb without bumping into anything, and fighting like that was out of the question. Also, Athos still had to connect the rest of the bones to

the skeleton. If the three-armed skeleton got too far away and out of the other's line of sight, it would be useless.

"Let's try to put the rest of the bones in and wait for you to get used to it." Athos spoke and proceeded to fuse all the bones at random locations on the skeleton. He could focus on functionality later, this was just a test for now.

Athos only managed to fuse half of the bones together before the skeletons began to shake strangely. Using death vision, Athos realized that the black cores were pulsing and sending mana through the bones, trying to repel each other.

What Athos didn't take into account is that fusing most of the bones would move the core of the bone pile into the chimera's skeleton. The new core naturally moved to the center of the body sending out pulses of mana to try to attack the pre-existing core while the latter tried to fend off the invader.

The energy signatures were similar to the point that their spells passed freely through each other without doing damage, but there were still enough differences that their cores repelled each other.

"Oh shit." was all Athos managed to say, before the chimera skeleton fell to the ground in spasms. The mana pulses inside the skeleton's body, causing cracks wherever it hits.

Athos tried to separate the bones again, but the core had already moved into the skeleton's body, removing bones now would be useless. The bones of the skeletons began to break and send splinters flying with each crack, before the cores finally touched and exploded in a haze of darkness.

Skeletons guarding outside entered to see what was happening, but Athos ordered them out.

"A failure, huh? I thought because their energy signatures are so similar their cores could coexist or maybe even merge, but it seems that's impossible. The black skeletons still have remnants of their original energy signature. Maybe it will work if I do use bones from a skeleton after destroying its core?" Athos began to ramble, calling out to two other skeletons.

This time, he crushed the skull of one of them with one punch, killing him on the spot. The skeleton fell to the ground dead and Athos began unceremoniously picking up its bones. The black core fell apart as soon as the skeleton died, its corrupt energy spreading through the bones.

Athos placed a humerus on the skeleton's shoulder as in the first attempt and the latter flowed mana through the bone which immediately merged with his shoulder. As there was no different energy signature this time, the bone fused smoothly.

The energy in the humerus spread throughout the skeleton's body before being absorbed into its core, filling it until it was full and slightly overworked.

"If I fuse more bones into you, your core is likely to become saturated and explode. I'll absorb the energy as you fuse it into your body." Athos spoke and began to fuse all the bones scattered on the floor into the skeleton's body, while using the vampiric touch to absorb the energy in the bones.

The bones were successfully fused this time, but it felt like a waste of time and skeletons. The bones' energy was completely wasted and even though the skeleton's size had increased, it could hardly fight with all these random bones.

“It’s a waste to continue like this. The cores repel each other and pure energy is wasted at the time of fusion. I need to somehow create undead with equal mana signatures, or any chimera would be useless.” Athos spoke, thinking of ways to overcome this limitation.

He still hasn’t had time to practice necromancy on the corpses he’s brought back from town and the only other experience he’s had with necromancy is when he turns Ricley into an ordinary skeleton. That’s when he remembered something.

When he tested whether he could create undead from corpses with no remaining energy, he created a skeleton that had no will and only obeyed his orders. But what mattered was that there was no residual energy in the corpse and it was entirely made up of its own mana, so its energy signature would match that of Athos.

‘Skeletons, I created one of you from a corpse with no residual energy. Come to my current position in the hospital.’ Athos mentally sent to all the skeletons, uncertain if the skeleton he wanted had survived the battle in the fortress.

Fortunately, the skeleton arrives in less than two minutes, still carrying sandbags from the work it had been given. Athos immediately used death vision and mana flowed through his arm, confirming his suspicion.

“I was right! You have the same energy signature as me and since you don’t have a will or previous experience, you will adapt much more easily to extra limbs.” Athos spoke aloud, his empty eye sockets almost glowing with joy at the solution of his problems.

‘That means I’m finally going to find a use for all those freezing corpses. With so many, I should be able to create bone giants or an entire unit of chimera soldiers.’ Athos thought.

“All of you are dismissed for the time being. Look for General Astrus for further instructions, he is responsible for building defenses around the fortress. And as for you, let’s go to where the corpses are gathered. I’ll raise some brothers for you.” Athos spoke and ran to where the corpses are, the soulless skeleton following behind him.

They arrived at the ice coffin and Athos began to melt the black ice. Some skeletons were using pickaxes to break the ice and separate the corpses that were separated for Treavor. Athos did not interfere with their work, unfreezing a single corpse to confirm his theory.

The corpse he picked up belonged to a young man, but Athos didn’t take a second look at his features and immediately began transforming him into an ordinary skeleton, rather than a black skeleton.

Athos was not willing to expend a spark of his life force every time he created a single corpse. There were nearly two thousand of them here and their loss would be significant to him, at the risk of unraveling his third layer. Athos didn’t know what would happen to a core if it regressed a layer, but he wasn’t willing to test it on himself.

The darkness devoured the entire corpse until only the bones remained, before injecting the vitality back into a spherical shape into the skeleton’s solar plexus. Athos filled the core with his own mana until it was full, but he didn’t use a spark of his own life force.

The black core formed and the skeleton remained unchanged. A few seconds passed while Athos thought he had failed, before the skeleton stirred as if it was having spasms and slowly got to its feet.

“Yo.” Athos waved at him awkwardly. As there was no connection between them, Athos did not know how to react.

Chapter 137 Bone chimera

The skeleton rose to its feet and began to look around vaguely, before its eyes fixed on Athos. He walked unsteadily until he was face to face with him, each step becoming firmer than the last. An awkward silence hung between them as the two entered into a staring contest, despite neither of them having eyes.

“Y-yo.” Athos repeated after a few minutes of silence in an attempt to break the tense atmosphere, but the skeleton continued to stare at him. Athos took a step back and the skeleton took a step forward, keeping some distance between them.

‘This thing doesn’t seem to be thinking about anything and isn’t connected to me, so I can’t mentally sort it out. Maybe you can order it verbally?’ Athos thought.

“Give me your hand.” He actually said it, treating the skeleton as if it were a dog. No reaction.

“Why can’t I control him? Is he incomplete in some way?” Athos began to wonder. He circled the skeleton as if looking at it from another angle would help him understand it better.

The common skeleton also turned around to continue facing Athos, until Athos gave up trying to circle it. “Well let’s try to remove a few more corpses for now.”

Athos began to melt the ice and remove another corpse, when a pair of bony hands began to lift the corpse and help it. The common skeleton seemed to follow him willingly.

Together they removed 5 corpses and Athos turned them into ordinary skeletons, hoping to find any patterns of behavior that would help him understand them. He needed to know if he could control them before testing anything else.

‘Hey, does anyone have any idea how to control ordinary undead? I created some for my experiments, but they are soulless undead and do nothing but follow me in silence.’ Athos spoke to all the skeletons, giving up trying to understand these skeletons.

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‘Boss, there are no soulless beings. If you created a new undead, a new soul formed in that undead. A newborn soul with no memory or personality. It’s useless to try to talk to something like that, because he has no idea what words are.’ Treavor replied a few seconds later.

‘You must be careful, master. I don’t know much about necromancy, but what little I do know, the undead indiscriminately attack anything they come across. That shouldn’t happen since the master is an undead too, but there’s no way to predict what they’ll do.’ Emilia also spoke.

'So I need a way to communicate with them? But if they don't understand my words and no mental link, how am I supposed to do that?' Athos asked, looking at the skeletons around him. They surrounded him in a semicircle and continued to stare at him.

'Did you create them from your own mana, perhaps to control them like you do with a spell? Try to impose your will clearly on them.' Treevor suggested.

Athos tested Treevor's theory and focused on one of the skeletons, trying to command him to approach. He closed his eyes and concentrated, realizing for the first time that there was a connection between them. It was very small compared to the black chain so he hadn't noticed. It was thin as a single hair, but it definitely existed.

Athos focused on that tiny link and noticed that its core was releasing tiny pulses of corrupted mana that strengthened that link. The skeleton core did the same, although it seems more like an involuntary act than something done consciously.

When the bond was strong enough, Athos began to hear a noise in his mind that increased in intensity as his bond strengthened. Incoherent thoughts that did not belong to Athos began to infiltrate his mind, causing a slight headache.

The skeleton's thoughts were flowing through his mind, but there was no malice in it, just genuine curiosity. They would normally be filled with hatred towards the necromancer who created them, an instinctive reaction of every undead to living creatures.

The necromancer would have to subdue the newborn undead's will, using his mana and superior will to subdue it while it was still weak. It was the reason why so many nobles were interested in the battle of the keep, presuming that a necromancer had figured out a way to overcome this limitation.

Athos obviously didn't have this problem. The skeleton recognized Athos as an equal, not just because he was another undead, but because they felt a kind of familiarity with him because they had the same energy signature.

The skeleton had no clue and just followed him, mimicking his every action. What Athos needed to do now was communicate in a way that the skeleton understood. Athos sent thoughts of submission and the skeleton offered no resistance, its sense of self-preservation completely non-existent.

It was a natural instinct for undead to act in groups and the strongest would always come out on top. Athos did the same with the other five skeletons, gaining full control over all of them. The sensation was strange, as the skeletons were willingly obeying him rather than being forced or corrupted, but Athos did not question the present gain.

'Disassemble.' Athos mentally ordered, sending a mental image of what he wanted the skeletons to do. Five of the six skeletons fell to the ground in piles of bones, before Athos took the bones from a pile and fused them into the last skeleton's entire body.

He used death vision and watched intently as the skeleton randomly added bones to its body, the core of the bone pile began to pulse and move. The core began to slowly approach the main skeleton's solar plexus, sending out pulses of mana to try to expel it.

The main core also sent out pulses of mana to try to push back the invader, but none of the attacks did any damage to their targets. The cores absorbed each other's energy without resistance, forming a link between them.

The cores pulsed in sync, until a single tendril made of life force emerged from both cores and formed a bridge between them. The original core seemed to absorb some of the invader's life force, increasing in size while the other decreased.

Athos was shocked by this, having never seen anything like it. The cores were stable and didn't look like they were going to fuse, so Athos made some mental notes of what had happened.

Athos fused the rest of the bones together again, wanting to make sure the process was a success. The bones have fused together naturally now, without the skeletons needing to focus. Athos feared that the skeleton might be surprised by the completely misshapen body, but he didn't seem particularly bothered by anything.

He took a few wobbly steps as if he wasn't used to his new balance, but got used to it with surprising speed. Divided thinking didn't seem particularly strange to them either. Their minds did not merge as Athos supposed they would, but found a balance like a hive mind.

Once he was sure there was no danger and this new form was stable, Athos decided to add the next skeleton. The core of the new skeleton began to move like the others as soon as half the bones were added. It joined the other two at the center of the skeleton and forming tendrils of mana, but merging only with the original core.

The main core absorbed part of the new core and grew again. Athos realized that it would be okay to fuse the other skeletons together and had them all fuse together at once. The undead could no longer be called a mere skeleton now, looking more like a bone abomination.

A surprising discovery that Athos made was that it was possible to change the shape of bones, rather than just fusing them together as they were. He noticed this when he tried to heal one of the skeletons who had a bent arm, probably an injury from when he was killed, and noticed that the bone looked strangely malleable.

The bone broke when Athos bent it too much, but he quickly healed it, consuming his own skin to regenerate it. With a little more testing, Athos realized he could use a mixture of corruption and darkness to shape the bones, creating his bone crafter spell.

The cores also connected to the main one, further increasing its power. It wasn't even close to a trained mage yet, but it sure would be a threat to a mana user. If he could walk, of course.

Athos had placed the bones in random places and the Abomination had become unable to currently walk, only to crawl. He would need to change the shape of the bones for the creature to be able to even walk, or all the bone abomination could do is crush enemies with its weight. But that could wait for the creature to have a little more mass.

Athos wanted a real titan and wouldn't stop until he got one. He began removing corpses from the black ice until he gathered a little over 40 and turned them all into skeletons, before destroying all of their minds.

It would be expensive to turn so many corpses into skeletons and fill their cores with mana, even if they are tiny cores on the same level as newly formed children. But Athos was a third level mage and incredibly powerful, as his mana body is capable of retaining much more mana than a normal mage. All it took was a small amount of your mana and it would be heavily diluted and fill the core quickly.

Chapter 138 Abomination of bones

“Ready to welcome some more brothers?” Athos asked, looking at one of the randomly arranged skulls.

The bone abomination snapped the bones in agreement and Athos began to fuse the skeletons one by one. His body grew in size and power, until it looked like a small hill. When Athos ended, the bone abomination had grown to nearly fifty feet, and its cores looked like a constellation, with several small black cores connected by life force threads to a central core.

“You have enough mass now, let’s change your shape a little.” Athos spoke and cast the bone craftsman into the abomination of bones. The abomination continued to look curiously at Athos, feeling its shape slowly change.

“Hmm... I think this bone looks better this way. Whoops, you’re going to need more legs here to keep your balance. Maybe I can add extra limbs? With so many skulls, it shouldn’t be a problem to control one or two more arms. And where should I put all these skulls? Would it be better to spread them out or leave them all together?” Athos spoke to himself as he removed, reshaped and fused the bones again.

Athos worked happily for hours, only stopping to regenerate his mana every now and then. He felt like a child playing with building blocks, letting his imagination run wild as he built the bone abomination’s body.

“My king, what are you doing?” Astrus approached while he was building one of the Bone Abomination’s arms. Athos had become so engrossed in his work that he ignored the call of his subordinates. They were worried he was going crazy on some crazy project and sent the skeleton closer to make sure he was okay.

General Astrus was currently only wearing an army uniform with a corrupted willow sword strapped to his waist, as his equipment had not yet been corrupted. Athos had prioritized corrupting large-scale spells and his own experiments over army equipment.

In defense of Athos, it would be useless for Athos to corrupt weapons while the skeleton mages were busy taking turns feeding the large-scale spells. He planned to leave it to Treavor to corrupt the weapons, as his yggdrasil arm could also draw corrupted world energy.

“It is not obvious?” Athos asked, finally finishing off the bone abomination’s left arm. Athos was giving a roughly human form to the bone abomination, but still he was still in the midst of work and the creature was a mass of bones with huge arms.

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“Have you really managed to merge several skeletons into a single being? Is it possible to do the same with other skeletons?” Astrus asked fearfully. He still didn’t know much about Athos’ personality, but what little he saw of the cruel experiments was enough for him to know just how inhuman Athos was.

“Unfortunately not. Your energy signatures aren’t similar enough for that. It’s really a shame. I’m curious what would happen if I merged someone with more than one layer into a bone abomination, but I’ll have to wait until what I learn to create undead with more than one layer.” Athos spoke with regret.

“Does your majesty need help? The mage skeletons have informed me that they will soon finish feeding the large-scale spells, so they will be free to help you.” Astrus spoke helpfully.

“No, other mages would just get in the way. The only one that could help would be Treevor, as his willow could conjure up a field of the dead and make it easy to turn all those corpses into undead. Tell him to join me as soon as the spells of large scale are ready.” Athos ordered and Astrus nodded before walking away.

Even Athos would be unable to turn so many corpses into undead without residual energy, but the field of the dead would solve that problem. Corpses, even ancient ones, would draw the corrupted world energy, saving Athos a lot of mana.

After saying goodbye to Astrus, Athos continued working diligently on the abomination of bones. It took approximately 4 hours to complete the transformation.

Athos took a few steps back after finishing, admiring his new creation. The abomination of bones was an impressive sight.

Approximately 12 meters tall, 4 meters wide and has a humanoid body. The bones that made up his body weren’t a smooth surface, but were clearly different bones joined together. The general structure of the body looked like a human skeleton, but it was as if the body had been broken into pieces and reassembled by a small child.

The abomination’s head was made up of dozens of human skulls arranged in all directions, ensuring that the abomination had no blind spots. None of the skulls were a real weak point, as they were part of a hive mind. It would take destroying all the skulls to actually destroy the abomination.

He had four arms made of dozens of bones stuck together, an upper pair and a lower pair.

The upper arms came off the shoulders like normal arms, but the lower ones were connected to shoulder blades directly connected to the spine. The upper arms were thick, nearly twice the size of the lower ones, which looked slender in comparison despite being the girth of a human torso.

Athos did his best to make it anatomically correct, but he let his creativity run wild when it came to making the fists. The upper fists were made from femur bones and Athos used his bone crafter spell to make the knuckles flatten like a hammer, making it an excellent blunt weapon.

Athos also created artificial joints between his knuckles, so fists were functional and not just weapons to crush. The lower hilts ended in fingers made from rib bones, which Athos made as sharp as blades.

They looked like curved, jointless claws, each claw having a different size as if they were real fingers. The largest of these was the middle finger, measuring 50 centimeters in length. Although there were no joints on the curved claws, there were joints at the base of the claws, so the claws still had some mobility.

The undead's torso looked like thick ribs, with a single skull right in the middle. The skull was just a decoy for enemies, who would focus their attacks on it, considering it a weak point. Inside the ribcage was the central skeleton that Athos used as the base for the abomination.

Athos didn't know what would happen if he altered it, as his core became the central core of the abomination, so he left it unchanged, just surrounded by a mass of bone so as not to be seen and pinned against the inner part of the spine.

His spine was made up of over a thousand vertebrae, as well as a set of flexible bone plates for protection. The plates overlapped each other slightly, folding in on themselves whenever the bone abomination leaned forward or backward.

Like skeletons, the bone abomination could bend or lean into seemingly impossible positions, as its joints were made of darkness rather than cartilage.

His legs had bony spikes that jutted out randomly between his thigh and ankle bones. Each tip was a maximum of 5 centimeters long and was serrated and retractable, and could be retracted into small spaces between the leg bones.

Its feet had six claws, five of them forward as toes and a larger one on the heel to keep the giant body balanced.

"Wow. You look amazing." Athos muttered, lightly touching the abomination's shin bones.

"Ohhhh..." The bone abomination made a deep sound from all the skulls at once, something Athos interpreted as a happy moan and stroked its head with one of its claws, being careful to use only the flat part.

Athos was surprised by the gesture, but did not complain.

"What the fuck is this?" Treevor asked as he approached, staring in amazement at the bone abomination. He was in his skeleton form, leaving the corrupted willow buried within the inner area of the fortress, recovering after long hours of fueling the large-scale spells.

"Remember I said I had an idea for a weapon after seeing the skeleton mages working together? This guy was what I thought of, only twice as good." Athos puffed out his chest with pride as he spoke.

What Athos said was only half true. Athos actually came up with the idea to create a chimera out of bones after seeing the skeleton mages working in sync, but he intended to do it with black skeletons, not using the corpses he brought back from Faltra. It was fortunate that the corpses served the purpose, or he would have embarrassed himself in front of his subordinates.

"And what the hell did you do?" Treevor asked taking in the undead's appearance, before choking in shock when he used death vision. "How did you create this thing? Balance multiple cores in a single body?"

"I merged the skeletons and the cores looked like this on their own. I tried using the black skeletons at first, but the few differences between the energy signatures caused rejection and destroyed the skeletons. I created these skeletons from the corpses using purely my mana and they all carried my energy signature rather than a similar one." Athos explained.

"I see. The skeletons' signatures are a mixture of your signature and the residual signature, so it makes sense that they can't merge." Treevor nodded in understanding and turned to Athos. "So boss, why did you call me here? It sure wasn't just to show off a new toy, right?"

Chapter 139 Hecatonchires

"I wanted to show off a little, but the main reason is that I need your help to turn all these corpses into skeletons. I need you to conjure a field of the undead on these corpses." Athos explained his plan, but Treevor denied it.

"I don't think it's going to work, boss. If I cast the spell, they'll charge my mana and energy signature. That would be counterproductive." Treevor said.

"The spell just turns pure world energy into corrupted one, so it'll be fine. Corpses will naturally attract the corrupted energy and I'll use that to make my job easier. I'll personally transform all corpses." Athos spoke with a weary sigh.

"We'll have to wait a few hours for that. I've abused the willow a little bit and it will need at least six hours to recover naturally. Forcing energy into it won't help either, it just risks permanently damaging its functions. Remember that the ability to attract darkness is not an enchantment, but a natural ability of the willow." Treevor explained with false regret.

He would finally get a chance to get some rest, without this workaholic pushing another task on him. Or at least he thought it would be.

"If you're going to wait, start corrupting the general's equipment. We have a lot of weapons and equipment that we still need to corrupt. In addition to the defensive equipment you promised Emilia and Caio." Athos said, shattering his hope of finally resting.

"I've just finished the large scale spells, my mana is less than half. I don't think it's a good idea to work in this state." Treevor said trying to escape but Athos was relentless.

"If the large-scale spells are ready, then the mages have already been released, right? Order them to enchant the items while you corrupt them. Since you'll only need to draw world energy, your mana amount doesn't matter." Athos cornered him with a smile on his face.

"All the mages are also out of mana. Most are lying on the ground and in a stupor, as we are unable to sleep." Treevor began to plead and to his surprise, Athos relented this time.

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"Well, without mages it's useless to continue, so try to recover as soon as possible. I'll keep gathering corpses to create other bone abominations. I should have enough mana for at least 100 more skeletons if I spend all my mana. Should be enough for two bone abominations." Athos thought, trying to calculate the most efficient way to proceed.

"Sorry to burst your bubble, but it's been a whole day since you left for your experiments. Even if you disregard time with other experiments, you still spent at least 8 hours on this abomination. You'll only be able to build a few dozen at most. before the enemy army arrives." Treevor spoke.

“I’ll split the mages into two teams, one for runesmithing the weapons you corrupt while the other will help me. They cannot create the skeletons, but using my bone crafter spell to shape the bones should greatly reduce the time spent.” Athos spoke confidently.

“Also, it took me a long time to create this one because I had to do trial and error to find a working body. If we use this as a base, it would take me less than two hours to create it.”

“I’m starting to feel a little sorry for the enemy army. You’re building up strength at an absurd rate.” Treevor spoke in exasperation, but Athos scolded him.

“Do you really think the next battle is going to be that easy? They will come to kill and come prepared. Of course, these weapons are going to be an unpleasant surprise for them, but our victory is not certain. A lot can happen during a fight and I want to prepare myself as much as possible for that.” Athos was serious, making Treevor laugh.

“And here I thought I was being a mad scientist just for fun. Until you have a brain, or at least something that acts like one inside that skull.” Treevor spoke while laughing.

“Hilarious. Now leave while I’m in the mood or I’ll get you another job.” Athos spoke in a threatening tone, a threat that Treevor took very seriously.

“Okay, okay, we don’t need to make threats here. One last question. How long do you plan on leaving this guy like this?” Treevor asked as he turned to leave.

“What do you mean like that?” Athos did not understand your question.

“Like, white. Your skeletons are black, do you plan on making them white to stand out as a decoy or something?” Treevor spoke as if it were an obvious thing.

“Is it possible to turn them into black skeletons? I mean, so far I’ve only turned corpses directly into black skeletons.” Athos asked.

“There’s only one way to find out.” Treevor responded with a shrug, stopping run away to see if it would work or not.

Athos ordered the abomination to duck and entered its rib cage, where the central skeleton was. If he was going to try to turn the bone abomination, he would do his best.

The mass of bones that protected the main body split open and Athos placed his hand on the skeleton’s solar plexus, where he felt the central core of the abomination. Athos shared a single spark of life force with the core, and the skeleton’s empty eye sockets darkened as a black mist formed inside its skull and spread through its bones, bathing them in darkness.

Its bones turned black and the darkness quickly spread beyond the skeleton, blackening all of the abomination’s bones. The bone abomination made a happy grunt, feeling the changes in his body.

Unlike a black skeleton, ordinary skeletons did not preserve all of their senses. They saw everything in black and white, and their taste and smell were absent. Now the abomination was seeing all colors and feeling things that were impossible before.

Athos felt the mana bond between them turn into a black current the moment all the bones darkened. He didn't get his life force back, but a few sparks of life force wouldn't be a problem for him.

"You look better in that color. I'm sure you feel better too." Athos spoke, feeling what seemed to be happiness

coming from the abomination of bones. The abomination had no control over what it sent through the mindlink and shared its thoughts of joy with everyone until Athos ordered it to hold back.

'Who is the new guy and why is he so happy?' Emilia asked curiously.

'My new experiment. I call him...' Athos paused for a moment as he thought of a suitable name, until he remembered a certain species among the extinct giants. 'Hecatonchires, our newest soldier.'

It was the name of a 50-headed, 100-armed giant who used to live on the Adula continent, before the human crusades wiped them all out. It still lacked a few arms to match, but His abomination of bones was similar enough for Athos.

'How are the other plans? Everything going well?' Athos asked as he thawed a few more corpses, starting to prepare the next abomination.

'All going according to plan, master. Large-scale spells are fully charged and ready to be activated at any time. We left 4 mages together with 10 skeleton soldiers to protect the control room and any one of them can activate large scale spells.' Emilia reported.

'The queen of the hawks hive has also departed with most of the flock towards the mountains. The queen is very smart but still took some time to explain in detail what she needed to do. A few hive hawks were left behind, as the master wanted some close by.' Caio added.

'By the way, what do you need them for? Of course, it would be useful to fire spells from a safe place, but I can't imagine you doing something like that.' Treevor asked suspiciously.

'That depends. How many wands can you craft before the enemy army arrives?' Athos asked with an evil grin and Treevor could tell he was up to something.

"As many as you want. I only need to pluck a single willow branch to make several wands and then use the darkness to feed on the earth to recover the lost mass. How many do you need?" Treevor asked with a shrug.

"One for every mage, paladin and priest in our army. Wizards have common wands which while still useful, are unsuitable for undead. Paladins and priests are in an even worse situation, unable to cast magic at the moment.

Paladins still have their duties on the front lines, but if we bring all the mages and priests together, we will have a powerful unit of mages who can cast spells in the safety of the fortress, while the hawks transmit attacks behind enemy lines." Athos spoke.

"We're not going to rain spells. We're going to cast just one and crush their ranks. We have more than enough mages to cast a temporary large-scale spell. Can you imagine their faces when such a powerful spell appears out of nowhere among their ranks? It's going to be hilarious." Athos began to laugh just at the thought.

"I see, that works too. As soon as the willow recovers I'll prepare the wands." Treevor agreed with his idea.

"Alright, we have a lot to do and little time for it, so let's get going." Athos spoke and returned to focusing on raising corpses like undead.

Chapter 140 Storm cloud

At the same time, in the mountains east of the fortress.

The queen of the hive hawks was flying over the mountains along with most of the flock, finally reaching her goal. They took longer than expected, mainly because The Queen had a hard time understanding what she had to do here.

Despite being incredibly intelligent, teaching her how to attract clouds and charge them electrically was a challenge for Emilia. After an hour of lecture, the queen finally understood what had to be done and led the flock into the mountains.

The queen followed Emilia's instructions and crossed the first mountain, looking for clouds that had not yet reached the mountain and were not too heavy. It would be much simpler to attract the clouds before they had reached the mountains and the heavy clouds were in danger of already being charged and the hawks would become lightning rods if they used lightning magic in that situation.

The queen had found a medium-sized cloud suitable for what they were looking for and was about to order the flock to head towards the cloud, when one of the males spotted a small humanoid being climbing the mountain.

Emilia had instructed the flock to avoid contact with humans, even though the chances of encountering humans in these mountains were low. The queen looked closely at the figure and realized that it was too small to be a human. Despite the queen being more than 1 kilometer away from the creature, she could see it clearly thanks to her excellent eyesight.

Maybe it was a human cub? No, it was too wide for that. The queen could not identify what it was, but the small humanoid soon touched the ground and the earth glowed, creating an underground tunnel that the small humanoid entered, before closing behind him.

The queen watched for a while longer to see if it reappeared, but it never did, so she went back to her main task, making a point of remembering the spot where the tiny humanoid had buried itself.

When the queen turned around, the cloud had already deformed and spread out, making it useless to her. Annoyed, she started looking for another suitable cloud for nearly half an hour until she finally found one.

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It was smaller than his first choice, but better than nothing. The cloud was only 500 meters, but it was enough. A cloud that is too big could disperse or risk the winds blowing it in a different direction.

The queen led the party and the hawks fanned out within the cloud, before the queen shared wind and lightning spells with them. The males fed the spell with their own mana and released it as soon as they

completed them, releasing gales that accelerated the clouds and ensured the cloud stayed in the right direction and releasing electricity to charge the cloud.

Sparks of electricity formed around the males and they transferred all the electricity to the queen. The queen charged the concentrated electricity with her own mana until it dried, before giving it back to the male hawks, who fed the lightning with their own mana and charged the clouds positively.

Much of the energy would disperse, but the cloud would slowly be charged with multiple charges and the cloud would become a storm cloud. The most important part was that the clouds would be charged with their energy signature, so it wouldn't harm the hive hawks themselves. After the cloud reached the fortress, the wind and water mages could increase the size of the cloud to cover the entire fortress.

Now, all the flock could do was fly slowly along with the cloud, sometimes releasing strong winds to redirect the cloud in the right direction whenever it started to swerve. They would also charge the cloud whenever they had energy to spare, random lightning bolts appearing more and more frequently.

The queen kept looking for the small humanoid until the mountain was no longer visible, but he was never seen again.

A few days later, at eight o'clock, in Colonel Orus's tent.

"What do you mean none of the scouts are back yet? They should have regrouped with us yesterday, why haven't we heard from them yet?!" Colonel Orus yelled at the hapless soldier on duty who came to report.

As usual, the bishop and the blue fang had met with him, but the news was not very good. They were only two days' journey from the keep and there was still no sign of the scouts.

The army had sent some mages as scouts to ensure the undead were still in the fortress and those had already returned and regrouped with the marching army, but all the others sent afterwards were missing. It was almost certain that they had been killed, but it didn't make sense that only the scouts sent later would have been eliminated.

According to the scouts who managed to return, none of them had been attacked and although they were unable to infiltrate the fortress, they noticed that the skeletons seemed busy setting up defenses around the outer area, probably planning an urban war.

It was very important and vital information for planning a strategy, the fact that the scouts had brought this information without difficulty almost seemed armed to the colonel.

"It's a tragedy that these lives were lost to the undead scum, but there's no use standing here mourning. All we can do is make sure their deaths weren't in vain and put an end to the evil being that holds on to this world." The bishop spoke with unveiled fanaticism, causing the blue fang to lift its lip in disgust.

Unlike the other two, Blue Fang knew what had happened, as the group of adventurers who had witnessed the scouts' deaths had gathered with them last night, taking care that their presence was not noticed as they gathered at the camp of adventurers.

They reported everything they saw to the blue prey, who congratulated them on coming back alive and ordered them to rest while they processed the information received.

‘Only three possible reasons for one group of scouts to have escaped unscathed and another completely eliminated. The first scouts fled before the undead began to eliminate them, the mages among the scouts were too strong to be eliminated incognito, or the information the first scouts brought back is false and the later ones found out too much.’ The blue fang thought, as he watched the colonel throw a tantrum.

‘Whatever the reason, the information provided is not very reliable. It is better to form another strategy if the information is wrong. Not that I’m going to mention it here.’ The blue fang finished the thought and went back to eating without caring about the world.

“Fuck this!” The colonel swore one last time and sat back in his chair, his face contorted with rage. It was an overreaction for someone who had lost scouts, but the look on the colonel’s face was one of pure anger rather than sadness for the lives lost.

‘This is totally personal to him. He doesn’t care about any of the lives on this mission as long as he gets revenge. It also means that he won’t give the order to withdraw, even if the situation gets ugly.’ The bishop thought with distaste.

Fighting to the death to purge evil was one thing, sacrificing honorable soldiers for personal revenge was another. The three spent the next hour reviewing their plans with the information received, but in the end, there weren’t many significant changes and they all returned to their respective camps.

In the end, the colonel sent new scouts ahead of the army, saying they needed to confirm the wizards’ report. They were ordered to make sure at least one of them would come back with the information, even if they had to sacrifice the others.

The bishop and the blue fang didn’t like his attitude or the way he was sacrificing his own soldiers, but they didn’t say anything as it wasn’t their subordinates being sacrificed.

At the same time in the fortress of the platinum fist.

“Good job guys, that was intense.” Athos congratulated the mage skeletons lying on the ground around him, looking at the row of bone abominations in front of him. They had been working for the past two days stopping only to regenerate their mana.

Of the 2000 corpses that Athos brought back from Faltra, 1800 were turned into 36 bone abominations, all identical to the Hecantochires. Just as Athos had predicted, using the Hecantochires’ body as a model greatly sped up the creation process and the Skeleton Mages gathered like an assembly line around the abominations.

36 bone abominations were standing in front of Athos. Their tyrannical bodies were impressive to say the least. Athos walked among them and shared a single spark of his life force with each, causing his bones to darken and a wave of joy to flow through the mind link.

“It’s really an impressive sight, but I believe my idea won first place.” Emilia spoke proudly as she approached, looking up at the sky. High above them, black storm clouds swirled slowly in a whirlpool.

The clouds were nearly a mile long and filled the sky above the fortress, but they didn’t move beyond the wall’s confines for more than a few feet before the hawks appeared and sent them back toward the center. The cloud was at a height of approximately 5 kilometers high, too high for even a large-scale spell to hit it.