

Legion lich 141

Chapter 141 Complete preparations

The hive hawks had arrived with the storm cloud nearly a day ago, its size nearly triple what it originally was. The clouds gathered as they moved, slowly growing.

When they arrived at the fortress, Athos stopped what he was doing for a few seconds just to admire them, before ordering them to move the storm cloud to the center of the fortress. The hive hawks began to spin in circles releasing strong winds to keep the cloud still above the fortress.

They had been on this unbroken cycle ever since, increasing the cloud's charge every time they had spare mana. Some of the mage skeletons with an affinity for water and air also helped, increasing the cloud's size to its current size.

"It's painful to admit, but you've earned this one. A wall of dark stone, an army of the undead, and a swirl of dark clouds in the sky create the perfect weather. It's impossible to have a more evil stronghold atmosphere than this. A spectacle to be seen, at least for our side. It will be a nightmare for our enemies." Athos spoke with an amused smile as he looked at the sky, until he felt a pair of bony hands touching his shoulders. "What are you doing?"

"A massage, master. You've been working with minimal breaks the last few days, your shoulders must be stiff. I'm only made of bones so I don't know, but your muscles can end up getting stiff so this is a necessary measure." Emilia spoke seriously, never stopping to massage him.

"My muscles are a mass of semi-solid darkness, so there's no need to- wow, that's good." Athos tried to refute her, but realized that the massage was really good and let her continue.

Athos ordered some skeletons to bring tent tarps to cover the bone abominations as they were supposed to be a surprise to the human army, while also checking on the other skeletons' work.

The forge was working non-stop while forging all kinds of weapons non-stop. Athos had considered using dark iron, but he would need to enchant each weapon to make the metal permanently corrupted, impossible with the tight time they had.

Low-ranking skeleton soldiers would have to make do with common iron and steel. Treavor and the skeleton mages were busy corrupting and reforging all of the army's enchanted weapons. They previously annotated all the runes of an equipment before corrupting, so that the weapons would be the same or as similar as possible to their original equipment, so the skeletons wouldn't have a hard time adapting.

.....

Astrus has also been working hard to reorganize the army. Skeletons that originally belonged to the army already had their own positions in the army, but the citizens of Faltra had no sense of combat or strategy and just ran into enemies mindlessly.

After discussing the matter with Athos, he decided to turn them into cannon fodder, forming the second line of defense when enemies attacked. The first would obviously be the corrupted mana barrier around

the walls. Astrus also gathered most of the army's beasts, whether animals or monsters, into a single battalion.

With the exception of the horses that would be used as mounts for knights and the birds flying overhead to give an overview when the battle began, all the beasts were gathered in this group.

The group of demihumans led by Vanilla were also ready to fight at any moment. Weapons made for humans wouldn't fit in the hands of the largest demihumans, but goblins and kobolds had once armed themselves with short swords with daggers suited to their size, while forges created adapted iron armor after taking their measurements.

The minotaurs and orcs were without any equipment, but Athos forced Treevor to create weapons made from the wood of the corrupted willow for all of them. Treevor needed to use darkness to feed on 100 corpses to have enough mass to make weapons for nearly 50 demihumans.

He created only greatswords and axes, leaving the enchantments to the skeleton mages.

Blockades were built around the outer area of the fortress to slow the enemy's advance, and traps such as pits dug with wooden spears at the bottom were scattered throughout the fortress. The skeletons didn't cover these traps on purpose, so invading humans would notice the traps and be forced to dodge them.

The main streets were full of traps and the humans would have to make several detours or break down the roadblocks to get through.

'Someone seems to be relaxing while the others are working, doesn't it?' Treevor complained through the link. He and the skeleton mages had already finished corrupting the enchanted weapons and were busy creating the weapons for the demihumans.

'My part is already done, I don't know runesmithing and I can't craft the wooden weapons, so there's not much I can do. Just stop complaining and focus on your work.' Athos ordered and removed the cloak he wore.

Emilia followed her lead and continued her massage all over her body. Since becoming an undead, Athos has lost all sense of embarrassment and has more than once forgotten to wear clothes when walking through the fortress. He was more ashamed to walk around with a bare skeleton than to walk around naked.

'Man, she really knows what she's doing. If you ever get your body back, you need to try her massage.' Athos spoke with good intentions, but Treevor refused with all his might.

No matter how gentle Emilia looked, he didn't know what she looked like in life and the idea of bony hands massaging her body didn't seem pleasant at all.

'Jokes aside, almost all of our preparations are complete. How long until the enemy appears?' Athos spoke seriously, but Emilia never stopped massaging him.

'The enemy army is a day or two away as they need to stop to rest. The undead birds can reach them in less than four hours and are monitoring their movements. Emilia reported through the mind link, so the undead could still hear.

'They also sent more scouts to us but fled the moment they saw our walls. There were many of them and they ran in different directions at the time of the escape, so it would be difficult to chase them.' Astrus also spoke. He was happy overseeing the undead at work, while also inspecting his new equipment.

Treavor had corrupted his spear and armor after the blacksmiths repaired it and the skeleton mages runesmithing again. His gleaming black armor matched the giant spear very well.

'Well, I don't mind scouts watching the walls, but make sure none of them have a view from above. It would be a pain if they could see the bone abominations.' Athos said.

"They haven't sent any mage among the new scouts yet, but it will be nearly impossible to stop the spying when the army approaches.' Astrus warned him worriedly, the bone abominations looked strong, but if the enemy took aim at them with siege weapons or ranged spells, it would be the end of them.

The creatures were stupid and didn't know how to use abilities, so they would be easy targets if some elite soldiers blocked them while the mages attacked, just like the crusaders did with Treavor.

'In that case, we will hide them inside buildings or tents. I can order them to disassemble to fit the buildings and remain in pieces until further notice.' Athos quickly thought of a solution.

'This might work. Where will you want to place them? Not every building can fit a Bone Abomination and soldiers will likely check buildings to ensure they won't be ambushed as they advance. We can block the buildings and leave them half-destroyed so that enemy soldiers can't get in, but that's the most we can do.' Emilia said, circling Athos to massage his chest and abdomen.

"Watch your hands, Emilia." Athos spoke in jest, making sure the skeletons in the link didn't hear and continued the discussion. 'We don't need to keep the abominations hidden for long, just until the enemies invade and it becomes difficult for them to retreat.'

'Once I finish crafting the corrupted willow weapons and the skeleton mages runesmithing them, there won't be much more we can do. What are we going to do after that?' Treavor asked, still busy with the demihumans' weapons.

'We expect.' Athos replied and donned the cloak again. His body was much more relaxed than before and he thanked Emilia for that.

"No problem master. Call me whenever you need to." Emilia said happily and said goodbye to him.

"What the hell happened to her today? Athos wondered. He was surprised by the obvious attempt to attract attention, but he didn't think it was a bad thing.

"She was very beautiful when she was alive. We could have fun if I found a way to return her body. It was Athos's last thought before he forgot. If he wanted to get back in the game, he needed to focus and win the battle ahead.

A few blocks away, Emilia was walking calmly when Caio appeared and crossed his arms in front of her. If he still had a face, Emilia was sure he would have a raised eyebrow and a questioning expression.

"What's it?" Emilia feigned ignorance.

“What are you planning?” Gaius didn’t fall for her act and asked brusquely.

“I’m just making sure the master doesn’t forget me in the future. As the army grows, more and more powerful skeletons are added to our ranks, and the weakest fall by the wayside.” Emilia spoke with the closest thing a skeleton could manage to a sigh.

Chapter 142 The arrival of the army

“Like this?” Caio asked, not understanding Emilia’s concern.

“Do you remember that earth mage Sevenus? He was one of the master’s first skeletons, but look at him now. The master barely remembers his existence, considering him just another of the skeleton mages. He doesn’t know how to runesmithing, so it was left in Astrus’ hands to build traps along with the low-ranking skeletons.” Emilia spoke of her concerns.

Athos didn’t really care for any of his skeletons, he just used them as tools. The only one who had a guaranteed place in his mind was Treevor, but that was because of his numerous exceptional abilities, not himself.

In fact, Treevor had been given command of the entire army as his second-in-command, while Astrus and Emilia became his generals. After them were squad leaders like Caio and Vanilla, but Athos paid no attention to them, remembering their existence only when it suited him.

“I understand now where your concern comes from. But what’s your plan? Want to lure the master into a honey trap? I must say, you need to gain a few pounds for that. You’re just the bone at the moment.” Caio spoke and Emilia slapped her forehead with her horrible joke.

“I’m just securing ground. The master will probably figure out a way to give us our bodies back and I want to have an advantage over anyone who might join us in the future.” Emilia spoke determinedly.

Caio nodded in agreement with her idea. Using a honey trap was very common in high society. Even Emilia was almost used in a political wedding before running away from home. Emilia herself was not against marriage per se, just the idea of being stuck in a noble family with no freedom at all seemed irritating to her.

“I really support you trying to move things forward and gain a foothold for yourself, but try to focus on the upcoming battle. Have you got the new gear from Treevor yet?” Caio warned her as he did when she was a child and was very engrossed in her games.

“It’s truly amazing that he took the time to make our equipment with the amount of work our master gave him.” Emilia spoke with a mixture of pity and admiration to Treevor.

.....

Blacksmiths had forged custom armor for Emilia, Caio, and Athos. It was the only dark iron armor made in the keep and Treevor personally charmed them despite their short time. The dark iron was no better than regular iron and didn’t have much energy, but Treevor managed to runesmith two enchantments throughout the set.

He spread the runes across the armor set to get enchantments he thought were decent. The first enchantment was magic dispersion that mage slayers were used to and the second enchantment was impact dispersion, which he learned from Astrus' equipment.

Both incantations were self-explanatory, reducing damage taken both physical and magical.

The two started walking around the fortress while watching the storm clouds. They usually walked together when they weren't busy, as there wasn't much to do in the keep.

"I know I said it's okay and I'll support you, but do you happen to have a plan? Because the master never mentioned women and any kind of desire other than violence and power. Even when he regained his manhood, he never expressed any desire for women. You'll go a long way if you want to take a chance, if you get a proper body, of course." Caio spoke a little discouraged.

"That's not a problem. I've already done some research on the master's past with Sevenus, and he said the master has a fetish in milfs. When I get my body back, I'll be right in his attack zone." Emilia spoke confidently.

That reminded Caio. Despite his human appearance being in his mid-20s, his actual age was already past his mid-30s. It was definitely in its master's attack zone.

"Besides, you also saw when the master walked around the fortress naked yesterday didn't you? That size is definitely something worth sitting on. I can't wait to get my body back so I can debut it." Emilia continued talking and Caio realized one more thing.

Emilia was also incredibly frustrated sexually and very assertive about what she wanted. She's never had a problem or shame in going after someone she cares about.

"Just be careful not to be too invasive and the master finds you annoying. Despite appearances, our master is still very young and inexperienced." Caio started giving relationship advice and Emilia undid the darkness in his ears, silencing him.

She even took care to nod her head every now and then and give generic answers so he wouldn't suspect anything.

Two days passed in the blink of an eye and soon the skeleton birds reported that humans were close to the fortress.

All the skeletons rushed to their positions the moment the first human was spotted on the horizon. Athos ran to the walls and took a spyglass to watch the enemies.

The vanguard of thousands of crusaders looked impressive, but Athos was sure their faces were shocked at the sight of the fortress. Or has the sight of an evil stronghold only made them more determined? The kingdom army soldiers on the left and right sure looked terrified.

'Emilia and Astrus come here. I want to know if any of you recognize any important figures in the army.' The human army slowly approached until it stopped a few kilometers away and Athos searched for any important figures among their ranks. There were a few soldiers with slightly superior armor than the others that Athos assumed were captains, but he found no major commanders.

'My king, take a look behind the crusaders, where the enemy's command center is.' Astrus spoke. Athos followed his advice and focused on the center of the enemy army. The soldiers in the center of the formation wore much better equipment than the rest of the army and the vast majority were on horseback, but they all wore armor or in the case of mages, hoods that covered their faces.

A group of paladins protecting a man in clerical robes made their way toward them, the horse soldiers respectfully clearing a path for them. A group that Athos assumed to be adventurers due to the difference in their equipment also approached them, but these came from behind the army.

'Master, take a look at the flags the soldiers are flying. You can find out what noble family they belong to, or if they are part of the kingdom's army.' Emilia explained to Athos, who was ignorant when it came to army practices.

The kingdom's army had the custom of flying the kingdom's flag and a flag of the noble house to which they belonged. The noble could never place his flag above the kingdom's flag, or that would be considered an affront to the royal family.

'I don't know any noble house, least of all their pennants. Does anyone recognize any?' Athos asked, before a slight regret crept into his mind. 'Should we have created a flag of our own? Do you think there's still time to create one?'

'I recognize that flag. It's my family's flag, so my brother must be the commander of this mission. He must have been chosen for this mission to make up for my mistake.' Astrus spoke in a voice more bitter than usual, ignoring Athos' idiotic concern.

His loyalty was entirely to Athos, but it's not like Astrus has completely forgotten about his family. He wouldn't hesitate to kill his own family when the fight started, but that doesn't mean it would be easy.

'Church forces will act as the vanguard, just as expected. The priests are being protected by adventurers and paladins, so it is likely that they will try to conjure a holy field to weaken us.' Emilia spoke as if she had already expected this. It was a standard tactic when facing undead.

She noticed that the court mages were scattered throughout the army in groups of five, so it would be difficult to target them. Priests were a much more obvious target and danger.

'They know this tactic wouldn't work and Treevor can teleport, so why insist on casting a large-scale spell?' Athos asked confused. Repeating the same strategy seemed stupid to him.

'It is likely to be a trap. I don't think it's a good idea to teleport to ambush them like we did the first time.' Treevor joined the conversation. He was already inside the willow at his human size, but he didn't climb the walls, preferring to watch the army through the eyes of the few hive hawks that weren't busy with the storm cloud.

'No, if they took the trouble to create a trap like that, I would feel bad for not completely spoiling their plans. Remember what I said about hive hawks and releasing large-scale spells in the midst of enemy formation?' Athos said amusedly.

'This might work, but the moment the spell wears off, I'll be alone in the midst of enemy forces. If the thousands of crusaders turn around and attack me along with the forces of the realm, I will die.' Treevor spoke worriedly.

'Don't worry, you're our ace and I won't use you right from the start. I want you to make your move when the troops are so entangled with each other that they won't be able to react to you until it's too late. We have other cards we can use in the meantime.' Athos replied confidently.

Athos was incredibly excited for the battle to come and to see how many surprises the human army had prepared for him and how he could crush them one by one.

Chapter 143 Start of the siege

"The scouts really were right. I still find it hard to believe, even though it's right in front of me." Colonel Orus muttered bitterly, looking at the black stone walls and the swirling clouds in the distance.

He was mounted on his familiar, a black bicorn. Unlike their one-horned cousins, bicorns were violent creatures and had an affinity for fire and darkness, being almost the size of a bull.

The fortress had an evil appearance that screamed "we are evil!" for those who saw. He could clearly see that his soldiers were shaken, but Orus couldn't blame them. The swirling black clouds and the occasional black bolt were a sight that would make any sane person turn and flee, but what really worried him were the black walls.

If the walls have turned dark, it means that the undead have successfully corrupted the stronghold's large-scale spells. It was hard to believe that the undead managed to corrupt spells on a large scale, but it would just be one more unbelievable feat added to these undead.

He would have to review his battle plan, as he didn't expect to face large-scale spells. Air defenses would have to be created to fend off the black lightning storm, plus a spell powerful enough to break down the barrier he knew would rise once combat began.

"Colonel, the bishop and blue fang are approaching us." One of the elite knights around him spoke up. The elite knights around him were his personal guards, knights he had brought with him from his own army.

Orus waved the knight back to his position and addressed the bishop and adventurer.

"That's not quite what I expected. I've never seen anything like this before. Since when do undead or plant monsters do that?" The blue prey started talking the moment it approached, looking curiously at the storm cloud. He didn't know much about magic and found the black wall frightening, but no more so than the storm.

"These filthy undead really are pure evil. How in Eishin's name were they able to remake the spells on a large scale? Wasn't the control room destroyed and completely inoperative? How did these plagues fix this?" The bishop began to curse furiously, looking at the black walls.

.....

He recognized the threat that large-scale spells posed. If the undead raised a barrier and attacked using magic or the storm, they would be one-sidedly attacked until the barrier fell.

"Wait, are you talking about those mana shields that appear whenever a big city is attacked? How are we going to take down such a thing?" The blue fang asked in alarm. He had already participated in the

defense of a major city more than once, and these barriers always rose and blocked any enemy that attacked.

He wasn't ignorant enough to believe they were indestructible, but they definitely didn't have enough firepower to destroy him today.

"Gather the mages. We have enough to gather them into five different units and still to cast large-scale spells. This might lessen the plant monster's focus on the false priests, but it's necessary to break down the barrier." Orus suggested and the two agreed.

"Blue Fang, your adventurers will be responsible for protecting the mages. You are the most versatile and can protect them better than elite soldiers." The blue fang nodded at his words and dismissed his team to go over the instructions.

"Bishop, your crusaders and priests will continue with the same formation as before. The holy field should make you alert and focus the undead aggression on you. With luck, the 'plant monster' will move as soon as the barrier falls to prevent the holy field from weakening your army." Orus said, but the bishop shook his head.

"If we insist on conjuring a holy field, we will be exposed to storm clouds. If the undead use the storm clouds to rain lightning on our forces, we will be lost. I will order them to conjure a great holy barrier to protect us from the storm rays and attacks from the enemy's siege weapons, while the mages destroy their barriers." The bishop said firmly.

"If they spend their mana on a barrier, it will take a long time to cast a holy field even if they use mana regeneration potions by the time they finish the barrier." Orus began to complain, but the bishop did not change his mind.

"I will not sacrifice good men in vain, Colonel. My crusaders are not sacrificial pawns for you to use in your personal revenge. We came here for justice and to purge evil and that is what we will do." The bishop spoke resolutely, causing the colonel to frown and glare at him, but he had to be careful with his words in front of the army.

Orus took a deep breath and calmed down, realizing the truth in the bishop's words. Being impulsive and sacrificing soldiers would get him nowhere and picking a fight with the bishop much less. He might have been the field commander for this mission, but the church forces were independent and were here as allies, not underlings.

"Alright, let's go with your plan. Since you're going to conjure a barrier, take the siege weapons with you. The siege weapons will do great damage to walls, but they are vulnerable to attack. Protect them as you advance." Orus ordered, his voice getting particularly authoritative towards the end.

It is not because the bishop was not under his authority that Orus would allow him to do as he pleased. A chain of command was still needed, particularly once the battle started.

"Not a problem. The siege weapons will be very useful and I guarantee my crusaders will give their lives to protect the soldiers operating them." Luckily, the bishop had no interest in who was in charge and just acted as he saw fit for the mission.

“Soldiers who will surround the gate on the other side will wait until the barrier is down before invading or trying to scale the walls, so we’re counting on you.” Orus spoke with disgust.

“But how are we going to deal with the storm clouds? Or do you intend to let them shoot lightning at us without fighting back?” the blue fang asked, realizing the conversation was winding down and the main problem still hadn’t been answered. He’d avoided getting involved in the spark exchange between the two, but he needed to ask.

Unfortunately, neither of them had an answer to that question. Trying to fight back against a cloud in the sky is like trying to fight nature and none of them had brought any artifacts capable of that. They were unable to fight back at the moment and were pinning their hopes on the lightning not being that powerful or consuming too much energy to attack.

“Fuck.” The blue fang understood their prolonged silence and swore under his breath. “Since the adventurers will be divided into different teams to protect the mages, my team and I will join the ‘adventurers’ protecting the priests.”

“Yes, fine.” Colonel Orus nodded and the blue prey walked away from them to rejoin his team.

“Then I must say goodbye too.” The bishop also left, leaving the colonel with only his knights protecting him.

“No more stalling.” The colonel sighed before taking a communication cube from a pouch strapped to his familiar’s saddle. He activated the cube and called the throne room, internally praying he wouldn’t be answered.

Unfortunately, their prayers were in vain and the other side answered a few seconds later. The royal court was almost fully assembled and their expressions were a mixture of anxiety and concern. The king was not present this time, but all the other members of the last meeting were present.

Before Orus could say anything, sounds of amazement came from the royal hall as many of the nobles gasped in horror at the sight of the swirling black clouds and the wall of dark stones. None of them expected to see large-scale spells functional, let alone an evil stronghold.

“Colonel Orus, what does this mean??” Commander Ragnar asked shocked.

“As you can see, the enemy has also prepared for battle rather than just standing around waiting. We are currently reworking our battle plan and are about to attack.” Colonel Orus spoke in a monotone voice, not at all willing to waste his own time arguing with idiots.

“Are you sure you are capable of winning? If you are not confident of victory, retreat immediately. Your defeat is not only a loss for the kingdom, but it will also strengthen the enemy even more.” The master of magic spoke coldly and the colonel glared at him.

There was no respect in his gaze, just wounded pride as if just the thought of retreating in front of the enemy who killed his brother was offensive to him.

“I have full confidence that we are able to eradicate these undead. From the start we were with excess firepower, but we still have the upper hand. The siege is about to begin, so I hope you’ll excuse me.” Colonel Orus handed the communication cube to another mage, ignoring the nobles’ complaints.

The colonel began shouting orders and the unit captains broadcast their orders, the army slowly beginning the siege.

Chapter 144 Trap revealed

“They started to move.” A mage slayer trailing behind the army spoke on the communicator to his companions. He had been following the human army silently for the past few days, but he began to move actively now that the battle was about to begin.

“Call the elder of darkness.” One of the unit captains spoke up and one of them removed a bracelet with a purple crystal.

Communication items used teleportation crystals for long-distance communication, as it would be impossible for a single mage to have enough mana to connect over great distances.

The teleportation crystals would use the resonance with the other crystals as a signal, greatly reducing the amount of mana spent to activate them.

“Has begun?” The dark elder Louis Zahara asked as soon as the call was connected.

“Yes sir, but things are a little different than expected. What are your orders?” One of the captains asked just to confirm as they reported what the fortress looked like.

“Fascinating. Your orders are still the same, captain. Do not interfere during the battle and find the hidden leader of the undead. Destroy his body and collect his remains. You must be careful as these skeletons explode their own bodies to take their enemies with them.”

“You need to destroy its skull, the weak point of these skeletons, before it explodes.” The elder ordered and the five captains listening nodded.

“We have to think of a way to escape after recovering the corpse. It’s possible the undead will fall the moment we destroy the leader. I don’t want to have to deal with the idiots in the army.” One of the captains began to complain.

.....

“Let me check something.” The elder disappeared for a few seconds and returned shortly after with a smile. “I have good news. The order cannot detect the teleport crystal in the fortress, so it is impossible to use portals to send reinforcements to you or use them to extract them after completing the quest.”

Athos had destroyed the crystal in the fortress, so the order mistakenly thought it had been destroyed to prevent the army from teleporting and sending reinforcements.

“I think we have different definitions of good news, elder.”

“That also means it’s possible to teleport to the fortress. Do any of you have a teleport crystal with you?” The elder asked and two of the captains replied yes. The teleport crystal was a very expensive item, but it was an excellent lifesaver and many mages took them with them as an emergency measure.

The crystals that the captains had was much inferior to what Emilia had, reaching only two kilometers, but it served its purpose.

“Fine! Use teleport after you’ve eliminated the target to take the remains away. It’s impossible to reach your goals without being discovered, so suffice it to say you’re late-deployed reinforcements or something. As long as you leave the corpse plant behind, no one will complain about getting help.” The elder spoke excitedly.

He had already prepared the specific experiments he wanted to test with this very rare material.

“Good, get ready to move. The siege will start soon.” The elder spoke and ended the call.

The captains split up and reassembled with their teams, each of them moving to their previously discussed positions. The leader would likely be inside the fortress rather than the outer area of the wall, but where exactly was still a mystery.

They intended to invade and split as soon as the barrier fell.

“They’re finally starting. I was getting tired of waiting.” Athos spoke with a smile, seeing the troops begin to move.

Most of the troops circled the fortress to surround them. making a long loop to stay out of the lightning range.

Light armored soldiers and mercenaries carrying ladders skirted the walls as heavy units and cavalry circled and headed for the other gate.

‘Should we raise the barrier?’ Trevor asked, but Athos shook his head.

‘It will take more than half an hour for the heavy troops to reach the other gate. Raising the barrier now would only waste energy.’ Athos spoke and continued to watch the enemy leaders.

The adventurers had joined the protection of the priests along with the church representative, but the army commander remained stationary.

“Master, the mages are assembling into five different teams, enough to fire large-scale spells. If all these mages fire large-scale spells, the barrier will fall in less than an hour.” Emilia spoke to Athos, pointing to where the hooded soldiers were gathering.

The adventurers also came from the rear and surrounded the mages to protect them.

“It’s going to be difficult to take them down with arrows or siege weapons, so let’s try to use the storm to eliminate them. Warn the queen of hive hawks to be ready to shoot lightning the moment they come into range. Even if the priests conjure a sacred field, the lightning will move too fast to be weakened.” Athos ordered.

“The cloud is too high in the sky for the hive hawks to aim accurately. We’ll need to aim the targets for them to hit.” Astrus spoke, still looking at his brother from a distance. They had already tested it using straw dolls and found that the beehive hawks could shoot beams accurately up to 2 kilometers away, any further they would need help aiming.

“Don’t worry, they’ll draw a lot of attention to themselves. The mages will glow with mana while casting the spell, so they’ll be a tough target to miss.” Emilia spoke, noticing that the mages began to concentrate. They all entered a circular formation and raised their wands in front of their chests and conjured up massive amounts of mana.

The mages focused their energy at the center of their formation and a sphere made of pure mana began to form. Mages had different elemental affinity and the only element they all had in common was pure mana.

The sphere was small, but it was extremely concentrated and volatile. The conflicting energies tried to drive each other out and the mages needed sheer concentration to keep the whole thing from exploding.

It was one of the biggest weaknesses of large-scale spells and the reason why mages needed to slowly add energy. To make matters worse, mages from different tiers would need to feed the large-scale spell in different amounts, to compensate for the different concentrations of energy.

The weakest ones would need to put in twice as much energy, while the strongest ones would only need to put in half the usual so the others could keep up and the spell’s power would be in the middle.

Skeleton mages wouldn’t have this problem and could feed their spell with all their energy without taking any risks.

One of the mages stepped forward in each group, taking control of the concentrated mana sphere. Only one mage could control and shape the spell while the rest kept the massive amount of energy from getting out of control.

Different mages cast spells in whatever way suited them best, so only one of them would cast the spell and all the others would act as a support.

“It’s really amazing that they can conjure up that much energy. I need to start my training in coordinating spells with others soon. This is too amazing to let go.” Athos muttered ecstatically. He couldn’t feel the energy because of the distance, but he knew how much energy 50 mages would be able to conjure if they worked together.

Athos turned to the priests and saw that the energy was even more intense there. A sphere of pure light was forming above them and Athos felt a threat coming from that sphere. Even without being able to feel it, Athos felt an instinctive repulsion just to see the element of light. His face twisted into a scowl of disgust, but he noticed an oddity.

The priests in the center of the formation were not at all focused, looking at the sphere of light above their stunned heads. The adventurers around him, on the other hand, were mostly with their eyes closed, focused on something. It didn’t make sense for priests who needed to control an even greater amount of energy to be even more relaxed.

Athos smiled wickedly at this, understanding the trap. ‘Guys, those priests are fake. They are decoys to attract Treevor. The real priests are disguised as adventurers. Take a good look at their expressions and you will understand what I am trying to say.’

The skeletons followed his command and realized it was true.

“How did you notice that, master? I can barely make out their faces from each other from this distance.” Emilia asked in surprise.

“You don’t have to look at their faces, you can see their relaxation by their body expression. The ‘priests’ are with their arms close to their sides or just crossed arms while the adventurers who are supposed to be protecting them are in deep silence, totally concentrated on casting the spell.” Athos explained his thinking.

‘Now that we find out what the trap is, should I teleport and thwart your plans?’ Treevor asked, his bloodlust building as he stared at the cluster of light in disgust, before noticing his own homicidal thoughts and trying to control himself.

‘No, follow the plan and wait quietly, you will have your chance to fight. We will only use siege weapons and storm clouds in the first phase of the plan, as we decided earlier.’ Athos ordered, straining at the sudden bloodlust Treevor displayed.

They had already discussed a strategy and everyone had agreed it was for the best, so it was strange that he wanted to move so soon.

Chapter 145 The force of storm

‘Have you prepared your poison? How much were you able to prepare?’ Athos asked to try to get Treevor focused again, as he seemed lost in his own thoughts.

‘65 barrels of pure poison. They are currently scattered around the wall and I intend for the archers to fire poison arrows when the fight begins. It is far more effective than bathing swords and spears in poison.’ Treevor replied, still half lost in his own thoughts.

Even if the poison arrows just graze it, it would still be a death sentence for anyone unable to use mana. Even mana users would only be able to slow the effects of the parasitic venom.

To make matters worse for victims, the parasitic venom could freely change between a liquid form and an airborne parasite form.

‘Great, focus the poisoned arrows on the poorly equipped enemy soldiers around the fortress. They will hardly be able to defend themselves being so poorly equipped.’ Athos spoke, but a light shining from outside the gate interrupted him.

The priests and mages had finished casting the large-scale spell and a gigantic dome made of pure light surrounded the crusaders, blocking their view. The dome of light was nothing Athos or any of the skeletons had ever seen before.

Instead of a standard spherical barrier, there were thousands of light shields with a hexagon pattern perfectly connected to each other. Each shield of light was the size of a tower shield and over two feet thick.

The biggest advantage of this barrier with hexagon patterns is that the bishop could freely control them and stack them to defend against more powerful attacks, although this created gaps in his defense.

The hexagonal barrier moved slowly as the army advanced, the crusader, wizards and siege weapons taking care to keep up with the marching speed of the priests.

.....

'Raise the barrier and start shooting lightning. I want this barrier in the ground and the priests who control it dead.' Athos ordered, making mental notes to steal the secret of these barriers.

The skeleton mage inside the control room nodded and touched the pedestal, activating the corrupted mana barrier. The black barrier rose in an instant, scaring all the soldiers around who had no knowledge of magic and did not expect such powerful magic from the undead.

But it was the swirling black clouds that really terrified them.

Ever since Athos ordered the queen to prepare, the whirlpool began to spin faster and faster, the thick clouds at the center of the whirlpool becoming more and more sparse until they disappeared completely, creating a vacuum at its center. The whirlpool now looked more like a ring of black clouds, dark lightning flowing through the ring constantly.

The hive hawks that acted as lightning rods were rotating at high speed in the same direction as the clouds, evenly spaced from each other and attracting the lightning to move the cloud faster and faster. The hawks were releasing a minimal amount of mana, but it was enough to draw black lightning to their bodies.

Athos and all the skeleton mages with an affinity for air or water had emptied their cores in the previous days to create this cloud and make it charged, so the hawks hardly needed to spend energy now, all the energy was already around them and they they only used a fraction of their energy to attract lightning.

The black lightning would flow through your bones without doing any damage, before the next hawk released energy and drew the lightning into a full circle, the movement increasing its charge with each cycle. The louder and louder sounds of thunder would have burst the birds' eardrums if they still had one, while the air around them crackled with energy.

The cycle continued until the rays moved so fast that the hawks had trouble keeping up, then they mentally signaled the queen that they were ready.

The queen stood in the center of the ring of clouds, lazily flapping her wings as she watched the hawks gather energy. The moment the males of the pride said they were ready, the queen charged the air around her positively with energy in the same way that Athos had taught her, drawing all the rays around her towards her.

Lightning came from all directions, forming a pattern like a spider's web of pure electricity. The queen almost lost control of so much energy, but the other hawks helped her to control the energy, despite being far away from each other.

Unable to keep the energy contained for more than a few seconds, the queen fired the contained electricity at the dome of light. A single bolt of lightning as thick as a pillar descended against the ground, cutting the distance between the clouds and the hexagonal barrier in seconds.

On the ground, Bishop panicked at the sight of energy in a spider's web pattern in the sky. He immediately focused the shields of light towards the sky, the pillar of black lightning striking the shields a few seconds later.

A burst of energy happened at the moment of impact, its glow spreading throughout the fortress and its surroundings. A deafening sound like a dragon's roar deafened the church forces and the mages beneath the barrier, their eardrums bursting as blood poured from their ears.

The shock wave knocked the reserve troops behind the Crusaders to the ground and caused the corrupted barrier to shake, deeply shocking Athos and the other skeletons. They had only tried shooting ordinary lightning so far and although they had tested the cloud ring, they hadn't fired their lightning at full force to save energy.

Emilia had explained about the energy ring and although she didn't know how it worked, she was sure she could concentrate all the storm's energy into one super strong attack. Although no one expected his power to be so absurd.

"Wow. That was amazing, Emilia." Athos congratulated her in a daze, seeing the corrupted barrier shake just from the incoming shock wave. It suffered no damage, but it said a lot about the magnitude of the attack.

"It was amazing for sure, but not enough." Emilia spoke with a little regret. The glare of light had diminished and although the humans still had to adjust after nearly going blind and deaf, but the skeletons only needed a small pulse of darkness to restore their senses.

They saw that even though more than a hundred light shields had been completely destroyed and even more were heavily cracked, the humans below only suffered the aftereffects of the explosion, but none of them had died. To make matters worse, more than half of the large-scale spells were still working.

With the exception of a team of mages who reacted late and had their eardrums burst, the other teams had activated the defensive enchantments on their cloaks and protected themselves from the aftereffects of the explosion. They were still hearing a loud humming, but they managed to stay steady enough to keep control of the spells.

The army's advance temporarily stopped, but Athos noticed that the bishop was shouting orders while sweating profusely. It was likely that many priests had fallen to the ground and lost control of the barrier, adding to the bishop's burden.

'Prepare the next attack, queen. It will take some time to conjure another lightning bolt this strong, so rain lightning down on them. Aim at the mages and prevent them from hitting the barrier with their spells.' Athos ordered and the queen obeyed.

The hive hawks again began to spin, and the rays that had disappeared slowly began to accumulate again. Seeing this, the bishop on the ground screamed even more, trying to wake up the stunned priests.

"All of you wake up!! Resume your positions immediately, the enemy will attack again soon! We need to invade them before then!" The bishop screamed as he sweated profusely, blood running from his nose in an effort to keep the shields of light with only half the priests.

"Paladins, heal as many as you can and resume the advance!" With that order, paladins who were not deafened cast area healing spells, saving as many people as possible. pulses of light spread from the paladins, healing everyone they reached.

The area healing spell healed anyone injured within a certain distance around the caster until the mana contained in the spell ran out. It was a very useful spell for healers in an army, but it ran the risk of healing someone with crooked or poorly healed bones, as it was something done automatically.

The nearby priests and adventurers finally regained their hearing, staring in horror at the still crumbling shields of light and the occasional lightning bolt in the sky. The priests immediately focused on regenerating the light shields still standing.

Before the priests could regenerate shields or the paladins heal the deaf crusaders, the first black bolts hit one of the mage units, the electricity bypassing magical wards and electrocuting their bodies as darkness spread through their bodies.

The shields of light were still concentrated where the pillar of electricity hit in the middle of the Crusader formation. Most of the army was unprotected at the moment and this unit of mages was particularly far from the shields, so the bishop couldn't protect them in time.

All the mages hit were badly injured, but it was the ill-timed healing that killed them. The paladins hurriedly cast healing spells in the hope that they could regain control of the large-scale spell, but that was a serious mistake.

The mages' flesh was charred and smoking, at least what the darkness did not devour. The cure drained what little vitality they had left and killed them, passing out the few survivors.

Chapter 146 Defense violated

Before the first crusader managed to reach the fortress, two of the large-scale spells had already been lost.

'Fuck. We need to react or we'll be killed before we can do anything. If any more mage units are killed or lose focus, we won't be able to bring down the miasma barrier. Eishin would never forgive me if this mission failed and neither would I.' The bishop thought, taking a special grade mana regeneration potion.

The bishop spread the light shields again to try to cover as much ground as possible, but the loss of so many shields created too many gaps in his defense. New shields were being conjured as priests recovered and resumed the spell, but it didn't do much to cover so many gaps.

"Continue the advance!" The bishop started shouting orders, but it was unnecessary. The Crusaders were deaf, but their fighting spirit was burning furiously. They saw that the lightning was falling again on their mages and realized the danger it posed, abandoning any concern for their own lives and running furiously for the gate.

Those further back followed the lead of the first and ran, the tight formation of the Crusaders breaking as they advanced fearlessly, ignoring the earaches they felt with sheer force of will.

In their minds, the beams would target those who were easy targets instead of hitting the shields of light. Many of them would die for it, but it wasn't a problem for the crusader fanatics. Dying on a crusade to ensure the evil was expunged was an honor, after all.

“Fire.” Unfortunately for them, Athos would not fall for this provocation so easily. The ballistae and catapults behind the walls fired, raining stones and arrows on the crusaders. Barriers had a convenient feature that allowed anything from inside to pass through, but would block any attacks coming from outside.

The Crusaders didn’t flinch in the face of attacks, raising their weapons and using their best skills in an attempt to block incoming ballista giant arrows, or at least serve as a human shield to protect others coming after them. Even with their best skills, all they could do was be crushed or roll to save themselves.

The rocks from the catapults crushed all the crusaders who were too slow to react, but it was the ballista arrows that did the most damage. The crusaders didn’t notice, but the arrows were black and their wooden base was rotting as they flew.

.....

Athos had positioned mana users to operate the ballistae and ordered them to use the weapon break skill on all arrows before firing them. Ballista arrows struck the Crusaders’ shields or armor and impaled them without resistance, slashing the corpses to pieces.

“Recharge.” Athos was impressed by the ballistae’s offensive power, but they had only killed a few dozen crusaders and there were still thousands.

“Screw this.” The bishop swore under his breath, before starting to yell again. “Follow the Crusaders’ lead and advance! We need to take down the walls at once! We will defend the lightning, so advance without looking up!”

The paladins and adventurers nodded their heads realizing the gravity of the situation, but the soldiers pushing siege weapons were still lying on the ground while holding their bleeding ears. They were moaning in pain on the floor and it didn’t look like they would get up anytime soon.

“Tch. Paladins heal them!” The bishop clicked his tongue and spoke reluctantly. The crusaders weren’t listening to their orders and were just running frantically, so they needed to advance at once to cover them with shields to avoid heavy casualties.

The paladins knew this and rushed to heal them, breaking out of defensive formation and moving to heal the soldiers.

A few sporadic bolts managed to break through the gaps in the defense and hit a third group of mages, causing the bishop to curse once more and try to hurry. Luckily, the soldiers weren’t new to war and they quickly recovered and pushed the siege weapons.

The paladins also helped push the siege weapons, but the walls were still far away.

“For Eishin!” Crusaders reached the gates and shouted as one, though they could not hear each other. They hit the gate with all their might, but only sparks flew. The energy of the large-scale spells made the gate as strong as the barrier.

The difference is that the barrier was made of pure energy, while the gates were made of steel filled with energy. It was pretty obvious which one would be tougher. Crusaders could only make superficial scratches, but the same wasn't true for the undead above the gate.

The skeletons dragged barrels full of oil and dropped them onto the crusaders below, before one of them threw a torch and all the barrels exploded. The crusaders pressed against the gate were unable to escape in time, their own comrades arrested them and were burned alive in the flame.

The oil also didn't burn all at once and made the gate keep burning, as well as the area in front of the gate.

"Fire!" Luckily, the siege weapons finally came within range of the wall and fired. Rocks, firebombs and explosive arrows rained down on the barrier, causing a series of explosions that made the walls shake, but the damage was far from enough.

The skeletons tried to fight back by firing their own siege weapons, but the priests had gotten too close and with them the light shields, most of the gaps filled in even as the lightning bolts constantly dealt damage.

Priests were pouring out all their mana to maintain shields, so even constant damage couldn't keep up with their regeneration. The shields again covered in a spherical pattern and protected the crusaders, the front shields touching the corrupted barrier.

The light fought the corruption as smoke billowed out of the point of contact. The attacks of both siege weapons were useless now, both blocked by their respective barriers. Both projectiles exploded on contact, sending out shock waves and sounds so loud they would deafen the nearest humans if their eardrums weren't already burst.

Skeletons on top of the gates and to the side also attacked physically while the crusaders unleashed long-range abilities like aura blades, but their attacks were just scratches compared to the rest.

"It's going to be broken soon, huh. I was hoping it would last a little longer." Athos muttered, seeing the constant attacks on both barriers. The corrupted barrier was in much better condition than the light shields, but without stopping the mages, the balance would tip in the enemy's favor in a matter of minutes.

"Should we back off master?" Emilia asked beside his. Neither of them were attacking the barrier or worrying too much, talking quietly despite the deafening sounds around them and the fanatical roars of the Crusaders.

"Yes let's go." Athos nodded and mentally ordered. 'All Skeleton Commanders, retreat from the wall and go to your previously agreed positions.'

All high-ranking skeletons obeyed and fled while they still could, leaving only the low-ranking ones behind.

In a timely manner, two beams of pure mana hit the corrupted barrier, causing the entire wall to shake as cracks spread from the point of impact. The slower mages had finally reached a position close enough and fired their mana cannons until their cores dried up.

Court mages who lost control of large-scale spells still had mana and cast their best spells against the barrier. Two of water mages conjured a layer of ice over the gates and doused the flames, allowing the waiting battering rams to reach them.

The enchanted battering rams reached the gates a few seconds later, slamming into the steel gates and causing the entire structure to shake. The rams delivered impacts both inside and outside the gate, weakening its resistance.

“Come on, come on. Break it at once!” The blue fang screamed looking at the cracks in the barrier and the darkness getting thinner and thinner. Even so, the barrier didn’t look like it was going to give way anytime soon and the light shields weren’t much better off.

The bishop had shared the energy between the light shields to protect everyone from lightning, great arrows from the siege weapons and even damage the barrier, but that came at a price.

The priests’ mana was almost gone and most of them had fresh blood marks running down their noses. Everyone had a terrible headache and despite the use of mana regeneration potions, their cores were dangerously empty, all regenerated mana was immediately consumed to maintain the light shields.

It would cause a lot of problems for the priests when the potion wore off, but they had no way of worrying about that now.

The stalemate continued for a few more minutes, before the corrupted barrier finally gave way and the cannons broke through. The corrupted barrier cracked like glass before shattering into thousands of pieces, which quickly disintegrated in midair.

Horns sounded as soldiers around the wall cheered and began to advance. The Crusaders’ cries were particularly loud, all their fervor and fanaticism clear as they attacked the walls with renewed fury, the closest ones using the wall’s imperfections to climb.

The paladins had healed several of them during the stalemate, but most were still deaf, so they couldn’t fight neatly as an army.

Chapter 147 Battle at the gate

Skeletons on top of the walls used spears or stones to bring down most of them, but a few cruzados still managed to successfully scale the walls. They roared as they sliced through the nearest skeletons, but the undead still outnumbered them and managed to push them back, knocking them off the wall.

This was a mistake on the part of the skeletons. With no Crusaders on the walls, the mages who still had any mana left squeezed their last strength and bombed the top of the wall, destroying dozens of skeletons at once.

Dozens of deaths also meant dozens of cores self-destructing at the same time and releasing a fog of darkness over the walls that made it impossible for the Crusaders to scale the walls again.

It wouldn’t last long, but it would be enough to obstruct anyone trying to climb in the next few minutes.

The gate also began to sag under the impact of the battering rams, now that the barrier was no longer strengthening them. There were skeletons trying to hold the gate, but that did little to stop the impact of the enchanted battering rams.

With a final blow from the battering rams, the gate were breached and the Crusaders stormed in with full force, massacring every skeleton that tried to stop them. Athos had positioned over 3000 citizen skeletons to stop the advancing church forces and even the Crusaders were forced to slow their advance against the bone mass.

It would only serve to delay them, however. The skeletons of Faltra's citizens had no sense of combat or teamwork and just attacked in a haphazard fashion. Their equipment was also just a weapon or agricultural tool, unable to do any real damage against the armored crusaders.

Very few Crusaders suffered damage from the skeletons, while the undead were slaughtered as soon as they approached. Black bones were piled on the floor as the crusaders advanced, but none of them could notice the strangeness.

They didn't notice it in the heat of battle, but it was strange that the bodies were piling up instead of exploding in a haze of darkness, but the skeletons kept advancing and the Crusaders didn't have time to think about anything. The only thing on their minds was to purge the evil in front of them.

.....

The crusaders advanced slowly with bloodshot eyes and roaring like beasts, but that was a mistake.

'Now.' Athos was hiding in a nearby building watching the situation and ordered the moment he saw half of the skeletons in pieces on the ground. The skeletons' empty orbits released a dark glow for a second before detonating their cores.

It was the first time that Athos had detonated so many undead at once and the result was incredible. An explosion of gigantic darkness rose up, devouring everything and everyone around it.

Many of the crusaders who were trampling the bones just a second ago didn't even have time to scream before being swallowed up by the darkness, their bodies withering like dry twigs in seconds before turning to dust.

The explosion went further and devoured everything alive around the gate. The Crusaders who were pushing each other to storm the fortress were trapped and died within moments. The blast of darkness spread for nearly 200 meters and formed a cloud around the gate.

Even the stone floors and nearby buildings couldn't resist and were completely swept away by the blast, the air around them becoming toxic and unbreathable. The cloud of darkness began to spread beyond the gate, but was stopped by the shields of light.

"Damn it, keep the shields up! We can't weaken now!" The bishop cried out in despair, feeling the priests around him weaken. He had taken a special-grade potion so its effects were still circulating in his body, but the others drank only high-grade potions and their effects were already wearing off.

The moment the effects wore off, everyone would fall to the ground suffering from mana detour, a condition where mages pushed their cores beyond their limits and became temporarily unable to use magic.

'It was really a success, master! Darkness is blocking the gate and they cannot climb the wall either.' Emilia spoke happily in her mind, but Athos was bitter.

'No, we made some mistakes here. I couldn't count, but I doubt we've killed more than 500 crusaders with this explosion, while our side has already lost more than 1500 skeletons. But the biggest miscalculation was the storm.' Athos spoke as he looked at the sky.

Their skeletons did the same and immediately noticed the problem. The ring of clouds appeared to be dispersing, though the hive hawks continued to spin. The lightning was also getting less and less frequent, its power diminishing to less than a fraction of what it was at first.

Its charge was almost gone and the hive hawks were expending more and more mana to attract the remaining energy.

'Now that the priests don't have to worry about the lightning, they can move all the energy of the shields to block the blast of darkness. We should have saved some of the storm's energy and attacked along with the blast. May it be a lesson to us.' Athos spoke and refocused on the front gate.

Just as Athos predicted, the bishop noticed the weakness of the lightning and focused all shields of light in front of the crusaders, blocking the cloud of darkness. With no one to control the cloud of darkness, it began to disperse while eroding some of the energy from the light shields.

Skeletons also took advantage of the cover of darkness to attack the shields of light, but their attacks were only scratches.

'My core is much better than those priests and the potion I took too, so I can still hold out for a little while longer, but the same can't be said for the priests. The effect of the potions will end at any moment and with them the shields of light that keep the crusaders alive.' The bishop thought as he weighed his options, but the choice was taken out of his hands.

Under normal conditions, the priests should have enough power to cast the barrier and recover mana with the potions to cast another large-scale spell. Unfortunately for them, the power of the storm clouds was much greater than expected and the black lightning not only caused damage, the darkness in them corroded the light on contact.

They expended a lot more energy than they intended, pushing their weak cores beyond their limits and were about to pay the price for it.

One of the priests suddenly dropped to his knees on the ground, vomiting blood. He was a new priest who had just been promoted from an acolyte, so he was less experienced and a lot weaker than usual. The problem is, he wasn't the only one on the verge of a breakdown.

One by one, the surrounding priests fell to the ground, adding to the burden on the remnants. The bishop had no choice but to give up on keeping the shields of light, but that didn't mean he was going to just waste the entire spell.

With a snap of his fingers, all the shields of light concentrated in front of the crusaders exploded, releasing a wave of shock and light towards the skeletons. The bishop took care that the energy of the shields moved only in one direction and did not damage the crusaders.

The blast of light drove away the cloud of darkness and with it all the skeletons attacking the shields, shattering them to pieces.

The Crusaders resumed their advance just as the darkness disappeared and this time nothing stopped their advance.

“All paladins, conjure a holy field immediately. We will never advance if all the undead we defeat turn into an explosion of darkness. The holy field must reduce the power of the explosions to a minimum.” the bishop ordered.

The paladins weren't confident in their ability to successfully cast a large-scale spell, but they complied anyway. Like most mages and priests, they were trained to cast spells alongside other mages, but rarely practiced thanks to their duties as paladins.

The bishop took the lead on the new spell to ease the burden of inexperienced paladins while following the Crusaders' advance. They resumed their advance just as the darkness dispersed, destroying all the undead in their path, even though they knew they would explode.

They came with the determination to die and with their eardrums burst, the only order they recognized was to go forward. The bishop knew this as he himself had trained hundreds of crusaders to fight like this and bit his lower lip in frustration, but he didn't stop casting.

The bishop felt regret every time a crusader destroyed a skeleton only for the bones to explode and drown the crusader in a cloud of darkness. But their sacrifice was not in vain.

A sphere of light was forming on top of the bishop and in a few more seconds the spell would be ready. The holy field was much less complex than the hexagram barrier and was also much faster to cast.

'Stop them from casting the spell.' Athos felt the danger of letting them cast a second large-scale spell and ordered the skeletons in charge of the siege weapons to destroy them, but the order came too late.

Human army siege weapons fire, but aiming at skeleton siege weapons. They learned their positions thanks to mages and their familiars, adjusting their positions accordingly.

Rocks, explosive arrows, and firebombs rained down on the skeletons' siege weapons, destroying most of them. A few shots missed their targets, but explosions dealt area damage and just hitting close was enough.

Chapter 148 The three sides of the battle

'Tch. It won't be able to stop them from casting. Let's retreat into the fortress to avoid getting caught in the spell. If it's an offensive spell, they'll sweep away all the undead and traps we've set. If it's a sacred field, we need to let them kill as many undead as possible before attacking.' Athos complained to the skeletons and left the building in which he was, erasing his own presence as he retreated further.

“How long will it take yet??” The blue fang asked impatiently, watching the fog of darkness slowly grow.

“Done!” The bishop shouted as he finished casting the spell. The sphere of light soared high into the sky before spreading out into a dome and filling the air within with the element of light.

The element of light began to purge the fog of darkness, while also reducing the power of the skeletons. Crusaders were also passively healed, their burst eardrums slowly recovering while any wounds received were repaired.

“Good job.” The blue fang congratulated the bishop honestly, but frowned slightly as he looked down at his feet. His brother was within his shadow and the shadow serpent’s ability was being weakened by the holy field.

“The battle is just beginning, so don’t relax just yet. The enemy leader or any strong skeletons are yet to appear.” The bishop spoke between gasps, feeling exhausted after casting a second spell large scale.

“Do you think it’s a good idea to continue the plan to lure the plant monster? At this point, either he’s figured out the trick or he doesn’t plan on fighting.” The blue fang spoke eager for action.

“That or waiting for our army to be weakened before act. The priests are already down while the paladins are now busy holding the sacred field. When the plant monster appears, the only ones with the strength to fight them will be the adventurers.” The bishop spoke, preferring to stick to the plan.

“I see. Let’s keep moving forward then.” The blue fang nodded and tightened its grip on the blue spear in its hands. There were still the elite troops for backup, but he doubted they could handle the plant monster. Hinder their movements is the most they could do.

.....

The Crusader invasion went more or less as Athos and the Skeletons had planned. The main streets were full of roadblocks and dug pits, so the Crusaders had to slow their advance to deflect or risk falling and being impaled on the wooden spears at the bottom of the holes.

The Crusaders also had to scatter after invading, not wanting to leave any skeletons behind. Some of them also climbed the walls, now that the fog of darkness had dispersed because of the sacred field and they had split in both directions, planning to cluster above the opposite gate.

Those who continued to invade searched all the alleys and buildings nearby, suffering several ambushes along the way.

Despite the skeletons being weakened, they still used the limited spaces inside the buildings to ambush the crusaders. Since the Crusaders used long weapons, they had a hard time fighting in closed spaces and the skeletons used this against them, stabbing them with short weapons or using their own bones as weapons.

Skeletons clung to Crusaders whenever they were about to die, exploding along with them. The holy field reduced the effect of the darkness, but at point-blank range it was still deadly.

The crusaders were advancing slowly, but making sure not to leave any undead behind.

The battle at the walls was going much worse than expected for the human army. It took them quite a while to reach the walls, as they were miles away to avoid being shot at by lightning.

They had reached the outskirts of the wall just a few minutes ago, only to be greeted by a shower of poisoned arrows. With the exception of the mercenaries who were a mixed unit, the light infantry had no way to defend against arrows.

Many were hit and fell to the ground screaming in pain. The parasitic venom spread to the wound site within seconds, causing the soldiers excruciating pain. The poison melted the bodies in less than 30 seconds, but it felt like hours to the suffering soldiers.

This caused panic among the infantry and mercenaries, causing the unhit to be on guard against the arrows, but there was very little they could do against the arrows coming from the sky.

There were no mages among them, so the only ones who could fight back from a distance were the archers among the mercenaries, but no matter how many arrows they shot, they were too few to make any difference.

Unlike siege weapons, skeletons had a much faster rate of fire and constantly fired almost without pause at humans.

The foot soldiers and mercenaries ran desperately for the wall, ignoring the cries of despair from the soldiers hit and the noise of flesh melting from the poison. They reached the walls and the foot soldiers released the ladders they were carrying.

The light infantry had dismantled the stairs for ease of transport, as stairs longer than 12 meters would not be viable. Once mounted, the first to climb were the mercenaries. It was their job to secure the walls so the soldiers could safely break through.

The skeletons on the wall used spears bathed in poison to knock them down the stairs, most losing their balance after being hit, the pain caused by the poison eating away at their flesh breaking their concentration and causing them to stumble.

Those hit by the poison fell down the stairs and knocked down those coming right behind them. To make matters worse, the skeletons only lightly scraped the wooden stairs, but it was enough for the poison at the ends to touch the wood and start to spread through.

The wood melted in seconds, the poison raining down on top of all the soldiers below waiting to climb.

A few managed to climb the stairs and climb the walls, but they were few and far between. The mercenaries fought for their lives, but the skeletons had the advantage in numbers and easily outnumbered them.

A horn sounded from somewhere and the mercenaries who were trying to climb the few remaining stairs turned around. The leaders of each unit decided that it would be impossible to take the walls this way and ordered them to retreat.

The foot soldiers and mercenaries retreated as fast as they could, skeleton archers firing at their backs until they were out of range, killing hundreds of them. They turned toward the gate where the Crusaders had already stormed, taking care to stay out of arrow range.

The battle at the opposite gate was not going as expected either.

Orus had sent many troops to ensure that the undead did not flee in large numbers, but things changed when he saw the storm and the black wall. The priests and mages would spend most of their energy to

break the barrier and protect themselves from the storm, they would hardly have enough energy to eliminate all the thousands of remaining undead besides the undead spirit.

The troops were ordered to storm the gate as soon as the barrier had fallen, but they had only reached the gates now. The heavy infantry and spearmen were at the forefront in phalanx formation, the cavalry split on either side as the archers followed close behind.

Orus had also ordered the archers to join them in support, ensuring they had a ranged attack if breaking through the gates took longer than expected. Orus had even given 5 enchanted battering rams to break down the gate.

With the opposite gate already stormed and with all the church forces, adventurers, and mages on one side of the army, that side's defenses should be weak, most of its assets trying to stop the crusaders from advancing.

What they didn't expect is that a row of minotaur skeletons was on top of the walls, carrying the giant arrows from the ballistae like throwing spears. The giant arrows looked small in the hands of the demihuman skeletons, but they were even deadlier than if they were in a ballista.

Athos had ordered Vanilla to lead the demihumans and defend the gate. He had made it clear that the only thing she needed to do was buy time and cause as many casualties as possible, but she purposely only listened to the second part.

"Shields raised!" The captains of the heavy infantry units ordered, but it was useless.

The minotaurs threw the arrows with all their might, even using a penetration skill to make them deadlier. The arrows sliced through the air as they hit the first line of heavy infantry, ripping through them as if they were paper.

Using a phalanx formation worked against them here. The arrows pierced the ranks behind them until they hit the ground, half the spear sinking into the earth, leaving the impaled corpses in place.

The minotaurs chuckled lightly as they looked at the impaled soldiers, counting how many soldiers each of them had killed. One of them raised his fist in the air in victory, his arrow had impaled five soldiers while the others had only impaled four or three each.

"Archers, take them down! Phalanx, keep advancing!" The commander shouted orders to the army that had temporarily stopped. The skeleton minotaurs had killed nearly a hundred soldiers in a single attack, so the closest soldiers were hesitant to advance, fearing they would be next.

The minotaurs on the other hand, launched the next wave of arrows as soon as they confirmed the number of casualties. Dozens of soldiers were impaled once more and this time the minotaurs didn't stop to count and launched the next wave.

"Fire Fire!" The commander shouted at the archer units, who were further behind the army and only now came within range of the walls.

Chapter 149 Plans that almost go wrong

Thousands of arrows were fired at once, but the minotaurs kept throwing the giant arrows without bothering, just activating a defensive ability. Most missed their targets, but even those that hit just bounced harmlessly, and a few left scratches.

The hard bones of the minotaurs easily withstood these simple attacks. Even spells cast by a second-tier mage would have a hard time hurting their bones, ordinary arrows wouldn't stand a chance.

Other demihumans who were also on the wall like goblins and kobolds still needed to protect themselves.

"How are we...doing?" Vanilla asked as she climbed onto the ramparts and looked at the approaching soldiers.

The minotaurs didn't respond, but launched the giant arrows even faster, as if they wanted to impress her. Unfortunately for the minotaurs, the arrows they brought with them weren't infinite and soon the excited minotaurs ran out of them.

Of course, they still caused hundreds of deaths in the human army, but that didn't seem to be enough to satisfy them. The ground in front of the gates was a mess, with corpses torn to pieces as survivors desperately tried to push forward.

A second hail of arrows rained down on them, but the minotaurs remained unmoved. They grabbed their axes and tried to go down to kill the humans, but Vanilla stopped them.

"If we kill too many humans before they reach the gates, they'll get scared and end up running for their lives. Let them get a little closer while the goblins and kobolds bring you more arrows." Vanilla ordered the blood-hungry minotaurs.

"The enemy arrows are gone! Take the opportunity and advance! We have to take the gate before they reload!" The commander ordered desperately, making the army break their own formation to run as fast as possible at the gate.

.....

The cavalry were the first to reach the gates, arrows raining down the walls to ensure the skeletons did not impale the knights. The infantry arrived a few minutes later while carrying the enchanted rams.

"See? Just...let them get close...and then we'll attack." Vanilla said proudly of herself, as if letting enemies near the gates was an achievement. "Orcs, it's your turn to work."

The orcs were waiting behind the gate and they nodded excitedly, drawing their swords. Trevor prepared greatswords for the orcs and axes for the minotaurs suited to their sizes at the request of the demihumans themselves.

Vanilla watched in amusement as battering rams hit the gates and immediately breached them, much to the humans' surprise.

There were no locks or skeletons trying to push the gate back. Instead, what awaited them were blades of black aura that sliced through the cavalry, infantry, and rams they passed.

Normally, an aura blade would have as much power as an ordinary skill and could hardly slice through enemies that way. Even Treevor had a hard time cutting down more than one soldier at a time.

The orcs' racial ability allowed them to overcome these limitations. Every time the orcs swung their swords, the aura blades fired ripped the soldiers in half along with everything behind them.

Ordinary soldiers unable to use mana were useless in front of these orcs and could only die horribly. Even though there were only 15 orcs and thousands of enemy soldiers, the space of the gate was limited and only two carriages could fit side by side. The orcs occupied this area in a semicircle killing anything that managed to break through.

"Shit, I'm not going to die like this! Damn this war-" A spearman screamed desperately and tried to turn to flee, but a sword caught him in the back and slashed him from shoulder to waist.

The soldier who screamed was just a low-ranking soldier, but his scream spread among the surrounding soldiers who were already in panic and started to retreat desperately for their lives.

The unit commander and captains shouted to keep moving forward, but the soldiers didn't listen to them anymore. The orcs were about to give chase, but Vanilla stopped them.

"You orcs never change, do you? You always rush forward without thinking and only realize you've run out of mana when your cores are totally empty. Back off a bit and let the minotaurs kill the fleeing soldiers." Vanilla scolded her bad habits.

Just like she said, the goblins and kobolds had already brought more giant arrows and the minotaurs were happily launching the arrows at the fleeing archers. They were angered by the stings they felt from the arrows and returned the favor.

With no other choice, the commander began to sound the withdrawal to avoid further losses.

'Vanilla, what do you think you're doing?' Athos yelled angrily in Vanilla's mind.

'Patriarch, what's the matter? I defended the gate and managed to drive off the invaders as you commanded! At least a thousand of them went dead and we didn't lose any of ours. Did I fail somewhere?' Vanilla asked in a panic, dropping to the ground on her knees to a beehive hawk that was watching the gate, assuming that Athos was watching her from her eyes.

'The plan was to inflict as many casualties as possible while retreating! That's why I put the demihumans at the gate. You are an elite unit that could deal a lot of damage while retreating, further attracting enemy soldiers.' Athos screamed inside his mind.

'I wanted as many humans as possible inside the fortress to kill as many as possible at once. The only thing we've been waiting for is the kingdom's army to invade and you've ruined that! Have you forgotten the plan?' Athos asked after he stopped complaining.

Athos had ordered the bone abominations to hide in places close to the inner wall, such as the forges and garrisons so that the invading forces would take time to detect them, but the crusaders would reach them soon and he needed to act before that.

'Of course not! I planned to retreat after the orcs ran out of mana or the arrows ran out, but the humans started to flee before that.' Vanilla tried to justify herself in a panic, but the damage was already done.

'It doesn't matter. We'll need to push the plan forward and launch a counterattack once we've eliminated the church forces and the infantry that came in support. It's a pity, we could have easily ended the battle-' Before Athos could finish speaking, two different horns sounded, interrupting their telepathic conversation.

Athos took a few seconds to respond again, checking the movements of the kingdom army with another hive hawk.

'Good news. It seems that the human army didn't give up on this gate and sent the elite units as reinforcements. They won't be as easy as the troops you just faced, so just pretend to fight as they invaded.' Athos ordered with a smile, internally thanking the stupid commander for helping him.

The enemy commander should have been shocked at the crushing defeat of the soldiers, as he sent in both elite cavalry and infantry, leaving only a few odd mages that Astrus recognized as tamers and a small unit of elite knights.

'I will not fail again, Patriarch.' Vanilla spoke hurriedly, but Athos was already focused on something else.

'It will take some time for the reinforcements to get around the fortress. Crusaders will definitely discover bone abominations before then. I need to buy time. Treevor?' Athos thought, realizing that the only way to buy time was to give the enemy what they wanted.

'Is it finally my turn?' Treevor asked looking forward to a fight.

'Yes, but be careful. The enemy's objective is definitely to kill you, so they'll go into a frenzy when you show up. I'll order the mages to start casting a large-scale spell, so wait for them to finish casting before teleporting.' Athos spoke and gave the signal to the skeleton mages.

They were all gathered inside the fortress in a room of meeting rooms, just waiting for Athos' order to start conjuring.

'It'll take at least two minutes for me to finish loading the crystal, so just let me know when they're ready. My hive falcon is already with me.' Treevor spoke and stroked the hawk's beak on his shoulder.

Minutes passed as Athos watched the crusaders slowly advancing. His holy field was glowing dimly now compared to before, most of his energy spent on weakening the skeletons' explosions and healing the crusaders who survived them.

The crusaders had destroyed nearly 3000 undead as they advanced, losing less than 400 in the process. It was incredible that a holy field could have withstood so much darkness, but after Athos thought about it, it made sense.

Many of the skeletons that exploded were not mana users when they were alive and had underdeveloped cores, while all paladins had a lifetime of discipline, training from the day they awakened their cores.

A mage at the first tier had dozens of times more mana than an ordinary person and it was likely that more than one paladin, if not all, had at the second layer of life. It was more than believable that the sacred field had more energy than a few thousand skeletons.

'We are ready and awaiting your command, master.' Emília answered from inside the meeting room. She had taken charge of the spell from large and since she had the biggest core, she naturally took control.

'Treevor?' Athos asked.

'I'm feeding the crystal slowly. Just give the order and I'll give the final push.' Treevor responded in the affirmative, his claws slightly extended in anticipation of the fight.

'When you want.' With those words, Treevor was enveloped in a purplish-black orb and disappeared.

Chapter150 Treevor joins the battle

A few minutes ago, in the middle of the reinforcement troops.

"How the hell does that make sense??" Orus yelled angrily, using a spyglass to observe the battle.

The church had suffered more than expected to storm the gate, but they still accomplished their objective and broke down the barrier, as well as bearing the full brunt of the storm cloud.

What he didn't expect was for everything else to go wrong. Not only did the light infantry fail to take the walls, but the army that was supposed to storm the opposite gate was completely defeated and fled after suffering thousands of deaths.

"Send reinforcements to the opposite gate! All foot soldiers and cavalry, take the opposite gate and destroy all those damn undead!" Colonel Orus called out to the hapless assistant at his side.

The poor man ran to do his bidding and the army moved to obey, blowing horns to let the army on the other side know that they would receive reinforcements.

'Why not just order the troops to storm through the already conquered gate? Even if they are mana users, they will still suffer a lot of losses at the hands of demihumans skeletons.' The assistant thought as he watched the troops move, but he didn't dare voice his thoughts.

Ever since the battle began, Orus had been exuding a bloodlust and actively searched the enemy army, looking for the undead spirit that killed his brother. He was determined to kill the creature, along with anyone who got in his way.

The nobles in the throne hall were shouting something as they glared at Colonel Orus aggressively, but he ignored them all as he continued to watch the battle anxiously.

.....

That was why he was the first to react when the purplish black orb appeared in the midst of the priests' formation. "All remaining soldiers, advance with me and we will eliminate the enemy leader!"

Without even waiting for an answer, the bicorn began to run at full speed, at the same time casting a fire and darkness spell using Orus's mana. Unlike his older brother, Orus didn't have any elemental affinity, but he used familiars that could make up for it.

"I will release you, brother. It was all that went through his head as he ran.

“Die.” Was all Treevor mumbled as he teleported in front of the bishop. The gusts of wind released by the black sphere suddenly hit him, breaking his concentration and making him stumble backwards.

The bishop tried to remain alert for any sudden intrusions from Treevor, but the chained use of large-scale spells drained his focus and his nearly depleted core rendered his vision blurry and his reaction time slowed.

It took him only a second to understand what had happened, but it took Treevor even less time to kill him.

Treevor merely extended his right arm and the vine wrapped around his wrist shot forward and pierced the bishop’s exposed neck. Most of the bishop’s neck exploded from the impact as the vine continued forward, leaving only a thin strip of skin attaching the head to the trunk.

Before the body even hit the ground, Treevor pulled the whip back and continued the attack, the vines on the back of his head spreading out in an attempt to kill all the closest paladins and adventurers. Or at least he tried.

The vines had a hard time moving forward, as if there was an invisible wall blocking it. No, instead of a wall blocking it, it was like fighting underwater. The air around him was offering extreme resistance every time he tried to move.

Strangely, his body was not being affected by the pressure, but anything within a three meter radius was affected by this strange pressure.

While he was trying to understand the situation, a spear crossed the bishop’s body aiming at his chest. The blue fang moved as soon as the sphere appeared, but he wasn’t fast enough to save the bishop. But at least he wouldn’t let his sacrifice be in vain.

Treevor tried and failed to dodge, the pressurized air around him preventing him from pulling the vines back. With no other choice, Treevor used his claws to block the spear.

Sparks flew as the spear failed to break through Treevor’s claws, both locked in a stalemate much to Treevor’s surprise. Somehow, the human in front of him was matching him in strength and even though he tried to push him back, the human wasn’t backing up even an inch.

The blue fang was also shocked, but for a different reason. He was strengthening his body as much as possible, just like his brother. Thanks to their duality trait, they could flow mana and share abilities with each other without side effects.

The black fang was terrible at hand-to-hand combat and preferred to fight in his brother’s shadow, helping him with skills and spells whenever he needed it.

Even reinforcing his body to the maximum with the power of two cores, he still couldn’t overcome the power of the undead spirit. What he didn’t expect was that Treevor was also reinforcing his body with two cores.

The difference was that Treevor was wearing enchanted willow as armor and weighed over a ton despite being at human size. The only reason why Treevor still hadn’t crushed the blue fang, was that

the air around him was now hindering his movements as well, while it didn't seem to affect the blue fang.

"Too bad I can't kill you in one hit. It would have saved me a lot of trouble if you just died." The blue fang spoke after a while. He tried to push or pull the spear to break the stalemate, but Treevor's grip was firm and he was gripping his spear with both hands.

The situation would be very tense if there wasn't a disfigured corpse trapped between them.

"I say the same about you." Treevor responded to the blue fang's surprise. The whip wrapped around its wrist slithered onto the spear like a snake and pierced the blue fang's forearm, injecting its parasitic venom.

"Ack! That's foul play!" The blue fang complained and twisted its spear before pulling, at the same time conjuring a stone spike that hit Treevor in the abdomen and knocked him back. The air also stopped pressing down on him, even making Treevor's body lighter so that he would move further away.

Treevor took no damage from a hastily cast spell, but he flew back like an arrow and threw himself into the midst of crusaders who were still stunned by the bishop's sudden death. For all their discipline, their leader's death was still a shock that froze them in place.

'I'm going to use the spell now.' Treevor spoke to Emilia through the mind link.

She nodded and transmitted the spell to the hive hawk that had teleported in with him, who immediately released the spell. Maybe it was because the spell was too powerful for the hive hawk, he couldn't hold back even a second before casting it.

More than a thousand spikes made of corrupted mana rained down on the church's forces, each one the size of a finger and powerful enough to pierce through rock. Skeletons didn't expend all their mana to cast this spell, preferring to cast it a little weaker and save energy to a second.

They flew as fast as arrows, piercing the bodies of crusaders and paladins they hit without resistance.

The spikes of corrupted mana ripped through armor, flesh, and anything else that got in the way, before exploding inside victims. The corrupted mana spread out and killed anyone who had survived the blow.

Paladins were completely wiped out in that attack, while nearly 600 crusaders were killed. As the hive hawk just released the spell without aiming, some of the spikes missed their targets and hit the ground, but still caused many deaths.

"It's the corrupted spirit! Kill it!" The surviving crusaders screamed as they turned and ran towards Treevor, but the last one just watched as the crusaders closed in.

The moment they got close enough and Treevor felt it would be impossible for them to retreat, the flower buds on his shoulders began to bloom as they drained the surrounding darkness, making his body shine like a second sun for a few seconds.

The crusaders found the glow on Treevor's body strange and mistaken for someone casting a spell of light on him, until the vines pointed at them and fired dozens of lasers of darkness. Treevor had mixed some of his own corrupted mana with darkness, allowing the lasers to interact with physical matter.

Lasers pierced the ranks of the crusaders before Treevor moved the vines and sliced the corpses to pieces. Even the closest buildings did not escape and were cut in half whenever a crusader tried to hide behind them.

Treevor stopped the lasers before running out of energy and sent pulses of dark amber energy throughout his body, ensuring that his willow would not be weakened by the lack of darkness. The lasers only lasted a few seconds, but they killed even more soldiers than the large-scale spell.

Crusaders have now been reduced to just 1/3 of their original numbers, everything else reduced to mangled corpses throughout the stronghold. For a moment, there was only silence in the fortress, all fighting temporarily ceasing. Even fanatical crusaders found it difficult to advance after this show of power.